ANTHONY BROWNE, 1st VISCOUNT MONTAGUE: THE INFLUENCE IN COUNTY POLITICS OF AN ELIZABETHAN CATHOLIC NOBLEMAN

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Tudor statesmen were understandably hostile to the pretensions of the old nobility and their claim to a seat by ancient right in the King's council. Dissatisfaction over exclusion from important offices often drove those families combining dissidence in religion with a feudal background into rebellion during times of Protestant ascendency. The first Lord Montague, however, was a recent arrival among the English peerage. Although Catholic in religion, he gave unswerving loyalty to the Queen whose father and sister had so amply rewarded his family; and while his influence was not as great under Elizabeth as under Mary, for the better part of Elizabeth's reign the government did allow him a degree of influence that was unique for a Catholic peer.

It was some years after the passing of the Act of Supremacy of 1559 before the oath of supremacy could be effectively administered with any regularity, and consequently the more moderate members of the Catholic gentry continued to play a part-admittedly a decreasing part—in local politics throughout the reign of Elizabeth.¹ Catholic peers, on the other hand, were exempted from taking the oath of supremacy, and were not per se debarred from holding public office or sitting in the House of Lords until 1678. In practice the government might minimize the influence of a Catholic nobleman by excluding him from high office such as membership in the Privy Council or a lieutenancy; but as long as he possessed lands and wealth, as long as his tenants depended upon his goodwill, a Catholic nobleman could continue to exercise his leadership in the rural society of England. Although Catholics had been excluded from the House of Commons by an act of 1563,² no attempt seems to have been made to exclude them from the House of Lords at that time. Despite the presence of zealous Calvinists on the episcopal bench and in the Privy Council, Elizabeth usually acted upon the assumption that the Catholic laity would be loyal to her.³ Lord Montague fully justified such confidence. He shared the lieutenancy

¹ Cf. my 'Catholics and Local Office Holding in Elizabethan Sussex', in Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, vol. XXXV (May 1962), pp. 47-61.
 ² 5 Eliz. I, cap. 1.
 ³ Joel Hurtsfield, Liberty and Authority under Elizabeth I (London, 1960),

³ Joel Hurtsfield, *Liberty and Authority under Elizabeth I* (London, 1960), p. 12.

of the counties of Sussex and Surrey with Sir Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst from 1569 to 1585 and was the most important factor in keeping the Catholic gentry of that part of England quiescent during the reign of Elizabeth. This period, during which Lord Montague shared the lieutenancy with Lord Buckhurst, a moderate Protestant, may be regarded as a stage in the gradual transition of power from the old Catholic nobility to the new Protestant aristocracy.¹

Anthony Browne, first Viscount Montague, was born in 1526. His father was Sir Anthony Browne, K.G., who had been Master of the Horse to Henry VIII and one of the executors of Henry's will.² Sir Anthony had been granted the former monastery of Battle, on 15 August, 1538 by Henry VIII, only three months after its dissolution. The abbey church, chapter house and cloisters were all razed to the ground leaving only the abbot's house, where Sir Anthony went to live with his wife Alice, the daughter of Sir John Gage, K.G., constable of the Tower of London and one of the commissioners who carried out the dissolution of Battle Abbey. Thus did the representatives of two of the greatest Catholic families of Sussex come to live where the monks had once prayed, and Sir Anthony planted a double row of yew trees where the nave of the church had been.³ Sir Anthony also received other grants of monastic land besides Battle, including the priory of St. Mary Overy, Southwark, where he built his town house later known as Montague Close. During the reign of Elizabeth, St. Mary Overy was to be known as "little Rome" because of the continuous resort there of priests and other Catholics.⁴ Other monastic property came to him from his half-brother Sir William Fitzwilliam. Earl of Southampton, including Easebourne priory (the parish in which he built Cowdray which even in ruins is one of the finest houses of the Tudor age) and the monasteries of Waverley in Surrey, Calceto near Arundel, and lands formerly belonging to Newark priory and Syon abbey.5

Since he was the only Catholic peer to whom Elizabeth showed favour, Lord Montague was in effect the spokesman for English Catholics at Court. He always tried very hard to combine devotion to his religion with a most meticulous display of loyalty. As such he could hardly be classified as an ultramontane, and he is said to have been distressed by Cardinal Allen's book supporting the

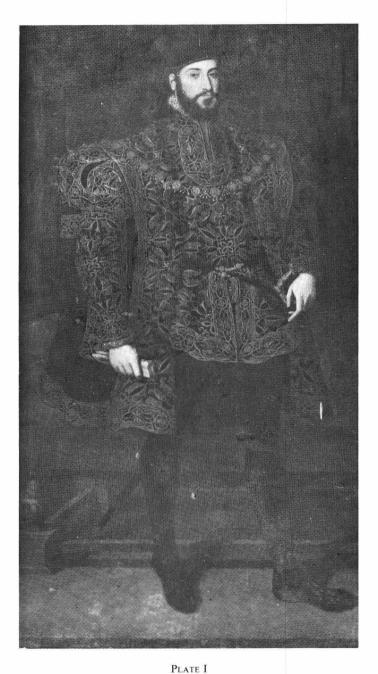
¹ I hope to develop this thesis more fully in my study of the enforcement of the Elizabethan religious settlement in Sussex.

² The best Browne genealogy is found in Sir W. St. J. Hope, *Cowdray and Easebourne in the County of Sussex* (London, 1919), facing p. 26.

⁸ J. A. E. Roundell, Cowdray: The History of a Great English House (London, 1834), p. 13.

⁴ G. E. C[ockayne]., The Complete Peerage, vol. IX, (London, 1936), p. 99.

Roundell, op. cit., p. 14.



Anthony Browne, 1st Viscount Montague, by Lucas de Heere (From the original in the Marquess of Exeter's Burghley House Collection)

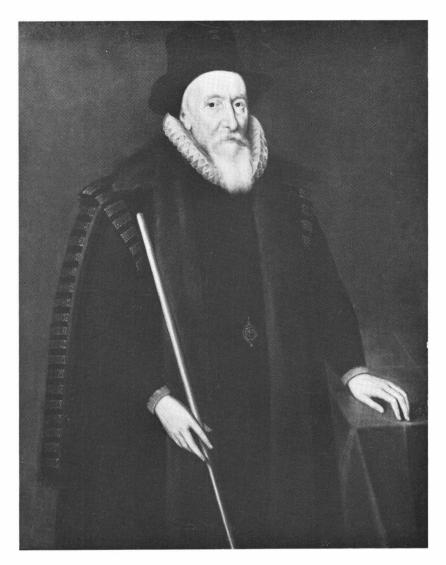


PLATE II Thomas Sackville, 1st Earl of Dorset, by an unknown artist (Reproduced by kind permission of the Director of the National Portrait Gallery, London. Crown copyright) claims of Philip II to the English throne.1 Lord Montague's peculiar position at court was probably due in part to his frankness, and Elizabeth perhaps reasoned that a man so outspoken in his views was not by character suited to plotting. His services to Queen Mary in re-establishing the Catholic religion were well known (it was Mary who raised him to the peerage), and he was one of the chief members of the embassy that Mary sent to the Pope. Displaying singular courage, Lord Montague was the only temporal peer who consistently opposed the ecclesiastical bills of 1559.2 His speech against the bill for the Queen's ecclesiastical supremacy has survived and indicates that his style of delivery was unusually direct and persuasive. Montague did not argue that Protestantism was false; rather he viewed it as a novel doctrine that should not be forced on a people who had not resolved the truth of that doctrine in their consciences. In an explicit plea of toleration for Catholics he asked.

what man is there so without courage and stomach, or void of all honour, that can consent or agree to receive an opinion and new religion by force and compulsion, or will swear that he thinketh the contrary to what he thinketh. To be still and dissemble may be borne and suffered for a time; to keep his reckoning with God alone; but to be compelled to lie and swear, or else to die therefore, are things that no man ought to suffer and endure.³

Yet Elizabeth still trusted Montague, and he was sent on an embassy to Spain in 1561.4

The Northern Rising of 1569 and other conspiracies, such as the Ridolfi plot, involved the mightiest of the old Catholic nobility and had the effect of hastening the removal of such feudal potentates from the lieutenancies of the counties and other high offices. Lord Montague narrowly escaped implication in the Ridolfi plot, but it would have been hard to identify his interests with those of a Howard or a Percy. Interrogations of the Duke of Norfolk's secretary, William Barker, and one Edmund Powell in September and October of 1571 revealed that Lord Montague and his son-inlaw, Henry Wriothesley, second Earl of Southampton, favoured the Duke of Norfolk's marriage with Mary, Queen of Scots. Barker based his information on a statement by the Bishop of Ross.⁵ William Barker also said that Ridolfi had included Lord Montague's name in a list presented to the Duke of Norfolk. Ridolfi had

Christopher Devlin, The Life of Robert Southwell, Poet and Martyr (New York, 1956), pp. 91, 108-109. ² Sir John Neale, Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments, 1559-1581 (London,

1953), p. 120.

3 Fox MSS. printed in John Strype, Annals of the Reformation (Oxford, 1824), I, 442.

D[ictionary of] N[ational] B[iography], sub Anthony Browne.

Hist. MSS. Comm., Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Salisbury, I, 526 ff., printed in extenso in A Collection of State Papers, ed. William Murdin (London, 1759), pp. 121-122.

spoken to Lord Montague and 'founde hym well affected', but Norfolk distrusted Montague because Montague had discouraged Leonard Dacre, the promoter of the Northern Rebellion, from coming to him for assistance. Lord Lumley had also told Barker that Montague was favourably disposed to the proposed marriage,¹ but apparently the government had previously trusted Lord Montague enough to include him in the commission of lieutenancy for Sussex during the Northern Rising in 1569.²

Lord Montague was a bluff, outspoken man, and it was not in his character to plot, but he must have found his relatives slightly embarrassing. George Browne, a son by his second wife, Magdalen Dacre, was imprisoned as a result of implication in the Ridolfi plot,³ as was Montague's son-in-law the Earl of Southampton, who had been imprisoned in 1569 because of his involvement in the plan to marry the Duke of Norfolk to Mary Stuart.⁴ Yet Lord Montague did not hesitate to offer his help to the young Earl and his daughter Mary, who were to become the parents of Shakespeare's patron. In the summer of 1570 the Earl and Countess of Southampton were confined to Loseley House,⁵ near Guildford, Surrey, under the custody of Sir William More, who also appears to have been a close friend of Lord Montague judging from the number of Montague's letters found among the Loseley MSS. Lord Montague and Sir William More were not able to procure Southampton's release until July 1573; but it illustrated the trust reposed in Montague when the Privy Council wrote to the Earl of Southampton that the 'Queen's Majesty is well pleased and contented that you shall remain at Cowdray with our very good the Viscount Montague, vour father-in-law '.6

Taking advantage of the well-known fact of Montague's loyalty, Lord Burghley-ever the astute propagandist-forged a letter represented to have been written by a Catholic priest to Mendoza, the Spanish ambassador in France, and had it published as a pamphlet. According to this forged letter, the first man to appear at Tilbury at the time when the Spanish Armada was entering the English Channel was Lord Montague, who, now aged and sick, vowed that 'he would hazard his life, his children, his land and his goods' as a token of loyalty. When the Oueen held her famous

1 P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice], S.P., Dom., Eliz. 85/64.

² Hist, MSS. Comm., Salisbury MSS., I, 773.
 ³ C[atholic] R[ecord] S[ociety], 'Official Lists of Prisoners for Religion,

⁴ D.N.B., sub Henry Wriothesley, 2nd Earl of Southampton.
 ⁵ Loseley MSS., vol. IV, nos. 6-7, printed St. G. K. Hyland, A Century of Persecution under Tudor and Stuart Sovereigns from Contemporary Records (London, 1920), p. 139.

⁶ Loseley MSS. IV, no. 18, printed ibid., p. 147.

review at Tilbury, Lord Montague ' came personally himself before the Queen, with his band of horsemen, being almost two hundred; the same being led by his own sons, and with a young child very comely, seated on horseback.' Lord Burghley had the purported writer of this letter add that he 'was sorry to see our adversaries so greatly pleased therewith." The story may or may not have been true. Certainly, Burghley knew that it was plausible.

Lord Montague, although an open Catholic, also took a hand in the management of county affairs and patronage in Sussex. Because of his religion Montague could not possibly hope to dominate county affairs by himself, for the government would never have permitted that. Nor would such domination have gone uncontested with the presence of so many noble landlords in Sussex. Instead Montague chose to exercise his influence in co-operation with the rising star of Sir Thomas Sackville, created Baron Buckhurst in 1567. The Browne and Sackville families appear to have been on very good terms, and their position was strengthened by presenting a common front. This political alliance was sealed by a marriage between the two families when Lord Montague's grandson and heir, Anthony Maria, married Jane Sackville.²

Although of different religions, both Lords Montague and Buckhurst belonged to the new Tudor nobility founded on royal favour and the ruin of the monasteries. While the Earls of Arundel of the ancient Fitzalan family had also refounded their family fortunes on monastic wealth, they must have resented the upstart Brownes and Sackvilles. In a county overpopulated with nobility and their gentlemen retainers it is not surprising that friction should arise and that pride should be wounded. In one such instance Lord Montague carried his grievance before the Privy Council charging Thomas Stoughton, the Earl of Arundel's comptroller, with some sort of insult. The hearing was postponed several times, but when the matter was finally settled, peace was ordered to be kept between the servants of Lord Montague and those of the Earl of Arundel. while Stoughton was ordered to use speech more befitting Lord Montague's position.³

At the beginning of the reign Henry Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, had held a position of pre-eminence in Sussex as Lord Lieutenant

¹ The pamphlet, entitled The Copy of a letter sent out of France to Don Bernadino Mendoza, Ambassador in France for the King of Spain, declaring the state of England (1588), has been proved a clever forgery by Convers Read. Cf. William Cecil and Elizabethan Public Relations', in Elizabethan Government and Society: Essays Presented to Sir John Neale, ed. S. T. Bindoff et al. (London, 1961), Listadys Presented to Sur John Nettle, ed. S. 1. Bindon et al. (London, 1961),
p. 45 ff. The part of the forgery dealing with the incident at Tilbury is printed in "A Booke of Orders and Rules ' of Anthony Viscount Montague in 1595," ed. Sir S. D. Scott, S[ussex] A[rchaeological] C[ollections], vol. VII, pp. 180-181.
² For a Sackville genealogy cf. The Works of Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, ed. R. W. Sackville-West (London, 1859), p.v.
³ A[cts of the] P[rivy] C[ouncil], vol. VII, pp. 193 ff., Feb. 10-25, 1564.

and Lord Steward of the Oueen's household, but he began to lose favour after 1564; and he and his son-in-law, Lord Lumley, were considered unreliable after their involvement in the Ridolfi plot. At the time of the Northern Rebellion in 1569, a new commission was issued bestowing the office of Lord Lieutenant jointly upon Lord Montague, Lord Buckhurst, and William West.¹

Assisted by Lord Montague, Lord Buckhurst was manoeuvring to use his position to control Sussex county elections, which, it would seem, were usually decided without contest by general agreement among the gentry.² The location of their lands, in both east and west Sussex, enabled Buckhurst and Montague to exert influence among the gentry throughout the whole county: and in October 1584 Lord Buckhurst nominated his son Robert Sackville and Sir Thomas Shirley to be knights of the shire. This election was not to go uncontested because Herbert Pelham and George Goring attempted to oppose Buckhurst's choices. Buckhurst sought to rally his followers by writing to Walter Covert, a prominent magistrate and several times sheriff of Sussex, to remind Covert that he had offered to help him. 'You frendle offered me your furtherance if nede so now though I doubt not of anie great need yet wold I be glad to use the help of my frends in this cause for Sir Thomas Sherlie and my sonne'.³ In a few days Lord Montague followed up with another letter to Sir Walter Covert making it known ' that both sondrie noble men and gentlemen with my selfe ' also approved of Lord Buckhurst's two choices. Choosing to ignore the opposition of Goring and Pelham, Lord Montague added: 'I praie you to make my wish and desire to be known to the freeholders there as I thinck most fitt and to whom I have given my consent and earnestlie request my frends to do the same '.4

Naturally, Lord Buckhurst incurred obligations from Lord Montague's support. On 4 November 1576 Montague wrote to William More of Loseley recommending William Dawtrey, a known Catholic, for the office of undersheriff of Sussex and Surrey: a year later the same recommendation was made by Buckhurst.⁵

In July 1585 Lords Buckhurst and Montague were displaced as Lords Lieutenant by Charles. Lord Howard of Effingham, but

¹ P.R.O., S.P., Dom., Eliz., 59/57-60. However, William West, later 1st or 10th Lord De La Warr, was at this time probably still under a cloud of suspicion because, it was alleged, 'being not content to stay till his uncle's natural death, [he] prepared poison to dispatch him quickly.' *G.E.C.*, vol. IV, pp. 158-159. William West's influence in county affairs was negligible. His inclusion in the commission of lieutenancy appears to be due to his part in denouncing Arundel and Lumley and the fact that he was not a Catholic.

Sir John Neale, The Elizabethan House of Commons (London, 1949), p. 29.

³ B[ritish] M[useum], Harley MS. 703, fo. 19v.

⁴ Ibid., fo. 17v. ⁵ Hist. MSS. Comm., Appendix to the Seventh Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (London, 1878), vol. vii, pp. 630-631.

Lord Buckhurst was reinstated in August 1586 and shared the lieutenancy with Howard to the end of the reign.¹ As a result of the increasing militancy of the Catholic Reformation overseas, the dominant voices in the government had already decided on a tougher policy towards English Catholics: this was made sufficiently clear when the fifth Parliament of Elizabeth assembled in November 1584. Lord Montague was never restored to the lieutenancy. Yet even in the troubled times of the summer of 1588, it would appear that the Privy Council had to make allowances for the fact of Lord Montague's patronage despite the withering of his influence. The Privy Council had sought to curb the power wielded by Lord Montague through his servants and retainers, but they found it necessary to give assurance that Adam Ashburnham would continue as captain of the rape of Hastings. Evidently, Lord Buckhurst had told the Privy Council that it would not do to treat Lord Montague in such cavalier fashion, and the Privy Council replied on July 27, 1588

that their Lordships' late letter touching the lord Montague's servantes and reteyners was not to withdrawe any principall officer heretofore employed in the countrye, and that therefore Adam Ashburnham may, notwithstanding the said letter, continew one of the Capteines of the Rape of Hastings as hereto fore he had done, wherewith their Lordships thought Lord Montague wold not be discontented . . ., his Lordship [Buckhurst] was also thanked for his care touching the Recusantes mentioned in his Lordship's said Letter.²

Lord Montague's influence in the rape of Hastings was marked because of his large landholdings there formerly belonging to Battle Abbey.

Although Lord Montague's religious views in an age of intolerance may be considered moderate, it would be going too far to describe his outlook as Henrician. He did accept the religious principles of the Catholic Reformation while rejecting some of the aggressively political overtones that blew out of Spain with the "Enterprise". Yet there were those in his family and household who could not see things quite so calmly.

At Cowdray Park, near Midhurst, Sussex, Lord Montague had a splendid mansion that any sovereign would have been proud to own. In 1595 it required thirty-seven different classes of officials and male servants, from the steward of the household and gentlemen of the horse to the lowest sculleryman, to staff Cowdray.³ A household of this size bore watching, especially since it was known that priests had been smuggled across Sussex in Lord Montague's livery; in 1586 the government were at pains to gather information on such activities, and Privy Council spies accused six of Lord Montague's servants and five in Lord Lumley's household of

¹ Joyce E. Mousley, "Sussex Country Gentry in the Reign of Elizabeth" (London Ph.D. thesis, 1955) pp. 277-278.

² A.P.C., vol. XVI, p. 194.

³ Scott, op. cit., S.A.C., vol. VII, pp. 180-181 and Hope, op. cit., pp. 119-134.

harbouring priests.¹ Francis Browne, Lord Montague's brother, had sheltered the first printing press of the Jesuit Robert Southwell in St. Mary Overy, and it was here also that Fathers Southwell and Garnet are said to have offered their first Mass in England.² Later, it was reported that ' Francis Browne and his brother [were] altogether governed by Edmonds [the alias of William Weston, s.J.] and Cornelius '.3 John Cornelius, a priest who was later executed, was often seen with 'Mr. Gower within his lord's house at St. Mary Overies '.⁴ St. Mary Overy was a meeting place for Catholics from many areas of England, but especially from Sussex, Surrey, and Hampshire; and in August 1599 the house was unsuccessfully searched for gunpowder.5

Bishop Richard Smith, later vicar-apostolic, who personally knew some of the chaplains that had been at Cowdray in Lord Montague's day, says that Montague occasionally attended Protestant services, and he blamed this on Alban Langdale, 'a learned and pious man indeed, but too fearful '.6 Langdale died sometime between 1587 and 1589, and his place was taken by Fr. Robert Gray, who was in Lord Montague's service at least as early as 1589. Fr. Gray was a priest of the Catholic Reformation and did not hesitate to reproach Lord Montague in no uncertain terms about the error of attending Protestant services. Bishop Smith, to whom the story was related by someone actually present, describes Lord Montague's reaction:

Instantly putting off his hat and falling on his knees, both with a gesture of his whole body and with his tongue, he most humbly submitted himself to the censure and piously promised never thenceforward to be present at heretical service which all the rest of his life he exactly observed.7

Up to the time of this incident Lord Montague quite possibly favoured Marian clerics for himself, but it was not in his character

1 P.R.O., S.P., Dom., Eliz., 195/107.

² Devlin, op. cit., pp. 91, 108-109.
 ³ Ibid., pp. 108-109; *D.N.B., sub* William Weston.

⁴ P.R.O., S.P., Dom., Eliz., 188/37, printed in *The Troubles of Our Catholic Forefathers Related by Themselves* (London, 1872), vol. II, p. 157.

G.E.C., vol. IX, p. 99.

⁶ Richard Smith, Bishop of Chalcedon, An Elizabethan Recusant House, comprising the Life of the Lady Magdalen Viscountess Montague (1538-1608), Translated into English from the Original Latin of Dr. Richard Smith . . . by Cuthbert Fursdon, O.S.B., in the year 1627, ed. A.C. Southern (London, 1954), p. 19. After his deprivation from the archdeaconry of Chichester, Langdale came to live at Cowdray and was probably Lord Montague's chaplain. A pamphlet saying that it was not wrong 'to give to the time' and attend the established churches occasionally was, it would seem, mistakenly attributed to Langdale. Joseph Gillow says that this treatise was written by Alban's nephew, Thomas Langdale, who became a Jesuit and later apostasized. Biographical Dictionary of the Énglish Catholics (London, 1885), vol. IV, pp. 117-118.

Smith, op. cit., p. 20.

to forsake someone in distress. In December of 1578 Lord Montague is found writing to his friend, Sir William More, notifying him of the death of Nicholas Heath, the deprived Catholic Archbishop of York, who lived at Cobham and was visited there by Queen Elizabeth, asking protection for Heath's relatives and servants and putting in a claim for Heath's books which the Archbishop had apparently left to him.¹

Lord Montague died in 1592 protesting to God his membership 'in the unitie of his catholicke churche' and beseeching 'the most blessed virgin Marye mother of xriste and all the holie companye of heaven to recommend my weakness and synnefull soule unto the aide and assistaunce of his infinite grace and mercy'.² His son Anthony had predeceased him by only a few months; his grandson, Anthony Maria, succeeded him as second Viscount.

In the absence of an effective centralized bureaucracy, the Elizabethan government was less able to ignore special interests than more modern governments. County factions and local influence simply had to be taken into consideration; and, since Lord Montague had shown himself a man of moderation, it must have seemed impolitic to withhold from him the small amount of patronage that he must have felt was his due. Until after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, there lurked around every corner the possibility of violent resistance from a disaffected nobility: among other reasons, Sir Henry Percy and the Duke of Norfolk were driven into conspiracy because they were disappointed in the rewards that they received.3

With evidence of discontent among the Earl of Arundel, Lord Lumley and the Fitzalan faction in 1569, it may have seemed to the government that the best thing to do was to balance the older Catholic nobility with Buckhurst, Montague and William West, representing those who would have liked to displace the Fitzalan party in the management of county affairs. Lord Buckhurst's temporary absence from the lieutenancy in 1585-86 may possibly be explained by the confinement to the Tower of his daughter-inlaw, Lady Margaret Sackville, who was an ardent Catholic.⁴ A thorough study of Buckhurst is very much needed, and only then will we know. As for Lord Montague, his commission as Lord Lieutenant could hardly be considered permanent when other courtiers had better claims to reward. Whatever the evidences of

Hist. MSS. Comm., 7th Rept., app., Loseley MSS., 632-633. Prerogative Court of Canterbury (Somerset House), Registers of Wills, 2 22 Neville.

³ W. T. MacCaffrey, 'Place and Patronage in Elizabethan Politics', in Elizabethan Government and Society: Essays presented to Sir John Neale, ed. S. T. Bindoff et al. (London, 1961), p. 98.

C.R.S., The Ven. Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, 1557-1595, ed. J. H. Pollen (London, 1919), passim.

ANTHONY BROWNE

his own personal loyalty, he was still a Catholic, and around his person and his household there inevitably hovered a cloud of suspicion.

112