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The Sidneys and the Continent: The Stuart Period

Michael G. Brennan

The Sidneys' involvement in Continental affairs during the seventeenth century through diplomacy, administrative appointments, and personal travel is central to an understanding of their public prestige and family lives. But while their court status was frequently enhanced by onerous duties abroad, the impact of these commitments on their family lives, especially in terms of their expense and a debilitating sense of being exiled from home and loved ones, was immense. The remarkable wealth and range of the Sidneys' family archive, published writings, and other surviving documents makes the narrative of their experiences from the accession of James I in 1603 until the death of William III in 1702 well worth exploring—and at times redefining—from the specific perspective of their Continental activities.

Robert Sidney, First Earl of Leicester

The new reign began promisingly for Robert Sidney (Illustrations 13, 14, and 15) as he had personally known King James VI of Scotland since 1588. On 4 May 1603 he was raised to the rank of Viscount Lisle, followed by his appointment on 13 May as Queen Anne's Lord Chamberlain. Given his productive dealings with King Henri IV during the last decade of Elizabeth's reign, Robert was a logical choice to be sent in early June 1603 to Canterbury formally to welcome to England the French ambassador, Maximilien de Béthune, Marquis de Rosny, whom he had known since 1593. It seems that he took this opportunity to discuss with him the need to reinforce the Flushing garrison. Certainly, when Rosny's brother-in-law, André de Cochefilet, Baron de Vaucelas, was passing through Flushing in mid-July, Sidney's deputy governor, Sir William Browne, invited him to dinner and then duly reported their discussions about the garrison back to Sidney. Vaucelas had been used in mid-June to deliver some correspondence from Henri IV to Queen Anne, and Browne also reported on 17 July 1603 French anxieties over the strong Continental sympathies of the new king and queen of England:

He discoursed somewhat freely in private and told me ... that our Queen was very goodly and beautiful lady and that he met her beyond Northampton but that he feared that she would be induced to procure our King to peace with Spain and that, as he said, haply by some propositions [which] might be made for some alliance of her children. I told him that I hope the contrary (HMC *De L'Isle and Dudley* 3:41–2; Hay 145, 217)

Robert Sidney had been appointed as successor to his eldest brother Philip as Governor of Flushing in 1589, and regarded this arduous posting as a personal exile from the English court. In a letter to the Earl of Essex dated 24 May 1597 Sidney had bitterly lamented: “I see Flushing must be the grave of my youth and I fear of my fortune.” But under James I it became much easier for him to perform these duties as an absentee office-holder, especially after his appointment as Lord Chamberlain of Queen Anne’s household and Surveyor of the Queen’s Revenues and his nomination in July 1604 as a member of her council, since these posts required his regular attendance at court (HMC *Salisbury* 7:210–11; Levin, Carney, and Barrett-Graves 30–38; Shephard).

Nevertheless, Sidney’s journeys to and from Flushing remained fraught with unexpected dangers. In August 1605, for example, his vessel was blown off course in a storm and was obliged to make an emergency landing at Gravelines, then under control of a Spanish governor, Archduke Albert, from where he hastily continued his journey overland, crossing through Spanish-held Flanders and Brabant on his way to Flushing. Rumors, certainly false, immediately began to circulate at the English court, suggesting that his landing at Gravelines had been deliberate and part of a secret mission to negotiate the handing over of Flushing to the Spanish. The Venetian ambassador reported on 14 September that King James had responded by issuing a peremptory order for Sidney to return home without delay, implying that he would be deemed a traitor, his estates confiscated, and under threat of execution if he failed to obey (CSPV 1603–07 271). In fact, the Privy Council had issued a more temperately phrased summons, and Sidney was obliged to write to King James and to solicit the support of the Earl of Salisbury so that he could conclusively establish his innocence. Although he was eventually able to clear his name, this misadventure may well have cost him a seat on the Privy Council (HMC *Salisbury* 17:380, 390–94, 403–4, 413–16). It was also damaging to his burgeoning reputation as Continental administrator and diplomat, as John Chamberlain’s mocking comment to Ralph Winwood on 25 October makes clear: “I doubt not but you have heard how Viscount Lisle was called *coram* for his absurd journey by Flanders to Flushing; and how he was fain to cry *peccavi* and confess his error” (1:209; Hay 213–15).

In late June 1606 Queen Anne’s brother, Christian IV of Denmark (1577–1648), made an official state visit to England, and as the queen’s Lord Chamberlain, Robert Sidney was personally involved in the arrangements. The Danish king, then aged twenty-nine, and his entourage proved a bibulously riotous assembly, and the various court entertainments, which Sidney would have been obliged to attend in his official capacity, became notorious for their indecorous indulgence. He remained occupied with these celebrations during July and August. In early July, for example, military tilts were held in Christian IV’s honor at Greenwich Park, with Sidney’s nephews, the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, taking two of the four lead roles in an elaborate chivalric event, the “Four Knights Errant Dominated by the Fortunate Islands” (Brennan, *Sidneys of Penshurst* 119). Just over twenty-five years later Sidney’s son, Robert, second Earl of Leicester (Illustration 23), was to encounter the drunkard Christian IV once again during a largely abortive 1632 embassy to Denmark.

Robert Sidney’s dealings with the Continent took an unexpected turn of events in 1606 with the escalation of his ongoing disputes with Sir Robert (or Roberto) Dudley (1574–1649), the illegitimate son of his uncle, the Earl of Leicester (d. 1588), by Lady Douglas Sheffield. Dudley claimed that his mother had gone through a secret but lawful marriage ceremony with his father, and consequently he was the legal heir both to the Earl of Leicester and his brother, Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, rather than Robert Sidney. The case was rejected by the Star Chamber on 4 May 1605, and soon afterwards, on 25 June, Dudley obtained a license to travel abroad, leaving England in July and abandoning his wife Alice and their five surviving children. He traveled in the company of Elizabeth Southwell, a former Maid

of Honour (disguised as one of his pages), with whom he later converted to Catholicism and had thirteen children. After spending some time in France, he took up residence in late 1606 at Florence, where he styled himself “Earl of Warwick and Leicester” and was employed as a naval engineer by Ferdinand I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, and later by his son, Cosimo II (Adams).

Emboldened by his new position at the Florentine court, Dudley revived his claims to the earldom of Warwick. In response, the Privy Council ordered his return home—an instruction which he arrogantly rejected because the summons did not formally style him as an earl. The legal wrangling then dragged on, to the mounting frustration of Robert Sidney, who recorded in a letter of 20 September 1607 to his wife Barbara that he was going directly to see “the King about Sir Robert Dudley’s matters.” A year later, on 8 September 1608, he was still complaining to Barbara that “that which stays me most” from returning from Hampton Court to Penshurst was “the commission” between “the King and Sir Robert Dudley.” In the following summer, on 1 July 1609, he lamented to Barbara yet again that he was stuck in London and unable to return to Penshurst because Dudley’s cause was about to be adjudicated upon, and he “must not be from the King till I have brought the business to an end.” But even these expectations were premature, and on the following 1 November Sidney was reporting to Barbara that yet another hearing was about to be given to Dudley’s suit. Dudley’s hopes were not finally dashed until August 1618, when he learned that Sidney had been created Earl of Leicester and the earldom of Warwick had been bestowed on Robert Rich (*DPFA* 130, 136, 142–3, 149; *Sidneys of Penshurst* 120–21). Dudley’s lifelong enmity with the Sidneys was revived in 1625, when Robert Sidney died and his son Robert, second Earl of Leicester, laid claim to Dudley’s two remaining Warwickshire estates, Itchington and Balsall, resulting in a new set of legal proceedings. Finally, in May 1644, following a review of the original 1605 Star Chamber case, Dudley’s legitimacy was retrospectively accepted by King Charles I, and his first wife Alice was created Duchess Dudley by Letters Patent. These decisions were reached primarily because the king had personally studied the files and felt that Dudley was indeed the first Earl of Leicester’s legitimate heir and that he had not been paid the appropriate price for Kenilworth when it had been sold in 1611 during his father’s reign (Adams; *Correspondence DPS* 75–6). As late as 1670 Dudley’s son, Carlo, was still attempting to establish his ducal rights in England by writing personally to Charles II, and in 1677 he made an abortive visit to the House of Lords in pursuit of his claim (Lee 187–8, 216–21, 234).

Robert Sidney’s eldest son, William (1590–1612), had been born at Flushing, and returned there as a child in 1597, where his father engaged a learned Dutchman as his tutor. He described this individual to Barbara in a letter of 9 May 1597, and also mentioned his plans for William to travel abroad when older:

He is of a race of gentlemen of these countries, but poverty constraineth him to seek means to live. He speaketh both high Dutch and low Dutch, French, and some English, besides Latin and Greek, and thereby besides teaching of the boy, will be able to do me other good services. And when the boy shall be old enough to travel he will be very fit to go with him. (*DPFA* 106)

William was appointed in November 1606 as a commander in absentia of one of its garrisons before being sent off, along with his younger brother Robert, to the University of Oxford in February 1607. On 15 January 1610 a license was issued for William to travel (like his father and uncle Philip) on the Continent for a period of three years, not in the company of his former Dutch tutor, but one of the Earl of Pembroke’s closest friends, Benjamin Rudyerd (*CSPD* 8:581). The purpose of these travels would have been entirely traditional—to gain

valuable first-hand experience of foreign courts and international diplomacy. But whether through reasons of ill health, family finance, or his own reluctance, William never undertook this grand tour, and by May 1611 plans were being made for him to take over the position of Deputy Governor at Flushing. Nor did these plans come to fruition, and later that summer he was back at Penshurst being tutored by a “Mr Johnson,” probably Ben Jonson, who wrote an “Ode to Sir William Sidney: on his Birthday” in November 1611 (Brennan and Kinnamon 430–37). Sadly, his father’s ambitions for his eldest son’s career in the administration of Flushing and Continental diplomacy were dashed when William died unexpectedly on 3 December 1612 from smallpox (*Sidneys of Penshurst* 124–5; Hay 182–5).

From the late 1590s there had been major developments in the political situation of Western Europe. The Franco-Spanish War had been concluded by Henri IV and Philip II in 1598 through the Peace of Vervins. In 1604 King James I and Philip III followed suit with the Treaty of London, ending the Anglo-Spanish War which had been initiated by the Earl of Leicester’s Dutch campaign and had led to the death of Sir Philip Sidney in the Low Countries. At first, this latter treaty enabled the Spanish to concentrate more on their struggle with the Dutch Republic, but both sides steadily grew weary of these hugely expensive conflicts. In April 1609 a cessation of hostilities was agreed (later known as the Twelve Years’ Truce) between the Spanish Habsburgs, the Southern Netherlands, and the Dutch Republic, leading to the formal recognition of the United Provinces. With more peaceful conditions now prevailing, Robert Sidney was able to use the excuse of his official court duties as a reason for acting largely as an absentee Governor of Flushing. Instead, he maintained regular correspondence with his deputies there over day-to-day administrative and military problems.

But during 1612 this convenient arrangement threatened to collapse, due to increasingly acrimonious tensions between the then deputy governor, Sir John Throckmorton, the Sergeant-Major of the Flushing garrison, Michael Everarde, and the widow of the previous deputy governor, Sir William Browne. On 7 March Sidney received a disturbing report from Throckmorton, lamenting the “desperate and distracted state” of “these disjointed and lacerated provinces” of the Low Countries. These problems rumbled on throughout the summer, and Sidney resisted returning to his governorship for as long as possible. Eventually, however, it became clear that he could procrastinate no longer, and he duly arrived back at Flushing at sunset on 11 August 1612. He took up residence in the house of the widow of the former deputy governor, Lady Browne—an arrangement which further aggravated Throckmorton’s own sense of grievance. After finally establishing some sort of order, Sidney compiled a formal report addressed to James I which underlined the strategic importance of the Flushing garrison to national security and as a bulwark against the threat of Spanish Catholicism. He viewed control of the town as key to maintaining the security of the English Channel, the only route via which English could realistically be invaded (SP 84/68/297–9). Even though he was able to return back home after just over one month, this depressing trip to the Continent reaffirmed in Sidney’s mind that the morale and military organization of Flushing were so poor that his governorship remained an ongoing liability which might at any moment entirely compromise his carefully cultivated reputation at the English court for administrative and diplomatic competency. Finally, in late April 1614 Sidney received reports of a drunken struggle between the still-feuding Throckmorton and Everarde, and he ratified the difficult decision to sack the latter (HMC *De L’Isle and Dudley* 5: 6–7, 18–20, 187–97; Hay 134–5, 221; DPFA 172–80; *Sidneys of Penshurst* 123–4).

On a more positive note, on 26 April 1613 Robert Sidney set out again for the Continent as one of the four royal commissioners with ambassadorial status appointed to accompany James I’s daughter, Princess Elizabeth, to Germany following her marriage to Frederick V, Elector Palatine. Sidney’s personal importance to this royal party was signaled by their galleon, the *Prince Royal* (so named after the princess’s late brother Henry) and an accompanying fleet

of over twenty other vessels, crossing directly to Flushing. Halfway across the Channel they were met by a Dutch fleet which accompanied them into the specially dredged Flushing harbor, where on 29 April they were welcomed by a military company under the command of Sidney's now eldest surviving son and heir, Robert (later second Earl of Leicester, see Warkentin *ARC* 1:9). Frederick left for The Hague on 30 April, and on 1 May Sidney and the princess moved on to Rotterdam and then The Hague and Bacharach, followed by a week-long journey, at the princess's personal invitation, up the Rhine to Heidelberg, where they arrived in mid-June. As was usual for such diplomatic missions, the personal costs for Robert Sidney were enormous, totaling close to £1,000. After several days of diplomatic niceties at Heidelberg, Robert senior and junior commenced their return journey. They passed through Cologne with the aim of spending some time at Spa, a favored Continental resort of the Sidneys. Meeting up with the Prince and Princess of Orange, they rested there for about three weeks before making a leisurely journey homewards via Liège, Aachen, Antwerp, and Flushing, arriving back in England in mid-August 1613 (Hay 218–20; *Sidneys of Penshurst* 126; Shephard).

Robert Sidney had been accompanied on the outward trip to Heidelberg by Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, and his countess, Aletheia, the most renowned aristocratic English female traveler on the Continent during this decade. After leaving Princess Elizabeth with her new husband in Germany, the Howards had traveled on to tour Italy with Inigo Jones, and her peregrinations may have inspired another senior member of the Sidney family to travel abroad for an extended period (Hannay, *MSLW* 175). On 25 June 1614 Throckmorton reported the arrival at the port of Flushing of Mary Sidney Herbert, Dowager Countess of Pembroke (Illustration 10), at the beginning of a Continental tour which then took her on to Antwerp:

Your Lordship's right honourable and noble sister the Countess of Pembroke arrived here yesterday. I first sent unto her honour my son (her ship being yet under sail) to know here pleasure whether she would come ashore or from her ship embark into another, that might carry her for Antwerp. Her honour desired to go on her journey. (HMC *De L'Isle and Dudley* 5:217)

This itinerary was echoed in William Basse's "Eclogue V: Of Temperance," which recounted how Poemenarcha (identified in his Eclogue 8 as the sister of Philisides) had left the "chalky cheeks" of Dover to travel to the Continent where the "Belgique boats" came to meet her on her way to "famous Spa" (Basse 209–12; Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix* 195). Now in her early fifties, the dowager countess was presumably attracted to Continental travel by both its intrinsic stimulations and the Sidneys' long-standing pleasure in the health cures available at Spa among a cosmopolitan and high-ranking social set. Certainly, in early August 1614 Robert Sidney remarked in a letter to his wife Barbara that he had received correspondence while at London from his sister at Spa, "where she found herself agree very well with the use of those waters" (*DPFA* 185). The dowager countess usually transmitted her letters to her brother via Throckmorton and the Flushing postal service, and Robert sent his replies via the same means and then on to her residence at Antwerp once the summer season at Spa had ended. By 2 November he was able to report to Barbara that the dowager countess had moved on to Amiens, "where it is thought she will stay all the winter" (*DPFA* 187).

By December 1614 the dowager countess was at Mechelen, where she probably stayed to see out the winter period until spring 1615. The town enjoyed a vibrant social life, with a constantly changing range of English visitors. On 24 February 1615 Throckmorton reported from Flushing to Robert Sidney:

On Monday last here passed by us in her coach one Mrs Ann Stanley, the widow of Sir William Stanley's eldest son, and sister unto Sir William Herbert, with her 4 daughters and landed at Middelberg, for the coach was of that town. I went yesterday of purpose to salute her and to offer unto her (out of duty I owe unto your Lordship and my lord of Pembroke) my best service to assist her in her passage from hence to Antwerp She came into these parts very well and never sick at sea. She telleth me she will stay about Mechelen until the Countess of Pembroke doth return to the Spa, and that with her she will return back into England. (HMC *De L'Isle and Dudley* 5:275–6)

Dudley Carleton described to John Chamberlain on 2 August 1616 how he had met the dowager countess at Spa, and noted that she “complains chiefly of a common disease and much troublesome to fair women, *Senectus* [old age], otherwise we see nothing amiss in her.” She was regularly socializing with another distinguished lady, the Countess of Barlemont, the wife of the Governor of Luxembourg, and both ladies enjoyed taking tobacco and shooting “at marks with pistols” (Carleton 209). She also encountered there the wealthy MP and comptroller of London customs Sir Arthur Ingram, and the Catholic diplomat Toby Matthew, with whom she may have corresponded over various now lost manuscript compositions. Rumors even circulated that she had formed a liaison with her handsome young doctor, Matthew Lister, and Lady Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory* may well shadow this relationship in the courtship of its central characters, Simeana and Lissius. Chamberlain even reported (erroneously) from London on 5 April 1617 that “Here is a suspicion that the old Countess of Pembroke is married to Doctor Lister that was with her at the Spa” (2:69; *Philip's Phoenix* 198–200; see Kuin ARC 1:15).

In autumn 1616 the dowager countess decided to return to England to attend the christening of her grandson, Philip Herbert's heir. On 25 August Robert Sidney advised his wife that the ceremony was being planned for 18 September: “where if my sister come not in the meantime, my Lady of Bedford shall be godmother. The godfathers are the King and my Lord Chamberlain [William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke].” Although the christening was delayed, it had become clear by 23 September that the dowager countess was not going to arrive back in time, and the Countess of Salisbury agreed to act as a replacement godparent. Still hindered by unfavorable winds, Robert Sidney reported on 1 October of the dowager countess's slow progress back home: “I think also that my sister is in England already, for a day or two ago she was at Calais, and sent to my Lord Zouche to borrow his pinnace to bring her over, which accordingly went for her” (*DPFA* 197–201). Another contemporary report suggested that she may have been delayed at Calais even longer. Back home in England, King James I granted to her a life interest in Houghton Park, Bedfordshire, where she built herself a three-story mansion, Houghton House (TNA SP 14/89; *Philip's Phoenix* 201–2).

Earlier, on 7 May 1616, Robert Sidney had been appointed as a Knight of the Garter, and during the following weeks he was closely involved in the Privy Council's plans, driven largely by financial considerations, finally to return Flushing to the Dutch. He crossed back there on 30 May to preside over the formal hand-over ceremony, and was granted a lump sum of £6,000 and a generous pension of £1,200 per annum in lieu of the governorship. The younger Robert, although often away from Flushing, remained in command of a new English regiment formed from the former garrison soldiers. After twenty-six years Robert Sidney was finally rid of this great administrative burden. He then traveled with his son to The Hague for the installation of the younger Robert as a colonel of an English regiment in the Low Countries (Hay 221).

Now in his early fifties and sometimes troubled by ill health, the remaining ten years of Robert Sidney's life were focused primarily upon court and family life rather than public

service overseas. But he and his immediate family retained a strong interest in Western European politics, especially relating to the affairs of Princess Elizabeth and her husband Frederick. This context seems to be implicitly relevant to the mysterious circumstances surrounding the publication of the prose romance *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621) by Robert's eldest daughter, Lady Mary Wroth, and its apparently sudden withdrawal from circulation (MSLW 234–5). Although nominally intended as a homage to her uncle's *Arcadia*, Wroth's fictions clearly also reflected on various aspects of the Sidneys' own family history and Jacobean court life. In particular, Wroth's romance seems to have focused on one of the most intriguing political fantasies of the early seventeenth century: the revival of a Holy Roman Empire in the West. This concept appealed personally to King James I, who systematically adopted a quasi-imperial identity in his formal portraits, civic entries, masques, and coinage (Wroth, *Urania* 1:xxxix–liv). In her *Urania* Wroth probably intended to commend and respectfully promulgate the king's desire to cast himself as a peacemaker and the harbinger of a new golden age in Western European diplomatic relations. But, with hindsight, her casting of her fictional character Amphilanthus as an idealized Roman-style emperor was potentially dangerous. The problem lay in the fact (reasonably obvious to anyone close to Wroth and the Sidneys) that Amphilanthus was modeled on her cousin, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. By 1621 he was, along with his younger brother, the Earl of Montgomery, her father's most influential friend at court, and was already (or soon to become) Lady Mary Wroth's lover and the father of her two illegitimate children. The casting of Amphilanthus/Pembroke in such an imperial role could have suggested to the Sidneys' enemies at court (and probably also to King James himself) that they and their Herbert relatives were becoming far too politically ambitious in their scarcely veiled responses to royal international policy.

Although the Sidneys' and Herberts' concerns for the welfare of Elizabeth and Frederick were genuine, their position had become increasingly beleaguered. After the death of Emperor Matthias in March 1619, Frederick had accepted the throne of Bohemia in response to a Protestant uprising against the oppressive Catholic rule of Ferdinand of Styria. The Dowager Countess of Pembroke had grown friendly with Dudley Carleton during her time at Spa, and her niece, Lady Mary Wroth, maintained a correspondence with him while he served as English Ambassador at The Hague (Wroth, *Urania* 1:xlvi). It seems that she was soon acting as a useful conduit for intelligence about Elizabeth and Frederick for her Sidney and Herbert relatives. But King James, ever the balancing peacemaker and already assiduously courting a Catholic Spanish spouse for his son, Prince Charles, had no desire, through Frederick's acceptance of the Bohemian crown, to be drawn into the Thirty Years' War. James was enraged by his son-in-law's lack of consultation and suspicious of those whom he regarded as Frederick's closest allies at the English court, especially the Sidneys and the Herberts.

Following the crowning of Frederick and Elizabeth at Prague as King and Queen of Bohemia in November 1619, Wroth's *Urania* represents Amphilanthus, Prince of Naples, being named King of the Romans and crowned at Frankfurt (the traditional location for installing Holy Roman Emperors). Amphilanthus then goes on to unify Wroth's imaginary Continental Europe in a period of halcyon religious toleration, an alluring counter-myth in poignant contrast to the reality of Frederick's beleaguered position as King of Bohemia. Within a year of his coronation Frederick's forces were crushed on 8 November 1620 at the Battle of White Mountain, resulting in his loss of the Bohemian crown and the invasion of the Palatinate by the Catholic imperialists. On 26 November Leicester wrote to his wife Barbara, lamenting how confusing and contradictory reports from the Continent had recently become:

Here we have had pitiful news of the overthrow given to the King of Bohemia and the loss of the town of Prague: but since, news are come that Prague is not lost, but that the King and Queen are in it and both in good health, and that in the fight, the Emperor lost more men than the King did. (*DPFA* 230)

In April 1621 Elizabeth and Frederick fled to The Hague, and in the following month Leicester was appointed to serve on a Council of War to consider the feasibility of English military intervention on behalf of the elector. In another letter to Barbara written on 9 May he commented: “The King and Queen of Bohemia are still at The Hague, in very good health and much respected: and the war is like to grow on there very hotly” (*DPFA* 232). The Earl of Pembroke was also deeply concerned, and Sir Benjamin Rudyerd remarked: “Nothing makes him so sad or merry as the success of their affairs” (*SP* 81/18/155). Wroth’s idealized depiction of her cousin as a quasi-imperial “King of the Romans,” implicitly usurping James’s own image as a beneficent dispenser of global peace, was as politically dangerous as it was unrealistic in terms of the sad reality of Frederick’s and Elizabeth’s true situation. Nor would James, along with those of his advisers who most keenly supported the proposed Spanish match, have welcomed Wroth’s *Urania*, with its implied support for a militaristic English intervention into Protestant affairs on the Continent. Instead, in November 1624 a formal marriage agreement was reached on behalf of the heir to the English throne, Prince Charles, and the Catholic Princess Henrietta Maria, the daughter of Robert Sidney’s former friend, King Henri IV of France (*Sidneys of Penshurst* 133–8).

Robert Sidney, Second Earl of Leicester

After Robert Sidney’s death on 13 July 1626 the Leicester earldom passed to his eldest surviving son, Robert (1595–1677; see Warkentin *ARC* 1:9 and Illustration 23), although little is known about his court or other public activities until 1632. In April of that year, however, he was drawn into royal diplomatic service when he was appointed as ambassador extraordinary to the late Queen Anne’s brother, Christian IV of Denmark. The public purpose of this mission was to offer English condolences on the death of King Charles I’s maternal grandmother, Queen Sophia Frederica. But a more significant political intention was to enter discussions with Christian IV over English debts to the Danes and to establish whether Denmark was sympathetically disposed towards an anti-Habsburg league which had been proposed by the Swedes (Bodl. Library, Oxford, MS Rawlinson C 354; *SP*/75/12). Accompanied by his two eldest sons, Philip and Algernon (see Brennan *ARC* 1:12), the second Earl of Leicester left England on 15 September 1632 with an entourage of some fifty-five black-clad retainers. Also traveling with him was his personal secretary, James Howell, who was an experienced Continental traveler, and later the author of *Instructions for Foreign Travel* (1642). Robert Sidney compiled and preserved a journal of his Danish embassy, and his pride in being entrusted to undertake this delicate mission was evident in his arranging for a Frankfurt publisher to print the first edition of the correspondence of Hubert Languet and his uncle, Sir Philip Sidney, intended as a tribute to the Sidneys’ long family tradition of diplomatic service.

Unfortunately, the business-like tone of Sidney’s personal entourage was compromised by the boorishly drunken behavior of the Danish court. He would have already known of the Danish king’s bibulous reputation from his father’s reminiscences of the chaotic court entertainments which marked the young Christian IV’s visit to the English court in 1606. Now in his mid-fifties, Christian kept Robert waiting until 1 October for his formal

audience (with each side addressing the other in Latin and Dutch) which seemed strangely perfunctory and inconclusive. Sidney was far from impressed by the Danish king, as his brief journal sketch of his person and habits eloquently conveys:

The King is a big, strong man, about 56 years of age, brown haired and but a little grey [“unless he use art” is scored through]. He is somewhat leaner than he was in England. A strange life he leads, for though he be careful of his business, yet he is very often drunk ... and every night he lies with a whore that he keeps, who follows him up and down where he goes and was a servant to Frau Christian, his last wife as most men say. (HMC *De L’Isle and Dudley* 6:19)

Sidney had another unproductive meeting with the king on 3 October, then six days later attended a formal banquet marking the conclusion of his brief embassy. At this riotous event Sidney’s main achievement seems to have been to remain mobile after thirty-five toasts while the Danish king had to be carried from the table drunk and prostrate in his chair. Leaving Denmark with nothing achieved other than some minor trade concessions, he reached Hamburg on 25 October, where on the following 5 November he recorded in his journal: “We kept the remembrance of the Gunpowder treason, which the English at Hamburg yearly do and have a sermon” (*Sidneys of Penshurst* 140–41). Back in England by late November, and after submitting unavoidably high expenses to the Treasury, he took some solace in the general view that his embassy had failed entirely due to the Danish king’s intransigence. The unexpected death on 6 November of King Gustavus II Adolphus of Sweden at the Battle of Lützen also stalled the earlier plans for an anti-Habsburg Protestant league. But the Sidneys, in the person of the second Earl of Leicester, had now been drawn once more into important royal service, and to commemorate this honor Van Dyck was commissioned to produce a series of lavish paintings of the Sidneys, with sittings at Penshurst and Eltham Palace (HMC *De L’Isle and Dudley* 6:12; *Sidneys of Penshurst* 140–41).

On the same day when Robert Sidney wrote in his journal about the Gunpowder Plot celebrations at Hamburg, his brother-in-law, Algernon Percy, succeeded to the earldom of Northumberland. Along with Robert’s wife, Dorothy Percy Sidney (see Akkerman *ARC* 1:10), Northumberland and his other sister, Lucy Percy Hay, Countess of Carlisle, and his younger brother, Henry Percy (later Lord Percy of Alnwick), were to play a major role in Robert Sidney’s next diplomatic appointment. The Percy sisters were assiduous in cultivating a friendly relationship with Queen Henrietta Maria, and Sidney readily described himself as her “Slave” (Collins 2:387). It was unsurprising, therefore, when in 1636 he was sent to France as an ambassador extraordinary with a brief to establish whether the French would be sympathetic towards English support for attempts to regain the Palatinate and to assess whether the earlier plans for an anti-Habsburg pact might be revived (SP 78/101–11). An English mission led by John, Viscount Scudamore, had been sent to France in the previous summer with virtually the same brief, but had met with no success. Robert Sidney arrived at Paris on 3 June 1636, again accompanied by his sons, Philip and Algernon, who continued their education at either Paris or the Huguenot Academy at Saumur (founded in 1602 by Philippe Du Plessis-Mornay). Robert was to be based mainly in France for the next six years, except for five months back in England during 1639.

This French embassy, although of high prestige for Sidney since it confirmed his importance within the circle of Queen Henrietta Maria, was fraught with problems, most of which revolved around Scudamore, who had also been retained as an ambassador-in-ordinary and bitterly resented his displacement. He did everything possible to hinder Robert’s progress, and although both men were guilty of irascible intransigence, the

English king and queen were also clumsily culpable in forcing them to work together. Sidney's personal relationship with Scudamore floundered from the outset, and as early as 16 June 1636 he remarked in a letter to Henry Percy: "He is jealous of me, and thinks that I come to supplant him in his employment" (Collins 2:387). They were soon using different lawyers, arguing with one another in official meetings, and even choosing to worship at different churches. Robert reaffirmed his family's long-term support for the Huguenots by attending the Reformed Church at Charenton, while Scudamore dutifully conformed to the preferences of the king and Archbishop Laud in the English Chapel at Paris. His wife, Dorothy, was clearly also preoccupied with the problems over Scudamore, and advised on 26 September 1636:

And if you know anything of importance against your companion [Scudamore] make the King acquainted with it and none else. For I am confident that if you had done so it would have been much the better for you and the worse for him. But if the things be trivial or cannot be proved I think it is best to say nothing of him (*Correspondence DPS 62*)

The key area of disagreement between the two men lay in their contrasting approaches to Continental policy. Scudamore loyally adhered to King Charles I's preference for a broadly neutral stance towards Spain, but Robert Sidney was obliged to support Henrietta Maria's closest associates at court, who favored a more militant anti-Habsburg alliance. Robert focused much of his diplomatic efforts on attempting to engineer an aggressive alliance between England and France against Spain, arguing that "nothing can be more glorious, nor more religious in the sight of God and man than such a war" (SP 78/101/400). Charles I and Scudamore, however, remained committed to securing a negotiated settlement—in contrast to the views of Henrietta Maria, who hoped to persuade her brother, Louis XIII, into a more militant stance.

While Leicester was away at Paris, the Percys promulgated at court his anti-Habsburg views, and Dorothy assiduously courted the friendship of Henrietta Maria. Her letters to Robert from this period are replete with telling details of the Sidneys' current intimacy with the royal families of both England and France, and in November 1636 she requested that her husband should provide her with a cipher so that she could keep him more fully briefed on English affairs while he was abroad (*Correspondence DPS 77*). On 4 January 1637 she reported giving a New Year's gift to the king, and in early February she was in earnest correspondence with Robert over selecting a suitable gift for the "Queen of France," Louis XIII's wife, the Spanish Anne of Austria (*Correspondence DPS 103*). Other lavish gifts followed, and on 5 May Dorothy was finalizing her "commodities for the Queen of France's present" (costing "about 120*ll*"), prior to sending it over to France (*Correspondence DPS 124–5*).

In April 1637, as plague spread rapidly through London, Dorothy informed Robert that she had been in discussions with Henrietta Maria over how Robert could best cultivate the political trust of her husband. She assured him of the queen's continuing high favor and absolute confidence in his loyalty to her. She also mentioned that her sister, Lucy, had been told by the queen that King Charles was "very well satisfied" with Sidney's diplomatic work in France (*Correspondence DPS 93, 118*). But both Robert and Dorothy remained nervous over exactly how the king viewed his embassy, especially in view of the unending clashes with Scudamore, as her letter of 20 April 1637 makes clear:

I am infinitely desirous to receive from you some assurance of a happy success in those affairs that you have negotiated with so much pains, but howsoever the French behave themselves I hope you will acquit yourself so as the King

shall find cause to value your service and not to blame it. (*Correspondence DPS 120*)

Events were now moving rapidly in France, with the negotiations for an Anglo-French alliance remitted to a peace conference to be held at Hamburg in 1637. Robert Sidney then became ensnared by August 1637 in plots between King Charles I and the exiled court of Marie de Médicis at Brussels, who was intent on thwarting and overthrowing Cardinal Richelieu (whose personality overwhelmed that of Louis XIII). Anne of Austria was also determined to foil Robert's attempts to foster an Anglo-French alliance against the Habsburgs. He was fatally compromised by the fact that his French secretary, René Augier, was secretly forwarding copies of Anne's letters to the Spanish Netherlands, and French spies were very probably also intercepting his correspondence.

In February 1639 Leicester wrote to Charles to express his grave concerns over a rumored Catholic plot to forge an alliance between the pope and the kings of France, Spain, and Hungary. He was rapidly recalled to England, accompanied by his sons Philip and Algernon, and the respect in which Sidney was still held by both his king and queen is evident from his being sworn in as a Privy Councillor on 5 May. His enmity with Scudamore, however, had antagonized Archbishop Laud, who remained his most problematic opponent at court, and who was determined to block any further promotions for Leicester. In July 1639 he was able to attend the wedding of his daughter Dorothy to Henry Lord Spencer (Earl of Sunderland from 6 June 1643). When Sidney returned to his Paris embassy in August 1639 he was accompanied by his wife and the newly married couple, whose two eldest children, Dorothy and Robert, were both born there. They did not return to England until 1641, when they took up residence at Spencer's ancestral home, Althorp in Northamptonshire.

As Charles's dealings with Parliament grew steadily more fraught during the late 1640s, Hawkins kept Leicester briefed at Paris on the impeachment of Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, and Archbishop Laud. The Earl of Northumberland again pressed the king to appoint Robert as his Secretary of State, but Charles replied, cryptically, that he considered Sidney "too great for that place" (Collins 2:664). Finally, with Strafford's attainder and execution in May and Laud's committal to the Tower on a charge of High Treason, Robert's path to higher preferment at the English court was now clear. On 14 June 1641 he was duly appointed as Strafford's successor to the post of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, thereby echoing the illustrious Irish role of his grandfather, Sir Henry Sidney, during Queen Elizabeth's reign (see Herron *ARC* 1:13). He briefly returned to France in August 1641 to complete his embassy, and was back in England by early October to prepare for his new duties (*Sidneys of Penshurst* 141–4; Atherton).

Philip Sidney, Third Earl of Leicester, and Algernon Sidney

The second Earl of Leicester's withdrawal from public life in the mid-1640s effectively ended his direct contacts with Western Europe, although his ongoing acquisition of books for his voluminous library continued to provide him with a range of intellectual interests in Continental affairs and scholarship (see Black *ARC* 2:1). The Sidney family's involvements in Continental travel now passed down another generation to Robert Sidney's children, and it was largely his wife's family, rather than Leicester himself, who sought to further their public careers. Her brother, Algernon Percy, Earl of Northumberland, was especially supportive towards his sister's sons. During the Second Bishops' War their eldest son, Philip (Illustration 28), commanded the cuirassiers who formed Northumberland's bodyguard, and

in the Short Parliament of April 1640 Philip was elected, again through his uncle's influence, this time as Lord Admiral, as MP for the borough of Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight (Firth). Similarly, on 2 May 1641 King Charles I's daughter, Princess Mary, married William, the son of the Prince of Orange. In the preceding December Northumberland had been making determined attempts to secure a military post for Algernon in the service of the Prince of Orange, almost certainly as an opportunistic response to this intended marital union (CKS U1475 C85/7; C85/9; Scott, *Algernon/Republic* 43). Almost fifty years later the son of Mary and William would accede to the English throne as King William III, a succession which would depend heavily upon the support of Henry Sidney, later Earl of Romney (Robert Sidney's youngest son), and Robert Spencer, second Earl of Sunderland (Robert Sidney's grandson).

Following Robert Sidney's acrimonious split with the king in the mid-1640s, he maintained a studiously neutral political position, but his wife Dorothy and two sons Philip and Algernon overtly sided with the parliamentarians. During the early 1650s Algernon enjoyed an active and influential political career, especially after his election to the Council of State in November 1652 (Illustration 25). His work was mainly focused on foreign affairs, regularly meeting with ministers from Portugal, Spain, France, Sweden, Hamburg, Tuscany, Holland, and Austria, and the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–54). But these involvements came to an unexpected halt in 1653. His father's diary contains a vivid account of Cromwell's expulsion of the Rump of the Long Parliament on 20 April, probably supplied by Algernon verbatim, for attempting to pass the Perpetuation Bill. Algernon had been involved only the previous evening in its final drafting and he was enraged by Cromwell's denunciation: "You are no Parliament, I say you are no Parliament." He steadfastly refused to vacate his place to the right of the Speaker, and only after Cromwell's command "Put him out" did he leave the chamber of his own accord (*Sidneys of Penshurst* 158–9). Algernon's parliamentary career was effectively over, and this crisis also impacted directly on his brother, Philip, who had been appointed in December 1652 as an ambassador to Sweden. Following his brother's ejection from Parliament, Philip also resigned from this mission just as his instructions were completed in late March 1653, but rather than risking another personal clash with Cromwell, he tactfully pleaded ill health.

The contrasting behavior of the two Sidney brothers at this period is revealing, both of their personal characters and political flexibility. Despite not carrying out his Swedish embassy, Philip managed to retain Cromwell's favor and was summoned to sit in the Barebones (or "Little") Parliament, serving as a member of both of its Councils of State. When the Barebones Parliament was dissolved in December 1653 the remaining MPs were obliged to resign all of their powers to Cromwell, who was installed on 16 December as Lord Protector of England, Ireland, and Scotland. Algernon's response to Cromwell's absolute ascendancy was in sharp contrast to Philip's quietly pragmatic approach. Although John Milton's *Defensio Secunda*, a strident defense of Cromwell's rule published on 30 May 1654, described Algernon as "Sidney (an illustrious name, which I rejoice has steadily adhered to our side)," he decided to leave the country, and by 31 July was at The Hague, where he stayed until the following September (*Sidneys of Penshurst* 159).

In May 1659 Algernon was chosen by the restored Rump Parliament to lead an embassy to Sweden, in view of the escalating risk of their current conflicts with Denmark impeding both English and Dutch trade via the Baltic Sound. His party arrived at Elsinore in Sweden on 20 July, but King Charles X Gustavus failed to agree to an audience quickly enough for Algernon's liking. Instead, he began impromptu discussions with the Dutch over assembling a joint fleet to impose a settlement on the Swedes. Naturally, the Swedish monarch was irate at Algernon's imperious behavior, a situation made even worse when he was handed by Algernon a draft treaty already signed by the Danes, with threats of war if Sweden

did not also agree to it. With Charles X incredulously claiming that the English wished “to command all, as if they were masters” (*CSPV 1659–61* 66), Algernon later insisted that “a few shots of our cannon would have made this peace” (Scott, *Algernon/Republic* 129). On a visit during this mission to the University of Copenhagen Algernon signed its visitors’ book with a pugnaciously proud Latin reminiscence (later adopted as the motto of the US state of Massachusetts) of the militarism in 1586 of his great-uncle, Sir Philip Sidney: “PHILIPPUS SIDNEY MANUS HAEC INIMICA TYRANNIS EINSE PETIT PLACIDAM CUM LIBERTATE QUIETEM” (“Philip Sidney, this hand, enemy to tyrants, by the sword seeks peace with liberty”).

The unexpected death of Charles X on 12 February 1660, along with the departure of the English fleet, severely hampered the progress of Algernon’s negotiations, but a treaty between the Swedes and Danes, mediated by England, France, and the Dutch, was finally agreed on 27 May. During his time in Sweden, however, Algernon had demonstrated himself to be a brusque and warlike diplomat, and more problematically in view of the changing English political landscape, an unrepentant upholder of the tenets of republican freedom (Scott, *Algernon/Republic* 127–35).

The resignation of Richard Cromwell on 24 May 1659 marked the beginning of another period of political uncertainty for the Sidneys. The Countess of Leicester died on 20 August 1659, and her husband Robert became even more introspective in his habits. Although he resumed his seat in the House of Lords in April 1660 and was named as a Privy Councillor on 31 May, as soon as Parliament adjourned in October he took the opportunity to plead ill health and withdrew permanently to Penshurst. He did not attend Charles II’s coronation in April 1661. However, despite his unquestioning service to both Oliver and Richard Cromwell, Philip, Viscount Lisle, was not regarded as a political threat by Charles II. He was granted a pardon under the Great Seal on 30 October 1660 and took little part in public affairs before his father’s death in 1677. In contrast, Algernon remained unapologetic, describing in 1659 the regicide as “the justest and bravest act ... that ever was done in England or anywhere” (BL Add. MS 32680 fols. 9–10), and republicanism as “that cause, which by the help of God I shall never desert” (Blencowe 170–71). Following Charles II’s restoration, Algernon lingered on in Scandinavia before moving to Hamburg, but his brusque treatment of the Swedish and Danish kings at Elsinore still rankled with the newly empowered royalists. Even his father, the Earl of Leicester, felt that Algernon’s refusal to condemn the regicides remained so perilous that he should not return home since his presence could endanger the welfare of his entire family: “[H]e must not think of coming into England, when that action was so much abhorred by all men, and by me in particular, that am his father” (BL Add. MS 32680 fols. 9–10).

Although Algernon’s father considered it wise for him to remain at Hamburg, where he met up with Christiana, ex-Queen of Sweden, he readily confessed: “I dislike all the drunken countries of Germany, and the north, and am not much inclined to France, I think I shall choose Italy” (Blencowe 195). Algernon remained in Italy from 1660 until c. 1663, first residing at Rome (Scott, *Algernon/Republic* 153). There he occupied himself with paying courtesy visits to various cardinals, whom in April 1661 he described in great detail to his father (Collins 2:711–15), and admiring the “Liberty and Quiet, which is generally granted to all Persons here” (2:700). Although he no longer found “those Signs of Ease, Satisfaction, and Plenty” which he had experienced on his first visit to Rome in 1638, he was duly grateful for the “Company of Persons excellent in all Sciences, which is the best Thing Strangers can seek.” He also offered to supply his father with books from Rome, such as a copy of the Jesuit Cardinal Pallavicini’s *Istoria del Concilio di Trento* (1656/57), which he felt would become “an Ornament to your Library” (Collins 2:700–702). During February 1661 he viewed with stern interest and characteristic disapproval, the various pre-Lenten festivities:

All the Streets are full of Masquerades there, every Day public Comedies, and many in private Houses, but all of them as ill as ever was seen. There hath been two moral Representations in Music ... which were very fine, and not to be equalled by any Persons out of Rome. The Jesuits have made many Plays in their Seminary, but they are exceeding cold and dull. (Collins 2:705)

During March 1661 he continued to compile a list of suitable books for his father (Collins 2:706–8), and by early April was also keenly hunting out other interesting objects to send back to Penshurst, noting:

I have written to my Correspondent at Frankfurt, for Sir Philip Sidney his Picture. I could not send your Lordship a Thing of less Value then my own, but since Sir J. Temple says your Lordship would have it, I will send it. If you please to have any Thing else provided here, that will be an Ornament to your new Buildings, as Pictures, Statues, Marble Table, or of Mosaic Work, I shall most diligently provide such as your Lordship shall please to Command me. (Collins 2:709)

By mid-1661 Algernon was residing at the idyllic Villa de Belvedere at Frascati, at the invitation of Prince Pamphili, a nephew of the previous pope, where he lived a more solitary life and devoted himself to academic study.

In mid-1663 Algernon was passing through Switzerland and paused to visit other English republican exiles at Vevey, before heading on through Geneva and Brussels to Augsburg (where later in April 1665 he survived an assassination attempt). At the University of Geneva he inscribed their visitor's book with a haunting lament for the executed regicides: "SIT SANGUINIS ULTOR JUSTORUM" ("Let there be revenge for the blood of the just"). He then traveled on to the United Provinces and the commencement of the Second Anglo-Dutch War in 1665 led him to some overly optimistic hopes for an invasion of England (Scott, *Algernon/Republic* 171–3). During the summer he traveled from the United Provinces to the court of Louis XIV, seeking to secure French financial support for such a campaign. His hopes of military action, however, were confounded by both the French king's caution and Dutch skepticism over how a renewed commonwealth in England could, in reality, advantage the United Provinces. At this period he was also drafting his explosive *Court Maxims*, arguing for rebellion against the restored monarchy, which, fortunately for the rest of the Sidneys, were not published until the mid-1990s. Five of the fifteen dialogues included in the *Maxims* focus specifically on England's foreign policy and argue for a union of Protestant nations. Residing variously at Rotterdam and Montpellier, Algernon poignantly viewed himself as wandering like a "Vagabond through the World, forsaken of my Friends, poor, and known only to be a broken Limb of a Ship-wrecked Faction" (Collins 2:720). His period of French residence confirms this depressing sense of a rootless existence: "Sidney's time in France was divided between Languedoc in the south-east (from 1666 to some time between 1670 and 1672) and Guyenne/Bordeaux in the south-west (from 1672 or 1673 until 1677), with extended visits to Paris throughout the period (in 1666, 1670, 1676, 1677)" (Scott, *Algernon/Republic* 223).

In 1670 he traveled to Paris, where the Earl of Northumberland and his family were also visiting, and to Versailles, where he tried to offer his services to King Charles II via the Vicomte de Turenne, Marshal of France. About this time Algernon finally retired to Nérac in Gascony, where he spent most of the rest of his exile in France.

Algernon was not to return to England until early September 1677, only two months before his father's death. Leicester died on 2 November, and was buried at Penshurst.

Although Algernon originally intended a prompt return to France, his father's will provided generous provision for both himself and his younger brother Henry, to the detriment of Philip, now third Earl of Leicester, who had fallen out with his father in late 1652. A protracted chancery case ensued, with Henry residing at Penshurst and Algernon at Leicester House in London. In the mean time, Algernon was drawn once again into the center of political affairs, maintaining close personal links with the French, and leading attempts to formulate an Anglo-Dutch republican foreign policy as an alternative to a monarchic union of the Houses of Stuart and Orange. With the execution of Algernon on 7 December 1683, following his complicity in the Rye House Plot, which was supposedly planned to murder both Charles II and his brother and heir James, Duke of York, the future political and family fortunes of the Sidneys now lay in the hands three individuals: Philip, who succeeded his father as third Earl of Leicester in 1698; his younger brother, Henry Sidney, later Earl of Romney, and his nephew, Robert Spencer, later Earl of Sunderland. The Continental involvements and crucial importance of these two latter members of the Sidney family in ensuring the accession of Prince William III of Orange as King William III of England are traced in Brennan ARC 1:12.

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