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### Sir Philip Sidney : Renaissance courtier and gentleman.

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**UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE**

**Sir Philip Sidney - Renaissance Courtier and Gentleman** ✓

**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Faculty**

**Of the Graduate School of the University of Louisville**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the**

**Requirements for the Degree**

**Of Master of Arts**

**Department of English**

**By**

**Marion Sidebottom Houchens** ✓

**Year**

**1932**



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**Sir Philip Sidney - Renaissance Courtier and Gentleman**

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## **Introduction**

## Introduction

Sir Philip Sidney, the "rare ornament of his age", the "most accomplished cavalier of his time", has become for us the ideal courtier of the Elizabethan period. It is one of the most remarkable facts of English literary history that the reputation of a man, universally admired during his lifetime as the flower of chivalry, has suffered little or no distraction at the hands of three and one-half centuries. More than that, in an era in which hero-worship is very decidedly frowned upon, Philip Sidney yet remains the shining example of courtliness. Though a writer of some note, it is his character, and not his genius, which is, and has ever been venerated.

However, there are many problems in the way of deciding to what extent Sidney truly conformed to the ideals of courtliness. One of these would surely be a definite conclusion as to courtly standards. Another would certainly be the ability to see particular character traits with a sixteenth century eye - undoubtedly a difficult feat even in this broad-minded century.

Then, there is the troublesome paradox that Sidney's courtiership was in reality compulsory,<sup>1</sup> and, as his letters to Languet will prove, that he was often champing at the bit and longing for action, or else sadly languishing in the enforced idleness at court which Elizabeth demanded in those she liked.

The tendency of the present day seems to be to make Sidney in many ways exemplary of the ideals set forth by Baldassare Castiglione in his Il Cortegiano. Mr. Kenneth Thorpe Rowe in an article which attempts to prove that Spenser's Sir Calidore may be identified with Sidney, says, "It is true, Spenser had a literary model in Castiglione's Il Cortegiano, translated by Thomas Hoby in 1561, but Sidney lent the force of a living embodiment of the ideal."<sup>2</sup> Miss Kelso calls Sidney "England's mirror of perfection, perhaps the

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1

Bourne, H. R. Fox, Sir Philip Sidney, Type of English Chivalry in the Elizabethan Age, p. 6.

2

Rowe, Kenneth Thorpe, "Sir Calidore: Essex or Sidney?" SP, XXVII, footnote, 139.

nearest approach to Castiglione's ideal that the English renaissance produced",<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Malcolm W. Wallace, who is a Sidney scholar, terms him "Castiglione's courtier reincarnated in an English gentleman, and with differences that endeared him to his countrymen."<sup>2</sup>

With so much reference to Sidney as the Castiglione ideal, I could not refrain from wondering whether he were not at least much influenced by Il Cortegiano. This seemed especially probable when I ran across a statement to the effect that Sidney "never stirred abroad without a copy of the Courtier in his pocket."<sup>3</sup> Miss Kelso also alludes to "Sidney with Castiglione in his pocket,"<sup>4</sup> but tells me that she does

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<sup>1</sup> Kelso, Ruth, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace, Malcolm W., "The Reputation of Sir Philip Sidney", Johns Hopkins Alumni Magazine, XVII, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Camb. Hist. of Eng. Lit., III, 496.

<sup>4</sup> Kelso, p. 52.



not remember where the reference comes from. Dr. Wallace also tells me that he thinks the statement one of those pieces of embroidery which manage to have themselves adopted widely without any solid foundation. I have been unable to find any source for the statement either in contemporary or secondary material; so that it will have to be discounted as of no value to our study. Be that as it may, it is very probable that Sidney was familiar with Castiglione, either in Italian or English dress. The Sidney family was on terms of intimacy with the family of Sir Thomas Hoby, the translator of the Courtier,<sup>1</sup> and in October, 1575, Philip took part in the baptism of Lady Hoby's eldest child by a second marriage.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there was no book better known to the court circle of Sidney's day than the Courtier, as I shall hope to show. Whether

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, Malcolm William, The Life of Sir Philip Sidney, pp. 16, 242.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

the book influenced him directly or not is hard to determine. For that matter, so universally was it read, that there could be no limit set to the influence which it did exert, either directly or indirectly. One might easily ask what direct influence Elyot's Gouverneur had upon Sidney. Yet, even were such influence proved, might it not easily hark back to Castiglione? Miss Pearl Hegrefe, of Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, has given some very worthwhile evidence to indicate that Elyot knew the Courtier in Italian through Thomas Cromwell, who possessed a copy of the book as early as 1550. Whereas Hoby's translation was not published until 1561, the book in Italian was published in 1528, three years before Elyot's Gouverneur was published. "Certain shifts in emphasis in the writings of Elyot from those of Colet, More, Erasmus, Vives and Ascham may spring partly from the influence of the Courtier."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hegrefe, Pearl, "Elyot and 'The Boke Called Cortigiano in Italian'." HP, XXVII 305.

Whether Sidney was or was not influenced by the Courtier is difficult to say. However, it is possible to ascertain in what respects he conformed to the ideals of Castiglione's Courtier, at a time when the Italian ideal was permeating Europe. I had for some time speculated upon this when Miss Kelse's treatise on The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century was brought to my attention. Miss Kelse distinguishes clearly between the Italian ideal and the new English ideal evolving as a result of the long-continued peace of Elizabeth's reign. With this in mind, the leading question now seems to be, In what respects did Sidney conform to the Italian ideal and in what ways did he typify the changing order of the English gentleman? As an issue of this question, is there anything in his writings to indicate the possible influence of Castiglione?

Particularly, at a time when love-making was not recommended by English writers as a part of the gentleman's education, did the composition of the "Astrophel

and Stella's sonnets help to place Sidney on the Italian side of the scale? Do the sonnets indicate a sincere love for Penelope Devereux, are they merely imitative in character, or are they examples of Platonic love? If they are Platonic, the key to their unquestioned acceptance by Sidney's friends and family may be found, and Sir Philip's own reputation as a courtier and gentleman may be understood.

Last, putting aside the differentiation between the Italian and English standards, did Sidney in the eyes of his contemporaries attain the praiseworthy qualities common to both ideals? As the years have passed, a tradition has grown up about him; yet, the one true guide to his character and his ability is the opinion of his contemporaries. I shall attempt to show that these contemporaries were eloquent and seemingly sincere in their praises of him. Granting that he merited such honor and esteem, it is safe to assume that whether he more nearly conformed to the ideals of the courtier or of the gentleman, he must

undoubtedly have possessed that most commendable characteristic common to both types - virtue.

To determine Sidney's position then, according to the standards of the time, I shall devote the first chapter to

- a. A glimpse of an Italianated England which read with avidity Italian courtesy books, particularly Castiglione's Courtier.
- b. The ideal Italian courtier, as sketched by Castiglione.
- c. The new English gentleman, differentiated from the Italian courtier type, as set forth by Miss Kelsey.

**CHAPTER I**

**Italian Renaissance Influences in England**

## CHAPTER I

### Italian Renaissance Influences in England

"The Middle Age acknowledged two specific types of education: that of the knight and that of the clerk...With the advent of a new concept - the express creation of Italy, or, at least, her rediscovery - of man as a layman, neither soldier nor clerk, of man as an individual, not a nameless fraction of a group, personality became the conscious goal of development."<sup>1</sup> During the Middle Ages every castle had been a miniature court, but now the dominant political feature of the age was the concentration of the supreme power of the state in the person of one sovereign prince, whose court became a stepping stone to the great careers of arms, diplomacy and administrative employments.

Where Italy led, Western Europe followed,

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<sup>1</sup> Woodward, William Harrison, Studies in Education During the Age of the Renaissance, pp. 244-245.

and the descendants of feudal lords were gradually transformed into courtiers, as the sovereign power of their kings was increased. Italy was the pattern in all phases of social life as Paris is in the world of fashions today. That such was the case is not remarkable, for in Italy the "outward appearance of men and women and the habits of daily life were more perfect, more beautiful, and more polished than among the other nations of Europe."<sup>1</sup> It is therefore not remarkable that Italy should have been the birthplace of the courtesy book.

"Toward the end of the fifteenth century Italian influences began to appear at the English court."<sup>2</sup> They were exerted largely through direct intercourse between England and Italy, and through the translation of Italian books, especially of such as related to manners. These are now termed courtesy

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<sup>1</sup> Burckhardt, Jacob, The Civilization of the Period of the Renaissance in Italy, II, 123.

<sup>2</sup> Einstein, Lewis, The Italian Renaissance in England, p. 59.



books. "A new type of courtier had grown up in Italy. At the courts of Urbino, Mantua and Ferrara a higher conception had been formed of what the companion of the prince ought to be; his manners and accomplishments became an outward reflection of the new life of the Renaissance, infusing the spirit in the court. By degrees these were formed into a system ready to be taught as part of the courtier's education." .... It was "during the sixteenth century" that "England in common with the other nations of Western Europe acquired considerable familiarity with this new type."<sup>1</sup>

It is not strange that the England which adopted the Italian courtesy book as its bible of etiquette should have become "Italianated". In sports she submitted to Italian methods and instruction. English youths had Italian riding-masters. "Sir Philip Sidney became the patron of two Italian riding-masters in England."<sup>2</sup> Italian fencing masters were numerous about

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<sup>1</sup> Einstein, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's England, II, 412.

London, for fencing was an Italian fine art. Even duelling was done in the Italian fashion,<sup>1</sup> and the tourney was revived along Italian lines.

In the matter of costume, the influence of foreign fashions was felt especially. Whereas the English had formerly given little attention to dress, they now gave much concern to it. They soon had the name of being the most imitative race on earth,<sup>2</sup> being particularly well-versed in incongruous mixtures. "How oddly his is suited!" says Portia of the young English baron, Falstaffbridge. "I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere."<sup>3</sup>

The Italian influence was also felt in Platonism, which became widespread in literary circles in the sixteenth century. Petrarch was regarded in his own country, according to Guasso, as "The Prince of Italian

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<sup>1</sup> Einstein, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's England, I, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare, William, The Merchant of Venice, I, ii, 78-81.

Peets",<sup>1</sup> and a "graund maister in love"<sup>2</sup> and his Platonic doctrines of courtly love were scarcely less known in England than in Italy. For those who were unable to read Italian, the translation of Remei's Courtier's Academy or Castiglione's Courtier, in which latter Bembo gives his great discourse on Platonic love,<sup>3</sup> were accessible.

Even the Italian language was affected, being much in use at court and in diplomatic circles. "Elizabeth herself had learned Italian as a child, and Roger Ascham declared that she spoke it perfectly at sixteen."<sup>4</sup>

In fact, so Italianated had England become, through travel and translations, that some writers became very indignant in their censure. Roger Ascham, who himself gave some advice on manners in his Schoolmaster, advances his opinion of the Italianated Englishman in no uncertain terms.

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<sup>1</sup> Guazzo, M. Steeven, The Civile Conversation, II, 180.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 194

<sup>3</sup> Castiglione, Count Baldassare, The Book of the Courtier, pp. 302-324.

<sup>4</sup> Kinstejn, p. 98.

"No, that by living, and traveling in Italic, bringeth home into England out of Italic...for Religion, Papistrie or worse; for learning, lesse commonly than they caried out with them; for pollicie...a mynde to medle in all mens matters; for experience, plentie of new mischieves never knowne in England before; for maners, varietie of vanities, and chaunge of filthy lyving."<sup>1</sup>

The chief Italian courtesy books translated into English were Count Baldassare Castiglione's Il Cortegiano, translated by Sir Thomas Hoby (1561); Della Casa's Il Galateo, translated by Robert Peterson (1576); and M. Steeven Guazzo's La Civile Conversation, the first three books translated by George Pettie and the fourth by Bartholomew Young (1581). Il Galateo was in reality intended for the middle classes, being a handbook of advice in protest against the unscouth manners which had been handed down from the Dark Ages. The Cortegiano was written for court personages. The Civile Conversation, as Sir Edward Sullivan points out in his

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<sup>1</sup> Ascham, Roger, The Scholemaster, Arber's English Reprints, p. 70.

introduction to Pettie's translation of Guazzo's work, "fell naturally midway between the Courtier of Sir Thomas Hoby and the Galathea of Robert Peterson."<sup>1</sup>

That these Italian books were formative in English life, the many allusions to them in literature prove. The Courtier was undoubtedly most influential. It has been claimed, according to Sir Walter Raleigh, in his introduction to the Tudor Translation of The Courtier, "that if one (book) rather than another, is to be taken for an abstract or epitome of the chief moral and social ideas of the age, that one must be the Courtier." Sir Edward Sullivan assures the reader that Guazzo all but excludes courtly life and etiquette in the first three books of the four, because Castiglione had already so well treated the subject.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Guazzo, I, 30.

"You know we are eased of this labour by him who with his learned penne hath most perfectly formed the Courtier."<sup>1</sup>

In the Cambridge History of English Literature is found this statement:

"Il Cortegiano of Castiglione, translated by Hoby as The Courtier is, of course, much more than a treatise on the upbringing of youth, but, as presenting a picture of the 'perfect man' of the renaissance, it had an undoubted, if indirect, effect on higher education. Il Cortegiano speedily became cosmopolitan in its vogue."<sup>2</sup>

James Cleland, in his Institution of a Young Nobleman, an educational treatise published at Oxford in 1607, listing books for general reading, recommends above all

"the Courtier of Count Baldassar Castille as very necessary and profitable for young gentlemen abiding in the court."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Guazzo, I, 111.

<sup>2</sup> III, 496.

<sup>3</sup> See Introd., Guazzo, p. 34.

John Florio, in his Second Frutes, 1591, "couple Castiglione's Scourier with Guazzo's dialogues as the two most commonly read by those who wished to learn a little Italian; and in A Worlde of Worlde, 1598, he speaks of well-forwarde students that have turned over Guazzo and Castiglione."<sup>1</sup>

Even Roger Ascham, who has been quoted as being very much opposed to all things Italian, said of the Scourier:

"To joyne learning with civill exercises Conte Baldessaer Castiglione in his booke, Scourier, doth trimlie teache: which booke, advisedlie read, and diligentlie folowed, but one yeare at home in England, would do a yong ientleman more good, I wisse, than three yeares travell abroad spent in Italie."<sup>2</sup>

William Martyn, in his Youth's Instruccion, 1612, a treatise of Polonius-like advice for his son, recommends,

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<sup>1</sup> Introd., Guazzo, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Ascham, p. 66.

"deliberate reading and meditating upon that excellent, and ever most praise-worthy work of Balthasar Castilion, who by his choise precepts, hath cast young Gentlemen into a fairer mould than their fathers did."<sup>1</sup>

Miss Kelse points out that the author of Civile and Uncivile Life only sketched briefly the life at court, recommending Moby's Courtier<sup>2</sup> for details.

In view of such widespread favor, it seems very probable that Philip Sidney, university man and courtier by profession, would have been familiar with Castiglione's treatise, and if we find that he conforms in many ways to the Italian ideals, it will not be surprising.

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Count Baldassare Castiglione was well prepared to write a sketch of the ideal courtier, for he himself was distinctively a gentleman and a courtier. It is known that he was born December 6, 1478,

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<sup>1</sup> See Wright, Louis B., "Handbook Learning in the Renaissance", SP XXVIII, 59.

<sup>2</sup> Kelse, p. 52.



near Mantua, of a family of some distinction. His education as a courtier was complete, first at the court of Mantua and later at Urbino under Duke <sup>1</sup> Guidobaldo.

His manhood was spent in the field or at court. While with the Duke of Urbino he served in many diplomatic missions, one of which took him to England. Il Cortegiano was composed as a record of these most happy years of his vexed life when he realized for a space his heart's desire in the companionship of the notable group which Duke Guidobaldo <sup>2</sup> and his charming Duchess brought together at Urbino. Mrs. Henry Ady (Julia Cartwright) in her interesting book, Beatrice D'Este, remarks,

"When Castiglione painted his ideal woman in the pages of the Cortegiano, he had no need to draw on his imagination. Elizabeth Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino, and Isabelle d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, were both of them ~~whom~~

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<sup>1</sup> House, W. H. D., Introd. to Courtier, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Woodward, p. 251.

of great intellect and stainless  
virtus, whose genuine love of art  
and letters attracted the most bene-  
ficial influence on the thought of  
the day."<sup>1</sup>

It is well said that Castiglione's wide  
familiarity with the various worlds of men, of  
women, and of art, came from his social relations.

"The sketch of the ideal courtier was  
thrown down in a few days in or about 1508, and was  
laid aside, taken up again, and finished in part,  
until it reached well-nigh its final form in 1516.  
Though known to many people in manuscript the book  
was" not published until 1528, "when it speedily  
became one of the best read works in Europe. It was  
translated into French by at least two hands before  
1538; it appeared in Spanish dress in 1540; Sir  
Thomas Hoby published it as The Courtier in 1561;  
and it was put into Latin."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ady, Mrs. Henry (Julia Cartwright), Beatrice D'Este,  
Duchess of Milan, p. 351.

<sup>2</sup> Woodward, p. 251.

The setting of the events recorded in The Courtier is the court of Urbino, where rule the noble but invalid Duke, Guidobaldo, and his Duchess, the Lady Elizabeth Gonzaga. The time is March 1507. The usual procedure of the courtesy becks was for the knights and ladies of the court to meet in the evening. A queen was elected from among the ladies present. She then assigned to the different members of the company a topic of discussion. "In this manner the important subjects of conversation were treated in turn, and the ideas and opinions of the age, on love and honor, beauty and riches.. were all expressed."<sup>1</sup> At the court of Urbino Castiglione says that

"the manner of the gentlemen in the house was immediately after supper to assemble together where the Dutchesse was. Where among other recreations, musike and dauncing, which they used continually, some-

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<sup>1</sup>  
Einstein, p. 83.

time they propounded feate questions,<sup>1</sup>  
etherwhile they invented certayne wittye  
sportes and pastimes at the device, some-  
time of one, sometime of another."<sup>2</sup>

The Ladie Emilia Pia, friend and companion of the  
Duchess, usually assigned the pastimes.

The four books of The Courtier, each repre-  
senting an evening's topic, are concerned respectively  
with the qualifications of the ideal courtier, the  
methed by which he is "to practise his good condi-  
tions and qualities,"<sup>3</sup> the qualifications of the  
perfect Renaissance woman, and last, the service of  
the Courtier to his Prince, and the proper tactics  
for the courtier in matters of love. The suggested  
pastime which brought forth these four discussions,  
on four consecutive evenings, was

"to shape in wordes a good courtier,  
specifying all such conditions and  
particular qualities, as of necessitie  
must bee in him that deserveth the  
name,"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
"neat questions"

<sup>2</sup>  
Castiglione, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>4</sup>  
Ibid., p. 29.

in other words,

"of what sort he ought to be that  
deserveth to be called so perfit a  
courtier that there be no want in  
him."<sup>1</sup>

The courtier is first of all "to be a  
gentleman borne and of a good house."<sup>2</sup> The question  
of nobility of birth was a much disputed one among  
the authors of the courtesy books. In point of fact,  
the trend of the times in Italy was toward more demo-  
cratic ideas. All were agreed that though a courtier  
be a gentleman born, his nobility should in no way  
excuse in him any lack of virtue. The more lenient  
thought that virtue, courtesy and wit could take the  
place of noble descent. Some, Castiglione included,  
believed that since the aim was to fashion a perfect  
courtier, he should be of noble birth, since people  
respected noblemen far more, even though their qual-  
ities were no more excellent.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Castiglione, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

Gastiglione's courtier in addition to nobleness of birth, is to have

"not onely a wit, and a comely shape of person and countenance, but also a certaine grace."<sup>1</sup>

This characteristic of grace is continually dwelt upon by the Renaissance writers. The courtier is to do everything well, but with grace, and an air of indifference, as though the act presents no difficulty. Guazzo agrees with Gastiglione, for he has Annibale to say,

"You have swarved nothing at all in this discourse from the duties of a perfect courtier, whose propertie it is to do all things with careful diligence, and skillful art: may yet so that the art is hidden, and the whole seemeth to be done by chaunce, that he may thereby be had in more admiration."<sup>2</sup>

"The principall and true profession of a Courtier ought to be," Gastiglione considers, "in feates of armes."<sup>3</sup> The courtier will be confident,

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<sup>1</sup> Gastiglione, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Guazzo, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Gastiglione, p. 55.

but not bragging, comely, but not effeminate.

"These men, seeing nature (as they seem to have a desire to appear and to be) hath not made them women..... ought to be banished not only out of princess courts, but also out of the company of gentlemen."<sup>1</sup>

In all sports the courtier is "to show his strength, lightness and quickness,"<sup>2</sup> if possible beating the actual professors of each game or feat of skill on their own ground. This proficiency must appear in sports as diverse<sup>3</sup> as duelling, riding, hunting, swimming, tennis, leaping, running and casting the stone. Castiglione then concedes,

"If our Courtier then bee taught these exercises more than indifferently well, I believe he may set aside tumbling, climbing upon a cord, and such other matters that tast somewhat of Jugglers craft, and doe little beseeome a gentleman."<sup>4</sup>

Continuing, the author says,

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<sup>1</sup> Castiglione, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-42.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

"But beside goodnesse the true and principall ornament of the minde in every man (I believe) are letters."<sup>1</sup>

He would have the courtier to have

"not onely the understanding of the Latin tongue, but also of the Greek."<sup>2</sup>

"Let him much exercise himselfe in writing both rime and prose and especially in this our vulgar tongue. For beside the contentation<sup>3</sup> that hee shall receive thereby himselfe, hee shall by this meanes never want pleasant intertainments with whome which ordinarily love such matters."<sup>4</sup>

He must use the vulgar language rather than the Tuscan (an archaic form) both in writing and speaking, for it is correct in wryting "to choose out the fairest and prepest of signification that be used in speaking."<sup>5</sup>

When someone raises an argument as to the respective merits of letters and arms, he replies,

"And these two points (learning and arms) linked together and aided the

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<sup>1</sup> Castiglione, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> "enjoyment"

<sup>4</sup> Castiglione, p. 71.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.



one by the other will I have to be  
in the Courtier."<sup>1</sup>

Such is the Renaissance standard. How different  
is Castiglione's versatile courtier, diplomat and  
adviser to his prince, literary man, scholar, and  
soldier, from the medieval knight.

Some of the advice, even though conforming  
to human nature, seems humorous. The courtier, even  
while keeping his nonchalant attitude, must get such  
publicity as he can, in battle performing "in the  
sight of noble men that he be of most estimation in the  
camp," and never being last to enter the lists, since  
women especially "take much more heed to the first  
than the last."<sup>2</sup> When he praises himself, he must do  
so discreetly; he must dance with dignity; he must  
have a practical acquaintance with music, for Plato  
and Aristotle advised music and Socrates in his old  
age learned to play the harp.<sup>3</sup> Finally, he ought to

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<sup>1</sup> Castiglione, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 95, 96.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

understand the art of painting and sculpture.<sup>1</sup>

Many other precepts are laid down for the use of his requirements and for his general conduct. His ordinary apparel is to be black, or dark in color,<sup>2</sup> but for festive occasions, merrier colors are correct. He is to have "an especiall and hartie friend," and "doe his best to fellowshippe himselfe with men of estimation that are noble and knowne to bee good, more than with the unnoble and of small reputation, so he bee also beloved and honoured of them."<sup>3</sup>

All of the injunctions which Castiglione gives point to the same end - that the courtier be properly fitted to advise his prince, informing him of the truth on all matters, and advising him when he is about to do wrong. The end of courtliness is the instructing of a prince.<sup>4</sup> The courtier must study the nature of his prince,

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<sup>1</sup> Castiglione, pp. 77, 79.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

and court his favor,<sup>1</sup> but must avoid wearying him with importunities. In all matters he must give his unerring loyalty, unless his prince be dishonorable, or ask dishonorable service of him. In that case, it is peremptory that he leave his service, since it would be derogatory to courtly character to remain.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. John Addington Symonds, commenting on Il Cortigiano,<sup>3</sup> says that Castiglione shows the Italian noble of the Renaissance at his best. The Court of Urbino -- refined, chivalrous, witty, cultured, gentle -- was confessedly the purest and most elevated court in Italy.<sup>4</sup> However, if Castiglione could take such a model court, even though it was an exception, and give its manners and culture to the Europe which was just emerging from the Dark Ages, he

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<sup>1</sup> Castiglione, pp. 106-109.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> Symonds, John Addington, Renaissance in Italy, pp. 180-180.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

could scarcely do more. Mr. Symonds says that at the time of Hoby's translation, the Cortigiano was in the hands of all the gentiofolk of Europe.

To be sure, there are obvious faults in the Cortigiano. So perfectly is the courtier fashioned that as one of the assembled company, the Lord Julian, so well remarks, he would be more excellent than the prince, which would be most unfitting.<sup>1</sup> But as the ideal was "such a Courtier as neever was", nor perhaps ever would be, he served very well as a pattern for Europe in general, whether for Sidney in particular or not.

Mr. Burckhardt says that Castiglione does not acknowledge the fact, but that the inner impulse which inspired the courtier was not service to his prince but to his own perfection. He says, "One instance will make this clear. In time of war the courtier refuses even useful and perilous tasks if they are

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<sup>1</sup> Symonds, footnote, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> Castiglione, p. 296.

not beautiful and dignified in themselves, such as for instance the capture of a herd of cattle; what urges him to take part in war is not duty, but 'l' honore'.<sup>1</sup> Miss Kelse implies the same.<sup>2</sup>

A notable quality in Castiglione's work is its lack of a religious standard. Especially would this lack be noticeable to the English, always more moral than their continental neighbors. Doubtless they, along with "high society in France, Spain and the Low Countries, not less than in Italy, revered the Cortegiano as an inspired guide, supplementing according to choice, its obvious omissions with respect to the side of religion and the stalwart virtues."<sup>3</sup>

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Now, what were the differences between this ideal courtier type, which Castiglione visualized, and the English Renaissance gentleman? Miss Kelse, in her

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<sup>1</sup> Burckhardt, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> Kelse, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Camb. Hist. of Eng. Lit., III, 496.

Portrait of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century, brings out very clearly the characteristics which differentiated the two.<sup>1</sup>

"Castiglione's Courtier presented in Holbein's English dress becomes to all appearance and intention an English book, and the recommended bible of the gentleman; and yet in many respects the ideal of the Italian courtier seems never to have become the ideal of the English gentleman. The ingredients, as may be seen, are greatly mixed."<sup>2</sup>

This English gentleman differed from the medieval knight.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the chief conditions which brought about the change from knight to gentleman were the prolonged peace of Elizabeth's reign, and the spread of education, the invention of the printing press, and the spread of wealth to include the merchant class. In consequence, there was a shifting of emphasis from military to civil employments, the addition of learning as

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<sup>1</sup> The conclusions of the remainder of this chapter are those of Miss Kelsey, and the quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from her book.

<sup>2</sup> p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> pp. 14, 15.

the necessary equipment of the gentleman, and the beginning of the democratization of the gentleman.<sup>1</sup>

Miss Kelse goes on to say that the "combination of warrior and scholar was first presented in the ideal of the courtier which arose in the Italian city-states during the renaissance," and that Castiglione gave the most perfect expression to the ideal for Italy; yet, she seems to consider that the Italians gave much more stress to arms than did the English, for she says, "The difference in this respect between the English 'complete gentleman' and the Italian courtier is striking. From Hyet to Peacham one may look in vain for such a sketch of military pride and prowess as Castiglione presents."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps chief of all the differences between the English gentleman and the Italian courtier was the courtier's ambition to achieve personal perfection, as opposed to the Englishman's desire to serve his state.

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<sup>1</sup>  
p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>  
p. 48.

"The court as an occupation is thus differently conceived in the English ideal and in the Italian. The Italian courtier at his best, as Castiglione conceived him, was a man fitted to conquer in war, to adorn a court, and to give wise counsel to his prince, but he was chiefly interested in the court as a place where he might achieve personal perfection and make his perfection known. At the hands of other writers, however, he did not escape the character of a flatterer, a trifler, whose only business was to entertain the prince during his hours of ease in order to relieve the strain of serious business.... There was none to speak for a perfect courtier except Castiglione in his English dress, and even a Sidney with Castiglione in his pocket fretted for activity elsewhere to the point of running away (Greville, Shap. 7). The ambassador, the counsellor, the secretary, the provincial governor, the magistrate, were the courtiers of England."<sup>1</sup> "The ideal of personal perfection far more than the idea of civil

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<sup>1</sup>  
pp. 51-53.



usefulness dominated the Italians. The perfect courtier is at the best an adviser only to his prince, not himself an administrator of affairs. Though Castiglione would have him more than ordinarily acquainted with the humanities - Latin, Greek, the poets, orators, historians, he is to avoid in all things the appearance of taking pains, of being expert.<sup>1</sup>

The graces and not the business of life are insisted upon. In England on the other hand, "it is the business of life that absorbs attention, and moral rather than aesthetic considerations set the standard."<sup>2</sup>

"The heaviest responsibility of the English gentleman lay not in the attainment of personal perfection, but in the performance of public service."<sup>3</sup> He was much interested in practical politics.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>  
pp. 84-85.

<sup>2</sup>  
pp. 84-85.

<sup>3</sup>  
p. 59.

<sup>4</sup>  
p. 59.

ideal public service was governing. Dr. Wallace says, "No Elizabethan...would have had any doubt as to what constituted the great occupation. To do the Queen service - this was their highest ambition, and the primacy of public service over all other employments has become a tradition."<sup>1</sup>

Miss Kelso continues, "Love, for the Italian, was an essential part of the courtier's life. It might serve only as the way to marriage; it might, though honest, contemplate only the pleasure of serving a mistress; or it might as with Castiglione furnish the courtier with a religion, a worship of perfection outside himself....But no one in England who sets forth the complete gentleman includes the art of loving among his accomplishments."<sup>2</sup>

Merits were dwelt upon by the English as they never were by the Italians. "Whereas in Castiglione the graces were emphasized to the neglect of the virtues, in

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, "Reputation of Sir Philip Sidney", p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Kelso, p. 68.

~~The Government~~ the emphasis is on moral qualities<sup>1</sup>  
to the exclusion of the graces."

The English gentleman was very probably  
more religious than his Italian prototype. It has  
been said that Italy "did not, like other lands,  
much fear the Church, of which she had the ironic<sup>2</sup>  
comprehension of intimacy". "Certainly no puritan  
gentleman could have lived more edifyingly than Sir  
Philip Sidney, according to the account of his  
friend, George Gifford, an eminent divine who was with  
him during the last two weeks of his life."<sup>3</sup>

There were many other precepts for the  
English gentleman. He should rather lean toward  
spending too much than spending too little, if a mean<sup>4</sup>  
could not be achieved. He must adhere to a code of  
honor. The theory of law of honor and the duel reached

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<sup>1</sup>  
Kelsey, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>  
Taylor, Rachel Annand, Invitation to Renaissance  
Italy, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>  
p. 107.

<sup>4</sup>  
p. 90.

its highest development in Italy where it amounted to a religion, but its effect was seen in practice<sup>1</sup> in England.

It has now been seen that the sixteenth century English gentlemen differed materially from the Italian courtier in these respects:

1. He gave less attention to prowess at arms than did the Italian.
2. His chief occupation was service to his state, whereas the Italian's was attempt at achievement of personal perfection.
3. The art of loving was not one of his necessary accomplishments, as it was the Italian courtier's.
4. He was usually more deeply interested in morals than in graces; the Italian, vice versa.
5. He was generally more religious than the Italian.

These are Miss Kelsey's conclusions, doubtless quite correct for the class of sixteenth century English gentlemen as a whole. How may Sidney be

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<sup>1</sup>  
p. 104.

classified? Was he so nearly the Italian ideal as he is so often portrayed, or was he representative of the new English order?

**CHAPTER II**

**Some Pertinent Facts in Sidney's Life**

## CHAPTER II

### Some Pertinent Facts in Sidney's Life

Philip Sidney was endowed by birth with the heritage of nobility which was preferred but not insisted upon by both Italian and English writers of courtesy books. "A grandson of a Duke, a nephew of a King, he belonged by birth to the English aristocracy, to the governing classes of England."<sup>1</sup> It was prophetic of his life, touched by the lives of many monarchs, that King Philip of Spain was his godfather and gave the boy his own name.<sup>2</sup>

Another important influence in the boy's early environment was exercised by the noble old castle in which he lived. "Few of the stately homes of England would have been better calculated than was Penshurst to instil into the mind of a sensitive boy ideals of dignity and simple beauty and a feeling for

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, Sidney, Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace, Life of Sidney, p. 12.

the historic<sup>1</sup>.

Many circumstances in Philip's early life<sup>2</sup> were conducive to making him a courtier of distinction. His father, Sir Henry Sidney, was certainly the most faithful though most abused governor that Queen Elizabeth could have sent to Ireland to create order out of the chaos there, and his injunctions to his son in his first letter to him,<sup>3</sup> as in all later years, are wise and helpful. His mother was a Dudley, daughter of the Duke of Northumberland, sister of the Earl of Leicester, and sister-in-law of the famous Lady Jane Grey. Philip was more fortunate than the average, in that his future biographer, Fulke Greville, enrolled as a student of Shrewsbury School on the same day that he did. Greville thereby had the advantage of knowing

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, Life of Sidney, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-71.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 68-69.



Philip for a great portion of the latter's life. Philip's chances at court were materially aided by his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, favorite of the Queen. It was probably Leicester's influence which made it possible for Philip when a young boy at Shrewsbury to have a holiday from school in order to share in the celebration when the Queen visited Oxford.<sup>1</sup>

It is of Philip's schoolboy days at Shrewsbury that we have one of the most minute accounts of any period of his life, thanks to Mr. Thomas Marshall's "Account of Mr. Philippe Sidney's expenses since the fifth of December 1563 untill the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel 1566."<sup>2</sup> This is an "old mouse-eaten record" stitched together in book form which Dr. Wallace was fortunate enough to discover at Penshurst.<sup>3</sup> It was unknown to Mr. Fox Bourne and other earlier

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, chap. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I, Wallace, Life.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

biographers of Sidney.

Somehow, this account seems to make the boy more akin to the rank and file of the human family than do even his own letters of later years, for, harsh as it may sound, the later years seem always to be characterized by a certain seeking after honor, a desire for effect.

From Mr. Marshall's "items" it is possible to glean about a mere boy bits of information unembossed with the embroidery of superlative praise which makes it so difficult to arrive at any just conclusion from the later documents about Philip Sidney, Gentleman. We learn that as a schoolboy his wardrobe was of most modest proportions, and not a small part of his expenses were credited to the purchase of some bit of cloth for mending, or to the converting of old doublets into new hose. It would seem that the Earl of Leicester was ashamed of his nephew's rather homely attire when the latter was to attend the great Oxford celebration, for Mr. Marshall

sets down an exact list of the apparel which the Earl of Leicester "vouchsafed to bestow on him",<sup>1</sup> and the taffeta coats, satin doublets, and leather jerkins indicate that for this one occasion the boy's attire was sufficiently gorgeous to befit his station.

Here in keeping with the life of an average schoolboy are these notations:

"Itm for a yarde of slothe to make Mr Philippe a paire of beste hose havinge nam but a paire of linen web were to thine to ride in after his disease...3s. 4d."<sup>2</sup>

"Itm for certaine b (yrd b)oltes for to showte at byrds.....8d"<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Marshall makes this notation for the return trip from Oxford:

"Itm gyvenne by Mr Philipps commandmente to a blinde harper who is Sr Willm Helles man of Nottinghamshier...12 d."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix I, p. 407.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 407.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 408.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 481.

From this period until that fatal hour when Sir Philip received his death wound but refused the cup of water to give it to a poor soldier we find such instances of his generosity. Surely as a boy of twelve he was actuated by other impulses than a desire for his own glory.

He must have been from childhood inclined to be serious and contemplative, for Fulke Greville says,

"Though I lived with him and knew him from a child, yet I never knew him other than a man; with such staidness of mind, lovely, and familiar gravity, as carried grace, and reverence above greater years. His talk ever of knowledge, and his very play tended to enrich his mind. So as even his teachers found something in him to observe and learn above that which they had usually read, or taught. Which eminence by nature and industry made his worthy father style Sir Philip in my hearing, though I unseen, lumen familiaris suae (light of his household)."<sup>1</sup>

The first letter written by Sir Henry to his son, although undated, is usually ascribed to

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<sup>1</sup> Greville, Sir Fulke, Life of Sir Philip Sidney, p. 6.

1888. It is preserved in the Shrewsbury School Library,<sup>1</sup> and if it is a fair sample of Sir Henry's efforts to engender noble character traits in his son, it is not difficult to understand Philip's "eminence by nature and industry."

"Be courteous of gesture and affable to all men, with diversity of reverence according to the dignity of the person. There is nothing that winneth so much with so little cost.... Remember, my son, the noble blood you are descended of by your mother's side, and think that only by virtuous life and good action you may be an ornament to that illustrious family."

This is only a small bit of the advice, much of it really worthwhile, and the letter is signed, "Your loving father, so long as you live in the fear of God, H. Sidney." Philip's mother adds a loving postscript. We may find by investigation that Sir Henry in later years does not hesitate to scheme and arrange for an expeditious marriage for his son,

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<sup>1</sup> See Wallace, pp. 67-70.

nor does he hesitate to make provision which will not hinder his own remarriage in case of his wife's death,<sup>1</sup> but such action in those days evidently detracted no more from a man's character than does the support by an eminent man today of a crooked politician.

Little is known in detail of the three or four years which Philip spent at Christ Church, Oxford, but it seems fairly probable that he did not waste his time, as the testimony of his father in letters to his younger son, Robert, of two of his tutors, and of Fulke Greville, will bear out. An inscription on the tomb of his first tutor, Thomas Thornton, bears witness "that he was a common refuge for young poor scholars of great hope and parts, and tutor to Sir Philip Sidney when he was of Christ Church."<sup>2</sup> The unknown writer named Philophilippus, who prefixed a short essay on 'The Life and Death of Sir Philip Sidney'

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, p. 292.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

to the Argadia, speaks thus in his quaint language of the years spent at Oxford: 'Here an excellent stock met with the choicest grafts; nor could his tutors pour in so fast as he was ready to receive.'<sup>1</sup>

At Oxford Sidney's friendship with Fulke Greville was continued. Other contemporaries there who later became famous were William Camden, Richard Hakluyt, Walter Raleigh and Edmund Spenser. The friendships which he formed with these men were lasting.

It was during the Oxford period that negotiations of a very business-like nature were transacted between Sir Henry Sidney and Sir William Cecil, looking toward a marriage contract between the latter's attractive daughter, Anne, and Philip. Cecil was cold and calculating though, and his own elevation to be Baron of Burghley, coupled with the very uncertain

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<sup>1</sup> Symonds, J. A., Sir Philip Sidney, p. 15.  
Note: The Foullierat edition of the Argadia which I am using does not include this.

chances of Philip's one day being Leicester's heir - not to mention Sir Henry's disfavor with Elizabeth and his scant pecuniary provision for his son - eventually brought an end to the plans, and Anne was married to the dissolute but wealthy Earl of Oxford.

Philip was now in his eighteenth year, with a university education to his credit. It was a day in which travel abroad was a necessary prerequisite to an accomplished courtier's education, however; hence we find that

"he was, in 1572, sent to Travel: For Queen Elizabeth, 25 May, in that Year, grants her Licence to her trusty and welbelovéd Philip Sydney, Esq.; to go out of England, into Parts beyond the Seas, with three Servants and four Horses, etc. to remain the Space of two Yeares, immediately following his Departure out of the Realm, for his Attaining <sup>1</sup> the Knowledge of foreign Languages."

Because in the estimation of his uncle, Leicester,<sup>2</sup> he was "young and raw," he went equipped with a

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, Arthur, Letters and Memorials of State (Sidney Papers), p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> Fox Bourne, p. 88.



letter of introduction from the Earl of Leicester to Mr. Francis Walsingham, her Majesty's regular ambassador at the Court of France.

It was perhaps the hand of destiny that the young gentleman should have been in Paris at the time of the horrible massacre of Saint Bartholomew. He had already doubtless absorbed freely the Puritanic spirit of Oxford, and the scenes of perfidy and horror which he now witnessed from the house of Walsingham quickened his Protestantism and affected for his entire lifetime his outlook on France and Catholicism.

He spent not two years, as designated in Elizabeth's permit, but three, in Continental travel. Perhaps the most influential event of his life took place at Frankfurt, for there it was in 1573, that lodging at the house of one Andrew Wechel, a famous printer, he met Hubert Languet, who was to become his devoted friend and counsellor, and the prime force in the shaping of his future education and political

ideals. To him we are indebted for a great part of our knowledge of Sidney, through such of their correspondence as is preserved. Pears, in his introduction to his translation of the letters - for they were written in Latin - says that "Hubert Languet, at this time in the 54th year of his age, was a native of Burgundy. He was educated in Italy."<sup>1</sup>

Sidney and Languet went to Vienna together, but the former with his attendants went on to Venice on horseback, and the correspondence between the two began immediately. Philip did not go to Rome because Languet had requested that he not do so. He studied at Padua however, and it was not until 1574 that he went back to Vienna and Languet. In 1575 he returned to England.

His career as a courtier started with this period. "Attached to the Court he largely occupied his time in its splendid recreations. He was at

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<sup>1</sup> Pears, Stewart, The Correspondence of Sir Philip Sidney and Hubert Languet, Introd., XVI.

Kensilworth in 1576 when his uncle Leicester gave that elaborate and fantastic entertainment in honour of the Queen's visit, which fills a glowing page in Elizabeth's history.<sup>1</sup> It was while the Queen was on the same progress, and she and her court were guests of the first Earl of Essex at Chartley Castle, that Sidney met Penelope Devereux, then a girl of twelve.

In 1577 he was sent on a diplomatic mission by the Queen to the continent. Greville is more detailed in his treatment of this period than of any other, and his accounts, as well as the letters of Walsingham and others, bear evidence to the fact that though young in years, Philip by the spell of his character made a very deep impression upon such notable men as William, Prince of Orange, and Don John of Austria. A part of this time he was with Langnet.

Returned to England, he did not again leave

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, Sidney, Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century, p. 76.

until 1585. The interim is largely a period of unrest. We know that for a year or more he was vacillating between the plan of taking an active part for the Protestant cause in the Low Countries, and of launching on some Indian project.<sup>1</sup> He also bestirred himself in defense of his father.<sup>2</sup> Languest visited him, and on his return to Germany, took Philip's younger brother, Robert, with him.

Sidney's much celebrated quarrel with the Earl of Oxford in the tennis court was an event of this period. Fears remarks that this is the period biographers most delighted to enlarge upon, but of which we know least. In connection with the quarrel, which led to a near-duel, but for the Queen's intervention, he says that these biographers relate all particulars of the quarrel in the tennis court, "which only shows that with all the graces of chivalry, Sidney unhappily retained one of its deformities."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> Fox Bourne, p. 133 ff; Wallace, p. 200 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Fears, Introd., LVI.

Shortly after this Sidney submitted a letter to Elizabeth in which he summed up the arguments which counted chiefly in his own mind against her marriage project with Alençon. Elizabeth had doubtless never received a letter so bold and direct, for most of her advisers practised the involved literary style of the Queen herself. She may have secretly liked the frankness; however, she could not suffer her pride to be impaired by retaining young Philip at her side, and he was banished from court.

A large part of his retirement was spent at Milton, the country home of his much adored sister, Mary, who after a brilliant period at court as a maid of honor to the Queen, had married the Earl of Pembroke. For her he now wrote "The Countess of Pembroke's *ARADIA*".

He was soon back at court, and during the years 1580-1582 we have the picture of a man of high purpose filled with a burning desire to do some worthy

work for his country, yet continually checked and thwarted, forced to recognize the sad fact that his energies were largely dissipated in the performance of tasks merely formal.<sup>1</sup> He turned to one scheme and then to another. Though elected to the House of Commons in 1581, he probably derived no great satisfaction from his new office, craving action as he did.

The marriage of Penelope Devereux to Lord Rich during this period must have added immeasurably to the disquietude of his mind.

Knighthood and his own marriage to Frances Walsingham, daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham, were the outstanding events of 1583. The conferring of a title added prestige to his name, but was not in actuality a mark of merit. "Count Casimir was about to be installed as a Knight of the Garter, and as he had named Sidney his proxy, and as no one could act

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, p. 277.

in that capacity below the rank of a knight,  
Sidney's deficiency was made good."<sup>1</sup> Collins says,

"In 1585, John, Prince Palatine of the Rhine, being made a Knight of the Garter, gave his Procurator to Sir Philip Sydney to receive his Stall, and in his Name to take Possession of it; and thereupon, he was knighted by the Sovereign at Windsor Castle, the 15th of January, the Morning before he proceeded to take Possession thereof."<sup>2</sup>

His marriage with Frances Walsingham is usually thought of as one de goudwast,<sup>3</sup> and was concluded not without difficulty on the part of Sir Henry, whose financial assets, like those of his wife and son, seemed never over-plentiful.

The period up until the time when Elizabeth finally conceded to Sir Philip's desire for action and gave him a command in the Netherlands was fairly uneventful. The story of Zutphen, Sir Philip's foolhardy daring and consequent wound, his

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, p. 288.

<sup>2</sup> Collins, I, 108.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, Sidney, Great Englishmen, p. 105.

unselfish relinquishing of the cup of water to the  
peer soldier, are too well known to need recounting.  
Greville is rather detailed in his treatment of Sid-  
ney's last days, and without doubt his going-out was  
as courageous as any knight of old could have wished.  
To Shelley,

"Sidney, was he fought and as he  
fell and as he lived and loved,  
Sublimely mild, a spirit without spot,"<sup>1</sup>

was one of the "inheritors of unfulfilled renown who  
arose from their thrones - far in the Unapparent" to  
welcome Keats, the Adonais, who like Sidney himself  
had passed from this mortal sphere while still young  
in years.

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<sup>1</sup> Shelley, Percy Bysshe, Complete Poetical Works,  
"Adonais", Stanza XLV, p. 318.



**CHAPTER XIX**

**Sidney, Courtier or Gentleman?**

## CHAPTER III

### Sidney, Courtier or Gentleman?

Sidney's was not a long life. The short span of thirty-two years from 1554 until 1586 would be for the average man but a framework of preparation for an exalted station in life, yet he was acclaimed at eighteen by "the graver sort of Courtiers", and at twenty-two had won the plaudits of many a notable man. Lodowick Bryskott, who had traveled with Sidney in Germany and Italy, once entertained a party of friends assembled in Spenser's house near Dublin by bearing this witness to his friend,

"who being but seventene yeeres of age when he began to travell, and coming to Paris, where he was ere long sworne Gentleman of the Chamber to the French king, was so admired among the graver sort of Courtiers, that when they could at any time have him in their companie and conversation, they would be very joyfull and no less delighted with his ready and witty answers, than astonished to hear him speake the French language so wel and aptly, having bin so short a while in the country. So was he likewise

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esteemed in all places else where he came in his travell as well in Germanie as in Italie. And the judgement of her Majestie employing him, when he was not yet full 22 years old, in embassage to congratulate with the Emperour that now in his coming to the Empire may serve for a sufficient prooffe, what excellencie of understanding and what stayednesse was in him at those yeeres." (See A Discourse of Civill Life containing the History of Sir Philip Sidney, London, 1608, p. 100)1

Aubrey, in his reminiscences says:

"Sir Philip Sydney, knight, was the most accomplished cavalier of his time....He was not only of an excellent witt, but extremely beautifull; he much resembled his sister, but his haire was not red, but a little inclining, viz. a dark amber colour. If I were to find a fault in it, methinkes its not masculine enough; yett he was a person of great courage. He was much at Wilton with his sister....."2

Pears remarks that at the time Sidney left England and proceeded on his travels into France in

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1 Quoted by Kelso, pp. 47-48; Wallace, p. 117.

2 Aubrey, John, Brief Lives, p. 247.

the latter part of May, 1572, he was

"in his eighteenth year, and his boyhood already gave promise of all these graces of mind and of person, for which his riper years were so famous. He was tall and well shaped; and even at his early age, skilful in all manly exercises. His hair and complexion were very fair, and his countenance soft and pensive as a woman's, and yet full both of intelligence and thoughtfulness."<sup>1</sup>

His extant portraits do not indicate his exceeding fairness, but they do testify to the shapeliness of his person, and to his thoughtful and straightforward expression. In a copy of The Connoisseur for March, 1886, is reproduced the portrait exhibited in the National Portrait Gallery, London. The artist is unknown, although the painting is sometimes ascribed to Enssere.<sup>2</sup> It shows a youthful man, clean-shaven, bare-headed, with a high forehead and rather long, thin face, pointed chin and contemplative eyes. He

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<sup>1</sup> Pears, Introd., p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> LXXIV, 189.

<sup>3</sup> Wallace, p. 484.

wears a white neck ruff, not wide, but well up about his face, white ruffs at his wrists, and a stiff looking costume with a steel gorget. The right hand, with very slim fingers, rests on the hip, and the left holds the hilt of a sword.

It is entirely impossible to show that Sidney conformed entirely on the one hand to an Italian ideal or to an English standard on the other. It must be remembered, however, that the great ambition of the Italian gentleman was personal perfection, even while he served his prince; whereas the Englishman placed greatest stress upon serving his country. To that end the latter placed more emphasis upon study and education, and less upon arms, than did the Italian. He exalted morals and religion; the Italian stressed graces rather than morals, and made a religion of his love.

Philip Sidney's life was an exhibition of an odd interplay of forces which, in a day when Englishmen were attempting to touch life at as many points as possible, set him apart for the almost universal praise

of his contemporaries. His praises may have become a tradition in succeeding centuries. That is often the case. The really remarkable thing about Sidney's reputation is that it was as great during his lifetime as it has ever been since. We can begin most sensibly if we proceed on the assumption that he was an extraordinary man. "This is the judgment of a great number of those who knew him well. When the judgment of so many wise men is unanimous it would be an excess of scepticism for us to doubt. Beyond question he is the most remarkable, the most completely typical, product of the English Renaissance."<sup>1</sup> He stands at the very opening of the modern epoch in English history - a shining figure in whom much of the best in the ancient and medieval world is gathered up, but whose face is turned resolutely toward the future. For him there was much in the ideals of chivalry that might well be incorporated in the new

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, "Reputation of Sir Philip Sidney", p. 10.

outlook on life. "Its exaltation of courage, of skill in arms and horsemanship, of loyalty to friends, of high respect for women, seemed to him forever valid, and in no sense to conflict with the new enthusiasm for letters and learning. His temperament was essentially catholic, eclectic, and he sought eagerly to learn whatever Italy or France or Spain could contribute to modern England."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps in seeking the real purpose of his life, the key to his almost unanimous popularity may be found. Challenge it as we may, there is a preponderance of evidence in Sidney's life which would seem to indicate that he consciously sought personal perfection; and in his near attainment of his goal in many respects, lies the clue to the universal appeal which he made to his contemporaries. He must not be too severely criticized for such conscious effort, for though selfish as it may seem, it did not redound to his discredit, nor did his ambition "overleap itself,

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, "Reputation of Sir Philip Sidney", p. 10.

and fall on the other," unless his tragic death-wound at Sutzen be attributed to conscious effort for military glory. Undoubtedly his own innate charm of personality and his able abilities gave him much advantage to start with. Added to these were the solicitous advice of an excellent father, the ever-persevering watchfulness of his friend Languet, and the influence of an age which had "taken all knowledge to be its province". Languet, writing from Frankfurt in January, 1878, addresses Sidney as

"...you, whom all the world pronounces to have been reared in the lap of the graces."<sup>1</sup>

Sidney in all probability did not pattern himself consciously after Castiglione's ideal, and would perhaps feel slandered if he could hear himself variously designated as "Castiglione's courtier reincarnated" and the "living embodiment" of the Italian ideal, for he shared with Aschen and Languet

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<sup>1</sup> Fears, p. 133.



a certain dislike for immoral Italy.

In a letter to his brother Robert in 1579  
(printed in "Instructions for Travellers") he writes:

"Also for Italy we know not what we have, or can do with them, but to buy their silks and wines; and as for the other point, except Venice, whose good laws and customs we can hardly proportion to ourselves because they are quite of a contrary government, there is little there but tyrannous oppression and servile yielding to them that have little or no right over them. And for the men you shall have there, although indeed some be excellently learned, yet are they all given to counterfeit learning, as a man shall learn among them more false grounds of things than in any place else that I know; for from a tapster upwards they are all discourgers. In fine, certain matters and qualities as horsemanship, weapons, paintings, and such, are better there than in other countries; but for other matters, as well, if not better, you shall have them in nearer places."<sup>1</sup>

It must be remembered, however, that although Ascham bled Italy and things Italian soundly, he had only praise for The Courtier. Sidney, familiar with Italian courtesy books as he must have been, could have quite unconsciously followed their dictates, while consciously

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<sup>1</sup>  
Pears, p. 196.

holding his life, as he thought, in totally different guise. Languet was largely responsible for his attitude on things Italian, and even while concurring with the elder man in matter of opinion, he never quite forgave him for not allowing him to visit Rome.

In 1573 Languet writes Sidney:

"I judge from your letter that the splendour of Venice does not equal your expectation; nevertheless Italy has nothing fit to be compared to it, so that if this does not please you, the rest will disgust you."<sup>1</sup>

On June 11, 1574, he impresses upon the younger man that the Italian school gives vices the name of virtues, and is

"not ashamed to call falsehood, treachery and cruelty by the names of wisdom and magnanimity."<sup>2</sup>

Again, in July of the same year, he writes,

"Your letter, in which you tell me that you have given up all thoughts of a journey to Rome has relieved me from great anxiety."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fears, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

It is in 1577 that a glimpse of Sidney's disappointment may be seen, for Langnet's letter of June 14 reads

"For I do not forget how often you have reproached me as the cause of your giving up the journey to Rome."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Howe says, "The peculiar service of Sidney to his age was that he embodied to his contemporaries their standard of personal perfection."<sup>2</sup> Is Mr. Howe right? Some of the Sidney letters which have been preserved make such a statement reasonable enough. Sir Henry Sidney, writing to his son, Robert, who was, after his uncle's death, Earl of Leicester, says:

"I felicitate the Necessity of your most loving Brother who, in loving you, is comparable with me, or exceeds me. Imitate his Vertues, Exercises, Studies, and Accoyms; he is a rare Ornament of this Age, the very Formular, that all well disposed young Gentylmen of our Court do form alike their Manners and

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<sup>1</sup> Pears, p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> Howe, p. 159.

Lyfe by. In Treth I speak yt wyth-  
out Flattery of hym, or of my self,  
he hath the most rare Vertues that  
ever I found in any Man...Sake the  
Knowledge of the Estate of every  
Prynce, Court, and Gytte, that you  
pas there...Gns agayn I say imytate  
hym."<sup>1</sup>

Sidney did make a conscious effort toward education, and had a knowledge of classical lore which would have been deemed unusual in an Englishman a century earlier. This is readily proved by the allusions in the *Armadia* and the really surprising number of classical references in *The Refutation of Essay*. Yet, he quite evidently did not place the stress upon painstaking learning which Lyly, Ascham, Cleland, Humphrey, and the other writers of the English courtesy books so earnestly did. Both his own letters and those of Langnet seem to indicate that his studies, like his various exercises, are to be those necessary to his own perfection, or perhaps more exactly, those which will be most essential to a man of high birth.

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, I, 246. Letter of March 25, 1578.

If such was not Sidney's original idea, it appears rather probable from the successive correspondence of the two friends that the diplomatic, cautious and ever-suspicious Langens must have instilled it into the mind of the younger man during the yet formative period of his life.

In addition, Philip's selection of studies was seemingly based rather largely upon what would be helpful in war. His evident yearning for military service, coupled with his desire to study such subjects as would be helpful in military science, smacks surprisingly of the Italian ideal, as opposed to the new English standard of education for civil life. It will be remembered that Count Lewis says, in The Courtier,

"and these two points (learning and arms) linked together, and aided the one by the other will I have to see in the Courtier."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Castiglione, p. 73.

A few excerpts from the letters of Langnet and Sidney will ably show that there was a conscious effort on the part of the latter for the education of both his mind and body to set off his good qualities to best advantage, as befitted his station. He may not have admitted this in so many words, and may never have recognized the fact that such was his motive, being less astute than Langnet in matters of diplomacy. He probably even congratulated himself upon having the interests of his country so at heart. Fear's opinion is that

"He felt, though few men have ever been more truly modest, that his natural endowments qualified him for high employments; he had an earnest desire to serve his country and the cause of the Reformation, as a soldier and a statesman. Ancient history and biography, with the philosophy of Aristotle, were his principal subjects. To this he added a knowledge of the outline of astronomy, and so much geometry as he judged necessary for a soldier to know; while, by his correspondence with Langnet, and diligent translations of Cicero's epistles, he endeavored to acquire a correct and easy style of

letter writing."<sup>1</sup>

The following selections will serve to show not only that there was a conscious effort on the part of both Langnet and Sidney for the latter's own perfection, but also that Sidney's ultimate aim for his life was military service, though "joined with learning".

Langnet to Sidney, from Vienna, January 22, 1874:

"I know not whether it is wise to apply your mind to geometry, though it is a noble study and well worthy of a fine understanding; but you must consider your condition in life, how soon you will have to tear yourself from your literary leisure - therefore the short time which you still have should be devoted entirely to such things as are most essential. I call these things essential to you, which it is discreditable for a man of high birth not to know, and which may, one day, be an ornament and a resource to you."<sup>2</sup>

Sidney replies from Padua on February 4, 1874:



<sup>1</sup> Fears, Introd., xxv.

<sup>2</sup> Fears, p. 25.

"...about geometry I hardly know what to determine. I long so greatly to be acquainted with it, and the more so because I have always felt sure that it is of the greatest service in the art of war."<sup>1</sup>

In December, 1573, he had written Langnet from Venice:

"At present I am learning the sphere and a little music,"<sup>2</sup>

and Langnet writes him in 1574, reminding him that he is now acquainted with four languages.

Sidney's own idea, at a more mature age, of these accomplishments which a man of high birth should have, is best represented in a letter to his brother, Robert, written from Leicester House, October 18, 1580:

"...Now, sweete Brother, take a Delight to keepe and increase your Musick, you will not beleive what a Want I finde of it in my melancholie Times. At Horsenshipp

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<sup>1</sup> Pears, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.



when you exercise it, reade  
Grims Gladio, and a Book  
that is called La Gloria de  
l'Espada, withall, that you  
may joyne the through Contem-  
plation of it with the Exer-  
cise; and so shall yow pro-  
fite more in a Moneth than  
others in a Yeare, and make  
the Sitting, Saddling, and  
Curing of Horses. I would by  
the Way your Worship would  
learne a better Hand; you  
write worse than I, and I  
write evell enough; once  
againe have a Care of your  
Dyet, and consequently of  
your Complexion. ... When you  
play at Weapons, I would have  
you gett thick Hopped and Swa-  
gers, and play out your Floy  
lustilie, for indeed Ficks and  
Balances are nothing in earn-  
est, for the Time of the one  
and the other greatlie differs,  
and use as well the Blow as the  
Thrust; it is good in it selfe,  
and besides exerciseth your  
Breath and Strength, and will  
make yow a strong Man at the  
Tourney and Barriers. First in  
any case practise the single  
Sword, and then with the Dagger;  
lett no Ray passe without an  
Hower or two such exercise;  
the rest studie, or conferr

diligentlie, and so shall you  
come Home to my Comfort and  
Credit."<sup>1</sup>

Robert Sidney writes to his father from Prague,

November 1, in this year, as follows:

"My brother likewise in his  
letter to Harry White, wrote  
that if there were any good  
warre, I should go to them, but  
as yet I have hard of none."<sup>2</sup>

Languet did not sympathize with Sidney's  
desire to do service in a foreign war when there was  
no call for such action. In May, 1578, he writes:

"...But most men of high birth  
are possessed with this madness,  
that they long after a reputation  
founded on bloodshed, and believe  
that there is no glory for them ex-  
cept that which is connected with  
the destruction of mankind. Ought  
not you, adorned as you are by Pro-  
vidence, with all those splendid  
gifts of the mind, to feel otherwise  
than men feel, who are buried in the  
most profound shades of ignorance,  
and think that all human excellence

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<sup>1</sup>  
Collins, I, 283-285.

<sup>2</sup>  
Fears, footnote, p. 171.

consists in physical strength?"<sup>1</sup>

From Cologne in October of the same year he again writes:

"But you, out of mere love of fame and honour, and to have an opportunity of displaying your courage, determined to regard as your enemies those who appeared to be doing the wrong in this war"..."You and your fellows, I mean men of noble birth, consider that nothing brings you more honour than wholesale slaughter; and you are generally guilty of the greatest injustice, for if you kill a man against whom you have no lawful cause of war, you are killing an innocent person."<sup>2</sup>

Languet was a discerning man, and knew Sidney well. He recognized his superlative virtues, but he also realized that the young courtier liked a framework for "displaying his courage", and there is something very revealing about these lines - something which makes it possible to understand why Sir Philip so quixotically abandoned his leg-armor at Zutphen

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<sup>1</sup> Pears, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

before entering the battle-fray - and why he refused the cup of water.

In spite of Languet's humanitarianism there was a certain worldly wisdom in his ideas, and Sidney was undoubtedly a child of his age, "by no means a stranger to the faith in politic considerations, in indirection of method, and in the effectiveness of the personal influence of the great. It was a faith that was almost inseparable from the conditions of Court life at the time and not inconsistent with essential nobility of character."<sup>1</sup> Languet upon one occasion writes:

"When you reach England, see to it that you cultivate the good-will of Cecil, who is friendly to you and who can smooth your path in every way. In no way will you be able to secure his favour more certainly than by your affection for his children, or at least by pretending that you love them..... It will also be to your advantage to cultivate the friendship of Mr. Walsingham.....Men are wont to feel warmly towards youths who, they see, are

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<sup>1</sup> Wallase, p. 146.

seeking out the society of the  
wise...To sum up, it is necessary  
that he who wishes to live above  
contempt in the courts of powerful  
kings should moderate his preten-  
sions, digest many injuries, avoid  
with the utmost care every occasion  
for quarrelling, and cultivate the  
good-will of those in whose hands  
rests his fortune. But I shall  
cease to weary you further, for you  
understand all these things better  
than I."<sup>1</sup>

Sir Philip himself writes to Sir Edward  
Stafford in 1584,

"He thinks you should do well  
to begyn betymes to demand some-  
thing of her Majesti as might be  
found fitt for you. And lett  
Folkes chafe as well when you ask,  
as when you do not."<sup>2</sup>

Upon one occasion only does he seem to  
have voluntarily forfeited his own personal advance-  
ment to what he truly considered his country's good.  
In 1580 he wrote to Queen Elizabeth a long and

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<sup>1</sup> *Epistolog*, p. 104 (March 10, 1575). See Wallace, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> *Collins*, I, p. 298.

seemingly logical epistle setting forth the reasons why she should not marry the Duke of Anjou. "Whereupon, that same year he retired from Court."<sup>1</sup>

Languet evidently feared that Sidney was flinging all diplomatic caution to the winds, for he immediately writes, on January 30:

"I admire your courage in freely admonishing the Queen and your countrymen of that which is to the States advantage. But you must take care not to go so far that the unpopularity of your conduct be more than you can bear....I advise you to persevere as long as you can do anything that may benefit your country but when you find that your opposition only draws on you dislike and aversion, and that neither your country, your friends, nor yourself derive any advantage from it, I advise you to give way to necessity, and reserve yourself for better times; for time itself will bring you occasions and means of serving your country."<sup>2</sup>

While Sir Philip was making of himself the "glass of fashion and the mould of form", while he

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, I, 108.

<sup>2</sup> Pears, p. 170.

was preparing himself for the active life of a soldier, he was, by the perverse plan of fate, forced to live a monotonous life of lassitude at court. It was perhaps not entirely by accident that he became a writer and a patron of writers, yet Greville says,

<sup>1</sup>  
".... the truth is; his end was not writing, even while he wrote; nor his knowledge moulded for tables, or schedules; but both his wit, and understanding bent upon his heart, to make himself and others, not in words or opinion, but in life and action, good and great."

He himself, in the letter of October 18, 1580, to his brother, says,

"My toyfull Books I shall send, with Gods Helpe, by February, at which Time you shall have your Money."<sup>2</sup>

These "toyfull books" were, according to the general opinion of critics, some of his writings.

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<sup>1</sup> Life of Sidney, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Collins, I, 285.

as this was the period during which he is known to have engaged in his literary endeavors. Fears comments that writing was not his vocation. He panted for action, and it was only when sick at heart of disappointed hopes and weary of the frivolities of court life, that he poured forth the fruits of his rich imagination, as the humor seized him, in sonnets or in the Armadia.<sup>1</sup> Of his own efforts he always spoke in disparaging terms, as the product of his idlest times. In his dedication of the Armadia to his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, he says:

"Here now have you (most deare,  
and most worthy to be most deare  
Lady) this idle worke of mine;  
which I fear (like the Spiders  
webbe) will be thought fitter to  
be swept away, then worn to any  
other purpose. For my part, in  
very truth (as the cruell fathers  
among the Greekes, were wont to  
doe to the babes they would not

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<sup>1</sup>  
Fears, Introd., lviii.



fester) I could well find in my  
harte, to cast out in some desert  
of forgetfulness this child, which  
I am leath to father. But you de-  
sired me to doe it, and your desire,  
to my hart is an absolute commande-  
ment. Now, it is done onlie for  
you, onely to you: if you keepe it  
to your selfe, or to such friendes,  
who will weigh errors in the balauce  
of good will, I hope, for the fathers  
sake, it will be pardoned, perchance  
made much of, though in it selfe it  
have deformities. For indeede, for  
severer eyes it is not, being but a  
trifle, and that triflinglie handled..  
In summe, a young head, not so well  
stayed as I would it were....having  
many many fancies begetten in it, if  
it had not ben in some way delivered,  
would have growen a monster, and more  
sorie might I be that they came in,  
then that they gat out."<sup>1</sup>

Sidney allowed nothing that he wrote  
to be published during his lifetime, and even  
Languet seems to have been unaware of the exis-  
tence of the Arsadia, for no mention is made of  
it in the extant letters. To be sure, he did  
"slip into the title of a poet", to quote his

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<sup>1</sup>  
Sidney, Sir Philip, The Complete Works, I, 3.

own words from the Defense of Peesey,<sup>1</sup> and in addition had a place by himself among Elizabethan patrons. Aubrey says,

"He was of a very munificent spirit, and liberrall to all lovers of learning, and to those that pretended to any acquaintance with Parnassus; in so much that he was cloyed and surfeited with the poetasters of these days."<sup>2</sup>

Even so, it seems that Sidney's ambition was ever for a soldier's life, or an adventurer's, and that his literary pursuits were in reality but a loophole of escape from the monotonous life of the court. His plans for accompanying Drake on his expedition, and his subsequent disappointment when he was not permitted by the Queen to go, are recounted by Greville.<sup>3</sup> He became excited over Frobisher's supposed discovery of gold,<sup>4</sup> and would doubtless

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney, Sir Philip, Defense of Peesey, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Aubrey, p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> Greville, pp. 70-78.

<sup>4</sup> Pears, pp. 116-122.

have taken an active part in the New World colonisation if he could ever have won Elizabeth's approval. According to Greville he considered "what possibility there was for him, that had no delight to rest idle at home, of repropounding some other foreign enterprise, probable and fit to invite that excellent Princesses minde, and moderate Government, to take hold off."<sup>1</sup>

This strange harking back on Sidney's part to a medievalism which considered the bearing of arms the only honorable pursuit for a man of high birth does not entirely coincide with the Italian ideal of the perfect courtier, for the latter was to do service for his Prince whether at court or on the battlefield. However, if the Italian ideal, Castiglione's, for instance, leaned more in either direction, it was probably toward arms rather than learning. Sir Philip, in his "learning joined with arms" and his seeking of personal perfection, has thus far inclined more to the

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<sup>1</sup> Greville, p. 78.

Italian than to the English side of the scale.

Miss Kelse, in refutation of this says that even Sir Philip Sidney,

"England's mirror of perfection, perhaps the nearest approach to Castiglione's ideal that the English renaissance produced, was more of a statesman than a soldier. His chief interest, as Fulke Greville's life of him shows, was the policy of governments....."<sup>1</sup>

She continues,

"And when this same Sir Philip Sidney fourteen years later took his last journey through the streets of London to St. Paul's, of all the rich and powerful civil companies, only the Grocers' followed in his funeral train to do honor to the soldier killed in his prince's war."<sup>2</sup>

Miss Kelse is quoting from Hubert Hall's Society in the Elizabethan Age, and she is correct in her statement, for Mr. Hall says, "When all England was in mourning for her greatest fighting man, one civic company only, the Grocers', followed his

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<sup>1</sup> Kelse, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

remains to St. Paul's."<sup>1</sup> As is pointed out by Mr. Hall, the good citizens - the burghesses - of that day shunned all warlike gear. However, Miss Kelse defeats her own point that Sidney was more a statesman than a soldier, by citing Hall, for the simple reason that Hall calls Sidney England's "greatest fighting man." As a matter of fact, he was probably not her greatest fighting man by any means, and his short military career, though successful enough, was not marked by any outstanding ability of the soldier. Yet, he should probably have liked to be England's greatest soldier, and his own hopes were built on a military rather than a civil career for himself.

In what other ways did Sidney seemingly conform to the dictates of the Italian courtesy books? In exercises of very diversified nature he

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<sup>1</sup>  
Dr. Hall, p. 46.

excelled. Collins records that

"In 1581, the French Treaty of Marriage was renewed and Sir Philip Sidney was among those noble Gallants that performed in the Justs, Barriers, and Harney, for the Entertainment of the Duke of Anjou, and his Train."<sup>1</sup>

In the Arcadia we read that among the public honours which the King and Courtiers of Iberia did to the Queen each year,

"none was either more gratefull to the beholders, or more noble in it selfe, then justs, both with sword and lance, maintained for a seven-night together."<sup>2</sup>

It will be remembered that in his letter to his brother he advises him to practise the blow and thrust, for acquiring breath and strength for the tourney and barriers.<sup>3</sup>

In the same letter he also suggests two manuals on horsemanship. "Of all manly arts horsemanship was held in highest repute, and none

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, I, 103.

<sup>2</sup> Sidney, Complete Works, I, Arcadia, Liber 2, p. 283.

<sup>3</sup> Collins, I, 283-285.

concerned failed to include it among the gentleman's necessary accomplishments."<sup>1</sup> Sidney at the beginning of his Defense of Poesy humorously relates how Gio. Pietro Pugliano, under whom he and Edward Wotton studied horsemanship in Vienna, exalted the horse until he himself, had he not been "a piece of a logician" before he came to him, would have wished himself a horse.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Sieveking, in Shakespeare's England, says that "Sidney was an early convert" (of the Italian art of training the horse in the manage) "and became the patron of two Italian riding-masters in England, Romano and Prospero."<sup>3</sup> In his forty-ninth sonnet he shows how love itself may be translated into terms of the "manage".

"I on my horse, and Love on me  
deth trie  
Our horsemanship, while two strong

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<sup>1</sup>  
Kelsey, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>  
p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>  
II, 412.

works I prove,  
A horsman to my horse, a  
horse to Love...."<sup>1</sup>

and in the forty-first sonnet he says:

"Having this day my horse, my  
hand, my Launce  
Guided so well, that I obtained  
the prize,  
Both by the judgement of the  
English eyes,  
And of some sent by that sweet  
emie Francke,  
Horsmen my skill in horsmanship  
advauce."<sup>2</sup>

As Fears points out,<sup>3</sup> Sidney in the second book  
of the Aradia has left a description of horse and  
rider scarcely to be surpassed in the English  
language. He does seem to understand the art of  
horsemanship to judge by such expression as

"he ever going so just with the  
horse, either fourth right, or  
turning, that it seemed as he  
borrowed the horses body, so  
he lent the horse his minde."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Complete Works, II, 362.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., II, 258.

<sup>3</sup> Fears, Introd., xlvi.

<sup>4</sup> Complete Works, I, The Aradia, Liber 2, p. 179.



Even the awkward Demotas "wanted but horse and  
apparell to be as brave a courtier as the best."<sup>1</sup>

The only specific reference to Sidney's  
hunting is that made by Aubrey, who remarks,

"My great uncle, Mr. Thomas  
Broune, remembred him; and sayd  
that he was often went, as he was  
hunting on our pleasant plaines,  
to take his table booke out of his  
pocket, and write downe his notions  
as they came into his head, when he  
was writing his Arcadia."<sup>2</sup>

Kalandor, entertaining Pyrocles and Musidorus, whom  
he knows as Daiphantus and Palladius, takes them  
hunting, discoursing with them upon the advantages  
of the sport.

"O, said he, you will never live  
to my age, without you kepe your  
selves in breath with exercise,  
and in hart with joyfullnes."<sup>3</sup>

Hawking also is a "country delight" of the  
Arcadia.<sup>4</sup>

The theory of law of honor and the duel

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<sup>1</sup> Complete Works, I, The Arcadia, Liber 2, p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> Aubrey, p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> Complete Works, Arcadia, Liber 1, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Liber 2, p. 277.

amounted almost to a religion in Italy, and was practised in England, although it was never set forth by the English writers as an ideal to the extent that it was in Italy.<sup>1</sup> Sidney's quarrel with the Earl of Oxford on the tennis court, when he assured the Earl that puppies were begotten by dogs, and children by men, is too well known from Fulke Greville's account to bear repeating.<sup>2</sup> A duel would have been the outcome had not the Queen intervened with the wrathful and impetuous Philip. Collins says:

"He was naturally of a warm and high spirit, so jealous of his Honour and Reputation that he could not brook the least Intrenchment on either, not even from Persons of the highest Rank; and much less from his Equals or Inferiors."<sup>3</sup>

Upon one occasion, thinking that his father's secretary, Edward Mellinoux, had divulged the contents of

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<sup>1</sup> Helso, pp. 104, 105.

<sup>2</sup> Greville, pp. 63-59.

<sup>3</sup> Collins, I, 101-102.

one of his letters to his father, he wrote:

"I assure you before God, that if ever I know you do so much as recde any Lettre I wryte to my Father, without his Commaundement, or my Consente, I will thruste my Dagger into you."<sup>1</sup>

Languet did not wholly approve of the duel as a method of satisfying honor. He writes in October, 1579, from Antwerp:

"From your letter as well as from his mouth (Clusius) I was informed of the dispute between you and the Earl of Oxford, which gave me great pain. I am aware that by a habit inveterate in all Christendom, a nobleman is disgraced if he does not resent such an insult; still I think you were unfortunate to be drawn into this contention although I see that no blame is to be attached to you for it. You can derive no true honour from it, even if it gave you occasion to display to the world your constancy and courage."<sup>2</sup>

Spenser in his Aspurgel pays tribute to Sir Philip's skill in all manly exercises:

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, I, 256.

<sup>2</sup> Pears, pp. 164-165.

"In wrestling nimble, and in  
running swift,  
In shooting steddie, and in  
swimming strong!  
Well made to strike, to throw,  
to leape, to lift,  
And all the sports that shep-  
herds are among!  
In every one he vanquish't every  
one,  
He vanquish't all, and vanquish't  
was of none."<sup>1</sup>

However, his participation in those exercises advocated by Castiglione does not imply by any means that he was consciously following the Italian standard, for English writers of courtesy books followed the Italian mode in that they advised exercise, riding, shooting with the long bow, wrestling, and so on, as relaxation from scholarly labors. The course which Lyly lays down in Euphues<sup>2</sup> is fairly typical of them all. Yet, Sir Philip in respect to his exercises was nevertheless adhering to the Italian standard, even as it has been shown that he sought his own personal

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<sup>1</sup> Spenser, Edmund, Complete Poetical Works, p. 701.

<sup>2</sup> Lyly, John, Euphues, p. 131.

perfection, and preferred arms coupled with letters, rather than a preponderance of literary life to the exclusion of military glory.

Did he in other ways show himself to be the ideal courtier rather than the new gentleman? He professed a liking for the social arts which Castiglione's courtiers approved so highly - "music and dancing". It has been seen that he wrote Languet from Venice that he was studying "the sphere and a little music" and that he wrote his brother "to keepe and increase" his music, commenting upon his want of it in his melancholy times. Though not a musician himself, he evidently appreciated the musician's art. Writing to the Earl of Leicester in December 1582, he says,

"I was bolde of late to move your  
Lordship in the case of the poor  
stranger Musician."<sup>1</sup>

In the last moments before his death, Greville says that he called for "Musick, especially that song which

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<sup>1</sup>  
Collins, I, 393.

himself had intitled, *La Guisasa romana*.<sup>1</sup>

Languet, reproaching Sidney upon one occasion for not writing him more frequently, reminds him that had he sacrificed but one dance a month he could have satisfied his old friend abundantly.<sup>2</sup> In the *Arcadia* Pamela tells her sister Philelea that Dorus one time "danced the Matashine dances in armour (O with what a gracefull dexteritie!) I thinke to make me see, that he had bene brought up in such exercises."<sup>3</sup> "Dancing with graceful dexterity" is a phrase which well might be taken from Castiglione himself. Dr. Wallace, commenting upon Sidney's very probable familiarity with the *Scourtiar*, says that he managed to transfuse something of its noble idealism into his own *Arcadia*.<sup>4</sup>

The *Arcadia*, in its combination of

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<sup>1</sup> Greville, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> From *Epistles*, p. 139. See Wallace, *Life*, p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> *Complete Works*, I, *The Arcadia*, Liber 2, p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> Wallace, *Life*, p. 243.

Arcadian and heroic characteristics, has many elements which might be attributed to a direct Castiglione influence; yet so permeated with the Italian's doctrine are the English courtesy books that it is impossible to say. The various young heroes of the Arcadia conquer giants, sometimes using force, sometimes policy, but "always vertus".<sup>1</sup> Pyrocles and Musidorus in their education had always "the beauty of vertus"<sup>2</sup> set before their eyes, and they are generally considered "paragons of vertus."<sup>3</sup> It will be remembered that even nobility cannot excuse lack of virtue in Castiglione's courtier. Also, his courtier in battle performed always "in the sight of noble men that be of most estimation in the campe" and was not to be last in entering the lists, since women took "much more heede to the first than the last."<sup>4</sup> In like manner, Sidney's knight,

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<sup>1</sup> Complete Works, I, The Arcadia, Liber 1, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Liber 2, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Liber 2, p. 332.

<sup>4</sup> Castiglione, p. 95.

Amphialus, would have Philoetia, for when he contends, at a window, that she may "with ease perfectly discerns the combat",<sup>1</sup> and even the glamorous Pyrocles, disguised as the Amazon, Belmana, challenging Anaxius to a duel for love of Philoetia, says,

"Choose thee what armes thou likest, I onely demaund, that these Ladies (whom I defend) may in liberty see the combat."<sup>2</sup>

The Defense of Poesy contributes its bit to first-person knowledge of Sidney's views. He here states that "the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action, those skills that most serve to bring forth that have a most just title to be princes over all the rest."<sup>3</sup> It was this feeling, that the end of earthly learning is virtuous action, which evidently so impressed him with his own ineffectual life at court.

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<sup>1</sup> Complete Works, I, Arcadia, Liber 3, p. 414.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 505.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney, Defense of Poesy, p. 13.



Spenser's framing of his style in the Shepherd's Calendar to an old rustic language Sidney does not allow,<sup>1</sup> citing Theocritus, Virgil and Sannazaro as not affecting it. Castiglione also decided against the use of the Tuscan dialect, an archaic form. Whether there be a connection with the Italian's argument in Sidney's train of thought it is difficult to say.

Sir Philip's sister, the Countess of Pembroke, of all English ladies, unless we except Lady Jane Grey or Queen Elizabeth herself, was perhaps closest akin to the Renaissance intellectual woman of which the Italy of Castiglione's day had so many examples.<sup>2</sup> Her brother's regard for her, and her influence on him, place her indeed among that rarefied group of women of whom the Lady Elizabeth Gonzaga, and Beatrice and Isabella d'Este were outstanding exponents.

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney, Defense of Poesy, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, p. 174.

One last argument, other than Sidney's love sonnets, which speaks for him as the "living embodiment" of Castiglione's ideal, to use the phraseology of another,<sup>1</sup> is the seeming fact that he may be identified with Spenser's Sir Galidore, knight of courtesy in the sixth book of the Faerie Queene. Such identification was for many years an article of faith of Spenser scholarship, until of late years some scholars have attempted to refute the argument. Chief among these dissenters is Mr. Percy W. Long, who in 1911<sup>2</sup> deposed Sidney as Sir Galidore, and set up the second Earl of Essex in his stead.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Kenneth Thorpe Rowe favors Sidney, as do other such Spenser scholars as De Selincourt and Greenlaw.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Rowe's argument seems sound

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<sup>1</sup>  
Rowe, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup>  
See Anglia, XXXVIII, 173.

<sup>3</sup>  
"Sir Galidore: Essex or Sidney?", SP, (1930) XXVII, 125-141.

<sup>4</sup>  
Ibid., p. 127.

enough. He examines Mr. Long's points individually and disposes of them very effectively. To him Sidney was a man of the purest idealism and morality of the court life of his age, while Essex was admittedly a man of intrigues, and as prefligate as handsome and charming. The sixth book of the Faerie Queene is devoted to courtesy, and Sidney, being the "noble and vertuous gentleman most worthy of all titles both of learning and cheualrie", as Spenser himself had addressed him in his dedication of the Shepheardes Calender,<sup>1</sup> was peculiarly noted for his courtesy, so it seems most probable that he may be identified with Sir Galidore.

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In what ways did Sidney definitely portray the new type of English gentleman, who made service to his country uppermost, rather than the chivalrous Italian courtier who looked to his own perfection in

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<sup>1</sup> Spenser, Complete Works, p. 1.

letters, arms, exercises, and social accomplishments?

In the first place, he was interested in politics. A large part of Greville's account is given over to Sidney's survey of the contemporary states of European politics.<sup>1</sup> He engaged in a really noble crusade for his father's rights in Ireland.<sup>2</sup> He defended his Uncle, the Earl of Leicester,<sup>3</sup> when occasion demanded. He really sacrificed his own standing with the Queen by means of his letter concerning Her Majesty's proposed marriage to Alençon. All these facts cannot be gainsaid. Though longing for glory on foreign land or sea, he was not so shrouded in medievalism nor intrigued with the prospect of romantic feats at arms that he could not perform his share of public service to his country.

Though a courtier in name, he was often

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<sup>1</sup> Greville, Ch. VIII.

<sup>2</sup> Pears, Introd. LX ff.

<sup>3</sup> Collins, Preface.

dissatisfied with the empty monotony of life at court. As early as 1578 Languet wrote:

"I am especially sorry to hear you say that you are weary of the life to which I have no doubt God has called you, and desire to fly from the light of your court and betake yourself to secluded places to escape the tempest of affairs by which statesmen are generally harassed."<sup>1</sup>

There is some ambiguity here, for Languet uses the word statesman to apply to the courtier. This follows the Italian mode - the identity of the courtier with the adviser to his prince. In England, however, there was very clearly a differentiation between the terms courtier and statesman. Mere attendance at court, with its necessary accompaniment of social graces, was sufficient to make a courtier, and many a keen shaft from the pen of Barnaby Rich and other satirists bears testimony to the rather useless

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<sup>1</sup>  
Pears, p. 155.

life which the courtier led. The statesman, on the other hand, was the actual adviser to the Queen, and such men as Burghley and Walsingham were probably far from being the usual courtier type. Though Sidney did have his political interests, he must have had as little opportunity for putting his theories into practice as he had for putting his colonising schemes into action or his measures against Spain into play. This means that he did stand in the courtier class rather than the statesman class (the latter class being fairly typical of the new ideal for the English gentlemen); yet, according to the testimony of his own and Languet's letters, he was weary of the life of the Court and would fain have run away. However, in view of his many projects for action, and his final and disastrous participation in the Netherlands struggle, it would appear that, in spite of his political interests, he did not desire the life of a statesman, but of a courtier in action, displaying his prowess at arms even as

Castiglione's courtier would have done. He was truly alarmed about his indolent ease. Upon one occasion he writes Languet:

"The use of the pen, as you may perceive, has plainly fallen from me, and my mind itself, if it was ever active in anything, is now beginning, by reason of my indolent ease, imperceptibly to lose its strength, and to relax without any reluctance."<sup>1</sup>

Though he so desired to be a soldier, he was evidently not cut out in the most desirable military mold. Languet tells him in March, 1580,

"To speak plainly, I fear that of the qualifications of a Commander severity will be the one in which you will be deficient. For by nature and inclination you are formed for gentleness, and soldiers cannot be kept to their duty without severity."<sup>2</sup>

The most conclusive point against Sir Philip's conformity with the Castiglione ideal is his religion. Platonic love for the Italians took

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<sup>1</sup> Pears, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

the nature of religion. In his life Platonism played its important part, but it was not his religion. Queen Elizabeth did not come to the throne until he was four years old, and he lived in an England which had scarcely decided whether it was Protestant or Catholic. Nevertheless, the massacre of St. Bartholomew, as nothing else could have done, considerably deepened in him the Protestantism which may have been somewhat indifferent before. Henceforth, he was a devout Protestant, although he had good friends who were Catholics. He disliked doctrinal extremists.<sup>1</sup> Greville says that "above all, he made the Religion he professed, the firm Basis of his life".<sup>2</sup> In his last hours, he called ministers and made profession of Christian faith. According to Greville, the last scene of this tragedy was the parting between the two brothers. The elder took his leave with these admonishing words:

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, "Reputation of Sidney", p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Greville, p. 55.



"Love my Memorie, cherish my  
Friends; their Faith to me may  
assure you they are honest. But  
above all, govern your Will, and  
Affections, by the Will and Word  
of your Creator; in me, beholding  
the end of this World, with all  
her Vanities."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
Greville, pp. 139-140.

**CHAPTER IV**

**Sidney's Sonnets: An Expression of Platonic Love**

#### CHAPTER IV

### Sidney's Sonnets: An Expression of Platonic Love

In this discussion of Sir Philip Sidney, one side of his life very much apart from that revealed in his correspondence with Langnet or by his friend Fulke Greville has not been touched upon. Yet, it has a very prominent bearing, and cannot be passed over in silence. It is his love affair with Penelope Devereux. It is, moreover, the stumbling block in the way of all who attempt to arrive at any definite conclusion as to the man. Some critics think the "Astrophel and Stella" sonnets are expressive of Platonic love. Many of course do not agree.

It will be remembered in the summary of differences at the end of Chapter I between the Italian and English ideal, love, with its accompanying artifices, was rather an integral part of the Italian courtier's life, while for the sixteenth century English gentleman it was not a necessary requisite,

and is not included as such by the writers of the English courtesy books. Such a conclusion is open to criticism, for the flood of love sonnets of the Elizabethan period would seem to indicate that love did play an important part in the courtier's education. Spenser, upon his return from court, reviewing for Hobbinsol the vanities there, says that

"Love most aboundeth there  
For all the walls and windows  
there are writ  
All full of love, and love,  
and love my deare,  
And all their talk and studie  
is of it."

(Colin Clout's Come Home Again, ll. 773-778)<sup>1</sup>

The truth of the matter is that the new English gentleman, represented by such men as Sir Thomas Gresham, born to a trade,<sup>2</sup> but knighted even as was Philip Sidney, born to a courtier's life, Henry Peacham, who spoke for the "compleat gentleman", and

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<sup>1</sup> Spenser, Complete Works, p. 696.

<sup>2</sup> Kelse, p. 40.

Richard Brathwaite, who wrote The English Gentleman<sup>1</sup> and the English Gentlewoman, --- to repeat, such men as these would have frowned upon the inclusion of love as a requisite for the complete gentleman. Sidney, though he has been called by no less a personage than Coleridge "that gentleman of Europe, that accomplished man",<sup>2</sup> was, despite his political interests and his boredom with court activities, more closely aligned perhaps to Castiglione's ideal than to the new English gentleman to such an extent that he did embrace the Platonic doctrine of love. The courtiers who wrote so profusely of love upon the walls and windows at court were lesser lights, probably imitators of the Petrarchan school, and in no wise to be confused with the new type of English gentleman who considered his first duty service to his state.

Mr. Fox Bourne thinks that Spenser's sketch

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, SP, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace, "Reputation of Sidney", p. 7.

of the brave courtier in Mother Hubbard's Tale is clearly intended as a portrait of Sidney.<sup>1</sup> His superiority to the spish crew of common courtiers is clearly defined.<sup>2</sup> At any rate, though Sidney was among the "common courtiers", yet not of them, he was at the same time a writer of love sonnets, and is therefore a candidate for the additional test which Miss Kelse applies in distinguishing between the English gentleman and the courtier.

What are the established facts concerning Sidney's love for Penelope Devereux Rich? They are meager, to be sure. Sidney evidently met her for the first time, as has been previously noted, at Chartley in 1575. She was then only twelve or thirteen, perhaps some eight years younger than he. The Earl of Essex, her father, had on his deathbed expressed a wish that Sidney marry his daughter. An extant letter<sup>3</sup> indicates that a formal agreement was

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<sup>1</sup> Fox Bourne, pp. 245-246.

<sup>2</sup> Spenser, pp. 99-100, ll. 713-777.

<sup>3</sup> Collins, I, 147.

drawn up and accepted between Sir Henry Sidney and Leicester of the one part, and the Earl of Essex of the other, but for some reason the match was broken off. In 1581 Penelope, by an arrangement of her guardians, in accord with the custom of the time, was married to Lord Rich, very unhappily so, it seems. At any rate, Sidney, for nearly five years prior to 1581, must have had unusual opportunities of seeing her often, for her mother upon the death of her husband, the first Earl of Essex, was within a few months married to the Earl of Leicester, and of course Sidney for a great part of this period made Leicester House his home. That is Dr. Wallace's deduction.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fox Bourne, on the other hand, thinks that Penelope, after her mother's marriage to Leicester, was taken care of by the Earl of Huntingdon.<sup>2</sup> Even though this were true, however, she must frequently have visited her mother. Also, the Earl of Huntingdon's

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<sup>1</sup>  
p. 245.

<sup>2</sup>  
Fox Bourne, p. 237.

wife was a sister of Lady Sidney; so the young courtier and the attractive girl must have often been thrown together.

Just when Sidney started writing his sonnets is a matter of dispute, but internal evidence makes it clear that only a small number of them could have been written prior to Penelope's marriage in 1581, and the remainder were undoubtedly composed between 1581 and 1583, the latter date being the year of Sidney's own marriage to Frances Walsingham. Penelope herself lived with Lord Rich for a number of years and bore him three sons and three daughters, but was ultimately divorced to become the wife of Sir Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, after being that nobleman's mistress for some years. These are well-established facts, and the singular thing is that her conduct does not seem in any way to have alienated her friends or have affected her position in society. Mr. Fox Bourne seems inclined



to excuse her<sup>1</sup> because of Lord Rich's harsh treatment of her, and Hubert Hall cites various instances<sup>2</sup> of similar conduct, among the noble families of the period, morally questionable to us, but evidently acceptable then.

Regardless of what Penelope's own character may have been, the enigmatical fact remains that Philip Sidney, the noble pattern of his age, addressed to a married lady amorous verses which are far from sedate in tone. About this paradox scholars have argued and disagreed for years, and the various conclusions drawn are almost as numerous as the critics, for few of them have agreed as to all the details, although some have as to the essentials. Are the sonnets indicative of sincere love, or are they merely imitative poetic exercises of the French and Italian mold? Upon the answer to this question much depends.

Dr. Wallace considers the sonnets essentially

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<sup>1</sup> Fox Bourne, pp. 245-246.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, pp. 90-92.

autobiographical, therefore sincere, in spite of their obviously conventional character in many respects.<sup>1</sup> He recognizes the fact that Sidney was an eager student of Italian and French literature, a disciple of Petrarch, Ronsard and Du Bellay, and thinks that when he was ready to write sonnets he went to those who were the recognized masters of the form. He believes that at the time of Penelope's marriage there is no reason to think that Sidney considered himself her lover in any but a conventional literary sense,<sup>2</sup> and that the first thirty-two sonnets, with the single exception of the twenty-fourth,<sup>3</sup> were obviously written before her marriage. Then, with the thirty-third sonnet Stella is now the wife of another man, and Sidney heaps upon himself reproach for his recent passivity. All his chivalrous instincts are aroused, and he decides to play

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, Chapter XIII.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace, p. 247.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

the role of knight-errant against the villainous Lord Rich who so mistreats the beautiful lady. Stella eventually returns his fervent love, but virtuously says "No" to all his pleas, until he in time masters his earthly love, and the series ends in the full exaltation of heavenly love. In answer to those who object to the autobiographical reading, saying that Sidney would not have blazoned his illicit relations with Stella abroad, if his passion had been sincere, Dr. Wallace insists that the sonnets were not blazoned abroad, that the more intimate were reserved for Stella and perhaps the Countess of Pembroke.

Mr. Symonds considers the sonnets autobiographical, and has constructed from the series a whole romance, with each step in the growth of Sidney's passion clearly marked,<sup>1</sup> although he does not state that there may have been some poetical exaggeration - in other words, he does not believe "that

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<sup>1</sup> Symonds, Sir Philip Sidney, Chap. VI.

Sidney would in act have really gone so far as he professes to desire.<sup>1</sup> Erskine agrees with Wallace, and believes that Lady Rich loved Sidney, since after the latter's death "she was addressed by complimentary poets as his love - a liberty they could hardly have taken had it displeased her."<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Drinkwater has the odd belief that Sidney was sincere in his amorous protestations, but that they were addressed to an ideal of his own, the framework for which he chose Penelope Rich.<sup>3</sup> In other words, he was in love with love.

Sidney Lee considers the sonnets frankly imitative, and devoid of any autobiographic significance. He places his chief argument upon Astrophel, the group of elegies to which Spenser was the chief contributor, and throughout which Sidney's celebration of Stella is accounted his most glorious

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<sup>1</sup> Symonds, Sir Philip Sidney, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> Erskine, John, The Elizabethan Lyric, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> Drinkwater, John, The Muse in Council, pp. 90-91.

achievement in literature. "The dedication of Astrophel to Sidney's wife deprives of serious autobiographical significance his description in the sonnets of his pursuit of Stella's affections."<sup>1</sup>

Fox Bourne is also convinced that the sonnets are insincere, and indicates that Spenser's celebration of Sidney's passion for Stella passes out of the realm of sober history when we come to a later stanza in the poem and read that Stella, instead of continuing for twenty years as Lady Rich and ending her days as Countess of Devonshire (as we know that she actually did) tore herself in pieces over the dying body of Astrophel, dying with him.<sup>2</sup>

Then there are the critics who consider Sidney sincere in his protestations of love, but believe his love to be Platonic. Chief of this school perhaps is Mr. J. B. Fletcher.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, Sidney, Elizabethan Sonnets, Introd. xlii.

<sup>2</sup> Fox Bourne, p. 244.

<sup>3</sup> Fletcher, J. B., Religion of Beauty in Woman.

Many of the sonnets are conventional, imitative, admittedly, for Sidney confesses that he had spent his time

"Oft turning others' leaves, to  
see if thence would flowe,  
Some fresh and fruitfull showre,  
upon my Sunne-burnt braine,"<sup>1</sup>

yet "it is impossible to avoid seeing in a small group of sonnets a presentation of Sidney's own life, for he did follow the Muse's injunction to 'look in thy heart, and write' ..... We believe this because many of the sonnets square exactly with the course of Sidney's career."<sup>3</sup>

Spenser does celebrate Sidney's love and honor for

"Stella the faire, the fairest star in  
skie,"<sup>4</sup>

even though he does have to exercise the poet's prerogative and place the correct ending on his

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney, Complete Works, Vol. II, Sonnet 1, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, Sonnet 1, p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> Reed, Edward Bliss, English Lyrical Poetry, p. 151.

<sup>4</sup> Spenser, p. 700.

pastoral elegy by having Stella slay herself upon the dying body of Astrophel. Matthew Roydon, in the same group of elegies, testifies,

"Our Astrophill did Stella love;  
O Stella, vaunt of Astrophill,  
Albeit thy graces gods may move,  
Where wilt thou finde an Astrophill?  
The rose and lillie have their prime,  
And so hath beautie but a time."<sup>1</sup>

The "Astrophel and Stella" series was not printed until 1591, nearly five years after Sidney's death; but some of them at least, in spite of argument to the contrary,<sup>2</sup> were freely circulated in manuscript during his lifetime, for they furnished his chief title to be honoured as a poet among his contemporaries, and honored he was. Yet, though proclaiming his love for a married woman, these sonnets did not seem to detract in the least from his celebrated good character. More than that, after his death, a group of elegies lauding his love for Stella were dedicated to his widow. What kind of

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<sup>1</sup> Spenser, p. 700.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace, p. 255.

world was this Elizabethan England?

To begin with, as Mr. Fletcher points out, Spenser's dedication was distinctly less to the widow of the dead Sidney than to the wife of the living Essex, whose patronage the poet was at that time courting. Assuredly, Spenser would have taken no chances of wounding Lady Essex's sensibilities, and Mr. Fletcher doubts if an Englishwoman would have welcomed, even in those more 'spacious days' the frank celebration of her late husband's amour with a married woman. Spenser certainly implies no marital infidelity.

And yet, "Spenser says that Astrophel did love Stella, but how? Was there not a manner of loving recognized at the time as capable of sincerity, even of fervency, and yet not in wedlock, and still not illicit?"<sup>1</sup> Yes, Platonic love.

By Queen Elizabeth's time a system of

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<sup>1</sup>  
Fletcher, p. 153.



courtly love had evolved from origins so diverse that it is natural to suppose that the concurrence of streams of influence about the writers of that period would be variegated to the extreme. The beginnings might be found in the Ars Amatoria of the Roman Ovid, with its rules for the game of love, and in the decrees of the Courts of Love which sprang up in France in the twelfth century. These Courts of Love became necessary for exercising jurisprudence in amorous affairs, chiefly those of troubadours for their mistresses, who were high-born ladies probably married to husbands much older than they. The songs which these troubadours sang to their mistresses were frankly immoral, and owed their growth to a corrupt condition of society. Marriage among the higher classes was an affair of politics or business, never of the heart, and it became a doctrine that love and matrimony were incompatible.<sup>1</sup> Love there must be,

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<sup>1</sup> Mott, Lewis Freeman, The System of Courtly Love, pp. 33-4.

according to the dictates of the Courts, and  
love there was; love for the married woman from  
the man who was not her husband.<sup>1</sup>

This was medievalism in France, but  
"among the Italians of the thirteenth century the  
revival of antique literature was in full swing."<sup>2</sup>  
Scholars like Dante were already familiar with  
whatever survived of antique learning,<sup>3</sup> including  
the transcendental theories of Plato. Indeed, from  
the doctrines of Plato, in Italy first, there arose  
a new religion - "the divine worship of beauty, and  
more especially of beautiful women."<sup>4</sup>

Petrarch, more than Dante, is the key to  
the literary awakening of England. He unites the  
threads of the ancient world and the medieval, Pla-  
tonism and chivalric courtly love, to pass them on  
to Castiglione, to Wyatt and Surrey, to Spenser

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, Vernon, Euphorion, pp. 140, 141.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>4</sup> Fletcher, p. 1.

and Sidney.

"The Platonic ideas of the Renaissance came from Italy to England not only through Petrarch's poetry, but by a hundred different ways of which but little was from Plato himself."<sup>1</sup> These in England who could not read Italian could find Platonism expressed for them in Hoby's translation of The Courtier. Pietro Bembo (afterwards Cardinal Bembo) expounding on love (in the Fourth Book of The Courtier) treats his audience to some<sup>2</sup> of the noblest ideas of Renaissance Platonism.

"Love is nothing else but a certain coveting to enjoy beautie." (p.303).

"Love, we will term it an influence of the heavenly bounty-fulness, the which for all it stretcheth ever all things that be created" (p. 304).

"Where sensuall love in every age is naught, yet in yong men it deserveth excuse, and perhaps in some case lawful" (p. 306).

"I say that beautie cometh of God, and is like a circle of goodnesse whereof is the centre.

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<sup>1</sup> Einstein, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Castiglione, p. 303 ff.

And therefore, as there can be no circle without a centre, no more can beauty be without goodness." (pp. 308-309).

"Therefore, the woman to please her good lover may also lawfully and without blame come to kissing- for since a kisse is a knitting together both of bodie and soule" (p. 313).

Indeed, there seem to be three fundamental similarities between these philosophies of Plato and Castiglione: "first, a conviction that all physical forms are but the shadowings of spiritual realities; second, a belief that the essence of beauty, virtue, and love are ultimately the same; third, a sublime faith that all sincere and holy human love is born of God and will lift man on wings of spiritual fervor up to the grandeur of immortality."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the mass of influences, partly Platonic and partly the reverse, brought to play upon Sir Philip Sidney. In Italy "the division between love

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<sup>1</sup> Ray, Dorcas Douglass, The Platonic Lover of Elizabethan Poetry, pp. 16-17.

and marriage was deeply set,"<sup>1</sup> and in England marriages were made by parents. "The easy morality of the sixteenth century allowed unsanctified attachments since from feudal times the Renaissance had inherited a difference in meaning between the words "lover" and "husband".<sup>2</sup> Indeed, "the Renaissance Platonic love-cult was derived from the fusing of the medieval chivalric love-cult (which as has been seen, held love and marriage incompatible) and Platonism proper. Renaissance love is defined as desire awakened by beauty, which by progressive illumination passes from sensible beauty to spiritual, and from spiritual beauty to divine - from lust to love, and from love to religion."<sup>3</sup>

In the light of such doctrine, reasons Mr. Fletcher, in his chapter entitled "Did Astrophel

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> Berman, John N., Early Tudor Poetry, pp. 19, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Fletcher, pp. 154-155.

Love Stella?" Sidney's relation with Stella becomes better defined. Spenser read Sidney's sonnets as expressions of pure Platonic love, held licit toward a married woman, and in such fashion were they evidently received by all concerned.

As has been seen, Castiglione required that the Platonic lover be no longer young, but sensual love he considered excusable in youth, and even to a degree permissible. This rather fits Sidney's situation, for "at the beginning of the sonnets" he "sees the better, yet cannot but follow the worse love."<sup>1</sup> He admits

"That my owne writings like bad  
servants shew  
My wits, quick in vaine thoughts,  
in vertue lame;  
That Plate I have read for nought,  
but if he tame  
Such coltish years; that to my  
birth I owe  
Nobler desires ..... (Sonnet 21)

He tells himself that virtue and beauty are one (Sonnet 25), but cannot yet make himself a true

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<sup>1</sup>  
Fletcher, p. 157.

believer, and cries out,

"Virtue, awake, beauty but beauty  
is;  
I may, I must, I can, I will, I do  
Leave following that which it is  
gains to miss." (Sonnet 47).

Stella proves the truth of the Platonic concept that Virtue and Beauty are one, for her physical charms accord with her noble behavior, Yet in sonnet 61 the poet still clings to earthly love. Gradually, however, his rebellion passes, and he becomes more subdued:

"Desire, though thou my old  
companion art,  
And oft so clingest to my pure  
Love; that I  
One from the other scarcely can  
descrie,  
While each doe blowe the fier of  
my hart;  
Now from thy fellowship I needes  
must part."  
\* \* \* \* \*  
Service and honour, wonder with  
delight,  
Feare to offend, well worthy to  
appeare:  
Gaze shining in mine eyes, faith  
in my spright,  
These things are left me by my  
only deare" (Sonnet 72).

As reward for the observance of "these things",  
the sacramental kiss is bestowed,

"O kisse which soules even  
soules together ties  
By linkes of love....."  
(Sonnet 81).

Finally, in the true Platonic spirit, Astrophel  
rises above the love of mortal beauty to the  
love of the divine "elements" themselves of  
beauty in God.<sup>1</sup> The last sonnet in the series,  
beginning

"Leave me ô Love, which reachest  
but to dust,  
And then my mind aspire to  
higher things,"<sup>2</sup>

marks the final end of the struggles against  
earthly desire, and the glorious triumph of Pla-  
tonic love. In this light, Mr. Fletcher thinks

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<sup>1</sup>  
Fletcher, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>  
This is not included by Feuillerat in his  
edition as a part of the "Astrophel and Stella"  
series, but as a 'Certain Sonnet' (II, 322),  
one that is properly dissociated from the se-  
quence to indicate an undetermined period during  
which the transition in the lover's attitude  
took place (Wal., 253).



that Sidney was the "right courtier" of Castiglione's stamp, in the contemporary unambiguous exaltation of his love for "Stella" as of the "new religion in love."<sup>1</sup>

If it were possible to doubt the Platonism of the sonnets, the Argadia could easily dispel all question, for the idealistic principles of Platonic love are visible always in its pages. Basilius complains that many young men love "because they feel indeed that divine power, which makes the heart finde a reason in passion."<sup>2</sup> He voices Bembo's belief that the love of old age is best.<sup>3</sup> Another character, "(though he were already stept into the winter of his age) found himselfe warme in these desires, which were in his soune farre

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<sup>1</sup> Fletcher, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., Liber I, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Liber II, p. 149.

more excusable,"<sup>1</sup> which but repeats Bamba's statement that physical desires are more excusable in youth.

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., Liber II, p. 244.

**CHAPTER V**

**Opinions of Sidney's Contemporaries**

## CHAPTER V

### Opinions of Sidney's Contemporaries

Pears says that the praises of Sir Philip Sidney would fill a volume,<sup>1</sup> and indeed it is true. What were the peculiar traits of this man which have given rise to so great a tradition? He never held a great office. His Arcadia, though its praises have been sung for generations, is admittedly tedious reading today. Even the sonnets, important as they are, are unequal in value and by no means superior in quality to those of Spenser and Shakespeare. Yet, the commendation of his contemporaries while he was yet living was unqualified, and his death was the cause of widespread and sincere grief. Thomas Lord Buckhurst, writing to Robert Dudley on the death of Sir Philip says that he

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<sup>1</sup> Pears, *Introd.*, lxxxiii.

"both lived and died, in Fame of Honour and Reputation to his Name, in the worthy Service of his Prince and Country; and with as great Love in his Life, and with as many Tears for his Death as ever any had." <sup>1</sup>

Collins also records:

"So general was the Lamentation for him, that, for many Months after, it was accounted indecent for any Gentleman of Quality to appear at Court or City, in any light or gaudy apparel." <sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the following is a clue to the great honor in which he was held:

"His noble and generous Disposition to relieve all who were in Distress, appears from several Instances, as well as from his Letters; and he was so universally applauded for it, that his Fame spread even beyond the Bounds of Europe." <sup>3</sup>

"At no period of his life are records wanting of acts of gracious kindness or intercession for those who are distressed....It was to

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, I, 393.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

spontaneous acts of humanity...that Sidney owed in great measure the love and admiration which were poured upon him by all classes of his countrymen as they were shown to no other Englishman of his time.<sup>1</sup> It will be remembered that one of the earliest recorded acts of Sidney when a schoolboy was his ordering his servant to give a shilling to a blind harper. It seems that even in the midst of his many activities he was never too busy to help the oppressed and poverty-stricken, and at every period of his life we find him soliciting his influential friends in behalf of the humble.<sup>2</sup> In regard to his patronage of poor writers, John Budge the bookseller, in 1618, said, "Report delivers of the Renowned Sidney that the most unfiled worke the poorest hand could offer up, hee received with thanks making the love of the man to supply the worth" (Harington's Epigrams, 1615, dedications).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, Life, pp. 287-288.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 260, 304, 375.

<sup>3</sup> See Shakespeare's England, II, 194-195.

However, he was not always in the right, and this fact, together with his impetuous kindness and generosity, perhaps explains most satisfactorily the appeal that he made, for any here too nearly perfect would have grated upon the sensibilities of his mere human brothers in the Elizabethan Age as much as now.

He was hot-headedly quick in making decisions about people, and often harsh in criticism. Upon one occasion, during his foreign travel, he unjustly accused one Coningsby of taking some money, for he writes Languet from Venice,

"As to the money which they took twice at Rachel's, I did not mention it to give you any trouble, but only to exculpate Coningsby, whom I formerly charged wrongfully with the act."<sup>1</sup>

At another time he rashly threatens to thrust his dagger into Mollineux, his father's secretary, because he thinks that the latter has divulged the contents of some of his own letters.<sup>2</sup> Further

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<sup>1</sup>  
Pears, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>  
Collins, I, 256.

correspondence indicates that he realized his mistake.

He was irresponsible - although probably no more than would be the average youth - in the matter of his correspondence with the devoted Languet. There is a certain pathos in this letter of Languet's:

"If you would only write in reply, 'I have received your letter; I am in good health; I am going to be married in a few days,' or anything else of this kind, I should be abundantly satisfied."<sup>1</sup>

and again:

"I do not much wonder that you are remiss in writing, as that you venture to charge me with remissness; me, who for one letter of yours sometimes pay you five or six of my own."<sup>2</sup>

Even the "spaceousness" of the age was scarcely sufficient to excuse the vanity of the tablet which Sidney caused to be hung on all

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<sup>1</sup>  
Pears, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid., p. 147.



houses where he lodged when he was sent abroad as a diplomatic ambassador of the Queen. It reads:

"Illustrissimi and Generosissimi Viri  
Philippi Sigisui Angli,  
Pro-regis Hiberniae filii, Comitem Warwici  
et Leicestriae Nepotis, Serenissimi  
Reginae Angliae ad Caesarem Legati."<sup>1</sup>

He was idealistic. His judgment of men was by no means profound, and it is disappointing to learn of his admiration for such men as James VI, the Master of Grey and Sir Christopher Hatton;<sup>3</sup> but they were temporarily prominent, and Sidney was a child of the times, in spite of his excellencies. Castiglione would have his courtier make friends of men noble and of great reputation,<sup>4</sup> and Sidney does not depart from his plan.

He was generous to a fault - so much so that he was continually in financial difficulties.

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, I, 100.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace, Life, p. 357.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>4</sup> Castiglione, p. 120.

Debt seems to have been his assiduous companion throughout his lifetime, and though he died at Arnheim on October 17, 1586,<sup>1</sup> his burial did not take place until February 16, 1587 because of the insistent demands of his creditors, and the inability of Walsingham and Leicester to meet his obligations immediately.

In spite of commendations to the contrary,<sup>2</sup> he was not a "spirit without blot", yet the many-sidedness of his character, his ability and his unique charm set him apart, as the tributes of his contemporaries will testify.

Greville is particularly fluent in his account of the praises heaped upon Sidney when, at twenty-three, he was sent by the Queen to Germany and the Low Countries on a diplomatic mission. He was left free to confer with any princes with whom it seemed expedient that he so do, for encouraging union

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<sup>1</sup>  
Fox Bourne, p. 350.

<sup>2</sup>  
Synmonds, Life of Sidney, p. 112.

among the various Protestant states.<sup>1</sup>

William of Nassau, Prince of Orange,  
Greville records as saying that

"if he could judge, her Majesty  
had one of the Ripest, and great-  
est Counsellors of Estate in Sir  
Philip Sidney, that at this day  
lived in Europe."<sup>2</sup>

The Earl of Leicester, not long be-  
fore his own death confessed to Greville

"that when he undertook the  
government of the Low Countries  
he carryed his nephew over with  
him, as one amongst the rest,  
not only despising his youth for  
a Counsellor, but withall bearing  
a hand over him as a forward young  
man. Notwithstanding, in short  
time he saw this Sun so risen above  
his Horizon, that both he and all  
his Stars were glad to fetch light  
from him."<sup>3</sup>

Sir Francis Walsingham, Sidney's father-  
in-law, also often told Greville

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<sup>1</sup>  
Fox Bourne, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>  
Greville, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid., p. 29.

"that his Philip do so far overshoot him in his own Bow, as these friends, which at first were Sir Philip's for this Secretaries sake, within a while became so fully owned, and possess'd by Sir Philip, as now he held them at the second hand, by his Son-in-laws native courtesie."<sup>1</sup>

"Likewise, Henry of France, then of Navarre, who having measured and mastered all the spirits in his own Nation, found out this Master-spirit among us, and used him like an equal in nature, and so fit for friendship with a King."<sup>2</sup>

Prince Don John of Austria, who at first treated Sidney with some hauteur as a mere youth, soon, after taking account of him,

"found himself so stricken with this extraordinary Planet, that the beholders wondered to see what ingenuous tribute that brave and high-minded Prince paid to his worth."<sup>3</sup>

Even Mendoza his enemy acknowledged openly

"That howsoever he was glad King

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<sup>1</sup> Greville, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

Philip his Master had lost,  
in a private Gentleman, a  
dangerous Enemy to his Estate;  
yet he could not but lament to  
see Christendome deprived of  
so rare a Light in these cloudy  
times; and bewail poor Widdow  
England -- that having been many  
years in breeding one eminent  
spirit, was in a moment bereaved  
of him, by the hands of a villain."<sup>1</sup>

Greville himself pays tribute to his  
friend in many pages, and comments that his great-  
ness was built upon "true Worth, for he esteemed  
Fame more than Riches, and Noble actions far above  
Nobility itself."<sup>2</sup> The greatest tribute that he  
could have paid stands clear upon his own monument  
however. Aubrey relates that

"In St. Mary's church at Warwick  
is a sumptuous monument of the Lord  
Brooke, round a great altar of black  
marble is only this inscription:

'Here lies the body of  
Sir Fulke Grevill, knight,  
servant to Q. Elizabeth,  
Counsellor to K. James, and  
friend to Sir Philip Sidney.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
Greville, pp. 32-33.

<sup>2</sup>  
*Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>  
Aubrey, p. 250.

Sidney "was the one English author of his time who had a European reputation; Du Bartas, for instance, some years later," in his second Semaine,<sup>1</sup> "grouped 'le milor Cydne with Sir Thomas More and Sir Nicholas Bacon as the three pillars of the English speech."<sup>2</sup>

The many dedications to Sidney as patron are scarcely indicative of his true repute, since it was the business of the struggling author to heap flowery compliments upon his benefactor, but the many types of books dedicated to him are a revelation of his diverse interests. His skill in arms pointed him out as the patron of Nicholas Lichefeld's translation of L. G. de la Vega's De Re Militari,<sup>3</sup> and his dextrous horsemanship brought him the dedication of Cliffford's Schoole of Horsemanship.<sup>4</sup> The Italian philosopher Giordano

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<sup>1</sup> Edition of 1616, p. 484. Quoted by Wallace, Life, p. 325.

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's England, II, 193.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., II, 193.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., also Wallace, Life, p. 266.

Bruno was his friend, and inscribed two of his works to him.<sup>1</sup>

Next in importance perhaps to Spenser's dedication of The Shepheardes Calender to Sidney as "the noble and vertuous gentleman most worthy of all titles both of learning and cheualrie"<sup>2</sup> is Richard Hakluyt's dedication of his Diversa Voyages to his old college friend.<sup>3</sup>

Languet's praises of his young protege are of course profuse,<sup>4</sup> and Collins in his preface remarks that "Sir Philip Sydney...is allowed to be as accomplished a Character as this Nation, or, perhaps any foreign one, ever produced."<sup>5</sup> He thinks it remarkable that there are exact parallels of the famous Sidneys amongst the chief of the Romans:

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<sup>1</sup> Fox Bourne, pp. 291-293.

<sup>2</sup> Spenser, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Fox Bourne, p. 295.

<sup>4</sup> Fears, pp. 182-184.

<sup>5</sup> Collins, Preface.

"In Sir Philip Sidney, we behold Marcellus and Meccenas united, who, with the strongest Elegance could at once teach the best Rules of Poetry, and most gallantly and bountifully rewarded Men of Letters and Science: Who as a Soldier, like P. Decius Mus. Successfully executed the antient Silence in March, and afterwards freely rewarded the Partners of the Victory out of his own Purse, and also, like Decius, devoted himself in Battle to his Country."<sup>1</sup>

It is unnecessary to catalogue the vast number of praises and lamentations voiced by Sidney's contemporaries after his death. By some strange prank of Fate, no monument in stone was ever erected to his memory. On a small tablet of wood was recorded this tribute:

"England, Netherland, the Heavens  
and the Arts  
The Souldiers, and the World hath  
made six Parts  
Of noble Sidney; for who will  
suppose  
That a small Heape of Stones can  
Sidney enclose.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Collins, Preface.



England has his Body, for she  
it fed,  
Netherland his Blood, in her  
Defense shed:  
The Heavens have his Soul, the  
Arts have his Fame,  
The Souldiers the Grief, the  
World his good name.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps of all those who bewailed  
the loss of an honored friend, none voiced a  
more exalted sentiment than did William Gauden:

"Rest then, in peace, O Sidney!  
(if I may be allowed this address!)  
we will not celebrate thy memory with  
tears, but with admiration. What-  
ever we loved in thee (as the best of  
Authors speaks of that best Governour  
of Britain) whatever we admir'd in  
thee, continues, and will continue in  
the memories of men, the revolutions  
of ages and the annals of time. Many,  
as inglorious and ignoble, are bury'd  
in oblivion; but Sidney shall live to  
all posterity. For, as the Greek poet  
has it, Virtue's beyond the reach of  
fate." (Brittania, translated into  
Eng. 2nd edit. edited by Edmund Gibson,  
1722, p. 225)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, I, 109; also Aubrey, p. 250.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Rowe, SP, p. 127; also see Collins, I.

## **Conclusion**

## Conclusion

Under the circumstances, there is little which can be said in way of conclusion, for Time, that most stern of all critics, has placed Sir Philip Sidney in the annals of those departed ones who yet live. In an age of transition to a new kind of living, he was able to pick up the threads of life at many points, neither wholly medieval nor modern. In Sidney his contemporaries "saw the re-birth of the Renaissance in England, not pagan this time, nor yet stifled by the narrowness of sectarian zeal. In him the conflict between flesh and spirit had resulted neither in frank paganism nor in sour repression of the natural man. The integrity of his character seemed a pledge that men can learn to live full, satisfying lives."<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible for us of today to put our fingers upon the exact qualities which endeared

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace, "Reputation of Sidney," pp. 11-12.

him to his countrymen. His was a character which cannot be catalogued by modern standards. Although he did not wholly conform to the Italian ideal, typified by Castiglione's courtier, as the casual reader is inclined to think, yet, in his conscious effort for personal perfection, his ambition for glory in war, and his ultimate consecration to Platonism, he was that courtier personified. In many details his life might have been modelled upon Castiglione's teaching. Whatever he did, he tried to do well, doubtless with as much grace as Castiglione's courtier himself.<sup>1</sup> Sports, music, handwriting - anything but the best he considered failure. He "exercised himself in Poets," in "Orateurs and Historiographers," and also "in writing both rime and prose".<sup>2</sup> He had "an especial and hartie friend"<sup>3</sup> in Languet. He, to whom royal favor meant so much, at his own

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<sup>1</sup> Castiglione, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

risk advised his prince when she was about to do wrong, or what he considered wrong, by marrying Alençon. Thus did he again, consciously or unconsciously, follow the dictates of Castiglione.

In Sir Philip's writings are many instances which seem to indicate the influence of The Courtier, yet in no case may these passages be positively identified as bearing the direct mark of Castiglione. As in his life, so in his works, Sir Philip was doubtless unconsciously a debtor to the Italian writer.

His interest in politics and his Protestant religion on the other hand, are the characteristics upon which rests his chief claim to be called a "sixteenth century English gentleman." These characteristics were but presagers of the interests of that new enterprising England which was to become a world-power as a result of the colonizing era. All in all, we shall have to disagree with Mr. Rowe when he calls Sidney the "living embodiment" of the

Gastiglione ideal;<sup>1</sup> however, we can concur with Miss Kelse when she says that Sidney was "the nearest approach to Gastiglione's ideal that the English renaissance produced",<sup>2</sup> and we can applaud Dr. Wallace when he calls him "Gastiglione's courtier reincarnated in an English gentleman; and with differences that endeared him to his countrymen."<sup>3</sup> The "differences" added to the charm of the man's personality, for they were largely of the medieval world. That inky "child" of his, the Arcadia - with its clutter of romanticism, knights in armor, ladies in distress, and heroic deeds - is a living witness of the kind of fancies, "many, many" of them, which were begotten in his young head. A great deal of the courtier, not quite so much of the gentleman - statesman, some of the medieval

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<sup>1</sup>  
SP, XXVII, footnote, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup>  
p. 47.

<sup>3</sup>  
"Reputation of Sidney", p. 12.

knight -- that was Sir Philip Sidney. A glorious product of shifting Renaissance influences! Most important of all, as the unquestioning reception of his sonnets by his contemporaries proved, and the many praises of his friends and enemies alike corroborated, he had that most rare trait which writers of both English and Italian courtesy books insisted upon -- the "virtue" which was "beyond the reach of fate".

It may be a fancy of Mr. Fox Bourne's, but to him "it is not mere guessing to assume that Shakespeare, who settled in London and joined the Earl of Leicester's company of players while all the world was talking of Sidney's life and its heroic ending, had him in his thoughts when he made Ophelia speak of Hamlet as

'The courtier's, scholar's, soldier's  
eye, tongue, sword,  
The expectancy and rose of the fair  
state,  
The glass of fashion and the mould  
of form,

The observed of all observers'  
(Hamlet, III, 1, 160-163)<sup>1</sup>.

The idea is provocative, and bears study.

It seems fitting to close with these verses by Sidney's friend, Lodowick Bryskett, who, if he could know, would surely feel that the "werthie Phillip's" fame leaves nothing to be desired.

"All haile, therefore, O werthie  
Phillip immortal,  
The flowre of Sydneys race,  
the honour of thy name.  
Whose werthie praise to sing  
my Muses not aspire,  
But sorrowfull and sad these  
teares to thee let fall,  
Yet wish their verses might  
so farre and wide thy fame  
Extend, that envies rage, nor  
time, might end the same."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Fox Bourne, p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> Spenser, p. 706.



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