

# THE PARLIAMENTARY SPEECH OF VISCOUNT MONTAGUE AGAINST THE ACT OF SUPREMACY, 1559

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The first Parliament of Queen Elizabeth I passed, in 1559, the Act of Supremacy, which while repudiating all ecclesiastical or spiritual authority of any foreign prince or prelate, declared the Queen to be 'the only supreme governor' of the realm in all spiritual as well as temporal causes. The Act in its third and final form,<sup>1</sup> had a rapid passage through the House of Commons, and in the House of Lords was opposed only by all the spiritual peers, and by one temporal peer. That temporal peer was Viscount Montague.

Anthony Browne was born in 1526, and succeeded his father in 1548. He was created 1st Viscount Montague by Queen Mary, at her coronation in 1554.<sup>2</sup> He was a staunch Roman Catholic, and had suffered imprisonment in the Fleet in 1551, for hearing mass. His seats at Cowdray<sup>3</sup> and Battle Abbey<sup>4</sup> in Sussex, and Montague House<sup>5</sup> in London, were strongholds of the old religion, and resorts for the deposed clergy, and later for the seminary priests.<sup>6</sup> However, when Elizabeth succeeded Mary in 1558, Viscount Montague was loyal to his Queen, and she seems to have trusted him. From 1569 to 1585 he shared the Lord Lieutenancy for Sussex and Surrey with Lord Buckhurst,<sup>7</sup> and con-

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Parliament of 1559, see J. E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and her Parliaments, 1559-1581* (1953), and 'The Elizabethan Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity', in the *English Historical Review*, vol. 65, July 1950, pp. 304-332.

<sup>2</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1554-1555*, p. 88. The letters patent are entered in British Museum Add. MS 31952, f.48v.

<sup>3</sup> The surviving archives of Cowdray House have been deposited in the West Sussex Record Office. See A. A. Dibben, *The Cowdray Archives*, Part I (1960) and *The Cowdray Archives*, Part II (1964).

<sup>4</sup> The dissolved abbey of Battle was granted to Sir Anthony Browne, Viscount Montague's father, in 1538. *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, vol. 13, pt. 2, pp. 98, 99. The letters patent are entered in B.M. Add. MS. 31952, f.17v.

<sup>5</sup> Montague House, formerly the site of the Priory of St. Mary Overy, Southwark, was granted to Sir Anthony Browne in 1544. *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, vol. 19, pt. 1, p. 637. The letters patent are entered in B.M. Add. MS. 31952, f.35v.

<sup>6</sup> See A. C. Southern (ed.), *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, Bishop of Chalcedon, by Cuthbert Fursdon, O.S.B., in the year 1627* (1954), and Rev. H. Willaert, *History of an Old Catholic Mission: Cowdray-Easebourne-Midhurst* (1928).

Public Record Office, State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth, 59/57-60.

tinued to have a considerable influence on local politics.<sup>1</sup> In 1561 he was sent on an embassy to Philip II of Spain, and in 1565 and 1566 to the Duchess of Parma, then Regent in the Low Countries. He was one of the forty-seven commissioners who sat on the trial of Mary, Queen of Scots, at Fotheringay in 1587. Finally, in August 1591, shortly after the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth paid him a week-long visit at Cowdray.<sup>2</sup>

Viscount Montague's speech in Parliament in 1563 against the Act entitled 'for the assurance of the Queen's royal power over all estates and subjects within her dominion', by which all persons were bound to take the Oath of Supremacy if required to do so, is well known.<sup>3</sup> It is also known that Viscount Montague spoke out in Parliament against the Act of Supremacy. A contemporary copy of Viscount Montague's speech of 1559 has recently been discovered, and is now available to scholars. The speech was found in a recusant manuscript, which was formerly part of the library of the Brudenell family at Deene Park, Northampton.<sup>4</sup> The manuscript was removed from Deene Park, and sold at Sotheby's in 1967,<sup>5</sup> and is now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.<sup>6</sup>

Primarily a two-volumed encyclopedic collection of material relating to the Catholic faith, derived from the New Testament, the Councils of the Church and the 'Fathers', the manuscript also includes several reports of events, ranging in date from 1585 to 1606, together with transcripts of letters and documents which are now lost.<sup>7</sup> Various notes scattered among the materials suggest that the manuscript was written sometime between 1600 and 1608. The scribe revealed his name on the last page of the manuscript, writing 'scriptor qualis erat si quis de nomine quaerat/cunctis noscatur Thomas Jollett sic nominatur'.<sup>8</sup> The manuscript, which bears a Tresham bookplate, was written on paper, 17 by 11½

<sup>1</sup> See Roger B. Manning, 'Anthony Browne, 1st Viscount Montague: The Influence in County Politics of an Elizabethan Catholic Nobleman', in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. 106 (1968), pp. 103-112, and Roger B. Manning, *Religion and Society in Elizabethan Sussex* (1969).

<sup>2</sup> See *The Honorable Entertainment given to the Queen's Majestie in Progresse, at Cowdray, in Sussex, by the Right Hon'ble the Lord Montacute*. (1591.)

<sup>3</sup> The speech of Viscount Montague against the Oath of Supremacy in 1563 is printed in Dodd's *Church History of England*, edited with notes by M. A. Tierney, vol. II (1839), Appendix XXXVII, pp. CCLI-CCCLIV; and also in John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation* (1824), vol. I, p. 442.

<sup>4</sup> See Joan Wake, *The Brudenells of Deene* (1953).

<sup>5</sup> See Sotheby and Co., *Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books, Autograph Letters and Historical Documents . . .*, Monday, 20th February 1967, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> The reference number is Bodleian Library MSS. ENG. th. b. 12, pp. 840-843.

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed description of the manuscript, see J. G. O'Leary, 'A Recusant Manuscript of Great Importance', in *Essex Recusant*, vol. 10 (1968), pp. 17-20.

<sup>8</sup> f. 812 b.

inches. It is written in secretary hand, with some coloured initials and decoration, within ruled compartments, and is here transcribed as it was originally written.

The Speech of the Lord Vicount Montacute in the p[ar]liament  
house Anno primo Elizabethhe Reginae

My Lords, loath I am to speake and much afraide, waying reverently the matter nowe in hande, both for the weight thereof, and also remembering the p[er]son whom yt seemeth to touche therw<sup>th</sup>, not willing to impugne the Judgment of others w<sup>ch</sup> have spoken therein, whom otherwise I honour and love, considering also myne owne insufficiency in all respectes to speake in so great a matter and case of such importaunce, to those in whom I doubt not either certeyne wisdome and knowledge, nor zeale to the true Religion of Christe. I have therefore earnestly and hartely desyred to have bene my self excused from speaking, by the declarations of others of my sorte who might and were able muche better to utter my mynde then my self: but seing my Faithe, as I take yt is called into questio[n] and the same impugned by others of my Condition, speaking as I thincke according to their consciences, and the contrarye nowe offered to be by us established by lawe, I am enforced to discharg my dutie towards god, my Prynce and Countrye. And nowe I might remember to your Lordshipps the matter in hande, to the body wherof exhibited unto us I have to speake and not to the p[ar]ticularitie of the title, w<sup>ch</sup> only toucheth the scripture, carying away by generall wordes the whole estate of Christs Religion. For as in the first p[ar]te the Supremacie is only intrated of, even so in the bodie of the Bill, all that ever was made for the defence of y<sup>e</sup> faith against the malignitie of wicked heresies, are wholly repealed, and the confusion lately used in Religion, newly received and established: the masse abrogated, the sacrifice of the Churche reiected, the Sacramentes prophaned, the holie Authars destroyed, temples vyolated, mariage of preistes allowed, their Children made legitimate; lybertie given to them by purchase or other meanes to procure to their posteritie, lands and hereditamentes, and thus I conceive the effect of this Bill. Therefore nowe have I to saye that I must speake for the staye of the whole state of Religion, w<sup>ch</sup> this Byll carieth away dyrectly w<sup>th</sup> yt,: yet am I two wayes much afrayed, the one by speaking to offend those whom I most desyre to please, the other and cheife by not speaking to offend my Conscience, and therby god himself. To speake therefore I am constrained by the matter, the place, and my Vocation. By the matter as touching my Faithe and religion called in question: the place being a Councell, wherin all men are bounde to discharge themselves, not only by yea and naye, but also as occasion serveth to further and advaunce all those thinges that

sounde to the honour of god and wealth of the Realme, and to hinder, let and be against all such thinges wherin god or his Churche might bee dishonored or o[ur] Countrye hyndred. Thirdly being unworthie by my Vocation a member of this Councell, and one of yo<sup>u</sup> my Lords: to the w<sup>ch</sup> calling nothing so necessarily appertayneth as in lawes making to laye aside all affections, and nothing to doo but for conscience sake, following the rule of truthe indifferently and Justice by good deliberation before to avoide all repentance afterwarde: Mynding then for theis causes to speake to the whole Bill and matter here being before us, I intend to professe and discharge my self w<sup>t</sup> all humilitie and reverence, not condempning others (w<sup>ch</sup> is not my office) but leaving every man to himself w<sup>t</sup>out offence, as I for my p[ar]te praye and humbly require you all to shewe yo[ur]selves unto mee, patiently to heare me and charitably to iudge of me, remembering the causes aforesaid w<sup>ch</sup> drive me. And for that I am loth to seeme unto yo<sup>u</sup> to frame my self a conscience, either wilfully or altogether ignorantly I shall w<sup>t</sup> yo[ur] favour as breifly as I can render reasons why I doo for theis three causes frame my self a Conscience in this matter. And here I humbly crave the priveledge of this howse, the evell observation wherof shutteth upp the mouthe of many who otherwise woulde more freely in divers matters declare their Consciences, if their Reverend speeches were not by misreportes caried out of this howse to their displeasure.

Nowe then to the first of my .3. causes w<sup>ch</sup> is the matter and in deed Religion, ye w<sup>ch</sup> I professed in my baptisme, wher I was made a member of Christs Misticall bodie, and vowed to beleeeve the holy Catholique Churche, as the spowse and only beloved of Christe, by unitie in the w<sup>ch</sup> I am to bee saved, or damned: to teache me Christes true Religion in this his Churche I learne that God hath therin appoynted neither Emperour, Kynge or temporall governour, but *quosda[m] prophetas, quosdam Apostolos, quosdam Episcopos, quosdam Doctores*, certeyne prophetts, c[er]teine Apostles, certeyne Bishoppes, certeyne doctours, unto whom he hath given charge as *St. Paule* saith to the same: yet was ther never Prynce nor Region, that durst in using this, destroye the other neither in refusing the obedience to the *Pope* to take to them selves the Supremacie of their owne Churches, but only in this Realme, neither in *Germany*, are the more p[ar]te evill, and at least gonne from the Churche of Rome, but wher the Protestantes bee, albeyt the more number in theis places resort to the assembly of that sort and sect, yet be the Churches left to such as remayne in their Fathers faith, and in those Churches all rytes remayne involate, both of praying p[re]aching and sacrifice, and no man enforced to leave the same, w<sup>ch</sup> seemeth and in deed is contrary to nature and reason, as not being offred to the Jewes so long as they receive not faith and revolt from the same: But at *Rome* yt is said, I did or

might see much abhominacion, : truly my Lordes I thinck I knowe that synne is greatly increased in the whole worlde, and doth in mann[er] overflowe all nations, but if I shall saye truly I sawe no more evill there, then I see in my owne Countrie saving that I did see some fewe Cardynalls unworthie of the place who to their owne shame did [*blank*] in the gravest Councell of the rest of that sorte and number y<sup>t</sup> ever I did see:<sup>1</sup> thus much I have said touching my Knowledg in that iourney, synce w<sup>ch</sup> tyme I knowe not why, all that then was donne, was not well donne, or why we lyve not nowe in a much better unities then any other auctoritie can make, saving the same that ordeyned this here those p[re]sent whom god hath appoynted in this Realme to teache his faithe, not only affirme that we p[re]sently hold that faith and Religion w<sup>ch</sup> pleaseth god, but in the violating therof wee devide o[ur] selves from the Church and so become the vessells of the Wrathe of god: if I beleve them not, my owne bloude be upon my owne head: if I dispice them and their teaching, I dispice Christe: but why doo I beleve them, not for that they saye so, but because they teache me the Auncient faithe of the Fathers delivered and received from hand to hande by Contynuall succession of all Bishoppes in the Church of Christe, and the same wherin all the holy Martyrs, patriarcks, Confessours, lyved and died, wherin, what cause have I to doubt, if I doo not thincke thatt all the worlde is damned, saving a fewe that beleve and p[ro]fesse this newe doctrine, unknowne to the Church, but by condempnation therof: in the w<sup>ch</sup> they never agreed among themselves, but have spent mo[re] mens lyves in their Controversies, and all against the truthe of the Church, that had bene sufficient to have delyvered *Greece* and *Constantinople* from the hands of the Turke: and as they from the first have bene so they Contynew, and let not even nowe to preache before the Queene that ther be but ij Sacraments and those but [*blank*]. Neither maye I therefore nor doo knowe my cause to the contrarie, but remayne constaunt, *a vita fide patrum*, and confesse god and his truthe before man, lest he deny me before his father in heaven; and so *quum veniet dies domini, peream*: at w<sup>ch</sup> tyme yt shall not be sufficient for me, that I said nothing, and flatter myself w<sup>t</sup> securitie of myne owne conscience secrete to my self, neither shall desire to please excuse me, nor feare of displeasure discharge me, no not the thundering wordes of a preacher; teaching his owne ymaginative doctrine, be my warraunt: but then the worme of my owne conscience shall sting me, and god himself accuse me and saye: thou hast dispiced those whom I have sent to teache thee, thou hast denyed me thy Lord god before man, thou hast feared man more than god: Woe be unto thee. Being therefore

<sup>1</sup> Shortly after Queen Mary's Coronation, Viscount Montague was chosen to accompany Sir Edward Carne and Thirlby, Bishop of Ely, to Rome, concerning the reconciliation of the Church of England to the Holy See.

thus p[er]suaded I rather chuse to fall into the hands of man (though lately) then into the hands of god willingly, and those rather being offered, the one of two swordes runne upon the one, the healthe and end wherof I see, then on the other, to the end wherof my imagination is not able to bring mee, and therefore to this p[ar]te thus I conclude, y<sup>f</sup> we have no auctoritie to treate upon their matters, yea we be utterly forbidden the same and therefore I most humbly wishe and desyre that we entermeddle no further herein, but remayne in Unitie, w<sup>t</sup> Christs Church and o[ur] neighbours. If religion and feare of god mooved me not therin, yet am I otherwise almost as hardly driven by duty to my Prynce and Countrey, whom I doo and ought to honour serve and humbly obaye: and here I crave and beseech of you my Lordes not to be noted of pride p[re]sumption or singularitie, in that I seeme to be fearfull of the sure and quyet estate of my Sovereigne and Countrey, as though the same were not by yo[ur] wisdomes thought on and cared for. I meane no such matter, but only to discharge my self, and in this poynte I have agayne occasion to remember my Vocation and this place: y<sup>e</sup> place being the highest and supreme Councell of this Realme of England: and I being by wrytt summoned to be p[re]sent and to give counsaile in matters of waighte, touching the prynce, Church and Realme of England, [<sup>r</sup> and I being', *deleted*] wherfore nowe hath god placed Noble men to be in dignitie before others, but to this end that they shoulde be more carefull of the honour and safty of the Prynce and Countrey, then others, and for any of theis to be ready and willing to sacrifice themselves. And I take god to recorde ther lyveth no subject in this Realme that w<sup>t</sup> better will will put his life in adventure to serve my Sovereigne Ladye then I woulde, nor woulde be more loath to offend her, nor more glad to please her Highnes: but if this matter here offred be as evill an advise as all her enemyes can imagine to give her and her realme, then I being so p[er]suaded, ought to beware howe to agree therunto, or suffer yt to p[ro]ceede if I might by my poore Councell stave the same. In chaunging of Religion we condempne all other nations, of whom some be our Fryndes and many o[ur] enymies, open and auntyent, who long tyme have and no doubt doo expect an opportunitie to annoy us: If the Pope hearing us by schisme devided from the Church doo p[ro]ceede to the Excommunication of the Realme, w<sup>ch</sup> we knowe hath followed others in the like case: howe enioyeth the Kyng of Spayne *Navarra*? ys yt not by sentence of Excommunication? and therby auctoritie given to him to possesse the same that coulde by strong hand obtayne yt? howe came *Naples* from the Auntyent goverment to the hands of their enemyes? uppon such a case o[ur] own Countrymen and Kyng of this realme *King John*, to what extremitie was he dryven by the like attempt in religion? this then that hath chaunced to so many, maye be of right feared in o[ur] selves, being

envyroned and as yt were set about in one of two so potent enymyes, who as you knowe would be loath to loose such opportunitie, specially remembring that if we should be devided from the universall Churche and so excommunicated (w<sup>ch</sup> our Lord defend) these o[ur] neighbours w<sup>ch</sup> otherwise would be most willing to assist us, neither I thincke woulde or durst give succour or helpe to us in a quarrell of faithe, the contrary wherof he so earnestly professeth, and being by the Aucthoritye of the Churche restrayned, neither would of him in case by coullour wherof he enjoyeth a Kingdome, and ad to this o[ur] owne weaknes and povertie, at home: mens myndes discontented, great somes of mony dewe, and more of necessitie demanded: and cheifly remember the evill nature of o[ur] people that alwaies uppon a little libertie are readie to rebell, and dare doo any thinge, and ev[er]y man followe his owne waye, w<sup>ch</sup> thing if yt doo happen (as to often of late yt hath donne) who seeth not the perrill of the realme almost inevitable. Theis thinges in my conscience I feare and doubtte and care least of any other thing for my self, who in any of theis cases (w<sup>ch</sup> god keepe farr from us) will readely spend my life: but I feare my Prynces sure estate and ruine of my native Countrie: maye I then being her true subject see such perrill growe to her highnes and agree to yt? see the daunger and losse of my Countrie and as yt were betraye yt? *Absit.* And therefore my Lords being moved by the zeale aforesaid, I re quyre and beseeche in *Visceribus Jesu Christi*, according to the Nobilitie of your bloudes and auneynt fames, consider the weight of this case and by your wisdomes use yt thereafter. Remember that the eyes of all Christendome be bent uppon you, doe and shall knowe what you have donne and shall doo, be not noted thus often to chaunge your faithe and Religion, and w<sup>t</sup> the Prynce to burye your faithe: and I nothing doubt but the *Queenes Matie*, whose harte I trust is dyrected by the hande of god, of her good nature and wisdomes will graciously heare and conceive your faithfull counsell and advise herein, to the doing wherof we have beene all exhorted and anymated by her *Matie*, wher yt was my chauce wise to be present, when upon occasion mynystred, her highnes declared the great confidence she reposed in her Nobilitie said that she esteemed nothing so worthie praise in them as w<sup>th</sup>out dissimulation to advise her highnes as they in Conscience thought, w<sup>th</sup>out feare or desire to please, and if any should otherwise doo, she neither coule nor would thincke well of them. Her Matie therefore having thus graciously not only encouraged us to saye our consciences reverently, but also as yt were laying the burthen of all matters on those that should give her highnes advise and counsell I thinke in humble declaration of the truthe, we shall serve god, be faithfull to our Prynce and Countrie, discharge our selves of perrill, that maye fall by our Actes and counsell: and fynally worke the best towards god and man. And

such as agree not in mynde w<sup>t</sup> me herein I hartely requyre that as I neither iudge nor mislike w<sup>th</sup> them, being I thincke led by conscience (as I am) even so they will thincke well of me and iudge me to speake w<sup>th</sup>out any other respect, but for the saving of my soule, at the terrible daye of god.