

SUMMARY: This undated letter from Lord Henry Howard to the Queen was written a few days after Howard's earlier letter (see BL Cotton Titus, C.6, ff. 7-8), and thus dates from early January 1581. Like Howard's earlier letter, it was written at the Queen's command. The principal theme enlarged upon by Howard in this second letter is Oxford's undutifulness to the Queen, and in particular that Oxford had vaunted of having received sexual favours from the Queen. Howard is quick to point out, however, that Oxford has never gone further than the privy chamber door, and that therefore Oxford's vaunts of receiving sexual favours from the Queen cannot be true, and that he, Howard, knows them to be untrue. Howard also alludes to the recent 'libelling' between Oxford and Leicester for which Oxford was confined to his chamber at Greenwich on the Queen's order, and to Oxford's angry speeches at the time, including his statement that he planned before long to leave England. Howard uses the fact that Oxford escaped from his quarrel with Leicester relatively unscathed as an excuse for his own failure to divulge the allegations he is now spilling out in his letters to the Queen ('For when I saw what fair escape he made from those that were of best account, I thought myself too mean a person to decipher his ill dealing'). Howard indicates that he has again been examined, perhaps by the Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas Bromley ('For mine own part, I was this day pressed and examined upon a point, whether I were ever privy to a note of certain persons that were bent against your Majesty'). The Queen seems to have been pursuing a counterproductive strategy, perhaps on Leicester's advice. On the one hand, she was having Howard examined by the Lord Chancellor on points concerning treason against her. On the other, she was directing Howard to write to her personally with allegations against Oxford, thus weakening the credibility of any evidence Oxford could offer of Howard's treasonous activities.

The credibility of the extensive allegations made by Lord Henry Howard and Charles Arundel against Oxford must be carefully weighed. On the evidence of the Spanish ambassador in England, Don Bernardino de Mendoza, Howard acted as a spy for Spain from the night of 25 December 1580 on (see Mendoza's letter of 25 December 1581 and other documents on this website). Moreover Mendoza himself suggested that one of the reasons for both Henry Howard and Charles Arundel's flight from court on the night of 25 December 1580 was fear of arrest because of 'their having been very intimate with the French ambassador' (see Simancas, Leg. 835, f. 6). After he fled England in December 1583, Charles Arundel acted as a spy for both Spain and France (see Paris Archives K.1564.218 and other documents on this website), and was declared guilty of high treason in England (see Paris Archives K.1563.122). Lord Henry Howard was named in a letter of Mendoza's as one of the principals involved in the Babington (see Paris Archives K.1564.150). When all these facts are considered, it is evident that both Howard and Arundel might have had much to hide when they fled the court on the night of 25 December 1580 for fear of arrest, and that the flood of allegations they unleashed against Oxford, whom they wrongly considered had reported their doings to the Queen, was designed to discredit him as a witness by bringing his character into such disrepute that anything he might say against them would be viewed with suspicion. In the end, the strategy was successful, and both Howard and Arundel were eventually released.

A great misfortune I may reckon and repute it to an honest mind, most gracious and my most redoubted Sovereign, that seeking only just and lawful means to clear itself, the same should notwithstanding still be strained to the charging and accusing of another.

But since your Majesty's prescript must be my law, what duty claimeth I resign by choice, and rather seek to save my credit with your Majesty by speaking truth than, to redeem or salve the credit of a thankless friend, to speak the least by cloaking shameful slander, wherefore I conclude with Aeolus to Juno, as it is set down by Virgil:

*Tuus O Regina quod optes  
Explorare labor mihi iussa capessere fas est*

In my last description of this gentleman with greater favour than his qualities require, I mentioned a general dislike of all those well-disposed gentlemen that friend him because they were too liberal in recommending those most rare and princely gifts and qualities wherewith it pleased God for our inestimable comfort to enfeoff your Majesty, but now in this particular and private letter I am dutifully to give your Majesty advertisement and understanding of a matter which I would have signified a good while since if I had not been in fear that the greatness of your grace and favour toward him would have outweighed the weakness of my simple credit. For when I saw what fair escape he made from those that were of best account, I thought myself too mean a person to decipher his ill dealing. Beside, I thought your Majesty, whose judgment is precise in terms and points of honour, would sooner have condemned me of great unkindness to so near a kinsman than have credited the crime, considering how far the same is parted and divided from all truth or probability. But since his lavish and untamed tongue hath made more than one or two witnesses of this excess in slandering, it were as good that I as others let your Highness understand that most undutifully, vainly and untruly he hath vaunted of some favours from your Majesty which I dare take mine oath upon the sacred testament were never yet imparted unto any man that lived on this earth, and so much the rather because myself could witness that at such times as himself avoucheth he reported me untruly. The particulars till this day never passed from my lips nor never shall, I do protest, before I may deliver them unto that sacred ear which useth and directeth everything according to the fittest opportunity. I marvel what this fellow would have said if he had been called to that private conference which divers are and must be for the weighty causes of your state, that durst presume to brave and flourish in this sort pressing never further than the threshold of your privy chamber. This is the chiefest point which, though it shall be proved to yourself more fully than the rest, yet finding it a matter fitter for your private understanding than for record, I thought good in this secret sort to recommend it to your Majesty, referring the particulars whereof until I may be once again so fortunate as to speak with yourself, for neither will I signify them by mouth of any man alive, nor leave them to Sibylla's leaves of flitting papers.

I speak not of his slanderous and hateful speech against your Majesty at Greenwich where he was restrained to his chamber, insomuch as where I willed him before with

Raleigh to forbear such speech as nobody could endure with duty to your Majesty, he said it skilled not since he was resolved ere it were long to be beyond the sea, and send your Majesty fifteen times so much by writing. Beside, at such time as he gave himself at Greenwich to attend your Majesty with greater diligence than he was wont, though not so great as he was bound, a friend of his, rejoicing at the change, demanded what might be the cause, to whom his answer was that your Majesty must be caressed for the pound and another for his pleasure, whereupon it was a course set down by common counsel at that house, and ever since pursued accordingly.

This beastly blindness which possessed him so far as it dispossessed him both of wit and reason was the cause why they forsook him that made more account of your good look than of his life, and feared still lest your Majesty, discovering this fraud with time, would thereupon discountenance all those that by depending on his train might seem to be partakers of his folly. Again, at such time as I made him privy to the treatise of your life which I had begun, and waited but until such time as your Majesty would deal with Mr Heneage for some notes and verses which I would have inserted according to the circumstances of the times wherein you made them, he dissuaded me from publishing this work at Greenwich in his gallery, not suffering me to read out the first leaf, and adjoined this one reason, that if the book were turned into Latin, as it was most like it would be, all the world would horribly condemn me for a flatterer, considering he knew the judgment of the states abroad to be far from any such opinion or belief of your Majesty's perfections. Furthermore, his Lordship's proving at his table one day by sundry slight pretended arguments, but with great choler, that arms might be justly taken against princes that began to swerve from right, I set myself against him, and withal declared that I was in readiness and had made my collection, wanting but leisure only to write against that cause. He said I could not justify the contrary. I told him yes, both by the scriptures, by the stories, by the laws, and by the wisest and best learned divines, either Protestant or Catholic that lived at this day in Europe, whereunto his Lordship suddenly replied again that, touching Protestants, he saw them practise other courses daily where they maintained arms, marry, indeed the Catholics, like good Ave Mary coxcombs, were content to lay down their heads till they were taken off, and therefore for his own part he wished that for every one they lost they might lose a thousand till they learned to be wiser and took out another lesson.

A thousand of these arguments I could set down and can avow by witness for allowance of this loyal gentleman, who stingeth none so mortally as those that have oppugned him in such undutiful discourses. For mine own part, I was this day pressed and examined upon a point, whether I were ever privy to a note of certain persons that were bent against your Majesty. The matter seemed strange to me that I, who have attempted all the means I can devise to publish and to spread the princely virtues of your Majesty, and I protest before the living God know no man in this land that seems not pressed to spend his blood at your devotion, should be questioned within such a case, but this I swear unto your Majesty, that if the man himself who seems to have invented this for execution of the malice which he hath declared many ways had discovered any such ill to me, either I would have presented him with meat in mouth or bestowed my dagger for a token of my

liking. Of such a bill some one or other must appear whereby your Majesty may soon find out the mournival(?). But of such bad fuel riseth more smoke than flame.

My lord of Oxford tells me that your Majesty desireth nothing more than to take me in a trip that you may trice me, and to Charles Arundel he said your Majesty desired no man's head in England half so much as mine, but I know the sweetness of your Majesty's most princely nature over-well to be terrified by scarecrows of an addle head and a railing tongue. For if your Majesty had hated me thus much it had not been hard for you this seven years day to trice a man that falleth prostrate at your feet, and though your Majesty can never have my head for any fault that I will make against your person and your state, yet so light account I make of it as, rather than I would continue in your indignation and disgrace, I would more gladly yield it to the block than keep it on my shoulders. If I were as others are I would not wish to live, but as I am I hope to serve your Majesty much better than they whom neither their own duty nor your Majesty's perfections could induce to follow you till very shame, with wrack of honour, countenance and credit, and desire to make you party for their own revenge, drave them even perforce to diligence. The men with whom I have familiarly conversed ever since my coming to the court have been my Lord Howard, my Lord Chamberlain I should first have said, Sir Henry Knyvet, my cousin Thomas Knyvet, my Lord of Dunsany, Mr Cornwallis, Sir William Drury and my Lady, with divers other whose oaths your Majesty may take whether ever they could find offensive thought in me toward your Majesty, nay, rather whether these and every one of these have not always found a zeal and care to please above the compass of an ordinary subject. And therefore it were hard if one man plunged in so many grievous faults to God and man, and who for some respects of cups and open talk was not to be trusted but by fools, should bear down with a slanderous and wicked tongue the witness of so many faithful gentlemen, especially considering how many ways, direct and indirect, he hath attempted to bereave me of my life and credit.

I grant that in frequenting service not permitted by your laws I have offended, but if it please your Majesty to weigh that zeal unto my God, not want of duty to my prince, enforced and provoked me to take this way until I might be better satisfied in sacramentary points, I hope you will the rather pardon my transgression. As for knowledge of any person under heaven that bears an unsound heart unto your Majesty (if it be not he that moveth the complaint), or of any practice that may peril your estate, I renounce the death of Christ if either any corner of my heart can burden me, or if I would not have discovered such dealings if they had been brought to my understanding. If it please your Majesty to call to mind my continual dependence on your favour and hew [sic?] for the comfort of the same a line [sic?] without demanding any kind of recompense I was content so many years together to be baited in the court, that might have lived elsewhere with greater ease and more commodity, I trust you will discharge me from conceit of any faithless dealing. I can say no more, but humbly casting myself prostrate at your Majesty's most gracious feet, beseech the same not to withdraw your good opinion from me for this fault, but rather to exile me from my country and my friends forever. If my life will satisfy your indignations, I resign it willingly, as one, I vow before Almighty God, that would more gladly shorten and abridge my wretched days without offence to God than live beneath the compass of my birth and ever pine in

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want as I have been constrained to do, rather than I would estrange myself from the presence or the service of your Majesty. God preserve your Majesty, and grant you to live longest of your people, more healthfully than any of your sex, and more happily than any of your calling, that England and the Queen of England, if it may be, may decline and make an end together. To myself I either wish a speedy restitution to your favour or a short end of my life.

Your Majesty's most humble, most affectionate and loyal servant and subject till the death,  
Henry Howard

Addressed: To the Queen's most excellent Majesty