
SUMMARY: Michel de Castelnau, Sieur de Mauvissiere, was the French ambassador in London when the conflict between Oxford and two of his friends and relations, Lord Henry Howard and Charles Arundel, commenced on the night of 25 December 1580. In this letter to the French King on 11 January 1581, Mauvissiere passed on what he had been told concerning the matter. In evaluating Mauvissiere's version of events, it is important to keep in mind that he did not speak English, as established in John Bossy's *Giordano Bruno and the Embassy Affair*, Yale University Press, 1991, p. 9. His sources of direct information were therefore limited.

Moreover Mauvissiere's letter contains statements which are either factually incorrect or intentionally biased. For example, Mauvissiere claims that Oxford:

proceeded to accuse his best friends who had supported him in his recent quarrels of having conspired against the state by having made profession of the Catholic faith

Profession of the Catholic faith did not constitute 'conspiracy against the state', and the fact that Mauvissiere reported this erroneous 'fact' to the French King indicates that Mauvissiere had no clear idea as to what had really gone on in the two weeks prior to the writing of his letter. Mauvissiere also reported that Howard and Arundel had 'cleared themselves very satisfactorily' of accusations of conspiracy against the state, yet immediately thereafter he states that the Queen had told him personally two weeks after their interrogation that she was still endeavouring to find out all she could about the matter and that:

they were madmen, but that there were certainly plots being hatched, with their roots abroad, and that she very much regretted to find her own subjects implicated in them, especially those who were so well affected to France and so favourable to the marriage

It is also significant that Mauvissiere, while stating that the affair had begun a few days before Christmas, had waited two full weeks, until this letter of 11 January 1581, before reporting anything about it to the French King. This fact suggests that Mauvissiere had heard nothing of the matter until the Queen had chosen to apprise him of it, and that his only source of information was the Queen herself. In that regard, it is important to keep in mind that high stakes marriage negotiations between France and England were going on at the time, and that the dispute between Oxford, Howard, and Arundel had an enormous impact on those negotiations since all three were members of the faction at court which favoured the French marriage against the vigorous opposition of the Earl of Leicester. Under these circumstances, had Mauvissiere actually had any information about the dispute between Oxford, Howard, and Arundel prior to January 11 he would surely have reported it to his master, the French King, as speedily as possible. The reality of the situation would thus seem to be that Mauvissiere had no information about the dispute until January 10th or 11th, at which time the Queen and Oxford staged a little show at court for his benefit, after which the Queen, so as not to jeopardize the French marriage negotiations, told Mauvissiere personally what she wanted him to report to the French King, not what had really happened.

There also seems to have been a subtle attempt by the Queen to intimidate Mauvissiere by drawing attention to the assistance he had given Oxford four years earlier in helping a Jesuit to escape from England. Mauvissiere denied any involvement, but after the exchange with the Queen he was well aware that she knew what he had done. And given that Lord Henry Howard had told the Spanish ambassador, Mendoza, when he fled to Mendoza's house on the night of 25 December 1580, that he feared that his (Howard's) dealings with Mauvissiere would be found out, it seems clear that the Queen, by drawing Mauvissiere's attention publicly to his involvement in the escape from England of the Jesuit, was hinting to Mauvissiere that she was well aware of other things in which he had been involved against her interests.

The original document is in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, Fonds Francais 15973, ff. 387v – 392v. The excerpt below is taken from Pollen, John Hungerford, and William MacMahon (eds) (1919), *The Venerable Philip Howard Earl of Arundel, 1557-95*, Catholic Record Society, vol. 21, pp.29-30. A translation of the excerpt by B.M. Ward is reprinted below. For a translation of the entire letter, see BN 15973, ff. 387v-392v.

AU ROY – SIRE, &c. Je n'obmetteray aussi à dire à vostre magesté que il y a quelques jours et ses festes de Noel, que le comte Dauxfort (lequel avoit fait, il y a environ quatre ans et demy, à son retour d'Italie, profession de la religion catholique), avec quelques gentilhommes de ses parens et meilleurs amys, et juré, comme il dit, et signé avec eulx, qu'ilz feroient tout ce qu'ilz pourroient pour l'avancement de la religion catholique. Il les a accuséz à la royne d'Angleterre, vostre bonne soeur, et pour sa part il a demandé pardon, disant qu'il voyoit bien avoir malfaict, et a voulu charger sur ceulx qui l'avoient plus aymé, et deffendu et voulu accompagner en ses derniers querelles. Il a dict quilz avoient conspiré contre l'estat en faisant profession de la religion catholique, et a cherché de leur faire tout le mal qu'il a peu penser. Ce qui a fort fasché le dicte royne, vostre bonne soeur, car elle estoit merveilleusement affectionnée et faisoit beaucoup de faveur a la pluspart de ceulx que a accusez le dict comte d'Auxfort, comme au milord Henri de Haward, frère du feu duc de Norfoc, au Sr Charles Arondel, grandement affectionnez à voz magestez et à monseigneur vostre frère, en estant de bons solliciteurs pour le mariage, dont ilz receproient beaucoup de bonnes chères pour faire en cela chose qui plaisoit à la dict dame, laquelle toutefois a esté, avec son grand regret, comme elle mesme le m'a dict, contrainte de les faire mettre en garde entre les mains de quelques conseillers, à scavoir, le milord Henry entre les mains du Chancelier, et le Sieur Charles Arondel entre les mains du Sr. de Hatton, Cappitaine de la garde, et le Sr. Sandonel entre les mains du Sieur de Walsingham.

Ayant estéz interrogé pour ce que le dict comte Dauxfort les avoit accusez contre l'estat, ilz s'en purgent très bien, et pour ce qui seroit de la religion catholique ilz sont bien congnoz, pour y avoir tousjours esté forte affectionnez et n'en avoir point eu d'autre en leurs coeurs, comme n'ont la plus grande parte de la noblesse de ce royaume, ce que la dicte royne connoist, et que le dict my lord de Haward, Arondel et Sandonel, estant

Catholicques d'affection, estoient néanmoins estimez et favorisez de la dict royne, vostre bonne soeur à l'occasion que eulx et leurs amys ont toujours esté pour le dict mariage et pour l'alliance de France. Le dicte comte Dauxfort ce trouve tout seul tesmoin et accusateur, ayant perdu le credit et l'honneur, estant habandonné de tous ses amys et de toutes les dames pour en avoir encores voulu toucher quelques uns en ceci des plus favorables à monseigneur vostre frère, et ce trouve avec tant de honte et de regret de dict comte qu'il en pert toute la contenance, et nul ne fait cas de luy; toutefois la royne a essayé jusques à ceste heure de tirer tout ce quelle pourroit, mais elle m'a dict ses jours quelle voyoit bien que cestoient des foulz, et que cestoient des praticqus qui venoient de loing de quoy elle avoyt beaucoup de regret dy voir meslez ceux que estoient si bien affectionnez à la France et sy favorables au mariage, et qu'encores quil ce trovast quelque mal en eux elle fermeroit les yeux le plus qu'elle pourroit, pour ce respect quilz estoient amys du dict mariage, estant bien marrye de telz accidans en ce temps icy.

Le dict comte Dauxfort a requis à la dicte royne, et c'est mis à genoux plusieurs foys pour la supplier voyant quil ne pouvoit avoir autre tesmoingnage que le sien, de me prier lui dire et scavoir de moy sy je n'avois pas congneu il y a environ quatre ans un jésuiste qui leur avoit dit la messe et les avoit reduits à l'esglise romaine, et lequel j'avois fait sauver en France à la requeste mesme du dict comte Dauxfort, de quoy la dicte royne m'a instamment prié de luy dire ce qui en estoit, non tant pour leur faire mal que pour en scavoir la vérité, me disant que je pouvois bien scavoir quelle estoit envers les catholicques qui ne mestoient leurs consciences avec l'estat, et m'a fait grand instance et prière de scavoir de moy telle chose. Je luy ay dutout nyé, ne scavoir que c'estoit, ny n'en avoir jamais ouy parler, ny rien sceu. Quoy voyant le dict comte Dauxfort c'est encores venu jecter à genoux d'avant elle la suppliant en ma présence de me prier de luy en dire la vérité, et me supplioit de l'autre part que luy fisse ceste grâce de me souvenir de chose qui luy importoit tant que celle-là, et comme il m'avoit envoyé prier et requérir de faire sauver en France et en Itallye le dict jésuiste, et lors qu'il fust en seureté, il m'en remercia. Je luy ay dict nectement à la dicte royne que je n'en scavois rien, et que je n'avois connoissance ny mémoire de telle chose de sorte qu'en la presence de sa maistresse le dict conte c'est trouvé bien confus.

Translation from Ward, B.M., *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford 1550-1604* (London: John Murray, 1928), pp. 207-9.

[+To the King – Sire, etc. I must not omit also to say to your Majesty that] a few days before Christmas, the Earl of Oxford (who about four and a half years ago on his return from Italy made profession of the Catholic faith together with some of his relatives among the nobility and his best friends, and had sworn, as he says, and signed with them a declaration that they would do all they could for the advancement of the Catholic religion), accused his former friends to the Queen of England, your good sister. For his own part, he craved forgiveness for what he had done, saying that he now recognized that he had done wrong. He then proceeded to accuse his best friends who had supported him in his recent quarrels of having conspired against the state by having made profession of

the Catholic faith, and he endeavoured to do them all the harm he could. The Queen, your good sister, was very much upset about it, for she was very fond of most of those accused by the Earl, among whom were Lord Henry Howard, a brother of the late Duke of Norfolk, and Charles Arundel, who is very devoted to your Majesties and to Monseigneur, your brother, both of them being strong advocates of the marriage . . .

It was to her great regret, as the Queen herself told me, that she was obliged to place them under restraint in the custody of some of her Councillors, Lord Henry under the charge of [+the Chancellor and Charles Arundel under the charge of] Sir Christopher Hatton, Captain of the Guard, and Francis Southwell under the charge of Sir Francis Walsingham.

Having been questioned regarding the accusations preferred against them by the Earl of Oxford, namely that they had conspired against the state, they were able to clear themselves very satisfactorily, and as concerns Catholicism, they are known to be well affected to it, as indeed is the case with most of the nobility of this kingdom. The Queen knew this perfectly well, and Lord Henry Howard, Arundel, and Southwell, although Catholics at heart, are nevertheless much esteemed and favoured by her, seeing that both they and their friends have always been in favour of the marriage and of the French alliance. The Earl of Oxford thus found himself alone in his evidence and accusations. He has lost credit and honour, and has been abandoned by all his friends and by all the ladies of the court . . .

Nevertheless, up to the present the Queen has been endeavouring to find out all she can about the matter. She has told me recently that they were madmen, but that there were certainly plots being hatched, with their roots abroad, and that she very much regretted to find her own subjects implicated in them, especially those who were so well affected to France and so favourable to the marriage. She added that she would close her eyes to it as far as possible in view of their attitude towards the marriage . . .

The Earl of Oxford, finding himself alone and unsupported, threw himself on his knees several times before the Queen, and begged her to hear from my lips whether it was not true that I knew of a Jesuit who had celebrated the Mass about four years ago at which they were reconciled to the Roman Church. The Queen earnestly begged me to tell her the facts, not so much to injure them in any way but to satisfy her as to the truth. She said that I knew quite well her favourable attitude towards Catholics who did not place their conscience in antagonism to the state, and entreated me to let her know about it.

I denied all knowledge of the business, saying that I not only knew nothing about it but that I had never even heard it talked about.

On hearing this the Earl of Oxford once again threw himself on his knees before her, and implored her to urge me to tell her the truth. At the same time he begged me to do him the favour to recall a circumstance which touched him very closely. He reminded me that he had sent me a message begging me to assist the said Jesuit to return in safety to France and Italy and that when I had done so he gave me his thanks. I replied clearly and unequivocally to the Queen that I had no recollection whatever of the incident. The effect

of my reply was that the Earl was fairly put to confusion in the presence of his mistress.
..

I bade him speak no more. He is evidently trying to sicken those who were earnest on the side of the match. Perhaps he is jealous of others, or is of the Spanish faction. . . .