

SUMMARY: The letter below written on 17 November 1605 by Oxford's first cousin, Sir Francis Vere (1560/1-1609), to Oxford's brother-in-law, Sir Robert Cecil (1563-1612), Earl of Salisbury, concerns a letter from Thomas Morgan (1543-1611?) which Sir Francis Vere passes on to Cecil with this comment concerning Morgan:

The contents are strange to me, for I never borrowed money of him nor to my remembrance spake with him, but such a man I saw when I was very young at Paris by reason of the company I kept with Sir Roger Williams and one Denys, a Frenchman, followers of my Lord of Oxford's, to whom he sometimes resorted.

The Thomas Morgan to whom Sir Francis Vere refers is not the Welsh soldier, Sir Thomas Morgan (d.1595), but rather the Welsh conspirator of the same name. According to *The Dictionary of National Biography*, Thomas Morgan joined the household of the Earl of Shrewsbury in 1568, where he met Shrewsbury's prisoner, Mary, Queen of Scots, and became involved in activities which eventually resulted in his flight to Paris in 1575. Morgan was thus in Paris in 1577 when 'the two young Veres' arrived in France seeking service in the French wars of religion under the Duke of Guise (see letters from Sir Amias Paulet, the English ambassador in France, written on 10 July, 24 September, and 19 November 1577).

Sir Francis Vere states that while he was in Paris in 1577 he kept company with the famous soldier, Sir Roger Williams (1539/40-1595), and 'Denys, a Frenchman', 'followers' of his first cousin, 'my Lord of Oxford', and that Thomas Morgan (1543-1611?) 'sometimes resorted' to Williams and Denys. Williams had served with the soldier Sir Thomas Morgan (d.1595) in 1573, and it may be that the two Thomas Morgans were related. Moreover Denys had come to France in 1577 with the 'two young Veres' and Walter Williams, and it may be that Walter Williams and Sir Roger Williams were related as well. Another factor which may have influenced the relationships among these men was that Sir Roger Williams and the two Thomas Morgans were all from Wales.

According to *The Dictionary of National Biography*, Sir Roger Williams' career in the Low Countries lasted from 1572 until the summer of 1577:

[Williams] was already a veteran when, in 1572, he joined the celebrated 300 volunteers raised by Thomas Morgan to serve in the Netherlands, which were now in revolt against Philip II for both political and religious reasons. Elizabeth I and her privy councillors sympathized with the Dutch, who, like the Huguenots, were their co-religionists, but England at this stage was weak. The government was building the nation's strength but dared not yet confront Europe's two great military, Catholic powers: France and Spain. It had covertly arranged for volunteers to aid the Huguenots and now did the same for the Dutch and their leader, William of Orange.

This unofficial religious war with Spain and France was the backdrop to Williams's early military career. About 2500 English mercenaries served the Dutch in 1572, but suffered defeats 'and the most of our men not being acquainted with such disasters, sought all

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meanes to return into England' (Works, 121). Morgan did serve into the following year with a newly raised regiment, which included his fellow Welshman, Williams. When Morgan fell out with William of Orange over pay and conditions at the end of 1573 and took his force home, Williams preferred to travel to the Rhineland, where the Huguenots were said to be raising an army. This rumour turned out to be false and Williams headed home, but took the direct route, through the southern Netherlands. He was arrested, but the Spanish commander who interviewed him had served with Pembroke in 1557 and therefore offered Williams the chance to enlist in his regiment. Williams accepted. His personal religious beliefs may still have been forming, for later in life he was a resolute protestant. When he eventually returned home in summer 1577, after three years' service in the Spanish army of Flanders, he was immediately employed by the principal secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham. Williams may thus have been an intelligence agent throughout.

The foregoing description of William's movements does not place him in Paris in 1577. However Sir Francis Vere's letter clearly places Williams in Paris at some time before he returned to England in the summer of 1577. Of this period in Sir Francis Vere's life, *The Dictionary of National Biography* writes:

In his late teens Francis Vere travelled through Europe, as did many young English gentlemen in this era. The English ambassador in Paris reported that 'two young Veres', clients of the Earl of Oxford, were in France in July and September 1577, hoping to fight in the country's sixth war of religion since 1562, but with the royal (Catholic) army (CSP for., 12.14, 192). The two were probably John and Francis (the latter then about seventeen) who were of course connected to Oxford. Moreover the chief royal general was the Duke of Guise and in later life Francis recalled that he was in Paris 'when I was very young' where 'I was for a time with the Duke of Guise ... [but] was called thence by her Majesty's command and made to know the error of that course' (Salisbury MSS, 17.494). Presumably the two young Veres were simply seeking actual military experience, but in later life none of the brothers would have contemplated serving a Catholic prince against protestants: indeed Horace was strongly Calvinist.

In the letter below, Sir Francis Vere excuses his short-lived service with the Duke of Guise in 1577:

It is true I was for a time with the Duke of Guise, as your Lordship may have heard. I was called thence by her Majesty's commandment and made to know the error of that course, which hath served me for a warning ever since.

Sir Francis Vere's comment reflects the attitude towards Catholics current in England in 1605. However Sir Amias Paulet's letter to Walsingham of 24 September 1577 establishes that when the 'two young Veres' were in France in 1577, Queen Elizabeth's attitude was openly tolerant of Englishmen who served on behalf of King Henri III under Henri de Lorraine (1550-1588), Duke of Guise.

Sir Roger Williams (1539/40-1595) has been proposed as the model for Shakespeare's Welsh captain, Fluellen. The fact that Williams was a 'follower' of Oxford's in 1577 has perhaps not been sufficiently remarked upon.

Most Honourable, I received the enclosed from Thomas Morgan this morning by one Wylmer, a stranger to me, but as he saith, well known to Sir William Waad. It was delivered him by Sir Robert Dormer. The contents are strange to me, for I never borrowed money of him nor to my remembrance spake with him, but such a man I saw when I was very young at Paris by reason of the company I kept with Sir Roger Williams and one Denys, a Frenchman, followers of my Lord of Oxford's, to whom he sometimes resorted. It is true I was for a time with the Duke of Guise, as your Lordship may have heard. I was called thence by her Majesty's commandment and made to know the error of that course, which hath served me for a warning ever since. The man is known to be no well-wisher to this state, and I cannot guess what his purpose is in challenging a supposed debt of 30 years old in this conjuncture of troublesome and traitorous practices, but his meaning I take hath some further scope, and therefore I thought it my duty to acquaint your Lordship with his letter and these few circumstances, being ready if need require to attend your Lordship for your further satisfaction. Resting ever your Lordship's.

Endorsed: Sir Francis Vere with a letter from Thomas Morgan out of France.