

SUMMARY: The document below is a copy of a letter written by Lord Henry Howard endorsed 20 July 1581. The unidentified addressee may have been the Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas Bromley. In the letter Howard says he has been imprisoned for seven months (strictly speaking, he had been under house arrest), and that whenever his liberty is spoken of, the Queen demands that there be a public confrontation with Oxford ('trial face to face'). Howard is by now convinced that this is a mere delaying tactic on the Queen's part, and that such a trial will never take place ('with pretence of that which is not meant to be done'). He appears to allude to Lord Burghley as 'Antonius', using his 'great credit' to protect the 'faulty' Oxford, and Leicester as 'Lepidus', oppressing the 'innocent', meaning himself. If so, it seems that Howard had finally come to realize that it was not Oxford who was his chiefest enemy and the prolonger of his incarceration, but Leicester. On 27 October, Howard was reduced to the extremity of writing a sycophantic letter begging Leicester's forgiveness (see SP 12/150/51, ff. 97-8).

I would not willingly withdraw your Lordship from matters of greater weight with my unlucky suit were I not so grievously oppressed by the daily practice of mine enemies in revenge of private malice that, without your Lordship's favourable help, I can neither hope nor look for remedy so long as my friends will suffer me to pine in this solitary seat, secluded from all joys that may refresh my weary mind. Her Majesty says little, and some others who cannot devise to plague me worse for want of grounds are content with this, but when my liberty is spoken of, her Majesty begins to speak of trial face to face, as if that should have been to do if I were in fault, or as if that prisoner need to tremble at the naming of the size who is out of doubt beforehand to be quit by proclamation. Wherefore my humble suit to your Lordship is that I may not be suspended with pretence of that which is not meant to be done for prolonging my disgrace, but that after seven months' imprisonment either I may be tried before equal judges or enlarged with an end of misery, which being done your Lordship may do me the greatest favour to procure my banishment out of the realm, for as I had not anything wherein to rejoice before saving your Lordship's favour and my liberty, so wanting those I cannot leave much to the spoil of mine enemies. My hap is hard, and harder than ever was any second brother's of this house. But when all is done, so long as truth and honesty may guard my life mine enemies shall want their will, and when those will not serve, there is another world wherein to rest where neither Antonius' great credit shall defend the faulty, nor the spite of Lepidus shall oppress the innocent. Your Lordship is my chiefest pillar in my honest cause, to whose good favour recommending my unhappy plight, with humble suit that you will never give me over till either you see me tried or set at liberty, I take my leave, this 20th of July.

Endorsed: 20 July, Lord Henry Howard in prison. Max. Comod.