CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

The defeat of the Invincible Armada brought wild rejoicing to England. In London and the provinces people had been stimulated to greater patriotic fervor by the plays presented in the theaters during the past few years. These had provided a potent source of inspiration, since, being Elizabethans and thus habituated to allegorical symbolism, the audiences saw in their former kings and heroes the realistic counterparts of those who now bore the banner of St. George to victory.

> Follow your spirit; and upon this charge,
> Cry, "God for Harry, England, and Saint George!"

This, to them, came as an immediate exhortation. Their response was manifest in the enthusiasm with which the men enlisted for service and by the valor with which the common soldier and seaman fought to keep their country free.

> This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
> . . . . . .
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

They had been taught to appreciate their heritage, to take pride in their tradition, and to feel responsibility for Queen and Country.

As creative center and motive-power of the spirit which generated this force, Lord Oxford had performed a service to his native land far more valuable than anything he could have done at Harwich or in the front line of vessels on the decisive day. But how inexpressibly bitter to him who knew the value of his work was the necessity for keeping it anonymous! (The Bear, Authority, had left Perdita unmolested upon the shores of Bohemia, but it had chased away and partially devoured him who had delivered her.) As the Veres had always participated with valor and distinction in the crises of England's history, so did this one now; yet by a devilish irony he was prohibited from adding his share of credit to his great name. He had been speaking of himself when he wrote Antonio's melancholy words, "I am the tainted wether of the flock."

Elaborate celebrations followed upon victory. Sir Christopher Hatton, recently elevated to the Lord Chancellorship, entertained the Queen at dinner on August 19 in Holborn, where "his hundred men-at-arms in red and yellow paraded before Her Majesty. The next day a similar ceremony took place at Cecil House, and shortly afterwards Leicester's troop was reviewed. But they were all thrown into the shade by Essex's splendid force of 60 musketeers and 60 mounted harquebuses, in orange-tawny, with white silk facings, and 200 lighthorsemen in orange and silver."

Oxford would have felt doubly disgraced that he, hereditary Lord Great Chamberlain of England, premier Earl and scion of his country's noblest house, had nothing to show in comparison. The bulk of his estates gone, he was living modestly, with scarcely any retinue to match Hatton's 100 henchmen and the splendor of new favorites.

It is an arresting fact that a few months later the statement was published which we have already quoted in part:

> But in these days (although some learned Princes may take delight in Poets) yet universally it is not so. For as well Poets as Poesie are despised, and *the name become of honourable infamous, subject to scorn and derision, and rather a reproach than a praise* to any that useth it. . . . And in Her Majesty's time that now is are sprung up another crew of Courtly makers [poets], Noblemen and Gentlemen of Her Majesty's own servants, who have written excellently well as it would appear *if their doings could be found out and made public with the rest,* of which number is *first that noble gentleman Edward Earl of Oxford.*[1]

[1] Ward; p. 299; quot. *The Arte of English Poesie,* 1589, which he believes to have been the work of Lumley rather than Puttenham.

Lord Oxford was reflecting disconsolately upon his paradoxical situation when he demanded of Elizabeth in Sonnet 125, what it had availed him that he had

> . . . laid great bases for eternity,
> Which proves more short than waste or ruining,

and besought her to

> . . . let me be obsequious in *thy heart,*
> And take thou *mine oblation poor but free.*

The Queen, seizing advantage of the flood of enthusiasm, decreed a solemn thanksgiving to be held at St. Paul's on November 24. And in this celebration the Earl of Oxford bore a distinguished part. Doubtless the reason Elizabeth had allowed three months to elapse before holding this public ceremony was that Leicester had died suddenly in early September; his loss had saddened and unnerved her.

The event was celebrated in an anonymous poem entitled, *A joyful ballad of the Royal entrance of Queen Elizabeth into the City of London, the 24th of November in the thirty-first year of Her Majesty's reign, to give God praise for the overthrow of the Spaniards.* Since it is very long, we quote only a few stanzas.

> . . . . . .
> Therefore to lovely London fair our noble Queen would go,
> And at Paul's Cross before her God her thankful heart to show;
> Where Prince and people did consent with joyful minds to meet
> To glorify the God of Heaven with psalms and voices sweet.
>
> A hundreth knights and gentlemen did first before her ride,
> On gallant fair and stately steeds their servants by their side;
> The Aldermen in scarlet gowns did after take their place;
> Then rode her Highness' trumpeters sounding before her Grace.
> . . . . . .
> The Lord Marquess of Winchester bare-headed there was seen,
> Who bare the sword in comely sort before our noble Queen;
> The noble Earl of Oxford then High Chamberlain of England
> Rode right before Her Majesty his bonnet in his hand.
>
> Then all her Grace's pensioners on foot did take their place
> With their weapons in their hands to guard her Royal Grace;
> The Earl of Essex after her did ride the next indeed,
> Which by a costly silken rein did lead her Grace's steed.
> . . . . . .
> And after by two noblemen along the Church was led,
> *With a golden canopy carried o'er her head.*
> The clergy with procession brought her Grace into the choir;
> Whereas Her Majesty was set the service for to hear.
>
> And afterwards unto Paul's Cross she did directly pass,
> There by the Bishop of Salisbury a sermon preached was.

> The Earl of Oxford opening then the windows for her Grace,
> The Children of the Hospital she saw before her face.

An account of *The Queen's Majesty's most Royal proceeding in State from Somerset Place to Paul's Church, Ann. 1588,* is given by Sir William Segar, in his *Honour Militarie and Civil* (1602).

We are indebted to Ward for the following explanation:

> The Earl Marshal at this time was George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. When we consider the places occupied by Oxford and Shrewsbury in the Procession, there can be little doubt that they must have been the "two noblemen" who carried the Golden Canopy over Her Majesty's head as she walked up the Nave of St. Paul's and took her seat in the Choir. Moreover, as Earl Marshal and Lord Great Chamberlain they ranked as the two senior Earls in the realm; and the only holder of a title higher than that of Earl at this time was the Marquess of Winchester, who carried the Sword of State.

In "the List or Roll of all Estates that were in this Princely Proceeding, according as they were marshalled," we read as follows:

Sergeants at Arms

Garter King at Arms — The Mayor of London — A Gentleman Usher of the Privy Chamber

Lord Great Chamberlain of England — Sword borne by the Lord Marquess — Earl Marshal of England

Sergeants at Arms

THE QUEEN'S MAJESTY IN HER CHARIOT

Gentlemen Pensioners
Esquires of the State
Footmen

Her Highness' train borne by the Marchioness of Winchester

The Palfrey of Honour led by the Master of the Horse

The Chief Lady of Honour

All other Ladies of Honour

The Captain of the Guard
Yeoman of the Guard

Gentlemen Pensioners
Esquires of the State
Footmen

Stowe's *Annals,* 1615, also relates that Elizabeth "was, under a rich canopy, brought through the long West aisle to her travers in the quire, the clergy singing the Litany." [2]

[2] Ward; pp. 293-5.

It was some years later that Lord Oxford addressed Sonnet 125 to his Queen: he evidently rewrote it in 1601:

> Were 't aught to me I *bore the canopy,*
> With my extern the outward honouring. . . .

But this is the occasion of which he is reminding her. The humiliating and paradoxical situation in which he had found himself during that period still rankled.

The following year marked the death of Lady Burghley, Oxford's mother-in-law. Upon the family tomb in Westminster Abbey her husband caused an elaborate inscription to be engraved in Latin, which has preserved for posterity a measure of the man's spirit more apt than he could have realized would be the case. Ward has translated the strange epitaph:

> Lady Elizabeth Vere, daughter of the most noble Edward Earl of Oxford and Anne his wife, daughter of Lord Burghley, born 2nd July 1575. She is fourteen years old and grieves bitterly and not without cause for the loss of her grandmother and mother, but she feels happier because her most gracious Majesty has taken her into service as a Maid of Honour.

(Query: Why did Lord Burghley feel it necessary to engrave the date of a granddaughter's birth upon her grandmother's tomb? Does this not seem a very far-fetched procedure? Having recorded Elizabeth Vere's birth-date, he was of course constrained to give those of Anne's other two daughters.)

> Lady Bridget, the second daughter of the said Earl of Oxford and Anne, was born on April 6th 1584, and although she was hardly more than four years old when she placed her mother's body in the grave, yet it was not without tears that she recognized that her mother had been taken away from her, and shortly afterwards her grandmother as well. It is not true to say that she was left an orphan *seeing that her father is living and a most affectionate grandfather who acts as her painstaking guardian.*
>
> Lady Susan the third daughter was born on May 26th 1587. On account of her age she was unable to recognize either her mother or her grandmother; indeed it is only now that she is beginning to recognize *her most loving grand-father, who has the care of all these children, so that they may not be deprived either of a pious education or of a suitable upbringing.*

No comment upon this wily, sanctimonious inscription is necessary. It calls to mind the words of Prospero (*Temp.:* I.2.108-12):

> . . . for he needs will be
> Absolute Milan. Me, poor man,—my library
> Was dukedom large enough: of temporal royalties
> He thinks me now incapable . . .
> So dry he was for sway.

Oxford may have been an unsatisfactory father. Geniuses usually are. But it should be remembered that, for whatever reason, Anne had kept her children, at least part of the time, in her parents' luxurious homes: life would have been easier there, service abundant. Since in no house can there be two masters, Oxford may habitually have absented himself. All this would be understandable. Whatever the cause of his divided household, the result is apparent. Burghley grappled Oxford's and Anne's children to him with hoops of steel. The "pious education" and "suitable upbringing" with which he endowed them would have been postulated upon his own code and would have stressed his own rectitude. Consequently it should come as no surprise if, many years later, they still saw certain questions precisely as he did, and with regard to their father's claim to literary fame, took the view that it was of minor importance compared with the honor of the House of Cecil and the lustrous repute of the "great Lord Burghley."

A moving sequel to the reproach of the epitaph is to be found in a letter Oxford addressed to his father-in-law two years later. Whatever may have been his initial reaction, he had by now become chastened; and his sense of justice had mitigated his resentment. Moreover, something seems to have snapped in his proud nature; no longer was he "swift to my revenge." The humiliations, bafflements, and frustrations which he had endured throughout the 1580's and which had caused him to say in the beginning,

> I am amaz'd, methinks, and lose my way
> Among the thorns and dangers of this world,

had matured and mellowed his temper, but they had also worn him down: he was paying the price of wisdom which is for sanguine and sensitive natures exorbitant.

In 1590 had come the final settlement of the Earl's business with the Court of Wards, and his debts were staggering. Those to the Queen are listed as follows:

Forfeitures, in the Court of Wards	£11,000
Forfeitures of Covenants upon the livery	4,000
Upon his Wardship	3,000
Other Obligations	4,000 [3]

This sum would be in today's money, as we have had previous occasion to observe, $880,000. We have been able to find no evidence that the affluent Burghley, Lord Treasurer and Master of the Court of Wards, ever did anything to alleviate Oxford's financial distress. It will be noted that a large proportion of his indebtedness is to the Court of Wards.

[3] Strype's *Annals;* III.ii.191.

At any rate, after previous correspondence concerning his properties and his need of ready money to "redeem certain leases at Hedingham," the Earl wrote Burghley in 1591:

> Whereas I have heard Her Majesty meant to sell unto one Midelsone, a merchant, and one Comarder, the domain of Denbighe, which (as I am informed) is £230 yearly rent now as it is; I would be an humble suitor to Her Majesty that I might have this burgh, paying the £8000 as they should have done, (Her Majesty) accepting for £5000 thereof of the pension which she hath given me in the Exchequer, and the other £3000 the next term, or upon such reasonable days as Her Majesty would grant me by her favour. And further, if Her Majesty would not accept the pension for £5000, that then she would yet take unto it to make it [to] that value [of] the total of the Forest,[4] which by all counsel of laws and conscience is as good right unto me as any other land in England. And *I think Her Majesty makes no evil bargain,* and *I would be glad to be sure of something that were mine own and that I might possess. . . .*
>
> The effect hereof is: *I would be glad to have an equal care with your Lordship over my children,* and if I may obtain this reasonable suit of Her Majesty, granting me nothing but what she hath done to others and *mean persons,* and *nothing but that I shall pay for it,* then those lands which are in Essex—as Hedingham, Brets, and the rest whatsoever—which will come to some £500 or £600 by year, upon your Lordship's friendly help towards my purchases in Denbighe, shall be presently delivered in possession to you for their use. And so much I am sure to make of these domains for myself.
>
> *So shall my children be provided for, myself at length settled in quiet, and I hope your Lordship contented, remaining no cause for you to think me an evil father,* nor any doubt in me but that I may enjoy that friendship from your Lordship that so near a match, and not fruitless, may lawfully expect. Good my Lord, think of this, and let me have both your furtherance and counsel in this cause. For to tell truth, I am weary of an unsettled life, which is the very pestilence that happens unto Courtiers, that propound unto themselves no end of their time therein bestowed. Thus committing your Lordship to Almighty God, I take my leave, this 18th day of May.
>
> Your Lordship's to command,
> EDWARD OXEFORD [5]

Ward comments upon this letter of Oxford's as follows:

> That he should attempt, at the age of forty, to commute an annuity of £1000 a year seems most extraordinary. Well might he say that the Queen would make "no evil bargain"! It seems, on the whole, most probable that Burghley, who knew by bitter experience his son-in-law's complete ignorance of the value of money, quietly allowed the matter to drop.

[4] The hereditary claim of Lord Oxford to the custody of the Forest of Essex was being discussed at this time before Lord Chancellor Hatton.—Ward; p. 305, note. (Needless to say, he did not receive it.)

[5] Ward; p. 306; cit. Lansdowne MSS., 68.6.

We agree that Oxford showed a marked financial ineptitude. It was founded upon just such indifference to money as that to which the plays attest again and again. But he also showed a desire to do his part towards his children, together with a proper feeling of responsibility for them and towards his father-in-law, which is quite belied by the inscription the self-righteous Burghley caused to be engraved in "brass eternal." Fate can be capricious as well as cruel, but it is not through accident that Edward de Vere suffered a "wounded name."

It was Christopher Hatton who, as Lord Chancellor in 1590, had forced the settlement of Oxford's debts to the Master of Wards, Lord Burghley. The nature and source of these debts is a mystery. From the time he became a Royal Ward in 1562 until his banishment from court in 1581, the Earl of Oxford had lived on an extravagant scale, never more so than while in ward to William Cecil. During his minority the account-books, still extant, show his scale of expenditure to have been that of a wealthy prince. He spent enormous sums throughout his sixteen months of travel; and, with one exception, the first sales of his estates were arranged while he was in Italy, for the most part by Burghley himself.[6]

In 1576, five estates were sold; in 1577, three; in 1578 and 1579, two and five respectively; then in 1580, the first year which saw him financing a company of actors, thirteen estates were sold; and one more in 1581, the year of his disgrace. Four went in 1582, five in 1583, seven in 1584, two in 1585. The total number of estates sacrificed was forty-seven out of the eighty-six he had inherited. Between the years 1576 and 1585, he acquired three properties by purchase or by grant. Before 1576 he had sold only one manor, and this was to finance his trip to the Continent.

He had continued to live extravagantly, after the temporary economic and emotional depression, on his return from his sojourn in Europe, buying a costly town house, Fisher's Folly, which became known as Vere House. In addition, he maintained the country houses, Wivenhoe, Bilton on the Avon in Warwickshire, and a few others besides.

William Cecil had begun his official career with Elizabeth as a comparatively poor man. His salary as Principal Secretary of State was 100 pounds per annum; his salary as Lord Treasurer is not known, but he made vast sums through suits and forfeitures, as well as by the seizure of monasteries and other Catholic properties. He had several magnificent homes and maintained large staffs of servants; he was frequently host to the Queen on her progresses and

[6] It will be recalled that in 1577 Burghley had been moved to make a public denial of an accusation that he had "misused my Lord of Oxford's funds."

spent money lavishly on these occasions. When he died, in 1599, he was the owner of 300 estates.

Upon his marriage to Anne Cecil, Lord Oxford was induced to arrange for Castle Hedingham, the great ancestral seat of the Veres, to be her jointure, securing this promise by a bond of 4000 pounds ($160,000 in today's value), to be void on Anne's death. Three years after her death in 1588, he conveyed Castle Hedingham to Burghley and his own daughters. At that time much of the castle was dismantled.

Not to be overlooked, of course, are the heavy losses the Earl had sustained through his unlucky investments in voyages of exploration during the late 1570's, these having amounted to some 5000 pounds (or $200,000, by today's count).

We have related how Elizabeth abruptly turned upon Lord Chancellor Hatton after he had forced the settlement of Oxford's debts in 1591, thus evincing a shrewd comprehension of his spiteful motives, and how her demand that Hatton himself pay a sum nearly twice as great "representing arrears of tenths and first fruits" shocked him so seriously that he did not recover but died during that same year. But Burghley seems to have pursued an unwavering course of successful aggrandizement.[7]

In 1589, the Earl of Oxford was living at Fisher's Folly, which occupied the site that is now Devonshire Square. Stowe says it was "a large and beautiful house, with gardens of pleasure, bowling alleys and such-like." According to Phillips:

> It stood in the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopgate (where William Shakspeare is reported to have owed for taxes, 1597–1600). Aubrey recorded that this Shakspeare lived "in Shoreditch at Hog-lane, within six doors of Norton Folgate." Anyone living at Fisher's Folly had only to walk five minutes straight up the street to be in the centre of Norton Folgate, where Marlowe lived. But we know from Kyd's own letter in 1591 he was sharing a room with Marlowe; and it is therefore highly probable, if not certain, that Kyd also was in Norton Folgate. Close by lived Robert Greene and Robert Poley. James Burbage lived in Hollowell Street adjoining Hog-lane. Adjoining Fisher's Folly were four messuages, purchased in 1585 by the well-known Alleyns, Edward and John [actors]. When the Earl of Oxford vacated Fisher's Folly in 1591, it was occupied by William Cornwallis, who employed Thomas Watson as tutor to his son.[8]

Thomas Watson, who had dedicated his *Hekatompathia* to Lord Oxford seven years before, had been one of the Euphuists under the Earl's patronage, and would have found other employment only when Oxford abandoned his London house, which had been a center for the writers and wits whom he supported as long as he was able to do so, in the face of Burghley's protracted opposition.

When Kyd was haled before the authorities on a charge of atheism, he defended himself by stating:

> My first acquaintance with this Marlowe [who was known to be an atheist] rose upon his bearing name to serve my lord, although his lordship never knew his service but in writing for his players, for never could my Lord endure his name or sight when he heard of his conditions, nor would indeed the form of divine prayer used daily in his Lordship's house have quartered with such reprobates.

As Phillips observes, it is quite obvious who his Lordship was: he kept players, he was a patron of playwrights, he was not a member of the Privy Council, and he was "sensitive about the Council's opinion of his orthodoxy." All this was certainly true of Oxford and of no other English lord of that period. He had just shown, in his current play, *The Winter's Tale*, a strong sympathy for the Catholic Mary; and he had been accused by the French Ambassador of making a profession of the Catholic faith in 1580, though his name was not on the Vatican list of Catholic nobles in England. His early training had been in the Catholic religion; and it is a commonplace that first influences fix the emotional patterns which persist against later questionings of the intellect, lessons of experience, or dictates of policy.

The decade of the 1580's, although brilliantly fruitful, had been a time of many difficulties and much sorrow for the Earl of Oxford. The '90's seemed to be beginning no less unhappily.

[7] It seems to us highly significant that Hatton's decisions as Lord Chancellor have been "lost," since Burghley was meticulous about preserving records which showed his own actions in a favorable light. Does this not smell of the "fish" with which Oxford as dramatist so frequently connected his Cecilian characters?

[8] *Ld. B. in Sh.;* pp. 54-5. Our investigations indicate that the dates on line 2, above, should be 1596–97.