

Of Thomas Lord Coventry (c.1640)

[Thomas White]

Transcript

Norfolk Record Office, HARE 6156, 228x4, ff. [1r]–[6v]

[1r]

Of Thomas Lord Coventry &c.:/

Thomas Lord Coventry &c.

Thom

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[2r]

Of Thomas Lord Coventry late Lord Keeper of the great Seale of England.

Some notable Observac[i]ons in the course of his life and vltimum vale to the world

To trace him in the begin[n]ings and first exposic[i]on hee was the sonne of a Judge and of the Com[m]on Pleas a gentleman by birth and Educac[i]on, The acquirings of his Father in the progresse of his profession (as it seemes) were not much, and in that accesse (as I may call it) which com[m]only men of the Lawe (attaineing to that diginity) leave to their heries in the new erecc[i]on of a Family. Wherefore I conceiue it probable that the sonne did not declyne that p[ro]fession wherein the Father concluded, but began (there to buyld on that foundac[i]on where himselfe had made his first approaches/.

Hee was of the Inner house of Court, and noe sooner by an indefatigable diligence in study attained the Barr, but hee appeared in the Lustre of his p[ro]fession aboue the com[m]on expectac[i]on of men of that forme, which hee made good in the manifestac[i]on of his exquisite Abilites. Soe soone as hee came to plead (for the Orator at the Barr hath much the Start of a Chamber man) but hee was in vtrumq[ue] paratus and

here

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here hee first began to grow into the name of an Active and pregnant man/

Hee marryed and interred his first love in the fruyte of his Primogenitus now surviving (a Baron and Peere of the Realme) his wife expiring he plighted his faith to the Citie (for he became Recorder of London by a publique suffrage and suyte of the Cittizens) and espoused for his second wife the widow of a Cittizen, lovely, young, rich, and of good fame, in whom hee became the Father of many hopefull Children of either Sex (all marryed richly in his life) or left in the way of a noble subsistance. Wee may pr[e]sent his happyines in nothing more then in this, that London had first given him the handsell of a place both ho[nora]ble and gainefull, together with a wife as loving as himselfe was vxorious, and of that sort, which are not vnaptly styled housewives, soe that these two drew diversly but in one way and to one and the selfe same end, hee in the practise of his profession shee in the exercise of her Domestick, for they that knew the Discipline of his house averre [tha]t hee waved that care

as a contiguous distract[i]on to his vocac[i]on, and left her onely (as an helper) to manage that Charge which best suyted to her Conversac[i]on./

The next stepp of his honor was in the service of

the

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The late King of eu[er] blessed memory (as his Sollicitor and successively his Attorney Generall) both, places of trust and of great income; Neither did hee then leave the Citie nor the Citie desert him. For by the marriage of his eldest sonne there (the now Baron) hee heaped vpp to his other Acquisic[i]ons a Bulke of Treasure of noe com[m]on sum[m]e, and leaving it soe, that it may well fall into the question whether hee was more beholding to the Citie or the Citie to him (or thus) whether more may bee attributed to his Fortune than meritt. Moreover they ascribe much to the blessing of his house, that they both were constant in their Religion and serious in their assiduous devoc[i]ons in the sett and fixed formes of o[u]r Church prayers, wherevnto the whole Family were com[m]endably assembled.

In the first year of o[u]r late gracious Sou[er]aigne my Lord of Lincolne (of the Clergy) being removed S[i]r Thomas Couentry was designed at Salesborow for the Seale by the Kings most excellent Judgment as the onely p[er]son of the tymes capeable of soe high a place with the Assistance of the Duke of Buckingham, and one that was a noble pr[e]ferrer of men of meritt. And to the further Augmentac[i]on of his honor. hee was shortly therevpon created Baron of Alisborow in which dignity and place, hee contynued without interrupc[i]on, vntil death sum[m]oned him to a great pitch of glory, in an Age plentifull in yeares, abundant in wealth felicious in ofspring, and that which is more ho[nora]ble a noble Fame, not that hee past on vnaccused, for

Envy is

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Envy is a constant follower and p[er]secuter of all greatnes and distracc[i]on an vtter Enemy of desert./

The Cheife Charge against him was that of Bonham Nortons wherein the best and most impartiall Judgments consent that his Accuser and Clyent was much to blame in the Error of his Accompt, between a Judge of Equity, and a quondam Advocate, and in a case where the Accuser had before received ample satisfacc[i]on by the advantage and rigour of the Lawe. More then this I find not much of regard charged on his sincerity (besides those of vulgar sum[m]es & private Intrests) where men are ever aforehand in flattery of themselues in opinion of that cause which goes not on their sides, and that which hath any relac[i]on to their friends.

The Character of his Outward man was this, hee was of midle stature somewhat broad and round fac'd, of haire black, and vpright in his Comportment and gesture, of Complexion sanguine, and of a comely aspect and pr[e]sence (Animadu[er]cons) which may bee left to posterity.

Hee was of a very fine and grave Elocution, in a kind of gracefull lisping, soe that where nature might seeme to cast something of imp[er]fecc[i]on on his speech, on due

examinac[i]on, shee added a grace to the p[er]fecc[i]on of his deliu[er]y, for his words rather flowed from him in a kind of Natue pleasingnes, then by any artificiall helpe or Assistance./

Hee was of a very liberall accesse, and (all addressers p[re]sented) affable, And as hee was of a very quick

appr[e]henc[i]on

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appr[e]henc[i]on, soe was hee of an exceeding Juditious and Expeditious dispatch in all affaires either of State or of the Tribunall, of hearing patient and attentive, and that which is not vsually incident to p[er]sons of dignity & place, seldome in any distempered mood or moc[i]on of Choller: And it was none of his meanest com[m]endac[i]ons, that hee was an helper or Coadjutor rather then a daunter of Councell at the Barr, and vnderstood better what they would have said in the Case, then what sometymes they did say for their Clyents, Soe that there appeared in his Constituc[i]on, a kind of naturall and vnaffected Insinuac[i]on, to creepe into the good opinion of all men, rather then any affected greatnes to discountenance any, but never rashly to discontent many./

Through the whole Course of his life, his fortune was soe obsequious, that it seemes shee allwayes wayted vpon him with a Convoy, for in all the stepps of his Rise, hee had ever an even and smooth passe without any Rubb or mate in the Check./

For his Erudic[i]on and Acquisic[i]ons of Art (though all knew hee was learned in the Sciences, and most profound in his profession) yet such was the happinesse of his Constellac[i]on, that hee rather leaned to his native strength, then depended on any artificiall relyance /

Without doubt hee was of a most solid and im[m]oveable temper, and voyd of all pride and ostentac[i]on, neither was hee ever in any Vmbrage or disfavor with his Prince, An Argument both of his wisdom and sincerity, neither in any fraction with his equalls

worthy

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worthy of Excepc[i]on /.

For that of my Lord of Suffolkes businesse was an Act of his, that told the world in how little Esteeme hee held greatnes, that would iustle and stand in Competic[i]on with Justice; and it is remaineing among the best of his memorialls, that hee allwayes stood impregnable, and not to bee overcome by might.

Amongst all and the many felicities of his life, that of his short sickness, and the willing Embracement of death (with open Armes) were of the most remarkeable observac[i]on for it is our *finis qui coronat opus*, and changes o[u]r mortality into that of im[m]ortall glory. for his sicknes was not contynued with any lingering or loathsome languishing, nor soe pr[e]cipitate as that it bereaved him of the Ability of disposing of his Estate to the contentment of his Posterity, or hindred the composing of his thoughts to another and better world./

[Left margin:#] If then in the briefe Collecc[i]on of the state of this Noblemans fortune, it may fall into suspic[i]on, that I had some relac[i]on to his p[er]son, or (in some one respect or

other obliged to his member) I assume the liberty to tender this Testimony to the world, that I neuer had reference at any tyme to his service (onely in such addresses as fell into my lott as a Supplicant) I had ever the honor of a free accesse, with liberty to speake as I could, and as occasion and the Cause required. But that which may best satisfie the suspitions, that I have not given my selfe the

least

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[*Left margin:#*] least scope of partiality or flattery either in favour or manicule affecc[i]on, it is that (I beleeeve) noe Subject ever suffered in that degree in losse of Estate, as I may selfe have endured, and onely by a Rule of his owne, in suspending my suyte in the Starrchamber (the Cause depending before in Chancery) vntill it had there a finall determynac[i]on whereby I was debarr'd from detecting as villanous a practise as this Age hath heard of, vnlesse I would have waved my Chancery suyte without further expectac[i]on to bee releived in equity, which (as I then appr[e]hended were Condic[i]ons of some hard measure, though by good reasons I was after p[er]swaded, it stood not with the honor of both Courts, that two suyts for one and the selfe same Tytle, should bee on foote at one and together, yet was it then informed by his noble Successor (and then of my Councell) that the Cause depending in Starrchamber, was not for the Tytle questioned in Chancery, but for p[er] [i]ury Combinac[i]on and practise com[m]itted in a Tryall at Lawe some yeares before at an Assizes at Sarum. To which his Lo[rds]hipp replyed, that true it was, the Tytle was not directly questioned in the Starrchamber Bill, yet did it conduce therevnto, and soe reported by the Cheife Baron Walter, that in case the defend[an]ts came to bee Censured by that Court, it vtterly destroyed both the former verdict, and the Tytle in Lawe. And thus much for myne owne Apologie, and soe to proceed, where I must not leave out of the number of his vertues, that hee was eu[er]more ledd by a very noble Conduct in the Choyce of his servants, w[hi]ch

I am

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I am bold to say were gent[lemen] of Civility ready to p[er]forme all good Offices of Urbanity, in pr[e]senting the meanest suytors to their Lord, which (as I have taken it as an observac[i]on of myne owne) was infused (if I bee not deceived) by his owne Instruc[i]on and disciplinac[i]on/.

The faculty of his dispatch in Court is best pr[e]sented in this, that at his first Accession to the Seale, hee found 200 Causes on the paper ready for hearing, All which (with such as fell in the way) hee determyned within the yeare, soe that the Clyents of the Court did not languish in expectac[i]on of the issue of their Causes./

Where it falls into observac[i]on, that this High place is rarely well served but by men of Lawe, and p[er]sons of deepest Judgment in the statute and Com[m]on Lawes of the Land, whereby they may distinguish of Cases, whether they lye proper in that Court to bee releived in Equity, without intrenching on the Jurisdicc[i]on of the Kingdome, which is the old Inheritance of the Subject./

And thus have I briefly traue[er]sed the life and fortunes of this noble Lord, I shall now close it vpp in the Judgment of some noble Personages and Councillors of State, which with one consent, and within few dayes of his decease concluded thus.

That the King had lost a most noble Servant of State irreprovable in his place, and in his life & Conu[er]sac[i]on of a very noble report, and that the Kingdome suffered in the losse with the King in this, That the roome of the Chancellor hath not been supplied

with

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with his like within the memory of o[u]r Fathers. And (if report bee not iniurious to truth) his Ma[jes]tie in recom[m]ending the Seale to this Noble Gentleman, enjoyned him to tread in the Stepps of his Predecessors. *memoria Iustoru[m] remanebit in aeternum.*/

Now to this little modell of his {praise} & vertue, I know somewhat of Course may bee expected to bee said of his vices, for man is composd of humane flesh and fraylty, but the best of men are all subject vnto Error, *Justus septies in die labitur*

And who is hee which feeleth not in himselfe the force of his owne corrupt nature, and the Contagion of o[u]r first Fathers Transgression streaming through the vaynes of their infected Posterity? surely modest men may say, that this Nobleman had not the Priviledge of Canonizac[i]on to bee sainted in Earth and that nothing of blacknes could bee layd to his Eye during the whole Course of his life; But when wee consider his Estate now it is translated to another world *lignor post fatum quiescit*, and that *odium altissimum* and {mon}coculated Envy which is soe emphatically fabled in *Avarum et Invidum*, becomes checked by the respect of >p[ro]fanac[i]on and feare of trampling on the sacred Ashes of the dead, yet am I not ignorant what murmurac[i]on hath passed on his integrity tacitely \, Charging it in implicate termes of playing the game dexteriously and closely, And that if our faults could bee all pencil'd in o[u]r foreheads, this

deceased

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deceased Lord might then beare in front, sufficient Argum[en]ts of his humane frailty/.

Howsoeu[er] thus much I say, that could hee have been lymb'd to the life (and I beleeeve it) wee should not find in him much of blemish, and that the mayne Objecc[i]on com[m]only inferr'd on the amassing of his wealth, could not well bee done in Justice, might bee Answered to the full in this, that his Patrimony considered, and that it was the gainefullnes of the places hee past thorough, together with the great fortunes of his owne and his sonnes intermarriages, all concurring and falling into a frugall Family might soone wipe away all imputac[i]ons of the most malignant, and p[er]swade even detracc[i]on itselfe to suffer him to rest in peace, and (as wee may charitably beleeeve) in glory as his Posterity surviving remains in his honor and fortunes./

Finis.:./

Other manuscript witnesses

- British Library, Lansdowne MS 1054, ff. 49x–50x
- British Library, Sloane MS 3075, ff. 1r–9r
- Cambridge University Library, MS Ee.4.17, ff. 2v–6v
- Somerset Archives, DD\AH/51/1, item 9

