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*PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.*

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**Sir Edward Dyer.**

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BY THE REV. PREBENDARY GRANT.

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WHEN the monastery of Glastonbury was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1539, Sharpham Park came into the possession of Sir Thomas Dyer.

The Dyers were an old family who for many years had occupied Roundhill Grange, near Wincanton, and were tenants of the Priory of Taunton. At the dissolution Roundhill was granted to the Earl of Oxford, and Richard Dyer still lived on as the tenant of the earl.

During the latter part of the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth centuries the Dyers rose to a position of some prominence in the county. They became connected by marriage with some of the leading families, entitled to bear a coat-of-arms, were patrons of several livings, large purchasers of abbey lands, and several members of the family became distinguished men.

One John Dyer, son of Richard Dyer of Wincanton, was appointed in 1459 to the living of High Ham by the abbot and convent of Glastonbury. He held the living for forty years, and it was during his incumbency that the beautiful church with its handsome screen was built. One of the witnesses to his will was "John Dier," vicar of Long Sutton, to whom he bequeathed "one gown of scarlet with its hood."

James, the second son of another Richard Dyer of Wincanton, after completing his course of study at Oxford and the Strand Inn of the Middle Temple, was called to the bar in 1537. His mother was the daughter of William Walton, *generosus*, of Shapwick. He was Sergeant-at-Law, Knight of the Shire for the county of Cambridge, Speaker of the House of Commons, and in the second year of Queen Elizabeth was created Lord Chief Justice of Common Pleas. He filled high offices with dignity, diligence and integrity during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth. He died at his country mansion at Great Stoughton, in Huntingdonshire, in 1582.<sup>1</sup>

His cousin, Sir Thomas Dyer, one of the King's gentleman sewers, was the first owner of Sharpham Park after the dissolution of the monastery. He also obtained for a term of twenty-one years, at £70 a year rent, the lease of the chief messuage or mansion of the manor of Weston in the county of Somerset, a close near the barn there, another close called Ward Close, the Rectory of Weston, with the tithes in Weston, Middlezoy, and Othery, parcel of the lands of Glastonbury, now in the King's hands by the attainder of Richard, late abbot. Seven years later, 1547, he acquired the manor of Greinton from William Walton, gentleman, deputy steward, who had purchased it from the King. In the reign of Queen Mary Sir William Crone, vicar, and the parishioners of Weston, presented a petition to the Queen, that she would direct letters to Sir Thomas Dyer, of Sharpham, "to give up a certain church house erected by them on a plot of

1. The Rev. Canon Mayo, of Long Burton, has in his possession a portrait of Sir James Dyer.

ground leased to them by the late abbot of Glastonbury for 12d. a year and two capons, because of their devotion in maintaining the church and its ornaments and finding a priest of the brotherhood of St. Mary."

Sir Thomas Dyer was one of the commissioners appointed by Edward VI "to take order," and complete the settlement of the Flemish weavers in Glastonbury under their superintendent Vallerandus Pollanus. And when they fell into difficulties on account of the exorbitant demands of one Crouch, Pollanus writes to Cecil that their only hope was in Dyer; a person of good religion, and their cordial friend, who promised to supply them with wool at a reasonable rate, and kindly offered them a long day of payment for it.

In the first year of Queen Elizabeth he was Member of Parliament for Bridgwater.

He married as his second wife a daughter of Lord Poynings. Phelps puts her in the family pedigree as the first wife. But in the pedigree given in the Somerset Visitation of 1623, she is placed as the second wife, and this is confirmed by other authorities. By this lady Sir Thomas had four sons, Edward, Alexander, Andrew and Thomas, and three daughters.

Alexander and his wife Catherine were buried in the church of St. John the Baptist, Glastonbury. A monumental brass in that church bears the following inscription: "Here lie the bodies of Alexander Dyer and Catherine his wife. He was son and heir of Thomas Dyer late of Street, deceased. She the daughter of John Thornborrow of Spaddesdon in Hampshire Esq. He died 7th of March 1633; she 20th September 1650. Here also lies what is mortal of Captain John Dyer who dyed the 24th of April 1670. This Captain John Dyer was the son of Alexander Dyer."<sup>1</sup>

Edward Dyer was the eldest son of Sir Thomas, and was born

1. The Rev. Canon Mayo very kindly informs me that this Alexander Dyer was the son of Thomas Dyer of Street, who was a son of Andrew Dyer, brother of Sir Thomas Dyer, Knight.

at Sharpham Park about 1540 or 1541. He was sent to Oxford and had some of his education at Balliol College. He appears to have left Oxford without taking his degree, though a "diligent and painstaking student." In Wood's *Athenæ* it is stated "that at the university his natural inclination to poetry and other polite learning, and his excellency in bewailing the perplexities of love were greatly observed by his contemporaries." For some time he travelled on the continent, and in 1566 we find him at the court of Queen Elizabeth: there he became a favourite with Her Majesty, distinguished for his courtly manners and literary tastes, and possessed great influence with the Earl of Leicester.

In 1571 he fell under the royal displeasure, as appears by a letter written by Lord Gilbert Talbot to his father the Earl of Shrewsbury. In that letter, dated May 10th, 1573, he gives an account of various matters going on at court. He writes, "Hatton the Vice-Chamberlain is still sick. It was thought he would not recover, the Queen went almost every day to see how he did. There were devices, chiefly by Leicester, not without the knowledge of Burghley, how to make Mr. Edward Dyer as great as ever was Hatton. Hatton being sick it was thought a convenient time. Thus it was brought to pass. Dyer was lately sick of a consumption, in great danger, and as his Lordshp well knew, he had been in displeasure for two years. It was made the Queen believe that his sickness was because of the continuance of her displeasure towards him; so that unless she would favour him, he was not like to recover. Hereupon Her Majesty hath forgiven him, and sent unto him a very comfortable message; and now he is quite recovered again."

In 1586 he was empowered to search and find out what manors and lands had been concealed from Her Majesty. These were certain lands which had formerly belonged to the monasteries. Two years later he received a grant of certain estates which he had discovered to have been concealed. But his method of dealing with these estates did not please the Queen, and he again

incurred the royal displeasure. He wrote to Lord Burghley begging his protection, submitting a full statement of "the whole course of my proceedings both before and since the granting of Her Majesty's warrant to me." This satisfied the Queen and soon after he was again restored to favour.

In 1588 he was returned as a Member of Parliament for the county of Somerset.

He was employed on several diplomatic missions. When the Netherland States sought the protection of Elizabeth, Edward Dyer was sent into Holland to ascertain the strength of their forces. He was also entrusted with an important embassy to Denmark. It was on his return from Denmark that he was in Bohemia, and there met Sir Edward Kelly and Dr. Dee. Kelly was a great student of the mysteries of nature. He pretended to have discovered the true elixir or philosopher's stone among the ruins of Glastonbury. By this he said he could change base metal into pure gold. He was created a baron by the Emperor of Bohemia, with whom he was in great favour for a time, but he was at last thrown into prison, and in trying to escape he fell and broke both his legs, and soon after died from the injuries he had received in his fall.

Dee was a celebrated mathematician and astronomer. At the age of fifteen he was sent to Cambridge, and during the three years residence there he says "I was so vehemently bent to study, that eighteen hours a day were spent in my studies and learning." He took holy orders, and settled at Mortlake, where he collected a library of four thousand volumes. On one occasion Queen Elizabeth went to see his library, but having buried his wife only a few hours before he was not able to entertain his royal visitor. The populace believing him to have dealings with the devil, broke into his house in his absence, tore up valuable manuscripts, destroyed many of his books, and scattered the rest, so that the greater part of them were irrecoverable. He became an astrologer and was supposed to hold intercourse with the spirit world, and



practise superstitious arts. Forming a friendship with Edward Kelly, who also had "dipped into these matters," they travelled together into Bohemia and Poland. But their adventures created such a sensation throughout Europe, that the Emperor was given to understand by the Pope's Nuncio, that it was a scandalous thing to the whole Christian world that he should entertain two such magicians as Dee and Kelly. Dee left Prague and came home. Kelly was imprisoned. It was in Bohemia that Edward Dyer met them, and he related at the table of the Archbishop of Canterbury that he saw them try a grain of the elixir on an ounce-and-a-quarter of mercury, and it was at once changed into one ounce of pure gold. At another time they cut a piece out of a warming pan and turned it into very good silver. The warming pan and the piece cut out were sent as a present to Queen Elizabeth.

Edward Dyer succeeded in performing all his diplomatic services so satisfactorily, that on the death of Sir John Wolley, in 1596, the Queen conferred upon him the Chancellorship of the Order of the Garter; at the same time he received the honour of knighthood, being esteemed a grave and wise gentleman. As the honour was rarely given it may be taken as a proof of the high esteem in which he was held by the Queen. Not much is heard of him in public life afterward; he was never married, and from the token books of St. Saviour's, Southwark, it appears he lived at Winchester House, and there he died in 1607. From the same authority we learn that "he gave a buck to the churchwardens of the parish every year." He was buried on the north side of the chancel in St. Saviour's Church. I am indebted to the kind courtesy of the rector, the Rev. Canon Thompson, for his permission to see the register book of burials, which contains the following entry: "1607. May 11, Sir Edward Dyer, Knight, in the chancel." He left no will, but letters of administration were granted to his sister, Margaret Dyer.

I now add a few particulars of his literary fame. He was the intimate and chosen friend of Sir Philip Sidney, and with him

formed one of the foremost figures in Elizabeth's court circle. Sidney mentions him in two of his poems :

“ Welcome my two to me, E.D., F.G., P.S.,  
The number best beloved,  
Within my heart you be,  
In friendship, unremoved ;  
Join hands and hearts ; so let it be,  
Make but one mind in bodies three. E.D., F.G., P.S.”

The initials stand for Edward Dyer, Fulke Greville, and Philip Sidney. Dyer and Sidney were called the Castor and Pollux of poetry on account of their close and intimate friendship. Gabriel Harvey styles them “the two very diamonds of Her Majesty's court for many special and rare qualities.” Spenser describes Dyer as “the Right Worshipful Gent: and famous Courtier Master Edward Dyer, in a manner our onely Englishe Poett.” Another critic praises him “for eligie most sweete solempne and of high conceite.” Drumond in conversation with Ben Jonson remarked, “He who writeth the arte of Englishe Poesy praiseth much Rawleigh and Dyer.” Two of George Whitney's emblems are dedicated to our Edward Dyer :

“ De morte et amore ; Iocosum  
To Edward Dyer Esquier.  
Pennæ gloria perennis  
To Edward Dyer Esquier.”

In another of his emblems he celebrates him thus :

“ Say we lack their herbes, their wormes, their flies,  
And want the meanes their gallant hues to frame,  
Yet Englande hath her star of orient dies,  
And seeke therein a Dyer most of fame,  
Who alwaies hath so fine and freshe a hewe,  
That in their lands, the like is not to viewe.”

Dyer's poems were contributed to England's *Helicon*, and were never collected or published in a volume during his lifetime. He also wrote a small prose work, *In Praise of Nothing*. The only known copy of the original edition is in the Bodleian

Library, Oxford. Twenty-five copies have been printed for private circulation by J. P. Collins. It is a great curiosity, bearing the stamp of a highly cultivated mind, wide observation, extensive reading, with gleams of humour here and there, occasional passages of deep pathos, and breathing throughout a devout spirit. The authorship of this tract has been doubted by some, but it was generally attributed to Edward Dyer by his contemporaries. The Bodleian copy bears his initials, E. D., and Wm. Oldys Norroy King-at-Arms, gives an anecdote which fits in with the authorship of Dyer. I give it in his own words: "Sir Edward Dyer, a man of fine parts and accomplishments, was a dependant at court in Elizabeth's time. He had expectations from her of preferment suitable to his merits. When he was walking one day under her window Her Majesty looked out and saw him in a pensive mood. Having a mind to be jocose, she said, "Sir Edward Dyer, Sir Edward, what does a man think of when he thinks of nothing?' 'A woman's promise,' said Sir Edward with a smile. The Queen drew back and said to someone near, 'Well, this anger would be a brave passion to make men witty, if it were not so base a one as to keep them poor.'"

Undoubtedly Sir Edward Dyer was considered a poet of mark and distinction in his own generation; but except for his connection with the court of Queen Elizabeth, of whom it has been said that she only drew and retained around her men of great minds and rare gifts; and his connection with Sir Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, the lustre has paled from his name. And yet the singer of "My Mynde to me a Kyngdome is, etc.," will hold his own against all time. An old Puritan writer quaintly observes, "His fame is too big a morsel for oblivion." To Glastonians his memory has a special interest from his birth at Sharpham Park. He is one of those distinguished men whom Glastonbury is proud to own among her sons. His most famous poem is appended to this paper. It is a description of contentment. It was set to music and published



in a collection of songs by William Byrde, organist of the Queen's Chapel, 1596.

“My mynde to me a kyngdome is,  
Such praesente joyes therein I finde,  
That it excells alle other blisse  
That earth affordes, or growes by kynde.  
Though muche I wante, which moste would have,  
Yet still my mynde forbids to crave.

No princely pompe, no worldly store,  
No force to winne the victorye,  
No wilye wit to salve a sore,  
No shape to feed a loving eye.  
To none of these I yelde as thrall ;  
For why ? My mynde dothe serve for alle.

I see how plentye suffers ofte,  
And hasty climers sone doe fall,  
I see that those which are aloft,  
Mishapp dothe threaten moste of all,  
They get with toyle, they keep with feare,  
Such cares my mynde could never beare.

Content I live, this is my staye ;  
I seek no more than may suffice,  
I presse to beare no haughty swaye,  
Look what I lacke my mynde supplies ;  
Lo thus I triumph like a Kyng,  
Content with that my mynde doth bringe.

Some have too much, yet still do crave ;  
I lyttle have, and seek no more.  
They are but poore, though muche they have,  
And I am ryche with lyttle store ;  
They poore, I ryche ; they begge, I gyve ;  
They lacke, I leave ; they pyne, I lyve.

I laughe not at another's losse,  
I grudge not at another's gayne,  
No worldly wanes my mynde can tosse,  
My state at one doth still remayne ;  
I fear no foe, I fawne no friende ;  
I lothe not lyfe, nor dread my ende.

Some weighe theyre pleasures by theyre luste ;  
Theyre wisdom by theyre rage of wylle ;  
Theyre treasure is theyre onlye truste,  
A cloked crafte theyre store of skylle ;  
But all the pleasure that I fynde,  
Is to maintayne a quiete mynde.

My wealthe is healthe, a perfect ease ;  
My conscience cleere, my choice defense :  
I neither seeke by brybes to please,  
Nor by deceyte to breed offence ;  
Thus do I lyve ; thus wyll I dye :  
Would alle did so well as I."

I beg to express my thanks to Canon Mayo for kindly interest and suggestions on several points.