

SUMMARY: The document below is a letter dated 10 April 1576 written by Dr Valentine Dale (c.1520–1589), the English ambassador in Paris, to Lord Burghley. As Dr Dale notes, Oxford brought the letter with him to England.

The situation in France was dire. King Henri III's younger brother, the Duke of Alençon (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, Alençon, which was signed on 21 November 1575. However Alençon had no control over Conde and John Casimir, and in December their army of 20,000 men crossed the Meuse, taking the King, who had not prepared for war, completely by surprise. He was forced to stand by helplessly as the army pillaged Burgundy. Alençon, 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, Alençon, 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. Alençon and Conde joined at Moulins. John Casimir and most of his German reiters were camped nearby. Navarre and his troops were in Poitou. Alençon was pressured to march on Paris. For a time he delayed. On 9 April 1576 he announced his decision: 'We have decided to exploit the means that God has given us to win by force the peace and tranquility that we could not achieve by way of reason'.

For the foregoing, see Knecht, R.J., *The Rise and Fall of Renaissance France 1483-1610* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), pp. 406-8.

It was in the midst of this tense and dangerous situation that Oxford returned to Paris at the end of March 1576. As Dr Dale notes in the letter below, by 10 April the situation had deteriorated further, and Alençon's forces were marching towards Paris.

It seems likely this exchange in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* is an allusion to the events of this period in which King Henri III was making war against his younger brother, Alençon, who was the next heir to the throne of France since Henri had no children.

Where France?

In her forehead, armed and reverted, making war against her heir.

From Clark, Eva Turner, *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's Plays* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1974 reprint), p. 15, citing Feuillerat, Albert, *Documents Relating to the Office of the Revels in the Time of Queen Elizabeth*, 1908.

On Tuesday, January 1st, 1576-7, "The historie of Error (was) shoven at Hampton Court on Newyeres daie at night, enacted by the Children of Poweles." This play I believe to have been the one known later as The Comedy of Errors.

My good Lord, our truce is ended without prorogation, and the army of Monsieur doth march hitherwards, and is between La Charite and Montargis. The deputies are come back again from Monsieur to make report to the King that the princes do like nothing of the King's answers, and to know the King's resolution whether he will grant anything further than he hath done, otherwise to depart shortly from hence.

Queen Mother is minded to go again to Monsieur, but she stayeth for safe-conduct from Duke Casimir, for she trusteth not well the strangers.

Duke Casimir would not meet Monsieur and the Prince of Conde at Moulins, but sent his deputies to them with round resolution that he would not be delayed any longer with vain treaties.

The King assembleth his forces and fortifieth his towns strongly, and Queen Mother hath much ado to entertain this treaty from breaking off.

I do send in this packet letters from Wilkes, some of a stale date because they were brought back to him again, and now sent to me with other letters of his.

Mr Secretary Walsingham hath written unto me to make diligent inquiry of the preparation of these ships in this coast, and I have written to him what I can learn hitherto.

I am right glad that I have occasion to send these letters by my Lord of Oxford, unto whom I find myself much beholden.

I trust by Mr Randolph to hear some good news from your Lordship for my return.

And thus I beseech Almighty God long to keep your Lordship in good health. From Paris the 10th of April 1576.

Your lordship's most humble, Valentyne Dale

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Le Roy de Navarre Lieutenant general representant La parsonne de Mons{ieur} filz et frere du Roy par tout Le Royaume [=The King of Navarre, representing the person of Monsieur, son and brother of the King, throughout the realm]

Endorsed: The style of the King of Navarre as he writeth himself

f. 31v

Endorsed: (1) To the right honourable my very good Lord, the Lord Treasurer of England; (2) 10 April 1576, Mr D{octor} Dale to my Lord from Paris, the truce broken off again