

SUMMARY: The letter below was written on 14 August 1578 by the Spanish ambassador in England, Don Bernardino de Mendoza (d.1604), to Gabriel de Zayas (1526-1593), secretary to King Philip II of Spain. Mendoza recounts an incident which took place on the Queen's progress in East Anglia in the summer of 1578. Nicolas, sieur de Bacqueville, and Monsieur de Quisse had been sent to England in late July by Francois (1554-1584), Duke of Alencon and Anjou, in connection with his prospective marriage to Queen Elizabeth. During a dinner for the French ambassadors, the Queen unjustly berated Thomas Radcliffe (1526/7-1583), 3rd Earl of Sussex, for not having sufficient plate on display, as a result of which a dispute broke out between Sussex and Roger (1530-1600), 2nd Lord North. When Sussex brought the matter to Leicester's attention, Leicester took the part of Lord North, with whom he had been close friends since the late 1560s, and to whom he was related by marriage, North having married Winifred Rich (d.1578) the widow of Leicester's eldest brother, Sir Henry Dudley (1531?-1557) (see the entry for North in *The Dictionary of National Biography*). As a result of this falling-out between Leicester and Sussex, Oxford, who was close to Sussex, refused to dance before the French ambassadors when requested to do so by the Queen. The incident is described in detail in Dovey, Zillah M., *An Elizabethan progress: the Queen's journey into East Anglia, 1578* (Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1996), pp. 37-47.

On 29 July Burghley wrote that the two representatives of the Duc d'Alencon had arrived in London and would reach the Court, which would still be at Audley End, the next day. Earlier in the month, Alencon had written to Elizabeth himself, telling her that he was sending her his Counsellor and Chamberlain in Ordinary, the Sieur de Bacqueville, 'to give her every assurance of his affection that she can possibly desire'. . . . De Bacqueville was accompanied by Monsieur de Quisse and four or five young followers of Alencon. One of the Queen's Gentlemen Ushers, Richard Brackenbury, was appointed to escort them, an assignment which lasted nearly two months. (pp.37-8)

Elizabeth probably left Audley End on Friday 1 August, making for Melford Hall, her next major lodging, about 20 miles away. This would involve two days' traveling . . . (p.39)

Melford Hall, which the progress reached that Saturday evening [=2 August], was the house of Sir William Cordell, Master of the Rolls. . . . (p.42)

On Sunday 3 August Elizabeth gave two important audiences [+at Melford Hall]. The French ambassador [=Mauvissiere] and Alencon's envoy, Monsieur de Bacqueville, who had arrived as expected, spent a long time with her. . . . (p.43)

About ten days later Bernardino de Mendoza, the Spanish ambassador in London, reported to Madrid an incident which must have taken place at Melford Hall. He had arrived in England only a few months earlier but he was able to follow Elizabeth's dealings with the French very closely through his informants with the progress. One of these had said that on an occasion when de Bacqueville was dining with the Queen, she decided that the gold and silver plate on the sideboard was not as impressive as she

would have liked the French to see. This was, of course, her own plate, brought by John Pigion from the Jewel House, so she sent for the Lord Chamberlain and asked him why there was so little. Lord Sussex replied that he had accompanied a great many progresses and had never known so much plate to be carried as on this one. The Queen told him to hold his tongue and abused him vigorously. Then she turned to Lord North and asked his opinion. North was no friend of Sussex and predictably he agreed with the Queen. The quarrel between Sussex and North continued outside the royal presence, Sussex eventually trying, vainly, to gain Leicester's support. (p.45)

Mendoza's story is borne out by an apparent sequel. In spite of his protestations, the Lord Chamberlain evidently took the Queen's censures to heart, for he sent Pigion back to London to collect more plate for the next two major stops. By using six horses to cover the ground quickly, he was able to return with 'certayne riche Cuppes, standing Trenchers and Salte of golde and other thinges' in time for Elizabeth to use them at Kenninghall Palace and in Norwich. (p.45)

The following day, again according to Mendoza, Elizabeth wanted the Earl of Oxford, who was traveling with the progress, to dance for the French party. Twice, however, he refused and would not listen to her messenger, saying he did not wish to entertain Frenchmen. . . . Mendoza was interested because he had heard that Oxford had expressed a wish to go and serve his master, the King of Spain. (p.45)

The Queen left Melford Hall early in the morning on 5 August . . . (p.47)

This account is supplemented in Doran, Susan, *Monarchy and matrimony: a study of Elizabeth I's courtships* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 149-52:

Just at this time when Elizabeth was beginning to share her councillors' doubts about Anjou, he sent two envoys, M. de Bacqueville and M. de Quissy, to England for the purpose of re-opening his matrimonial suit. They were also told to reassure her that the duke was 'at her Majesty's devotion' and would follow her directions in the Netherlands. Shortly afterwards, Henry III, who disliked his brother's independent behaviour, sent over his own envoy, M. de Rambouillet, to keep an eye on the negotiations in England. During their stay in August and early September 1578, Elizabeth treated these French ambassadors with great favour, often spoke of her desire to marry a prince 'de bonne maison', and made light of the age difference which had caused her so much unease in the previous negotiations; Anjou, she said with apparent contentment, would be a son to her as well as a husband. (p.149)

The opponents of the Anjou matrimonial negotiations kept a low profile at court during the visit of the French envoys, and Mauvissiere had no notion at all that Leicester was hostile to it. (p.150)

The message that reached Anjou, therefore, was that Elizabeth was open to the idea of a match but would not marry anyone whom she had not met. Seeing that his Flanders enterprise was in danger of collapse owing to his disagreements with the states and the

desertions of his troops, Anjou decided to take Elizabeth at her word and pursue his courtship more vigorously. None the less he still held back from making a personal visit to the queen. Henry III had warned him against entering such a commitment until the terms for a marriage-contract had been agreed, and besides he was needed in France because of the breakdown in the religious peace there. Consequently, he first sent his intimate councillor, Bussy d'Amboise, to the English court and then dispatched his trusted household servant Jean de Simier, baron de Saint-Marc, to woo Elizabeth in his place and negotiate a matrimonial treaty based on the demands put forward on behalf of his brother in 1571. (p.152)

By the time Simier was due to arrive, Elizabeth had already begun to blow hot and cold about the visit and the marriage. In early October 1578 she had sent Anjou her portrait and presents, but a month later she was beginning to prevaricate. According to Mauvissiere, there had been 'grands factions' attempting to persuade the queen against receiving him, and rumours had been spread that Anjou was secretly planning to marry a Spanish princess. She was also concerned that Simier would want to negotiate a treaty which she was not prepared to consider before an interview with the duke took place. None the less, she decided to go ahead (p.152)

Ward suggests that Oxford's refusal to dance before the French ambassadors did not reflect a negative attitude towards the French marriage, which other evidence indicates he favoured, but was rather his way of showing the Queen what he thought of her childish behaviour towards Sussex (see Ward, B.M., *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford 1550-1604 From Contemporary Documents* (London: John Murray, 1928) pp. 160-3). However, it seems naïve to categorize the Queen's behaviour as 'childish'. The Queen had no intention of marrying Alençon. The marriage negotiations were mere political manoeuvring. It thus seems that the Queen deliberately chose the sham pretext that there was insufficient plate on display in order to publicly discredit Sussex, who was a proponent of the marriage. In so doing, the Queen weakened Sussex' influence by humiliating him publicly before the French delegation. Oxford's refusal to dance thus suggests that he saw through the Queen's behaviour, and refused to facilitate her duplicitous approach to the marriage negotiations at Sussex' expense.

Mendoza concludes his account by explaining to Zayas that Oxford had a 'great following', and that he had requested the Queen's permission to serve Don John of Austria (1547-1578), the victor of Lepanto, and the half-brother of King Philip II of Spain. Dovey states (see above) that by 'His Highness', Mendoza meant King Philip, but the use of the title 'His Highness' rather than 'His Majesty' suggests that Ward may be correct in identifying Don John as the person Mendoza had in mind. On 31 January 1578, Don John, who had been reinforced by the Duke of Parma with troops from Spain, had inflicted a crushing defeat on the Protestants at Gemblours. According to Ward, Mendoza's claim that Oxford wished to serve Don John should be taken with considerable reservation since in the previous year Queen Elizabeth had written a letter to the King of Spain in which she had referred to Don John as her 'most mortal enemy'. Moreover as noted by Dovey, Mendoza had only been in England a few months at the time he wrote this letter, and was relying on second-hand information from informants

who were reporting to him on events occurring outside London. The transcript below is taken from *Coleccion de Documentos Ineditos para la Historia de España por El Marques de la Fuensanta del Valle, D. José Sancho Rayon y D. Francisco de Zabalburu*, Tomo XCI (Madrid: M. Ginesta Hermanos, Impresores de la Real Casa, 1888, reprinted Kraus Reprint Ltd., Vadux, 1966), pp. 271-2. The translation below is taken from Hume, Martin, ed., *Calendar of Letters and State Papers relating to English Affairs*, Vol. II, 1568-1579, p. 606. The first and last parts of the letter have not been transcribed or translated.

Esta Reina ha regalado mucho al Embajador del de Alanzon, y festejándole un dia que comió con ella, le pareció que el aparador no estaba tan poblado de piezas como ella quisiera que le viera el francés, y así llamó al Conde de Sussex, gran Camarero, á quien le toca el tener cuenta con esto, y le dijo, que cómo habia tan poca plata; el Conde le respondió que él le habia seguido en muchos progresos que habia hecho, y á otros Reyes de Inglaterra y que jamás habian llevado tanta plata como entónces se traia; y que la Reina replicó que callase, que era grande bellaco, y que á semejantes como él, cuanto más bien se les hacía era peor. Volviéndose á un tal Nort que estaba allí en la pieza, le preguntó si era poca la plata que habia en el aparador, qué le respondió que sí, cargando al de Sussex, el cual saliendo el Nort de la Cámara de la Reina, le dijo que como habia hecho muy mal, y que mentia en lo que habia dicho á la Reina, á que le replicó el Nort, que si no fuera del Consejo le respondiera satisfaciéndole de lo que decia. El de Sussex se fué luego para el de Leicester, y quejándose de la bellaquería que habia hecho el Nort, le respondió el de Leicester, que de tales personas no se debian decir semejantes palabras. Replicó el de Sussex, que semejantes ó no semejantes, él era un grandísimo bellaco, de suerte que quedaron amordiscados y de ántes lo estaban mucho sobre otras cosas, y aunque esto no sea de importancia no he querido dejar de decirlo á V. merced para que vea cuán dispuesta está la materia para el desavenirse; si se asegurase alguna de las partes de tener espaldas, para lo que le podia suceder, y la Reina envió á decir otro dia dos veces al Conde de Asfort, que es un mozo muy bizarro, que danzase delante de los Embajadores, y él le respondió que S. M. no se lo mandase porque no queria festejar los franceses, y la segunda vez que se lo dijo el Gran Camarero, le respondió que no queria regocijar á franceses ni oír semejantes recaudos, saliendo de la pieza; es mozo que tiene gran séquito en este Reino y mucha cualidad; ha pedido licencia para ir á servir á S. A. y la Reina no se la ha dado diciéndole que por qué no queria ir á servir al Archiduque Matias, le respondió que no era hombre que habia de servir fuera de su Rey á ninguno que no lo fuese muy grande y tanto como el de España.

This Queen has greatly feasted Alencon's amabassador, and on one occasion when she was entertaining him at dinner, she thought the sideboard was not so well furnished with pieces of plate as she would like the Frenchman to have seen it. She therefore called the Earl of Sussex, the Lord Steward, who had charge of these things, and asked him how it was there was so little plate. The Earl replied that he had, for many years, accompanied

her and other sovereigns of England in their progresses, and he had never seen them take so much plate as she was carrying then. The Queen told him to hold his tongue, that he was a great rogue, and that the more good that was done to people like him the worse they got. She then turned to a certain North who was there in the room, and asked him whether he thought there was much or little plate on the sideboard, to which he replied there was very little, and threw the blame on Sussex. When North left the Queen's chamber, Sussex told him that he had spoken wrongly and falsely in what he said to the Queen, whereupon North replied that if he, Sussex, did not belong to the Council he would prove what he said to his teeth. Sussex then went to Leicester and complained of the knavish behaviour of North, but Leicester told him that the words he used should not be applied to such persons as North. Sussex answered that, whatever he might think of the words, North was a great knave, so that they remained offended with one another as they had been before on other matters. This may not be of importance, but I have thought well to relate it so that you may see how easily matters here may now be brought into discord if care be taken on one side to ensure support against eventualities.

The next day the Queen sent twice to tell the Earl of Oxford, who is a very gallant lad, to dance before the ambassadors, whereupon he replied that he hoped her Majesty would not order him to do so as he did not want to entertain Frenchmen. When the Lord Steward took him the message the second time, he replied that he would not give pleasure to Frenchmen, nor listen to such a message, and with that he left the room. He is a lad who has a great following in the country, and has requested permission to go and serve his Highness, which the Queen refused, and asked him why he did not go and serve the Archduke Mathias, to which he replied that he would not serve another sovereign than his own, unless it were a very great one, such as the King of Spain.