

CHAPTER
17

Section 3

PRIMARY SOURCE **A Conference with Elizabeth I**
by André Hurault

Elizabeth I (1533–1603) was the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. She became queen of England in 1558. In the following passage, the French ambassador to England records his impressions of a private meeting that he had with Elizabeth I on December 8, 1597. As you read his account, think about the queen’s appearance and behavior.

On the 8th of December I did not think to be given an audience for that day and was resolved to make my complaint; but about one hour after noon there came a gentleman from the Queen who said to me that her Majesty was much grieved that she had not given me audience sooner, and that she prayed me to come to her that very hour. He brought me in a coach to take me down to the river where one of the barges awaited me, and we went thence to the gate of the Queen’s palace. . . .

She was strangely attired in a dress of silver cloth, white and crimson, or silver ‘gauze’, as they call it. This dress had slashed sleeves lined with red taffeta, and was girt about with other little sleeves that hung down to the ground, which she was for ever twisting and untwisting. She kept the front of her dress open . . . and often she would open the front of this robe with her hands as if she was too hot. The collar of the robe was very high, and the lining of the inner part all adorned with little pendants of rubies and pearls, very many, but quite small. She had also a chain of rubies and pearls about her neck. On her head she wore a garland of the same material and beneath it a great reddish-coloured wig, with a great number of spangles of gold and silver, and hanging down over her forehead some pearls, but of no great worth. On either side of her ears hung two great curls of hair, almost down to her shoulders and within the collar of her robe, spangled as the top of her head. . . .

As for her face, it is and appears to be very aged. It is long and thin, and her teeth are very yellow and unequal, compared with what they were formerly, so they say, and on the left side less than on the right. Many of them are missing so that one cannot understand her easily when she speaks quickly. Her figure is fair and tall and graceful in whatever she does; so far as may be she keeps her dignity, yet humbly and graciously withal.

All the time she spoke she would often rise from her chair, and appear to be very impatient with what I was saying. She would complain that the fire was hurting her eyes, though there was a great screen before it and she six or seven feet away; yet did she give orders to have it extinguished, making them bring water to pour upon it. She told me that she was well pleased to stand up, and that she used to speak thus with the ambassadors who came to seek her, and used sometimes to tire them, of which they would on occasion complain. I begged her not to overtire herself in any way, and I rose when she did; and then she sat down again, and so did I. At my departure she rose and conducted me to that same place where she had come to receive me, and again began to say that she was grieved that all the gentlemen I had brought should see her in that condition, and she called to see them. They made their reverence before her, one after the other, and she embraced them all with great charm and smiling countenance.

from André Hurault, Journal of an Embassy from Henry IV to Queen Elizabeth, 1597, trans. by G. B. Harrison and R. A. Jones (Nonesuch Press, 1931). Reprinted in John Carey, ed., Eyewitness to History (New York: Avon Books, 1987), 156-159.

Research Options

1. **Writing Expository Paragraphs** Use print or on-line resources to find out more about the life and reign of Elizabeth I. Then write a brief biographical sketch and share it with your classmates.
2. **Making Judgments** André Hurault provides a detailed description of the queen’s attire. Research fashions of the Renaissance. Then sketch costume designs for a film set during this time period and display them in class.