

SUMMARY: The excerpt below from a letter to Queen Catherine de Medici written on 15 February 1569 by the French ambassador to England, Bertrand de Salignac Fenelon, seigneur de la Mothe (1523-1589), accompanied a letter written on the same day by Fenelon to King Charles IX of France (1550-1574). The excerpt deals with Oxford's request that Queen Elizabeth grant him leave to serve in the French wars.

The Queen's position throughout the French wars of religion was ambivalent. She secretly favoured the Huguenot rebels on religious grounds, offering them aid and allowing young Englishmen to serve in the Protestant forces led by Henri (1552-1588), Prince of Conde. However she was careful not to openly oppose her fellow monarch, Charles IX, on the general ground that England was weak at the time, and on the particular ground that if she were to openly support subjects who were in rebellion against their sovereign on religious grounds, it might encourage the same thing in her own realm. Thus, when Oxford, a high-ranking nobleman, requested permission to serve with the Huguenot leader, Conde, the Queen replied that she could not permit someone of his stature to fight alongside Conde, who was making war against his King.

Oxford then discussed with friends the possibility of enlisting in the King's forces, and when this became known, was summoned before the Privy Council. Members of the Council, like the Queen, favoured the Huguenot rebels, and were prepared to deal somewhat rigorously with Oxford for his expressed desire to fight on the King's side, suspecting it to have arisen from some practice by English Catholics. As Fenelon notes, however, the Council was astonished to learn that Oxford's position resulted from the answer given to him by the Queen that it would be inappropriate for a nobleman of his stature to join the Huguenot forces under Conde. Only after receiving that answer from the Queen had Oxford discussed with friends the possibility of fighting with the King's forces against Conde. Faced with the Queen's pronouncement, the Council immediately dropped the matter.

The transcript below is taken from *Correspondance Diplomatique de Bertrand de Salignac, de la Mothe Fenelon, Ambassadeur de France en Angleterre de 1568 a 1575*, 7 vols., (Paris and London, 1838-40), Vol. I, pp. 197-8 at:

<https://archive.org/details/correspondance6701feneuoft/page/196/mode/2up>

For a letter dated 21 March 1569 from Fenelon to Charles IX concerning Oxford's desire to serve with Conde, see *Correspondance, supra*, Vol. I, pp. 269-70 at:

<https://archive.org/details/correspondance6701feneuoft/page/268/mode/2up>

XVIIIe DEPESCHE

du xv de février 1569

(Envoyée par Nicolas Estoo, chevalcheur.)

Assurances de paix données par le conseil de la reine. – Nouvelles réclamations contre le saisie de Rouen et l'arrestation de plusieurs Anglais à Bordeaux. – Le sieur d'Assoleville est autorisé à comminiquer avec l'ambassadeur d'Espagne. – Marie Stuart au château de Tutbury. – Troubles in Irlande. – Mesures prises par le conseil à l'égard du comte d'Oxford et de milord Southampton. – Proclamation de la reine ordonnant aux Anglais de se tenir prêts à prendre les armes.

[The first part of the letter has not been transcribed. The transcript below begins at the foot of p. 197.]

J'endenz, toutes foys, que, ces jours passés, au comte de Oxfort, jeune seigneur bien estimé en ceste court, qui desiroit veoir de la guerre, et inportunoit la dicte Dame de luy donner congé d'aller trouver le prince de Condé, après plusieurs reffuz, elle luy a respondu qu'elle ne vouloit q'un tel personnage des siens se trouvât avec ung qui estoit contre son Roy. Dont luy, despuys, devisant avec d'autres seigneurs de bonne volonté, leur a dict qu'il desireroit que la Royne, sa Mestresse, luy donnast congé d'aller servir le Roy, et qu'il combatroit volontiers contre les rebelles, qui luy faisoient la guerre; de quoy estant taxé, il a esté mené devant les seigneurs du conseil, devant lesquelz il s'est monstré si résolu en son opinion, qu'ilz ont estimé que cella venoit d'aucune pratique des Catholiques, dont luy ont vollu user de quelque rigueur; mais, après leur avoir dict franchement ce que la Royne luy avoit respondu, ilz sont demeurez toutz estonnez, et ne luy ont rien plus répliqué.

De Londres ce xve de février 1569.

I hear, however, that a few days ago the Earl of Oxford, a young lord well thought of in this court, who desired to see the wars, and importuned the said Lady to give him leave to go to the Prince of Conde, after several refusals she answered him that she did not wish a personage of hers of such stature to be found with one who was against his King, which he, afterwards discussing with other young lords of goodwill [to France], said to them that he would desire that the Queen, his Mistress, would give him leave to go to serve the King, and that he would willingly fight against the rebels who were making war on him. Being accused of this, he was brought before the Lords of the Council, before whom he showed himself so resolute in his opinion that they considered that it arose from some practice of the Catholics, for which they wished to use him with some rigour, but, after he had told them frankly what the Queen had answered him, they were utterly astonished, and said nothing more to him.

From London the 15th of February 1569.