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Source: *Huntington Library Quarterly*, May, 1957, Vol. 20, No. 3 (May, 1957), pp. 205-218

Published by: University of Pennsylvania Press

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THE
HUNTINGTON LIBRARY
QUARTERLY

NUMBER 3 MAY 1957

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Thomas Wilson, Tudor Scholar-Statesman

By Albert J. Schmidt

Jacob burckhardt in his masterly volume on the Italian Renaissance observed that "there were two purposes . . . for which the humanist was as indispensable to the republics as to princes or popes, namely, the official correspondence of the State, and the making of speeches on public and solemn occasions." He proceeded to show how only the "humanist was credited with the knowledge and ability for the post of secretary."[1] What Burckhardt had to say of Italian humanists of the Quatrocento most assuredly pertained to the humanist-statesmen of Tudor England. Uncommonly versatile, English scholars frequently during the sixteenth century passed directly from the hallowed life of the university to the more exciting and lucrative one at court. No impractical academicians were these scholar-statesmen; rather they often appeared hard-headed and ruthless, no less adept in applying the rack to a rebel than discoursing on Cicero and Demosthenes. Their creditable performance as diplomats and secretaries needs no amplification here; generally, because of their grounding in the Roman law and classics, they were conservative in their political and social creeds. Reform, they supposed, should conform to the pattern prescribed by the ancients. They found it difficult to reconcile the disruptive forces unleashed by the break from Rome with their concepts of the wellordered society. Many of them appear little more than prophets of doom, but others considered the problems of their age with caution and wisdom. The contributions of this second group during an age of social, political, and intellectual turbulence stands in need of illumination.

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[1] *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York, 1954), p. 168.

Most of these Tudor personages have left little data on their private lives. It is a source of satisfaction for the historian when an official document or letter reveals a personal note which aids in the delineation of an almost hidden character or in a more accurate diagnosis of his public life. This paper purports to deal with the interrelationship of the private and official life of one such Elizabethan scholar-statesman, Dr. Thomas Wilson.[2]

The life of Thomas Wilson because of his versatility was to some extent a microcosm of the Tudor age in which he lived. If he did not rank so high in scholarship as Cheke or Smith, in economic acumen as Gresham, or in political wisdom as Cecil and Walsingham, he did possess a good many qualifications which nonetheless made him important in each of these three categories. As a humanist scholar he is best known as the author of the *Rule of Reason* (1551), the more celebrated *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553),[3] and as the translator of Demosthenes' orations from Greek into English (1570). As an economist he entered through the backdoor with a *Discourse upon Usury* (1571), a savage attack on usury and enclosures. His methods were not those of the cloudy-minded monk; his grasp of economic principles in general and his analysis of the intricacies of the Antwerp money-market in particular mark him as second only to the great Gresham as an economist in Tudor England.[4]

On the political level Thomas Wilson had a varied and highly exciting career. For nearly twenty years he sat in the queen's various parliaments rendering good service to the crown as a royal official, but still speaking his own mind when occasions demanded. As a civilian he served on separate embassies to Portugal and the Netherlands. After his Portuguese mission in 1567 he became the queen's recognized authority on the affairs of that country and was at the end of the next decade one of the strongest supporters at the English court of the Portuguese pretender Don Antonio. Wilson journeyed twice to the Netherlands in the mid-seventies on the queen's business. Unlike his royal mistress he did not temporize but rather became an unconditional partisan of the Prince of Orange. In 1577 he returned to enter the privy council and share the office of principal secretary with Walsingham. Both these offices he retained until his death in 1581.

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[2] Cf. A. F. Pollard's biog. in *Dict. Nat. Biog.*, XXI, 603-607.

[3] The best authority on Wilson's contributions to rhetoric was the late Russell Wagner, whose doctoral dissertation (Cornell U.) and many published articles dealt with the subject. Wilson's work on rhetoric has been considered the best English treatment of that subject during the sixteenth century.

[4] Raymond de Roover, *Gresham on Foreign Exchange* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), p. 97, suggests that Wilson was abler than Gresham in analyzing theoretical economic problems. Cf. Wilson, *Discourse upon Usury*, ed. R. H. Tawney (London, 1926).

Thomas Wilson was born in 1523 or 1524, one of five sons of Thomas and Anne Wilson of Strubby, Lincolnshire.[5] The elder Thomas was a man of standing in his community; he apparently capped a good marriage with land acquisitions after the Lincolnshire rising of 1536. Young Thomas, his eldest son, was in 1537 packed off to Eton, where he established a long friendship with the master, the dramatist Nicholas Udall.[6] From Eton he went up to King's College, Cambridge, where from 1541 until 1553 he acquired, along with the New Learning, the new religion.[7] Wilson became a member of that scholarly circle which included John Cheke, Thomas Smith, Roger Ascham, Walter Haddon, and a host of others. He cast his political lot with the Dudleys and Greys and was among those scholars who embraced the theologian Bucer when the latter arrived in Cambridge in 1550. As if to emphasize his ideas on theology, he joined Ascham in tutoring the sons of the great Protestant patroness Katherine Brandon (the former Katherine Willoughby), duchess of Suffolk.[8] Mary's accession at first sent Wilson into retirement on his Lincolnshire estates and finally to travel on the continent. As a classical scholar he was perhaps more naturally attracted to Italy than to the English communities in Germany or Switzerland, but in Italy he soon fell out with the authorities. After a period of residence in Padua, where he studied Greek under Cheke, he moved on to an atmosphere of less tolerance in Rome. Wilson's intrigue there against Cardinal Pole provoked Queen Mary, and she denounced him to Pope Paul IV as a heretic. This pope, who needed no prodding when it came to heretics, had the scholar clapped into prison sometime during the summer of 1558. There he languished until freed by the Roman mob in August of the following year. From Rome he fled north to Ferrara, where he stayed long enough to obtain from the university a degree in civil law. By early 1560 he had successfully made his way back to England after an absence of nearly five years.

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[5] Wilson was born between Aug. 13, 1523 and Jan. 29, 1524. Cf. my article, "Some Notes on Dr. Thomas Wilson and his Lincolnshire Connections," soon to appear in the *Lincolnshire Historian*, for a fuller discussion of Wilson's Lincolnshire background.

[6] Cf. A. W. Reed, "Nicholas Udall and Thomas Wilson," *Review of English Studies*, I (1925), 275-283, which discusses Udall's association with Wilson in the early 1550's. The entire article is based on P.R.O. Town Deposition, C 24/30.

[7] Wilson went up to King's College on Aug. 13, 1542 (King's Coll. Protocollum Bk., I, fol. 104); he was admitted a fellow on Aug. 14, 1545, but ceased to be one by the term Michaelmas to Christmas 1547 (ibid., fol. 118; King's Coll. Mundum Bk., 1547-48). He received his B.A. in either 1546 or 1547 (ibid., 1545-46; *Grace Book Delta*, 1542-89, ed. John Venn [Cambridge, 1910], p. 40).

Disillusioned with scholarship and penniless, Wilson turned to politics and statecraft for a career.[9] Through the intercession of his friends William Cecil and Robert Dudley he secured such political plums as the mastership of St. Katharine's Hospital, an advocateship in the Court of Arches, and mastership in the Court of Requests. About the same time (1560-1561), Wilson married a widow Agnes Brook,[10] the sister of the English merchants Winter, whose commercial grievances he pleaded at the Portuguese court in 1567. He made his family life conform rigidly to his official duties. The couple lived at St. Katharine's, where before 1565 they had three children. Rarely in good health, Agnes died in June 1574. Some two years later Wilson married Jane Pinchon, the widow of John Pinchon of Writtle, Essex, and granddaughter of

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[8] Wilson mentioned the young Suffolks in his *Rhetorique* and wrote *Epistola de Vita et Obitu duorum Fratrum Suffolciensium Henrici et Caroli Brandon* (London, 1551) shortly after their death from the sweating sickness. For information on the Lincolnshire connection between Wilson and the Willoughby-Brandons see my article in the *Lincolnshire Historian.*

[9] Cf. Wilson's own statement on the subject in his preface to the 1560 ed. of the *Rhetorique*. The latest is G. H. Mair's ed. (Oxford, 1909).

[10] See *The Visitation of the Country of Gloucester*, 1623, ed. J. Maclean, Harl. Soc., XXI (London, 1885), p. 278. Contrary to the earlier biographies of Wilson, Agnes Brook was his first rather than second wife.

Henry VII's infamous minister Richard Empson.[11] She died some three years later. Wilson, ill much of the time himself during the two years following, finally succumbed on May 20, 1581.[12]

The manner of man Thomas Wilson was has been discussed by historians because they have felt that his character was a vital force in his writings and actions. One seventeenth-century biographer noted that the scholar-statesman

> had the breeding of courtiers so long until he was one himself. . . . It was his interest as well as his gift to be more learned than witty, more reverened than plausible, more considerate than active. His thoughts were as his inclination, grave; his discourse as his reading, subtle; his actions as his education, well weighed, regular as his temper, even and smooth as custom, and resolved as a habit gotten in that advancement of virtue, a well-disciplined society; where example teacheth, company comforteth, emulation quickneth, glory raiseth. . . . Three things completed this Secretary: Quick dispatch and industry, constant intelligence and correspondence, a large and strong memory.[13]

More recently G. H. Mair has observed that Wilson cannot be called an Elizabethan, for that "word fits best the high sense of glory and achievement which sprang upon the nation after the destruction of Spain." Rather he "belongs to an elder and graver age," for he and his friends were "no splendid courtiers nor daring and hardy adventurers; still less were they swashbucklers . . . or literary dandies." Wilson was

> one of a band of grave and dignified scholars, men preoccupied with morality and citizenship as well as with the lighter problems of learning and style. They fought for sound education, for good classical scholar-

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[11] Jane had married Pinchon some twenty years before he died (1573); she was the granddaughter rather than the daughter (cf. Pollard in *D.N.B.*) of Henry VII's minister whose son and heir Richard fathered Jane (cf. Prerog. Court of Canterbury Wills, Richard Empson, 1556, 10 Ketchyn and *L. and P.*, Henry VIII, 1538, XIII, pt. I, no. 190-224).

[12] According to P. R.O. Inquis. P. M., C. 142/233, no. 41, 34 Eliz. and Court of Wards, 7/23, no. 112, 34 Eliz. May 19, rather than June 16 or 17 (cf. *D.N.B.*), was the date of Wilson's death. On May 30 Hunsdon wrote Walsingham and mentioned that he had heard of his passing (British Museum, Harleian MS. 6999, fol. 185). Wilson prepared his will the day before he died (P.C.C.W. 32 Tirwhite).

[13] David Lloyd, *Statesmen and Favorites of England Since the Reformation* (London, 1665), pp. 209-212, et passim.

> ship, for the purity of written English, and behind these for the strength and worth of the native English character, which they felt was menaced by the reckless orgy of assimilation which seized young England face to face with the allurements which reached it from abroad.[14]

Tawney in his introduction to Wilson's *Usury* noted Wilson's wealth of practical experience, but generally concurred with Mair that he was one of those "grave Henricians" out of joint with his times during the reign of Elizabeth.

Wilson's written remains and recorded activity go far to substantiate the view that he was a grave scholar concerned with problems of morality, religion, and commonwealth. Vigilant against threats to the realm both from within and without, he attacked his foes savagely. The usurer whose high interest rates hit hard his queen's purse as well as the commonalty of the realm he denounced as a caterpillar or "Spider, Canker, Aspis, Serpent, and Devil" of the commonwealth.[15] The enclosurer fared no better with him. In his *Discourse upon Usury* he made his Civilian say:

> [From usury] commeth decay of good houses and wracking of the people, throughe this devouring caterpiller, which being not many, in respecte of all others, doe gather the goodes of infinyte persones into theire owne handes. And so the commonweale is weakened, and whole townes destroyed, through the covetous usurer. For when they have gotten whole manours and townes into theire hands, they are sorye that anye shoulde dwell there but them selves. And so they ridde a waye in time the poore tenauntes and suffer them to begge, and to dye for hunger; and for tillage use sheepgates wher no men are mainteyned, nor house holden, but all overthrowne, and in steede of houses, desert places to bee seene, and wilde solytarines for beastes to raunge in and to feede upon, cattaile and shepe occupyinge the places of manye a good honest meaninge man. So that by these twoe idle occupacions, great usurye and manye flockes of sheepe and heardes of beastes, this noble Countrey is made in maner a forest, and brought to great ruyn and decay, through dyspeoplying of men, overthrowing of townes, and oppressyng of the poore with intollerable usury.[16]

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[14] Wilson's *Rhetorique*, ed. G. H. Mair, Introduction, p. xxvii.

[15] Quoted from a speech Wilson made in the commons on Apr. 19, 1571 (B. M. Cotton MSS, Titus, F. I, fols. 163-164).

[16] Tawney, ed. Wilson's *Usury*, p. 286. He viewed with alarm the "sturdy beggar." (Cf. speech in commons on Apr. 15, 1571, on this topic in B. M. Cotton MSS, Titus, F. I, fol. 152b.)

He criticized the idle who by their "dicing, carding, picking, stealing and fighting" brought moral as well as physical decay to the realm, but the choicest invective he reserved for "lewd" and "varlet" rebels whom he was usually inclined to classify either as Anabaptist or Papist. Well he might take cognizance of conspirators, for there was opposition enough to the queen's sovereignty in certain parts of England. Because much of the unrest came to focus upon the person of the Scottish queen, Wilson in the commons in 1572 minced no words in demanding the extreme penalty for that lady.[17] On the foreign scene he worked incessantly to counter England's enemies. He made no secret of his views on the inadequacy of his queen's foreign policy and was one of the foremost spokesmen among Elizabeth's councilors for alliance with the Protestant princes on the continent.[18] Wilson's concern for the reformed religion was deep-rooted, but that he made his foreign policy contingent upon it was contrary to the will of his *politique* queen.

Wilson's dourness was further emphasized by his reputed cruelty. One biographer has characterized him as "a remorseless torturer or an officious priest-catcher." The torture that he endured while in Rome left him embittered and little inclined to pity those who opposed him. As a frequent inquisitor of suspects, he was especially active with Sir Thomas Smith in ferreting out Ridolfi conspirators and torturing them in "the pryson in the blodie Tower."[19] The English Catholic exiles in the Netherlands so felt his sting that they threatened him with death, but such a threat in no way dismayed him. The Spanish agent Guaras even accused him of conspiring with William the Silent to kidnap the Spaniard Don John.[20]

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[17] The record of this speech is to be found in Thomas Cromwell's Parliamentary Diary, 1572 (J. E. Neale transcripts, London).

[18] Cf. my article, "A Treatise on England's Perils, 1578," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, XLVI (1955), 243-249.

[19] *Cal. Salisbury MSS*, I, 508 ff. Wilson examined many suspects during his public life. Some of the more prominent were the commonwealth man John Hales, the Irish clergyman Creaghe, the Bishop of Ross, and the Spanish agent Guaras mentioned below.

[20] *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1568-79*, nos. 463, 464. Wilson, not oblivious to the animosity Guaras bore him, was largely responsible for the lengthy imprisonment suffered by the Spanish agent.

Among contemporaries Wilson's reputation for industry was well known. A voluminous correspondent, he sent long and detailed accounts of his own embassies to court and similarly dispatched detailed instructions and fatherly advice to ambassadors in the field after he had been elevated to the secretaryship. In 1578 when the queen directed the establishment of an office "for keeping papers and records concerning matters of state and council," she appointed the ever-efficient Wilson first keeper, or "Clerk of the Papers."[21]

Unquestionably one so meticulous, incisive, purposeful, and intelligent as Thomas Wilson was a valuable servant to the Tudors, but, say his biographers, his narrow prejudices and dour nature impaired his usefulness because they deprived him of the flexibility in public affairs that Cecil and Walsingham possessed in quantity. Certainly Wilson did not measure up to these giants, but his status as diplomat and courtier hardly seems compatible with his characterization as an ascetic and moralist. More needs to be said about the worldly side of Wilson's character if his role in the turbulent politics and intellectual climate of Elizabeth's England is to be fully revealed.

Thomas Wilson, linguist extraordinary, moved with ease whether in the cosmopolitan society of the continent or in that of England. Those who knew him testified that he was no scholarly recluse. The papal legate in the Low Countries marveled at the finery of his retinue when he was there on embassy.[22] The Spaniard Requesens wrote to his master Philip that Wilson, constantly feted by the Flemish nobility, hardly ever left their banquets sober.[23] He got on well with the vacillating Flemings though he lost all faith in them as political allies. He distrusted the Spanish leaders, yet he was not aloof and unsociable. With Requesens he argued the respective merits of Catholicism and Protestantism;[24] he subtlely criticized

[21] M. S. Giuseppi, *Guide to the Public Records* (London, 1924), II, 1. When Wilson received his appointment it was decided "that certain place should be appointed for them [state papers] and a fit man chosen for registering and keeping them in order, who should be tied by oath for the secrecy and safe keeping thereof." Ibid.

[22] Sega to Como, July 1, 1577. *SP, Rome, 1572-78*, no. 617.

[23] Requesens to Philip II, Dec. 12, 1574. Louis P. Gachard, *Correspondance de Philippe II* (Brussels, 1848-79), III, 214.

[24] Wilson to Burghley, Feb. 20, 1574/75. *SP, Foreign, 1575-77*, no. 31.

DeRoda for permitting the Spanish soldiery to commit barbarities in Antwerp.[25] To Don John of Austria he good-naturedly but pointedly expressed his mistrust of all that Spain stood for in the Netherlands. The Spaniards, judging from their letters, accepted him as much as they did any Englishman despite his opposition to their policy. Wilson considered William the Silent England's most faithful ally on the continent, and he himself was considered by the prince and his wife as their best friend, next to Leicester, in England.[26] Casimir of the Palatinate looked to him in a similar fashion, while no one at the English court gave the Portuguese pretender so much encouragement as did Wilson. He knew and liked Philip Marnix, Orange's lieutenant. Ludovico Guicciardini, the best contemporary authority on the Antwerp money market, apparently discounted Wilson's diatribe against usury when he once recommended Wilson for an embassy to Germany.[27] He was well acquainted with the Spanish humanist Arias Montano,[28] who was serving his master Philip in the Low Countries; and probably through Montano he met the latter's good friend, Ortelius the mapmaker. Nor to all Catholics residing in the Netherlands did Wilson show hostility. So long as they did not practice sedition, he was even cordial. He was sympathetic with the unfortunate Thomas Copley, for whom he tried to regain properties in England. He had nothing but good will for the old Henrician scholar John Heywood. But when the latter's son, a Jesuit, offered to preach before Wilson, the ambassador threatened to "pluck him out of the pulpit" if he uttered an offensive word against the queen, her religion, or her magistrates.[29]

At court Wilson had numerous friends. He identified himself with the radical protestant faction in the privy council led by Walsingham and Leicester, yet he kept on good terms with the moderates. Toward Burghley he showed scrupulous good will and is said to have acted as a mediator between those great enemies,

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[25] Wilson to Privy Council, Nov. 19, 1576. Ibid., no. 1021.

[26] Rogers to Wilson, Mar. 24, 1577/78. *SP, Foreign, 1577-78*, no. 733. Wilson even contemplated sending one of his daughters to wait upon the princess of Orange.

[27] Rogers to Burghley, Mar. 28, 1578. Ibid., no. 744.

[28] Wilson to Burghley, Mar. 13, 1574/75. *SP, Foreign, 1575-77*, no. 46.

[29] Wilson to Burghley, Dec. 20, 1574. *SP, Foreign, 1572-74*, no. 1615.

Leicester and Sussex.[30] Wilson was especially fond of the ill-fated William Davison, his successor in the Low Countries. To that ambassador the newly appointed secretary sent fatherly advice and gentle encouragement. Wilson had many friends among the divines, the most prominent of whom were Archbishop Parker and Bishops Jewel and Parkhurst.[31] He perhaps encouraged such friendships by occasionally sending a thoughtful gift—a goshawk or some jewels from the Netherlands for Leicester, or some greyhounds for his friend Casimir of the Palatinate.

Wilson's association with the Cambridge humanists and reformers during the 1540's and 1550's has been noted. Probably of the lot Walter Haddon from his own King's College was his closest friend. They corresponded frequently; and while Wilson was in Portugal in the 1560's, he acted as a mediator in the scholarly feud between Haddon and the Portuguese scholar Osorio.[32] Wilson himself was highly esteemed in the world of scholarship. Many contributed poetic praise in the prefaces of his written works. Daniel Rogers, an old friend and fellow diplomat, wrote a series of epigrams in Wilson's honor.[33] Thomas Hatcher, a Cambridge scholar and friend, dedicated to him his edition of Nicholas Carr's *De Scriptorum Britannicorum* in 1576 and another Cantabrigian, Thomas Bing, his edition of Nicholas Carr's Latin translation of Demosthenes.

In dress and dwelling Thomas Wilson displayed an elegance which marked him less the Henrician than the Elizabethan. During an age when a gentleman's clothes conveyed an impression of unmatched richness, his wardrobe conformed to the prescribed pattern of the aristocracy. A portrait painted in 1575[34] depicted him bearded and wearing the fashionable flat-crown cap and a black, fur-trimmed gown. This gown of quality was perhaps one listed in his inventory as "a long, wrought, velvet gown faced with sables and furred with squirrels," or perhaps it was the one of "black velvet with a broad parchment lace of black silk furred with squirrels and faced with pootes." His wardrobe contained numerous other articles of apparel.[35] Wilson's establishment in Edmonton, Middlesex, reflected extravagant taste and worldly interest.[36] An edifice of some twenty rooms, it was at the time of his death in 1581 well stocked with all the necessaries and a goodly number of luxuries. The true richness of the house shows itself in the furnishings of the "Street Chamber" where Wilson had "a Canapie of crimsen satten flowred with Embroderie of cloth of Golde gilte bells fringed with crimsen damaske fringed with Crimsen silke with fyve curtaynes of crimsen silke Taffetie" and "a fyne quilte of Turkey crimsen silke on the one side & yealow tyke on the other side." In his stables he sheltered horses, and in his cellars he kept an ample supply of wine and beer.[37] Though a widower during his brief residence at Edmonton, he evidently intended to provide his children as well as himself with every comfort.

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[30] Lloyd, p. 212.

[31] Returning penniless from his Marian exile in 1560, Wilson obtained from Parker appointment as moderator of the "college of Stoke by Clare" in Suffolk (Cambridge, Corpus Christi MS. CXIV, fol. 801; Parkhurst Epist., Cambridge University MSS, Ee, II. 34 et passim). Jewel wrote Wilson a warm note of approval for the latter's condemnation of usury (*Works of John Jewel*, ed. John Ayre [Cambridge, 1850], IV, 1276); Wilson kept a portrait of the bishop in his study at Edmonton (cf. Wilson's Household Inventory, Estate House, Old Charlton, Kent; this inventory is reproduced in my forthcoming article, "A Household Inventory, 1581," *Proceedings* of the American Philosophical Society).

[32] Cf. Lawrence V. Ryan, "The Haddon-Osorio Controversy (1563-1583)," *Church History*, XXII (1953), 142-154.

[33] Cf. Hist. MSS Comm., *4th Report*, pp. 252-254.

Wilson's striving for and achieving material well-being is closely associated with his keen understanding of high finance. As a civilian and ambassador he had negotiated on commercial matters and was familiar from firsthand experience with the Antwerp money market. His good business sense was recognized by his English friends. Burghley and Leicester thought him a good judge of horses and entrusted him with purchase of the same; the earl also directed

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[34] Located at the National Portrait Gallery, London.

[35] Wilson's Inventory, 1581. These two gowns were priced at £36 13s 4d and £28 respectively. The value of all his gowns totaled £126 16s 3d.

[36] This estate, called Pymnes, he purchased from one Nicholas Rodelsby, gent., in the spring of 1579 for £300; during the summer following he secured from Rodelsby additional land adjacent to his estate for £40 (P.R.O. Close Rolls, C. 54/1052, and P.R.O. Feet of Fines, CP 25 [2] 172, 21 Eliz. Trinity). The Pymnes estate, sold after Wilson's death to pay his debts, was valued in his final inventory at £350. Burghley possessed it by the late 1580's.

[37] Wilson's Inventory, 1581. This canopy and quilt were valued at £5 and £7 respectively. His stock of beverages included 4 hogsheads of Gascony and half a butt of sack as well as 14 hogsheads of "stronge beare."

Wilson to buy jewels for him abroad. Wilson showed the same astuteness when it came to his own affairs. Destitute on the eve of his political career in 1560, he died in 1581 a man of more than moderate means. His wealth accrued less from the statutory salaries of his offices in the Courts of Arches and Requests and the secretaryship than from the perquisites attached to them.[38] He improved his state also by his business activities and by obtaining various sinecures and gifts from the queen. Wilson had substantial land holdings,[39] and from his Edmonton estate he sold timber.[40] The most attractive political plums which he received from the crown were the mastership of St. Katharine's Hospital in 1561 and the lay deanship of Durham in 1578.[41]

Wilson's association with both St. Katharine's and Durham deserve detailed consideration, for in both these offices Wilson seems to have gone beyond the bounds of acceptable business-like practice to exploit their worth. He was variously charged in the case of St. Katharine's with wasting the revenues, destroying the buildings, and selling the choir.[42] Although these charges were not altogether justifiable, they do suggest that Wilson did not always have the best interests of the hospital at heart. Once he seems to have paid his brother Godfrey and an associate excessively for a loan which they made to the institution; the whole transaction took on the appearance of a clever family manipulation to fleece the hospital.[43] On another occasion he tried blackmailing the London city authorities by threatening to resurrect St. Katharine's ancient rights to hold a fair—one that would rival the highly profitable one of St. Bartholomew. The London city officials resisted and threatened litigation before Wilson finally sold the fair rights to them for £300. There is no evidence that the sum ever accrued to the hospital.[44] In another instance Wilson secured for the hospital—not for himself this time—exemption from the First-Fruits and Tenths taxes of the crown.[45]

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[38] The statutory salaries for Master of Requests ordinary and secretary were £100 each (cf. Inner Temple, Petyt MS. 538, XXXIX, 147).

[39] Wilson supplemented lands inherited in Strubby and Washingborough, Lincs., with purchases made during the 1570's (P.R.O. Close Rolls, C. 54/917; C. 54/1017; C. 54/1050; C. 54/1054; P.R.O. Patent Rolls, C. 66/1175). He seems to have taken over the Writtle, Essex, estates of his second wife, and added to them (ibid., C. 54/1005). Wilson's final inventory noted his having a lease on the manor of Saltfleetby, Lincs., valued at £633 6s 8d. Wilson's final holdings are for the most part listed in Inquisit. P.M. C. 142/233, no. 41, 34 Eliz. and Ct. of Wards 7/23, no. 112, 34 Eliz.

[40] Cf. Wilson's Inventory in which his debtors are noted. One was Burghley, who had made separate purchases of "deal Bordes" and "Tymber."

[41] Besides these he received from the queen a £100 life annuity in 1571 (P.R.O. Patent Rolls, 13 Eliz., C. 66/1076, m. 29); and the parsonage of Mansfield in Nottinghamshire with all its rights and lands (ibid., C. 66/1189, m. 38).

[42] The best and most recent history of St. Katharine's is that by Catherine Jamison, *The History of the Royal Hospital of St. Katharine by the Tower of London* (London, 1952). Miss Jamison's chapter on Wilson's administration is excellent. One myth which Miss Jamison dispelled pertains to Wilson's selling the choir. Fuller, in his *Worthies of England* (London, 1662), interpreted Stowe's account of Wilson's dissolving the choir, "not much inferior to that of Paul's," to mean that he took down the choir loft and sold it. Actually, Wilson for purposes of economy did no more that discontinue the male singing choir.

Wilson's appointment to the deanship of Durham in 1579 was from beginning to end a political reward and as such was an unconcealed mockery of the church office which he held. Not once did he visit Durham, since he was installed by proxy, had letters of dispensation from the queen for non-residence,[46] and was a layman taking over a clerical office.[47] Wilson clearly stated his policy to the sub-deans of the cathedral when he wrote them on February 22, 1578-79, that

> I would have you and the other prebendaries to lay your heads together for the common welfare and whom you find faulty to deal with them thereafter, to call unto account such as are suspected to have made their own gain. In anything you shall agree upon, amongst yourselves for the profit of the house, when I know your minds and determinations particularly, you shall have my assent thereunto by letter or otherwise.[48]

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[43] Jamison, pp. 71-72.

[44] Wilson's dealings with the London Alderman are recorded at the London Record Office, Minutes of the Court of Alderman, Repertory Books, XV and XVI passim. I am indebted to Miss Jamison for these sources, which I have checked.

[45] P.R.O. First Fruits Court, Plea Rolls, E. 337, Roll V, no. 29. This is Miss Jamison's source.

[46] For appointment, cf. P.R.O. Patent Rolls, C. 66/1188. The Durham Dean and Chapter Register, III, fols. 2v, 3v, deals with proxy and non-residence.

[47] B. M. Additional MSS. 23, 235, fol. 5.

[48] Durham Dean and Chapter Acts, I, 1578-83, fol. 29. One prebendary, Ralph Lever of Durham, opposed Wilson's absenteeism; but after receiving censure from court, he wrote submissively to Burghley that "I did labor and wish to have such a one dean as was qualified according to our statutes and would have been resident among us." He acquiesced to Wilson's appointment when he understood that the

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Thomas Wilson died just as Elizabeth was entering the most critical decade of her career. He was a competent public servant, a sound scholar, a defender of the old order in matters economic and social, and withal a stout Protestant. By temper and training he had more in common with Smith and Burghley than with the Elizabethans of the newer order. If he seemed a grave alarmist, the danger to the realm—both from within and without—justified his position. But for all his moralizing he was no ascetic; rather he chose to serve his commonwealth by participation in the world of affairs. His learning and cosmopolitanism on one hand and his relentless persecution of those who opposed him on the other made him well known among his contemporaries. His tastes were worldly, and like so many other Tudor statesmen he feathered his own nest whenever the opportunity presented itself. Undoubtedly, Dr. Thomas Wilson stands as a significant Tudor personage because his activities and interests mirror many of the diverse currents of his remarkable age. In versatility if not excellence he was a match for most of his contemporaries in the England of Elizabeth.

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secretary could not reside in Durham because of his occupation in "more weighty affairs in the commonwealth." (*S.P. Domestic, 1580*, CXXVI, no. 18.) Wilson's statutory salary was recorded at £266 for each year Michaelmas 1579-80 and 1580-81 (Dean and Chapter of Durham Treasurer's Book, 1579-80, no. 2; ibid., 1580-81, no. 3). The rents from his Durham properties appeared to total about £400 per year (Wilson's Inventory, 1581).