

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 31 March 1576 written by Dr Valentine Dale (c.1520–1589), the English ambassador in Paris, to Sir Francis Walsingham (c.1532-1590). As Dr Dale notes, Oxford was in Paris awaiting Walsingham's arrival before returning to England after his continental tour.

The situation in France was dire. Alencon (styled 'Monsieur') had escaped from court on 15 September of the previous year. At the same time the Prince of Conde and John Casimir had signed a treaty by which Conde agreed to provide 16,000 troops for an invasion of France. Catherine de Medici negotiated a 7-month treaty with her son, Alencon, which was signed on 21 November 1575. However Alencon had no control over Conde and John Casimir, and in December their army of 20,000 men crossed the Meuse, taking King Henri III completely by surprise. The King had not prepared for war, and was forced to stand by helplessly as the army pillaged Burgundy. Alencon, seeing his advantage, repudiated the truce in December, and went to Villefranche where he was joined by Turenne with 3000 arquebusiers and 400 horse. On 5 February 1576, Henry of Navarre also escaped from court, and repudiated Catholicism. Two weeks later a delegation representing Navarre, Alencon, Conde and Damville presented 93 articles to the King, demanding the free exercise of the Protestant religion throughout France and many other concessions. The King was unable to oppose the forces arrayed against him. Alencon and Conde joined at Moulins. John Casimir and most of his German reiters were camped nearby. Navarre and his troops were in Poitou. Alencon was being pressured to march on Paris.

It was in the midst of this tense and dangerous situation that Oxford returned to Paris at the end of March 1576.

For the foregoing, see Knecht, R.J., *The Rise and Fall of Renaissance France 1483-1610* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), pp. 406-7.

Sir, we hear you are to be here shortly, whereof of all men I would be most glad, and I trust you will bring my successor with you. It will be very requisite you do bring large commission with you [ ] besides your letters of credit to treat between the King and Monsieur and the rest, lest they do cavil with you as they have partly done with other for lack of commission. And surely speed is very necessary, for now is the time to do good or never. You do see the camp of Monsieur approacheth. The King is unready. The strangers cannot abide to linger the matter. I do send you such things as have come to my hands since my last dispatch. My Lord of Oxford is here attending your coming. And thus I pray God keep you in good health. From Paris the last of March 1576.

Your most assured, Valentyne Dale

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Endorsed: (1) To the right honourable Mr Francis Walsingham, esquire, one of the Queen's Majesty's Principal Secretaries; (2) 31 March 1576, from the ambassador resident [ ]