

SUMMARY: In this letter of 11 May 1573, Gilbert Talbot (1552-1616), later 7th Earl of Shrewsbury, writes to his father, George Talbot (c.1522-1590), 6th Earl of Shrewsbury, about the latest events court. Much of the news he reports to his father is gossip, such as his statement that Oxford was currently a favourite of the Queen, which had made Lady Burghley 'jealous' on behalf of her daughter, Anne Cecil. The nature of the gossip in Gilbert Talbot's letter confirms, in general terms, the allegations concerning Queen Elizabeth's sexual indiscretions and favouritism contained in a letter written by Mary, Queen of Scots, circa 1584, and the mention of 'Rolston' in Gilbert Talbot's letter also lends credibility to an allegation made by Mary concerning Rolston (see Murdin, William, *A Collection of State Papers* (London: William Bowyer, 1759) pp. 558-60). Other information in the letter was of considerable importance to the Earl of Shrewsbury, in particular the comments concerning his prisoner, Mary, Queen of Scots. Shrewsbury acted as Mary's jailer from February 1569 until September 1584. Mention is also made in the letter of Francis Southwell, and of his friendship with both Gilbert Talbot and Dr Thomas Wilson (1523/4-1581). This would appear to be the same Francis Southwell who was later involved in allegations against Oxford in 1580-1 (see TNA SP 12/151/57, ff. 118-19). The copy of the letter below is taken from Lodge, Edmund, *Illustrations of British History, Biography, and Manners in the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, & James I*, vol. II (London: John Chidley, 1838) pp. 16-21.

My most humble duty remembered, right honourable my singular good Lord and father, because of the convenience of the bearer hereof I have thought good to advertise your Lordship of the estate of some here at the Court as near as I have learned by my daily experience.

My Lord Treasurer, even after the old manner, dealeth with matters of the state only, and beareth himself very uprightly. My Lord Leicester is very much with her Majesty, and she shows the same great good affection to him that she was wont; of late he has endeavoured to please her more than heretofore. There are two sisters now in the court that are very far in love with him, as they have been long, my Lady Sheffield and Frances Howard. They (of like striving who shall love him better) are at great wars together, and the Queen thinketh not well of them, and not the better of him; by this means there are spies over him. My Lord of Sussex goes with the tide, and helps to back others, but his own credit is sober, considering his estate; he is very diligent in his office, and takes great pains. My Lord of Oxford is lately grown into great credit, for the Queen's Majesty delighteth more in his personage and his dancing and valiantness than any other. I think Sussex doth back him all that he can; if it were not for his fickle head, he would pass any of them shortly. My Lady Burghley unwisely has declared herself, as it were, jealous, which is come to the Queen's ear, whereat she has been not a little offended with her, but now she is reconciled again. At all these love matters my Lord Treasurer winketh, and will not meddle any way. Hatton is sick still; it is thought he will very hardly recover his disease, for it is doubted it is in his kidneys. The Queen goeth almost every day to see how he doth. Now are there devices (chiefly by Leicester, as I suppose, and not without

Burghley's knowledge) how to make Mr Edward Dyer as great as ever was Hatton, for now in this time of Hatton's sickness the time is convenient. It is brought thus to pass. Dyer lately was sick of a consumption, in great danger, and as your Lordship knows he has been in displeasure these two years. It was made the Queen believe that his sickness came because of the continuance of her displeasure towards him, so that unless she would forgive him, he was like not to recover, and hereupon her Majesty has forgiven him and sent unto him a very comfortable message; now he is recovered again, and this is the beginning of this device. These things I learn of such young fellows as myself.

Two days since, Doctor Wilson told me he heard say that your Lordship with your charge was removed to Sheffield Lodge, and asked me whether it was so or not. I answered I heard so also that you were gone thither of force till the castle could be cleansed. And further he willed to know whether your Lordship did so by the consent of the Council or not. I said I knew not that, but I was certain your Lordship did it upon good ground. I earnestly desired him of all friendship to tell me whether he had heard anything to the contrary, which he sware he never did, but asked because, he said, once that Lady should have been conveyed from that house. Then I told him what great heed and care you had to her safe-keeping, especially being there, that good numbers of men continually armed watched her day and night, and both under her windows, over her chamber, and of every side her, so that unless she could transform herself to a flea or a mouse it was impossible that she should escape. At that time Mr. Wilson showed me some part of the confession of one (but who he was, or when he did confess it, he would in no wise tell me) that that fellow should say he knew the Queen of Scots hated your Lordship deadly because of your religion, being an earnest Protestant, and all the Talbots else in England, being all papists, she esteemeth of them very well, and this fellow did believe verily all we Talbots did love her better in our hearts than the Queen's Majesty. This Mr. Wilson said he showed me because I should see what knavery there is in some men to accuse. He charged me of all love that I should keep this secret, which I promised, and notwithstanding, considering he would not tell me who this fellow was, I willed a friend of mine, one Mr Francis Southwell, who is very great with him, to know, amongst other talk, who he had last in examination, and I understood that this was the examination of one at the last session of Parliament and not since, but I cannot learn yet what he was.

Mr. Walsingham is this day come hither to the court. It is thought he shall be made Secretary. Sir Thomas Smith and he both together shall exercise that office. He hath not yet told any news. He hath had no time yet for being welcomed home. As soon as I hear any your Lordship shall have them sent. Roulston [=Rolston?] hath written to your Lordship, as he saith, by this bearer, he trusteth to your Lordship's satisfaction. I have been very importunate of him for the present payment of his debt to your Lordship. He cannot any ways make shift for money unless he sell land, which he vows to do rather than to purchase your Lordship's displeasure. I have moved my Lord Treasurer two sundry times, as your Lordship commanded me, for the mustering within your Lordship's offices. The first time he willed me to come to him some other time and he would give me an answer because then he had to write to Berwick in haste. This he told me before I half told him what I meant. The second time, which was on Saturday last, my Lord Leicester came unto him as I was talking, but tomorrow, God willing, I will not fail to

move him thoroughly. For other matters I leave your Lordship to the bearer hereof. And so most humbly desiring your Lordship's daily blessing, with my wonted prayer for the continuance of your Lordship's honour and health long to continue, I end this 11th of May, 1573.

Your Lordship's most humble and obedient son,
Gilbert Talbot