CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

IT HAS BEEN SAID that if Mary Stuart's execution had taken place immediately after her trial, public approval would have been assured and even the monarchs of other countries would have felt a certain relief; whereas the postponement necessitated on their part long letters of protest and much fruitless negotiation. But Elizabeth, in her efforts to appear sensitive and merciful, overshot the mark and awakened further resentment abroad, while decreasing her popularity at home.

For the populace, worked up as they were to a high pitch of excitement by the public garroting of Babington and the others, had responded with enthusiasm to the sentence imposed upon Mary. Lord Oxford must have been revolted by the demonstrations of barbarous delight with which Londoners celebrated, first, the execution of the conspirators and, then, the conviction of the Queen of Scots, since he made Paulina the mouthpiece for a stringent rebuke (*W.T.*: II.3.114-20):

> *It is a heretic that makes the fire,*
> *Not she which burns in 't.* I'll not call you tyrant;
> But this most cruel usage of your queen,—
> Not able to produce more accusation

Than your own weak-hing'd fancy,—*something savours*
Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you,
Yea, scandalous to the world.

Ostensibly, these words are addressed to the jealous husband who had been a tyrant to his wife. But we have had sufficient evidence by now to suspect that the Earl was again—as he usually was—addressing Elizabeth. It certainly cannot be denied that she had behaved ignobly.

She would have known well enough how seriously the Earl of Oxford disapproved of the course she had taken. This may have been one reason why she went to such fantastic extremes of self-justification. One historian puts it thus:

> The news [that Mary's execution had taken place] was received by Elizabeth with the most extraordinary demonstrations of astonishment, grief, and anger. Her countenance changed, her voice faltered, and she remained for some moments fixed and motionless: a violent burst of tears and lamentations succeeded, with which she mingled expressions of rage against her whole council. They had committed, she said, a crime never to be forgiven; they had put to death without her knowledge her dear kinswoman and sister, against whom they well knew that it was her fixed resolution never to proceed to this fatal extremity. She put on deep mourning; kept herself retired among her ladies abandoned to sighs and tears; and drove from her presence with the most furious reproaches such of her ministers as ventured to approach her. She caused several of her councillors to be examined as to the share which they had taken in this transaction. Burghley was of the number; and against him she expressed herself with such peculiar bitterness that he gave himself up for lost, and begged permission to retire with the loss of all his employments. This resignation was not accepted; and after a considerable interval, during which this great minister deprecated the wrath of his sovereign *in letters of penitence and submission worthy only of an Oriental slave,* she condescended to be reconciled to a man whose services she felt to be indispensable.[1]

It is not difficult to imagine Burghley's indignation in the face of Oxford's attitude. These two men were destined by nature for ever to see things from antipodal standpoints. But even the Lord Treasurer could not have denied that Elizabeth had made herself "scandalous to the world" before Mary was finally put to death. Her repudiation of Davison for conveying to Burghley the warrant she had signed for the execution, her willingness to have this faithful servant brought to ruin merely for the sake of maintaining the hollow pretence that she had not really wished Mary to be put out of the way, is one of the most shameful blots upon her career. That Burghley made himself a party to it by calmly countenancing Davison's ruin is not surprising, since from the beginning of his official life to the

[1] Aikin: *Memoirs,* etc.; vol. II, p. 186.

very end, expediency, and not moral principle, motivated his actions. Strikingly enough, this is the identical method Elizabeth and Burghley employed to maintain the hollow pretence of her virginity.

Shortly before the trial of Mary Stuart began, Sir Philip Sidney received a mortal wound at the battle of Zutphen. He had conducted himself with initiative and valor in the attack, and he bore his sufferings bravely.

Mary Queen of Scots went to the block on February 8, 1587. One week later, and *four months after his death,* a magnificent funeral was accorded the remains of Sir Philip Sidney. Since his father-in-law, Walsingham, was in straitened circumstances,[2] and Sidney himself had practically nothing, it has been thought that the sumptuous public display was deliberately planned to unite the people in a sentimental patriotic observance, in order to make them forget the tragedy at Fotheringay. Leicester, no doubt, arranged everything at the behest of Elizabeth.

The situation at the time was crucial, and this was a piece of brilliant strategy, producing, as it turned out, a curious by-product in the form of the exaggerated Philip Sidney legend. England was threatened with civil war, the Catholics backed by Spain were becoming increasingly bitter against the Protestants led by Burghley, Leicester, and Walsingham. The success of the Catholics would of course have meant the ruin of these three ministers, as well as the death of the Queen. In staging the splendid funeral of Sir Philip Sidney, the government invested with a halo of martyrdom this young soldier who had been fighting for his country against the Catholic allies of Spain in the Low Countries. What was lacking in spontaneity, in respect to obsequies four months belated, was made up in expenditure: the great pageant cost a sum equivalent in our money to $250,000. The story of his having given his cup of water to a dying soldier was played up and his literary achievements celebrated. And thus was born the legend of the great Philip Sidney, who was only a mediocre poet and a soldier whose heroism has been matched by countless others still unhonored and unsung.

While there is no record of Oxford's part in the public mourning for Sidney, it is not unlikely that several poems included in two anthologies, *The Phoenix Nest* and *A Poetical Rhapsody,* published in 1593 and 1602 respectively, are praise from his pen for the man his friendship with whom had been marked by so many ups and downs. (Certain poems on other subjects in *The Phoenix Nest* are undeniably by the Earl of Oxford, some of them in his early manner.)

[2] The author of *Fuller's Worthies,* upon Walsingham's death, in 1590, speculated upon "the cause that so great a *statesman* left so small an *estate,* and so *public* a person was so *privately* buried in St. Paul's." (Italics in original.)

It is possible that the opening scene of *1 Henry VI,* written at about this time, does honor to Sir Philip Sidney in the lines spoken at the funeral of King Henry V. For the time being, Oxford may have been willing to share with his friend the mantle of the king whom he had always identified with himself, as he had shared a role with him, for example, in *Much Ado.* But we doubt that, even if the Queen had requested him to praise Sidney, he intended all of Henry's encomiums—whether written or only supervised by himself —to be applied to the deceased knight.

> *Bedford.* Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!
> Comets, importing change of times and states,
> Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky,
> And with them scourge the bad revolting stars,
> That have consented unto Henry's death!
> King Henry the Fifth, too famous to live long!
> England ne'er lost a king of so much worth.
> *Gloucester.* England ne'er had a king until his time.
> Virtue he had, deserving to command:
> His *brandish'd sword* did blind men with his beams;
> His arms spread wider than a dragon's wings;
> His sparkling eyes, replete with wrathful fire,
> More dazzled and drove back his enemies
> Than mid-day sun fierce bent against their faces.
> What should I say? his deeds exceed all speech:
> *He ne'er lift up his hand but conquered.*

How dramatically these words must have rung in the ears of those who had recently beheld the magnificent cortege! They must have played a considerable part in the glorification of Philip Sidney. But they are praising Shakespeare too, and that fact has been ignored.

When at the mercy of his own analytical power, Oxford could be devastating in his criticism; but no one was more generous than he when his heart was touched or when he wished to pay tribute to nobility. He had teased and taunted Sidney while they were young courtiers and friendly rivals in literature, but he had dignified him as his friend in the character of Laertes; and now in all solemnity he did honor to his virtue in this play.

In the late spring of 1587 Burghley wrote a letter to Secretary Walsingham:

> Sir, Although I am sure that you will not omit any convenient time to move Her Majesty to assent that Her Majesty's gift to my Lord of Oxford of Edward Jones' land and goods might be perfected; yet I was so vexed yesternight very late by some grievous sight of my poor daughter's affliction whom her husband had in the afternoon so troubled with *words of reproach of me to her*—as *though I had no care of him as I had to please others* (naming Sir Walter Ralegh and my Lord of Cumberland whose books I had speedily solicited to pass)—as she spent all

> the evening in dolour and *weeping.* And though I did as much as I could to comfort her with hope; yet she, being as she is great with child, and continually afflicted to behold *the misery of her husband and his children, to whom he will not leave a farthing of land;* for this purpose I cannot forbear to renew this pitiful cause, praying you to take some time to have Her Majesty's resolute answer.

After details of business, the letter concludes:

> No enemy I have can envy me this match; for thereby *neither honour nor land nor goods* shall come to their children; for whom, *being three already to be kept* and a fourth like to follow, I am only at charge with sundry families in sundry places for their sustenance. But if their father were of that good nature as *to be thankful* for the same I would be less *grieved with the burden.* And so I will end this uncomfortable matter this 5th day of May 1587.
>
> Your most assured,
> W. BURGHLEY [3]

To begin at the end and mention the passages we have italicized, we submit that it would seem not too great a hardship for a man in the Lord Treasurer's circumstances, constantly enriched by suits and, as he had been for many years by the sacking of monasteries (someone has suggested that this was why he was so partial to *sack*), the owner of vast properties, of great homes where he maintained many servants—eighty at Theobalds alone—to have the "burden" of the partial support of his daughter and three small children. It is, of course, regrettable that Lord Oxford had not managed his affairs better than he had, but it is not to be forgotten that many of the estates he had lost had redounded to his father-in-law, and it would be exceedingly gratifying to be vouchsafed—for once—his own side of the question; for though his letters must have been eloquent, yet they have not been preserved. As for the "honour" which Burghley complains will not come to the children, we submit that, for this, no one is more to blame than he. They could have had an honor far greater than that of the material wealth their grandfather bequeathed them, had he been capable of recognizing the quality of his son-in-law. But this he never did.

Incidentally, we are hereby indirectly informed that the grant of 1000 pounds per annum recently made to Lord Oxford by the Queen *was not being used for his personal expenses.* In fact, Burghley seems to imply something like this in thanking Walsingham for his good offices shortly afterward:

> I heartily thank you for your care had in my Lord of Oxford's cause; wishing *his own case* was the like to convert Her Majesty's goodness *to his own benefit, and in some part for his children.* . . . When the form is agreed to, I must pray you that my Lord of Oxford may perceive

[3] Ward; p. 285; cit. S.P.Dom. Eliz. 201.5.

that the making of the books may be directed from you, as by Her Majesty's order to Master Attorney. For anything directed by me is sure of *his lewd friends,* who still rule him by flatteries.[4]

Burghley saw to it that this letter went into the record, as he did the one about the Queen's virtuous relations with Leicester in 1564. It is from such statements as the Fox made here that historians have supposed the Earl of Oxford to have been a profligate. How could they know that his "lewd friends, who still rule him by flatteries" were the foremost writers of the day receiving instruction and inspiration at his hands?

We say none of Oxford's letters on this subject of domestic stress has survived. But he had his own avenues of communication. He must, for example, have taken up *Othello* again and again: once, as we have said, after his disappointment at being recalled from his assignment in the Netherlands, and now, in order to record what would seem to be the very incident of his wife's distress about which Burghley wrote Walsingham. In the following passage he combines these grievances; for now Othello is become the black side of Oxford himself which he does not scruple to reveal, stipulating only that he may be judged for what *he is,* with nothing extenuated yet nothing set down "in malice":

Othello. O devil, devil!
If that the earth could teem with *woman's tears,*
Each drop she falls would prove a *crocodile.*
Out of my sight.
Desdemona. I will not stay to offend you.
Lodovico. Truly, an *obedient* lady;
I do beseech your lordship, call her back.
Othello. Mistress!
Desdemona. My lord?
Othello. What would you with her, sir?
Lodovico. Who, I, my lord?
Othello. Ay; you did wish that I would *make her turn:*
Sir, she can *turn,* and *turn,* and yet go on,
And *turn again;* and *she can weep,* sir, *weep;*
And she's *obedient,* as you say, *obedient,*
Very obedient. Proceed you *in your tears.*
Concerning this, sir,—O *well-painted passion!*—
I am commanded home. . . . Sir, *I obey the mandate,*
And will return to Venice. (IV.1.246-62.)

Like Ophelia, Anne was "obedient"; like Desdemona, she was "obedient," and she "wept"; she could not be trusted, any more than her father could be. She was married to the wrong man, a man who was proud and high-strung, who hated subserviency and demanded truth. Anne's pliancy—"she can turn, and turn, . . . And turn again"

[4] Ward; p. 286; cit. S.P.Dom. Eliz., 201.16.

—drove him to nervous desperation. Poor Anne. She had always b
obedient to her father, and this she could not change; now she t
to be obedient to her husband, who stood at the opposite pole
loathed meekness: no wonder she wept!

But as for Burghley's protestations of virtue regarding Oxfo
accusation that he helped others though not him, it is interestin
learn that at this very time he was maneuvering to have his
Robert, still in his early twenties, made Secretary of State. Both
thony Bacon and Spenser testified to Burghley's selfish machinati
Within a few years the former was to write:

On the one side I found nothing but fair words, which make foo
fain, and yet even in those *no offer of helpful assistance or real kindne*
which I thought I might justly expect at the Lord Treasurer's hand
who had inned my ten years' harvest into his barn.[5]

It has been previously noted that, of all the Royal Wards who
been under Burghley's guardianship, Oxford was the only one
did not hate him.

Even the inordinately partial Hume, who usually put criticism
footnotes, was constrained to record that in 1592,

The talk of the Court generally was that Burghley was jealous of t
rise of all men who might compete with his beloved son Robert: a
Ralegh's friend Spenser puts the thought in verse (*The Ruins of Tim*
thus:

O grief of griefs! O gall of all good hearts!
To see that virtue should despised be
Of him that first was raised for virtuous parts,
And now broad-spreading like an ancient tree,
Lets none shoot up that nigh him planted be.[6]

But this policy on the part of Burghley to look out for his own
the present case, his son's—interests was not, as Hume would in
anything new. It had been his rule throughout his career. Maca
says:

In a letter written many years later to Villiers he [Francis Baco
expressed himself thus: "Countenance, encourage, and advance able m
in all kinds, degrees, and professions. For in the time of the Cecils, t
father and the son, able men were by design and of purpose suppressed
. . . It seems that the old lord [Burghley] whose temper age and go
had by no means altered for the better, and who loved to mark his d
like of the showy, quick-witted young men of the rising generation, to
this opportunity [Bacon's application for "being called within the ba
in the 1580's] to read Francis a very sharp lecture on vanity and wa
of respect for his betters.[7]

[5] Hume: *The Gr. Ld. B.;* p. 451, note.
[6] Op. cit.; p. 454.
[7] *Lord Bacon.*

Essex hated the Cecils, both father and son. And Lord Henry Howard who, in the early 1570's, had written a political satire directed against Sir Nicholas Bacon and Lord Burghley[8] which was not allowed to be published in England, was still his bitter enemy twenty years later. But, of course, this is not surprising.

Although there is no record, as we have said, of Lord Oxford's side of the matter of which Burghley complained to Walsingham in 1587, there, nevertheless, exists one letter belonging to that period which has a good word for him. One Andrew Trollop, then in Dublin, wrote the Lord Treasurer as follows:

> From the 10th to the 21st year of Her Majesty [i.e., 1568-79], I was deputy to Thomas Gent, esquire, then steward of the manors of the Right Honourable the Earl of Oxford, and *during all that time being privy not only of his public dealings, but also of his private doings and secret intents,* found and knew him, *indued with special piety, perfect integrity, great care to discharge all trust imposed in him, and no less desire to do good to the commonwealth.*[9]

The phrase, "his private doings and secret intents," applied to the 1570's, is arresting. Trollop and others close to Oxford knew even then that he was writing for the theatre and keeping his activities private and secret.

One can visualize the wry expression with which Burghley must have read this missive, for it is at about this time—the autumn of 1587—that he writes tartly to the Earl. Again his letter of self-justification has been preserved, but Oxford's destroyed.

> You seem to infer that the lack of your preferment cometh of me, for that you could never hear of any way prepared for your preferment. My Lord, for a direct answer, I affirm for a truth—and it to be well proved—that your Lordship mistaketh my power. Howsoever, you say that I manage the affairs, the trouble whereof is laid upon me; but *I have no power to do myself or any kin or friend any good,* but rather *impeached, yea crossed; which I am taught these many years to endure, yea, to conceal.*

We interrupt to suggest that this last may well be a roundabout complaint on the part of Burghley against his portrayal in Oxford's dramas; and, while we can only condemn the disingenuousness of his protestation of helplessness "to do myself or any kin or friend any good," still we freely admit his right to feel that he has been "impeached, yea crossed" for "many years" by the way he has been shown—or should we not say, shown up?—in the plays.

> Secondly [the letter continues], that there have been no ways prepared for your preferment I do utterly deny, and can particularly make it manifest, by testimony of Councillors, how often I have propounded ways to prefer your services. But why these could not take place, I must not particularly set them down in writing, lest either I *discover the hinderers* or offend yourself, in showing *the allegations to impeach your Lordship from such preferments.*

As for "the hinderers," Leicester and Hatton were sufficiently influential to balk any favors. For the rest, his old Lordship was evidently not above getting, as the British put it, a bit of his own back. Incidentally, if indeed he had ever "propounded" to the Councillors "ways to promote" Oxford's service, and if he had done so in the same carping spirit in which he had written Walsingham in Oxford's behalf, it is easily seen why nothing had come of his efforts.

The question suggests itself that, if Elizabeth had such a high regard for the Earl of Oxford's worth, respecting, as she did, his wisdom and integrity to the extent of granting him extraordinary license in the plays, and at the same time maintaining her feeling of real affection for him, why was she less generous to him than she was to the others—to Leicester, to Hatton, to Walter Ralegh, and later Essex? The answer would seem to be that although the rift between them caused by his love-affair and banishment was at least superficially healed at the time of their reconciliation in 1583, the old smooth basis of Elizabeth's possessiveness and Oxford's devotion was never entirely restored. Never again did he squander himself in personal homage to the Queen as he had done before; never again did he allow himself to be subsidized to feed her insatiable vanity. For one thing, he was far too busy; for another, he had found that "sweet are the uses of adversity" and had no intention of being among those who were "for compound sweet" foregoing "simple savour." He preferred the compensating verities of work at his "country Muses of Wivenhoe" to the glamorous vacuities of court-life. Never again would he be "the forehorse to a smock." Elizabeth was willing, if it were necessary, to pay for what she received, and she set the highest value upon personal gratification. If she paid, she saw to it that the payment was fully earned, and those men upon whom she showered benefactions worked for what they got. She was willing to bestow a grant upon her Turk which would enable him to produce the dramas in which she took satisfaction and delight and which were of benefit to England; but if he absented himself from her side, then he must arrange his personal affairs as best he could. Whatever else Gloriana may or may not have been, she was

[8] The book was called *A Treatise of Treasons.* See Short Title Catalogue; p. 169: Pollard and Redgrave, 1926. Evidence of authorship: B.M., G.5443.2, and S.P.Dom. Eliz., 147.4&6.

[9] E.T.C.: *Hidd. All.;* p. 582. This letter probably escaped destruction because it was with documents *in re.* Ireland. Trollop expressed disappointment that Oxford had not helped him with his Irish reports.

supremely selfish. But though she refused to reward him with personal gifts unless he assiduously courted her, while he refused to sacrifice his freedom in order to win sinecures, they remained intimate friends, even, it would seem, mutually dependent in an almost mystic way, until the end; and he continued, as he had done all his life, to write sonnets to her.

* * * * * * *

> Now all the youth of England are on fire,
> And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies;
> Now thrive the armourers, and honour's thought
> Reigns solely in the breast of every man:
> They sell the pasture now to buy the horse,
> Following the mirror of all Christian kings
> With winged heels, as English Mercuries.
> *For now sits Expectation in the air. . . . (H.V:* Chorus, *Act* II.)

If this were true when *Henry V* was first written, it was even more intensely so now. The King of Spain's plan had been to send the Invincible Armada up the Channel in 1587, where, at Gravelines, it was to join forces with the Spanish army in the Netherlands under the Duke of Parma. There had been some delay, but an attack was known to be imminent. Oxford had—according to Camden—fitted out a ship at his own expense and was arranging to command it.[10]

For this reason and also because he was at this crucial time occupied in directing and producing patriotic plays written by others as well as by himself, he had apparently only blocked out the current drama, *1 Henry VI,* and composed a few of the scenes, leaving the bulk of the work to his assistants. We shall not discuss this play in detail, though we should like to say in passing that the scene in the Temple Garden (II.4) seems to bear the stamp of the master hand. It has been suggested that an analogy exists between Mary Stuart and Joan La Pucelle, who, although one was thought to be a peasant and the other was a queen, were the two women that stand out conspicuously in pre-French Revolution history as having been executed. Another less important feature which relates *1 Henry VI* to the year 1587 strikes the reader's attention in the lines in which Joan deplores the defacement by warfare of the cities and towns of France (III.3.44-9):

> Look on thy country, look on fertile France,
> And see the cities and the towns defac'd
> By wasting ruin of the cruel foe.
> As looks the mother on her lowly babe
> When death doth close his tender dying eyes,
> See, see the pining malady of France.

[10] Ward; cit. Camden: *Annals;* pp. 405, 414.

On May 26, Susan Vere had been born; and on September 12 of the same year Frances Vere died. She must have been very young, but no other information remains concerning her. One of Lord Oxford's assistants evidently inserted these lines in sympathetic tribute; nothing is less likely than that the Earl himself would have alluded to one of his daughters as a "lowly babe." (Another detail which indicates an alien hand at work in *1 Henry VI* occurs where the word "Hecate"—III.2.64—scans as three syllables: Oxford habitually gave it only two.)

It was not until July 1588, that the Armada crossed the Bay of Biscay. But the English had been on the *qui vive* long before. By June, Oxford may have been aboard his ship, the *Edward Bonaventure,* ready for action. There is no record as to his whereabouts when, on the 5th of that month, his wife, Anne Cecil, died, having been stricken with a fever in the royal palace at Greenwich. He may, of course, have been at her side. One cannot but believe he was there; for surely he was expressing his own tortured emotions in Othello's words of anguish and remorse spoken while viewing the dead wife whom he had so grievously wronged through jealous mistrust:

> O ill-starr'd wench!
> Pale as thy smock! when we shall meet at compt,
> This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
> And fiends will snatch at it. . . . (V.2.271 *et seq.*)

The following account of Anne's funeral is found in a manuscript by Sir William Dethicke, Garter King at Arms:

> She was interred in Westminster Abbey on June 25th, attended by many persons of great quality and honour. The chief mourner was the Countess of Lincoln, supported by the Lords Windsor and Darcy, and her train borne by the Lady Stafford; and among other mourners at the funeral were the Ladies Russel, Elizabeth Vere, Willoughby, sister to the Earl of Oxford, Cobham, Lumley, Hunsdon, Cecil, wife to Sir Thomas Cecil. Six bannerets were borne by Michael Stanhope, Edward Wotton, Anthony Cooke, William Cecil, John Vere and Richard Cecil.[11]

The last named must all have been young boys, the Cecils sons of Sir Thomas. Ward's comment that Oxford's name is not mentioned as among those present, and his inference that the Earl may not have attended the obsequies, seems to us far-fetched. Neither Lord nor Lady Burghley's name is mentioned, nor that of Thomas or Robert Cecil. It was taken for granted that they were present; why not Lord Oxford?

His feelings during this period must have been deep, violent, and contradictory. For the past five years he had been living with Anne,

[11] Ward; cit. *Bibliographia Britannia,* vol. IV, part I. p. 4031.

part of the time, at least, tormented by the unsatisfactory character of their relationship, affected, as it was, by her ingrained subjection to her father. Meanwhile, if we are to be guided by the Sonnets, we must suppose that Anne Vavasor had not ceased to exercise her old allure over the emotional poet. And further to complicate his state of mind and heart, the Fair Youth was growing older, claiming an ever larger share of his love and perturbing his mind with concern about his status. It is no wonder that, after some correspondence between him and Leicester on the subject of military service, the latter reported that the Earl of Oxford "seems most willing to hazard his life in this quarrel"—i.e., with Spain.

But there were still other causes of grief and bitterness at this time. No one knew better than Oxford that

> When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
> But in battalions.

For ill fortune seems to have dogged his activities in the naval war. Although he undoubtedly took part in some of the heavy fighting against the Armada, his ship must have been put out of commission.[12]

> The enemy . . . had been sighted on the 23rd [of July], and for the next few days a running fight had been carried on up Channel. On the 28th the Spaniards anchored in Calais harbour. That night the English sent fire-ships among the enemy vessels, which were once more driven out into the open sea. The following day the decisive battle was fought and the Spaniards utterly defeated. . . . Lord Oxford took part in the fighting during the early days of the encounter, although he missed the decisive battle, as is evidenced by the following letter from Leicester to Walsingham, written from Tilbury Camp on July 28th:
>
> "My Lord of Oxford . . . returned again yesterday by me, with Captain Huntly as his company. It seemed only his voyage was to have gone to my Lord Admiral; and at his return thither he went yesternight for his armour and furniture. If he come, I would know from you what I should do. I trust he be free to go to the enemy, for he seems most willing to hazard his life in this quarrel." [13]

A long ballad written by Lyly—signed I.L., for Iohn Lyllie—depicts the Lord Admiral and Oxford in action, in the following stanzas:

> The Admiral with Lion on his Crest,
> Like to Alcides on the strand of Troy,
> Armed at assay to battle is addressed;
> The sea that saw his powers waxt calm and coy,
> As when that Neptune with three-fork'd mace
> For Trojans sake did keep the winds in chase.
>
> De Vere, whose fame and loyalty hath pearst
> The Tuscan clime, and through the Belgike lands
> By winged fame for valour is rehearst,
> Like warlike Mars upon the hatches stands.
> His tusked Boar 'gan foam for inward ire,
> When Pallas filled his breast with warlike fire.

(The mention of Pallas in connection with the Vere Boar is significant. And it will be remembered that Bottom had said he would have Peter Quince write a "ballad.")

Lord Oxford reported on July 27 to Leicester, who was in supreme command. And as Ward states, on August 1 the latter wrote as follows to Walsingham acknowledging Her Majesty's instructions regarding the Earl's employment:

> I did, as Her Majesty liked well of, deliver to my Lord of Oxford her gracious consent of his willingness to serve her among the foremost as he seemed. She was well pleased that he should have the government of Harwich, and all those that are appointed to attend the place—which should be two thousand men—a place of great trust and of great danger. My Lord seemed at first to like well of it. Afterward he came to me and told me he thought the place of no service nor credit; and therefore he would to the Court and understand Her Majesty's further pleasure; to which I would not be against. But I must desire you—as I know Her Majesty will also make him know—that it was good grace to appoint that place to him, having no more experience than he hath; and then to use the matter as you shall think good. For my own part, being gladder to be rid of him than to have him, but only to have him contented; which now I will find harder than I took it. And he denieth all his former offers he made to me rather than not to be seen to be employed at this time.[14]

We can never read this letter without a smile. The cool independence of Oxford confronting the Supreme Commander, of whom he had a very low opinion and whose appointment he spurns, telling him what he will and will not do, although he had, indeed, had very little experience in martial matters, and even withdrawing his offer to serve! This, and Leicester's relief at having him go away—it strikes us as very amusing. Ward sums up the situation thus:

> After his experiences at sea Lord Oxford must have looked upon the offer of the command of a Naval Base as somewhat of the nature of an anti-climax. He had missed the dramatic episode of the fire-ships on July 28th and the decisive battle of the following day. It is perhaps to this cause that we must attribute *the restlessness amounting almost to insubordination* that he exhibited during his interview with Her Majesty's Commander-in-Chief. Without question he was a very unsatisfactory subordinate from the point of view of his superiors, but so was Lord Nelson, and the result was probably the same in both cases. Oxford's views, we may be sure, coincided very closely with those expressed in Nelson's favourite Shakespeare quotation from *Henry V:* "If it be a sin to covet honour, I am the most offending soul alive." [15]

[12] Ward; p. 290.
[13] Ibid.; cit. S.P.Dom., 213-55.
[14] Ibid.; cit. S.P.Dom. Eliz., 214.1.
[15] Op. cit.; p. 292.

But there can be no doubt that the soul of Oxford was full of wretchedness at this time. For all his outward pride, he must have been sore with self-condemnation. He would have been brooding remorsefully about his treatment of Anne and perhaps reflecting that he had been somewhat vainglorious in the light of what he had actually to show. Of course, we have no way of knowing exactly when he added certain passages to *Othello* or the other plays, even those which strike a clear contemporaneous note; but surely the lines (I.3.226-7) about Othello's being content to "slubber the gloss" of his "new fortunes" with an inferior post, stem from this period. And we should not wonder if, on his return to his home, where "the sweet little Countess of Oxford" would never again preside at his table or baffle his heart, he had taken up *Othello* for a final revision, adding, along with other bitter lines, Emilia's speech (V.2.231-2):

> O murderous coxcomb! what should such a fool
> Do with so good a wife?

A whole year was to go by before he finished another play, and this was to be one of his blackest tragedies.