ALGERNON SIDNEY, 1623-1683

By Brigid Haydon

In 1583, Philip Sidney, heir to Penshurst, was knighted like his father and grandfather for service to the Crown. A hundred years later, his great-nephew Algernon Sidney was executed on Tower Hill for alleged complicity in the Rye House Plot. Not only historians have felt some awkwardness in explaining the presence of a confessed Republican and convicted traitor among the descendants of the hero of Zutphen. His immediate family also found Algernon Sidney something of an embarrassment; apart from his notoriously bad temper, he made no secret of political views which they regarded with a mixture of amusement and distaste. Other than a few eighteenth-century Whigs, his later admirers have been few.

His reputation is partly of his own making; he rather liked to think of himself as "fierce, violent, seditious, mutinous, turbulent"[1] but it is also a tribute to Stuart official propaganda. Sidney's intellectual preference was certainly for a republic, but in practice, his philosophy was nearer that of 1688; he gave every sign of willingness to co-operate with a monarchy that was prepared to acknowledge the authority of Parliament. Whether he was really a traitor, as then defined, is open to doubt, and it is most unlikely that he was, in fact, involved in the plot which text-books invariably link with his name. In spite of his posthumous acquittal, however, by the House of Lords on 13th February, 1689, the labels of republican and traitor have continued to stick. It may be because he was never a sympathetic figure to his contemporaries. "I strain at gnats and swallow camels . . . I cannot help myself nor can I correct the defects of my own creation".[2] Even misfortunes did not make him popular in his life-time, but the one virtue which his enemies never denied was his stoical courage. This supported him to the end of a wasteful and frustrating life, and by itself would entitle him to an honourable place in Sidney records.

Apart from his own letters, most of which are published, there is a good deal of material about Sidney to be gathered from family diaries and correspondence, and from the collection of De Lisle and Dudley MSS with the Historical Manuscripts Commission, which through the kindness of Lord De Lisle and Dudley I was allowed to consult. The most important of these documents, for the early part of Sidney's life,

[1] Letter to Lord Leicester of 30.8.60. *Sydney Papers* ed. Blencowe (1825), p. 196.

[2] *Ibid.*

proved to be the series of accounts kept by Philip Maret for Lord Lisle between 1618 and 1626.[1] They help to clarify a point which has hitherto been in doubt; the approximate date of Algernon Sidney's birth. Meadley, as well as the Dictionary of National Biography, gives 1622 as the year, without specifying the date, and Ewald, his most comprehensive biographer, gives 1621 or 1622.[2] None of them quotes the source of the information, which makes it difficult to say whether the confusion has been caused by a lack of evidence or only by " new style " dating. Certainly there is nothing to be found in the Penshurst parish registers, which list eight Sidney baptisms, none of them Algernon's, between 1620 and 1634. The year 1621 can, however, be excluded at once, because the register includes entries for the baptism of a Robert Sidney and a Henry Sidney, both of whom died young, in October, 1620 and November, 1621 respectively. These dates taken in conjunction with the next entry (Lucy, baptised in March, 1624), suggest that Algernon is unlikely to have been born much before September, 1622, or after May, 1623; the inscription on his coffin, died on 7 Dec., 1683 " in the sixty-first year of his age " also suggested a date in late December 1622, if not early 1623. The possibility that the christening took place in the private chapel at Penshurst (which oddly enough, is in the neighbouring parish of Leigh) could not be followed up because the Leigh registers, and therefore the chapel records, are practically non-existent before 1633. There was, however, a chance that the family might have been staying at Baynard's Castle, by Blackfriars, in London, where at this time they generally spent the winter. There again the local registers (St. Andrew by the Wardrobe, St. Benet, Paul's Wharf, published by the Camden Society) proved unhelpful, and no pre-Fire registers exist for St. Pauls'. Luckily Maret's accounts provide the significant detail. In November, 1622, the lodgings at Baynard's Castle were being made ready for the household, and Maret bought a " cradle, a basket and a Hamper ". Just before Christmas, the family seem to have moved from Penshurst to London, their festivities, no doubt, overshadowed by little Henry's illness and death on Boxing Day. He was buried at Penshurst, but by the 11th January, 1623, the household is clearly at Baynard's Castle. Three days later, someone makes a hurried journey by water from Whitehall, and the next day, 15th January, £20 for her services was paid to Mrs. Stephens, the midwife, with £2 for her daughter.[3] This suggests 14th or 15th January, 1623, as the actual date of Algernon Sidney's birth.

[1] *De Lisle and Dudley MSS.* (Historical Manuscripts Commission), Nos. 322-332.

[2] *Memoirs of Algernon Sydney*, Meadley (1813); Ewald, *Life of Hon. A. Sydney*, (1873).

[3] *De Lisle and Dudley MSS.*, No. 324, " Phillip Maret his Accompts beginninge 29 7hr. 1622 and ending 15th January 1622 " (1623).

It is possible that the confinement proved difficult ; next day Maret " paid more to the midwife her daughter—£1.0.0 " and Mrs. Stephens herself stayed in the house for seven weeks, until the end of February. What is more significant, Lady Leicester did not go to be churched, or to christen her son, until 4th June, nearly six months after the birth. Although the accounts do not say where the christening took place, there is one entry, and one only, dated 14th May, for ale and milk " at the Blue Anchor for the wet-nurse " (rather than the nanny, Nurse Friday, whom Maret generally mentions by name). As she would normally have been supplied from the nursery, either at Penshurst or Baynard's Castle, the exceptional purchase could indicate a break in the journey from London to Penshurst ; if so, the chapel is the most likely scene of the christening. On the other hand, the family as a whole do not seem to have moved from London until the middle of June, and the place of the ceremony must therefore remain in doubt.

Other papers among the De Lisle and Dudley MSS. fill in the details of the Sidney household about this time. Algernon's grandfather, the first Earl, who died in 1626, presided over Penshurst like a benevolent Victorian paterfamilias. The servants had to be in by 10 p.m., mind their table manners, and attend chapel twice a day.[1] Like the house itself, the furniture and fittings were plain, ample and solid. The number of dishes at the high table would have satisfied Mrs. Beeton, but the Sidney children, relegated to the nursery, lived on mutton stew.[2] Between 1623 and 1634, the three eldest, Dorothy, Philip and Algernon, were joined by seven surviving sisters and a brother, Robin. In 1632, Lord Leicester took the two elder boys, now aged 13 and 9, abroad for the first time, on a three-month mission to Denmark.[3] Four years later, he was posted to Paris as Ambassador Extraordinary, with the main object of persuading Louis XIII to support the Elector Palatine. Although this was likely to be a long-term assignment, Lord Leicester apparently decided not to move the entire family to Paris ; Lady Leicester stayed at Penshurst, rather disconsolate, with Robin and the girls, while Philip and Algernon again accompanied their father. Algernon by this time had had some time at boarding school,[4] and must have started to read Latin, though never apparently to write it.[5] He may have begun to use the remarkable library at Penshurst, where he eventually found a good deal of his material on

[1] Orders made by Robert Sydney Earl of Leicester to be observed in his house, *c.* 1620. *De Lisle MSS.*, No. 1165.

[2] Weekly accounts of household expenses, 1624-29, *De Lisle MSS.*, Nos. 333-337.

[3] See " Journal of the Embassy of Robert Sydney, 2nd Earl of Leicester, to Denmark in 1632 ". MS. in his own hand, *De Lisle MSS.* No. 1110 A.

[4] MS. in Lord Leicester's hand dealing with family finances, *De Lisle MSS.*, No. 1110 B.

[5] See letter of 2.4.60 to Thurloe, in *Thurloe State Papers* (1742) vol. VII, p. 882.

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history and political thought. He also learned to write a legible italic hand, and in Paris added French to his accomplishments, winning at the same time golden opinions for his general behaviour : " All who come from Paris " wrote his mother to Leicester, " commend Algernon for a huge deal of wit and much sweetness of nature."[1]

The years in Paris, 1634-1641, besides teaching him a language, gave him some familiarity with Continental diplomatic society. In many ways he was as a result better fitted for living abroad than many of his later colleagues in exile. The disadvantage was that he grew up out of touch with contemporary England. Although the Leicesters were related to most of the leading families of the Establishment : the Cecils, the Percys, the Spencers, and the Earl of Manchester : Algernon grew up outside this tightly-knit country house society. If he ever had close friends among his contemporaries, there is little evidence of it. He also missed the political enthusiasm of the last years of the Long Parliament. Lord Leicester must have been the chief interpreter of English affairs to the household in Paris, and he by this time was a disillusioned man. A scholarly, high-minded, hard-working member of that new nobility which had found their vocation as well as their fortune in the public service, Leicester was " rather a speculative than a practical man and expected a greater certitude in the consultation of business than the business of this world is capable of ".[2] His debts had risen during his tour in Paris to £10,000, and he had at least expected a reasonable allowance to meet the heavy expenses of diplomatic representation. His appeal to the King was refused, with the result that Algernon's inheritance, the Suffolk estates, had to be mortgaged and were soon lost altogether.[3] Apart from his sense of personal injustice, Leicester disapproved strongly of Charles I's handling of the political situation, and of his obstinate loyalty to his favourites. " I beseech you ", he wrote to Vane, then Secretary of State, " take heed how you employ such persons as with some reason . . . are not well thought of generally by the people, for that is not the way to redress our dangerous disorders ".[4] He was nevertheless glad to accept the offer, in 1641, of a post he had long coveted—Lord Deputy of Ireland in succession to the executed Strafford—and brought his family home in that year.

Commissions were found for Philip and Algernon in the army sent to subdue the Catholic rebels, and they spent two years in Ireland, while their father tried in vain to persuade the King to let him follow to take up his command. For reasons of his own, Charles would neither despatch Leicester to Ireland nor relieve him of his appointment until

[1] Letter of 10.11.36, in Collins' *Memorials* (1746), vol. II, p. 445.
[2] *History of the Great Rebellion*, Clarendon (1703), Vol. II, p. 153.
[3] A. Sidney, *Statement of his suit with the Earl of Leicester*, British Museum Add. MSS. Eg. 1049, f. 9.
[4] Letter of 21.9.40 in Collins' *Memorials*, Vol. II, p. 659.

1643, when the Earl retired to Penshurst a disillusioned and embittered man. Though still conparatively young, he took no further part in public life but nursed his grievances against successive Governments and, as he grew older, against his ungrateful wife and sons.[1]

Algernon by 1643 was equally disenchanted. The political and religious issues of the Civil War do not seem at first to have aroused any enthusiasm in him. " If I had well known how to dispose myself ", he wrote to his mother, " I confess I should not have been patient so long. I am not likely to seek after those employments many others receive with greediness. Nothing but extreme necessity shall make me bear arms in England, and yet it is the only way of living well for those that have not estates."[2]

A year later, he had undergone a conversion. Captured on their return to England in August, 1643 by the Parliamentary troops, he and Philip were sent up to London under guard as valuable prizes. By the following spring of 1644, Algernon had thrown over the family tradition to join the Parliamentary army under his cousin the Earl of Manchester. At Marston Moor he " charged with much gallantry at the head of my Lord's regiment of horse and came off with much honour, though with many wounds ".[3] His convalescence was prolonged, and a more sedentary job had to be found for him as Governor of Chichester. " I have not left the army ", he told Fairfax, " without extreme unwillingness and would not persuade myself to it by any other reason than that by reason of my lameness I am not able to do the Parliament and you the service which would be expected of me."[4] At twenty-two, Sidney was a retired Colonel, invalided out of the service in which he seems for once to have found an outlet for his energies. Although he never (except for three months in Ireland in 1647) saw active service again, he kept the military title till his death.

From this time onwards, it is difficult to see a recurring pattern in Sidney's career. Short bursts of intense engagement are followed by much longer periods of blank frustration. His military career ended when he was twenty-two ; when after a few years he turned with equal enthusiasm to politics, he was thrown out of Parliament by Cromwell. Six years later, having successfully accomplished his first important diplomatic mission, his legitimate prospects of a foreign service career were cut short by the Restoration. Algernon Sidney was a man of unusual ability and intelligence ; he was forceful, energetic and almost obsessed by principle. Two hundred years later he might have spent

[1] See *De Lisle MSS.*, No. 1110 B.

[2] Letter of 18.6.43 printed in Gilbert, *History of the Irish Confederation and the War in Ireland (1832)*, Vol. 2, p. xlix.

[3] Ash's *Intelligence from the Armies in the North*, No. 6., quoted by Meadley, p. 18.

[4] Letter of June, 1645, from Fairfax Correspondence, quoted in *D.N.B.*

his talents in colonial administration ; in the disturbed political climate of the mid-seventeenth century, his misfortune was to be almost continually without a job. He was nominally employed for perhaps twelve years of his whole working life, in fact for much less. He emerged from each spell of inactivity a little more severe and solitary than before.

As a very young man, he had learned from his father to put no trust in princes ; this cynicism was, however, only a defence against an intense capacity for loyalty to an ideal. Algernon Sidney was naturally attracted by the intellectual arguments, as well as the enthusiasm, of the Parliamentary party. Since, unlike Lord Leicester, he happened to be on the winning side, he tasted the experience of political success. It lasted too short a time for disillusionment, but long enough to fix in his mind an ineradicable loyalty, to " that old cause in which I was from my youth engaged ". To many the " good old cause " was identified with Cromwell ; to Sidney it meant the Parliamentary republic. He made several apparently sincere attempts to compromise with the Royalist regime, but when they failed he always turned back for comfort to the Republican principles which, publicly aired and upheld, made him suspect to the Protectorate and Restoration governments alike.

In 1645, the Republic was still a long way off ; " If we beat the King 99 times, yet he is still King."[1] The House of Commons was not brought up to strength till 1646, when elections were held to fill the vacancies left by the Royalist members. Sidney, after 18 uneventful months at Chichester, was elected as member for Cardiff, but took little part at first in the proceedings. His allegiance was still to the Army, and he spent the first few months of 1647 in Ireland, only to be deprived, at the last moment of another Governorship, that of Dublin. Although the House of Commons resolved instead that " in due time this House will take into consideration the merits and services of Colonel Algernon Sidney "[2] he was temporarily without a job. The disappointment gave Lord Leicester the opportunity to reflect once more upon the universal injustice of public life.[3]

The reward when it came was another more important governorship, that of Dover. Although the post was no doubt welcome as a source of revenue,[4] Sidney had by this time altered his objective and was far more interested in Parliament than in military administration.

[1] Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War* (1893), Vol. II, p. 59.

[2] *Commons Journals*, IV, p. 136.

[3] " Journal of Robert Earl of Leicester ", 8.4.47, in *Sydney Papers*, ed. Blencowe p. 16.

[4] Sydney had no regular allowance from his father (Add. MSS. E.g. 1049, f. 9). He received " the same entertainment as formerly paid to the governor out of the sequestrations of Kent ". C.S.P.(D.) 31.3.49.

He had continually to be ordered from London to repair to his charge, and appears to have been unpopular with the garrison ; there were complaints to the authorities which had to be referred to the Council of State, and although for the moment he was adjudged " a fit person to be continued in his trust ",[1] he was replaced at Dover in the spring of 1651.

For the next two years there was nothing to keep him away from London, and his energy was absorbed in politics. It was the great age of government by Parliamentary committee, and Col. Sidney's name appeared on an increasing number. In November, 1652, his career reached its highest point ; he was elected to the Council of State. Like his brother, he now took a special interest in foreign affairs, helped to receive Ambassadors and draw up treaties, and he was almost invariably chosen to make the subsequent report to the House.[2] The Republic's foreign credit at this time stood phenomenally high, and for four months Sidney shared in its success. A successful foreign policy, however, was not enough to impress the army, who remained the Republic's real source of power. The Rump, in Cromwell's view, degenerated into a mutual admiration society. Reforms in land tenure, taxation and law were still only on the agenda. In April, 1653, the General, accompanied by a band of musketeers, marched into the House. " Depart, I say ", he cried, " and let us have done with you." " Fetch him down ", pointing to the Speaker ; " what shall we do with this bauble ? take it away ", and after handing the Mace to a musketeer, he caught sight of Sidney. " Put him out ! " said the General. A hand was clapped on his shoulder, and Sidney, seeing it was useless to protest, left the chamber with the rest.[3]

Although this was Sidney's last effective appearance at Westminster, the House of Commons never lost its fascination for him. As a returned exile, he stood unsuccessfully for election on three, possibly four occasions. Not until Charles II seemed finally to have abandoned the device of Parliaments did Sidney commit himself to less constitutional forms of opposition. Even so, the re-establishment of Parliamentary authority seems to have been far more important to him than the return of the Republic and the abolition of the monarchy.

His intellectual preference was certainly for a republican regime and his own experience of it was entirely satisfactory. His views were well known ; he would make extravagant remarks in conversation about the evils of tyranny, and Evelyn, as well as most of his contemporaries, seem to have been convinced of Sidney's " tragical principles ".[4] In practice, however, he was not the diehard he sometimes pretended.

[1] C.S.P. (Dom.) (1650), 2.7.50 ; 26.10.50. *Commons Journals*, VI, p. 562.
[2] *Commons Journals*, VII, p. 263, 267, 269, 271.
[3] Ludlow's *Memoirs* (1698), Vol. II, p. 456.
[4] Evelyn, *Journal*, ed. Bray (1850), Vol. 2, p. 180.

" As I thought I might most justly oppose the first and second King whilst I followed the authority of Parliamentary ", he explained in 1660, " I knew it was my duty to submit and serve him when that same authority did acknowledge him."[1] Although this is not strictly true (after Charles II had tried to assassinate him in Augsburg,[2] Sidney returned the compliment by intriguing with Louis XIV) it is a surprising fact that once back in England, he was apparently among the last to join in the serious plans for overthrowing Charles II's government which had been talked of since 1680. Even then, the purpose of the 1683 rising was to have been " to secure the settlement of the kingdom to a Parliament ".[3] Whatever his Republican convictions, regicide seems never to have been part of his programme. In January, 1649, in a letter to his father, he criticized the Commons for having been too hasty in declaring that " to the validity of any law passed by them, neither the assent of King nor Lords is necessary ". The trappings of government were not important ; the Commons should have contented themselves with the definition that " all just power was originally in the people themselves ".[4] Both he and Philip refused to sit as members of the Commission appointed to try Charles I. Algernon actually went into the Painted Chamber, and told the other judges that " the King could be tried by no court and no man could be tried by that Court. You may take your own course, I cannot stop you, but I will keep myself clean from having any hand in this business ". Although as an emissary of the republican government he defended the execution in public (" and never did disavow it unless it were to the King of Sweden and Grand Maitre of Denmark who asked me privately "), his refusal to subscribe to it himself was no doubt one of the reasons why Cromwell disliked him so much.[5]

It seems most unlikely, therefore, that Algernon Sidney could have taken part in a plan to murder Charles II, as was alleged at his trial. " Even the King ", he said, " knows I am not a man to have any such design ; and I am no more capable of it than of eating him if he were dead. "[6] Deposition was probably the most he would have sanctioned, either in 1649 or 1683. In 1649, he says he had a design " that was not very fit for a letter ",[6] and this may have been it. If either of the Stuart Kings had been prepared to own the ultimate authority of Parliament, as William III was eventually forced to do, it seems likely that Algernon Sidney's Republicanism would have remained academic. His complaint in his dying speech was that they would not acknowledge

[1] Letter of 21.9.60, Blencowe, p. 214.
[2] Ludlow's *Memoirs* (1698), Vol. III, p. 173.
[3] *Secret History of the Rye House Plot*, Ford, Lord Grey (1754), p. 55.
[4] Letter of 10.1.49, Add. MSS. 21506, f. 55.
[5] Letter to his father, 12.10.60, Blencowe, p. 235.
[6] *Apology*, published in *Discourses on Government* (1763), p. 180.

" that they had received their crowns by the consent of willing nations ". There is a striking passage in his Discourse on Government which illustrates his ideal of a Constitutional monarch, in this case Elizabeth I. " She did not go about to mangle acts of Parliament and to pick out what might serve her turn, but frequently passed 40 or 50 in a session without reading one of them. She knew that she did not reign for herself, but for her people, and that what was good for them was either good for her, or that her good ought not to come into competition with that of the whole nation."[1]

Sidney is unusual in that he practised politics before preaching its philosophy. The *Discourse on Government*, an answer to Sir Robert Filmer's defence of the divine right of Kings, was probably written between 1653 and 1659 during his enforced retirement. In spite of its elaborate illustrations from history and scripture, the argument is vigorous rather than subtle ; the theme is " that the people under God are the source of all just power ", and that " magistrates were for the good of nations, not nations for the honour and glory of magistrates ". Given some form of elected assembly, Sidney never asked whether it was truly democratic. He cheerfully endorsed a limited franchise,[2] bribed the electorate,[3] and regarded the Rump as a satisfactory representative body. The redeeming feature of the Parliamentary Republic was no doubt that it took Government seriously. Sidney came of a family of professional administrators more or less thwarted in recent years by the effects of patronage. He was therefore more concerned that authority should be disinterested than that it should be strictly democratic. The existence of any form of assembly, even a body like the Rump which owed its position to conquest and privilege, was apparently a sufficient guarantee against exploitation.

There is in the de Lisle and Dudley papers an unpublished commonplace book of Sidney's ;[4] it seems to be the unfinished notes for a book on the lines of the *Discourse*, and consists mostly of quotations (grouped under headings like " slavery " and " war ") from English, French, German, Spanish and Latin historical works to be found in the Penshurst library.[5] Sidney probably divided his time, during his retirement, between Penshurst and a house he had taken from his sister Isabella at Sturry. Most of the surviving Sidney daughters were married by this time, leaving only Diana, in her late twenties, and Henry, the youngest boy, aged twelve in 1653, at Penshurst with their parents. Algernon seems to have made himself felt in the family. Philip, who had

[1] *Discourses on Government*, A. Sidney (1763), p. 462.
[2] *Case of Algernon Sidney as it appeared before the Committee* (1680).
[3] Letter from Gilbert Spencer to Henry Sidney, *Diary of Henry Sidney*. Ed. Blencowe (1843), Vol. I, p. 115.
[4] *De Lisle MSS*, No. 1223.
[5] Catalogue of the library at Penshurst, *c.* 1660, *De Lisle MSS*, No. 1100.

transferred his allegiance to Cromwell, wrote with pained surprise to his father that "the younger son should so much domineer in the house, his extremest vanity and want of judgment are so well known". Knowing what Cromwell thought of him, Algernon had persuaded the household into amateur dramatics of a pointed political kind (by tradition *Julius Cæsar*, with himself as Brutus). "The business of your Lordship's house hath passed somewhat unluckily", wrote Philip from London, "and that it had been better to do a seasonable courtesy to my Lord Protector than to have had such a play acted in it of public affront to him, which doth much entertain the town."[1] Algernon seldom met with very much appreciation from his family. Even his favourite sister Isabella, married at sixteen to a feckless Irish cousin with whom she "ran about from one place to another seeking company" and incurring debts for her brother to settle, showed no gratitude "unto the said Algernon (that only worldly help that had never failed her)". In return for his financial help and (no doubt) good advice to the young couple, there were "new discontents, which servants daily increased, suggesting that he endeavoured to govern them, that he was too severe for their age, which required iollity".[2] Eventually in 1659 Isabella tore up the deeds by which she had promised to repay his kindness, and was in fact largely responsible for his financial difficulties in the first year or two of his exile.

Meanwhile, Algernon seems to have found no comfort outside the family circle. At the age of 35, he was still apparently living alone at Sturry. He did, however, leave at Penshurst a short manuscript essay which, many years after his death, was published in the *Somers Tracts*,[3] and which may suggest an explanation. It is called "Of Love", and might be dismissed as a conventional composition if its directness did not ring true. There is a good deal of Sidney in it which he did not generally choose to disclose. He is writing, he says, "only that which I shall read the next week, or month, and then burn". The subject is love, because "it is better to speak passionately, and perhaps unadvisedly, of what we know, than universally, darkly and ignorantly if those that we feel nothing of . . . this extremity of disorder and torment seems fabulous to those that have not felt it". He does not apologize; "if desires were absolutely sinful, they had never been given us; if beauty might not be desired, it had never been created; there is no forbidden fruit out of Paradise". But the fruit was out of reach. "I can neither conform my desires to my hopes, nor raise my hopes to my desires: the lowness and meaness of my fortune and person forbids me to hope; the beauty and loveliness of the person whom I love

[1] Letter of 17.6.56, Blencowe (Appendix), p. 315.
[2] MS. in Sidney's handwriting in *De Lisle MSS.* No. 1154.
[3] *Somers Tracts* (1748), Vol. II. Original in Add. MSS.

makes my desires approach as near to eternity as that can do which is seated in a mortal foundation. My constancy is both my fault and my punishment; death alone can give me a dismission from either." It was a good enough epitaph. In view of the many references to his violence and bad temper, it is worth remembering what he knew he had missed. "As love is the cause of the greatest ills that men suffer, it is the cause also of the most perfect pleasures . . . and as many as are made miserable by love, none are made happy without love."

This essay was probably written between 1653 and 1659. In the latter year, Sidney was called out of retirement, as a member of the Rump, for a last period of official employment. In June, 1659, he was sent by the restored Republican Council of State as one of three Commissioners to the Sounds, to negotiate a peace between Sweden and Denmark. As a diplomat he was indefatigable. He took the lead in the interviews with the two kings, wrote the reports home, even drew up the articles of treaty in false Latin, "for our two secretaries being absent I wrote it, having never in my life written so much as three lines in that language".[1] Just as the tiresome negotiations were concluded, in May, 1660, Sidney heard that Charles II had landed. The government he was representing no longer existed. Like a good career diplomat, he took it upon himself to assure the governments to which he was accredited of the goodwill of the new monarchical regime; he also confidently awaited instructions from London which would renew his commission. Efficient service was surely more important than past affiliations, and he hoped that "this employment (wherein I think I have served England and consequently him that is at the head of it) may be no prejudice to me".[2] He had had enough of inactivity in the past ten years, and all too little chance to use his abilities: "I had rather be in employment than without any."[2]

His confidence was soon seen to be misplaced. The bones of the regicides were exhumed for public desecration. "You were likely to be excepted out of the general act of pardon" wrote Lord Leicester to Algernon, "there is as ill an opinion of you as of any." . . . "Either you must live in exile or very privately here and perhaps not safely."[3] In any case, no further authority was to be expected from London.

Algernon was at first shocked and then bitterly angry. He had no wish to live privately: "Where Vane, Haselrigg, cannot live in safety, I cannot live at all." He refused absolutely to forswear the whole republican episode: "I had rather be a vagabond all my life than buy my being in my own country at so dear a rate."[4] As the Stuart mon-

[1] See letter of 2.4.60 to Thurloe, in *Thurloe State Papers* (1742). Vol. VII, p. 882.
[2] Blencowe p. 186; letter of 28.5.60.
[3] Letter of 30.8.60. Blencowe, p. 205.
[4] Letter of 30.8.60 from A. Sidney, Blencowe, p. 196.

archy was restored with its whole apparatus of patronage, Sidney could hardly bear the prospect. "We are naturally inclined to delight in our own country and I have a particular love to mine . . . Is it a pleasure to see all that I love in the world is sold and destroyed? Shall I renounce all my old principles, learn the vile court arts, and make my peace by bribing some of them? . . . Ah no, better is a life among strangers than in my own country on such conditions. . . . Miserable nation, that from so great a height of glory is fallen unto the most despicable conditions in the world".[1] The violence is understandable. He had condemned himself to a wasteful exile that in fact lasted for seventeen years, from the age of 36 to 54.

His position in Copenhagen was becoming embarrassing, and he therefore came south, not, as his father suggested, to Hamburg, because he found the Germans drunken and depressing,[2] but to Italy. He rode over the Brenner pass and arrived in Rome in November, 1660. During his two years there, living on five shillings a day, he met with nothing but kindness from that highly sophisticated society. He could not "but rejoice a little to find that when I wander as a vagabond through the world, forsaken of my friends, poor and known only to be a broken limb of a shipwrecked faction, I yet find humanity and civility from those who are in the height of fortune and reputation".[3] It was more than he got from his own father. Ever since Lady Leicester's death, while Algernon was in Denmark, the old man had brooded on his son's lack of consideration and now refused to send him his mother's legacy. As for Isabella's ingratitude, it would serve him right, Lord Leicester wrote, "for bestowing so much of your care where it was not due and neglecting them to whom it was due and I hope you will be wiser hereafter".[4] Sir John Temple, an old family friend was afraid that this treatment would cause Algernon to take some desperate way out: he had, indeed talked of going to fight the Turk in Hungary.[5] Instead, he lapsed into a kind of dead indifference. In the summer of 1661, he was lent a fabulous villa at Frascati, where he spent the time sleeping and reading. "I intend this half burial as a preparative to an entire one", he told his father. "I find stupidity an advantage; nature hath given me a large proportion of it" and he hoped that before long Whitehall would "believe me so dull and lazy as to be fit for nothing". "When that opinion is well settled, I may hope to live quietly in England."[6]

He did not give it time to settle. The life in Rome became intoler-

[1] Letter (n.d. ? Aug. 60). Blencowe, p. 199.
[2] Letter of 28.7.60, Blencowe, p. 190.
[3] Letter of 23.6.61, Blencowe, p. 247.
[4] Letter of 30.8.60. Blencowe, p. 205.
[5] Letter from Sir J. Temple to Lord Leicester, 21.11.60, Blencowe, p. 245.
[6] Letter to Lord Leicester, 14.7.61. Blencowe, p. 251.

able and in 1663 he went north to Switzerland, where he got in touch with Ludlow and other exiled Republicans.[1] "It was an ill-grounded peace that I enjoyed", he said, "and could have no rest in my own spirit because I lived only to myself and was in no ways useful unto God's people, my country and the world."[2] After an attempt by Charles II's hired thugs to murder him, it was not surprising that Sidney's restlessness hardened into active opposition. Since effective action was impossible without foreign help, Sidney turned in 1665 to the European monarch most likely to be interested. Louis XIV was already courting the exiles. "Je ménageais les restes de la faction de Cromwell pour exciter par leur credit quelque nouveau trouble dans Londres. J'ecoutais les propositions qui me furent faites par M. Sidney, gentilhomme anglais, lequel me promettait de faire éclater dans peu quelque soulèvement en lui faisant fournir cent mille ecus, mais je trouvais la somme un peu trop forte pour l'exposer ainsi sur la foi d'un fugitif . . ."[3] The deal fell through; Sidney resigned himself to indefinite exile, left his old colleagues to plot in Belgium and Switzerland, and buried himself at Nérac, a Protestant centre in Gascony. Here he lived for ten years, the most obscure period of his life. He was still only 45, and one can only guess at what a man of his temperament can have found to occupy him in a small French provincial town. "I have burned more papers of my own writing than a horse can carry", he said at his trial. Perhaps some of these (for nothing remains that can be dated after 1666) were produced—and consumed—at Nérac.

A chance meeting in Paris with his great-nephew, Henry Savile, led to his return to England.[4] The older Henry Savile was Ambassador in Paris at the time, and managed to arrange a safe-conduct for Algernon to see his old father and settle his finances. He arrived in October, 1677, just before Lord Leicester died. By the time Philip, the heir, had been forced by a law suit to pay his younger brothers the annuities due to them,[5] Algernon had given up his original intention of returning to live in France. He had taken up his old rooms at Leicester House, on the north side of Leicester Square, and had been drawn irresistibly into the treacherous political waters of Charles II's last years.

It was now seventeen years since the Restoration, and the honeymoon was over. Charles II had found, like his father, the fundamental difficulty of maintaining an adequate revenue without yielding the executive authority to Parliament. The Duke of York's solution

[1] Ludlow's *Memoirs* (1698). Vol. III, pp. 136, 173.
[2] Letter to Mr. Furley (n.d.). Blencowe, p. 259.
[3] Louis XIV, *Oeuvres*, Vol. II, p. 203, quoted by Meadley, p. 330.
[4] *Life and Letters of Halifax*, Foxcroft (1898), Vol. I, p. 137.
[5] A. Sidney's *Statement of his suit with the Earl of Leicester*, Add. MSS. E.g. 1049, f. 9. The outcome reported in G. Spencer's letter to H. Sidney of 7.1.80 in *Diary*, ed. Blencowe, Vol. I, p. 233.

would have been to fight the Civil War again, if necessary, in defence of the royal prerogative. Charles preferred to avoid a clash by dispensing with Parliament as far as possible. This depended upon his being able to count on some alternative source of revenue, and in 1677, the Opposition were already beginning to suspect the truth ; that Charles II was an eager pensioner of Louis XIV. To put them off the scent, in that year he married his niece to the popular Protestant William of Orange and talked of helping the Netherlands in a war with France. The Parliament of 1678 accordingly began with enthusiasm to vote supplies for the raising of an army.

Not only was Louis XIV alarmed by the success of his manœuvre. Respectable Whig peers like Lord Russell, descendants of the Presbyterian opposition to Charles I, began to wonder if the army was indeed intended for Holland, or whether Charles II, with Louis' help, was not planning to make himself absolute in England—even to restore Popery ? The French ambassador, Barillon, lost no time in making contact with Russell and other highly placed critics of the regime. Among his contacts as early as 1678, was Algernon Sidney.[1] Whether he was influenced by the traditional Republican fear of the Dutch, or his suspicions of William of Orange, Sidney never seems to have regarded France as a serious threat. According to Burnet, he " did all he could to divert people from that war, so that some took him for a pensioner of France, but to those to whom he durst speak freely, he said he knew it was all a juggle, that our court was in an entire confidence with France and had no other design in this show of war but to raise an army ".[2] He was sufficiently cynical about the motives of both courts to see no reason against accepting Barillon's money :[3] it must be remembered that Louis XIV's payroll included not only Charles II himself, but most of the opposition as well.

There was in the event no war with France in 1678. But suspicions had been roused, and were linked more and more with anxiety about the succession. Charles II was a secret convert to Catholicism and would no doubt have preferred a monarchy on the French pattern as being less trouble and more lucrative. For him, however, it was largely a matter of expediency ; for his brother James, it was one of principle. The prospect of James as king, using French money to make his position impregnable, was alarming enough from a constitu-

[1] Alleged by Barillon, quoted by Sir John Dalrymple in *Memoirs* (1790), Vol. I, p. 253, on the basis of despatches, not printed, dated 20.10.78, 27.10.78, 24.11.78 and 22.12.78. See also Barillon's despatch of 5.12.80, p. 355, referring to Sidney's help " in the affair of the Earl of Danby ".

[2] *History of My Own Times*, Bishop Burnet (1893), Vol. II, p. 352.

[3] Barillon's despatch of 14.12.79 quoted in Dalrymple, Vol. I, p. 339. Accounts on p. 381, dated 14.12.79 and 5.12.80 show 500 guineas paid in each year to Algernon Sidney.

tional point of view, and the Popish plot conveniently focused attention upon the possible religious consequences of his succession.

The significance of the Plot, which deceived at first even informed observers like Sidney,[1] lies mainly in what it tells us about the state of public opinion in 1678 ; that a Catholic plot to assassinate Charles II and bring in James as King not only seemed possible but even likely. All sorts of vague fears were henceforward concentrated upon the heir to the throne, and the problem of finding an alternative to James is, from 1679 onwards, the main pre-occupation of would-be politicians, including Sidney.

The first Exclusion Bill, on which the 1679 Parliament was dissolved, would have merely prevented James from succeeding ; it did not name another heir. The two possibilities in practice were James Duke of Monmouth, Charles' eldest illegitimate son, and his nephew William of Orange. The latter, who was already ruling with considerable skill in the Netherlands, was from nearly every point of view the most sensible choice, and so indeed he appeared to a number of contemporaries. While Algernon himself apparently continued to distrust an international alliance of Stuarts, his family were among the first to realize where the best hope lay. Henry Sidney, his youngest brother, had been sent (to Algernon's disgust)[2] as envoy extraordinary to Holland. He reported that the Prince " was convinced the Duke (of York) will never have the crown and I find would be very willing to be put into a way of having it himself ".[3] He was not, however, prepared to come to England and cross swords in public with his father-in-law, and his backers, led by Algernon's nephew Sunderland, had therefore to withdraw for the time being.

Although Henry records a meeting with his brother in 1680, it is unlikely, on personal as well as political grounds, that Algernon himself was a party to the negotiations with Orange. After 17 years in exile, he was barely on speaking terms with most of his relations. Tempers had run high over the law suit with Philip for the disposal of their father's estate ; he seems hardly to have visited his sisters Dorothy and Lucy, in spite of invitations to be sociable,[4] and he made little effort to take advantage of his family connections with Halifax and Sunderland, in 1679 newly appointed to the Privy Council and two of the most influential men in England. Quite the reverse ; " some of our friends ", he wrote at the time to Halifax's brother, " being newly grown men of business are so political and secret that a man who sees it can hardly

[1] Letter to Savile of 16.6.79 in *Letters*, A. Sidney (1742), p. 101-2.
[2] Letter of 10.7.79 in *Letters* (1742), p. 127. See (64).
[3] *Diary of H. Sidney* ed. Blencowe, Vol. I, p. 130.
[4] Letter from Dorothy Dowager Countess of Sunderland to H. Sidney, 19.2.80 ; *Diary*, p. 278.

forbear laughing ".[1] As for Henry Sidney, even Barillon knew that Algernon was " on bad terms with his brother and laughs at the court's making use of him as a negotiator ".[2] It is not likely, therefore, that he was Henry's confidant in a scheme to which on general principles he was known to be opposed. As between the other candidates to the succession, it was all one to him, he said, whether James, Duke of York, or James Duke of Monmouth was to succeed ; the strongest reason he could think of for preferring the latter was that " Whatsoever is opposed to York will have a good party ".[3]

Exile had not, however, turned him into a bystander. He was lucky to have been allowed into England, and might have been expected to keep out of further trouble. Instead, he stood for election as the opposition candidate for Guildford within a year of his return. His chief supporter was the Quaker, William Penn, a combination which seems to have daunted the Mayor and Aldermen of Guildford. They informed him that they were already committed to the Court candidate, and that " it was the custom of the town to vote as the Magistrates did ". Finally they held the election without telling him. It was not much comfort to be told by Penn that " to be put aside by such base ways is really a suffering for righteousness ".[4]

Next year, 1679, Sidney tried to make sure of a seat by standing for two boroughs at once ; Amersham, and Bramber in Sussex, where the Pelhams could be relied on to support a brother-in-law. It had not occurred to him that Henry, stationed in the Hague, might have had the same idea. Henry also had a loyal and efficient agent, prepared, in his master's interest, for " kissing the old women, and drinking wine with handfuls of sugar and great glasses of burnt brandy, three things much against the stomach ".[5] In this convivial atmosphere Algernon's " learned speech " went for nothing, as did the " ten or twelve guineas " which he left to the townspeople in advance " to thank them, as was pretended ". Henry was elected, and " my uncle Algernon ", wrote Sunderland to him, " is very angry with you for pretending to any thing he had a mind to ".[6] At Amersham, his second string, he was elected on a disputed return; he never sat, and in December, 1680, the election was eventually declared void. His friends were on the whole, rather sorry. As Henry Savile said when the news first reached Paris : " Colonel Algernon is I hear chosen a Member of Parliament ; I did not think I should ever have so good a reason to wish to be so too as to hear how he will behave himself."[7]

[1] Letter to H. Savile, 10.7.79, *Letters* (1742), p. 127.
[2] Barillon, despatch of 14.12.79, in Dalrymple, Vol. I, p. 339.
[3] Letter to H. Savile, 5.5.79, *Letters* (1742), p. 53.
[4] Letter of " First, First Month, 1679 ", quoted in Ewald, Vol. II, p. 61.
[5] Letter from G. Spencer to H. Sidney, 1.9.79 ; *Diary*, Vol. I, p. 115.
[6] Letter from Sunderland to H. Sidney, 19.8.79 ; *Diary*, Vol. I, p. 88.
[7] Letter from H. Savile to H. Sidney, 28.8.79 ; *Diary*, Vol. I, p. 203.

Frustrated of his great wish to take part once more in legitimate politics, Algernon kept up his connection with notorious Independents like Slingsby Bethel, whom he was said to have sponsored for election as Sheriff of London.[1] His sister Dorothy reported in July, 1680, that "Mr. Algernon is very busy, about what, God knows. Last night he was called out of my chamber. I asked 'By whom?' and my man said, 'A Quaker' ".[2] (He might as well have said "a Communist".)

The bolder spirits among Cromwell's old soldiers and City dissenters had begun to gather around the Earl of Shaftesbury, the mainspring of Monmouth's party, and there was talk in 1680 of forcing Charles to accept Exclusion. Algernon, however, seems to have had no direct connection with the organizers in this radical wing. He boasted to Dorothy that he knew Shaftesbury's mind,[3] but in fact disliked and distrusted Monmouth's chief adviser. Their mutual antipathy, and Algernon's quarrel on the other hand with Henry Sidney, kept him out of what might be called constructive plotting on either side until the year of his death.[4] At the end of 1680, he was isolated from his family and reputable political connections. His health broke down, he developed a really bad cough, and for some time existed on nothing but water gruel.[5] "As for the other brother", said one of Dorothy's friends about Algernon, "she wonders why nobody shoots him."[6]

At the end of 1680, Sunderland, through his wife and Henry, made a last bid for William of Orange's intervention. "If there be nothing to fix on, tis certain the Duke of Monmouth must be the king, and if the Prince thinks it not worth going over a threshold for a kingdom, I know not why anybody should for him."[7] William refused to come unless the Exclusion Bill was passed, and Charles II would not abandon his brother. Parliament was again dissolved and given what was clearly a last chance at Oxford. It was also Sidney's last opportunity to take a public part in politics. From a letter which the 1742 edition of his *Letters* dates as 1679, but which clearly relates to 1681, it seems that he may have stood once more for Amersham without success. Nevertheless, he remarked, "we good subjects hopes all will go perfectly well . . . We need not fear a few discontented lords, a mutinous city, or murmuring counties".[8] All did not go well. Parliament was

[1] Barillon, despatch of 5.12.80 in Dalrymple, vol. I, p. 357.
[2] Letter from Dorothy, Dowager Countess of Sunderland to Halifax, 19.7.80 in *Letters*, Lady Rachel Russell (1809), p. 135.
[3] The same to the same, 3.7.80 and 27.7.80 ; *ibid.*, pp. 128, 136.
[4] Howard's evidence at Hampden's trial ; *Trials*, ed. Hawles (1689), Vol. 7, p. 11.
[5] Letter from Dorothy to Henry Sidney, 12.3.80 ; *Diary*, ed. Blencowe, Vol. I, p. 203.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Countess of Sunderland to Henry Sidney, 8.11.80 ; *Diary*, Vol. II, p. 122.
[8] Letter to H. Savile, dated (wrongly) 3.2.79 ; *Letters* (1742), p. 10

dissolved almost at once, and it was not expected that the King, while he lived, would repeat the experiment. The vague talks of James' exclusion by force now acquired a new urgency. In view of William's scruples, it was confined to the supporters of Monmouth. The Duke had built up considerable popularity through his tours in the West Country, and Cheshire, and, as the Government tightened its hold on the City of London, Shaftesbury found that there were a fair number of citizens who like him saw their necks in danger. He began to make plans in earnest for an insurrection in London to be reinforced by a simultaneous rising in the West. In the City, his " brisk boys " were to attack the trained bands at 11 p.m. one Sunday night in November, 1682, barricade Snow Hill, by Smithfield, and marching through Holborn to fall upon Whitehall in the rear. Reputable Whigs like Russell and possibly Essex, the disillusioned Lord Treasurer of 1679, may have known about these plans, which were, however, postponed at the last minute for the ostensible reason that on the appointed day the Western confederates were not ready. At this, Shaftesbury " took a fright and went away "[1] to the Netherlands, where he shortly died; the other conspirators, less committed and unable to proceed without his City contacts, decided to drop the whole plan for the time being.

Meanwhile, towns all over England were being forced to yield up their charters. In December, 1682, there was a major persecution of Dissenters in London. The court seemed determined to get control of local government and of the mechanism for appointing juries. If they succeeded, James II would have a frighteningly strong inheritance. Early in 1683, Russell and the treacherous Lord Howard began to revive the project of a rising, and this time they included Sidney in their plans.[2]

Now that Shaftesbury was dead, Howard could safely introduce Sidney to Monmouth, warning the Duke that he would have to take the old republican as he found him and " dine with him as he uses to dine at his own table ".[3] The four of them—Russell, Howard, Monmouth and Sidney, with Essex and Hampden, grandson of the Parliamentary leader—formed a Council of Six, to which Grey was later co-opted, in the early months of 1683. The plan followed Shaftesbury's, except that it was to begin with a rising in Scotland, and Sidney was apparently commissioned to send one Aaron Smith to invite the Scots to send representatives to discuss in London with the Council of Six. Among themselves, the Six only had four or five formal meetings, which served to highlight the difference in their motives. Howard was

[1] *Secret History*, p. 41.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[3] Howard's evidence at Hampden's trial ; *Trials* (1689) Vol. 7, p. 12.

" zealous for no government but that under which he could get most ". Monmouth was the figure-head, naively believing that " there would be little bloodshed, for all would end in an accommodation between the King and a Parliament ".[1] Russell, the moral strength of the Shaftesbury party, was no Republican but was nevertheless " still of the opinion that the King was limited by law and that when he broke through the limits his subjects might defend themselves and restrain him ".[2] Sidney, and apparently Essex also, may have hoped that the free Parliament, which was the cornerstone of the Council's political programme, might produce a return to the Republican form of Government. At the worst, however, if Monmouth succeeded, " A Prince who knew there was a flaw in his title, would always govern well ".[3]

The facile Howard was the weakest link of this cabal. The trust he reposed in him must be regarded as one of Sidney's worst errors of judgement. Perhaps Howard pretended to be a good listener ; Sidney, like other lonely old bachelors, " had a particular way of insinuating himself into people that would hearken to his notions and not contradict him ".[4] In the Council of Six, he was apt to hold forth at what Grey considered was tedious length ; at the final meeting delivered " a long prologue of the necessity we were reduced to of taking up of arms and of the lawfulness of it ",[5] but he would not commit himself in the aims of the rising except to say " he had heard when wise men draw their swords against the king, they laid aside all thoughts of treating with him ".[6] The Six, seem indeed to have avoided discussion of their ultimate objective. Monmouth was never actually named as King, but only as General—and some members at least probably had no intention of deposing Charles. They were all, however, prepared to subscribe to Sidney's version of the immediate aim : " to secure the settlement of the kingdom to a Parliament, which if were successful would know how to provide for the safety of themselves and the people ".[7]

At first, the Council's plans progressed systematically. Essex collected several subscriptions towards the cost of armaments : in May, the Scottish commissioners arrived, and the rising was supposed to take place before the end of June. Even then Russell still had misgivings : " an ill laid and ill managed rising would be our ruin ".[8] His wife was to swear, later on, that the Council's plans were " no more than

[1] *Secret History*, pp. 43, 61.
[2] Burnet, Vol. II, p. 371.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 353, (attributed to Lord Howard).
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 342.
[5] *Secret History*, p. 51.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 55.
[8] Burnet, Vol. II, p. 346.

(my own Lord confessed) talk ".[1] Possibly they would have lost their nerve at the last moment ; in any case, they were never put to the test, for in June, 1683, while the Scots were still in London, the warrants were out for the arrest of every one of the Council of Six.[2]

The discovery was an unlucky accident. After Shaftesbury's death, some of his wilder followers, old soldiers and Anabaptists, took to meeting in public houses round Fleet Street. Here they dreamed up the perfect plan to get rid of the King and the Duke together. On the way back from the races at Newmarket, the royal coach would pass the Rye House at Hoddesdon, where one of the party happened to live. Here the guards could easily be overpowered, and the royal brothers murdered. The details were certainly impractical, but the whole scheme was frustrated in any case, by the King's return to London a week early. One of the plotters, however, " who was sinking in his business and began to think that of a witness would be the better trade ",[3] went to Whitehall and confessed the whole thing to an incredulous Secretary of State. " The King is betrayed by his little people "[4] commented L'Estrange, the Government agent, and suspicion would indeed have been confined to joiners, carpenters and East End conventicle members, if one of the leading spirits in the Rye House Plot, a Colonel Rumsey, had not also been concerned with Monmouth, Howard and possibly Russell in the plans for Shaftesbury's rising of November, 1682. To save himself, he turned King's evidence and incriminated the others. Howard, when they finally found him hiding in a chimney, did the same, and added Hampden, Essex and Sidney, to the list of suspects.

The Government did not wait for this further evidence, but arrested Sidney as he sat at dinner in Leicester House, at one o'clock on 26th June. Russell was taken the same day, and Grey, the only one who managed to escape, on 29th June. The others were brought in early in July, except for Monmouth, whom his father deliberately tried to shield ; the King, he said " could never be brought to believe that I knew anything of that part of the plot that concerned Rye House ".[5]

It is unlikely that any of the Council of Six were in fact connected with the murder plot. The King told Russell to his face that no one suspected him of any design against his person.[6] Sidney was emphatic

[1] *Letters*, Russell, p. xlvi.

[2] C.S.P. (Dom.) (1683), p. 385 (June 30th, 1683). Entry Book 54, pp. 177-8; p. 366 (June 28th), S.P. Dom. Various. 12, p. 425 ; p. 373 (July 8th) and S.P. Dom. Car. II, 428, No. 13.

[3] Burnet, Vol. II, p. 360.

[4] C.S.P. (Dom.) (1683), p. 336 (June 23rd) and Conway pps. (S.P. (Dom). Car. II, 425, No. 48).

[5] Monmouth's diary for 13.10.83, quoted by Foxcroft, Vol. I, p. 401.

[6] Burnet, Vol. II, p. 365.

that he himself was no murderer.[1] It was the greatest misfortune for the Six that their own plans should have come to light at the same time. The evidence of the intent to rebel did not, by itself, constitute treason, which was confined, under the Act of 25 Ed. III, to the actual levying of war and " conspiring and compassing the death of the King ". It was to the Government's advantage to exploit the connection which existed in the public mind between their arrest and the discovery of the Rye House Plot. Former Privy Councillors, some of them responsible men of known integrity, were far more dangerous, and at the same time more difficult to convict, than the genuine Rye House plotters.

Since the Government had no evidence against Sidney, they seized the papers in his study and brought him before the Privy Council in the hope of exacting a confession. Unable, from what he told them, to manufacture a charge, they nevertheless kept him in the Tower until November, in considerable discomfort and without the benefit of counsel. Russell, meanwhile, had been brought to trial almost at once, and convicted on the unsupported evidence of two separate witnesses, one of whom was Howard. Two hitherto unestablished principles of law, which proved equally fatal to Sidney, were stated at Russell's trial : " If there be one witness of one act of treason, that will be sufficient," and : "an act of continuing rebellion and insurrection . . . is in itself an evidence to seize and destroy the King ".[2] While Howard was in the witness-box, news was brought that Essex had that morning cut his throat in the Tower with a razor. On this evidence of guilt, Russell was at once convicted. His execution in Lincoln's Inn Fields probably did as much as anything to consolidate the opposition in the House of Lords to the Stuart regime.

In November, the Duke of Monmouth, on Halifax's advice, gave himself up and confessed everything to the King and the Duke. Henry seems to have asked him to intercede for Algernon but was told " that it was impossible to save him, he was such an enemy to the Government ".[3] In fact, Monmouth himself may have settled Algernon's fate ; Hampden was told " that the Duke of Monmouth's owning the plot to the King was the cause of Colonel Sidney's death, for the King balanced before ".[4] However, the forms had still to be observed. On November 7th, Sidney was informed by a Grand Jury at Westminster that, " moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil ", he had conspired on 30th June " to bring and put the said lord the king to death and final destruction ".[5] Had Sidney been allowed to see the

[1] *Apology*, in *Discourses* (1763), p. 180.
[2] Attorney-General, in Lord Russell's trial ; *Trials* (1689), fol. 2, p. 50.
[3] Memorandum by Halifax in Devonshire MSS., quoted in Foxcroft, Vol. I, p. 390, note 4.
[4] *Lords Journals*, Vol. XIV, p. 39.
[5] *Arraignment Tryal and Condemnation of A. Sidney, Esq.* (1684), p. 1.

charge in writing (which he never was) he might have realized that on 30th June he was already in the Tower. He tried to refuse to plead altogether, denying that it was a true bill, but eventually pleaded "Not Guilty", and was returned to the Tower, asking in vain for Counsel, for another fortnight.

On 21st November he appeared in Court, still without a copy of the indictment. He had been told that "it would be impossible to avoid condemnation before such judges and such juries as I should be tried by",[1] and the truth of this was soon apparent. A new Lord Chief Justice had just been appointed, Sir George Jeffreys, who by the verdict he obtained on Sidney "was to deserve his otherwise undeserved preferment"[2]; he was devilish, coarse and frequently drunk. During the trial he kept up a stream of bullying abuse calculated, thought Burnet, to put Sidney into a passion, "to which he was subject"[3]. If so, it did not succeed. Sidney kept his head and his temper throughout.

As might have been expected, the jury was "ignorant, sordid and packed".[4] After six months, the Government had managed to scrape up only two pieces of first-hand evidence. One was Lord Howard's statement at Russell's trial, which he obligingly repeated, and the other was the *Discourse on Government*, found in manuscript in the search of Sidney's rooms. "They have proved a paper found in my study of Caligula and Nero; that is compassing the death of the King, is it?"[5] "No tribunal", he said later, "did ever take notice of a man's private, crude and undigested thoughts."[6] Like Russell, Sidney attempted to draw the distinction between plots and actual rebellion. "Conspiring to levy war is not treason . . . 'Tis two distinct things, to make war, and to endeavour to kill the King." In any case, what had actually happened? "Was there a war levied?" Sidney's patience suddenly snapped. "I confess I am not fit to answer these points, I think I should have Counsel, but if you won't allow me, I can't help it."[7]

Jefferys and Withins, the other Justice involved, paid no attention to points of law or the strength of the evidence. The central fact from the Government's point of view was that Sidney had not actually denied the existence of a plot. "Says Colonel Sidney, 'Here is a mighty conspiracy, but nothing comes of it.' Whom must we thank for that? None but the Almighty Providence." Withins was heavily

[1] *Apology*, p. 171.
[2] *ibid.*, p. 190.
[3] Burnet, Vol. II, p. 397.
[4] *Apology*, p. 190.
[5] *Arraignment*, p. 27, 34.
[6] *Apology*, p. 179.
[7] *Arraignment*, pp. 30, 34, 43, 44.

sarcastic. "I believe you don't believe it treason", he said. "That is the worst part of your case", interrupted Jeffreys. "When men are riveted in opinion that Kings may be deposed, that they are accountable to their people, that a general insurrection is no rebellion, and justify it, 'tis high time, upon my word, to call them to account."[1]

After the trial was over, Sidney seems to have realized that the law of treason was a poor defence and that his only hope would have been to discredit Howard's statements altogether. "If the reputation that some of them (the Six) have or had in the world be compared with that of the Lord Howard, it will be thought more probable that he is a liar than that they were fools."[2] At the time, however, the jury had no opportunity to be taken in by this argument. Jefferys, "not satisfied with directions given in public, he had been further pleased when he retired upon pretence of taking a glass of sack, to follow the jury and give them more particular instruction".[3] Sidney was brought to court once more on 26th November to hear the verdict of "Guilty". He was unmoved, even by Jeffreys' last unspeakable assault: "I pray God work in you a temper fit to go into the other world, for I see you are not fit for this." "My Lord", said Sidney, "feel my pulse and see if I am disordered. I bless God, I never was in better temper than I am now."[4]

Although "it was thought he had very hard measure"[4] to be convicted "on the single witness of that monster of a man", Lord Howard, the execution was fixed almost at once to take place at the Tower on 7th December. That, said James with satisfaction, "will give the lie to the Whigs, who reported he was not to suffer".[5] Sidney's behaviour on the Friday was in keeping with his conduct during the trial. With characteristic self-sufficiency, he walked out to the scaffold unaccompanied by friends, family or even a chaplain. "Instead of a speech he told them only that he had made his peace with God, that he came not there to talk, but to die . . . said one prayer as short as a grace, laid down his neck and bid the executioner do his office."[6] His body was buried at Penshurst, in linen as suited to his rank[7]; and his estate, forfeit to the Crown, was granted to Henry, to whom he died in debt.[8]

[1] *ibid.*, pp. 62, 63.
[2] *Apology*, p. 187, p. 190.
[3] *Arraignment* (as printed in *Discourses*), p. 168.
[4] *Journals*, Evelyn, ed. Bray (1890), pp. 452, 453.
[5] Letter of 4.12.83 to Prince of Orange, printed in Dalrymple, Vol. I, Appendix, p. 115.
[6] *Journals*, Evelyn, p. 453.
[7] Penshurst Parish Registers, December, 1683.
[8] Petition from Henry Sidney "the said Algernon being indebted to him in 15001, and there being a mortgage on the land descended from his father", S.P. 44/55, no. 305, of 31.12.83. The award is referred to in P.C. 49/70, p. 250, of 12.10.84.

Sidney's death earned him more sympathy than he ever had in his life, and he probably needed it less. The evidence suggests that at last he himself was curiously contented. He had been allowed to die for the Good Old Cause, that nostalgic ideal of government which alone had remained untouched by his eroding cynicism. He had chosen to take it seriously ; at last, some others were doing the same. He wrote his last *Apology* with a kind of exaltation : " Grant that I may die glorifying Thee for all Thy mercies, and that at the last Thou hast permitted me to be singled out as a witness of Thy truth and even by the confession of my opposers, for that old cause in which I was from my youth engaged and for which Thou hast often and wonderfully declared Thyself."[1] His Christianity, never much more, according to Burnet, than " a divine philosophy in the mind "[2] seems at the end to have acquired a new reality. Sidney had gone back forty years to rediscover, in Cromwellian language, the zest that frustration and exile had frittered away.

" A man of most extraordinary courage, a steady man, even to obstinacy, sincere, but of a rough and boisterous temper that would not bear contradiction but would give foul language upon it "[2]—Algernon Sidney was not an easy man to live with, but he deserved some gratitude. His death, just after that of Russell and of Essex, was the last notable political execution before 1688. It stiffened the Whig resistance which finally broke the Stuart conception of monarchy. Hampden, the only survivor of the Six, told the House of Lords five years later that he thought " King William's coming into England to be nothing else but the continuation of the Council of Six ".[3] Much as he had disapproved of the Orange connection, Sidney, had he lived to see the Revolution, might have realized that the good old cause in fact had come again.

[1] " Very copy of a paper delivered to the Sheriffs." Luttrell MS. III. 58 (1683).
[2] Burnet, Vol. II, p. 352.
[3] *Lords Journals*, Vol. XIV, 20.12.89.

All reference dates as in original, except that Jan.-March dates are written in what would now be the calendar year ; e.g., Sidney's letter three weeks before the execution of Charles I is given the date 10.1.49, not 10.1.48.