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Elizabeth's Spy Master

Francis Walsingham and the Secret War that Saved England

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Extract

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CHAPTER ONE

'Serviceable to Our Age'

'Especially have regard . . . chiefly of the nobility [and] gentry . . . that you see the inclination of each man, which way he is bent, whether it be a marshal or counsellor, a plain open nature, [or] dissembling or counterfeit and what pension[1] he has from abroad . . .'

ADVICE FROM SIR FRANCIS WALSINGHAM TO ONE OF HIS NEPHEWS, PROBABLY WRITTEN IN THE LATE 1570S.[2]

Francis Walsingham was born around 1532,[3] the only son of William, a London lawyer with extensive estates in Kent, and his wife Joyce, the daughter of Sir Edmund Denny of Cheshunt in Hertfordshire. She was sister to Sir Anthony Denny, Chief Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to Henry VIII and the real unseen power behind the throne during the ailing monarch's last months.[4] Politics, particularly Protestant politics, therefore ran vigorously through Walsingham's veins. Francis' uncle was Sir Edmund Walsingham, a gallant soldier who fought against the Scots in the crushing English victory at Flodden Field in 1513 and who later became the Lieutenant of the Tower of London,[5] being rewarded with grants of property by Henry VIII for his 'good, true and faithful service'.[6]

Some confusion surrounds the Walsingham family's ancestry. Several pedigrees exist that seek to prove their gentle blood – a direct lineage from the lords of the manor of Walsingham in north Norfolk. One of these – drawn up by a fawning Robert Glover, the *Somerset Herald*, sometime during 1570–88 – lists a host of Walsinghams, some knighted, beginning with a Thomas who died in 1337.[7] This genealogy is largely fictitious, indeed is an Elizabethan fake, and is wholly unsupported by history. The harsh truth is that the Walsinghams came from trade.

The family was hardly 'in every way splendidly conspicuous', as Walsingham's epitaph later gushingly claimed. Their lowly origins lie in Alan Walsingham, a humble cordwainer – in other words, a shoemaker – who purchased tenements in the parish of St Benet's, Gracechurch Street, in London in 1403. His prosperity grew and he bought up a number of valuable properties elsewhere in the city, including a 'mansion house' in Eastcheap and a brewery and alehouse, called the Cock and Hoop, in Cripplegate. By 1412, his property holdings were incurring sizeable taxes totalling £17 11s a year, or just over £7,000 in today's money. His son Thomas became a wine merchant and also dabbled in other profitable trades, such as the export of fish and cloth from London. In terms of city hierarchy, Thomas married well – to Margaret Bamme, daughter of the goldsmith Henry Bamme, whose influential family included two former Lord Mayors of London in 1390 and 1396. In 1424, he purchased, as his country house, the manor of Scadbury in Chislehurst, Kent, which was to become a seat of the Walsinghams in succeeding generations. His descendants remained in the lucrative vintner trade until James, Francis Walsingham's grandfather, made the final triumphant transition from merchant to gentleman, signing himself 'esquire' and being granted the socially all-important coat of arms. It was a saga typical of many in England during the fifteenth century, of a family successfully clambering their way up the ladder of society.

Francis' father William was the younger of James's two sons, and trained as a lawyer at Gray's Inn. In 1524, he was appointed a Commissioner of the Peace in Kent, and again in 1526 and 1532, and was recommended by both Henry VIII and his queen, Catherine of Aragon, to

fill the post of Common Serjeant for London in 1526.[8] Three years later, he may be the William Walsingham who appears on a long list of debtors, owing a total of £330 in sealed bonds to the rapacious Thomas Cromwell, who became Henry's Chief Minister. In 1530, William was one of three commissioners appointed to investigate the possessions of the disgraced Cardinal Wolsey and two years later became one of the two Under-Sheriffs of London. He prospered as a lawyer, purchasing considerable new property including the manors of Foots Cray, Rokesly and Chelsfield in Kent and in the parish of St Mary Aldermanbury, where he maintained his London home. He died in 1534, seeking in his will to reserve Chelsfield to fund the marriage of his five daughters, and 'if Joyce, my wife [dies] before Francis my son be twenty-one, my said manors of Foots Cray to be used as payment of my debts and for the advancement of my daughters'.[9] His twenty-seven-year-old widow was left with Francis, now a two-year-old infant, and all those daughters to marry off into good families. She remarried herself in 1538 to the courtier Sir John Carey of Plashy[10] in Hertfordshire, a match probably mooted and arranged by her own family, the Dennys, who held property in that county.

Walsingham's early life is frustratingly short on detail, as perhaps befits the man of the shadows he was later to become as head of Queen Elizabeth's secret service.

At the age of sixteen he went to the then notoriously Protestant King's College, Cambridge,[11] where John Cheke, Edward VI's reformist tutor, was then provost. Walsingham's tutor was Thomas Gardiner, another keen adherent of the new religion. He matriculated as a fellow commoner on 12 November 1548 and probably went down, seemingly without taking a degree, sometime before 1551. Walsingham then travelled in Europe, visiting 'many foreign countries whose manners, laws, languages and policies he accurately studied and critically understood',[12] before returning to London a year later, a confirmed and devout Protestant. He enrolled as a student at Gray's Inn, clearly intending to follow his father into the legal profession. But his ambitions and dreams in the staid and stuffy world of the law were not to be fulfilled.

Edward VI died 'thin and wasted' in his sixteenth year on 6 July 1553,

from a suppurating pulmonary infection, septicaemia and renal failure. As planned, the leaders of his Protestant government immediately proclaimed the teenage Lady Jane Grey, grand-daughter of Mary, one of Henry VIII's sisters, his lawful successor. Edward's elder half-sister, Princess Mary, fled London for the safety of East Anglia. There she mustered forces loyal to her Catholic cause and, gathering more troops en route, marched on the capital where the chastened Privy Council hastily named her queen on 19 July. Catholicism had returned to England.

Around 1,000 Protestant reformers fled England for safety, particularly after the Kent-based rebellion launched by Sir Thomas Wyatt in 1554 in protest against Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain was finally defeated at the western gates of the City of London. It may be that some relatives of the Walsingham family were caught up in that abortive uprising and were closely involved in the attempt to maintain a Protestant royal line via that tragic and misused figure of English history, Lady Jane Grey.[13] Certainly, by the time the fearsome torchings of heretics began in London's Smithfield and the market squares of many English towns as Mary sought to cauterise the fervour of the new religion, Walsingham had departed the shores of England for Europe once again, youthful discretion overcoming his gamecock valour.

After some journeying in Europe, he reappears at the University of Padua in Italy on 29 December 1555, where he was elected *Consularius* or representative of the English students studying in the faculty of civil law, with an influential seat on the university's governing senate. But his time at this liberal and tolerant seat of learning was strangely brief, as Walsingham left there in 1556 and travelled on to France, Switzerland and probably Frankfurt in Germany. He returned from exile sometime after Mary's death in 1558 and the accession of the Protestant Elizabeth, the last of Henry's turbulent brood to come to the throne of England.

Walsingham was probably in England when his mother died in 1560; she was buried next to her first husband in St Mary Aldermanbury Church.[14] Despite Walsingham's now fervent Protestant beliefs, a Mass was said during the funeral and communion was taken by at least some

of the mourners. Four of his sisters had married during his exile,[15] the youngest, Mary, to Walter Mildmay, later to become Chancellor of the Exchequer in Elizabeth's government, the founder of Emmanuel College in Cambridge[16] and a staunch friend. Walsingham was by this time aged twenty-eight, fluent in French, Italian and Latin – indeed, he was later reckoned to be 'the best linguist' of the period.[17] He had his own complex coat of arms, recording the Walsingham family marriages, with the motto *Auspicante Deo* – 'With God being propitious'.[18] It was high time he found himself a wife and made something of his life.

During this period he met Anne Carleill, or Carlyle, the widow of a London wine merchant and the daughter of the haberdasher Sir George Barnes, who was Lord Mayor of London in 1552. She already had a young son, Christopher, by her dead husband. Walsingham married her in 1562 and sold his property at Foots Cray in Kent to John Gillibrand in April that year. He leased the manor at Parkebury in Hertfordshire, where the family lived quietly as country gentle folk for several years, with members of the Denny family and Sir William Cecil, Elizabeth's Chief Minister, as near neighbours.

Walsingham was a good catch for the widow – he was well off and, having some influential relations and friends, looked to have excellent prospects. Utilising that patronage, he had already been elected to the second parliament of Elizabeth's reign[19] as the pluralist member for both the Dorset port of Lyme Regis and also the Oxfordshire market town of Banbury, although he appeared to play no active role in its legislative proceedings.

Sadly, Anne died in 1564, just two years after the wedding. There were no children of the marriage. Her will, dated 29 July of that year, leaves £100 (just over £20,000 in today's money) to her husband. 'By his consent' she made a host of small legacies to her friends and family. These included £10 to her friend Christopher Robinson, the public notary living in Paternoster Row, near Old St Paul's, who witnessed and subsequently proved her will, and a 'purse of silk and gold' to her brother-in-law William Dodington, an officer at the Mint. A bequest of £2 also went to the sister of her first husband, Cicely Hastenden, née Carleill.

Most importantly, for her, there remained the issue of the wellbeing and education of her son by her previous marriage:

> My husband to have custody of my son Christopher Carleill, to be by him virtuously brought up and to pay him when twenty-one all money and goods remaining out and besides my said son's exhibition.[20]

This Walsingham faithfully fulfilled, even after his second marriage, probably in August of 1566, to Ursula,[21] the comfortably-off widow of Sir Richard Worsley of Appuldurcombe[22] on the Isle of Wight, who had died a few months before. She was left with two young sons, John and George, as well as ample financial provision through the manor, the estates of the former Benedictine priory at Carisbrooke and the manors of Godshill and Freshwater on that garden isle. Appuldurcombe was a handsome property in the parish of Godshill, consisting of a large house with extensive grounds, including a bowling green, which had come into the Worsley family by marriage in 1511.

The following year, tragedy struck Walsingham's new family. His two stepsons

> being in the lodge or gatehouse at Appledurcombe, where they went to school, the servants were drying of [gun] powder there against [before] the general muster [of the local militia].
>
> A spark flew into the dish, that set fire to a barrel which stood by, blew up a side of the gatehouse, killed the two children and some others [and] hurt one James Worsley, a youth, their kinsman, that went to school there with them.[23]

This heartbreak was not the only calamity that came with Ursula's hand in wedlock to Walsingham, for the violent death of the two boys spawned a bitter legal dispute over the terms and intentions of her first husband's will.[24] Her brother-in-law John Worsley, the executor, amongst other contentious issues, maintained that various moveable goods and chattels left to her sons when they came of age now belonged to him, as they had both been killed. The lengthy suit was finally decided in favour of Walsingham and his wife in June 1571.[25]

Despite this annoying distraction, the added wealth brought by his second marriage enabled Walsingham to quit the leased manor at Parkebury. He purchased a house in the parish of St Giles Cripplegate in London on 5 March 1568, as well as maintaining a fine, if somewhat remote, country home at Appuldurcombe. He later bought a new town residence, 'The Papey',[26] a substantial building across the street from the church of St Mary Axe,[27] next door to the Fletchers' Hall and hard up against the north-eastern section of the city walls. Next door was the newly built house of Walsingham's brother-in-law Robert Beale, then one of the clerks of the Privy Council, who had married Ursula's sister Edith.[28]

Little is known of Ursula, but her formidable likeness, painted in 1583 by an unknown artist, probably when she was in her early forties, is still preserved in London's National Portrait Gallery.[29] The painting shows an elegant red-haired lady wearing a tight-fitting black 'Paris' cap, a starched white ruff and a long, heavy and obviously expensive gold chain hanging around her neck. Her face is oval with a pointed chin, pursed lips and an angular, almost beak-like nose. There is something about her expression and that thin, disapproving mouth that strongly suggests this was not a wife whose feelings or views could be taken for granted, and it is easy to imagine that Ursula would not have tolerated any kind of nonsense from her husband. Some clues to Walsingham's relationship with Ursula emerge from his surviving correspondence, containing broad hints that Walsingham's second marriage suffered not a few tempestuous moments. Writing from Paris to Thomas Heneage, Treasurer of the queen's Privy Chamber, in June 1571 regarding the marriage then being brokered between Elizabeth and the Duke of Anjou, Walsingham described the French suitor as:

> choleric, yet he lacks not reason to govern and bridle [the queen]. And you know that these natures are the best . . . and commonly prove the best husbands. Or else should not you and I be in the highest degree in such perfection as we are. Yet in this matter, we shall well not to be judged, neither by Mrs Heneage nor Mrs Walsingham, because they are parties.[30]

And in January 1574, he told his friend William More:

> Bear, sir, with my earnestness, in recommending my wife's causes. You are yourself a married man. You know, therefore, what force Mrs More's commandments are to you.[31]

Despite these tell-tale suggestions of marital tension or discord, Walsingham warmly describes Ursula as 'my well-beloved wife' in his will, written in December 1589, in which she was appointed sole executor.[32] Throughout the twenty-four years of their marriage, perhaps Walsingham was a generous husband, attempting to compensate her for his constant overwork and distraction, at all hours, with the complexities and secrecy of state business. In contrast to her husband's rather dour, puritanical outlook on life, it seems likely that Ursula had a penchant for expensive and pretty things, having an account with a goldsmith.[33]

She bore him two daughters: the first, called Frances, was probably born in October 1567, and the second, Mary, in early January 1573,[34] but she died seven years later.[35]

We come now to the defining moment in Walsingham's career, and like much of his early life, it is shrouded in tantalising mystery. He first appears in the State Papers in a cryptic comment scribbled hastily in September 1566 by Elizabeth's Chief Minister Cecil. The brief note is contained in a memorandum concerning issues to be discussed by Parliament: Mr Walsingham, he instructed, 'to be of the House.'[36] His attendance at Westminster was therefore required. What role he was to play there remains obscure, like an actor caught dimly in the footlights. There is no doubt that his presence in the Parliament House was important to the political objectives of Elizabeth's government at the time, possibly with him acting as a lobbyist, or perhaps whipping the members into voting for a specific piece of legislation. The issue and its outcome remain unknown. Two years later, he makes another brief but significant appearance. Walsingham was now aged thirty-six and a letter from him to Cecil on 18 August 1568 may well signal the beginning of his distinguished, arduous and generally thankless career in the queen's service.

Walsingham wrote on behalf of Sir Nicholas Throgmorton,[37] whom

he had replaced as MP for Lyme Regis a few years before and who was now a close friend. Throgmorton, a former ambassador in Paris and subsequently a supporter of the French Huguenots, had fallen ill, and therefore asked Walsingham to contact Cecil about one Robert Stewart, an emissary who had come to England to seek the queen's support for their cause in the French civil wars. Walsingham urged the Chief Minister to arrange an audience with Elizabeth for Stewart, as he had much important information to impart only 'by mouth' on this sensitive matter, and asked that Cecil should organise lodgings for him and see him 'properly attended'. Walsingham added as a postscript:

> Touching these matters wherein you appointed me to deal, I will tomorrow, in the morning, attend upon your lordship to advertise [tell] you what I have done therein.[38]

These last few words are telling. They indicate that Walsingham was now engaged in secret work for Cecil, who already operated an active intelligence service for Elizabeth.

Amongst those on the state payroll was one Rooksby, at that time living undercover in Edinburgh to spy on the intrigues of the court of Mary Queen of Scots,[39] who had fled to England and Elizabeth's unwilling protection in the middle of May 1568. In September of that year, King Philip II of Spain replaced his ambassador to London, Diego de Guzman de Silva, with the aggressive and conspiring Don Guerau de Spes, who described Cecil as 'that astute and false liar and old heretic'. Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alva and the Spanish commander in the Netherlands, was forced to admonish de Spes to end his conspiracies 'for a meddling fool!' Alvarez had heard from reports in France how Mary 'was being utterly ruined by the plotting of her servants with you, for they never enter your house without being watched'.[40] Allington, one of Cecil's private secretaries, was also arrested after receiving bribes from de Spes to murder the Chief Minister. The Spanish envoy's correspondence was quickly intercepted and deciphered by a government cryptographer called Somers.[41] This was the dark, dangerous world into which Walsingham – armed only with his linguistic skills and the

'knowledge how best to use his tongue'[42] – patriotically stepped that summer of 1568.

Two days after delivery of his letter concerning the Huguenot messenger Stewart, Walsingham wrote again to warn Cecil of a plot to poison the queen by contaminating her bedding and furniture with some toxic substance. This startling intelligence was based on a tip-off passed to Walsingham by 'Franchiotto, the Italian' – alias Captain Tomaso Franchiotto of the ancient walled city of Lucca in Tuscany, a Protestant who had spied for the French crown for forty years.[43] Franchiotto was well known to Cecil: another of his pseudonyms was 'Captain François', a codename under which the Chief Minister had employed him to uncover French agents in England.[44]

With Mary Queen of Scots now the focal point of burgeoning Catholic plots, both at home and overseas, to put her on the throne in place of Elizabeth, the need to monitor subversion and espionage in England became ever more pressing. On 7 September, Walsingham supplied information about 'a Frenchman and an Italian secretly lodged in London' and asked for the assistance of the city authorities to immediately search their houses. He also suggested that taverns and inns should report on foreigners staying with them – an early version of today's familiar hotel register.[45] A week later, Walsingham told Cecil that he had arranged with Sir Thomas Row, then Lord Mayor of London, to draw up weekly lists of all strangers who took up lodgings within the square mile of the city. He also reported information, imparted 'from a friend', about two suspects 'with a loathsome disease' who had just left Southwark, across on the South Bank of the River Thames. In addition, he helpfully enclosed physical descriptions of the secret agents employed in London by Charles de Guise, Cardinal of Lorraine and uncle of Mary Queen of Scots.[46]

The following month, Walsingham passed on intelligence about preparations in Marseilles to transport soldiers to the North of England, using twelve galleys then in readiness, 'for the better execution of some conspiracy'.[47] This report proved to be unfounded. The subsequent embarrassment may have taught Walsingham a hard lesson in the world of espionage – both the importance of evaluating or analysing raw infor-

mation and knowing the reliability of one's sources. Perhaps as a result of this, in late December he was sceptical about more reports from Paris he had submitted, warning that France and Spain were working closely together 'for the alteration of religion and the advancement of Mary Queen of Scots' in England. He explained his doubts to Cecil:

> For that this advertisement [news] is so general and descends to no particulars, I thought to have [not] troubled your honour with [it] at present.
>
> But, weighing [the] earnest protestations of the credibility of the party it came from, the nature of the matter as of the greatest importance, the malice of this present time, the allegiance and particular goodwill I owe her majesty and the danger that might come to me by the concealing thereof, if any such thing (which God defend) thereafter should happen, I saw it in duty [that] I could not forbear to write.[48]

Here lies the eternal dilemma in espionage – can you afford *not* to pass on intelligence of possibly vital importance because of any doubts, however small, you may harbour about its veracity or credibility? Nothing changes: no doubt today's MI6 and CIA officers frequently suffer the same testing quandary, as emerged over the issue of weapons of mass destruction in Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 2003. Back in 1568, Walsingham sought to explain his perplexity:

> I beseech your honour that I may without offence conclude that in this division that reigns among us [the Catholic plots] there is less danger in fearing too much than too little and there is nothing more dangerous than security.[49]

Guard against complacency! This was to become one of his key beliefs when he later took over Elizabeth's secret service from Cecil and completely reorganised England's spy network at home and overseas. For Walsingham, this letter and this intelligence also marked the genesis of the major *bête noire* of his career – the striking, sensuous figure of Mary Queen of Scots and the constant plotting that surrounded her.

The acrid stench of conspiracy was in the very air of England that autumn. The premier peer of the realm Thomas Howard, Fourth Duke of Norfolk, Earl Marshal of England and a Privy Councillor, had tragically lost his third wife Elizabeth[50] and their child during her confinement the previous year. The son of the wild and arrogant Earl of Surrey – the 'poet earl' executed for treason in the dying hours of Henry VIII's reign – Norfolk had been a loyal Protestant all his life. However, he lacked foresight,[51] was politically naïve and, fatally, remained ever ambitious for greater power and influence, despite already being the richest man in England. Now he was one of the commissioners[52] appointed to head north to investigate allegations of Mary Queen of Scots' complicity in the murder, in December 1567, of her husband, the distinctly unattractive, hard-drinking and syphilitic Henry Stuart, Earl of Darnley.[53]

Whilst taking a break from the deliberations, Norfolk went hawking on 16 October with the Scottish Secretary of State William Maitland, on the banks of the River Ouse near Cawood, eight miles south-west of York. During a pleasant day's sport, the Scot suddenly suggested to the duke that he should marry the Scottish queen as a convenient way of bringing the two nations into a powerful alliance, as well as securing Mary's claim as heir to the throne of England. After much pondering, Norfolk found himself sorely tempted by the marriage plan.

The murder investigation was inevitably adjourned without result and Elizabeth called a full Privy Council meeting in London to continue the inquiries away from the machinations of the Scottish delegation.[54] The queen was now becoming suspicious about her cousin Norfolk[55] and she suddenly asked him point-blank whether he intended to marry Mary Queen of Scots, a match that in her eyes threatened both her person and her crown. Disingenuously, the duke replied that

> no reason could move him to like of her that has been a competitor to the crown and if her majesty would move him thereto, he will rather be committed to the Tower, for he meant never to marry with such a person, where he could not be sure of his pillow.[56]

He would come to bitterly regret those rash words. Foolishly, he

became more set on the enterprise of marriage with Mary. The Scottish queen, seeing a chance both of freedom from virtual imprisonment at the hands of Elizabeth and leapfrogging all the objections to her claim to the English throne, enthusiastically pledged her love for the duke.[57] At the same time, Mary did not hesitate to hedge her bets and secretly contacted the Catholic Earls of Northumberland and Westmorland to seek their help in releasing her, by force of arms if necessary.

By the middle of the following year, 1569, the proposed match between Mary and Norfolk was taking on its own momentum, and Elizabeth, still harbouring dark suspicions fuelled by the whispering in the corridors of her court, was becoming exasperated. She gave Norfolk three separate opportunities that summer to confirm that he sought to marry the Scottish queen. Three times, he could not find the courage in his heart to reveal his plans to Elizabeth and on 6 September, when he finally did tell the queen of his intentions on his sickbed while visiting Titchfield in Hampshire, he was treated to a vintage Tudor tantrum. She angrily forbade any notion of such a marriage and solemnly charged him, on his allegiance to her, 'to deal no further with the Scottish cause'. He hastily assured Elizabeth that he had 'a very slight regard' for Mary and that her rank and fortunes meant little to him. Norfolk, with the fatal, foolish pride that afflicted the house of Howard in the Tudor period, boasted that his own revenues 'were not much less than those of the kingdom of Scotland . . . and that when he was in his tennis court at Norwich, he thought himself in a manner equal with some kings'.[58] It was not a statement to calm the proud, prickly queen.

On 26 September, the duke arrived, still unwell with an ague (an attack of malaria), at Kenninghall, his opulent country estate in Norfolk, hoping that his departure might help to cool tempers at court. Even he had noticed his social ostracism and he wrote to the queen that his enemies found 'such comfort of your majesty's heavy displeasure that they began to make of me a common table talk [and] my friends were afraid of my company'.

In this case, Norfolk's absence did not make Elizabeth's heart grow fonder. She feared that his sudden, unexplained disappearance could be

the prelude to a rebellion by her Catholic subjects, with him in the vanguard, marching as their figurehead. The painful memories of the 1549 'Prayer Book' insurrections against her half-brother Edward VI in the West, the Midlands and in East Anglia must have loomed large in her thoughts. She closed the main English ports as a security measure and put the militia on full alert. She had issued a peremptory summons on 25 September to Norfolk to attend upon her, now safely ensconced within the protective walls of Windsor Castle, but as ill-luck for the house of Howard would have it, the duke somehow failed to receive the royal charge.

A second, more pressing royal command eventually reached him and Norfolk set off for Windsor on 1 October with a thirty-strong escort. He was arrested on suspicion of treason and taken by Sir Francis Knollys to the Tower of London. He was confined in the Constable's Lodgings, ironically in the very same rooms that had been occupied by his grandfather Thomas, Third Duke of Norfolk, for six years after his own arrest for treason in December 1546 on the orders of Henry VIII.

A pamphlet virulently attacking Norfolk's marriage plans was swiftly published in London. There seems little doubt that Walsingham wrote the polemic *Discourse Touching the Pretended Match between the Duke of Norfolk and the Queen of Scots*, probably at Cecil's prompting,[59] and it demonstrates an early talent for producing the rawest of propaganda, aimed principally at the enthusiastic and willing audience of England's Protestants.[60] The author minces few words, nor wastes any opportunity to blacken the character of his targets, and like all effective disinformation or today's 'spin', utilises a number of truths and half-truths to provide veracity. Centuries later, little limping Josef Goebbels, Hitler's *Reichsminister* for National Enlightenment, would have glowed with pride if he had produced it himself.

The Queen of Scots, claimed the document, was 'either a Papist, which is evil, or else an atheist which is worse'. She was in league

> with the confederate enemies of the Gospel by the name of the holy league, to root out all such princes and magistrates as are professors of the same. A thing well known, though not generally.

> Of nation, she is a Scot, of which nation I forebear to say what may be said, in a reverend respect of a few godly of that nation. Of inclination . . . let her own horrible acts[61] publicly known to the whole world witness, though now of late seduced by practice [to] seek to cloak and hide the same.
>
> Of alliance on her mother's side, how she is descended of a race that is both enemy to God and the common quiet of Europe,[62] [as] every man knows, but, alas, too many have felt.
>
> In goodwill towards our sovereign, she has showed herself [in] sundry ways very evil affected, whose ambition has drawn her by bearing the arms of England, to decipher herself a competitor of the crown, a thing publicly known.

Norfolk is then rolled out to be roundly abused. His religious beliefs are left to 'God and his own conscience'. But, says this poisonous pamphlet, he is clearly inconstant in his supposedly Protestant beliefs, for five reasons:

> First, his education of his son under the government of a Papist [shows] it.
>
> Secondly, the corruption of his house, his chief men of trust being Papists.
>
> Thirdly, the reposed trust and confidence he has in the chief Papists in this realm.
>
> Fourthly, his last marriage with a Papist and lastly, this pretended match.

Was it likely, asks Walsingham, raising the spectre of the murdered Darnley, that any man who professes some religious belief, or respects worldly honour, 'or regards his own safety, would match with one detected of so horrible crimes in respect of love?' Mary could solemnly swear by oath that she posed no threat to Elizabeth, or 'confirm anything that may tend to the queen's safety', but, adds the pamphlet bleakly, 'If she [falsifies] her faith, no pleading will serve. The sword must be the remedy.'

Regarding the alliance between England and Scotland that such a marriage could bring, Walsingham is scathing:

> If we look well upon the uniters with a single eye that loves the continuance of God's glory and the safety of our sovereign and the quietness of this state, we shall see more profit in division than in union.

Mary's son by Darnley, the three-year-old James VI, had a Protestant 'governor' and was being brought up 'faithfully inclining' to England and Elizabeth

> whereby during his government she may assure herself of most perfect union. Thus, you see the queen in safety, the two realms united and this remedy [the marriage] needless.[63]

After speedily producing this propaganda, Walsingham was asked to take on a new role – that of secret policeman, for a conspiracy against the crown had been discovered.

A curious and sinister figure now steps into the ring of intrigue – the Italian banker Roberto Ridolphi. He was born in November 1531 into a family connected with the nobility of Florence – the Ridolphi di Piazza. His parents were amongst the directors of prominent banking and commercial concerns in that city[64] and he too entered the business. He came to London in 1561 and within five years had been tasked to channel the secret funds provided by Pope Pius V to the English Catholics to help overthrow Elizabeth and her government in a conspiracy that came to be called 'the Enterprise of England'. The French and Spanish ambassadors were both involved in the plot, as were some of Elizabeth's Catholic nobles (with whom Ridolphi had business dealings) and Mary's special envoy in London, John Leslie, Bishop of Ross.[65] Ridolphi's visits to the home of the Spanish ambassador and to Norfolk's London base, Howard House, had been closely monitored by Cecil's agents. On 7 October, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, wrote to the Chief Minister and Walsingham informing them that orders had been issued to the Lord Mayor of London Alexander Auenon to immediately arrest Ridolphi. He was to be confined in Walsingham's home at The Papey and there questioned by him in several sessions.[66]

It was Walsingham's first experience of the interrogation of a suspect.

Under close questioning in fluent Italian over many days, Ridolphi admitted dealing with the Bishop of Ross and giving both him and Norfolk cash from overseas. Elizabeth was puzzled by some of the Florentine's answers, which seemed 'very different from the truth'. She asked for copies of Walsingham's questions about issues on which Ridolphi was to be further examined. Four days later, there were more instructions on the interrogation, specifically on the banker's dealings with Mary Queen of Scots.[67] Walsingham also searched Ridolphi's home for incriminating papers and submitted all the evidence to Cecil. Suddenly, on 11 November, Leicester and Cecil wrote to Walsingham ordering Ridolphi's release from his custody and into house arrest at his own lodgings. Their letter said that the queen, now 'disposed to act with clemency', was pleased

> to give Ridolphi his liberty on certain conditions. Say to him that he has misused his privileges, seeing he is but [allowed] to live here as a merchant and has interfered in affairs of state. These he has confessed in part. Her majesty, if she were disposed to be severe, might force him to confess more. Nevertheless, she will grant him liberty if that he shall be bound by writing by you to the sum of £1,000, with securities besides, not to deal directly or indirectly in any matters concerning her majesty or the state of this realm, except by her consent.[68]

The following January, his bond for good behaviour was returned. He was completely free.[69] What on earth had happened? In modern espionage parlance, Walsingham had probably 'turned' Ridolphi – persuaded him to become a double agent in the pay of the crown. The herald and antiquary William Camden, who probably knew Walsingham well, said he was 'a most subtle searcher of hidden secrets, who knew excellently well how to win men's minds unto him and apply them to his own use'.[70] Here, then, were these talents brought to play, and their full value was to be demonstrated later, in bringing down the house of Howard. Cecil may also have hoped that Ridolphi, now at liberty, might flush out other traitorous members of the conspiracy.

The government's concerns about the security of queen and state

were amply justified. Ridolphi's plot may have been nipped in the bud and the Pope's agent in London removed from circulation at a crucial time; and the Duke of Norfolk may have been safely incarcerated in the Tower. But overarching all were continuing fears about a potential Catholic insurgency coupled with possible attempts to free Mary Queen of Scots.

Their worst-case predictions became true.

In November 1569, the Catholic magnates in the North – Thomas Percy, Seventh Earl of Northumberland, and Charles Neville, Sixth Earl of Westmorland – gathered together, armed their tenantry and marched on Durham. Then they headed south, planning to free Mary Queen of Scots from her confinement at Tutbury Castle in Staffordshire.[71] Although poorly equipped and possessing little military training, the rebels managed to eject the royalist forces from Barnard's Castle before suddenly withdrawing back in the direction of Durham, fearing the advance of troops hastily levied by the government, 265 miles (425 km) away in London. Elizabeth's retribution was terrible: as well as the executions, the destruction wreaked by her forces on the homes and properties of the insurgents meant that the economy of the North of England would not fully recover for almost two centuries.

Norfolk was eventually released from the Tower after ten months, in early August 1570, but kept under close surveillance and house arrest at his London home under the charge of Sir Henry Neville.

Walsingham meanwhile had risen steadily in the estimation of both Cecil and the queen. In the same month as Norfolk's release, he was instructed to go on a diplomatic mission to the French court, charged with winning justice and security for the Huguenot Protestants in France after the bloody civil wars in that country. However, Bertrand de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon, the French envoy in London, believed Walsingham's task was more about discovering his master King Charles IX's attitude towards Mary Queen of Scots and his policy on Scotland than merely reassuring the Huguenot party.

The presentation of diplomatic credentials is normally a staid, formal occasion, clothed in grandeur. When Walsingham and the English ambassador Sir Henry Norris arrived at the French court on 28 August, the

French king's mother, Catherine de Médici, threw aside any subtle niceties and went straight for the jugular. She asked Walsingham outright if the harsh treatment accorded to Mary Queen of Scots in England was caused by Elizabeth's Ministers' hatred of her. The envoy was equally direct in his reply. His royal mistress, he said, would not be diverted from an honourable course by any Minister and, moreover, she could and would justify her actions to anyone in the world.

A forthright reply – but the English delegation apparently made another kind of impression on the French royal family. Francés de Alava, the Spanish ambassador in Paris, reported that the

> English nobleman at his audience was clothed entirely in black. He entered haughtily and spoke with the king and queen in a blunt and uncourtly fashion. At his dismissal, both he and Norris were so ill-mannered that I hear that both of them did not escape censure as they passed out [of] the doors. They did not bestow upon [Henry] Duke of Anjou [one of the king's brothers] so much as a salutation or even a glance, nor for that matter, upon any other of the great personages present.[72]

Walsingham's version of the meeting was different – he reported the discussions as cordial. His diplomatic work in Paris, moreover, led to his appointment as Norris's successor as English ambassador there. He did not want the job. Back temporarily in London, he wrote to a lady – probably his wife – of his hopes that Elizabeth would find

> so small taste in this my present service that she will forbear to employ me any further by making choice of some other of more sufficiency. Thus madam, you see in what doubtful terms [I] stand whereby I cannot dispose of myself.

His Puritanism shines through his comment that he would rather stay in England 'with a piece of bread and cheese' than be based in France with all 'their best [delicacies] and entertainments'. Haplessly, he realistically conceded that 'seeing I am born a subject and not a prince, I am tied to the condition of obedience and commandment'.[73]