

SUMMARY: The letter below, dated 14 July 1581, was written by Sir Francis Walsingham (c.1532-1590) to Lord Burghley in connection with Walsingham's efforts to persuade the Queen to keep her promise to set Oxford at liberty. Walsingham states that the obstacle to Oxford's release is that others are making 'importunate suit' for the release of Lord Henry Howard and Charles Arundel, and before releasing the latter, the Queen is determined to have Oxford accuse them publicly. Oxford has requested that he not be required to publicly accuse Howard and Arundel until he himself has been set at liberty, as he was when he first charged Howard and Arundel with treason.

Walsingham states that he 'utterly dislikes' the idea of having Oxford publicly accuse Howard and Arundel, and shrewdly guesses that those who are urging the Queen to this course of action (likely Leicester) are doing it because they feel that it will provide Howard and Arundel with an opportunity to counter Oxford's charges against them with public accusations against Oxford. Howard and Arundel's written libels against Oxford have survived, and are filled with frivolous and exaggerated allegations. It appears from Walsingham's letter that these written libels by Howard and Arundel had not been taken at all seriously by either the Queen or the Privy Council, and that those who were attempting to influence the Queen against Oxford thus felt that their next best course was to persuade the Queen to have Oxford publicly confront Howard and Arundel with the accusations of treason which he had made against them months earlier, thus leaving open a hoped-for opportunity for Howard and Arundel to counter by publicly bring forward the allegations which they had earlier made in writing against Oxford but which had been ignored. It would appear that Walsingham's view prevailed, and that the Queen released Oxford without going through with her plan that he publicly accuse Howard and Arundel.

It should be noted that Oxford had been sent to the Tower, not in connection with any allegations Howard and Arundel had made against him, but rather as a result of the Queen's anger at the birth of his illegitimate son by Anne Vavasour on 21 March 1581.

My very good Lord, I have been all this day by her Majesty's express commandment set a-work about the examination of certain persons charged to have conspired to have attempted somewhat against her own person, but as far as I can gather by those examinations that I have already taken, I think it will prove nothing. And yet it is happy that the parties charged are taken for that they be runagate priests, such as have been bred up at Rome and Douai, and seek to corrupt her Majesty's good subjects within this realm.

Her Majesty is determined to hold on her resolution touching the two Lords wherewith she did yesterday acquaint your Lordship, and yet did I acquaint her with the alteration of your opinion in respect of the present service her Highness is to use them in.

I dealt very earnestly with her touching the Earl of Oxford's liberty, putting her in mind of her promise made both unto your Lordship and the Lady, his wife. The only stay groweth through the importunate suit that is made for the delivery of the Lord Henry and

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Mr Charles Arundel, whom before their delivery her Majesty thinketh meet they should be confronted by the Earl, who hath made humble request to be set at liberty before he be brought to charge them, as he was at the time he gave first information against them. Her Majesty, notwithstanding the reasonableness of his request, and the promise made unto your Lordship that he should be first set at liberty before he be brought to confront them, cannot as yet be brought to yield.

I hope yet this evening to prevail so far-forth as to procure that he may be enlarged tomorrow.

For my own opinion, I do utterly dislike the confronting, and as I suppose, they that are authors of that advice do it to that end that the Earl may be charged by them. And so being sent for by her Majesty, I am driven to end.

Most humbly taking my leave. At the court, the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1581.

Your Lordship's to command,  
Francis Walsingham