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ARTICLE

The Sacrifice of Thomas Cromwell

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Abstract

The arrest of Thomas Cromwell in June 1540 and his inescapable execution on 28 July offered a chance for the Catholic powers of Christendom to hope and work for the end of the English schism. In 1540, Charles V proposed colloquies between the different confessions in his empire and in the same spirit conceived an alliance with Henry VIII. Both Charles and Henry practised to deceive, but two mysterious Imperial missions to England in July 1540, which the removal of Cromwell made possible, and the manner of Henry's welcome of them, provide proof of the seriousness of their intent. The brief period between Cromwell's arrest and his death was exploited by both Henry VIII and European powers to attempt reconciliation, or, at least, to temporize. This article analyses complex diplomatic reports to show how Cromwell's fall assumed significance far beyond England, as new evidence of an abrupt realignment at a climacteric of European dynastic politics and Reformation diplomacy reveals.

On 10 June 1540, Thomas Cromwell, lord privy seal and vice-gerent in spirituals, newly created earl of Essex and great chamberlain of England, who had dominated the counsels of Henry VIII for a decade, was suddenly arrested in the council chamber at Westminster. The Great George of the Garter was snatched from his neck and the Garter untied, in contempt of his elevation. He waited in the Tower for royal mercy which never came.[1] Denied access to plead his case to the king, Cromwell awaited execution. Only the manner of it remained uncertain. On 28 July, he went to the scaffold. The French ambassador Charles de Marillac later reported rumours of the king's change of mind: repenting his loss and exculpating himself, Henry blamed counsellors who 'upon light pretexts, by false accusations,...made him put to death the most faithful servant he ever had'.[2] He had been propelled, he claimed, into allowing a *coup d'état*. Cromwell's fall bewildered observers, was mysterious to contemporaries in its inwardness, and has been variously, and insufficiently, explained since.

[1]*Correspondance politique de MM. de Castillon et de Marillac, ambassadeurs de France en Angleterre (1537–1542)*, ed. J. Kaulek (Paris, 1885) (*Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*), pp. 189–94; *Letters and papers, foreign and domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII, 1509–1547*, ed. J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, and R. H. Brodie (21 vols. in 33, London, 1862–1932), XV, 766–7, 804 (*LP*). Reference is to document numbers, unless otherwise stated. *Life and letters of Thomas Cromwell*, ed. R. B. Merriman (2 vols., Cambridge, 1902), II, pp. 264–78.

[2]*Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, p. 274 (*LP*, XVI, 590).

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The fall of Cromwell, so dominant a figure in English political and religious life, has invited differing, yet not mutually exclusive, explanations. Most focus upon domestic affairs in the confused spring and early summer of 1540. Cromwell's pre-eminence in the counsels of the king, his role in the assault upon the universal church, and in finding a way to break with Rome had brought him powerful and dangerous enemies. During the decade of his dominance, he had sought reform in the church and commonwealth. His opponents could blame him, with justice, for protecting evangelical reformers and for playing a principal part in directing innovations in religion.[3] The tensions between the opposing factions at court and in council, one led by Cromwell and the other by Bishop Stephen Gardiner and Thomas Howard, 3rd duke of Norfolk, had grown so bitter by the spring and early summer of 1540 that it seemed that one must yield. Religious divisions grew more bitter and the revelation early in 1540 of the extent of reform in Calais, England's bridgehead on the continent, under the patronage of Cromwell and Archbishop Cranmer, was shocking, particularly to the king.[4] A contest between conservative and reformed preachers in London during Lent threatened social as well as religious discord.[5] Henry was discovering, with alarm, how far the new faith was spreading in his name. Cromwell's promotion of the king's marriage to Anne of Cleves proved not only intolerable to the king but also disastrous for his own prospects and safety.[6]

Factional manoeuvring was, for G. R. Elton and J. J. Scarisbrick, sufficient cause for Cromwell's fall.[7] Cromwell's part in bringing about Henry's doomed marriage to Anne of Cleves and his failure to find a way to its annulment was judged a principal cause of his disgrace.[8] For Diarmaid MacCulloch, both factional struggle and the disaster of the Cleves marriage were responsible for the fall: Cromwell's failure to remove Anne to make way for the king to marry again was exploited by a coalition of conservatives.[9] Henry was alarmed by Cromwell's harbouring of heretics who preached sedition along with scripture.[10] Lucy Wooding presented the Cleves debacle as secondary to matters of religion: Cromwell's removal was proof of an attempt by the king 'to distance himself from religious radicalism in the most dramatic fashion'.[11] More recently, she has elevated 'the role of Henry himself, whose furious disappointment was the driving force behind Cromwell's fall'.[12] Only George Bernard has insisted upon the diplomatic dimension of Cromwell's quietus; he portrayed it

[3]For Cromwell's dominance, see the magisterial biography of Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cromwell: a life* (London, 2018).

[4]S. Brigden, *Thomas Wyatt: the heart's forest* (London, 2012), pp. 510–11.

[5]Idem, 'Popular disturbance and the fall of Thomas Cromwell and the reformers, 1539–1540', *Historical Journal*, 24 (1981), pp. 257–78, at pp. 263–6.

[6]R. McEntegart, *Henry VIII, the League of Schmalkalden, and the English Reformation* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 177–9, 189–91, 196–7.

[7]G. R. Elton, 'Thomas Cromwell's decline and fall', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 10 (1951), pp. 150–85; J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (New Haven, CT, 1968), p. 378.

[8]G. Redworth, *In defence of the church Catholic: the life of Stephen Gardiner* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 106–19.

[9]MacCulloch, *Thomas Cromwell*, pp. 506–31.

[10]Brigden, 'Popular disturbance and the fall of Thomas Cromwell'.

[11]L. Wooding, *Henry VIII* (Abingdon, 2009). The quotation is at p. 239.

[12]Idem, *Tudor England: a history* (New Haven, CT, 2022), p. 194.

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as the strengthening of Henry's 'bargaining position' with both Francis I, the French king, and Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor.[13]

Analyses of Cromwell's fall have neglected its European significance. The reasons for his demise are primarily to be found in England, but it had European consequences. A dramatic diplomatic reversal coincided with the arrest. England's place in Christendom always dominated the king's thinking, as a matter of honour as well as of security, and in 1540 he found himself dangerously isolated. In 1538–9 he had faced the terrible prospect of an international crusade against him when Pope Paul III sent Cardinal Pole as legate to summon the Catholic powers to partition England and depose the king. Neither the king of France nor the emperor had answered the call then, but the pope had not abandoned, and could not abandon, the attempt to return or 'reduce' the schismatic king to obedience.[14] 'Destitute of eny foraine assurans', Henry should seek fuller alliance with the League of Schmalkalden of German Protestant princes, so Sir Thomas Wyatt, resident ambassador with the emperor, urged him on 9 March 1540.[15] Diplomatic imperatives may not have been the first cause of Cromwell's arrest in June but in its aftermath, in the weeks before his death, his incarceration, and imminent demise provided a remarkable opportunity for new alliances in Christendom. '*Gramuello*' became a '*preda* [prey, prize, victim]' – so judged two Florentine envoys at the Imperial court on 19 July 1540 – in a far wider stratagem and arena than English court politics.[16] European powers understood his fall as having international and not simply domestic repercussions. Reports from ambassadors, envoys, spies, and agents from England, Ferrara, Florence, France, the Holy Roman Empire, the papal court, Mantua, Scotland, and Venice reveal the exploitation of Cromwell's demise as part of a broader European negotiation. The methodologies of 'New Diplomatic History', with its emphasis on sub-ambassadorial figures, agents, and informal diplomatic contacts, allow a reassessment of this moment in English political history as an entanglement of European interests.[17] We provide evidence of new hopes and alliances at a climacteric in European affairs. Diplomatic missives are its primary source base. These sources are notoriously liable to overinterpretation, however; as E. W. Ives has argued, historians of early modern politics should 'engage critically' with diplomatic reports, 'not discount them a priori'.[18] A cross-referencing of these reports, from across Europe, therefore becomes a necessity. Juxtaposing these reports provides an understanding of the new alignments of continental powers.

[13]G. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the remaking of the English church* (New Haven, CT, 2005), pp. 565–7, 578.

[14]S. Brigden, 'Henry VIII and the crusade against England', in T. Betteridge and S. Lipscomb, eds., *Henry VIII and the court: art, politics and performance* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 215–34.

[15]*The complete works of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, I: *Prose*, ed. J. Powell (Oxford, 2016) (*CWTW*), pp. 228–9; McEntegart, *Henry VIII, the League of Schmalkalden*, ch. 5; idem, 'Towards an ideological foreign policy: Henry VIII and Lutheran Germany, 1531–47', in S. Doran and G. Richardson, eds., *Tudor England and its neighbours* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 74–105, especially pp. 76–9.

[16]Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Mediceo del Principato (MP), 4297, fo. 87r, Agnolo Niccolini and Giovanni Bandino, 19 July 1540, Antwerp.

[17]G. Giudici, 'From new diplomatic history to new political history: the rise of the holistic approach', *European History Quarterly*, 48 (2018), pp. 314–34.

[18]E. W. Ives 'Review: stress, faction and ideology in early-Tudor England', *Historical Journal*, 34 (1991), p. 196.

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I

In May 1540, Cromwell declared that 'the hole worlde of Christendome hangeth yet in ballance'.[19] The unlikely peace between the emperor and the French king, made at Nice in 1538, had lasted during Charles V's long winter journey through France at the end of 1539 but faltered and failed in the spring of 1540. Contention over Milan always stood in the way of peace; it was the prize which Francis never ceased to claim, and Charles would never cede. By mid-March, Thomas Wyatt observed that the peace 'wexeth colder and colder euery day', prevented as always by the 'non donation of Millan'. In Lenten days and weeks in Ghent, where the emperor punished the rebellious city *ad terrorem*, he was 'in gret melencoly, in so muche that he confest he could not slepe on nyghtes'.[20] Charles was 'imparked' like a hunted beast, said Henry, trapped between the territories of France and England, of the duke of Cleves and the princes of Germany.[21] The proposed marriage alliances, including that of the widowed emperor to the French king's daughter, with their partition of territories, were completely unacceptable to Francis.[22] On Good Friday, 28 March, when the Imperial ambassador 'browght with hym many fayre wordes and promysses, with more delayes, and nothing of effect', Francis was 'so chaffed and freted inwardly' that he heard mass that day impatiently.[23] Without Milan, there could be no agreement, so Francis finally instructed the ambassador to return to the emperor on 4 April.[24] The king must now seek new alliances with the Schmalkaldic League and the Great Turk, the emperor's enemies.[25] If not peace between the two great protagonists, then perhaps war.

By mid-April, the pact between Francis and Charles was 'as cold as tho the things passed had bene but dremis'.[26] The emperor, in desperation, turned to an unlikely friend. His designs were impenetrable, hidden in deepest secrecy, but the papal ambassadors watched aghast as Nicholas Perrenot de Granvelle, Charles's principal minister, and Wyatt conferred frequently and familiarly for hours at a time in the days after the collapse of the Franco-Imperial alliance.[27] A new alliance between the emperor and Henry VIII – seemingly unthinkable – was now in prospect. The Holy Roman Emperor was forced to countenance the schismatic and excommunicated king against whom the pope had declared holy war only the year before and, as Most Catholic King, to ally himself with the man who had dishonoured the blood

[19] *Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell*, ed. Merriman, II, p. 262.

[20] *CWTW*, I, pp. 234–5.

[21] *State papers, published under the authority of His Majesty's Commission. King Henry the Eighth* (London, 1830) (*SP*), VIII, p. 263.

[22] G. Parker, *Emperor: a new life of Charles V* (New Haven, CT, 2019), pp. 266–7.

[23] *SP*, VIII, pp. 290–1.

[24] *LP*, XV, 457.

[25] *Calendar of letters, despatches and state papers relating to the negotiations between England and Spain*, ed. G. A. Bergenroth et al. (13 vols., London, 1862–1954) (*CSPSp*), VI, i, *1538–1542*, p. 234. Robert Knecht, *Francis I* (Cambridge, 2008) pp. 300–2.

[26] *CWTW*, I, p. 255.

[27] Archives Générales du Royaume, Brussels (AGR), Papiers Gachard, 644, fos. 77v–78r; Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), Fondo Pio, 56, fos. 218r–v, 224r, Cardinal Farnese to Pope Paul III, 8 and 10 Apr. 1540, Ghent; ASFi, MP, 4297, fo. 79v. L.-P. Gachard copied the Farnese papers in Naples, lost during enemy action after the Second World War.

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of Castile when he cast off Katherine of Aragon and disinherited Charles's cousin, Princess Mary, now Lady Mary. Also standing in the way of any alliance was the pact Charles had made with Francis not to enter any agreement with Henry without the other's permission.[28] There was also the not inconsiderable stumbling block of Henry's recent marriage to Anne of Cleves, whose brother the duke had defied the emperor, and who was the sister-in-law of Elector John Frederick of Saxony, leader of the League of Schmalkalden. It seemed 'marvellously strange', so the diplomatic community mused, that Charles would unite with the king of England, against the faith, yet if he did not make this 'unholy alliance' the French king would. An anonymous *avviso* sent to Ferrara at the end of April declared that France, along with the Lutheran princes and England, had 'secretly' entertained a 'pratica' with the duke of Cleves.[29] An Imperial alliance with Henry had the advantage for Charles of blocking any alliance between England and the Protestant princes of the League which posed a clear danger to Imperial interests.[30]

On the night of 4 April, just as Francis announced the collapse of the peace, Wyatt had received an amazing message from Ferrante Sanseverino, the great prince of Salerno.[31] Here was a sign of the world turning. 'He [Sanseverino] had leve of th'emperour to come see the kynges highnes, wiche he had long desird.' Wyatt was dazzled. Sanseverino was a great prince of the empire, cultivated, and of great pride, power, and wealth. 'He is a man of xxx or xl thowsand duketes rent, and bysides that gretly estimid in all Italy and on of the gretest men of Naples. I suppose he wold tary there to se hunting and suche pastyme for on monthe.' Wyatt hoped to attend the prince on his journey and to be at the English court in time for the May Day festivities.[32] Sanseverino, addicted to hunting and chivalric romance, might have wished to visit the land of King Arthur, the birthplace of Amadís de Gaula, but, for cultured Italians, England was a place of irredeemable barbarism.[33] This projected, allegedly private, visit came as a surprise in England, and seemed unlikely to happen.[34] Nothing more would be heard of it for weeks, and then with portentous timing and mysterious intent.

Wyatt returned from England in late April, without the prince of Salerno. He brought with him Katherine Howard's suspect half-brother, John Legh, who had been in exile.[35] Since by March or early April Henry envisaged Katherine as his next queen,

[28] *CWTW*, I, p. 255; AGR, Papiers Gachard, 644, fos. 138r–139r, Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 9 June 1540, Brussels.

[29] 'Avviso from Ghent', 30 Apr. 1540, Archivio di Stato, Modena (ASMo), Archivio Segreto Estense (ASE), Cancelleria, Avvisi e notizie dall' Estero, b. 3, fo. 294r.

[30] *Lettres et mémoires d'Estat, des roys, princes, ambassadeurs, et autres ministres, sous les règnes de François premier, Henry II & François II*, ed. G. Ribier (2 vols., Paris, 1666), I, p. 519 (*LP*, XV, 548); Carlo Capasso, *Paolo III (1534–1549)* (2 vols., Messina, 1924), II, p. 32.

[31] Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Regia Camera della Sommaria, Diversi, II, 233 (account book of Vincenzio Martelli), fo. 125v.

[32] *CWTW*, I, pp. 250–1, 258.

[33] In Amiens in February 1540, Sanseverino spent the day hunting with Cardinal Farnese and the duke of Orléans and the evening telling tales from history and romance: ASV, Fondo Pio, 56, fos. 111r, 137r, 142r, Cardinal Farnese to Pope Paul III, 7 and 13 Feb. 1540, Amiens.

[34] British Library (BL), Cotton MS Titus BI, fo. 380r (*SP*, I, p. 624).

[35] *CWTW*, I, p. 250.

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he did not wish an embarrassing relative to compromise her. Wyatt's parting audiences with the emperor had 'passid swetly with smilinges and good countenances'. 'We partid frendes.'[36] Although publicly the emperor refused Wyatt's invitation to celebrate the feast of St George as Knight of the Garter, lest he be seen to condone 'the evil opinions of that king',[37] privately he bestowed 'carezze' on him, showing him 'the greatest cheer' and 'extraordinary favour'.[38] What message he sent back with the ambassador can only be surmised. Back in England, Wyatt became, fleetingly, Henry's pre-eminent courtier, favoured and splendidly rewarded. Between Wyatt's rise and Cromwell's fall there was in these weeks and months a grim symmetry. Four days after Cromwell's arrest, Wyatt – alone of Henry's courtiers at the Dissolution – acquired an entire London religious house, the friary and precinct of the Crutched Friars.[39]

II

On 10 June, all the rivalry at the English court seemed resolved by Cromwell's arrest. Henry's ambassadors at foreign courts were instantly sent the official version of Cromwell's fall, an account of his treason and usurpation of royal religious policy. While Henry 'most godly travaileth, to establish such an order in matters of religion, as, neither declining on the right hand ne on the left hand, God's glory might be advanced', Cromwell had 'secretly and indirectly' been 'advauncing thone of thextremes', the reformed religion. He had, allegedly, vowed to 'fight in the field in his own person, with his sword in his hand' against Henry 'and all other; adding, that if he lived a year or two, he trusted to bring things to that frame, that it should not lie in the Kings power to resist or let it, if He would'.[40] His ambassadors could not necessarily control the narrative. As Richard Pate, Wyatt's successor as resident ambassador, relayed the news of Cromwell's arrest on 16 June, the emperor, always inscrutable, was 'nothing moved therewith utwardlie, other in cowntenaunce or

[36]Brigden, *Thomas Wyatt*, pp. 501ff. For the quotations: *CWTW*, I, pp. 253, 255.

[37]*Legationen Farneses und Cervinis. Gesandtschaft Campeggios. Nuntiaturen Morones und Poggios, 1539–1541, Nuntiaturberichte aus Deutschland. Abteilung, 1533–1559*, ed. L. Cardauns (Berlin, 1909) (*NAD*), V, 92, pp. 183–4, Cardinal Farnese to Paul III, 20 Apr. 1540, Ghent ('havevan fatto instantia alla M(aes)tà Ces(area) che per l'ordine, quale tiene del re lors ignore, volesse celebrare la festa di San Georgio secondo il costume et obligo del detto ordine, et che S(ua) M(aes)tà Ces(area) non pensava di farlo, per non mostrare le male oppinioni di quel re, convenendo seco in questo').

[38]ASFi, MP 4297, fo. 79r–v, Bandino to duke of Florence, 8 July 1540 ('Don Luis d'avila andò co(n) il Principe di Salerno in Inghilterra. Tutto'l mondo dice..., ch(e) l'ha andato p(er) vedere la figlia di quel re..., Reggo che quando parla co(n) l'ambassador Inglese da 2 mesi in qua li fa bonissima cera e carezze e ritraggo..., e che conversa in camera ch(e) sempre gli occorre parlar di quel Re o dell'isola ch(e) M(aes)tà ne dice mille beni et io so ch(e) la no(n) si lassa uscir le parole senza considerarle'); ASFi, MP 4297, fo. 48r–v, Bandino to duke of Florence, 27 Apr. 1540 ('L'or(atore) d'Inghilterra è partito e venuto il successore e li era paruto ch(e) nell'ultime audienzie S(ua) M(aes)tà gli havesse fatto extraordinarij favori, donde coniecturava inclinatione al suo Re, poiché le pratiche di Francia cominciavano ad intoppare').

[39]The National Archives (TNA), E 40/12, 598, E 305/2/A 55 (original grant, dated 14 June 1540), C 66/694, m. 14 (enrolled grant, 10 July 1540); N. Holder, 'The medieval friaries of London: a topographic and archaeological history, before and after the Dissolution' (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 2011), pp. 180, 193–4, 455; M. Lazarus and S. Brigden, 'Poetry, patronage, and the art of the land-grab: a newly discovered letter to Thomas Wyatt', *Review of English Studies*, 75 (2024), pp. 546–61.

[40]*SP*, VIII, pp. 349–50.

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worde, onlie demaundyng, after his maner, "What, is he in the Towre of London? And by the Kinges commaundement?"'[41] At foreign courts, fevered speculation followed. Confusion and astonishment emerge from the diplomatic reports.

Rumours swirled of court *coups* in England. On 10 June – the day of the arrest – news came to Brussels that Henry had been assassinated and the duke of Norfolk had led a conspiracy; 'every man had it in his mowthe abowte this Cowrte', wrote Pate.[42] As a courier arrived from England bringing secret intelligence, Giambattista Abbadino also misreported the death of Henry VIII to his master, the duke of Mantua.[43] Soon it was known that the fall was not the king's but Cromwell's, and envoys immediately discussed it as a plot – a *pratica*, an *impresa*, a *maneggio*, a *travaglio*, a *disegno* – in the quintessential language of conspiracy, intrigue, and secret machination. On 14 June, Cardinal Cervini, the future Pope Marcellus II, wrote of an altercation between the emperor and Henry's ambassador which had left Charles 'troubled in his mind'.[44] But the following day, Abbadino reported that some incident – as yet unrevealed – had occurred, and 'His Majesty [Charles V] and Monsignor de Granvelle are manifestly cheerful, which makes one believe that the news was positive...The affairs between His Majesty and England will develop well and with surety of an alliance.' The term 'parentato' was used for 'alliance': in the language and politics of the time the way to peace lay through kinship and marriage alliance. 'Pratiche' (dealings) between Henry and the French king would soon be at an end.[45] Cromwell's arrest was taken as the sign of Henry's change of mind and heart and became the catalyst for new diplomatic moves. Diplomatic decision-making was being made swiftly, in reaction to news coming from the English court, and in the belief that Henry's gestures were signs of his good will. He had seemingly fooled the European diplomatic community.

The great prize for all of Catholic Christendom would be Henry's return to papal obedience. The king's abandonment of his principal counsellor seemed to offer the prospect of his reconciliation with Rome, especially to the nuncios and agents of Catholic powers whose ardent hope it was. Henry was not prepared to dispel these hopes, at least not at this stage. Writing to Cardinal Farnese on 15 June, after dining with Constable Montmorency and the English and Imperial ambassadors, Filiberto Ferrerio, the nuncio in France, expressed the hope that by 'putting his favourite Cromwell in prison' it would be possible to secure 'the submission of that King [to Rome]'.[46] Francis had been delighted to hear of Cromwell's fall: the 'news was not

[41] *SP*, VIII, pp. 349–50, 355–6.

[42] AGR, Papiers Gachard, 644, fo. 146r–v, Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 11 June 1540; *SP*, VIII, p. 356.

[43] Archivio di Stato di Mantua (ASMn), Archivio Gonzaga (AG), Estero (E), XI. 3, 568, Abbadino to duke of Mantua, 15 June 1540, Brussels ('Che il Re d'Angliterra era morto, ma freddo p(er)ò, il ch(e) poco fu creso').

[44] *NAD*, V, 142, p. 296 ('travagliata di animo').

[45] ASMn, AG, E. XI. 3, 568, Abbadino to duke of Mantua, 15 June 1540, Brussels ('da q(ue)l giorno in qua su M.tà et Mons.r di Granvella dimostrano di star molto alegri il ch(e) fa creder ch(e) la nova fosse in effetto bona..., Le cose tra Su M(aes)tà et Angliterra sabbino ad passar bene et co(n) Convi(n)tione d(el) pare(n)tato').

[46] *Correspondance des Nonces en France: Carpi et Ferrerio, 1535–1540*, ed. J. L'Estoquoy, *Acta Nuntiaturae Gallicae* (*ANG*) (Rome and Paris, 1961), I, 557, p. 568, Ferrerio to Cardinal Farnese, 15 June 1540, Melun ('a faire mettre en prison son favoir Cromwel et dira comment on pourrait obtenir la soumission de ce roi').

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only pleasant', but would also contribute to 'the common good of the Church, the princes, the nobles, and generally of all the peoples of England'.[47] The English ambassador in France, John Wallop – no friend to Cromwell or his religion – heard from the duke of Norfolk the details of Cromwell's disgrace and passed them to Carlo Sacrati, the Este ambassador in Paris.[48] Within days, Sacrati had reported that Norfolk 'snatched' Cromwell's Garter collar and 'threw it to the ground, shouting "traitor, you are not worthy of it"'.[49] While it is important to be sceptical of the accuracy of diplomatic reports, Sacrati's letter reveals how quickly informal diplomatic channels could spread highly detailed news. Nevertheless, French delight at Cromwell's disgrace was tempered by alarm about the Anglo-Imperial rapprochement which it portended. Many envoys, like the Venetian ambassador to the Imperial court, believed the official English propaganda; that Cromwell had been arrested for matters of 'faith'.[50] By 18 June, the Ferrarese ambassador in France had heard that Cromwell had hoped to make himself king and to marry the king's daughter, Mary. The bishops of Winchester and Durham – 'good Christians and Catholics' – were now governing the realm. This news would be sent by post to the Holy See.[51] A day later, Abbadino wrote that the cause of the arrest was Cromwell's 'maligning of the King over matters of faith' – the official English version.[52] Yet by the beginning of July, he believed more to lie behind it: since Cromwell had 'induced' the king to 'become so heretical', Henry's move was surely intended to demonstrate 'to the emperor that he wishes to be Christian and to make possible the *pratica* he planned with His Majesty for an accord and *parentado*'.[53] Cervini continually described the Imperial dealings surrounding Cromwell's fall as the 'pratica' and 'disegno d'Inghilterra', implying the

[47]*Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, p. 191, Francis I to Marillac, 15 June 1540, Fontainebleau ('nouvelle qui m'a esté non seullement agréable, mais...au bien, honneur et prospérité de ses affaires..., du common bien de l'Eglise, des princes, des nobles et généralement de tout le peuple d'Angleterre'). An additional reason for French antipathy was Cromwell's role in the 'Rochepot Affair', a maritime incident where Cromwell allegedly enriched himself by denying justice to François de Montmorency, Sieur de La Rochepot, brother of the constable of France. See A. J. Slavin, 'The Rochepot Affair', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 10 (1979), pp. 3–19; D. L. Potter, 'The constable's brother: François de Montmorency, sieur de La Rochepot (c. 1496–1551)', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 48 (2004), pp. 141–97; *LP*, XV, 910.

[48]ASMo, ASE, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori Francia, b. 16. 3, fo. 3v, Sacrati to duke of Ferrara, 18 June 1540, Melun.

[49]ASMo, ASE, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori Francia, b. 16. 3, fo. 6r, Sacrati to duke of Ferrara, 18 June 1540, Fontainbleau ('testimonij degni di fede, dicono ch(e) essen(do) in consiglio co(n) l'ordine al collo il Duca di Norfolch fu q(ue)llo ch(e) se li accostò et li levò l'ordine, et lo gettò a terra dicendo traditor tu non sei degno di portarlo').

[50]*Calendar of state papers and manuscripts relating to English affairs, existing in the collections of Venice and other libraries of northern Italy*, ed. R. Brown et al. (38 vols. in 40, London, 1864–1947) (*CSPVenice*), V, 217.

[51]ASMo, ASE, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori Francia, b. 16. 3, fo. 4r, Carlo Sacrati to duke of Ferrara, 18 June 1540, Melun ('P(er) farsi Re et sperava che S(ua) M(aes)tà gli havesse a dare la figliuola..., subito il nontio inteso q(ue)sto espedì a posta al papa p(er)ch(e) fu pub(blica)to').

[52]ASMn, AG, E. XI. 3, 568, Abbadino to duke of Mantua, 19 June 1540, Brussels ('p(er) haver sparlato co(n)tra il Re p(er) causa d(e)lla Fede').

[53]ASMn, AG, E. XI. 3, 568, Abbadino to duke of Mantua, 3 July 1540, Brussels ('Dicesi che questo Cremuel è stato q(ue)llo ch(e) ha indutto la tr(atta)ta d(e)l Re d'Angliterra ad divenir(e) ad tanto heretic(o)..., qua se fan(n)o diversi iudicii, et la più parte tiene ch(e)'l ditto Re sia divenuto arg(u)to p(er) far conoscer al Imp(erat)ore ch(e) vol esser(e) Christiano, et p(er) facilitar(e) la pratica ch(e) tiene co(n) su M(aes)tà d(e)l accordi et d(e)l parentado').

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deliberate manipulation of its consequences and of the direction of English affairs more generally.[54] Giovanni Poggio, nuncio at the emperor's court, reported that 'murmuring' about events in England was widespread. Granvelle was certain that if Cromwell were killed 'sera assai bona cosa [it would be a very good thing]'; it would pave the way for England's however unlikely reconciliation with Rome.[55]

III

Evidence of Charles's overtures to Henry lies in two mysterious missions to England in July 1540, their purposes clouded by deepest secrecy.[56] By May, Wyatt had believed that the prince of Salerno would not visit England, that he had changed his mind.[57] But on 26 June, the prince sent word to Pate of his urgent desire to visit the king, praising Henry's 'noble stomacke, greate humanite'.[58] Salerno did not begin his journey until early July, and when he came it was with a companion of great significance. Salerno acted as noble escort and cover for Charles's most trusted negotiator. Don Luis de Zúñiga y Ávila (1500–64) was a gentleman of the emperor's chamber, close to him in peace and war, and entrusted with secret missions of double deception.[59] Writing later of Charles's wars in Germany, de Ávila related that the emperor 'hath broughte me up in his house', recalled the Tunis campaign, the war in Provence; 'there was nothing done but I haue bene nere unto hym'; 'I am a wytnes.'[60] For a grand noble to accompany a skilled negotiator was standard diplomatic practice. Marillac was told by Henry VIII that while Salerno had probably come to 'sightsee', de Ávila had most likely come 'under his master's instructions'.[61] The Venetian Francesco Contarini wondered, too, whether the purpose of the trip was to 'see the Island', or because 'they may perhaps have something to negotiate with His Majesty on behalf of the emperor'.[62]

[54] *NAD*, V, 142, p. 296, Cardinal Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 14 June 1540, Brussels.

[55] *NAD*, V, 144, p. 298, Poggio to Cardinal Farnese, 15 June 1540, Brussels ('procurai d'intendere fra che s'havia de Inglaterra, perchè pur si murmurava de pratiche fra loro').

[56] S. Brigden, 'Pastime with good company: the visit of the prince of Salerno to England in July 1540', *University of Oxford History Working Paper*, II (2013), pp. 1–30. The prince of Salerno's journey has hardly been noticed by historians, either of England or the continent. Rare exceptions are Capasso, *Paolo III*, II, p. 32; R. Colapietra, *I Sanseverino di Salerno: mito e realtà del barone ribelle* (Salerno, 1985), pp. 177–8. For the life of Ferrante Sanseverino, and his antecedents, see C. Gatta, *Memorie topografico-storiche della provincia di Lucania* (Naples, 1732; repr. Bologna, 1996), pp. 460–88; T. Pedìo, *Napoli e Spagna nella prima metà del Cinquecento* (Bari, 1971), pp. 294–8, 330–41, 361–94; Colapietra, *I Sanseverino di Salerno*; Luca Addante, 'Ferrante Sanseverino', *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (*DBI*), XC.

[57] *Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, p. 181 (*LP*, XV, 651).

[58] *SP*, VIII, pp. 366–7.

[59] For the life of de Ávila, see A. Gonzalez Palencia, *Don Luis de Zuñiga y Avila: gentilhombre de Carlos V* (Madrid, 1932). His journey to England is not mentioned. Parker, *Emperor: a new life of Charles V*, p. 262.

[60] From the English translation: *The comentaries of Don Lewes de Auela, and Suniga ... which treateth of the great vvars in Germany made by Charles the fifth* (London, 1555), sig. Nvi r.

[61] *Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, p. 197, Marillac to Francis I, 6 July 1540, London ('le dict seigneur prince de Salerne vienne plus tost pour veoir le pays que pour négocier, néantmoings il ne peult penser que ledict seigneur espagnol [de Ávila] face le voyage sans quelque cause ou charge de son maistre').

[62] *CSPVenice*, V, 220.

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In France, the missions were observed with trepidation. In May, after the first intimation of Salerno's visit, Marillac wondered why Salerno had not set sail yet.[63] The missions of Salerno to England, and of John Clerk, bishop of Bath, to Flanders and Cleves made him fearful; he wondered who this 'personage' who had 'secretly' crossed the Channel really was, and why Henry had asked him not to speak of it.[64] The view that Clerk's mission was to further an entente was widespread, though the Venetian ambassador remained completely in the dark.[65] In Paris, Sacrati was certain that Salerno 'had come for the marriage negotiations'.[66] In mid-July, the papal nuncio in France relayed anxieties of an 'accordo segreto'.[67] Yet while dreading an alliance between the emperor and Henry, the Most Christian King could hardly lament the end of the English schism. In France, they discussed how to halt this alliance without compromising Henry's reconciliation to Rome: the nuncio declared his intention to find 'an antidote', which would 'not harm' reconciliation with Rome while simultaneously damaging Henry's reputation with the emperor.[68] That Charles had chosen to send his closest adviser with a great prince of the empire proved the importance of the mission. Franco-papal efforts do indicate that there was a shared belief in the possibility of reconciliation, and that they did not want to leave the empire with the credit for over securing England's return to Rome.

'With great hylarite and gladnes', Salerno planned his trip, asking how long it took by sea from Calais to Dover, and how far to London – all places infinitely remote to this Italian prince. Utmost secrecy was enjoined.[69] On 2 July, Salerno and de Ávila, with a retinue of forty men, dressed in mourning black for their dead empress, arrived in Calais, where they were crassly entertained by the monoglot garrison, and the next day sailed to Dover. Salerno came 'from themperowr as some sayde, othar some sayde he came for his owne pleasure for to se the kynge of England'.[70] The given story was that the prince and de Ávila were visiting for pleasure and pastime, to hunt, and to 'see the island'. But surely, they were travelling for a deeper purpose

[63]*Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, p. 181, Marillac to Francis I, 8 May 1540, London ('Le prince de Sallerne, qui debvoit venir par deça, n'est encore bougé de la court de l'empereur, et m'a dict maître Hoyet..., qu'il croit ledict seigneur avoir changé de propos').

[64]*Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, p. 199 ('Touchant le personnage que ledict seigneur a faict secrètement aller en France, qu'on disoit estre allé en Allemaigne, il m'a pryé n'en vouloir dire aulcun mot; et je ne puis penser pourquoy, veu que telle chose qui sera au premier jour notoire ne se peult aulcunement céler').

[65]Abbadino recorded that Clerk 'sia sta(to) ma(n)dati a negociar ben se fan(n)o iuditij ch(e) le cose tra Angliterra et su M(aes)tà siano'l bon camino'. ASMn, AG, E. XI. 3, Abbadino to duke of Mantua, 6 July 1540, Bruges. Contarini reported that the bishop of Bath 'has crossed the Channel and is on his way either to the emperor or to the Most Christian King', *CSPVenice*, V, 219.

[66]ASMo, ASE, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori Francia, b. 16. 3, fos. 1–4, Sacrati to duke of Ferrara, 10 July 1540, Paris ('no(n) ho potuto intendere la causa p(er)ch(e) qui siano ma è certo ch(e) è p(er) pratica di parentato').

[67]*ANG*, I, 569, p. 582, Ferrerio to Cardinal Farnese, 13 July 1540, Seine-Maritime.

[68]*ANG*, I, 569, pp. 581–2: 'O vero trovare l'antidoto che non possa nocere pertroppo portare Inghilterra et appresso levarli la credenza dala parte Cesarea'.

[69]TNA, SP 1/160, fo. 165r–v (*SP*, VIII, pp. 366–7).

[70]*The chronicle of Calais in the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII to the year 1540*, ed. J. G. Nichols (London, 1846), p. 48; William Turner, *A nevv booke of spirituall physik for dyuerse diseases of the nobilitie and gentlemen of Englande* (Rome, i.e. Emden, 1555), fos. 45–46.

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than 'solazzo [pastime]', so every observer surmised.[71] Waiting at the Imperial court was a shadowy figure called 'Navarro', who was ready to negotiate English matters 'fairly'.[72] The news from Antwerp on 4 July was that 'it kan not b[e known] what commyssion he hathe gyven hym...And ffor all that they hathe [given] owtt voyce to come asportyng the tryuth [is] that they be sended of him [the Emperor].'[73] Matters were 'heating up'.[74] Even Henry knew nothing, he claimed, perhaps truly, of what lay behind the visit; he was suspicious of fine words and supposed that 'they wished to get something from him'.[75] The Este ambassador in France wrote that he and the papal nuncio thought that Salerno's visit was not for recreation, but that he 'had been sent by the emperor because His Holiness had advice from the Most Reverend Legate Marcello [Cardinal Cervini]'.[76] Cervini was aware of what was at stake; he remained concerned about how the emperor could 'use the situation, England, and the necessity of the German [matter] to satisfy Cleves and grant concessions to the Protestants so as to induce them into obedience'. Nevertheless, he stressed how 'at present', these plans were but 'discussions and designs (*ragionamenti et disegni*)'.[77]

From Dover, the party rode to court on splendid horses sent by the king. Lodgings were hurriedly prepared.[78] Feasting at the royal palaces with the king and nobility, the 'strangers' had 'great cheer', and Luigi Dentice, who had travelled from Naples with the prince, entertained the English with sublime singing.[79] The French ambassador sent his king a brief report of the fleeting visit. 'The prince of Salerno, who came hither only to see the country', was feasted 'in this Court and in some of the most beautiful places this King has'.[80] To Constable Montmorency, Marillac was more open. De Ávila broadcast matters which were better suppressed. The emperor would never cede Milan; Francis was no nearer to achieving his aim, 'but rather further

[71]ASV, Fondo Pio, 56, fos. 241r, 244r, Cervini to the nuncios of France and Venice, 3 and 10 July 1540; ASV, Carte Farnesiane, 2, fo. 102r, Cervini to [Pope Paul III], 5 July 1540, Bruges; ASMo, Camera Ducale (CD), Ambasciatori Germania, busta 4, Rossetto to duke of Ferrara, 5 July 1540; *Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, pp. 197, 199 (*LP*, XV, 847–8.)

[72]*NAD*, V, 148, p. 316, Cervini to Farnese, 25 June 1540, Bruges ('Quanto ad Inghilterra si lavora tutta via, ma anche non è concluso niente, il che fa che il Navarro non parta di qui, aspettando per trattare le cose giustamente').

[73]BL, Cotton MS Galba B X, fo. 132r (*LP*, XV, 838).

[74]ASV, Fondo Pio, 56, fos. 241r, 244r, Cervini to the nuncios of France and Venice, 3 and 10 July 1540; ASV, Carte Farnesiane, 2, fo. 102r, Cervini to [Pope Paul III], 5 July 1540, Bruges; ASMo, CD, Ambasciatori Germania, busta 4, Rossetto to duke of Ferrara, 5 July 1540.

[75]*Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, p. 199 (*LP*, XV, 848), Marillac to Montmorency, 6 July 1540.

[76]ASMo, ASE, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori Francia, b. 16. 3, fos. 1–4, Carlo Sacrati to duke of Ferrara, 10 July 1540, Paris ('Il Principe di Salerno, il q(ua)le diceva che passava in Inghilterra a spasso ma il nontio et Io ch(e) havemo ragionato di tal cosa tenemo ch(e) vada mandato dall'Imp(erato)re p(er)ch(e) S(ua) S(antità) ha adviso (sic) del R(everendissi)mo legato Marcello').

[77]*NAD*, V, 156, p. 336, Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 5 July 1540, Bruges ('donde potria nascere che S(ua) M(aes)tà con questa occasione et Inghilterra et con la necessità d'Alemagna si disponessi talvolta a contentare Cleves et levati simili favori alli protestanti indurli alla voluntà sua. Pure tutti questi sono per hora ragionamenti et disegni').

[78]*LP*, XVI, pp. 189, 190.

[79]D. Cardamone, 'Orlando di Lasso and pro-French factions in Rome', in idem, *The Canzone villanesca alla napolitana: social, cultural and historical contexts* (Aldershot, 2008), ch. v, pp. 36–7.

[80]*Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, p. 202 (*LP*, XV, 901).

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off'. The deluded English believed that they had 'gained a great advantage'.[81] Their mission a failure, Salerno's party left England, arriving in Calais on 15 July.[82]

As Salerno left, another Imperial mission arrived, its purpose no less shadowy. On 11 July, Don Francesco d'Este, marquis of Padula, had sent a messenger by night to Pate, announcing that he longed to visit England and its king. The emperor had so often praised the 'excellent benefites of nature and like gyftes of mynd' that made Henry the image of his Creator that it 'dyd engendre in his stomache such a love...as could not be ferdre defferred without his greate greafe and discomfite'.[83] His claim that he wished to visit England to avoid an 'uncomfortable and unpleasant' journey with the emperor to Zeeland and Holland seems implausible since the Channel voyage to England was still more miserable.[84] Since it was a sin for anyone of the true faith to consort with heretics, a special dispensation was needed to travel to England. D'Este sought the necessary leave from the emperor and papal nuncio to 'see that island'.[85] On 18 July, his party, dressed in mourning black, sailed from Calais.[86] Ercole II, duke of Ferrara, hedging his bets, had dedicated the service of one brother, Francesco, to the emperor, and that of another, the magnificent Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, to the French king. Arriving at the French court in February 1540, Francesco was denied audience with Francis, but Charles welcomed him personally in Ghent.[87] Also among the envoys were leading Sicilian nobles. Giovanni Tagliavia d'Aragona, marquis of Terranova and count of Castelvetrano, was one of the most influential figures of the kingdom of Sicily; as grand admiral he had led the Sicilian fleet in the Tunis campaign, and between October 1539 and April 1540 acted as president of the kingdom in the viceroy's absence. With him came his brother Pietro, bishop of Agrigento.[88] Also in the party was M. de Flagy, one of the *Gentileshombres de la Boca* (Spanish court officers charged with feeding the king) of the emperor.[89] On Mary Magdalen's day, 22 July, at Westminster, they were 'highlie feasted, and noblie interteined'. They departed on 30 July.[90] D'Este was delighted with his visit: he praised the 'good, rare and unique king', and described how Henry had entertained him with banquets, a joust, bull and bear baiting, and tours of his treasures, the

[81]*Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, pp. 203–4 (*LP*, XV, 902).

[82]*Chronicle of Calais*, p. 48.

[83]TNA, SP 1/161, fos. 89r, 90r (*LP*, XV, 877–8).

[84]ASMo, ASE, Cancelleria Ambasciatori Germania, b. 5. 5, fo. 1r, Francesco d'Este to duke of Ferrara, 18 July 1540, Bruges ('Che S(ua) M(aes)tà Ces(area) deliberata di andar in Zelanda et Olanda partendo domani di qua et sapendosi qua(n)to sia incommodo et poco piacevole tale camino, mi è paruto opportuno di trasferirmi fra tanto in Inghilterra...').

[85]ARG, Papiers Gachard, 644, fos. 175v, 184v, Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 3 and 13 July 1540; ASMo, CD, Ambasciatori Germania, 4; Rossetto to duke of Ferrara, 5 July 1540, Bruges.

[86]*LP*, XV, 877–8, 889; *Chronicle of Calais*, p. 48.

[87]ASMo, ASE, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori Germania, b. 5. 5, Francesco d'Este to duke of Ferrara, 25 Feb. and 1 Mar. 1540.

[88]L. Bertoni, 'Francesco d'Este', *DBI*, XLIII; Lina Scalisi, 'Giovanni Aragona Tagliavia, Marchese di Terranova', *DBI*, XCV. M. Zaggia, *Tra Mantova e la Sicilia nel Cinquecento* (3 vols., Florence, 2003), I, pp. 142–5. None mention this English mission.

[89]*Relation des troubles de Gand sous Charles-Quint*, ed. M. Gachard (Brussels, 1846), p. 43 n. 2; *La corte de Carlos V*, ed. J. Martinez Millán, Carlos Javier de Carlos Morales, Santiago Fernández Conti (5 vols., Madrid, 2000), III, pp. 166, 170.

[90]*LP*, XVI, p. 191; Raphael Holinshed, *The chronicles of England* (1585), p. 952.

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kingdom's arsenals and munitions, and several palaces, and had given him 'a beautiful and ornate' gift.[91] Such favours were far from customary for the sixth son of an Italian *signore*. The French ambassador judged rightly that d'Este came only to visit the country, not to negotiate.[92] As with the previous mission, a grandee escorted and acted as cover for a principal negotiator who was charged with conducting delicate and difficult business.

'This Court is the closest in the world I think for newes', so Pate wrote on 27 June.[93] Insisting, as ever, that there could be no friendship with the English king until his return to the faith, Charles now held out hope, but everything must be kept secret.[94] Secrecy was necessary because Charles was violating his agreement with Francis that neither of them would treat with Henry;[95] it was also vital because of the extreme delicacy of the proposals at the heart of the missions. But vigilant envoys had penetrated at least part of their purpose. The Florentine, Agnolo Niccolini, understood that the diplomatic overtures came not only from the emperor but from England: Cromwell's fall was Henry's way of dealing with the 'maneggi [negotiations/business] of Germany and France'.

Cromwell's fall enabled and accelerated a series of diplomatic manoeuvres. The timing of two embassies to England and the events in London concurrent with them indicate their purpose. The fallen minister was a useful 'preda', sacrificed by Henry to rid him of the Cleves match for which he held him responsible. At the same time, he could use Cromwell's arrest to demonstrate his Catholic faith, a necessary precondition to securing an alliance with Charles. The aim was the 'unione della fede et religione [union of faith and religion]'.[96] The secret at the heart of the negotiations was a marriage proposal. Giovanni Bandino knew that Salerno went to inspect 'the daughter of that King' as a prospective bride for her cousin the emperor. This was not, he insisted, 'capriccio mio [my fancy]'.[97] On 3 July, the Mantuan ambassador reported a diversity of opinions, most judging that Henry prepared to deceive the emperor by pretending that he wished to be 'Christian' – that is, a loyal Catholic – in order to advance the negotiations for the agreements and the marriage alliance.[98] In France, too, there was speculation about the match. The nuncio received ciphered intelligence from the Imperial court about meetings between

[91] ASMo, ASE, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori Germania, b. 5. 5, fo. 1r–v, Francesco d'Este to duke of Ferrara, 13 Aug. 1540, Amsterdam ('Re bon raro et unico', 'son..., assai contento di haver fatto tale viaggio per la buona ciera et carrozza che mi son state fatte da quel Ser(enissi)mo Re il qual mi ha ricevuto alla sua mensa et donatomi un..., bellissimo et ornatissimo, facendomi far anco una giostra et veder caccie de tori et de orsi et facendomi menar ne parchi a far caccie bellissime di damme caprioli et..., oltre il piacer grande de mirar et admirar ogni suo thesoro, le munitioni, li palazzi ornatissimi...').

[92] *Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, p. 207 (*LP*, XV, 926).

[93] *SP*, VIII, p. 367.

[94] ASV, Carte Farnesiane, 2, fos. 100v–101r; AGR, Papiers Gachard, 644, fo. 181v, Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 5 and 11 July 1540, Bruges.

[95] AGR, Papiers Gachard, 644, fo. 185v, Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 13 July 1540, Bruges.

[96] ASFi, MP 4297, fo. 87r, Niccolini and Bandino to duke of Florence, 19 July 1540, Antwerp.

[97] ASFi, MP, 4297, fo. 79v, Bandino to duke of Florence, 8 July 1540. *LP*, XVI, 214, 606.

[98] ASMn, AG, E. XI.3, 568, Abbadino to duke of Mantua, 3 July 1540, Brussels ('diversi iudicii, et la più parte tiene ch(e)'l ditto Re sia divenuto arg(u)to p(er) far conoscer al Imp(erat)ore ch(e) vol esser(e) Christiano, et p(er) facilitar(e) la pratica ch(e) tiene co(n) su M(aes)tà d(e)l accordi et d(e)l parentado').

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the English ambassadors and Charles; Henry wished perhaps to make a marriage alliance with the emperor.[99]

This proposal had been made long before – Cardinal Wolsey had wept when Charles had married the 'daughter of Portingall' instead[100] – but this had been when she was Princess, not Lady, Mary and her father was not yet supreme head of the English church, professed enemy of the bishop of Rome. At the end of 1539, another match had been proposed for Mary, with Philipp, duke of Bavaria. It had for Cromwell, similar advantages to the Cleves marriage, and was serious enough, and Henry and Mary liked it well enough, for Philipp to meet Mary in the garden of the abbot of Westminster and to be allowed a kiss.[101] But soon, reports came of a quite different and far grander marriage for Mary. On New Year's Day 1540, Cardinal Farnese had reported the secret proposal of the marriage of the 'daughter of England' to the emperor, a proposal too secret to appear in any open instruction, and almost too delicate to make. It was refused then: Charles's response had been 'between sweet and sour' – unless Henry returned to papal obedience there was no hope of alliance.[102] Rumours of the starry match returned in the spring and summer of 1540, with Cromwell now removed. By 11 July, as Salerno and de Ávila visited the king, Cervini believed that Charles would take as his new wife his cousin, 'la figliuola de Inghilterra'.[103] Two days earlier, with seeming promise, Charles had instructed his retinue to remove the mourning black they had worn since the death of the empress.[104]

Not all the emissaries were princes and courtiers. A cleric came, too. The sending of Pietro d'Aragona Tagliavia, bishop of Agrigento, intrigued Pate: 'he is an honorable prelate, a personage of an humble spirite, of great humanitie, of honest lerning, and withowte all fuke and crafte...and in great favor and lyke credite with thEmprour'. 'I here not what shulde be the cause of his resorte to Inglonde, excepte it shuld be to se the Kinges Grace.'[105] The bishop had resigned his ancient title but became a powerful figure in the church as well as in the kingdom of Sicily. 'Most faithful to Charles V', he would be in the Imperial party at Ratisbon in 1541 and from 1545 to 1547 at the Council of Trent, aligned to the emperor's interest.[106] His loyalty to Charles and to Rome was unimpeachable, and he had the authority to conduct negotiations at the highest level, such as those now called for in England.

In the previous summer of 1539, and again early in 1540, the pope had proposed sending special envoys – 'protestanti': not Protestants, but protestants – to induce Henry to return to obedience to Rome and to God. If he refused, they were to warn

[99]*ANG*, I, 569, p. 582, Ferrerio to Cardinal Farnese, 12 July 1540, Seine-Maritime ('desiderando forse il Re Anglo de imparentarsi con la Maestà Cesarea').

[100]TNA, SP 1/164, fo. 19r (*LP*, XVI, 298).

[101]On the possible Bavarian match, see J. Edwards, *Mary I: England's Catholic Queen* (New Haven, CT, 2011), pp. 61–2; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cromwell*, p. 513.

[102]ASV, Fondo Pio, 56, fo. 39r, Cardinal Farnese to Pope Paul III, 1 Jan. 1540, Paris.

[103]For continuing rumours, see *CSPSp*, VI, i, *1538–1542*, pp. 282, 285; AGR, Papiers Gachard, 644, fo. 181v, xxxx to Cardinal Farnese, 11 July 1540.

[104]TNA, SP 1/161, fo. 72r (*LP*, XV, 864).

[105]*SP*, VIII, p. 414; Roberto Zapperi, 'Pietro d'Aragona Tagliavia', *DBI*, III. The visit to England is not mentioned.

[106]Zaggia, *Tra Mantova e la Sicilia*, I, pp. 229–31. The quotation is at p. 229.

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him that the Catholic monarchs would fulfil the commands of the Holy See 'to execute by force the sentence of excommunication and deprivation against him'.[107] A memorandum written by Cervini, perhaps late in 1539, described his own prospective spiritual embassy to the king of England. It was 'dark' and doubtful and 'most strictly secret', for 'it is quite possible' that Henry 'will make sport' of him, 'and of his Holiness as well', or worse. Henry had imagined the assassination of a cardinal before. 'The King of England must be moved to promise' that Cervini's life 'shall not be in peril during his stay in England'.[108] Cervini was never sent, but Tagliavia may have come with a similar brief. 'News that the King of England has condemned his favourite Cromwell to death' quickly reached the papal court.[109] This could be taken as a sign of the king's repentance. No hint survives of Henry's encounter with Bishop Tagliavia or of what or whether he knew in advance of the mission, but his actions during the envoy's stay were telling. The sequence of events was Henry's diplomatic tour de force.

Henry must offer pledges of his good faith in order to make amity and alliance with the emperor credible or possible. The annulment of his marriage to Anne of Cleves was not only personally vital – because he was repelled by this queen and sought to marry another – but also a dynastic and diplomatic necessity. Anne's brother, the duke of Cleves, was Charles's disobedient vassal, in conflict with him over the duchy of Gelderland. The depositions concerning the fated Cleves marriage were heard at the end of June and early July, crucially during the embassy of Salerno and de Ávila, and on 9 July, while they were in England, the process of nullity took place. In full convocation, it was declared that 'the King and Anne of Cleves were nowise bound by the marriage solemnised between them'. Henry was no longer allied to the family of Cleves; Charles was duly informed.[110]

To conciliate Charles, Henry needed to prove his religious orthodoxy, his will to repudiate reform in his new church. Now he did. For the festival of amity prepared for Salerno and de Ávila, Henry staged a theatre of blood. On 7 July, William 'frantic' Collins was burnt at the stake in Southwark. Collins, iconoclast and sacramentary, who had preached a message of social egalitarianism along with scripture, was likely to have been martyred eventually, but the timing of his death was expedient.[111] As soon as d'Este and Bishop Tagliavia arrived in England, a major inquisition for heresy began in the City of London. 'In fourteen days' space', 500 Londoners were arrested and many imprisoned. The names of at least 200 of them are known. Original indictments for twenty suspects were endorsed 'billa vera' by the City's mayor on 17 July, and suspect citizens were rounded up.[112] This was the first quest under the

[107] ASV, Miscellanea Armaria II, 49, fo. 210v; *LP*, XIV, i, 1081, 1110, 1142–3, 1149, 1168, 1203; *CSPSp*, VIII, *1545–1546*, p. 605.

[108] ASV, Fondo Pio, 56, fo. 91v, Cardinal Farnese to Pope Paul III, 30 Jan. 1540; *CSPSp*, VIII, *1545–1546*, pp. 606–9. Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, undated, but written before Cervini was created cardinal in Dec. 1539.

[109] ASMn, AG, E. XLI. 2, 1910, Ghinucci to Cardinal Gonzaga, 14 July 1540 ('qui son nuove ch(e)'l Re d'Inghilterra ha fatto condemnar a morte q(ue)l suo gran favorito Cramuel').

[110] *LP*, XV, 860, 861; *SP*, VIII, p. 386; TNA, SP 1/161, fos. 73ff (*LP*, XV, 865).

[111] Brigden, 'Popular disturbance and the fall of Thomas Cromwell', pp. 259, 272–3.

[112] TNA, SP 1/243, fos. 60r–68r (*LP, Addenda*, 1463); *Original letters relative to the English Reformation*, ed. H. Robinson (2 vols., Cambridge, 1846–7), I, pp. 208, 232–3; Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 320–3; idem, 'Popular disturbance and the fall of Thomas Cromwell', pp. 272–4.

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Act of Six Articles, the penal act which had passed the previous year but had not been enforced, while Cromwell, the foremost patron of London's evangelicals, was in power. Now he could no longer protect them or himself. The coincidence of the quest with Cromwell's fall did not escape contemporaries. The Este ambassador in Paris, reporting on Salerno's visit, understood the importance of the act, and the significance of the timing of its implementation, declaring that Henry VIII's 'Six Articles are very important, good for the Church'; 'in the matters of God things will improve day by day'.[113]

At the Imperial court, rumours circulated that Charles and Henry would meet, 'whether by land or sea'. While his emissaries parleyed in England, Charles remained in the Low Countries. His journey to the coast of Zeeland and Holland was kept secret – the court was not to follow, nor any ambassadors, but only his intimate household.[114] Between 13 and 23 July – the exact period of d'Este and Tagliavia's mission – Charles was at sea, sailing from Bruges to Flushing, to Middleburg, to Veere, to Zierikzee, to Dordrecht and Rotterdam.[115] The secrecy and timing of his journey suggest that he was waiting on events, on news of the success or otherwise of the missions, which would decide whether or not he would meet Henry. He was also calculating the risk of his return journey to Spain. Travelling anywhere outside his own dominions made him vulnerable. Laughingly, while in England, de Ávila had marvelled that Francis had allowed Charles passage through France in 1539.[116] Charles had reason to fear the Channel voyage; the memory of his father's shipwreck and dishonour was bright. In 1506, Philip the Fair was driven by storms onto the English coast and became the hostage of Henry VII.[117] Maybe a meeting between Charles and Henry really was in prospect, if all went well with the missions. In the event, he spent the summer in his Netherlands provinces reasserting his authority and travelled back to Spain via Germany.[118]

IV

The destruction of Cromwell was, in part, believed to be the price of Henry's alliance with the emperor, the pledge that his master was a true Christian prince, a necessary sacrifice, the ineluctable sign of Henry's will to reconcile. In late June and early July, Cervini was counting Henry's moves towards reconciliation – the arrest of Cromwell, the Act of Six Articles – and believed that the only obstacle was the 'peccadiglio [small sin]' – he wrote ironically – of his purported supremacy in the English church. Henry hated Lutheranism and Cromwell's heresy, Cervini was sure. Now was

[113]ASMo, ASE, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori Francia, b. 16. 3, fos. 1–4, Carlo Sacrati to duke of Ferrara, 10 July 1540, Paris ('sei articuli molto importanti, buoni p(er) la Chiesa et sicu(ri) de ch(e) va ogni dì di bene in meglio per le cose d'Iddio').

[114]ASV, Carte Farnesiane, 2, fos. 100v–101r; AGR, Papiers Gachard, 644, fo. 181v, Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 5 and 11 July 1540, Bruges; AGR, Papiers Gachard, 644, fo. 178v, Poggio to Cardinal Farnese, 7 July 1540, Bruges.

[115]*LP*, XV, 889; *Estancias y viajes del Emperador Carlos V*, ed. Don Manuel de Foronda y Aguilera (Madrid, 1914), p. 486.

[116]*Correspondance de Castillon et Marillac*, p. 203 (*LP*, XV, 902).

[117]ASMo, CD, Ambasciatori Spagna, busta 3, Alfonso Rossetto to duke of Ferrara, 7 Dec. 1538; *CWTW*, I, p. 177.

[118]Parker, *Emperor: a new life of Charles V*, p. 268.

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the time to persuade him to return to Rome. At once, Paul III sent instructions to Cervini, to discuss with Charles how best to carry out Henry VIII's reconversion.[119] Cromwell's incarceration made possible the visit of the Imperial envoys. Once he was in the Tower, with 'not one friend in the whole island', only the manner of his death was uncertain. Would he burn alive as a heretic or suffer the death of a traitor? Abbadino discussed Cromwell's sentencing, unsure of whether Cromwell had yet been killed, but certain that he had been condemned to be hanged.[120] Returning from England, Salerno reported to Cervini on 23 July that Cromwell was not yet dead, but soon would be: the sentence was passed; 'they would tear out his heart and stuff it in his mouth'.[121] Both were unaware that the execution would be commuted to decapitation.

The envoys' relation to Cervini was also their confession for communication with a heretic, which required absolution. Doubtless, they reported to him what they believed he wished to hear, and he in turn sent a selective account to the Holy See. Henry 'had greatly cherished' the envoys, 'presenting himself as great and prudent'. But Salerno and de Ávila excoriated him as 'beyond reason and like an irrational animal'.[122] De Ávila continuously mocked the king, possibly with the intention of dispelling suspicions that Charles V had assigned secret orders to him and Salerno.[123] De Ávila appeared to Cervini – 'se non lo fa ad arte [if he did not speak to deceive]' – to have returned from England 'extremely dissatisfied' with the king. Henry had honoured Salerno, but not de Ávila and the others. When the king insulted the pope, calling him 'Bishop of Rome', they defiantly called him 'Papa', angering Henry and his nobles who, because of their sacrilege and self-enrichment, were so opposed to the Holy See that unless God intervened it would be impossible to return the realm to obedience. The king was 'like a pig, and showed little emotion'. The mass was still celebrated, but priests were now ordained by the king and marrying. 'Everything is descending into chaos and it seems like Hell.' They had not been allowed even to meet Princess Mary. Salerno spoke darkly of the Cleves divorce and of the king's impending marriage to Katherine Howard, who was already recognized as queen.[124] But Salerno's mission seemingly strengthened Charles's diplomatic efforts: Eustace Chapuys returned as ambassador to England, while at the Imperial court Pate 'of late had very frequent audiences with His Majesty'.[125]

The day of d'Este's and Tagliavia's departure from England and of Henry's marriage to Katherine Howard, 28 July, was the day of Cromwell's execution. Thomas Wyatt, who had seemingly brought the Imperial overture, which was the harbinger

[119] AGR, Papiers Gachard, 644, fos. 156v–157r, 182r, Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 24 June and 11 July 1540, Brussels; *NAD*, V, 146, 151, pp. 305, 320.

[120] ASV, Carte Farnesiane, 11, fo. 150v, Ferrerio to Cardinal Farnese, 30 June 1540; ASMn, AG, E. XI. 3 568, Abbadino to duke of Mantua, 19 July 1540, Brussels ('non si sa ch(e) Cremuel si anchora sta iustitiato ma ben iudicato di esser imbicato').

[121] AGR, Papiers Gachard, 644, fos. 198–199r, Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 23 July 1540, Dordrecht.

[122] ASMn, AG, E. XLI. 2, 1910, Poggio to Cardinal Gonzaga, 10 Aug. 1540, Holland ('chel Re gli facesse molte carezze et si sforzasse di mostrargli grande, et prudente, dicano liberamente che è fuor(i) di juditio, et come uno animale surazionale').

[123] *NAD*, V, 166, pp. 352–3, Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 23 July 1540, Dordrecht.

[124] AGR, Papiers Gachard, 644, fos. 198–199r, Cervini to Cardinal Farnese, 23 July 1540, Dordrecht.

[125] *CSPVenice*, V, 222.

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of his former master's fall, stood by.[126] At Tower Hill, Cromwell insisted: 'I die in the Catholic faith not doubting of any article of my faith, no nor doubting of any sacraments of the Church.' Yet he also confessed that he had been led astray: 'yet all were not slanders, for as God hath instruct so hath the Devil seduced'.[127] Thus, Henry proved to his people and to the world his repudiation of heresy. Two days later, three evangelical reformers were burnt to death and three papalist priests were hanged, drawn, and quartered, in a bloody demonstration of the king's personal religion, his avowed scrupulous equity.[128] The timing and theatre of these executions are significant. Isolated from Catholic Christendom, and potentially humiliated by the failure of the Imperial missions, the king needed to assert universally his Imperial power and supremacy in his new English church.

V

A domestic conspiracy brought Thomas Cromwell down. In England, his removal was politic because the king desired to halt the religious reform which Cromwell had promoted, and its attendant dangers of extremism and sedition. But in the long weeks of his imprisonment – 10 June to 28 July – his fall and imminent execution became part of a European diplomatic scheme to 'reduce' the rebellious, schismatic, heretical, 'perduto [lost, damned]', tyrannical, king of England to obedience. The sacrifice of Cromwell was Henry's tentative show of willingness to moderate religious reform in his kingdom and allow the promise of his reconciliation, by peaceful means rather than by war. The emperor might countenance a 'parentado' with Henry once he abandoned his 'heretic' counsellor. It is possible that the missions were adventitious: Salerno's visit had been proposed in April, only to be postponed and abandoned, *until* Cromwell's arrest provided evidence of Henry's change of heart. Whether Henry knew in advance the nature and purpose of the Imperial emissaries is far from certain. Perhaps Wyatt had brought an overture of the marriage alliance which Salerno and de Ávila came later to negotiate, but Bishop Tagliavia's mission was more shadowy by far.

Diplomatic considerations might also have lain behind Cromwell's arrest. The possibility hovers that the emperor, who so favoured Thomas Wyatt at his last audience, sent him back to England with overtures of a marriage proposal, with the condition attached that Henry provide evidence of a move away from reform. The rewards lavished on Wyatt, days after Cromwell's arrest, and his tears of grief and remorse at Tower Hill, hint at his implication in his patron's fall.[129] If so, he had little choice; an ambassador must advance his prince's interest. But in this confused year, some of Henry's ambassadors were found to have a higher loyalty to Rome than to their king. In December, Pate, who had for months been secretly working for reconciliation, defected and fled the Imperial court to kiss the feet of His Holiness. In the wake of this shocking betrayal, Wyatt and Wallop were

[126]Brigden, *Thomas Wyatt*, pp. 524–5.

[127]Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 168, fo. 209r.

[128]P. Marshall, *Heretics and believers: a history of the English Reformation* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2017), p. 281.

[129]Brigden, *Thomas Wyatt*, pp. 522–8.

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arrested.[130] This demonstration of orthodoxy so advanced by Henry during the period of Cromwell's imprisonment had not only convinced foreign diplomats but also his own ambassadors.

Ambassadors were often in the dark, so private and personal were the counsels of princes, but envoys at foreign courts had penetrated their most secret intentions in the summer of 1540. None of them saw Cromwell's fall as simply a domestic matter; their language, their suspicions show that they saw him as a 'preda [prize]' in a much wider diplomatic game. Ambassadors relied on rumour, speculation, and gossip, but from a tissue of half-truths could report the truth of events which lay beyond the dissimulation, concealment, and secrecy. Too great attention to reports from Marillac, the French ambassador in England, has led to a misleadingly domestic interpretation of Cromwell's fall.[131] Similarly, reports sent home to the court from English envoys abroad cannot adequately convey the intentions of foreign princes. The letters of foreign envoys are likely to reveal the motives and designs of their principals far more accurately. From the accounts of so many Catholic nuncios, ambassadors, and spies a quite different picture appears of the entangled affairs of Christendom in the summer of 1540, a moment which gave the English king a newly significant role. Henry's potential reconciliation was part of a wider move towards confessional alignment. Cromwell's fall should be revisited as part of a wider series of diplomatic crises in the first half of 1540.

Henry's unforced submission to Rome was never likely, but if there were ever a chance that he would reconcile and bow to papal obedience, or pretend to do so, the summer of 1540 was the most propitious time. As Francis refused the peace proposals and a new declaration of war seemed inevitable, the emperor prepared to compromise, and to deceive. His mind always fixed upon his conflict with the Turk, and dreaming of leading a crusade to Constantinople, Charles needed to temporize and find accommodation with England and the German princes. He was the principal advocate of colloquies between Catholic and Protestant theologians in an attempt to find religious accord within the empire. In June, just as Salerno and de Ávila prepared to come to England, a colloquy was called at Speyer.[132] Ten days before Cromwell's arrest, Paul III appointed Cardinal Contarini as his legate to this debate in Germany.[133] But he and the cardinal-nephew doubted the emperor's good faith, fearing that he might temporize or compromise with both England and the Schmalkaldic League. They warned Charles that 'this would be a bad example, if such resolutions were made in Germany in His Majesty's presence, the king of England having made a start in the right direction with his punishment of Cromwell for his promises given to the Lutherans in matters of religion'.[134] This was a vital moment of détente

[130]T.A. Sowerby, 'Richard Pate, the royal supremacy, and Reformation diplomacy', *Historical Journal*, 54 (2011), pp. 265–85; Brigden, *Thomas Wyatt*, pp. 530–3; *NAD*, VI, 326, pp. 198–9, Poggio to Cervini, 19 Feb. 1541, Nuremberg.

[131]D. Potter, *Henry VIII and Francis I: the final conflict, 1540–47* (Leiden, 2012), p. 8.

[132]H. Jedin, *A history of the Council of Trent*, trans. Ernest Graf (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1957), I, pp. 372ff.

[133]ASMn, AG, E. XXV. 3, 888, F. Peregrino to duke of Mantua, 1 June 1540, Rome.

[134]*NAD*, V, 219, p. 456, Cardinal Farnese to Cardinal Morone, 23 July 1540, Rome ('di male exempio, che hora in Germania in presentia di loro Maestà si facesse cotal resolutione, havendo il re d'Inghilterra dato principio d'indrizzar a qualche buona via con haver punito Gramwel per la intentione data a Lutherani circa le cose della religione').

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and attempted conciliation in Christendom, and the missions which Charles sent to England were part of it. Bishop Tagliavia, his agent of reconciliation in England, Charles would send again to Ratisbon and Trent.

Cromwell's fall enabled a reluctant but seemingly genuine collaboration and a consolidated response from the otherwise inimical powers of Catholic Christendom, who, through different channels and strategies, sought to reconcile England with Rome. The nuncios at the French and Imperial courts discussed how Henry VIII would be able to secure an Imperial alliance if 'he would submit himself to the Apostolic See'.[135] In Paris, Bishop Ferrerio was ordered to keep Francis 'inclined', and French agents put forth papal proposals to Henry VIII through the aid of David Beaton, cardinal-archbishop of St Andrews, and other Scottish envoys.[136] The years 1540 and 1541 represented a real possibility of reconciliation between Protestant and Catholic Europe. Some diplomats acted as if reconciliation were a certainty and in 1541, at the Diet of Regensburg, envoys would flock to listen to the theological discussions over double justification between Melanchthon, Bucer, and Gropper.[137] While these hopes did not materialize, many remained convinced that a settlement between the Lutheran princes and the papacy would be secured through the promise of a general church council. If the German princes backed down, Henry VIII could not risk remaining the last schismatic ruler in Christendom.[138]

Whether Henry sacrificed Cromwell in order to secure an alliance with the emperor and gave a hint of potentially returning to the Catholic fold lies in the secret negotiations of the Imperial missions. Both Charles and he had acted to deceive. Their deception was intended to secure a reluctant alliance, or at least to buy time. They persuaded the diplomats and agents of Catholic Christendom, looking on, that England's reconciliation with Rome was conceivable. That reconciliation never came in Henry's lifetime, nor was likely, but the fall of Thomas Cromwell was used to make it seem possible.

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[135]ASMn, AG, E. XLI. 2, 1910, Poggio to Cardinal Gonzaga, 10 Aug. 1540 ('Il Re de Inglaterra mostra desiderare la bona amicitia et conventione con questa M(aes)tà et l'haveria se si reducesse alla obediencia della Sede App(ostoli)ca').

[136]*ANG*, I, 570, p. 584, Ferrerio to Cardinal Farnese, 18 July 1540, Dreux ('mantener disposta S(ua) M(aestà) Chr(istianissi)ma per la reduction del Regno Anglico'). See also *ANG*, I, 560, pp. 571–2, Ferrerio to Cardinal Farnese, 30 June 1540, Paris.

[137]See M. Viallon, 'Le colloque de Ratisbonne (1541) ou la dernière chance du Cardinal Contarini', *HAL Open Science* (2005), pp. 1–9.

[138]Sowerby, 'Richard Pate', p. 270.

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