Lady Rachel Russell

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Lady Rachel Russell: "One of the Best of Women".

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In October 1654, Rachel's formal education and childhood came to an end with her marriage to Francis Vaughan, styled Lord Vaughan, the heir to the second earl of Carbery. This arranged marriage, celebrated at Apscourt, her father's estate in Surrey, lasted until March 1667, when Francis died of the plague. The union linked Rachel at the age of seventeen with a noble family whose social standing, cultural interests, political views, and tradition of active service in public affairs were comparable to those of her own family. Her name changed to Lady Rachel Vaughan.

Rachel's first marriage did not shower her with advantages. It is true that the two families occupied the same social rank, the fathers in each holding the rank of earl, and that the lineage of each was about equal. The Carbery family first came to view in the sixteenth century, at about the same time as the Southampton family, when John Vaughan established a seat at Golden Grove in Carmarthenshire, Wales. Vaughan, like Rachel's grandfather, served with the earl of Essex in his Irish campaign in 1599. Later he was comptroller of the household for Charles, Prince of Wales, and accompanied him on his trip to Spain in 1623. In 1628 he was created first earl of Carbery (in the Irish peerage). Richard, his eldest son, Rachel's father-in-law, was born about 1600. A member of Parliament for Carmarthenshire from 1624 to 1629, he inherited his father's title in 1634. In the Civil War, to the disappointment of parliamentary leaders, he became lieutenant-general of the king's forces in three Welsh counties, which won him the title of Baron Vaughan of Emlyn, Carmarthenshire, and the office of governor of Milford. His military career, however, was not a success. After being defeated in 1644 in a battle with the parliamentary army, the second earl of Carbery was so bitterly criticized as a coward that he resigned his command. Although heavily fined as a delinquent, Carbery, alone among royalists in South Wales, escaped sequestration, a favor accountable, it was said, to
his friendship with parliamentary generals. Such friendly connections deepened. In 1648 he opposed a royalist uprising in Wales, and that same year the second countess of Carbery, Frances Altham, a strong woman of great piety, so impressed Cromwell, who stopped at Golden Grove on a military campaign, that he later sent the earl some stags for his estate. Carbery was, obviously, politically flexible, and it is a measure of Southampton's political moderation that he, who had been so entirely devoted to the royalist cause, should have been willing to ally his family with Carbery’s.

On the other hand, the financial settlement that Southampton and Carbery arranged for Rachel and Francis was not outstanding. Forty-six manors and farms in Wales were placed in the hands of trustees, including Southampton's cousin Henry Vernon and his nephews Robert and Thomas Spencer, to pay the new couple £900 a year and to guarantee that same amount to Rachel as her portion, payable during her lifetime should Frank predecease her. The size of Rachel’s dowry is unknown, but if it conformed to the average for daughters of peers between 1650 and 1674, the sum was £7,800. Furthermore, the bridegroom, although heir to title and estate, was not an especially promising young man. Francis Vaughan was just past sixteen years of age, a little younger than Rachel, when they married; he was also younger than the average English nobleman at first marriage. Frank, as he was called, had been tutored privately as a child by the Reverend Jeremy Taylor at Golden Grove, his development anxiously overseen by his parents. In letters of advice written in 1651, his father noted several weaknesses in his character, among them a “wandering carelessness of spirit,” a tendency to criticize others, the habit of speaking out before considering his words, and a passionate nature which the earl feared would later become uncontrollable sexuality. On the other hand, Frank was blessed with quickness of spirit and ability to make sharp, perceptive observations. Lord Vaughan, however, did not go to university, as his younger brother John did, a possibly significant fact given his father’s intense interest in education and apparent intention that his heir would do so. The little that is known of Frank’s adult personality suggests immaturity: he offended his sister-in-law by a fondness for foul-smelling cheese and disappointed a correspondent by dilatoriness in correspondence.

What Rachel thought of Frank is uncertain; she makes no direct comment about him in surviving memorabilia. But an anonymous correspondent, writing within a year of Rachel’s marriage, remarked, apropos of a story about how Rachel’s aunt had encouraged the attentions of a suitor, that Rachel “had not been so kind to Lord Vaughan.” Rachel herself, reflecting later upon arranged marriages, said that it was “accepting—not choosing—on both sides,” probably a reflection on
her own experience.\(^9\) She may have inadvertently revealed the nature of her relationship with Frank in 1695 when, in writing to her daughter Katherine to comfort her over some unhappiness, she recalled that when she was her exact age—that is, nineteen years old—she faced the same problems and dealt with them by not allowing unpleasant things to torment her for long. She counselled her daughter to believe that problems would pass with time and that temporal pleasures and pains were not worth too much trouble.\(^{10}\) Moreover, what she recorded of her life as Vaughan’s wife was not her happiness in him, but her travels from Wales to London and other places to visit her family. What she found to regret about these years when she reflected on them in old age was that she had trifled away her time and enjoyed the social diversions offered by London. Further, she confessed that she took little interest in the baby boy born to her in 1665, who died, the second child she had borne who died. She admitted that she wanted to regain her strength quickly following the birth, so that she might spend her time as before, with her “loved sisters.”\(^{11}\) She recorded Frank’s death of the plague in March 1667 without comment. Clearly, these are not the recollections of a devoted wife and loving mother.

During her marriage to Vaughan, Rachel’s principal residence was at Golden Grove in Wales, the main seat of the Carbery family. After 1660, when the earl became lord president of the Marches of Wales, she was also often at Ludlow Castle, in Shropshire, the lord president’s official residence. But Rachel was not isolated in a cultural backwater, as one might think. Notwithstanding restrictions on the travel of royalists during the Interregnum, Rachel made frequent trips to visit her family. She was often in London, where she stayed with her father, and he visited Golden Grove for “some months” in 1656. The entire Carbery family was in London “on business” in 1657.\(^{12}\) Rachel also traveled to Titchfield, the home of her sister Elizabeth, married in 1661 to Edward Noel, son of third viscount Campden, and to Petworth, the home of her half-sister Elizabeth, who married Joceline Percy, eleventh earl of Northumberland, in 1662. She went on holiday to Bath in the summer of 1661 with her second stepmother, Frances, and was at Bath again the summer of 1662 with her cousin Margaret Spencer and Margaret’s husband, Anthony Ashley Cooper, later the first earl of Shaftesbury.\(^{13}\) In all she records twenty-three visits to places outside of Wales. Such visits would have kept her in touch with a larger social, cultural, and political world.

The Carb erys were cultivated people who respected the life of the mind and promoted the interests of creative intellectuals. The earl’s enthusiasm for education, expressed in letters of advice to his son, goes far beyond a formulaic endorsement. As he put it, “A noble person of all
others has need of learning and therefore should contribute most time to it.” If one may infer that Carbery practiced what he preached to Frank, then one may believe that he kept abreast of the law he had learned at Gray’s Inn earlier, and that he took special pleasure in reading history, which he described as the “nobleman’s best school.” He three times recommended the works of Sir Francis Bacon to Francis, commending them especially for their style. Carbery, moreover, appreciated lively, intelligent conversation. He had developed an admiration for the wit of the Spanish, having visited Spain as a young man, and thought Spaniards the “best company in the world.” He offered detailed advice on how to argue a point, conveying the impression of a man who has had experience in doing himself what he is talking about.\textsuperscript{14}

Of first importance in his education, Carbery told his son, was to love God and to practice faithfully religious devotions and duties. He advised Frank to avoid sectarianism and ground his convictions upon study of the Bible. There is nothing rigidly doctrinaire about his advice, and discussions about religion were probably lively at Golden Grove. On the one hand, Carbery was tolerant of advanced Puritan ideas. A copy of the third edition of Milton’s \textit{Eikonoklastes} was sent to him, inscribed in a late-seventeenth-century hand, an extraordinary gift to a noble Englishman.\textsuperscript{15} His son John flirted for a time with Quakerism and was arrested in 1664 for attending a Quaker conventicle at Mile End Green.\textsuperscript{16} On the other hand, Carbery gave asylum to the Reverend Jeremy Taylor, who served the household as domestic chaplain and tutor of the children and would have provided a strong orthodox Anglican viewpoint. Taylor gratefully acknowledged that the earl allowed him free time from his duties to write. Among the books he wrote while at Golden Grove were his two most popular pieces of devotional literature, \textit{Holy Living} (1650) and \textit{Holy Dying} (1651), both dedicated to the earl of Carbery. One of the themes in his sermons and essays was the nature of ideal Christian marriage. He set out the duties of the partners and painted a picture of shared love in each other and their children.\textsuperscript{17} Rachel’s views about marriage seem to reflect the message of Taylor’s sermons.

A further measure of the range of the earl’s interests and tolerance of diverse views is his patronage. For example, he assisted such writers as James Howell, who dedicated his \textit{Lexicon Tetraglotten} to him in 1658, and Rowland Watkin, who wrote poems in his honor published in 1662 under the title \textit{Flamma sine Furno}. He entertained John Taylor, the “Water Poet.” William Nicholson dedicated his \textit{Exposition of the Apostles’ Creed} to the earl, and Samuel Butler, while serving as the earl’s steward at Ludlow Castle during 1661, wrote the first part of \textit{Hudibras}, the long satirical poem about Puritan leaders.\textsuperscript{18}
Lady Vaughan could have met all of these people, but the only one she mentioned in later life was Jeremy Taylor. She certainly would have heard Taylor preach and otherwise have encountered him during the years they both were at Golden Grove (1654–57). They would have met again in London when he served as chaplain to her father in 1662. She turned to Taylor’s essays and prayers to help guide her devotional life, saying later that for years her prayers were drawn from his book *Holy Living*.

Rachel’s mother-in-law would also have enriched the Carberys’ cultural life. Alice Egerton, daughter of the first earl of Bridgewater, became Carbery’s third wife the summer of 1652. Gifted musically, she had earlier taken part in several masques, as both dancer and singer, and had played the role of the Lady in the first performance of Milton’s *Comus*, which took place at Ludlow Castle in 1634 to welcome her father as lord president of the Marches of Wales. Her music master, Henry Lawes, a friend of Milton’s, had written the music for that performance. Lawes regarded Lady Alice as one of his most promising pupils, and in 1653 he dedicated his *Ayres and Dialogues* to her and her sister, referring to their excellence in “vocal music, wherein you were so absolute, that you gave life and honour to all I set and taught you.” It seems certain that as countess of Carbery, Alice would have continued her interest in music and likely that she invited her old music master, who had other friends in Wales, to visit Golden Grove.

The countess’s reputation for intelligence and interest in the arts preceded her to Wales. Katherine Philips, the poet, called “the Matchless Orinda,” lived nearby and welcomed her with a poem. Philips admitted that the cultural life in the country was rather thin, but asked the countess to “receive this tribute of our shades from me.” She went on to declare that Lady Egerton’s talents “to these sad groves such a refreshment bring” that Wales will become the envy of cities. Such praise may be thought to be overblown, but it still portrays a woman who had won recognition outside of her family and who would have insisted upon a cultivated environment wherever she lived.

Katherine Philips had other indirect ties with the Carberys. She and Henry Lawes knew each other, for he had been her music master and she wrote a poem in his honor. Further, Philips put herself in touch with Jeremy Taylor, writing him for advice on reconciling friendship and Christianity. He responded in a lengthy essay, later published, in which he acknowledged Philips’ query and complimented her on the strength of her ideas. There is no evidence that he and Philips ever met or that Philips was invited to Golden Grove, but in view of the connections that had been established, both possibilities are likely.

John Vaughan, Rachel’s brother-in-law, who was only fifteen
months younger than her husband, would have surely enlivened conversations at Golden Grove. Educated at Oxford (he matriculated at Christ Church in 1656), John developed an interest in poetry and wrote verse himself. Later he became one of Dryden’s first patrons. Moreover, it was he who was captivated by Quakerism and, as already mentioned, was arrested at a Quaker meeting at Mile End Green in 1664. He courted Guilielma Maria Springett, whose mother married the republican Isaac Pennington, and who herself married William Penn in 1672. John Vaughan remained sympathetic to the Quakers until he succeeded to his father’s title in 1686. Interested also in mathematics, science, and navigation, John won admission to and eventually the presidency of the Royal Society. In 1667 he was prominent in the impeachment of the earl of Clarendon, because, it was said, of Clarendon’s desire to curtail the powers of the Marches of Wales. In 1675 he was made governor of Jamaica and accused of administering the island with a brutal hand. His marriage in 1682 to Anne Savile, the only daughter of George Savile, who that year had been made the first marquess of Halifax, provided another familial link between Rachel and Halifax, who were already cousins by marriage, his mother being a Spencer. John Vaughan and Rachel must have become friends during the 1650s; they kept in touch with each other until Vaughan’s death in 1713.

It may be presumed that politics was a topic of conversation at Golden Grove. One letter has survived to suggest that Lady Vaughan probably took part in such talk. An unidentified correspondent, known only by the initials A.E., wrote to Rachel on January 20, 1660. Intimating that the correspondence was regular—“I must begin...where I ended in my last”—the writer provided a detailed account of General Monck’s activities, the relations between London and Parliament, and the internal affairs of the House of Commons. He sent Rachel copies of political doggerel and of a letter the Speaker of the House of Commons allegedly concealed. His remarks are of uncommon importance because they prove that prior to the Restoration Rachel possessed—or was thought to possess—a more than casual interest in public affairs and that a correspondent kept her rather well informed.

Although Lady Vaughan’s recollections of these years at Golden Grove and Ludlow Castle do not mention cultural and intellectual activities, and although Rachel did not in later life show much interest in music or poetry, it is inconceivable that the interests of the Carberys made no impression upon her. Had she married into a different kind of family and spent the decade of her twenties vegetating in a remote country house, then her own intellectual self-confidence and interests might have failed to develop. As it was, the Carbery family provided a stimulating cultural and intellectual environment.
That Rachel fit easily into that environment is suggested by the fact that she endeared herself to her husband’s family. Within a year of her marriage one Francis Williams, a friend of the Carbery family, paid her a fine compliment; he wrote that she proved that there was no charm so great as goodness, that he had observed this quality in her, and that all who knew her honored her for it. Rachel shared her mother-in-law’s interest in books, as Williams’ efforts to supply the two women with them show. Following Frank’s death, Carbery wrote her a warm and sincere letter, assuring her of his love and affection, regretting her absence at Golden Grove, and affirming his obligations to her. Throughout her long life, Rachel kept in touch with the Vaughters, including her father-in-law, her brother-in-law, John, and his wife, Anne Savile, and her two sisters-in-law, Frances and Althamiah. It need hardly be said that a woman does not always achieve such a position in her husband’s family; that Rachel did suggests a personal attractiveness that appealed to diverse people. Rachel’s affection for her husband’s family did not weaken her identity with her own family. Rather, it revealed her emotional warmth, need for approval, and desire to create extended family connections, attitudes that remained with her throughout life.

Rachel’s marriage introduced her to a family in which there were a number of men: husband, father-in-law, brother-in-law, male intellectuals, and probably other family friends. As we have seen, she also received letters from men. This male presence in her life was very different from her girlhood and adolescence. The evidence is too small to draw firm conclusions, but it seems to show that for the first time Rachel had male friends. Such contacts would also have helped to keep her in touch with a wider world and have prepared her for later heterosexual friendships.

All during the years of her first marriage, as was the case during her childhood, Lady Vaughan confronted personal illness and the illness and death of people close to her. Three years after her marriage, in 1657, she was stricken with measles and three years later with smallpox, both dread diseases in the seventeenth century. There is no indication that she was left pockmarked. Her successful recovery from these illnesses would have induced immunity and would explain why she later escaped infection when so many members of her family succumbed. Death struck people close to her. Her grandmother, in whose charge, it will be remembered, she had been placed as a little girl, died in 1654 and her first stepmother, Elizabeth Leigh, in 1656. Two half-sisters died—the second Penelope in 1655 and Audrey in 1660. Rachel’s first pregnancy in 1657 presumably ended in a miscarriage, and the two babies that she bore Francis Vaughan died—in 1659 and 1665. Frank died in March
1667 and her father two months later. There was scarcely a year that Rachel was not either ill, pregnant, giving birth and suffering the trauma of infant death, or enduring the deaths of people near her. Even though she records rather than comments on these events, they must have influenced her attitudes, sharpening her awareness of the transitoriness of life and the power of God over each individual’s fortunes. Taylor’s *Holy Dying* assisted her then as it was to do later.

The Restoration brought office and wealth to the men in the Carbery and Southampton families, and thus gave Lady Vaughan entrée to high social and political circles in London and Wales. Her husband’s political career was a modest one. Frank’s father had predicted earlier that Frank would not be “easily enticed” out of private life into the public world, but he did undertake the duties usual to a person of his class. Both he and his brother were elected to represent Carmarthenshire in the Cavalier Parliament, and he served on one important committee, that for the Corporation Bill. He also took his place as a county leader, holding such posts as justice of the peace for Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire from July 1660 to his death and serving as a member of the Council of the Marches of Wales under the presidency of his father. His interest in mining—he was involved with others in securing a license from the king to dig mines in certain areas and retain the profits for forty-one years—may have revealed economic and intellectual venturesomeness.

Rachel’s father, by contrast, held one of the most important posts in Charles II’s government, that of lord treasurer, and received the Garter, the highest order of English knighthood. But Southampton was not an intimate of the new king, in large part because he found many things to criticize in Charles’s private activities and public policies. First, he took offense at the king’s mistresses, refusing to visit them and to allow Lady Castlemaine’s name to appear in the treasury books, despite the fact that Charles was known to regard as an “enemy” anyone who criticized his mistresses. Second, Southampton opposed the project of maintaining soldiers in peacetime who would be answerable to the king, and was only dissuaded from pointedly objecting to the king by Clarendon’s promise that the number of soldiers would be kept to a minimum. Third, the earl disagreed with the religious policy of the Anglican bishops and the king. He disliked the bishops’ refusal to amend the church’s government in order to conciliate Presbyterians. Passionately anti-Catholic, he believed that both the king and the duke of York underestimated the danger from Rome. Accordingly, he joined with Clarendon in opposing Charles’s bill for liberty of conscience, a step which so angered the king that he upbraided them both. Finally, Southampton was deeply disappointed that Charles failed to follow his
advice to reduce his expenses. Exasperated with the king, Southampton reportedly declared that Charles should not have been allowed to return to England without conditions on his authority.44

For his part, Charles had little regard or affection for his treasurer. The earl's integrity and good intentions could not compensate for his frequent absences due to poor health or his failure to deal effectively with the debt of the government.45 By 1664 some men were urging Charles II to replace Southampton, but either because of his respect for the earl's popularity or because of Clarendon's intervention, Charles refused. A contemporary aptly summed up the relationship when he wrote that when Southampton died, the court felt that it was “delivered of a great man, whom they did not much love, and who they knew did not love them.”46

Whatever the view of the court, other people found much to admire in Southampton. He was regarded as personally incorruptible and commended for taking a fixed salary—of £8,000 a year—and refusing to sell treasury offices to his own profit. Clarendon, his good friend, thought him to be a “person of extraordinary parts,” and Burnet concurred.47 Southampton's nephew by marriage, Anthony Ashley Cooper, described him as “wise and worthy.”48 The two medals of him cast in 1664 were testimony to the social and political prominence that Southampton had achieved.49 It was, of course, such views as these that Rachel hoped to recall when she appeared at her second husband's treason trial in 1683 and then prostrated herself before Charles II, begging for his life. Perhaps she did not fully appreciate that Charles had little love for her father and that her appeal must have suffered some diminution as a result.

Not only did Lady Vaughan's father hold high office during the Restoration, but he also was able to rebuild and expand his estate. Although the Cromwellian financial exactions represented a setback, they had not destroyed him financially, and in 1657 he reactivated the plans he had made in the early 1640s to build a mansion on his Bloomsbury property. In 1660 he spent over £5,000 finishing the house. He named it Southampton House-in-the-Fields, to distinguish it from the earlier Southampton House on Holborn. Over the next few years he furnished it lavishly, buying silver candlesticks, hangings, screens, silver serving dishes, linens, and paintings, including portraits of two of his deceased children, Henry and Magdalene. In 1662 he commissioned the portrait artist Sir Peter Lely to paint Rachel and paid him £20. The earl also purchased from Jeremy Taylor, now one of his chaplains, a great Bible for the chapel.50 He greatly improved the setting of his mansion by tearing down the wooden tenements in the area and replacing them with brick houses which he rented. By doing so, his income was greatly aug-
mented, his London estate bringing in over £3,000 a year at his death.\textsuperscript{51} A first-class suburban developer, the earl created a highly profitable, exceedingly attractive complex, which his daughter Rachel was to inherit. He also set an example in property management which Rachel could—and did—draw upon.

The political and social position of her male relatives involved Rachel in the lively social life of Restoration London. She had a little extra money of her own to spend, for, starting in 1660, her indulgent father provided her and her two sisters with an allowance of about £33 a year.\textsuperscript{52} She enjoyed “all too well,” she admitted later to her chagrin, the “esteemed diversions of the town”—walking in the park, visiting, plays, “etc.” According to her account, she indulged in idleness at Tunbridge and Bath, and was “slothful” in her attention to spiritual duties in both Wales and London. She remembered regretfully that she had preferred attending Sunday services at some place other than her “dear” father’s house, where the sermons were long and the ensuing discussions tedious.\textsuperscript{53} In her old age, having lived for many years a life of piety, Rachel may have exaggerated these youthful follies, but it cannot be doubted that she indulged in the diversions usual to an aristocratic lady in the 1660s, and that at the time she enjoyed doing so.

The year 1667 was a traumatic one in Rachel’s life. She lost her husband, who died of the plague at Ludlow Castle on March 2, 1667, and her father, who died on May 16 in London at Southampton House of kidney stones, an ailment that had plagued him all of his life. Rachel noted both events in her diary, but added about her father, “my good father died.”\textsuperscript{54} She would have witnessed her father’s remarkable fortitude during the last days of his life. He suffered excruciating pain, made all the more agonizing by a new French treatment he had tried.\textsuperscript{55} It is likely that Rachel would have known of her father’s concern for the ill children of James, duke of York, and his inquiring about them the morning of his death.\textsuperscript{56} Perhaps she hoped to evoke memory of such a thoughtful gesture when she pleaded in 1683 with the duke to urge his brother to spare the life of her husband. Rachel would probably have assisted her stepmother in making the arrangements for her father’s elaborate funeral and certainly would have gone with her family to Titchfield for the burial on June 18.\textsuperscript{57}

Thus, Rachel was left at the age of thirty a childless widow, with her father dead. Her father had been a greater influence on her than any other person up to that time. For her entire life, he had set an example of devotion to the Anglican church but sympathy for Dissenters, of high-minded living, and of service to one’s country. From him, an observer remarked later on, Rachel had inherited her ideas about the church, the role of the Dissenters, and the “business of civil government.”\textsuperscript{58} South-
ampton had also given her what psychologists today say is of great importance in the development of a girl’s self-confidence, the affection, approval, and even indulgence of a father. His influence may also have inclined Rachel to identify with men more than with women and throughout life to choose a male rather than a female for her closest confidant.

Living for thirteen years in the Carbery family as Frank Vaughan’s wife also surely left a mark on Rachel. The religious, political, and cultural attitudes of the Carberys reinforced those already exemplified in her father and encouraged Rachel’s intellectual development, which, had the family been differently inclined, might have atrophied. Her lack of fulfillment in this first marriage may also have inspired both a romantic notion of what married love might be and a realistic assessment of the chances of achieving it.