"SAFELY KEPT and GUARDED"



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Elizabeth R.

By the Quene

Trust and welbeloved we grete yo/u/ well. Forasmuche as wee have for dyvers good consideration gyver and ers to our trusty and right welbeloved Cousyns the Earles of Showsbury and Huntington to bring the Scottyshe Queene to that our towns of Coventrie and here to see her safely kept and garded untyll o/ur/ pleas/ure/ shall be otherwise to determine: We let yo/u/ will o/ur/ pleas/ure/ and commandment is that for the better assystance of our sayd Cousyns and either of them in this charge committed unto them, yo/u/ shall from tyme to tyme follows suche order and direction, as shall for that purpose bee by them or either of them prescribed unto yo/u/ in suche wyse as they or either of them shall think fit for the weale and furtherance of our service. Yeven under our Signet at o/ur/ Castle of Wyndsyr the xxvith of Novemb/er/ the xiith yere of our Reigne.

Transcript of an Order issued by Elizabeth I to the people of Coventry directing them to guard against an escape by Mary, Queen of Scots. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Elizabeth had always viewed Mary as a threat to her throne. Even at the beginning, when Mary sought Elizabeth's protection, Elizabeth had in mind to make sure her cousin could not escape England. Even the places where she was confined were not close to the coast where waiting ships could take her away from England's shore.

How do we know this? When Mary was brought to Coventry - around the end of 1569 - The English Queen sent a notice to the people of that town. It ordered them, among other things, to be sure that "Marie the Scottyshe Queene" was "safely kept and guarded." The implicit message was:

No escapes!

Mary had not been forgotten, however. Many ardent Catholics still thought Mary - now ill with various ailments, including rheumatism - should be queen of both Scotland and England. Sir Francis <u>Walsingham</u> (brilliantly portrayed by Geoffrey Rush in the movie, <u>Elizabeth</u>) knew that's what Catholics in England and Scotland

thought. He decided to concoct a scheme that would fatally implicate Mary once and for all.

Using the unsuspecting <u>Sir Anthony Babington</u>, a Catholic, as his pawn, Walsingham allowed Mary to <u>secretly</u> correspond with Babington (who wanted to help Mary escape). Mary's two secretaries <u>coded</u> all messages, but Walsingham knew the code. Anxious to be free, and relieved someone was finally talking about escape, Mary responded to <u>Babington's letters</u>.

If <u>the letters</u> had just talked about escape, Walsingham's efforts would have come to nothing. But Babington was becoming bolder with his ultimate objectives. Going farther than helping Mary to escape house arrest, he directly referenced a plot against Elizabeth.

Babington wanted to know whether Mary would reward him "For the dispatch of the usurper." Ignoring the advice of her counselors, who worried about the veiled threat against Elizabeth, Mary decided to respond to Babington's letter.

With her own hand, and using her own words, Mary wrote to Babington.

While she said nothing at all about Elizabeth, Mary did agree to Babington's proposed plans for her escape. Her signature was on the letter. When <u>Walsingham</u> read it for the first time, he must have exclaimed: "I've got her!"

Someone else - Walsingham's top-coder and forgery expert - had already drawn a picture of the gallows on the intercepted letter.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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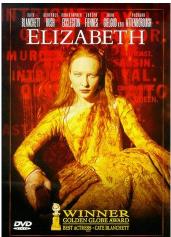
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Sir Francis Walsingham

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<u>Elizabeth - Movie Poster</u>

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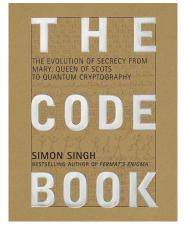
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Sir Anthony Babington

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The Code Book - by Simon Singh

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Babington Letter

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Elizabeth I - Prevent Mary Queen of Scots from Escaping

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