

SUMMARY: The excerpt below from a letter written on 21 March 1569 [=1570] by the French ambassador to England, Bertrand de Salignac Fenelon, seigneur de la Mothe (1523-1589), to King Charles IX of France (1550-1574) reports Oxford's request that Queen Elizabeth grant him leave to serve, along with a number of other English gentlemen, in the French wars, either under the Protestant leader, Henri (1552-1588), Prince of Conde, or under some German prince. In an earlier letter of 15 February 1570, Fenelon had reported to Queen Catherine de Medici that Oxford had sought Queen Elizabeth's permission to join the Protestant forces of Conde. However at that time Queen Elizabeth had told Oxford that she could not permit someone of his stature to fight alongside Conde, who was making war against his King.

Queen Elizabeth's position throughout the French wars of religion was highly ambivalent. She secretly favoured the Huguenot rebels on religious grounds, offering aid to them, and allowing young Englishmen to serve in the Protestant forces led by Conde. Openly, however, she was careful not to oppose King Charles IX, a fellow monarch, on the general ground that England was weak at the time, and on the particular ground that her open support for subjects who were in rebellion against their sovereign on religious grounds might encourage the same thing in her own realm.

As Fenelon notes, in the end the Queen expressly forbade Oxford to go to Conde, and gave him licence to travel to Ireland instead. As Fenelon wryly remarks, however, this may have been a mere subterfuge on the Queen's part, since a contrary wind might well carry Oxford, not to Ireland, but to La Rochelle, which in 1570, was one of four Protestant strongholds in France.

The letter is found in *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) at i, pp. 269-70.

XXVe DEPESCHE
du xxie de mars 1569

(Envoyée par Jehan Pigon jusques à Calais.)

Instances des protestants de France, auprès d'Elisabeth, pour obtenir un secours d'argent, à titre d'emprunt. – Revues générales faites en Angleterre. – Départ de la flotte destinée pour la Rochelle.

Vray est que le jeune comte d'Oxford s'est monstré plusieurs jours tout prest, avec ung nombre de jeunes gentishommes anglois, pour aller trouver le prince de Condé ou quelque prince d'Allemaigne, affin de veoir de la guerre, mais il n'en a peu obtenir la permission de la dicte Dame. Bien a semblé qu'aucuns luy conseilloient d'y aller

voluntaire, et qu'ilz luy respondoient que pour cella il n'incourroit l'indignation de la dicte Dame; mais en fin elle le luy a deffandu expressément et luy a baillé lettres pour passer en Irlande. Je ne sçay si quelque contraire vent le poulsera, de son gré, à la Rochelle.

It is true that the young Earl of Oxford has shown himself very ready, for many days, with a number of young English gentlemen, to go to the Prince of Conde or some German prince, in order to see the wars, but he has not been able to obtain permission from the said Lady. It seemed that some actually advised him to go as a volunteer, and that they assured him that he would not incur the indignation of the said Lady for it. But in the end, she expressly forbade him, and has given him letters to pass to Ireland. I know not whether some contrary wind will push him, of its/his will, to La Rochelle.