

Introduction

Dorothy Percy Sidney's Life and Writings

Dorothy Percy Sidney, Countess of Leicester, is both passionate and practical in her correspondence. She is not afraid to tell her husband that her bed is lonely while he is away on embassy to France, or to instruct him in how to gain favour at court or handle finances. Her deepest concern is for her family – their health and safety, her husband's career, her daughter Doll's marriage. Dorothy Sidney bore fifteen children and saw eight of them die. During her husband's long absences, she managed the family estate at Penshurst and supervised the construction and furnishing of their London home, Leicester House. Although her life seems to have been largely untouched by the scientific revolution, it was shaped by war. During the civil wars her sister, Lucy Percy Hay, was imprisoned; two of the royal children lived with her; her husband was betrayed by the king; her daughter's husband, Henry Spencer, Earl of Sunderland, was slain in battle; her son Robert went into exile with the court and had an affair with the king's ex-mistress, and her sons Algernon and Philip supported Parliament against the king. Dorothy's relationship with her husband was severely tested by long years apart and, particularly during the English civil wars, a series of family deaths and disasters. They quarrelled and even considered living apart just before the onset of her final illness, but after her death her husband was inconsolable. Her correspondence is a vivid reminder of what a seventeenth-century English aristocratic woman could, and could not, achieve in court politics, and how much her life was dependent on the careers of her father, brothers, husband, and sons. Throughout their married life, Robert Sidney depended heavily upon his wife Dorothy for personal, political and, during times of duress, psychological support, although his personal reserve and hasty temper often made such loyalty a very testing duty for her. Her letters, particularly in the early years of their marriage, are affectionate, but only once does she mention that his made her blush. He seems to have rebuked her efforts to advise him about court politics, a subject that she, at the English court, knew much better than he could in France. Nevertheless, Dorothy's letters to her husband reveal her to have been a loving and supportive spouse, constantly alert to matters relating to his personal welfare and the promotion of his court career, as well as always keen to look after the needs of her growing family and closest relatives.

Women in Dorothy Percy Sidney's family were renowned both for their beauty and for their intelligence. Dorothy's grandmother, Lettice Knollys Devereux Dudley, Countess of Leicester, was a famous beauty; her maternal aunt, Penelope Devereux Rich, celebrated in Sir Philip Sidney's songs and sonnets as his beloved Stella, was known for her wit, her dark eyes, and her golden hair. Dorothy's mother,

Dorothy Devereux Percy, Countess of Northumberland, who had attracted the attention of a great earl instead of a poet, was equally attractive. Young Dorothy herself had both wit and beauty, but she was eclipsed by her younger sister Lucy, a flirtatious girl often accounted the most lovely in England. And in later years Dorothy's own daughter, Dorothy Sidney ('Doll'), was celebrated by the poet Edmund Waller as his incomparable 'Sacharissa'.¹

When Dorothy married Robert Sidney the younger, she thereby became related to two of the most important English women writers of her time. Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, celebrated as poet, patron, and translator, was her husband's affectionate aunt; Dorothy habitually spent winters with her and with other members of the Sidney and Herbert families in the Pembroke London home, Baynard's Castle.² Also wintering at Baynard's Castle were Dorothy's three Sidney sisters-in-law: Lady Philippa Hobart; Barbara Sidney Smythe, later Viscountess Strangford, and Lady Mary Wroth. Wroth was the author of *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, a sequence of songs and sonnets; *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, a prose romance, and *Love's Victory*, a pastoral drama. These young Sidney women gathered at Penshurst in the summer months, and Dorothy's sister Lucy Percy Hay sometimes joined them. Dorothy may thus have been among the first readers of Wroth's works, as they circulated among the family. Dorothy's own letters recall those of her husband's father, which we edited in this series in *Domestic Politics and Family Absence: The Correspondence (1588–1621) of Robert Sidney, first Earl of Leicester, and Barbara Gamage Sidney, Countess of Leicester*.

Childhood and Family Heritage

Born in 1598 to one of the richest and most powerful families in England, Dorothy Percy had a tumultuous childhood in a family known for its opposition to the throne. When she was three, her maternal uncle, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, was beheaded for treason against Queen Elizabeth I. On the Percy side of the family, execution for treason was almost a family tradition, foreshadowing the 1683 execution of Dorothy's son, the famous Republican Algernon Sidney. Dorothy's great-great-grandfather, Sir Thomas Percy, had been put to death at Tyburn in June 1537 for his involvement in the Pilgrimage of Grace. Dorothy's great-grandfather, Thomas Percy, seventh Earl of Northumberland, had joined the rebellion of the northern earls in support of Mary Queen of Scots and was beheaded in August 1572. Her grandfather, Henry Percy, eighth Earl of Northumberland, had also been involved in intrigues with Mary Queen of Scots and was sent to the Tower, where

¹ See Julia Cartwright, *Sacharissa. Some Account of Dorothy Sidney, Countess of Sunderland Her Family and Friends 1617–1684*, London: Seeley and Co., Ltd: 1893, 30–36, 44–46, 73–74.

² See Margaret Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix: Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, Oxford University Press, 1990.

he reportedly committed suicide in June 1585 by shooting himself through the heart, although he too may have been killed.³

Dorothy Percy's father, Henry Percy, then succeeded as the ninth Earl of Northumberland. He married in 1594 Lady Dorothy Devereux Perrott, whose father-in-law, Sir John Perrott, had been Lord Deputy of Ireland (1584–88), a post previously held by Sir Henry Sidney (1565–71, 1575–78). Their marriage was a troubled and often tempestuous one. Following the deaths of two infant sons in 1597 and the births of Dorothy in 1598 and Lucy in 1599, they temporarily separated from October 1599 until December 1601. After their reconciliation two further sons followed: in 1602 Algernon, later tenth Earl of Northumberland, and in about 1604 Henry, later Baron Percy of Alnwick.⁴ Dorothy Percy's father was a scholarly individual, and his well-stocked library contained many books on medicine, science, astronomy, military affairs, travel, architecture, and the classics. He had a notoriously short temper and had been briefly imprisoned in 1587 for his behaviour during a dispute at his mother's house. He was also not averse to threatening to resolve disagreements through duels, most notably with Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, in 1597 and (even more foolishly) in 1602 with the renowned soldier and swordsman Sir Francis Vere, a long-time antagonist, who was also an opponent of the elder Sir Robert Sidney, later Dorothy's father-in-law.

Both the Percys and the Sidneys were keen to see the peaceful succession of King James VI of Scotland to the English throne following the death of Queen Elizabeth I, but the positions of their respective families after his accession were in stark contrast. The Sidneys had been carefully cultivating James since he was nine years old, when in 1575 Philip Sidney had sent, via a Scottish courtier Sir John Seton, his expressions of respect and hopes to be of loyal service to him. Following the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, Philip's younger brother, Robert (our Dorothy's father-in-law), had been sent on a successful embassy personally to thank James VI for his assistance in resisting the Spanish threat against England. He clearly made a strong personal impression on the young Scottish king. Years later, when James became King of England, the Sidneys began to reap the rewards of this political perspicuity when on 13 May 1603 Robert Sidney was created Baron Sidney of Penshurst and appointed as Queen Anne's Lord High Chamberlain and Surveyor. For the christening on 4 May 1605 of Princess Mary – the first of the royal couple's children to be born in England – Robert Sidney was again honoured by being raised to the rank of Viscount Lisle.

Dorothy's father, Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, had also been eager to demonstrate his personal loyalty to King James VI and, soon after the downfall in 1601 of his wife's brother, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, he was complicit

³ The account of the Percy family given here is based upon various *ODNB* articles on the Earls of Northumberland and their relatives; Gerald Brenan, *A History of the House of Percy*, ed. W.A. Lindsay, 2 vols, Freemantle & Co.: London, 1902; and Richard Lomas, *A Power in the Land: The Percys*, East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999.

⁴ Betcherman, 3–20.

with Sir Robert Cecil, Sir Walter Raleigh and others in making secret overtures to the Scottish king in response to Queen's Elizabeth's obviously declining physical state. His intermediary in establishing these contacts was his distant cousin and trusted factor on his northern estates, Thomas Percy, who as a Catholic was also hoping to elicit from James VI a promise of toleration for English Catholics (which was never forthcoming). As Queen Elizabeth's health went into a rapid decline in March 1603, Northumberland was invited to join the Privy Council for some of its discussions and he was duly sworn in as a member of King James's first Privy Council in April 1603, as well as being appointed as captain of the gentlemen pensioners, the ceremonial royal bodyguard, in the following May. Northumberland allowed himself to be identified as a supporter of Catholic toleration at the English court, and although this was not a fatal error it did temper his growing intimacy with the new and scrupulously cautious king of England. Because of his irascibly proud temper, however, his position at court collapsed entirely in July 1603: to James I's great personal distaste, he spat in the face of his old adversary Sir Francis Vere during yet another of their arguments. He was immediately banished from the royal presence and spent the next two years attempting without success to rebuild his reputation at court and his intimacy with the royal family.

After the failure of the Gunpowder Plot in November 1605, the discovery that one of the leading conspirators was Northumberland's cousin and close associate, Thomas Percy – and that they had dined together on the evening of 4 November – proved damning to his reputation. It was also discovered that Northumberland had appointed Thomas Percy as a gentleman pensioner without ensuring, as required by royal decree, that he take the oath of supremacy. Although Northumberland protested that he and Percy had only met to discuss estate business, Thomas Percy was killed soon afterwards when resisting arrest, and it became impossible either to prove or disprove Northumberland's complicity in the conspiracy. Although Northumberland escaped the axe, he was committed to the Tower of London on 23 November 1605 and in June 1606 Star Chamber fined him £30,000, deprived him of all of his offices and imprisoned him in the Tower during the king's pleasure; he was to remain there until June 1621, in relatively comfortable conditions in his own suite of rooms in the Martin Tower.

Thus, from the time when Dorothy was seven until she was twenty-three, her father was imprisoned. Dorothy and Lucy were raised by their mother and saw their father only on formal visits to his luxurious rooms in the Tower, where he was permitted his own furnishings, books, and scientific instruments. In contrast, the imprisoned earl, sometimes termed 'the wizard earl' for his scientific knowledge, took it upon himself to play a major role in the education of his son and heir, Algernon, whose tuition he personally supervised and who was often with him in the Tower from age seven ('to wean him from his nursery company and his mother's wings') until he went to university as a teenager in 1615.⁵ Northumberland's

⁵ G.R. Batho, 'The Wizard Earl in the Tower 1605–1621', *History Today*, 6 (1956), 344–51, 346.

unenlightened but representative male views on the capabilities of women were eloquently encapsulated in a long letter of ‘Advice to My Son’.⁶ His various tenets of advice delineate the social constraints and limitations eventually faced by Dorothy Percy Sidney herself when she was a married woman with a husband who was often away from home for long periods on court and diplomatic duties. Northumberland begins by instructing his son always to ‘understand your Estates generally better than your Officers’. But this reasonable advice is then immediately followed by a stern decree that ‘you never suffer your Wife to have Power in the Manage of your Affairs’ – somewhat ironic advice since Northumberland’s own wife had to bear much of the responsibility of running the Percy households and estates during her husband’s long incarceration in the Tower. In the choice of a spouse, Northumberland’s instructions were starkly typical of the general attitudes of the age and members of the English nobility:

First, that my Wife should neither be ugly in Body, nor in Mind.

Secondly, that she should bring with her Meat in the Mouth to maintain her Expense.

Lastly, that her Friends should be of that Consequence that they might appear to be steps for you to better your Fortune.⁷

Algernon and the youngest child Henry, later Baron Percy of Alnwick, then went to university while the girls, as was customary, continued to live with their mother and study at home at Petworth, the Sussex seat of the Percys, and at the estate of Syon, set in a rural landscape on the Thames at Isleworth in Middlesex, about ten miles west of central London.⁸ Syon had been leased by her mother’s first husband, Sir Thomas Perrott, and the lease had become part of her mother’s dowry when she had married Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland. In 1604 King James I had granted the house to Northumberland, yet Syon was primarily Dorothy’s mother’s house, and her mother continued to supervise improvements to the house and grounds, modelling the direct involvement in architectural design and supervision of builders that Dorothy in these letters demonstrates in her concern for the construction of Leicester House.⁹

⁶ This tract was composed in two parts. The first was written in 1595, shortly after the birth of a son who died in infancy; the second in 1609 when Algernon was seven years old. Lomas, *The Percys*, 136–37.

⁷ Brenan, *House of Percy*, 2:176–80; and Betcherman, 18–19.

⁸ Petworth Park, rebuilt in the late seventeenth century, is the subject of famous paintings by Joseph Mallord William Turner; Petworth is now administered by The National Trust. Syon Park, still the London home of the Percy family, now the Dukes of Northumberland, is visible from Kew Gardens, directly across the river, and is also open to the public: <<http://www.syonpark.co.uk/>>.

⁹ Syon House also had important mid-sixteenth-century connotations for the Sidney family. Syon Abbey had been built during the early fifteenth century and was dissolved by

Dorothy's family also had leased a section of Essex House, a magnificent residence in central London on the Strand adjacent to the Middle Temple between the city and Westminster that was the residence of Dorothy's grandmother, Lettice Knollys Devereux Dudley (the widow of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester). Formerly Leicester House, it had been renamed in 1588 after it was inherited by Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, Lettice's son and Dorothy's uncle. Lettice had continued to live there with her second husband, Sir Christopher Blount and her son's family; and after the executions of Essex and Blount, she remained there until her death in 1634.¹⁰ During the London season Dorothy frequently resided at her grandmother's magnificent mansion, which was convenient to court and from which she could visit with friends and family, attend the theatre, and shop in the new Royal Exchange.

Although King James repeatedly refused to release Dorothy's father from the Tower, Queen Anne remained a resolute friend to Dorothy's mother and to her aunt, Penelope Devereux Rich, and in 1607 she honoured Dorothy's family with a royal visit to Syon House. Another influential member of the queen's court, Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford, was Dorothy's mother's closest personal friend and Queen Anne's First Lady of the Bedchamber.¹¹ Since they grew up in a household in which male authority was conspicuously absent, Lucy, Countess of Bedford may well have provided them with an influential 'role model' for their own later involvements in public and court life.¹²

No records of Dorothy Percy's daily life or her educational regime as a child have survived, but she was obviously given an education appropriate for an aristocratic woman, including instruction in reading and writing, in music, and in estate administration. Her personal library (see Appendix Two) is composed almost exclusively of devotional works in English, so she may not have been taught ancient and modern languages; in this regard Dorothy was unlike the

Henry VIII in 1539 when it became crown property before passing to Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, who was Lord Protector at the beginning of Edward VI's reign. He built a grand mansion, known henceforth as Syon House, in the Italian Renaissance style over the foundations of the west end of the abbey church. But following his fall from power and execution in January 1552, his rival, John Dudley, who had assumed the Percy title of Duke of Northumberland, took possession of the house. It was John Dudley's daughter, Mary, who married Henry Sidney; and John Dudley was the great-grandfather of Dorothy Percy's future husband, Robert Sidney, second Earl of Leicester. It was at Syon House, with Mary Dudley Sidney in attendance, that Lady Jane Grey was formally offered the crown of England by her father-in-law, John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland.

¹⁰ In later years, Dorothy Percy would have known the house very well because Lettice also leased part of it to James Hay, Earl of Carlisle, who married Dorothy's sister Lucy in November 1617.

¹¹ Lucy's husband, Edward Russell (1572–1627), third Earl of Bedford, had been implicated in the failed Essex Rebellion of 1601 but managed to extricate himself from the judicial aftermath by paying a large fine.

¹² Betcherman, 13.

previous generation of highly educated aristocratic Englishwomen, such as Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, who later became Dorothy's aunt by marriage. And Dorothy evidences no interest in poetry or fiction, unlike Lady Mary Sidney Wroth, her future sister-in-law. Much of Dorothy's knowledge of the world undoubtedly came from conversation with relatives and friends at court. For example, Dorothy's uncle George Percy, her father's younger brother, was one of the original founders and an early governor of the English colony in Jamestown; he returned to England in 1612, so young Dorothy is likely to have been among the first to hear about life in Virginia from him and from her father's friend Sir Walter Raleigh.

Dorothy's first recorded appearance at court came when she was about fourteen. She attended the marriage of the king's eldest daughter, Princess Elizabeth, to Frederick, the Elector Palatine. The Elector and his uncle, Count Henry of Nassau (later Prince of Orange), who was then about thirty years old, were lodged at Essex House on their arrival in England in October 1612. Dorothy probably met them there. Dorothy and her mother attended the wedding at the Chapel Royal, Whitehall, on St Valentine's Day 1613, and Dorothy may well have been one of the 'Noblemen's daughters' who appeared as 'virgin bridesmaids'.¹³ The celebrations included fireworks on the Thames depicting St George and the dragon, and a mock sea battle between 'Venetians' and 'Turks'. John Chamberlain describes the ceremony and accompanying festivities in a letter to Alice Carleton, the sister of his close friend and regular correspondent Dudley Carleton (who had once served as Dorothy's father's private secretary and was then English Ambassador at Venice). Detailing the lords and ladies in attendance at the wedding, Chamberlain mentions that 'the earl of Northumberland's daughter was very gallant'. This is probably a reference to Dorothy Percy, rather than to her younger sister, Lucy, who was then only twelve or thirteen. In his letter of 25 March to Carleton he notes some even more interesting gossip:

Here is whispering that the Count Henry of Nassau hath a month's mind to my Lord of Northumberland's daughter, which if it should fall right might prove a great match for her.¹⁴

Although the Count wore her ribbons on his armour and gallantly danced with her at the banqueting hall, nothing came of this dalliance, and he returned home alone to the Low Countries in late April.¹⁵

¹³ John Nichols, *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivals of King James the First*, 4 vols, London: J. Nichols, 1828, 2:541–44

¹⁴ *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. N.E. McClure, 2 vols, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, 12, Philadelphia, 1939, 1:424–25, 441.

¹⁵ Nichols, *Progresses*, 2:542ff.

Courtship

Their father's imprisonment made finding suitors for Dorothy and her sister Lucy problematic, even though their finances had recently improved. Northumberland's fine of £30,000, imposed immediately after the Gunpowder Plot, was in 1613 reduced to £11,000, which he promptly paid.¹⁶ This resolution may have been reached because he was mindful of the need to set aside appropriate dowries for his two daughters. By late 1614, Dorothy Percy was seen as a possible spouse for an eminently eligible suitor, Walter (1587–1633), second Lord Scott of Buccleuch (created first Earl of Buccleuch in 1619), the son of one of King James's favoured Scottish courtiers. John Chamberlain confidently writes to Dudley Carleton on 22 December:

The Lord of Buccleuch is a suitor and like to carry the earl of Northumberland's eldest daughter, which some think may be a means of her father's delivery, but he is so well inured to a restrained life, that were it not that the world takes notice that he is in his prince's displeasure, he would not seek to change.

There turned out to be no substance to this rumour, however, and by 12 January 1615 Chamberlain bluntly advises Carleton: 'I must recall that I wrote touching the Lord of Buccleuch, for I hear it goes not forward.'¹⁷

More promising negotiations had begun in 1614 between Robert Sidney, Viscount Lisle, and Northumberland for a marriage between Sidney's eldest surviving son, Robert, and the earl's elder daughter, Dorothy. (Young Robert Sidney's elder brother William had died of smallpox in 1612 and so Robert was now the major focus of his parents' marital plans.) Families jostled each other, contending to make the most advantageous match for their children, often placing rank and fortune ahead of the young person's affections. At first, Lisle had been hoping to forge a match between Robert and Elizabeth Cecil, the daughter of the Earl of Salisbury, but this scheme failed; in 1614 young Elizabeth married Sir Thomas Howard, second son of the Earl of Suffolk. This union spurred Lisle into exploring the possibility of finding a suitable spouse for his son from the Percy family, despite Northumberland's now long-standing imprisonment and banishment from royal favour, because of his alleged complicity in the Gunpowder Plot. After a visit by the young Robert to the Tower, Northumberland writes to Robert's father Lisle that 'his worth deserves a gladness of any man of his acquaintance'; but the two fathers could not readily reach an agreement over the amount of the dowry. Dorothy's mother grew anxious that money had

¹⁶ Batho, 'The Wizard Earl', 345; E.B. De Fonblanque, *Annals of the House of Percy: From the Conquest to the Opening of the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols, London, 1887 (consulted on microform, Trinity College Library, Dublin, 1976), 2:327; and Lomas, *The Percys*, 131.

¹⁷ Chamberlain 1:566, 571.

become such a problem and took matters into her own hands, without briefing her husband. When he heard of her activities some months later she vigorously protests that she had only acted for his good:

nor would I ever have done it but that I found it would never have been concluded between the two fathers in regard of the portion, although otherwise they were both very willing and the world having taken so much notice of the young couple's affection, I doubting it would be some touch of disgrace to my daughter, was loath a money matter should break off so fit a match.

Northumberland had originally offered £5,000 as a dowry, along with land worth £350 per annum to be inherited after the death of Dorothy's mother, but Lisle was holding out for a £6,000 dowry. Dorothy's mother was so keen on this match for her eldest daughter that she even took legal advice on how to guarantee the dowry from her own assets.¹⁸

Sir Francis Darcy, a friend of the Sidneys who resided at Brentwood manor near Syon House, took a leading role on their behalf in these marriage negotiations. A holograph letter written by Lisle to Darcy on 28 July 1614 details how delicate these negotiations had become, because Lisle was also much aware of the risk of incurring the king's displeasure if he was seen to be too intimate with Northumberland:

I am very sorry that my Lady of Northumberland should be offended with anything that she hath perhaps heard of me, which you know I sought from the beginning to keep away, but I see I cannot avoid it. I pray you remember (and I know that you cannot forget it) that when you spoke first to me of that matter I did desire that there should not be¹⁹ so much as a speech of it for the great respect that I bear both to my Lord and to her, until I could be resolved of two points: the one, what portion would be given; the other, how I might enter into treaty of it, without offending of the King in respect of the state in which my Lord now is, and that I am the King's domestic servant. For as I am on the one side to provide for the good of my house by having a sufficient portion, with my son's wife, so must I not buy a portion so dear, as by it to endanger his favour.

Lisle's reference to the Countess of Northumberland taking offence at his behaviour refers to a period of almost one month when their negotiations seemed to have stalled and Lisle heard nothing from Darcy. Understandably, he had begun to look around for other possible suitors, as he explains to Darcy in the same letter:

¹⁸ Batho, 'A Difficult Father-in-law: The Ninth Earl of Northumberland', *History Today*, 6 (1956), 744–51, 746–47; and Betcherman, 28–31.

¹⁹ not be] be MS.

Here a manifest difference to be seen but that which made me conclude, that there was no meaning of any further proceeding, on my Lady's side was that you promised me within eight days after to be with me again, in which meantime my Lord should be spoken with. It was between that and the writing of your letter very near a month, and I never heard of you, whereout I gathered that there was no purpose to give me satisfaction but quietly to let the matter fall: which also was the reason that I holding myself free from any engagement did not give warning of any other course I might intend.²⁰

Although this letter to Darcy does not mention the name of any other possible suitor, the elder Robert Sidney had already entered negotiations with a rich court official with an eligible daughter, one Thomas Watson, who was a teller at the Exchequer. A letter of 7 August 1614 from Robert Sidney to his wife Barbara reveals that the Watsons had even been invited to Penshurst:

I hear that Mr Watson and his wife are at Penshurst: if they be, I pray you mark well what she says to these matters: but if she grow too desirous, she will be the slacker to speak. I have not seen Mr Watson since we came to London together.

In another letter of 10 August the elder Robert Sidney confirms that he was hoping 'to speak with Mr Watson', who had by then returned to London.²¹ Unexpected problems arose, however, when a Sir Lewis Watson (probably a relative who was created Lord Rockingham in 1645) claimed in the ecclesiastical courts that Watson's daughter was already contracted to him. Inevitably, it became impossible for the Sidneys to keep these negotiations with the Watsons secret and, as Darcy details, Dorothy's mother was infuriated by this apparent snub to her family's honour: 'It is told my Lady of Northumberland that your Lordship should entertain conference, and that in great forwardness, in a far meaner place, and of much less reputation, which is very distasteful unto her, and very unkindly taken.'²²

The ecclesiastical court case involving the Watsons dragged on and Chamberlain notes on 12 January 1615:

The suit for Master Watson's fair daughter goes forward in the spiritual court, where one Sir Lewis Watson hath her in chase, and pretends to have sure cards to show, so that the match with young Sir Robert Sidney hangs in suspense, though his mother be very earnest or rather violent for it. But it is thought the young gentleman inclines rather to a daughter of the Earl of Northumberland's, and grows weary of hunting in a foiled scent, that hath been haunted by so many suitors.²³

²⁰ Lisle to Darcy, 28 July 1614, CKS MS U1475 C80A/1.

²¹ *DPFA*, 184–85.

²² Collins 2:346.

²³ Chamberlain 2:570–71.