

**LETTERS, WRITTEN BY
JOHN CHAMBERLAIN
DURING THE REIGN
OF QUEEN ELIZABETH**

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Letters, Written by John Chamberlain During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth by John Chamberlain & Sarah Williams

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JOHN CHAMBERLAIN & SARAH WILLIAMS

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JOHN . CHAMBERLAIN

DURING

THE REIGN OF QUEEN ELIZABETH.

EDITED FROM THE ORIGINALS

BY SARAH WILLIAMS.



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[LXXIX.]

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INTRODUCTION.

THE CHAMBERLAIN LETTERS now published are those which were written during the reign of Elizabeth, and, with the exception of a few extracts in Nichols's Progresses, have not hitherto been printed. The nature of Chamberlain's Correspondence is so well known from the letters printed in "The Court and Times of James I.," and in other works, that any comment, either upon his style or the general character of his gossiping letters, is wholly superfluous. There are but sixty-two of the Elizabethan Letters, and all but one are addressed to Dudley Carleton; the single exception is a letter (No. LXIX.) which was begun for Carleton, but was afterwards sent to Ralph Winwood, who was then in Paris with him, and was doubtless handed over by Winwood to Carleton, which will explain its apparently solitary appearance. Chamberlain wrote frequently to Winwood during the sojourn of the latter in Paris, during 1601 and 1602, but I find no trace of any of these letters among the State Papers.

Although Chamberlain's letters are extremely numerous, and are entirely made up of personal allusions and references, little has been known of his own individual history. The importance of the information of which he is the sole chronicler has gained him a niche in Chalmers's Biographical Dictionary, but it is surprising how few

details have been collected respecting himself. Even his descent, his parentage, and his family connections, have up to this time been altogether unknown. From his brief allusions to some of these subjects we are enabled to infer that he was born in January 1553-4;^a that he had brothers named Robert and George; and that after the death of the latter, in February 1623-4, John Chamberlain became the survivor of all his father's children, the last of eight brothers and sisters.

His expression, "our university of Cambridge," used by him in a letter of 17 June 1612, intimates the place of his education, and Messrs. Cooper, the able authors of the *Athenæ Cantabrigienses*, in a recent communication to the always-useful "Notes and Queries" (2nd series, xi. 296), state that he was matriculated as a pensioner of Trinity College in May 1570, but took no degree. We may probably infer, from the frequency of his visits to his country friends, that he did not follow any profession; sometimes we find him at Rowland Lytton's, at Knebworth; sometimes at Sir Henry Wallop's, at Farley; sometimes at Mr. Gent's, at Ascott (a small parish in the county of Oxford); and at various other places. He seldom went far away from London, with the exception of a "voyage" to Ireland, in 1597 (p. 5), and of a journey to Venice in 1610, in company with Sir Dudley Carleton, whence he returned in November 1611.

In November 1620,^b "Chamberlain was appointed one of the Commissioners for the repair of St. Paul's." This is his only public appointment of which I have found any trace. Messrs. Cooper,

^a In a letter, dated 25 January 1622-3, he says, that "about the middle of this month" he "began to be *septuagenarius*."

^b Birch MS. 4173, f. 46.

in the communication to Notes and Queries before alluded to, state that "he was member for Clithero, in Lancashire, in the Parliament which met 19th November 1592, and for St. German's, in Cornwall, in that which met 24th October 1597;" but, with all deference, I rather incline to think that this must have been another person. Some allusion to such important incidents, if they had really occurred in Chamberlain's usually retired and quiet life, would surely have been found in his voluminous correspondence.

He does not appear to have been married, as there is no reference to wife or children in his letters, with the exception of a playful title which he gave to Winifred Wallop (p. 70). The latest letter in the State Paper Office is one addressed to Sir Dudley Carleton, H. M. Ambassador in Paris, dated March 7, 1625-6, Chamberlain being then in his seventy-fourth year; and in it, after giving the ordinary news, he says, "I have kept house these two days, and taken a little physic, more than I have done in a dozen years before."

From this time all further correspondence appears to have ceased, for, after a careful examination of the Domestic and the French Correspondence, I find nothing whatever concerning Chamberlain, from which I infer that he must have died shortly after writing the above letter. In the Rubens Papers, edited by Mr. W. Noël Sainsbury, a gentleman to whom I have long been indebted for valuable literary information and suggestions, I find a note at p. 9, wherein Secretary Dorchester, writing to Sir Issac Wake, on the 15th of October, 1630, alludes to "Mr. John Chamberlain, our good friend, who is with God."

All our information respecting him has hitherto stopped a little short of the few facts which I have thus thrown together. But I am enabled to add something more to this meagre narrative.