prepared.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

A CONTEMPORARY DRAWING, made by Marcus Gheeraedts, shows the young Earl of Oxford carrying the Sword of State before Queen Elizabeth on the way to St. George's Chapel at Windsor, where the Order of the Garter was to be bestowed upon the duc de Montmorenci, in June 1572. An engraving of this, signed "U Hollar [1] *fecit* 1668," has perpetuated likenesses of the Queen and her Lord Great Chamberlain hardly more realistic, one feels sure, than those of the toy reindeer grazing in the park behind them. But the total effect is interesting, not the least so for the picture of the Castle, the Royal Chapel, and other buildings of Windsor.

In his introduction to *The Poems of Edward de Vere,* Mr. Looney has remarked, after noting that Lord Oxford had spent much of his youth at Elizabeth's court at Windsor and Greenwich,

[1] Quot. from A. F. Pollard—*The Times Literary Supplement,* London, 3 April, 1937—by E.T.C.: *News-Letter,* of the Shakespeare Fellowship, Am. Br., Oct.-Nov., 1940.

[1] For Wenceslaus Hollar.

It is not without significance, therefore, that the "Shakespeare" play which contains the fullest and most precise English topography is *The Merry Wives of Windsor:* a play which certainly exhibits much greater familiarity with Berkshire, Windsor, and its environs than any other shows respecting Warwickshire, Stratford, and its neighborhood. Indeed . . . it is the only drama from the master pen in which precise local detail is made predominant: an intimacy embracing the Royal Park and its traditions, and extending even to the rooms of the Castle and the Royal Chapel.

He quotes a provocative commentary made by a Stratfordian apologist, William H. Dixon, in his *Royal Windsor:*

Once only was he [the dramatist] fettered by a theme, a name, a site; and that was when he wrote his comedy of Sir John. . . . That, in his studies [sic] for this picture, Shakespeare made his eye free of King's house and the royal chapel, needs no evidence beyond his play. . . . No less perfect were his sweep and glance through St. George's choir. . . . No less happy were his notes on the Garter. . . . [He] made himself familiar with parts beyond. . . . Street and market-place, inn, yard and water-side, hedgerow and park-fence became to him as objects in his native town.[2]

Of course, the Earl of Oxford knew Windsor Castle as well as he knew Castle Hedingham, his own birthplace. There is a record of his "being sick at Windsor" in 1570. He did not have to make "studies for this picture" or "make himself familiar with parts beyond." He was, like Hamlet, "to the manner born." (Incidentally, he was similarly "fettered by a name [and] a site" in *Arden of Feversham,* to which town he had beyond doubt accompanied the Queen on her progress in 1573, although overt reference to this fact has been carefully expunged from the record.)

In the year 1593 there was another festival of the Garter, and *The Merry Wives* must have been revised to add gaiety to this occasion. There are, in fact, many topical allusions relating it to 1592–93. But the original play would seem to align itself with a period preceding by many years the writing of *Henry V*—in any case, well before the death of Falstaff and also before Bardolph and Nym were hanged. We find it difficult to believe that these characters were resurrected and put through capers so light-heartedly after their demise.

The Merry Wives of Windsor would seem to be the play entitled *An Antick play and comodye,* presented at Somerset House on February 23, 1585. We suggest that it was a revision of an old one, and that "Antick" was a pun on "antique." We cannot be reconciled to the idea that it closely preceded *2 Henry IV,* for to us the Falstaff of the Windsor débâcle is not a Falstaff who will soon become "the tutor and the feeder" of Prince Hal's "riots": this one is diminished,

[2] Looney: *Poems of E. de V.,* p. xx; quot. *Royal Windsor,* iii, pp. 301-3.

he loses face, and so can easily be—as he never could during his happy association with the Prince—deflated. He is not much more than a tricky old buffoon. And so we wonder if this is not actually a refurbishing of a very early Falstaff, a Sir John in evolution, one step beyond his first adumbration as Sir Tophas, in *Endymion,* which we are confident was built upon a masque written by Oxford in his youth, the Earl himself being Endymion, Cynthia the regal aspect of the Queen, Tellus her earthly or mundane aspect, etc.: an allegory Lyly could have expanded into a play under the Earl's direction many years later but would never have dared originate. We have already called attention to the correspondence between the songs in *Endymion* and in *The Merry Wives;* so there is a definite connection.

There is said to have been an old play about Anne Page and her three suitors called *Wily Beguiled.*[3] And this bears out our theory; for here we have Fenton-Oxford winning "sweet Anne Page" over the pallid suit of Slender-Sidney, who is the cousin, instead of too realistically the nephew, of Robert Shallow-Leicester. Philip Sidney was very young at the time his uncle was negotiating with Anne Cecil's father for their marriage, and he would have been quite as little concerned as Slender is. Since his early nickname was Willy, he must have been the one "beguiled." The third suitor would have been the Earl of Rutland, who was a ward at Cecil House for seven years.[4]

The tradition that *The Merry Wives* was written because the Queen

[3] This is mentioned by Dowden, in his Intro. to the Oxford ed. of *The Merry Wives.*

We might add here that there is a great deal to be said on the subject of unrecorded early versions of Oxford's plays. As we have pursued this study, it has become patent to us that he had been writing masques and simple plays, or interludes, from the time he was at Gray's Inn, where he may well have collaborated with Gascoigne on *The Supposes.* We believe that *The Comedy of Errors* was written there, in a simple form; we are convinced that *Wily Beguiled* was written before 1571, and that there was a version of *Troilus and Cressida* (to say nothing of *The Dream),* as we have observed, in 1572. Some evidence appears from the fact that it was at this very time that the young Earl was writing poems signed *Meritum petere, grave,* comparing Elizabeth with "kites of Cressid's kind," etc. As for the initial version of *The Merry Wives,* it is clear that the youthful dramatist was to some extent influenced by the first English domestic comedy, *Ralph Roister Doister,* published between 1560 and 1566. The vainglorious Roister Doister pays court by means of a rather pompous letter to a virtuous widow. Together with her maids, whom she calls her "gossips," and abetted by one Matthew Merrygreeke, she flouts her suitor and succeeds in making an ass of him. (We have seen Oxford punning on "Merrygreeke" in *Tr. and Cr.*) *The Spanish Tragedy* was similarly influenced by the altogether inferior *Gorboduc of Sackville.* It is impossible to follow here the byways of Lord Oxford's early, unacknowledged work—of which *The Spanish Tragedy, Locrine, Arden of Feversham, Edward III,* and others invite lengthy comment—for that would require a book in itself; thus we confine our discussion to those works which are admittedly Shakespeare's.

[4] Ward found an indication that he and Anne had formed a passing boy-and-girl attachment, p. 62, note 2.

had expressed a wish to see Falstaff in love, has no historical foundation. As a matter of fact, the story appeared for the first time in 1702, when John Davies stated that *The Merry Wives* had been written at the Queen's direction: this, ninety-nine years after the Queen's death. Nicholas Rowe added the rest in 1709. In any event, Falstaff could hardly have been said to be "in love"; he was merely trying to profit by the supposed gullibility of a pair of middle-aged women. It is significant that he gets involved with the Pages' soiled linen—although, in the corresponding incident of *Il Pecorone*, the linen is clean, just from the tub—and later passes for the old "cozening Quean" of Brainford. (Capulet is called "cot-quean" by Juliet's Nurse.) He is already obese, a prolific letter-writer—like both Sir Nicholas Dawtrey and another more famous, and infamous, personage; and he refers to the exchequer (I.3.70-2):

> I will be 'cheator to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me.

(An escheator is one who collects money for the exchequer. But he is even more in character when he leaves off the *es*.) So he must already be the Lord Treasurer.

Yes, we are convinced that we have here Sir John in an early stage, though of course touched up for verisimilitude, before he evolves into the richly symbolic figure he was later to become to the dramatist: the apple-john or medlar (meddler), the old humbug who will hide behind the arras in *1 Henry IV*—and in *Hamlet* too, for that matter—as he does here, the Welsh derivation of whose name, False Taffy, is False David. (William Cecil's grandfather was named David.) *Shakespeare's England* records the following:

> Both Legh and Bossewell tell the tale of how *Sir John* of Sitsilt, a knightly shadow raised up as an ancestor for Burghley, disputed ages ago with *Sir William* of Fackenham for the possession of those very arms which glow in Burghley's hall-windows.[5]

He is the man who will later be Shylock and is here referred to by Mrs. Page as "a Herod of Jewry" (II.1.20), and by Ford as "the fox" (III.3.160); the man who speaks of having "plucked geese" in his boyhood days (V.1.25), as William Cecil is known to have done.

For detailed interpretation of *The Merry Wives*, in terms of its essential authorship and its elaborate significance for three separate periods, several chapters would be required. The play would seem almost to be written in code, so intricately is it woven with double meanings, so primed with innuendo, some of which remains elusive. This is complicated by the fact that not only does it belong to the mid-1580's and 1592–93, between which years some of the chief characters had died and their implications been shifted, it carries much old cargo from the early 1570's, quite as *Troilus and Cressida* does, perhaps even from the 1560's; furthermore there may have been a slight revision in the late '90's.

[5] Vol. II, p. 80.

Nevertheless, taking it in the form we know, we find that nearly all the characters have their innocently obvious historical prototypes: Falstaff, Captain Nicholas Dawtrey; Shallow, Sir Henry Wallop; Sir Hugh Evans, the parson, Adam Loftus, Archbishop of Dublin; Bardolph, Pistol, and Nym, Barkley, Pistor, and Mynne, of the English forces in Ireland, Barkley's record showing that he was indeed a coney-catching rascal. Slender is probably a caricature of Wallop's kinsman, Captain Anthony Deering. Doctor Caius is Sir John Perrot, appointed Lord Deputy in 1584; he and Loftus had a longstanding feud, suggestive of the quarrel between Evans and Caius. Fenton is Captain Geoffrey Fenton, who had been engaged in literary pursuits and in espionage for Burghley until the age of forty, when he joined the campaign in Munster; at one time he dedicated a translation he had made to Lady Oxford. He later fell in love with a widow, whose nine children may have provided the idea for the fairies in the play.[6]

But beneath these superficial identities there are more actual ones. Shallow is Leicester, in the 1585 version: both are named Robert. The surname Shallow may have been candidly descriptive, since it has been said of Leicester that "Wise word or witty never passed his lips. Cool counsel lay beyond him." Evans's little song (III.1.16 *et seq.*) stresses the word, stopping short on it in each verse: "To shallow—" It will be recalled that Leicester had been the subject of other rhymes, in *Love's Labour's Lost, Troilus and Cressida,* and *Hamlet.*

Shallow promotes the matrimonial interests of his lackadaisical cousin, Slender, as Leicester did those of his young nephew, Philip Sidney, the earliest candidate for Anne Cecil's hand. Slender speaks of her "brown hair" (I.1.46), and there is considerable interest in her wealth expressed. We have previously noted that Dowden saw Slender as a youthful version of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, for so, indeed, he was; and we have mentioned Slender's remark (I.1.264),

> I am not a-hungry, I thank you forsooth,

matched by Sir Andrew's (*T.N.*: II.3.128-9),

> 'Twere as good a deed as to drink when a man's a-hungry.

The cryptic passage (I.1) about coats of arms and "luces"—luce being the heraldic name for pike, a freshwater fish—is highly informative; for we find that Leicester's father's coat, as Duke of Northum-

[6] These parallels have been worked out with historic detail by Mrs. Clark: *Hidd. Alls.*; pp. 511-24.

berland, had contained "twelve luces," as Robert Shallow's is said here (16) to contain a "dozen white luces."

> *Slender.* . . . they may give *the dozen white luces* in their coat.
> . . . . . .
> *Evans.* The dozen white louses do become *an old coat* well . . .
> *Shallow.* The luce is the *fresh fish;* the salt fish is *an old coat.* (16-23.)[7]

Gratifying corroboration of several points we have hitherto made is offered in the opening lines of *The Merry Wives.* One is that this play did, indeed, follow by one month the earliest production of *Hamlet,* which was in January 1585, for Shallow's first words, addressed to Evans, show Leicester's anger with Oxford about his portrayal as Claudius:

> *Shallow.* Sir Hugh, persuade me not; I will make *a Star-chamber matter of it;* if he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, esquire.

Falstaff here represents the bohemian, the dramatist, aspect of Oxford, and the Welshman Hugh Evans stands for his stage-manager, the Welshman Henry Evans, who must have trained the boy-actors in the same amusing manner his counterpart uses with the fairies: "I will teach the children their behaviours." (IV.4.67.) Shallow-Leicester complains to him of the treatment he has received in the recent play, *Hamlet.* His threat of invoking the Star Chamber makes the point unmistakable, since a playwright could be haled before the Star Chamber for representing a living person on the stage. Leicester may actually have complained in these very terms, avowing that if the Earl were twenty de Veres, he should not abuse Robert Leicester. The words have a realistic ring. Oxford was indeed irrepressible.

> *Evans.* If Sir John Falstaff have committed disparagements unto you, I . . . will be glad to do my benevolence to make atonements and compromises between you.
> *Shallow.* The Council shall hear of it; it is a riot. . . . Ha! o' my life, if I were young again, the sword should end it. (30-40.)

It would not have been the first time Leicester had complained against the highhanded doings of the younger Earl to Lord Burghley, head of the Council, nor the first time he had resorted to the sword

[7] In Burke's *Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage,* John Dudley's coat-of-arms as Duke of Northumberland is described in part as follows:
"*Arms.* Quarterly: 1st and 4th grand quarter, 1st and 4th counterquartered 1st and 4th Or a lion rampant az.; 2nd and 3rd Gu, 3 lucies haurient arg., for Lucy. . . ." And the replica in Woodward's *Heraldry British and Foreign* shows six luces in groups of three in each of two quarterings, Dexter and Sinister, making the twelve cited here, "the dozen white luces."
In neither book were we able to find Robert Dudley's coat-of-arms as Earl of Leicester; and though the Northumberland arms were forfeited upon his father's execution, they were still the family's "old coat."

to avenge himself. Incidentally, Camden records that in 1587 Elizabeth had made Leicester "Chief Justice in Eyre south of the Trent"; and Shallow is designated "a Country Justice."

Bardolph, Pistol, and Nym, as composites of the University Wits, some of whom became protégés of the Earl of Oxford, were patently elaborated for the 1592–93 version. Pistol's first line is,

> How now, Mephistophilus! (I.1.128.)

And *Doctor Faustus* is usually dated between 1585 and 1590. While Oxford apparently did not consort with Marlowe as he did with some of the others, he obviously knew his work; in 1589 Kyd testified that "his lordship never knew his service but in writing for his players." The Pistol-Nym quarrel (*H.V.*: II.1) may represent the Marlowe-Kyd breach of 1589. (In our judgment, anything Marlowe may have contributed to *Edward II* was done under Oxford's supervision upon an old play of his own, in which he had lost interest.)

Doctor Caius would seem to be an amiable caricature of Doctor John Caius of Cambridge, with whom Oxford had had familiar contact during his University days.

Fenton, who, as Looney observes, stands somewhat "apart from the other characters, who *dances, writes verses, kept company with the wild Prince and Poins* (III.2), was *great of birth,* whose *state was gall'd . . . with expense,* and who speaks of *my riots past, my wild societies* (III.4)," is clearly the Earl himself. He failed to add that the Hostess says "he writes verses, he speaks holiday, he smells April and May." (III.2.66-7). Oxford ever had a facile tongue, and he had had a perfume named for him.

When Page says Fenton is of "too high a region" (III.2.72) and Fenton tells Anne that her father "doth object, I am too great of birth" (III.4.4), we are presented with a situation now grown familiar.

"Sweet Anne Page" is a simple picture of the "sweet little Countess of Oxford," with her "brown hair"—though belonging to the earliest version, undoubtedly *Wily Beguiled.*

In 1585, Robin is the little page from 2 *Henry IV,* who is being "made ape," or actor. "Here comes little Robin," cries Mrs. Page (III.3.20); he is young and he is small. And Mrs. Ford calls him "my eyas-musket." (21.) He is not, however, an ordinary page, as we are to understand (III.2.1-8):

> *Mrs. Page.* Nay, keep your way, little gallant: you were wont to be a follower, but now you are a leader. Whether had you rather lead mine eyes, or eye your master's heels?
> *Robin.* I had rather, forsooth, go before you like a man than follow him like a dwarf.
> *Mrs. Page.* O! you are a flattering boy: now I see *you'll be a courtier.*

As, indeed, he was to be. Jonson will show him as Asotus being tutored to "be a courtier" by Amorphus-Oxford, in *Cynthia's Revels.*

The passage between Evans and William (IV.1), rich in word-play, belongs to a later date and will be examined later. (Chap. Seventy-two.) Every scene, in fact, is full of word-play, while almost every name is significant.

Ford and Brook are both alternates for Ox-ford and Ver, or the second syllable of the Earl's secondary title, Bolebec, or Bulbeck, "beck" being of course another word for brook. His names were similarly punned on by his contemporaries, signally by Greene, in his *Groatsworth of Wit:*

> Stop shallow water still running [i.e., a brook or a beck], it will rage, or tread on a worm [Ver] and it will turne: then blame not Schollers vexed with sharp lines, if they reprove thy too much liberty of reproofe.

In his charges against Lord Oxford in 1580, Arundel frequently called him "Oxe."

We are recalled to the Earl's identification with Bottom, the weaver, who had had the audacity to be beloved of a queen, when Falstaff says:

> I do begin to perceive that I am made *an ass,*

and Ford replies,

> Ay, and an *ox* too; both the proofs are extant. (V.5.122-5.)

So here again we find the bohemian Oxford himself participating in the ample character of Falstaff.

When Slender questions Simple (I.1.195) as to whether he has brought the *Book of Riddles* with him, we may take the hint that we have to do with riddles in the text of this play. It is indeed a very esoteric affair.

A few lines before (192-3), Slender has said:

> I had rather than forty shillings I had my *Book of Songs and Sonnets* here.

And this integral point is worth a few words of explanation.

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, one of the pioneer court-poets of England and Lord Oxford's uncle by marriage, had in his youth spent nearly three years at Windsor as a companion to Henry VIII's illegitimate son, Henry, Duke of Richmond. When, some twenty years later, he was imprisoned in the Tower awaiting execution, he thought of those carefree days with a nostalgia which inspired the touching lines:

> So crewell prison! How could betyde, alas!
> At prowde Wyndsour, where I, in lust and joye,
> With a kinges son my childishe years did passe.

The collection of poems he left was called *Book of Songs and Sonnets.*

Surrey and Wyat had begun versifying the Psalms; Philip Sidney and his sister continued the practice. *Lady Green Sleeves,* a popular song of the day, was published in *A Handful of Pleasant Delites,* in 1584, an anthology which contains unsigned lyrics indubitably by Oxford. Mrs. Ford connects the two to illustrate the incongruity between Falstaff's disposition and his words when she says (II.1.60-2):

> they do no more adhere and keep place together than the Hundredth Psalm to the tune of 'Green Sleeves.'

We mention this for its relation to the middle '80's, and to Sidney as well.

Falstaff's opening remark to Mrs. Ford at their rendezvous (III.3.41),

> 'Have I caught my heavenly jewel?'

is a quotation from Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella.* And Slender's asides (III.1.38 and 67), "Ah, sweet Anne Page . . . O, sweet Anne Page!"—not spontaneous but quite mechanical—may be intended to imitate the spirit in which the courtly Sidney wrote sonnets to Stella (Penelope Rich), with whom he was never, it would seem, actually in love.

There is one other indication of Slender's identity in his speech (I.1.264-9):

> . . . I keep but three men and a *boy yet,* till my mother be dead. . . . (268.)

It will be remembered that in *Love's Labour's Lost,* Sidney appears as Boyet.

A visit to Windsor in 1592 of Count Mümpelgart—later the Duke of Württemberg—is the source of the passage (IV.5) in which the Host becomes excited about the theft of his horses. In the quarto the supposed thieves were called "cosen-garmobles," a play on Mümpelgart; but the word was afterwards changed to "cozen-germans." It seems that the Count had received an order from the court for post-horses for which he was to pay nothing. There had been some mistake, however—perhaps too many horses were used—for the tavern-keepers were badly disturbed.

One of the peculiarities of this play, which is written in prose, for the most part, about prosy people, is that, with the exception of the occasional songs and rhymes, verse is employed only in passages having to do with Fenton and Ford, both of whom are Oxford. In the business of Ford's "jealousy" and Ford's "melancholy," the volatile Earl makes sport of his own shortcomings. In the person of Fenton, he is an attractive young lover. Perhaps when very young he had

written the "lost" play, *Wily Beguiled,* and now, in 1585, elaborated it into *The Merry Wives,* as a relaxation after *Hamlet,* partly for the sake of reminding Anne that he had loved her once, as Hamlet says he had loved Ophelia—in the time when things had been simple and true between them.