Let Us Not Praise Famous Men

An Essay on Political Correctness

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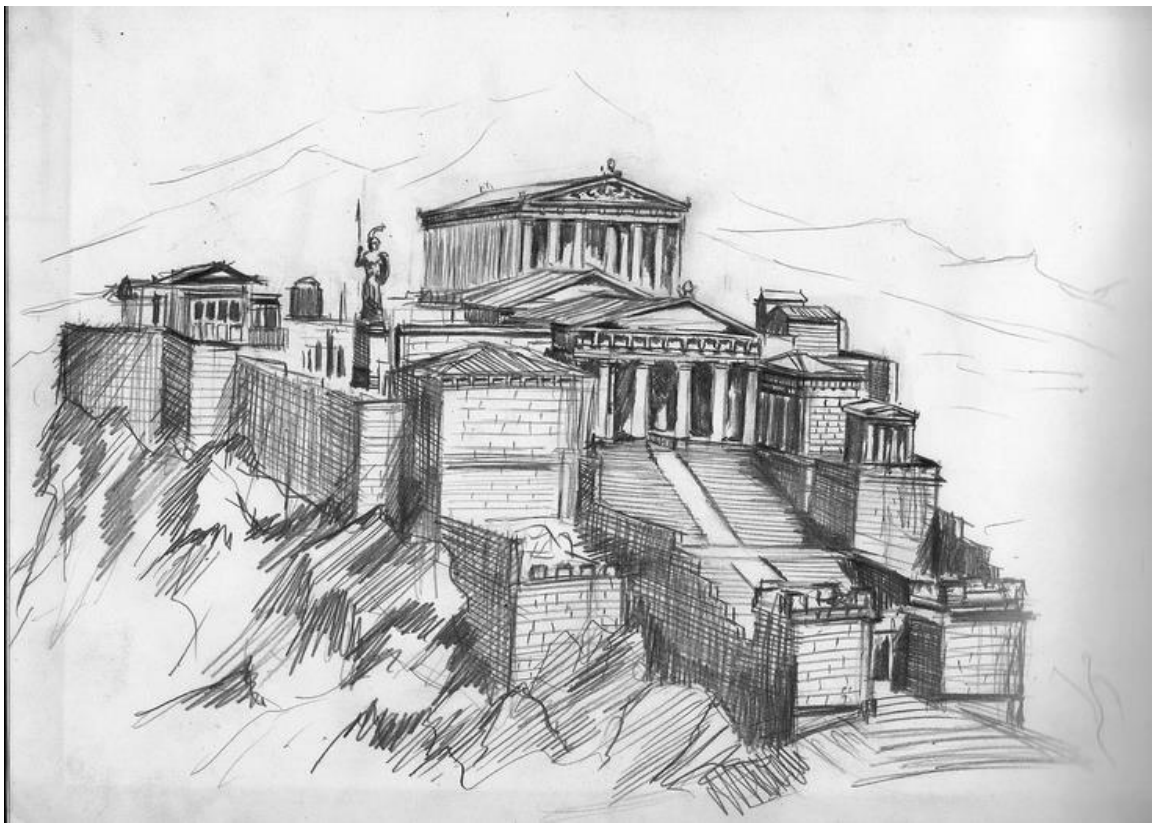

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INTRODUCTION

Political correctness, much talked about today, is actually a pale and shallow version of the ways that successful politicians behaved in earlier times. To find some of its historical origins, I have been re-examining the 16th century career of Queen Elizabeth I of England, a remarkably shrewd and effective practitioner of the art of politics. Though she preferred to call what she did simply "ruling," as though one standard of royal conduct generally prevailed, often her words or actions were suited to a certain situation or a particular individual. Critics could call her inconsistent or indecisive. But the difficult encounters were many and varied. How she handled them is the stuff of legends. I will use the expression ***"PC Alert"*** in this essay occasionally, to highlight instances of Elizabeth's acquired expertise. She was not inherently an expert to begin with.

At age 25, Elizabeth Tudor inherited a small, vulnerable, poorly financed monarchy which had been mismanaged by her predecessors, most notably her larger-than-life father, King Henry VIII. Initially it consisted only of England and Wales; it was internally divided along religious and ethnic lines; and it was severely threatened with competition or conquest by Spain and other European powers. Yet somehow, during Elizabeth's 45-year reign (1558-1603), her beloved island kingdom was gradually transformed into a more coherent, confident nation with increasing prosperity, imperial aspirations, and regional control of the seas. Who brought about this transformation? The Queen herself deserves much of the credit. One modern historian says: "Elizabeth played a centrally important role in political life, not as a passive object of aspiration and devotion in the hands of her courtiers and ministers, but as an active player in decision making."[1]

Active though she was, however, Elizabeth had to function within the existing hierarchy of social classes, guided yet restricted by a confusing and sometimes conflicting array of laws, customs, allegiances, ideological factions, family ties, and individual personalities. She could not search widely for talent, nor freely choose the most capable people to serve her. Instead, to fill most of the higher, more prestigious positions in government, Elizabeth was expected to (and usually did) make her selections from an established male aristocracy consisting of approximately sixty peers of the realm and three hundred knights at the beginning of her reign.[2] But when it came to serving her more directly, in England or abroad, Elizabeth sometimes selected a promising gentleman of lesser rank, and promoted him later to knighthood or the nobility (or both) if she was pleased with his performance. Even so, her choices were usually limited to ambitious men who found their own entries into the fringes of her daily life, and attracted her attention by what they did and how they did it.

For this short essay, a variety of examples will be briefly discussed, including famous knights such as Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh. Several other less famous examples will be identified as we go along. You will see that Elizabeth's chosen few did not all adhere to the same standards of knightly service or chivalrous conduct, nor did she always wish them to. At different times she singled out different kinds of men for different uses, including her own personal entertainment and comfort.[3] Moreover, she never relinquished the right to change her royal mind. The results, for England and for the Queen herself, were somewhat mixed.

I will present my examples in several categories, starting with **stalwart supporters** of the Queen. Note that these categories are not chronologically sequential; most of the individuals that I discuss were active at about the

same time, though some lifespans were shorter than others because of sudden death by accident, illness, suicide, execution, or in combat. Elizabeth outlasted all but one of them (the flamboyant Walter Raleigh, who survived until 1618).

1. STALWART SUPPORTERS

Elizabeth's first stalwart supporter was **Sir William Cecil** (1520-1598), better known as **Lord Burghley** after the Queen elevated him to the rank of Baron in 1572. Burghley was a one of those wise, older, and outwardly devoted subjects that every ruler needs, particularly when young, insecure, and inexperienced like Elizabeth Tudor at age 25. A sober-looking but happily married man, the father of several children (and the founder of an impressive political dynasty), Cecil had originally been hired to administer the many scattered parcels of land that Elizabeth owned or controlled as Princess. His job seems to have included buying, selling, collecting rents or taxes, taking advantage of insider information to find some good deals for himself, and charging fees or commissions on all of the above. ***PC Alert:*** Burghley made sure that Elizabeth also benefited financially from this arrangement. He kept at it for years after she was crowned Queen, avoiding any involvement in glamorous activities such as jousting, dancing, poetry writing, or flirtation with the ladies of the court; nor did he serve her as a warrior or an explorer. Instead, being habitually cautious and pragmatic in most respects,[4] he gradually acquired a firm grip on the business side of government, and held onto it tenaciously for the rest of his life, acting as Secretary of State, Lord High Treasurer, and so on, skillfully reconciling

Elizabeth's wishes with what he conceived to be her best interests as well as his own, and thereby earning her nearly unshakable trust.

On at least one occasion, however, Elizabeth made an executive decision without consulting Burghley beforehand: she approved Francis Drake's daring voyage into the Pacific Ocean in 1578, which infuriated the King of Spain (as Burghley had feared) but eventually yielded a much-needed shipload of treasure for her and other investors. Having accumulated a fortune of his own from real estate dealings, Burghley ostentatiously refused to accept any part of these "stolen" Spanish riches for himself, but he used the Queen's large share to pay off England's foreign debts.

Born an untitled "commoner" with deep roots in ancient Welsh families, Lord Burghley was both down-to-earth and immensely proud. His portrait in the Bodleian Library (Oxford University) shows him riding on a mule, in preference to a knightly charger, yet he is clutching what appears to be a symbolic Tudor rose, and his "Sitsylt" (Cecil) coat of arms is intertwined with the coveted Order of the Garter, the most exalted level of English knighthood, which the Queen had awarded him in 1572.[5] This and the rank of baron were evidently the only outward signs of distinction that Burghley wanted or received. He was well known to some of his contemporaries, but not "famous" in the popular sense, and seldom praised in public. Elizabeth herself did not make much of Burghley at court, during all the years of his faithful service, but she took the time to visit him as he lay dying in 1598, and when he was no longer able to lift a spoon, she fed him. Thereby she endeared herself to Burghley's immediate family and the watchful circle beyond.

Another stalwart supporter, **Sir Francis Walsingham** (c. 1532-1590) also rose from obscurity to pursue a distinguished career in English government. Recruited and subsequently advanced by William Cecil (Lord Burghley), he too became devoted to Elizabeth, but served her primarily in the mysterious realms of espionage, foreign intrigue, and what today might be called counter-terrorism. Walsingham and his numerous hired agents protected the Queen from mortal dangers, including the assassination conspiracy for which Mary Queen of Scots (mother of Elizabeth's successor, James I) was eventually tried and convicted in 1587.

Walsingham often wore plain black clothing, with no ornaments other than a cherished cameo of Queen Elizabeth, which she had presumably given him on some special occasion.[6] Thus he was as conspicuous in his own somber way as the Queen and her more extravagant courtiers in their elaborate finery. This contrast might have been taken by the Queen as a negative comment of some sort, but fortunately for Walsingham it was not.

Although she was not especially interested in him as a man, she undoubtedly valued his dedication and his accomplishments. After he had succeeded in negotiating a defensive alliance with France against Spain in 1572, Elizabeth gave him another unique gift: a large portrait, suitably inscribed, of herself and her Tudor ancestors.[7] The following year Walsingham was appointed her principal secretary, an influential post he held until his death in 1590. It would be interesting to learn what prompted Elizabeth to give Walsingham the cameo and the ancestral painting, both related directly to her, rather than money or real estate or other impersonal gifts. Perhaps she was conscious of the fact that, having survived a number of assassination plots and near misses because of his interventions, she owed her life to him.

Even as he focused on darker, conspiratorial matters in Europe, Walsingham became a leading advocate of the growing English navy and its potential uses for exploration and aggression abroad, as well as for defense at home. Less cautious than Burghley, but equally interested in the future prosperity of the kingdom, he wanted England to acquire a substantial share of the New World and its wealth, in spite of Spain's exclusive claims, so he supported the efforts of Drake, Raleigh and others in that direction. He invested his own money in some of these overseas adventures, and encouraged the Queen to do likewise.

Walsingham was also a strong if unlikely believer in the knightly tradition and its code of honor, as epitomized by his son in law, Sir Philip Sidney, known to some as the "perfect knight." Sidney had his own ideas about correct behavior, not excusing even the Queen if she fell short of his high standards on certain occasions. We'll see more of him later. When it turned out that this young paragon (fatally wounded in the Netherlands in 1586) had died almost penniless, Walsingham paid all of Sidney's debts and funeral expenses, a large sum of money, rather than allow any shame to be attached to his memory. Just a few years later, Walsingham himself died penniless or nearly so, having supported some of his many agents and spies out of his own pocket because the Queen could not or would not cover those items. She may have regarded his expenditures as just compensation for the money she lost in some of the overseas investments that he had encouraged.

PC Alert: Elizabeth seems to have developed an intricate calculus of personal profit and loss, which included money, power, security, prestige and honor among other variables. In relation to Walsingham, the final score between them was clearly to her advantage.

2. EARLY FAVORITES

In addition to her stalwart supporters, Elizabeth depended on certain other men as she learned to cope with the hard work of governing. **Sir Robert Dudley** (1532-1588), late elevated as 1st **Earl of Leicester** (1564), was one of several subjects widely regarded as Elizabeth's **early "favorites"**. These men were not necessarily her lovers or potential husbands, but sophisticated and attractive courtiers with whom she could enjoy dancing, horseback riding, games of chess, flirtation, companionship, even brief periods of intimacy or near-intimacy within the constraints and obligations of her very public life as Queen. **Dudley** (later called **Leicester** because of his noble rank) was the earliest of them, actually a close friend even before her coronation in 1558. He stepped easily into the role of leading courtier, having been brought up as the son of a Duke, familiar with the ways of royalty and well schooled in knightly activities including horsemanship and jousting. Elizabeth doted on him in the early years of her reign, using pet names such as "Eyes" and "bonny sweet Robin," and showering him with gifts of real estate and money, plus many special tokens of affection, as well as appointments to her Privy Council and other positions. He had already been elected to parliament as early as 1551; she made him a Knight of the Garter in 1559.

But Leicester's privileged status as the Queen's foremost favorite did not last many years. When she observed that he was jealous of a possible rival for her attention (Sir Thomas Heneage) in 1565, Elizabeth burst out: *"God's death, my Lord, I have wished you well, but my favour is not so locked up for you that others shall not participate thereof. And if you think to rule here, I*

will take a course to see you forthcoming [i.e., departing]. I will have but one mistress [meaning herself] and no master."[8]

PC Alert: In essence, Elizabeth was admonishing Leicester for a shocking breach of politically correct behavior as she saw it. He was merely an hereditary Earl, daring to lord it over her, the anointed Queen! Elizabeth's admonition might also be criticized as a minor breach of political correctness on her part, a lack of proper restraint at the royal level; but she was the monarch, after all, the political ruler of England and incidentally head of the Protestant Church of England for good measure. It was her prerogative to determine what conduct was correct and what was not, and to reward or punish her subjects as she saw fit. Although English politics were gradually opening up in the 16th century, the monarch's word was still the last word in many instances.

As to her playing favorites among the men at court, Elizabeth must have realized (early on) that she could get away with a very one-sided game of stylized romance, focusing on whichever man she preferred at any given moment, and letting other favorites (or would-be favorites) like it or lump it. During his long relationship with her, the Earl of Leicester was motivated at times by political ambition (including the exciting possibility of marrying the Queen) as well as genuine affection for Elizabeth as a woman. And he was reassured now and then by her expressions of the strongest feelings towards him. He remained loyal to her until his death in 1588, just after the Armada victory. For a ruler like Elizabeth, whose status was not always secure, the demonstrated loyalty of subordinates usually trumped any other kind of political correctness. Elizabeth reportedly wept as she read and re-read Leicester's last affectionate letter to her.

Sir Christopher Hatton (1540-1591) was an early favorite picked out by the sprightly Queen herself; she had been delighted to observe him at court, dancing an intricate, athletic step known as the *galliard* that she particularly enjoyed doing. Soon enough, Hatton was one of her regular dance partners, and a passionately outspoken admirer (in speeches and in writing) of her grace, beauty, intelligence, and other attributes. No doubt the Queen found his behavior to be pleasing. She lost no time in appointing him a "gentleman pensioner" (one of her 50 body guards), then a gentleman stationed close to her bedchamber, and later captain of the yeomen of the guard. Thus he was never very far from her, day or night, and there were rumors of sexual activity (as there were regarding several other favorites of the Queen).

PC Alert: Hatton was fully alert to the potential risks at this point: he avoided any hint of forwardness (or political incorrectness) by carefully cultivating the reputation of a model courtier, unmarried and childless, presumably chaste, one who adored Elisabeth to the exclusion of all other women. Hatton would die rather than be separated from her for more than a day or two. This was his chivalric pose, at any rate, and he continued to be included in the Queen's exclusive gatherings of advisers and confidantes. In Elizabeth's world, as she grew older, it was increasingly correct for courtiers to maintain the fantasy of her continuing youth and beauty, to praise her extravagantly day and night; and Hatton did not tire of doing this. What did he gain thereby? He was appointed Lord Chancellor in 1587 and Knight of the Garter in 1588, but received no financial rewards; on the contrary, he spent a big part of his fortune on lavish entertainment of the Queen and her court, which could amount to several hundred people on lengthy visits to country estates. Elizabeth loved big parties, especially when she was not expected to pay the bills.

In 1577 Hatton had been one of the financial backers of Francis Drake's expedition into the Pacific Ocean (other backers included Walsingham, Leicester, and the Queen). With his share of profits from Drake's voyage, Hatton proceeded to build what was then the largest mansion in England (Holdenby, in Northamptonshire, 1583), but he quixotically refused to sleep there until Elizabeth had done so, which she never did.

PC Alert: Careful though he usually was, Hatton violated the Queen's notions of political correctness by outspending her on palatial housing, an activity where she assumed that she should reign supreme. She was famously snobbish. What right did a mere mortal have to compete with her, even to outdo her? Hatton died insolvent in 1591, owing the substantial amount of £56,000 to the Queen, and this fact may have mollified her. It is said that she unexpectedly paid for a formal state funeral at Old St. Paul's Cathedral, London. But the details are lacking. Did Elizabeth attend the ceremony? If so, this could have been an occasion for her to praise Hatton in public, better late than never.

3. KNIGHTS ERRANT

Queen Elizabeth I, who never left England, occasionally authorized one or another of her more daring subjects to venture overseas, seeking territorial advantage such as a "northwest passage" to Asia, or sites for future colonies, while incidentally preying on vulnerable Spanish shipping and weakly defended seaports in the Caribbean and elsewhere. In certain instances, Elizabeth invested her own money and/or included her ships in these projects; in every instance it was she or her ministers who approved the licenses or other official documents, such as those giving mariners

legitimacy as "privateers" (authorized agents of her government) rather than pirates.[9]

I call these individuals **"knights errant"** after the medieval characters of an earlier age, who preferred to wander the world impulsively, instead of consistently following a rational plan. In some cases, Queen Elizabeth couldn't be sure what her more adventurous knights would end up doing after she turned them loose, but she could still be talked into letting them try. It's also possible that she was partly motivated by a mischievous wish for international affairs to be stirred up a little, even as she struggled with her heavy (sometimes tedious) responsibilities as ruler.

These Elizabethan knights errant were inclined to plunge themselves and their followers into dangerous situations without sufficient preparation and support--such as long, uncharted voyages into the unknown, or impromptu battles against more powerful enemies. If they succeeded (or if they failed spectacularly, in some cases) they stood the chance of being hailed as *heroes.*

PC High Alert: Elizabeth gradually came to realize that *heroic behavior* could be extremely incorrect (or politically troublesome, at least) from her vantage point, as many of her subjects tended to confuse heroism with the best sort of leadership potential. *Hero today, rival tomorrow!* Nearly all of the rivals were males, with whom it would have been difficult for her to compete. The prior history of the English monarchy included some instructive examples, of which she was quite aware; and during the later years of her reign, a commoner called "Shakespeare" was dramatizing these and similar stories for all to see. So the best course of action was to nip any new heroes in the bud, by not providing them with opportunities for praise or other forms of free publicity.

This insight into Queen Elizabeth's motivation helps us to understand how the various knights errant of her kingdom were dealt with. The earliest important example is **Sir Humphrey Gilbert** (c. 1537-1583). He was one of the first Elizabethans to talk enthusiastically about the prospect of overseas expansion, and one of the first to actually do something about it, though his efforts were generally clumsy and ineffective. Gilbert came from an old provincial family with strong but obscure ties to Elizabeth, even before she became Queen (it seems that his aunt had been one of her nursemaids during childhood). Gilbert entered Princess Elizabeth's service as an eager young man, a soldier rather than a sailor, and distinguished himself in the 1560s by helping to suppress her "uncyvill" Catholic subjects in Ireland.

Hot-tempered and unnecessarily violent on occasion, Gilbert also proved to be an over-ambitious, greedy visionary of sorts; he devoted his later years to the idea of establishing English colonies in the New World. In the early 1580s he conjured up (and raised some of the financial backing for) proposals that would have given him enormous power and extensive property in North America, if he had succeeded; but somehow the conditions of wind and weather were seldom quite right for him to sail very far from England. After several false starts, Sir Francis Walsingham informed Gilbert that the Queen wished him not to accompany a proposed expedition, despite the fact that she had previously approved it, because he was "a man noted of not good happ [aptitude or good fortune] by sea."[10] Gilbert was terribly disappointed. At the last minute, however, Elizabeth changed her mind again and permitted Gilbert to go abroad, due to the intervention of her current favorite at court, Walter Raleigh, who happened to be Gilbert's half-brother. More about Raleigh in a few moments. Elizabeth had little or no

financial investment in Gilbert's projects, and may not have taken him seriously as a future leader of English activity in the New World; but she seems to have been sufficiently moved by strong feelings of appreciation for the unquestioning loyalty and support of his patriotic Devonshire family to let him try. She was not worried about the possibility that Gilbert could succeed in becoming rich and powerful enough to pose any sort of threat or challenge to her.

Gilbert's final overseas adventure would have planted an English colony at what is now Newport, Rhode Island, in 1583; but this historic effort was cut short by severe storms and disastrous errors of navigation, with Gilbert insisting on leading the convoy in his own tiny ship, the *Squirrel*.[11] He was last seen from another ship, sitting on deck, trying to read a book, possibly the Bible or Thomas More's *Utopia*, before the churning waters of the North Atlantic engulfed him and his hapless crew of eight. With Gilbert's death by drowning, the idea of creating English colonies in North America was nearly extinguished at this point, but some of his relatives and friends were able to revive it (with the Queen's approval) in the next few years.

Another of Queen Elizabeth's knights errant, **Sir Richard Grenville** (c. 1542-1591) was a cousin of both Gilbert and Raleigh, and had a similar background. Brought up in a family with strong traditions of military service to the monarchy, dating from the Norman conquest, Grenville fought in Ireland, was knighted, and elected twice to parliament. He seems to have manifested irrational or literally bloodthirsty tendencies from time to time, both in his public life and in private. For instance, it was said of Grenville that "while at dinner or supper, he would carouse three or four glasses of wine, and in a [fit of] bravery take the glasses between his teeth and crush them in pieces and swallow them down, so that often times the blood ran out

of his mouth without any harm at all unto him."[12] Whether true or not, such stories made it easy for men like Grenville to overawe more timid opponents, or at least to give them pause before challenging him.

Grenville was eager to seek his fortune abroad, like Gilbert, but unlike Gilbert he did have some aptitude for the sea.[13] In 1574 he had proposed (and organized financial backers for) an unprecedented voyage into the Pacific, hoping to find bountiful territories unclaimed by Spain—and possibly to locate the opening of a navigable "northwest passage" through North America. This far-reaching project was rejected by Queen Elizabeth because of temporarily smoother relations with the Spanish king, only to be revived in 1576-77 and given instead to Francis Drake (a socially inferior upstart, from Grenville's viewpoint). Drake jumped at the chance, and embarked on an amazing 3-year voyage of circumnavigation and discovery. Deeply disappointed, Grenville tried to content himself with homely duties, serving as sheriff of Cornwall and converting Buckland Abbey (formerly church property near Plymouth, England) into a residence fit for a knight. Drake's triumphant return to Plymouth in 1580, with several tons of Spanish treasure for the Queen and other investors, must have been a severe blow to Grenville's ego. He put Buckland Abbey on the market and moved to a more remote estate, only to learn later how Drake, recently knighted, had purchased the Abbey through intermediaries with a third of the £10,000 that Elizabeth allotted to him as his share (a tiny portion) of the huge fortune he had brought home from the Pacific.

In April 1585 Grenville was given a second chance for success in North America, leading an expedition to "Virginia" (present-day North Carolina) on behalf of Walter Raleigh (also his cousin) who had become such a great favorite of Queen Elizabeth that she would no longer permit him to go

overseas himself. Grenville, leaving 107 men "settled" at Roanoke, sailed back to England for additional supplies but failed to deliver them in time. The seemingly ubiquitous Francis Drake (homeward bound from a Caribbean raid) had stopped at Roanoke before him, in June 1586, and rescued the starving survivors.

For the next two years, as impending war with Spain made further voyages to America increasingly problematic, Grenville was assigned to unexciting work on coastal defenses against the Great Armada, the Spanish invasion fleet, whose celebrated defeat in 1588 would be widely attributed to the superior seamanship of Drake and other English mariners. Grenville had been denied the chance to take a significant part in this major naval battle, perhaps because of his well-known animosity towards Drake, yet he had been ordered to put his own best ships under Drake's command.[14] Reputed to be "a man of intolerable pride and unsatiable ambition,"[15] Grenville was undoubtedly seething with frustration and jealousy after that.

But Drake's own career ran aground in 1590, when he and others (given a huge force of 130 ships and 23,000 men) failed to execute a complicated plan to seize control of Portugal, plus some of the Azores Islands, from Spain. As a result of this expensive failure, and regardless of his earlier successes, Queen Elizabeth did not give Drake another command at sea until 1595. ***PC Alert:*** Drake's performance had been so bad from Queen Elizabeth's standpoint that it was not simply a matter of failure to fulfill her wishes; Drake had cost her a lot in terms of money, power, and prestige. If she had not needed to keep Drake in reserve for future emergencies such as additional invasion attempts by Spain, she might have grounded him permanently; or worse. But five years ashore must have seemed like eternal punishment to a seagoing man like Drake.

Grenville's biographer writes: "In the curious way in which his fortune was connected with Grenville's, indirectly, almost as if by mutual exclusion, Drake's reversal opened the way to Grenville's opportunity."[16] In 1591, a fleet of 16 English ships were sent to intercept a large convoy of Spanish treasure galleons in the Azores Islands. Outnumbered more than 3:1, the Englishmen withdrew to fight another day—all but Grenville, in command of the *Revenge*, a strongly-built vessel which had been used effectively by Drake against the Spanish Armada and was still considered the best warship in the Queen's navy. Grenville, unwilling or unable to get away, drove his ship into the midst of the Spanish fleet, doing much damage and drawing fire from all sides, until he had no more ammunition and only 25 men left standing on the shattered, dismasted hull. Grenville, with multiple wounds, died a few days later. His cousin Walter Raleigh, who did not personally witness this incident (because of a last-minute order from the Queen, keeping him ashore), wrote an extremely flattering account of it, which was widely circulated.

Although Elizabeth deplored Grenville's intentional sacrifice of himself and most of his crew (not to mention the loss of a valuable ship, which could be repaired and used later by the enemy) many of her subjects reached a different conclusion. This incident came to be widely regarded as an outstanding demonstration of English *heroism.* [17] Future generations of British sailors and soldiers would be called upon to do likewise, at sea or on land, in conflicts all over the world, as the new entity known as the British Empire took shape. Alfred Lord Tennyson (Poet Laureate of the Victorian era) would celebrate Grenville's sacrifice again with an rousing ballad on the eve of World War I. We don't need a "PC Alert" here to get the point that heroism is a political factor which rulers must learn to handle with care.

Now let's look more closely at the most famous knight errant in English history, **Sir Francis Drake** (c. 1540-1596). Drake had the humblest family origins of all the Elizabethans discussed in this essay—his Latin motto, *Sic Parvis Magna,* means "Greatness from Small Beginnings." Yet having been recruited by Walsingham while still a commoner, because of his remarkable aptitude for the sea and his fierce hostility towards Spain (based on misdeeds for which he vowed revenge) Drake was already inspired by the knightly tradition of lifelong service to the sovereign. During his famous voyage of circumnavigation (1577-80) Drake seems to have believed that he was acting *in loco reginae* (to coin a phrase), and in accordance with a plan she had personally approved. Upon his return to England, Drake reported directly to Queen Elizabeth, talked privately with her for six hours (a rare privilege), and had his precious cargo of gold, silver, jewels and spices (all or nearly all of it) delivered under guard to her officials in London.

PC Alert: Despite some initial uncertainty about Drake's actions and their possible consequences, Queen Elizabeth soon decided that it had been politically correct for him to transfer a huge amount of wealth from Spanish hands to hers. And the English public, most of it, evidently agreed. Drake was instantly a popular hero. But after this, as we have already noted, Elizabeth usually kept Drake on a tight leash, forcing him to prove his loyalty and worth to her repeatedly. Drake accepted these terms, in order to be able to continue serving Queen and country as a leading mariner.

You may be aware that in recent years, some historians have rejected the whole notion of heroism, and a few have singled out Francis Drake in particular with highly charged accusations of psychopathic behavior, specifically so-called "conscienceless" murder and piracy. These charges

refer mostly his famous voyage of circumnavigation, about which I will comment briefly.

Drake was doing what Elizabeth had directed him to do, or so he thought. He apparently carried some form of written orders from her, which he flourished when addressing his fellow adventurers and his crew. This document, like those issued to other ships' captains at the time, would have directed him to utilize *"punishment, correction or execution"* (my italics) to deal with mutiny and other forms of unruly behavior that might disrupt a voyage undertaken to do the Queen's business, which included exploration and discovery. On the strength of such a royal "commission," Drake formally tried and executed an unruly companion (Thomas Doughty) who refused to obey his orders. Thereafter Drake had no difficulty exercising his authority as leader of the expedition.

In the Pacific, his force now reduced to one well-armed ship and less than a hundred men, Drake obtained food, water, gold, silver, jewels, marine supplies, maps, etc. from various Spanish vessels and port facilities. He literally took whatever he needed or wanted, from people he considered the Queen's enemies and his own. A San Francisco scholar who translated and published the official Spanish records of these encounters said: "We now know that Drake succeeded in doing so without shedding the blood of a single Spaniard." [18] This finding has been overlooked by Drake's "revisionist" critics, one of whom has written: "He was a pirate, and a good one, largely because he was untroubled by a conscience that in most men would murmur against theft or murder." [19] This view of Drake as a conscienceless (or psychopathic) murderer is debatable as we learn more about the societal norms and values of the Elizabethan era in England, where murder, prolonged torture, and various agonizing methods of execution were

common.[20] I've already mentioned the bloody reputations of Humphrey Gilbert and Richard Grenville, who were guilty of killing unarmed prisoners of war. Compared to them and others of his contemporaries, Francis Drake comes across as a man of purposeful action, bold but not reckless or out of control, who used his natural abilities, his acquired skills, and the resources available to him in serving Queen and country, sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

As to theft, Kelsey and other revisionists have conveniently ignored the fact that whatever Drake supposedly "stole" from the Spanish had previously been stolen by the Spanish from the indigenous people of the New World, often with considerable loss of life. But in those days there were no international laws to prohibit either kind of theft.

What about Drake's ego? Was he self-consciously "heroic" like Gilbert (drowning himself and his crew) or Grenville (taking on an entire convoy of Spanish ships)? Apparently not. The "greatness" in Drake's motto (which was personally chosen for him by the Queen) refers to the significance of the results he achieved for England in his voyage of 1577-80, rather than to his opinion of his own importance. His circumnavigation of the globe, though not planned in advance, succeeded because of a remarkable combination of good luck, good judgment at many times of decision, and determination to get the job done for the Queen. He couldn't find the "northwest passage" through North America (because it doesn't exist), but he did claim the territory of "Nova Albion" (probably today's British Columbia) for Elizabeth and her successors; then he sailed westward, the rest of the way around the world, to deliver his shipload of treasure to her back in England. For his services Drake was knighted aboard his ship in 1581 with the Queen looking on —this was an unprecedented honor—and he was granted an

impressive coat of arms [21] that Elizabeth may have chosen personally for him. Also as mentioned earlier, he was given £10,000 as a financial reward, less than 2% of the estimated total value of the cargo he had brought home.[22]

These were enormous rewards to a man of modest beginnings like Drake, but for reasons of her own the Queen refused to give him what he wanted most: permission to publish the detailed maps and notes of his geographical discoveries in the Americas, and the opportunity to make a return voyage to the Pacific coast. He pleaded with her repeatedly but in vain. Elizabeth or her advisors may have thought it best to keep Spain and other countries (and most of England) uncertain as to precisely where Drake had gone and what he had found (or had not found, most particularly the "northwest passage"). After the Queen's death in 1603, this uncertainty persisted until Captain James Cook and others rediscovered "Nova Albion" in the late 18th century, and Drake's claim was renewed, so that much of North America could eventually be added to the British Empire.[23] But convoluted are the ways of historians these days. Drake's behavior is judged by some to be profoundly incorrect, according to their standards, and the Empire itself a huge mistake, doomed to failure from the outset.

I will skip over other famous deeds performed by Drake, such as leading England's ships against the Spanish armada in 1588. Incidentally this was only the first of several large fleets assembled to invade England, and Drake played some part in thwarting or forestalling each of these hostile actions. It's interesting, too, that Queen Elizabeth sometimes conferred with him about how best to meet the Spanish enemy. She addressed him with the authority of commander in chief, calling him simply "my servant Drake," never letting him or anyone else forget that she was in charge: not a heroic figure herself, but a ruler increasingly confident of her own power. Drake

meekly obeyed her, on every occasion that has been recorded, and thus the traditional hierarchical structure of English society was preserved until the so-called "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, and the overthrow of a later monarch, King James II.

4. THE PERFECT KNIGHT

Next I'll tell you a little about a category that has only one example: the **"perfect knight".**

Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) was exceptionally well connected socially and politically: he was the godson and namesake of King Philip II of Spain; he was the nephew of the Earl of Leicester, in whose military campaign in the Netherlands he would be fatally wounded; he was the cousin of his friend the Earl of Essex, to whom he bequeathed a favorite sword; and the unrequited young lover of Essex's sister, Penelope Devereux. Prior to his heroic death as a gallant young soldier (having given part of his body armor to a comrade in need), Sidney had travelled to Paris, Vienna, Florence, and other centers of European culture, and had gained expertise in jousting, poetry, and the rituals of romantic love; thus he was remembered (and virtually worshiped by some of his followers) as a perfect Renaissance knight.

Sidney's debts and funeral expenses amounted to more than £6,000. The Queen, assured that all of these bills would be paid by Walsingham, ordered the most elaborate public ceremony on record, with black-robed clusters of clergy, court officials, nobles, and knights on horseback, all in the solemn procession, followed by many other officials of lesser status, "walking two and two."[24] Hundreds of ordinary citizens of London, many in mourning

and some bearing arms, brought up the rear. All in all, it was a stunning display of appreciation of an exemplary young Englishman, a genuine military hero, who had also achieved lasting fame as poet, playwright, and leader among his well-born peers.

Considering the magnitude and splendor of this unprecedented public funeral, it is surprising to learn that Elizabeth had shown somewhat less regard for Sir Philip Sidney in private, during his brief lifetime; he was not one of the favorites on whom she liked to bestow personal nicknames, expensive gifts, or special tokens of affection and esteem. Why not? ***PC Alert:*** Perhaps this perfect courtier was simply too perfect for her taste. As a young man, Sidney had set the strictest standards of correct conduct for himself and others of high rank; even the Queen was not exempt from his outspoken criticism when she did something of which he disapproved, such as considering marriage to a foreigner, albeit a Frenchman of noble birth. ***PC 2nd ALERT:*** Even worse perhaps, from Elizabeth's standpoint—even more incorrect, so to speak—in Sidney's conduct there was a noticeable lack of the romantic admiration that she required: Sidney did not rhapsodize blindly about her fading beauty and withered charms, preferring to direct his masculine ardor and his love poems towards ladies younger and fairer than the Queen, whether imaginary or real. So from Elizabeth's viewpoint, much of Sidney's behavior had not been politically correct.

But these were especially difficult times for the Queen. The controversial execution of her rival Mary Queen of Scots had finally taken place, only a week earlier, in October 1586; and a massive invasion of England was now being prepared by the King of Spain, Philip II. Therefore Elizabeth needed to make a very convincing demonstration of national unity and strength, and in 1587, with the magnificent commemoration of this young man's death,

she made it. An idealized Sidney would be remembered as her iconic warrior, the Tudor equivalent of Sir Galahad, the purest and most gallant knight at King Arthur's mythical Round Table. Thus she conveyed an impressive message to the world: *Such are my knights—such is my power—such is England!*

5. LATE FAVORITES

My final category is **"late favorites."** As she aged and weakened physically, Elizabeth continued her practice of picking out one or two or several attractive younger men to shower with favors, in hopes of getting their undivided attention and constant flattery. The two I'll focus on are **Raleigh and Essex.**

Sir Walter Raleigh (c. 1554-1618) might have become one of Queen Elizabeth's most effective knights errant if she had not made him one of her greatest favorites instead. The more she was attracted to Raleigh, it seems, the less she would leave him free to accomplish. But later, after she was finished with him, he accomplished very little.

Raleigh was related to several of the best-known seagoing families of Elizabethan England. (He was a half-brother of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, a cousin of Sir Richard Grenville, and also a distant cousin of Sir Francis Drake, among others). Raleigh tried to reach the Americas in 1578 with one of Gilbert's abortive expeditions, and then added to his military experience in Ireland, acquiring a mixed reputation for tactical brutality and strategic acuity.[25] Sent to London in 1581 with dispatches from the battlefield, Raleigh instantly made a favorable impression on the Queen because of his dashing (call it sexy) appearance and his astute comments about the Irish

situation. Elizabeth preferred him to Leicester, Hatton, or any other favorite for the next several years, and spoiled him accordingly, with frequent gifts of money, real estate, and expensive clothing and accessories such as a suit of solid silver armor. Raleigh greedily took everything she gave him, and asked for more.

1581 was a year of intense excitement about the New World and its wealth. Drake had recently returned from the Pacific with a shipload of treasure, and Raleigh briefly cultivated him, hoping to play a significant part in the next attempt to exploit Drake's discoveries—if such a voyage were authorized. But Drake was denied this permission by the Queen; among other reasons why, Elizabeth understood that the Atlantic coast of America was much closer to England than the Pacific coast, and more immediately profitable, because of Spain's concentration of ill-gotten wealth in the Caribbean and vicinity. So Walter Raleigh tried to take advantage of his own meteoric rise as Elizabeth's favorite of favorites, and position himself as Humphrey Gilbert's successor in exploring the New World (he was actually Sir Humphrey's half-brother, as noted earlier). Gilbert having failed (and died) on an earlier expedition to "New England" in 1583, Raleigh began to redirect England's overseas effort southward to what he called "Virginia" (present-day North Carolina) in honor of Elizabeth, the so-called "Virgin Queen".

PC Alert: By this time, Elizabeth seems to have become emotionally dependent on Raleigh's frequent companionship, so she held him back, like a precious pet on a leash. She listened to his far-sighted plans for colonizing the Atlantic coast of North America, but she would not permit him to sail there himself. Instead, Raleigh had to enlist other English mariners to make the voyages for him, with ships, crews, supplies and would-be colonists that

were supported largely from Raleigh's own resources. Raleigh believed in what he was trying to do. He proudly assumed the title "Lord and Governor of Virginia" although he never actually got there to realize and develop what he envisioned. Within a few years, Raleigh's small coastal settlements died out, from lack of sufficient reinforcements and supplies, so that nothing of his "Virginia" was left in English hands when Queen Elizabeth died in 1603.

PC Alert: Actually, Raleigh's star had begun to fade years before that. Impatient to start a family and have heirs for the fortune he was still hoping to gain, Raleigh infuriated the Queen by entering into a marriage that was kept secret for a while. Elizabeth retaliated by sending him and his wife to the Tower of London (a royal prison) with separate apartments. After his release, he was barred from court for the next five years, but managed to survive on one of his recently-acquired country estates, where he had ample opportunity to think about the twists and turns of political correctness and incorrectness in his case. But there were more such problems to come.

Raleigh's last overseas project, searching for a legendary "City of Gold" (present-day Guyana) in South America, was his final failure as a would-be explorer. After Elizabeth's death, Raleigh quickly became *persona non grata* to her Stuart successor, King James I, because his attitude of continuing hostility towards Spain was no longer in England's best interests. Consequently, Raleigh spent most of the next 15 years as a political prisoner in the Tower of London; with nobody left to take his side, he was executed for treason in 1618.

Finally, let's take a brief look at **Sir Robert Devereux** (1566-1601), who became the 2nd **Earl of Essex** at age ten, upon the death of his father in 1576.

Essex was Elizabeth's last and arguably her most spectacular favorite. He arrived at her court in a blaze of glory in 1586, having been knighted for valor on the field of battle in the Netherlands. To be just one more of the Queen's many courtiers was of little importance to this exuberant young man, however; he was already high in the ranks of English nobility, and hugely egotistical. For a short while, Devereux may have been satisfied by the many compliments and social invitations he received from the Queen and others in London; but he clearly preferred the active, military life, with its emphasis on chivalric honor and selfless bravery—which could easily lead to further advancement for him. Thus in 1587 Essex impulsively ran away from court to rejoin the war on the Continent. He was stopped by order of Elizabeth before he made it across the Channel, but he ran away again in 1589 to join Drake and others in attempting to seize control of Portugal from Spain. The failure of this ill-conceived campaign did nothing to diminish Essex's eagerness for new adventures, the more grandiose the better.

Much taken with him despite the 33-year difference in their ages, Elizabeth tried to keep Essex close by offering him various government positions and assignments, but she could never quite satisfy his bounding ego; "he consciously fashioned himself as [Sir Philip] Sidney's heir, as the ideal courtier knight."[26] Having inherited Sidney's favorite sword, and married his widow, Essex took over the leadership of Sidney's friends and numerous followers. But Essex's idea of knightly behavior was badly skewed; often it involved taking reckless, pointless risks, which suggest a serious lack of judgment. Sir Christopher Hatton, then Lord Chancellor, tried to caution Essex in 1591; he said: "Your Lordship best knows that true valor consists rather in constant performing of that which has been advisedly

forethought than in an aptness or readiness of thrusting your person indifferently into every danger."[27] True valor required a certain amount of common sense or judgment—which Essex, with all of his abilities and advantages, seems to have lacked.

Lack of judgment was also revealed in Essex's eagerness to create lots of new knights on the battlefield: 24 at Rouen (1591), 68 at Cadiz (1596), about 80 in Ireland (1599). These spur-of-the moment gestures probably delighted the men so honored, and made Essex increasingly popular, but (adding so many names to the roster so quickly) they seriously cheapened the value of English knighthood and distorted its meaning. "After Ireland, where Essex had continued to dub knights in defiance of Elizabeth's direct orders, the Queen was so enraged that she determined to degrade the new knights and was only dissuaded after the intervention of [Burghley's son, the Secretary of State] Robert Cecil."[28]

PC Alert: The wholesale dubbing of knights was part of a larger story of increasingly poor judgment and irrational behavior on the part of Essex. At this time, unfortunately, Elizabeth kept on promoting him to higher levels of military incompetence. In 1599 he took command of a well-equipped army of 16,000 men from England to put down a rebellion in Ireland. Instead of using this numerical superiority to crush the enemy immediately, as the Queen surely expected him to do, Essex frittered away his force on minor attacks and maneuvers, until it was no longer sufficient for accomplishing his major objective. Such wasteful misuse of the Queen's limited military resources was extremely incorrect as Elizabeth saw it.

Essex tried desperately to save face in his own pseudo-chivalrous way, by offering to engage in single combat (winner take all) with the elderly leader of the Irish rebel forces, who sensibly and predictably declined. Essex then

rushed to England in a frantic attempt to justify his actions to the Queen—but now he was far out of Elizabeth's favor, and he could not talk his way back. He impulsively decided to make a show of force instead—to take Elizabeth prisoner and hold her in the Tower or elsewhere, until she came to see things as he did. Meanwhile he would presumably rule the kingdom in her place. This was the ultimate degree of political incorrectness for Elizabeth Tudor, as it would have been for most legitimately established rulers. Essex paid the ultimate price. He ended up being tried and executed for treason in 1601.

EPILOGUE

As expected, Elizabeth I was peacefully succeeded by James Stuart, the son of Mary Queen of Scots; he ruled England, Wales, and Scotland as James I. For reasons that are not entirely clear to me, one of James's immediate priorities was the rewriting of the Protestant Bible used by the Church of England, of which he was now the head. He enlisted 47 biblical scholars, mostly academics from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, who worked in teams to produce the "King James version" in 1611. The resulting Bible is cherished by some readers for its heightened, poetic use of the English language, although none of its contributors was a major poet.

For other readers, the King James can be a collection of philosophical puzzles or provocations, especially the "Apochrypha" verses which were inserted in 1611 between the Old Testament and the New. Without pretending to be a Biblical scholar, I have thought about some of these verses for years, and debated them with myself at odd moments. For

example, I turn to **Ecclesiasticus 44:1**, which says: *"Let us now praise famous men."*

Oh really? Why praise? I have asked myself. Why famous? What about the infamous? Why men? Why not women as well? Why not, indeed.

Conceivably as a result of (someone's) discontent with gender prejudice, the "Apochrypha" books were removed from the Protestant Bible in the 1880s, the heyday of another strong and decisive ruler, Queen Victoria, who ruled from 1837 to 1901. Victorian standards of political correctness were quite different from the standards enforced by Queen Elizabeth I some three centuries earlier, but the two women had at least one belief in common: they definitely did not mandate the praising of famous men.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Dickinson, p. 64.
[2] McKee, p. 300.
[3] Below the rank of gentleman she would not go to select a favorite. "It is a certain note of the times that the Queen in her choice never took into her favour a meer new man, or a Mechanick." (Sir Robert Naunton, Fragmenta Regalia, 1641, quoted in Winton, p. 12.)
[4] Except for a continuing interest in finding new sources of gold, whether through mining or alchemy, according to John Dee's diary, available online.
[5] For example, see Williams, p. 34.
[6] For example, see Cooper, plate 5, following p. 181.
[7] This painting, now in the National Museum of Wales, is entitled "The Family of Henry VIII: an Allegory of the Tudor Succession. Queen Mary and Philip of Spain are shown with Mars, symbolizing War; Elizabeth joins hands with Peace and Plenty (Williams, p. 102). To it has been added a personal inscription: "THE QUENE TO WALSHINGHAM THIS TABLET SENTE MARKE OF HER PEOPLES AND HER OWNE CONTENTE" (Bate & Thornton, p. 24).
[8] Quoted in Weir, p. 166.
[9] "To a Spaniard, all the English seamen were pirates; they made no distinction between piracy and privateering, especially when the latter was directed against Spain." (Rowse, *Sir Richard Grenville of the Revenge,* p. 256) "It will be noticed however that in the official charges against Drake, drawn up in Spain . . . the epithet [pirate] does not occur." (Nuttall, p. xiv)

[10] Quinn, *op. cit.,* p. 82.
[11] Compare the estimated tonnage or carrying capacity of Gilbert's *Squirrel* (8-10 tons) with that of Drake's *Pelican/Golden Hinde* (100-150 tons) and Henry VIII's flagship *Mary Rose* (500 tons).
[12] Rowse, *op. cit.,* p. 235.
[13] His father had served as captain of Henry VIII's flagship, the *Mary Rose.*
[14] Rowse, *op. cit.,* p. 257.
[15] Ralph Lane, Governor of Roanoke colony, to Walsingham, 8 Sept 1585; Cal. State Papers, Col., quoted in Wikipedia article "Richard Grenville (sea captain)."
[16] Rowse, *op. cit.,* p. 288.
[17] Rowse *op. cit.,* p. 23, says: "There was never any fight more famous in a nation's history; never any that was more purely heroic in quality—that mixture of dare-devilry, defiance of fate, supreme indifference to consequences, which men admire more than anything, because their own ordinary lives are at every point so circumscribed by circumstance, from which there is, save in such moments, no emancipation."
[18] Nuttall p. xxxiii. A noteworthy conclusion, based on her translations of numerous contemporary Spanish records found in Mexico and Spain.
[19] Kelsey, p. 136.
[20] It is beyond the scope of this short paper to offer a detailed refutation of appraisals such as Kelsey's, except to suggest that human behavior should be assessed in relation to recognizable norms or standards in a particular historical context. If Drake was a thief or a pirate, so were many other Englishmen (and women) that profited from licensed "privateering," not least Elizabeth their Queen, who issued the licenses and usually received a share of any loot. If Drake was guilty of bloodshed, then so were many other adventurers, including Gilbert, Grenville, Ralegh, and Essex, whose victims sometimes included unarmed prisoners and civilians as well as enemy combatants; and we know Queen Elizabeth occasionally ordered bloody executions, torture, and punishments of various kinds, or condoned them. So did her Stuart successor, James I. According to MacGregor (p. 260): "In Shakespeare's world, human butchery was a part of life. Strolling across London Bridge to see a play at the Globe or the Rose, you would sometimes pass rows of traitors' heads impaled on spikes. The execution of criminals was, if not exactly public entertainment, certainly popular public spectacle."
[21] To see Drake's coat of arms and motto, go to http://www.wyverngules.com/Documents/ArmsofSFD/arms_of_sir_francis_drake.htm
[22] Drake's supposedly "greedy" behavior could be contrasted with that of other Elizabethan knights, Gilbert or Ralegh for example, who claimed enormous tracts of land in the Americas for themselves (rather than the Queen) and hoped to create enormous streams of revenue. Even Sidney the "perfect knight" was briefly tempted when Gilbert offered him an estate of 30,000 acres in what is now Rhode Island; but later, being Sidney, he refused it.
[23] Gough, Paper I, p. 52.
[24] Wallace, p. 396. We might wonder if some of Sidney's many debtors were marching in the ranks of the grocers?
[25] "That autumn [1580] there was foreign intervention in Ireland: the Pope sent a small expedition of some seven or eight hundred Italians, who fortified themselves upon the

peninsula at Smerwick in the extreme south-west. ‘When the [Italian] captain had yielded himself and the fort appointed to be surrendered, captain Ralegh together with captain Macworth entered into the castle and made a great slaughter, many or the most of them being put to the sword.’” (Rowse, *op. cit.*,, p. 135)

[26] Dickinson, p. 15.

[27] Dickinson, p. 19, source note 98.

[28] Dickinson, p. 21.

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