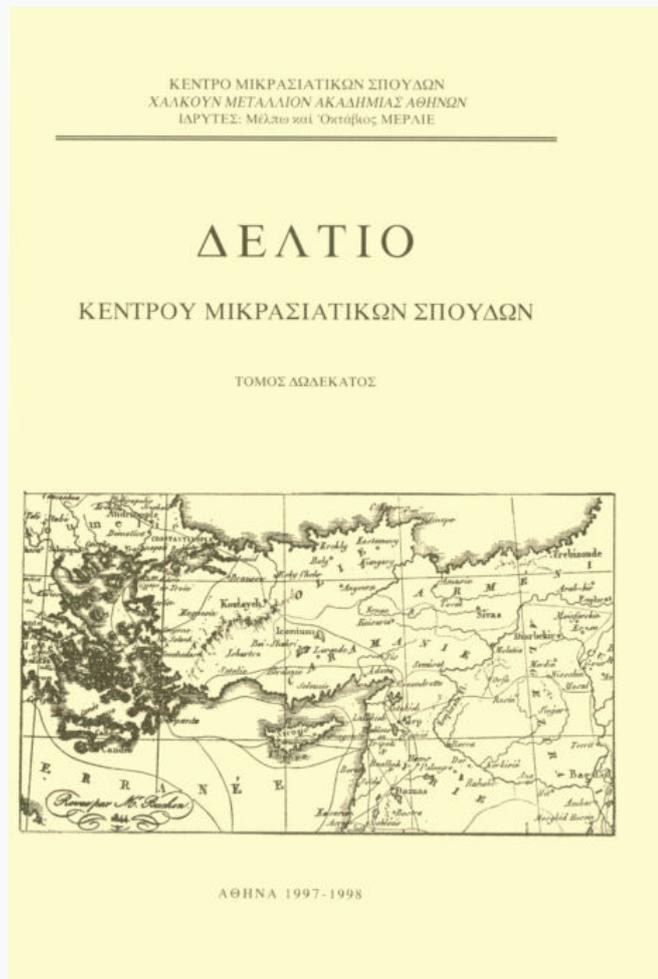


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### The ottoman court in 1682

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PAUL SEAWARD

## THE OTTOMAN COURT IN 1682<sup>1</sup>

In 1682, in his last known letter from abroad, printed here,<sup>2</sup> the former English ambassador at Constantinople described the condition of the Ottoman court, and discussed its ambitions on the eve of its famous attack, through Hungary, on Vienna. Finch had been English ambassador at Constantinople since 1672. His family had made the post something of a personal fief: Finch's two predecessors had been his cousin, the Earl of Winchilsea, and his brother in law, Sir Daniel Harvey. John Finch was born in 1626. At Christ's College, Cambridge, in the 1640s he was taught by the Platonist, Henry More, and met Thomas Baines, who was to become his friend and lifelong companion, in a relationship which even during their lifetimes was famous for its constancy and devotion. Together they left England in 1651, to study medicine in Italy. In 1659 Finch gained the patronage of the Grand Duke of Tuscany and the professorship of Anatomy at the University of Pisa. The two returned to England in 1661 —perhaps to share in the Finch family's good fortune at the Restoration: John's elder brother, Heneage, became Solicitor General and a close associate of Charles II's principal minister, the Earl of Clarendon. Finch was knighted, and Baines appointed Professor of Music at Gresham College. They returned to Italy the following year, and in March 1665 Finch was made English resident at the court of the Grand Duke in Florence, a post he held until the Grand Duke's death in 1670. Finch and Baines spent 1670-73 in England, when Baines was knighted, and Finch appointed ambassador to the Porte.<sup>3</sup>

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1. I am most grateful to Professor Lewitter for bring the letter to my attention, for suggesting this article, and for commenting upon it.

2. The letter was purchased by Christ's College, Cambridge, in the sale at Sotheby's in 1993 of the Fairfax library and archive. It is printed here by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Christ's College.

3. For the lives of Finch and Baines, see Archibald Malloch, *Finch and Baines, a Seventeenth Century friendship*, Cambridge 1917.

They spent nearly ten years in Constantinople, troubled by vexatious English merchants, an intensely competitive diplomatic corps, the piratical activities of the Barbary corsairs, and the frustrations of dealing with a capricious court.<sup>4</sup> In 1680 Finch was replaced by Lord Chandos, who arrived at Constantinople in July 1681; but Sir John's departure was delayed by the illness and death, in September, of his friend Baines; and by his own serious illness which followed. Not until November did he leave, taking with him Baines's body. His ship made a slow return home, stopping at Cephalonia, Leghorn, and in Spain.

When Finch left Turkey, Europe was resting briefly and nervously between the end of one major war and the beginning of two others. The Treaty of Nijmegen of 1679 finally halted the conflict begun by Louis XIV's invasion of the Dutch republic in 1672. The war had involved not only the Netherlands, but had spilled over into the Spanish possessions in the Low Countries and into Germany, drawing into a series of fragile coalitions against France the Hapsburg Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold I, and a host of German princes. Nijmegen was a brittle peace, and Louis continued to nibble at imperial and Spanish possessions along their borders with France. The Emperor and his ministers strove to construct a diplomatic and military alliance to hold back France when war was renewed—as no one doubted it would be. But they had another traditional enemy to the South East. The Ottoman empire was just as belligerent as was France. Its forces had invaded imperial lands in 1663-64, reaching almost to Vienna; it had fought a twenty-five year struggle with Venice, which ended with its capture of Crete in 1669; in 1672 it had assaulted Poland, and conducted annual campaigns there until 1676; and it had become embroiled with the Russians, too, with whom it eventually made peace in 1681. Between these two great theatres of war, West and East, there existed complex cross-currents. Among them were the struggles of Paris and Vienna for influence in the lands to the East of Austria. They competed to win for their candidates the elective throne of Poland in 1674, and then they competed for the goodwill and alliance of the winner, King John III Sobieski; and they struggled by proxy in Hungary, where the Emperor grappled with a strong Protestant movement and resistance to Hapsburg influence.

As Finch wrote his letter, a new war was commonly expected to erupt at any moment. It was well known in 1681 that the Turks were once more preparing their war machine<sup>5</sup>; it was not known exactly (indeed, the Turks had not yet decided) at whom it was directed. Their intentions were, naturally, a subject of

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4. G. F. Abbott, *Under the Turk in Constantinople: a record of Sir John Finch's embassy 1674-81*, London 1920; see also S. P. Anderson, *An English consul in Turkey: Paul Rycout at Smyrna, 1667-78*, Oxford 1989.

5. Thomas Barker, *Double Eagle and Crescent: Vienna's second Turkish siege and its historical setting*, New York 1969, p. 131.

consuming interest to the diplomats of Europe: to those of the Empire, because the Turk's most likely targets were deemed to be either Poland, or Hapsburg Hungary; to those of France, because an Ottoman attack on the Empire would add immensely to Louis XIV's freedom to attack Hapsburg territories on France's Eastern borders; and to those of the remainder of Western Europe, because another French assault on the Netherlands or Germany would almost certainly reignite a general war.

Finch was well qualified to comment on Turkish intentions, although by June 1682, several months since he had left Constantinople, he was a little out of touch with the Ottoman court. His letter lacks a superscription, and so it is unclear who was seeking his views. It was written to one «employed in a Publique ministry», but it gives no other definite clue to the identity of its recipient. In its catalogue of the sale of the Fairfax papers,<sup>6</sup> Sotheby's suggest that it was Sir Henry Goodricke, then ambassador to Madrid, presumably because the letter was written from Cadiz, and perhaps because the collection contained a number of other Goodricke papers.<sup>7</sup> Goodricke had been ambassador since 1679, and did not leave until March 1683.<sup>8</sup> But there seem no other grounds for supposing that it was addressed to him, and he is not known to have a connection with Finch. The letter implies, in any case, that the recipient has but recently entered into his position of trust. A number of others had been recently appointed to diplomatic posts at the time. Edmund Poley in February 1682 had been appointed resident ambassador to the Imperial Court; Viscount Preston in March had been made Envoy Extraordinary to France; and in May, Thomas Howard, known as Lord Howard of Norfolk, was sent as Special Ambassador to the Spanish Netherlands.<sup>9</sup> No evidence links the first two to Finch: but the connections between the Howard family and the Finches were relatively close and long-established.

The Howard family genealogy is complex. Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, was in 1660 restored to the Dukedom of Norfolk which his ancestor had forfeited in 1572. He, however, had been regarded as mad since 1645, and remained at Padua, where his madness had apparently first manifested itself. His brother, Henry Howard, was to all intents and purposes the head of the family—as well as one of the most significant figures among English Catholics. When the Duke died in 1677, Henry Howard succeeded to the title, as the sixth Duke. He had two sons by his first wife, the daughter of the Marquess of Worcester. The first, Henry, succeeded to the title, as seventh Duke, on his father's death in 1684. The second was Thomas, the Special Ambassador of 1682.

Henry Howard the elder (the sixth Duke) came to know Finch in Italy, in

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6. The Fairfax Library and Archive, Tuesday 14th December 1993, Lot 494.

7. e.g., Lot 462.

8. Gary M. Bell, *A handlist of British diplomatic representatives, 1509-1688*, London 1990.

9. *Ibid.*

1666. In January 1665 Howard left London for a continental tour, aiming ultimately at Constantinople.<sup>10</sup> He wrote from Vienna in April to the ambassador at Pera, Sir John Finch's predecessor and cousin, the Earl of Winchilsea, announcing his intention to arrive at about the end of June.<sup>11</sup> He travelled to Constantinople in the company of his younger brother and Count Lesley, the Imperial Ambassador to the Ottoman court. They arrived in Pera by 1 September.<sup>12</sup> Abandoning their plans to continue to Jerusalem, Howard and his brother returned home early the following year via the Balkans and Italy.<sup>13</sup> By February he was in Belgrade,<sup>14</sup> and in May he was at Rome.<sup>15</sup> Howard arrived at Florence on 6 July (NS), and stayed in Sir John Finch's house for thirteen days, leaving for Padua on the 18th. Finch reported to the English Secretary of State, Lord Arlington, that the Grand Duke of Tuscany had treated Howard as if he were already Duke of Norfolk. Howard left apparently intending to return: he talked, according to Finch, of going to meet his children in France, and returning with them to Italy.<sup>16</sup>

There is no evidence that he and his sons did return to Florence. His sons were apparently back in England by May 1667, and went off to Magdalen College, Oxford. It is unclear, indeed, whether Thomas Howard ever actually met Sir John. But his father had evidently built up a rapport with Winchilsea; and while a rapport with the religious Finch may have been rather harder to establish, the two had become well enough acquainted.

Thomas Howard's appointment as ambassador to Brussels in 1682 was apparently intended to offer the compliments of Charles II to the new governor of Flanders, the Marquis de Grana.<sup>17</sup> He arrived at Brussels on 29 May 1682; he

10. HMC Finch I, p. 349, Sir Henry Bennet to the Earl of Winchilsea, 25 January 1664/5.

11. HMC Finch I, p. 368, Henry Howard of Norfolk to the Earl of Winchilsea, [14?]/24 April 1665.

12. HMC Finch I, p. 394, Winchilsea to Sir Heneage Finch, 1 September 1665.

13. PRO SP 98/6, Sir John Finch to Lord Arlington, 4/14 December 1665.

14. HMC Finch I, p. 409, Howard to Winchilsea, 1/11 February 1666.

15. PRO, SP 98/7 Sir John Finch to Lord Arlington, 5/15 June 1666.

16. PRO, SP 98/7, Sir John Finch to Arlington, 10/20 July 1666; John Burbury published an account of Howard's travels in 1671 (*A relation of a Journey of the Right Honourable Lord Henry Howard from London to Vienna, and thence to Constantinople in the company of his excellency Count Lesley*). Howard may have engaged in some discreet diplomatic activity on behalf of the English court while he was in Rome: see Finch's letters in SP 98/6, and also T. A. Birrell, «William Leslie, Henry Howard and Lord Arlington, 1666-67», *Recusant History* 19 (1989), no. 4.

17. De Grana's appointment is dated 12 March 1682, see *Correspondance de la Cour d'Espagne sur les affaires des pays-bas au XVIIe siecle*, V, *Correspondance de Charles II, 1665-1700*, Brussels 1935, p. 374; no instructions apparently exist for Howard's embassy, although this is offered as his role in a newsletter, see *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, Charles II, 1682, p. 243.

left less than two weeks later.<sup>18</sup> The embassy was probably entrusted with more substantial matters, in particular, the French attempt to annex Luxembourg, a possession of Spain, at the threshold of the Low Countries. Spain had demanded English support against France under the terms of the treaty of 1680 between the two countries. Charles II had tried to avoid military intervention, and had been let off the hook by the French withdrawal from their blockade of the town in March 1682; Louis at the same time had requested Charles to arbitrate between rival claims to the Duchy. At the time of Howard's embassy, the Spanish were resisting the idea. Howard was perhaps given the task of discovering the new governor's views on the issue, and his latest instructions from Madrid.<sup>19</sup> Howard was, like many of his family, a Catholic, and unlike his brother had not conformed after the passage of the Test Act. This may explain in part the informality of his embassy (no instructions appear to exist) as well as raise questions about its purpose.<sup>20</sup>

The intentions of the Turks were a major element in the diplomatic jigsaw, for whatever they did would profoundly influence Louis XIV's next move. And so it would have been natural for Charles II's ambassador to Brussels to seek advice from an old family friend so well —acquainted with the Turkish court as Sir John Finch. In fact, Howard would certainly not have received Finch's letter in time to contribute to his embassy— if, indeed, he ever received it at all. In any case, Finch's analysis was a poor one. Turkish aggression in 1682 was to be directed against Hungary and Vienna, not Poland, as he guessed; and despite their weaknesses, the Turks very nearly captured Vienna in 1684. Finch died five months after writing the letter; his body was taken to Christ's to be buried along with that of Baines.<sup>21</sup> Howard became closely enough identified with the Catholic regime of James II to become his Master of the Robes in 1687, and was despatched in that year on an embassy to Rome. Later, after the 1688 Revolution, he went into exile to join the deposed king. He was drowned later that year on his return to France from Ireland, where he had gone in support of James's cause.<sup>22</sup>

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18. PRO SP 77/53, f. 431, Sir Richard Bulstrode to Secretary Sir Leoline Jenkins, 29 May 1682; f. 438, same to same, 12 June 1682.

19. see John Miller, *Charles II*, London 1991, pp. 360-364.

20. See John Martin Robinson, *The Dukes of Norfolk*, revised edition, Chichester 1995, pp. 142, 147-8. Robinson appears to be unaware of the embassy.

21. Malloch, pp. 77-78.

22. H. Kent Staple Causton, *The Howard Papers* (no date or place of publication) p. 205; for corrections to this account, and further details of Howard's career after 1685, see R. A. Beddard, *A Kingdom without a King*, Oxford 1988, p. 198, n. 204, and John Martin Robinson, *The Dukes of Norfolk*, p. 148.

Cadiz June 7/17th 1682

Right Honorable

Though Sir Thomas Baines had no other title to that of a Prophett but the being a Wiseman, My Lord Bacon averring that their Predictions are the best prophecy's, yet I should injure his Ashes & your own worth also, if I did not acquaint you that he had long since foretold your being employ'd in a Publique Ministry out of the foresight of what was due to your Eminent Qualifications, of which no man was a greater admirer and (pardon the dotage of my friendship) scarce any Man a better judge; so that Our friendship though it merits not so great an Esteem as you are pleas'd to set upon it; for *Laudari a Viro laudabile ea demum est Vera Laus*,<sup>23</sup> your character giving lustre to what before, though a Jewell it may be, was yet unpolish'd: however the agreement wee were at as in most things, in being your most unfeign'd servants was one part of our friendship, & therefore that Esteem you are pleas'd to sett upon [it] only enobles the Tribute you receiv'd. And since your goodness is pleas'd to accept of a friendship on my part; I return you my most humble thanks for the honour on your part, and assure you Sir I shall never doe any thing unworthy of the Grace you have admitted me to but shall make it my endeavours to have title to it by a personal merit of my services, to what I have now no Pretension but that of a perfect donative for I blush that my weake endeavours at Florence should be by the favour of yours of the 9th reckon'd amongst things of value and merit; since they have title to nothing but that of your pardon. Sir I beseech you that the Epoche of your friendship if you will allow me a place in it, may beginn from this time; and I will be responsible for the future On all occasions of your service for the being answerable to it.

Since your commands are that I should tell my opinion of the Turkish Descent into Christendome; I hold myselfe obliged to do it without reserve, but then remember tis one part of friendship to excuse to others the faults of your friend, and reprehend them in Himselfe. The Turkish power is in so vast an Empire a thing that cannot but raise especially at a distance great apprehensions of it. And really their first Aggression is very formidable for the number, but like *Gailen* though that be *major quam virorum* the second is *minor quam faeminarum*; And their first Invasion now is lesse considerable than formerly; for they were never so ill provided of Generalls or any good field officers as at present their bravest men being cutt off at Candia, or since dead. The present Visir<sup>24</sup> has no repute of a Souldyer nor is any Man beside the Bassa of Aleppo thought fitt for command.

23. To be praised by a praiseworthy man is indeed true praise.

24. Kara Mustafa (?1634-1683).

The *Gran Signor*<sup>25</sup> is wholly taken up with two things which he loves equally Money and Women &c for his Amours are unlimited. Warr He was never Personally so near at as to hear the Great Gunns. The Publique Treasury is miserably low and sunk & for those vast Treasures they talke of which every Emperour layes up, first they consist most in jewells and they cannot pay an Army unless they can find buyers, & secondly, I am apt to believe, who know what robberyes are constantly practised in the Seraglio that those imaginary Treasures are like the Chests that lay in the Zecca at Venice which were said to be full of Zecchins, but at the Warr of Candia they were found to have more of noyse than reality, and to be fuller of Ayr than Gold. Further I am apt to thinke That if the Janizarys were beaten [in] the first battle which are the strength of His Army be they never so numerous for his Spahys or horse are not in any degree comparable to those of us Christians, that nothing could hinder the victorious army from marching directly to Constantinople; & that therefore at a Time when the Emperour is known to be so well Arm'd as he is at Present, that a Descent into Hungary will not readily be made by the Porta; & if He would this year I am confident the Turke is not able to doe it. Tis very likely He will make use of this pretence to Arm; but His interest lyes against Poland a weake People because broken in their own discontents; and the limits of Podolia and Ukraina being not yet settled;<sup>26</sup> I fear that the Torrent will carry all away in that unfortunate country who will scarce be able to putt an army into the field by reason of their domestick distractions; and the certainty the Turke hath upon the new Peace that the Moscovite cannot assist them and that no other Xtian Prince can, if a new Warr be declared: And the reason why France so much talkes of Hungary is the fear that Crown hath for Poland, the King there being wholly at the devotion of France. But besides the French King having commanded his Amb[assado]r as Mon[sieu]r de Guilleragues shewed me at Constantinople under the King his Master's own hand, not to receive Audience below the sofa, and the Gran Signor having commanded the visir under his hand to let the Amb[assado]r of no Christian Prince have it upon the sofa It is hard to adjust at any time this difference between these two Peremptory Monarchs without the losse of honour on one side, which has kept Mon[sieu]r Guilleragues from Audience 2½ years.<sup>27</sup> And if the Emperour should

25. Mehmed IV (1648-1684).

26. These territories (to the East of the River Dnestr) had been the occasion of intermittent warfare between Poland and Russia since 1654.

27. The dispute over the degree of respect shown to western ambassadors at audiences with the Grand Vizir had begun with the succession to the position of Kara Mustafa in 1676. Guilleragues replaced the Marquis de Nointel as French ambassador in 1679 with instructions to insist at audiences that he be accorded the same respect given before 1676. As a result he was not received until September 1681. Finch's reports to London on the subject are summarised in Abbott, *Under the Turk*, pp. 198-201, 285-287, 345-347.

*be attacked in Hungary I believe France would really on this Account send troops to his assistance to reduce the dreaded Empire to termes of decency practised in my time & with me; and at the same time by sea I believe He would send a Fleet to lye before the Dardanells: as I believe the King Our Master will also doe if his subjects are so ill-treated, for the visir as my successor the Lord Chandos wrote me exacts exorbitant summes having refused 80m Dollars the Amb[assado]r offer'd, but that is not accepted nor he is not admitted to Audience.<sup>28</sup> I beg your Pardon for this length, and referr the judgment to your great Prudence all Particulars occurring to me being lay'd before you of which make what use you thinke fitt. I had the Honour of conducting Mr Howard to Livorno, and recommending of him particularly to the Great Duke with whom he passeth this Summer, your Cousin is a most accomplish'd Gentleman.<sup>29</sup> I have room enough left to wish you all imaginable success in your great trust and Ministry & to ratify myselfe to be with great devotion Sir.*

*Your most humble & most obedient and obliged servant*

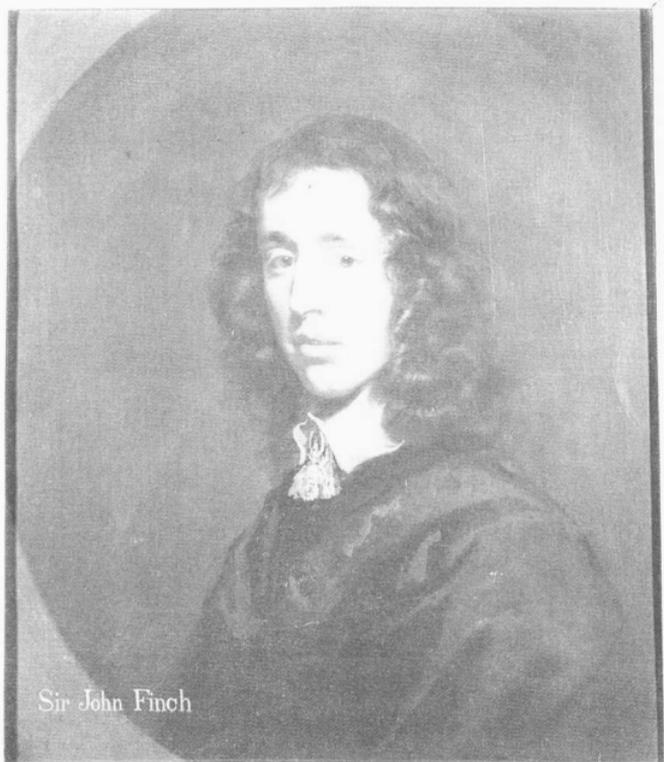
*John Finch<sup>30</sup>*

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28. This appears to refer to the reprisals made against Guilleragues for the bombardment of Chios by a French fleet in August 1681 (see Abbott, pp. 359-360). The French fleet reappeared in the Dardanelles in May 1682 to indicate French displeasure at the treatment of its ambassador. It may also refer, however, to a sum that was being claimed from the British as a result of a commercial dispute.

29. Finch stopped at Livorno (Leghorn) on his return to England. I have been unable to discover which Howard is referred to here.

30. In this transcription, contractions have been silently expanded. Otherwise, original punctuation, spelling and capitalisation have been retained.



Sir John Finch

Cardiz June  $\frac{7}{17}$  1682.

Right Hon<sup>ble</sup>:

Though Sr Thomas Bacon had no other title to be of a Prophet  
but the being a Wise man, My Lord Bacon avowing that their Predicti-  
ons are the best prophecies, yet I should injure his Ashes & your  
own worth also, if I did not asseverate that he has long since fore-  
told yo being employ'd in a Publick Ministry, out of the  
best sight of what was due to yo eminent Qualification, of wch  
no man was a greater admirer and ponder the degree of my  
friendship, scarce any Man a better judge; So by Our friendship  
though it might not be quite an Esteem as you are pleas'd to set  
upon it; for *Laudan a Viro laudabili ea demum in Vira Laus*  
your character giving lustre to what before though a faint  
may be, was yet well polish'd. however the agreement will be as  
as in most things, in being your most unfeign'd Servant was  
one part of Our friendship & therefore I from you are pleas'd  
to set upon only another the Tribute you receive. And since  
your Goodness is pleas'd to accept of a friendship on my  
part, I returne you my most humble Thanks for the honour  
on your part, and assure you so I shall never do any thing  
unworthy of y<sup>e</sup> Grate you have admitt'd me to, but shall use  
in my Endeavours to have little to be by a Personall merit of my  
Service, to what I have now no Pretension but of a Person  
donative; for I trust that my weak endeavours in Services should