

SUMMARY: In the letter below dated 12 July 1577 from Henri III (1551-1589) of France to his ambassador in England, Michel de Castelnau (d.1520-1592), Sieur de Mauvissiere, the King explicitly rejects overtures made to Mauvissiere by unidentified members of the Catholic party in England who had suggested armed rebellion against the Queen if Henri III would support such action.

Despite his awareness of the Queen's duplicity towards him in supporting the rebellion of his own Huguenot subjects, the King states unequivocally that even were these English Catholics sincere, and not merely trying to entrap him, he would still not want anything to do with such plots because a sovereign should not assist subjects rebelling against another sovereign.

The contents of the letter are inaccurately reported in Bossy, John A., 'English Catholics and the French Marriage 1577-1581', *Recusant History*, Vol. V, (Bognor Regis: The Arundel Press, 1959-60), pp. 2-16 at p. 3. The members of the Catholic party who had advocated armed rebellion against the Queen to Mauvissiere are unidentified. It is perhaps not unreasonable to suspect Lord Henry Howard and Charles Arundel, both of whom are known to have intrigued with foreign powers. However because Oxford and Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, are mentioned in the next paragraph of the King's letter, Bossy erroneously states as a fact that it was Oxford who had approached Mauvissiere:

According to Bossy:

*Oxford was already known in France, and some time in June 1577 went to the French Ambassador, Castelnau de Mauvissiere, offering, with his friends and adherents, to lead a revolt of the "Catholic Party", if France would support it. The ambassador's reaction was not encouraging: still, he forwarded the proposal to Paris, where it aroused a benevolent, if timid, curiosity. The King replied with some ambiguity that so long as the Queen of England did not support rebellion in his dominions, he would refrain from doing so in hers. On the other hand, it would not be amiss to encourage Oxford and his friends in their good intentions, and to present the earl with a jewel as a token of esteem.*

There is no evidence in Henri III's letter that it was Oxford who had made overtures to Mauvissiere on behalf of the Catholic party, nor can Henri III's reaction be described as ambiguous. He rejects outright the idea of supporting armed Catholic rebellion in England:

*Also I very much wish to tell you that even though it might be that they were making these overtures sincerely, nevertheless I would not wish to hear of it . . . .*

On the other hand, the King considers it prudent to maintain the goodwill of members of the nobility in England who are well affected to him:

*Also I say to you that it will be well done by you to preserve the young Earl of Oxford in the good affection which he demonstrates to have to the welfare and prosperity of my*

*affairs & service, & similarly the son of the late Duke of Norfolk, his cousin. But watch that it be so secretly and dexterously that they not fall into suspicion & bad opinion over there because of it. I will send you soon a jewel in order to make a present on my behalf to the said Earl of Oxford, & to serve him as a token of the amity and goodwill which I bear him.*

Oxford had been presented to Henri III at the French court on 6 March 1575 while he was on his continental tour, and it is apparent from this letter that Henri III had formed a good opinion of him. The king advises Mauvissiere to cultivate both Oxford and Philip Howard (1557-1595), 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Arundel, and says he will send a jewel for Mauvissiere to present to Oxford.

In the letter the King also mentions an audience he had recently given to the English ambassador, Sir Amias Paulet (c.1532-1588) at Bourgueil. According to the *ODNB*, Paulet ‘sympathized with the Huguenots and distrusted Henri III and Catherine de Medici’.

As well, the King mentions Charles of Lorraine (1554-1611), Duc de Mayenne, who besieged and took Brouages in 1577. The character DuMaine in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labours Lost* may be partly based on Charles of Lorraine, Duc de Mayenne.

The transcript below is taken from *Laboureur, Jean Le, Les Memoires de Messire Michel de Castelnu Seigneur de Mauvissiere*, 3 vols., (Brussels, 1731), at Vol. III , pp. 519-21.

Monsieur de Mauvissiere. Je vous ay par ma derniere Dépêche du 20. du passé fait un bien ample discours de ce que le Sr. Paulet Ambassadeur de la Reine d’Angleterre Madame ma bonne soeur & cousine dit en l’audience, que je luy donnay ces jours passez à Bourgueil & de la response que je luy fis & la Reine Madame & Mere aussi. Ce que je m’assure que vous n’obmettez à bien représenter & faire entendre à ladite Dame Reine d’Angleterre & à ceux de son Conseil, selon que vous verrez qu’il sera à propos & que les occasions, que vous sçaurez bien prendre & choisir, le voudront,

& pour ce je n’en reprendray rien par cette-cy, qui fera pour accuser la reception depuis faite des vostres des 14. & 25. jours dudit mois passé, ayant esté bien aise de voir par la premiere d’icelles que vous ayez diverty les Escossois qui retournoient de la guerre de Flandre pour le Prince d’Orange de prendre le party de mes Sujets élevez en armes contre mon service & autorité. Et aussi que vous ayez fait sentir au Ministre de Viliers qu’il fera bien de se déporter plus modestement qu’il n’a de coustume, & semblablement ceux de mes Sujets qui se sont refugiez par-delà, les actions desqels, à ce qu j’ay vû, par vosdites deux Dépêches & mesme par la derniere, sont fort mauvaises & pleines de pratiques & menées contre le bien de mes affaires & service, & toutefois ladite Dame Reine d’Angleterre leur preste l’oreille & promet d’assister & favoriser auxdits Suejts élevez de ses moyens & deniers, comme elle a cy-devant fait, pour leur aider a faire les levées des gens de guerre qu’ils poursuivent en Allemagne, pour satisfaire & parvenir à leurs

pernicieux desseins & délibérations. En quoy elle montre qu'elle tient tant peu de compte de ce que luy avez tant de fois rémonstré là-dessus de ma part & ce que j'en ay aussi dit à coeur ouvert audit Sr. Paulet son Ambassadeur, lequel m'a tenu toûjours un langage fort éloigné de cela. Et encore naguere en ladite audience que je luy donnay à Bourgeuil, où il s'efforça de me persuader & faire croire, que ladite Dame Reine sa Maistresse ne desiroit rien davantage que d'entretenir nostre commune amitié, suivant nos derniers Traitez si solennellement jurez.

Mais, à ce que je vois, les effets ne respondent pas aux paroles. C'est pourquoy il faut que vous vous en plaigniez vivement, tant à icelle Dame Reine, que à ceux de son Conseil, leur faisant bien connoistre de quelle consequence & importance est de voir qu'un Prince Souverain porte les Sujets rebelles d'un autre Prince Souverain en leur désobéissance & leur mauvaise cause. Car qu'elle soit telle, il en appert par les commencemens, n'y ayant personne qui ne sçache que devant que je fusse arrivé à Blois pour y tenir les Estats Generaux de mon Royaume, ceux de la nouvelle opinion avoient dés-ja fortifié Perigeux & sans s'y vouloir trouver, ny attendre ce qui succederoit de l'assemblée si legitimement faite d'i-ceux Estats, ils se rendirent les plus forts dedans la Ville de la Charité, la remparerent & fortifierent en toute diligence, surprirent aussi plusieurs autres Places & Chateaux, arresterent prisonniers, pillerent & rançonnerent ceux de mes bons Sujets Catholiques qu'ils pûrent trouver, parurent en armes en la campagne, rompant le repos qui estoit en cedit Royaume, & firent en somme tous les actes d'hostilité que pourroient exercer les plus barbares ennemis d'iceluy.

De quoy se pouvoient-ils plaindre? & quelle occasion avoient-ils de reprendre les armes? vû que ladite assemblée des Estats Generaux de mondit Royaume se faisoit à leur requeste, & suivant ce qui avoit esté accordé par le dernier Edit de Pacification. Il est doncques aisé à juger par ceux qui sont sans passion, que c'est eux qui ont recommencé cette guerre.

Mais un Prince Souverain n'a que faire de rendre raison de ses actions à qui que ce soit, & ce que je vous en dis, n'est que pour opposer la verité aux mensonges & faux bruits, qu'en ont fait courir & semer par delà lesdits refugiez, qui ne dûssent estre soufferts par ladite Dame Reine d'Angleterre non plus que je ne voudrois retirer ceux qui l'auroient offensée & seroient en pareil predicament envers elle, que ceux-la sont en mon endroit, comme je desire que vous luy fassiez bien entendre, & que si j'eusse voulu & voulois prester l'oreille à ceux qui se sont offerts de troubler le repos qui est en son Royaume, j'en ay eu & ay encore assez de moyens. Ce que je n'ay jamais pû goûter, pour estre cela de trop mauvais & dangereux exemple & éloigné de l'amitié que nous avons ensemble.

Et a esté fort bien fait à vous d'avoir ainsi que m'escrivez par vosdites Dépêches, fait la sourde oreille à ceux du party Catholique d'Angleterre, qui vous ont porté parole de prendre les armes avec un grand nombre de leurs adherens, si je leur voulois prester epaule pour l'establissement de leur Religion, dont l'exercice est défendu par de-là, estant à croire que ce n'est que feinte & pour faire preuve de la bonne volonté que je pourrois avoir de rendre à ladite Dame Reine d'Angleterre ce qu'elle me preste; comme vous l'avouez vous-mesme, connoissant beaucoup de ceux de ladite Nation estre doubles, &

auxquels il y a peu de fiance. Aussi vous veux-je bien dire que, quand ce seroit franchement qu'ils fissent ces ouvertures, je ne voudrois pourtant y entendre, moyennant que je visse que ladite Dame Reine usast de mesme respect envers moy & ne fomentast la mauvaise volonté de mesdits Sujets élevez, par le secours qu'elle leur promet & fait bailler sous main, & pour cela il suffira que vous laissiez parler ces gens-là qui font ces offres, sans montrer que vous les trouviez bonnes & approuviez en façon que ce soit.

Bien vous diray-je que ce sera bien fait à vous d'entretenir le jeune Comte d'Oxford en la bonne affection qu'il démontre avoir au bien et prosperité de mes affaires & service, & semblablement le fils du feu Duc de Nortfolk son cousin. Mais regardez que ce soit si secrettement & dextrement, qu'ils n'en tombent en soupçon & mauvaise opinion par-delà. Je vous enverray bien-tost une bague pour en faire present de ma part audit Comte d'Oxford & luy servir de témoignage de l'amitié & bonne volonté que je luy porte.

Quant aux autres advis que me donnez par vos autres Dépêches, j'ay esté bien aise de les voir & me ferez service agréable de me tenir continuellement adverty de toutes occurrences, avec la mesme diligence que vous avez fait cy-devant à mon contentement.

Au demeurant je veux bien vous advertir que mes affaires continuent en la mesme bonne prosperité que je vous ay cy-devant escrit, estant mon frere en chemin pour venir du costé de Perigeux, & a en passant repris quelques Chasteaux forts, où ceux de la nouvelle opinion faisoient leurs retraites; d'autre costé mon cousin le Duc de Mayenne tient Brouage assiégué par terre & par Mer. J'ay mes Galeres & bon nombre de Vaisseaux ronds bien armez & équipez, de sorte que j'espere qu'il sera bien-tost remis sous mon obeissance. Cependant je ne laisse pas de faire tout ce qui se peut pour avec la douceur ramener medits Sujets élevez à l'obéissance qu'ils me doivent, ayant encore depuis trois jours renvoyé le Sr. de Villeroy, l'un de mes Secretaires d'Estat, vers mon oncle le Duc de Montpensier, qui est encore prés le Roy de Navarre mon frere, pour cet effet, dont & de ce qui succedera de cette negociation je vous donneray cy-aprés advis. Priant Dieu, Monsieur de Mauvissiere, &c. Escrit à Poitiers le 12. jour de Juillet 1577.

La Reine Mere du Roy a accompagné de ses Lettres cette Dépêche.

Monsieur de Mauvissiere. I made you, by my last dispatch of the 20<sup>th</sup> past, a very ample discourse of that which Monsieur Paulet, ambassador of the Queen of England, Madam my good sister & cousin, said in the audience which I gave him a few days ago at Bourgueil, & of the answer which I made to him, & Madam the Queen Mother also, which I assure myself you will not omit to well represent & make understood to the said Lady Queen of England & to those of her Council according as you will see that it will be convenient, & that the occasions which you will well know how to take & choose will permit.

And as I will not take any of that up again, this will do to acknowledge the receipt since made of yours of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> days of the said month past, having been well pleased to see by the first of them that you have diverted the Scots who were returning from the war in Flanders for the Prince of Orange to take the part of my subjects risen in arms against my service & authority, and also that you made Minister de Villiers aware that he will do well to comport himself more modestly than he has been accustomed, & similarly those of my subjects who have taken refuge on the other side, the actions of whom, from that which I have seen by your said two dispatches, & especially by the last, are very bad, & full of practises & intrigues against the welfare of my affairs and service, & always the said Lady Queen of England lends them her ear, & promises to assist & favour the said risen subjects by her means & money, as she has done before, to aid them to make levies of men of war whom they follow in Germany in order to satisfy & achieve their pernicious designs and deliberations, in which she shows that she takes very little account of that which you have so many times thus pointed out to her on my behalf, and that which I have also said concerning it with an open heart to the said Sieur Paulet, her ambassador, who has always spoken to me with a language far distant from that, and again but lately in the said audience which I gave him at Bourgueil where he attempted to persuade me and make me believe that the said Lady Queen his mistress desired nothing more than to treat of our common amity, following our last treaties so solemnly sworn.

But as I see, the effects do not answer to the words, which is why it is necessary that you complain of it energetically, so to that Lady Queen as to those of her Council, making them to well know of what consequence & importance it is to see that a sovereign prince supports the rebel subjects of another sovereign prince in their disobedience & their bad cause. For that she is such it appears by the beginnings, there not being anyone who did not know that before I had arrived at Blois to hold there the Estates General of my realm, those of the new opinion had already fortified Perigueux, and without wishing to be present there themselves, nor await that which would follow from the assembly so legitimately made of those Estates, they went as strongly as possible inside the town of La Charite, rampiring & fortifyng it with all diligence, surprising also many other places & chateaux, arresting prisoners, pilling & ransoming those of my good Catholic subjects whom they were able to find, appearing in arms in the countryside, breaking the peace which was in the said realm, & doing, in sum, all the acts of hostility which the most barbarous enemies of them would be able to do

Of what can they complain, & what occasion have they to take up arms again, seeing that the said assembly of the Estates General of my said realm was being held at their request, & following that which had been agreed by the last Edict of Pacification? It is then easy to judge, by those who are without passion, that it is they who began this war again.

But a sovereign prince has no need to render a reason for his actions to anyone whosoever, & that which I say to you of it is only to oppose the truth to the lies & false rumours concerning it which the said refugees have spread & disseminated on the other side, who ought not to be suffered by the said Lady Queen of England, no more than I would wish to harbour those who would have offended her & would be in a similar predicament towards her as these are in my domain, as I desire that you make her to well

understand, & that if I had wished, & was wishing, to lend an ear to those who have offered to trouble the peace which is in her realm, I have had, & do still have, sufficient means, the which I have never been able to taste, for that it is too bad & dangerous an example, & far removed from the amity which we have together.

And it has been very well done by you, as you write me in your said dispatches, to have already turned a deaf ear to those of the Catholic party of England who have brought word to you of taking up arms with a great number of their adherents if I would be willing to lend a helping hand for the establishment of their religion, the exercise of which has been forbidden there, believing that it is but a dissimulation, & in order to make proof of the goodwill which I might have, to return to the said Lady Queen of England that which she lends me, as you avow yourself, knowing many of those of the said nation to be double, & in whom there is little faithfulness. Also I very much wish to tell you that even though it might be that they were making these overtures sincerely, nevertheless I would not wish to hear of it, considering that I would [+have preferred to] have seen that the said Lady Queen would have used the same respect towards me, & would not have fomented the ill will of my said raised subjects by the help which she promises them & takes in hand, & for that it will suffice that you let these people speak who make these offers without showing that you find them good, & approve in any way whatsoever.

Also I say to you that it will be well done by you to preserve the young Earl of Oxford in the good affection which he demonstrates to have to the welfare and prosperity of my affairs & service, & similarly the son of the late Duke of Norfolk, his cousin. But watch that it be so secretly and dexterously that they not fall into suspicion & bad opinion over there because of it. I will send you soon a jewel in order to make a present on my behalf to the said Earl of Oxford, & to serve him as a token of the amity and goodwill which I bear him.

As for the other advertisements which you give me by your other dispatches, I have been very pleased to see them, and you will do me agreeable service to keep me continually advertised of all occurrences with the same diligence which you have done before, to my contentment.

For the rest, I very much wish to advertise you that my affairs continue in the same good prosperity that I wrote you before, my brother being en route to come from the vicinity of Perigueux, and has in passing retaken some strong chateaux where those of the new opinion were making their refuges. On the other side, my cousin, the Duc de Mayenne, holds Brouage besieged by land & by sea. I have my galleys and a good number of vaisseaux ronds well armed & equipped, in such sort that I hope that it will soon be put back again under my obedience. Nevertheless I do not leave to do all that is possible in order with mildness to recall my said raised subjects to the obedience which they owe me, having again three days ago for that purpose dispatched the Sieur de Villeroy, one of my secretaries of state, towards my uncle the Duc de Montpensier, who is still near the King of Navarre, my brother, of which, & of that which will follow from that negotiation,

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I will give you advertisement afterwards. Praying God, Monsieur de Mauvissiere, etc.  
Written at Poitiers the 12 day of July 1577.

The Queen Mother of the King has accompanied this dispatch with her letters.