

SUMMARY: The letter below dated 12 August 1581 was written by Don Bernardino de Mendoza (d.1604) to King Philip II. It concerns Sir Francis Walsingham's interview with the Queen's suitor, Francois (1554-1584), Duke of Alencon and Anjou. The background to this interview is provided in the entry for Sir Francis Walsingham (c.1532-1590) in *The Dictionary of National Biography*:

On 22 July [1581], however, Walsingham was sent on an embassy to France that lasted until 21 September. Just after the marriage treaty was signed Henri had informed Elizabeth that he was prepared to consider a full alliance after the marriage was concluded, yet at the same time it was obvious that he was trying to obstruct his brother's Netherlands plans. The basic purpose of the embassy was to discover what he was up to and to keep Anjou's enterprise alive. The complex instructions Walsingham was given reflect the genuine English puzzlement over Henri's intentions. Walsingham tried to escape the embassy, fearing a repetition of 1578, but without success. There was, however, a challenge for him. During the spring he had become increasingly interested in plans for a naval expedition to aid the Portuguese pretender, Dom Antonio, and invested in it himself. In May Dom Antonio had sent an envoy to Elizabeth, who claimed that Henri had promised him assistance. When Elizabeth offered to share the costs the French king replied that he would do so only after the marriage. Walsingham observed to Huntingdon on 29 June, 'yt is to be gathered by this could [cold] answer that yf the mariadge take not place, the portugalls can look for no relefe out of France and that the French King will come some other coorse' (Hunt. L., Hastings MS 13070).

Once in France, Walsingham went first to see Anjou at his crowded headquarters at La Fère-en-Tardenois on 3 August 1581, where they had to retire to the latter's bedchamber to escape the noise of the courtiers in the adjoining apartment. Here he expressed Elizabeth's concern that the marriage would commit her to an open war with Spain, though she was willing to ally with France and would aid him discreetly. Anjou replied that his brother would do nothing until the marriage was concluded. However, he responded to her promise of assistance by requesting a loan to keep his forces in the field. Walsingham thought this a good way of retaining control of him. Shortly afterwards Walsingham encountered Catherine, who had come to dissuade Anjou from the enterprise and to agree to a Spanish marriage, but he apparently managed to persuade her to support an English alliance. He then went to Paris, where he had his first audience with Henri on 10 August. He found him difficult to pin down, but concluded that without the marriage Henri would not agree to an alliance. On 24 August Elizabeth followed Walsingham's advice by agreeing quickly to the loan Anjou had requested. However, at the same time Walsingham discovered that his negotiations with Henri were being sabotaged by reports from Mauvissière and Anjou's agent Pierre Clause, sieur de Marchaumont, that Elizabeth would ultimately proceed with the marriage. With this stalemate his embassy came to an end.

Mendoza states in his letter that after the Queen received news of Walsingham's interview of 3 August 1581 with Alencon, she 'wept like a child', and 'sent Lord Howard to Alencon to mollify him, writing most sweetly, so as not to lose him altogether'.

Another letter of Mendoza's dated 27 September 1581 reports the return of 'Lord Harry' a month later:

Lord Harry, whom this Queen sent to Alencon, has returned. He reports that Alencon was marching along the French frontier towards Boulogne, saying that he was going to Dunkirk for greater facility for his coming hither. See Hume, Martin, ed., Calendar of Letters and State Papers relating to English Affairs, Vol. III, 1580-1586, p 175.

Historians have identified the 'Lord Howard' and 'Lord Harry' referred to in these letters as Oxford's first cousin, Lord Henry Howard (1540-1614). Howard and Charles Arundel had both been arrested after fleeing to the house of the Spanish ambassador, Mendoza, at midnight on 25 December 1580. In a letter endorsed 20 July 1581 (see CP 98/129) Howard still refers to himself as a 'prisoner', and complains that 'when my liberty is spoken of, her Majesty begins to speak of trial face to face'. Moreover on 27 October 1581 Howard wrote a sycophantic letter to Leicester (see TNA SP 12/150/51, ff. 97-8) in which he speaks of himself as being under 'restraint':

But now that doubts and jealousies are happily provided for, and that it pleaseth God upon compassion of my wrongs to soften and incline the princely mind of my most gracious Sovereign to pity my restraint, mine humble suit unto your Lordship is to banish all the relics of your former misconceit and, according to the discipline of Athens, to begin a fresh account of my well deserving.

These documents thus suggest that Howard was continuously a prisoner, or under house arrest at least, from 27 December 1580 until 27 October 1581, and that, moreover, he was not released until he had asked forgiveness of Leicester, whom he had blamed for the execution in 1572 of his brother, Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk.

In view of these documents, it seems unlikely that the 'Lord Howard' and 'Lord Harry' who was sent to Alencon in August 1581 was Lord Henry Howard (1540-1614). On the other hand, Lord Henry Howard was one of the strongest proponents of the French marriage, and it is possible that Queen Elizabeth liberated him from house arrest and sent him on this mission to Alencon in August, confining him to house arrest again on his return to England in September.

For the roles played by Charles Arundel and Lord Henry Howard in events involving Oxford in 1580/1 see TNA SP 15/27A/46, ff. 81-2 and other documents on this website, in particular the letters of the Spanish ambassador to England, Don Bernardino de Mendoza (d.1604). The translation below is taken from Hume, Martin, ed., *Calendar of Letters and State Papers relating to English Affairs*, Vol. III, 1580-1586, pp. 158-9.

After writing the enclosed letters, I learn that the Queen has received a dispatch from Walsingham, reporting what had passed with Alencon, to whom he had said that, as he had declared himself so openly against your Majesty, she could not now marry him

without adopting a similar course, which the people of her country opposed, and recommended her rather to make masked war on you, with other things of the same sort. Alencon answered Walsingham that he did not accept this as an answer, and would receive none as regards the marriage, excepting from the Queen's own lips, for which purpose he would come to this country as soon as he had finished the business he had in hand. He was quite sure, he said, that such messages as this were not in accord with the Queen's own will, judging from what she had said and written to him many times. He also said that, even if his brother made an alliance, unless he married the Queen, he, Alencon, would break it. He went to such a length that Walsingham reports that if the Queen-mother had not been present he thinks he would have lost his composure entirely.* I am told that when the Queen heard this she wept like a child, saying that she did not now know what to do, nor into what trouble Leicester had drawn her. She sent Lord Howard to Alencon to mollify him, writing most sweetly, so as not to lose him altogether. Walsingham also reports that the King of France was much annoyed that, after having sent so many personages here, Walsingham alone should be sent to him in return, and that if he could manage to have him put out of the way he would attempt it. They have agreed, in view of this news, that Don Antonio's armaments shall be delayed until they hear more from Walsingham. London, 12th August 1581.

* This interview took place at La Fere in Picardy, and a full account of it and Walsingham's other negotiations during his visit to France will be found in the Walsingham Correspondence. Consult also Le Laboureur's addition to the Castelnau Memoirs.