

CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE



IT REMAINS to speak of certain late sonnets and to emphasize the poet's expressed intention that they should be given to the world, as well as his unmistakable acceptance of anonymity. He expected to be taken at his word; but he has not always been Far from it!

And all in war with Time for love of you,
As he takes from you, *I engrave you new*. (15.)

But were some child of yours alive that time,
You should live twice,—in it and *in my time*. (17.)

*So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee*. (18.)

Yet, do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong,
My love shall in *my verse ever live young*. (19.)

And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,
When that shall vade, *my verse distils your truth*. (54.)

No. 55 must be quoted in its entirety; it is clearly addressed to a prince:

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, *shall outlive this powerful time*;
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
*'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth*; your praise shall still find room
*Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom*.
So till the judgment that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes. (55.)

Here he seems to have the dramas in mind: "Shall you pace forth . . . and dwell in lover's eyes"; they will be "the living record of your memory." The phrase "all-oblivious enmity" tells much. It was this which blotted out the father: he was determined that it should not blot out the son. He reveals these things to us. We must heed them.

And yet to times in hope *my verse shall stand*,
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand. (60.)

His beauty shall in *these black lines* be seen,
And *they shall live*, and he in them still green. (63.)

O! none, unless this miracle have might,
That in *black ink* my love may still shine bright. (65.)

Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read;

And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead;

You still shall live, such virtue hath my pen,
Where breath most breathes, even in the moults of men. (81.)

The reference here again may be to the plays, as well as the Sonnets, for, from the time of his birth, the Fair Youth is portrayed in them.

The poet apostrophizes his Muse in 100 and 101, in the former apparently reproaching himself for having wasted his time on *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*:

Spend'st thou *thy fury on some worthless song*,
Darkening thy power to lend *base subjects* light?
Return, forgetful Muse, and straight redeem
In gentle numbers time so idly spent;
Sing to the ear that doth thy lays esteem
And gives thy pen both skill and argument.

Give my love fame faster than Time wastes life;
So thou prevent'st his scythe and crooked knife. (100.)

"Thy fury" is the familiar *furor poeticus*, elsewhere called "a poet's rage"—the creative force at the mercy of the "invisible commander."

Excuse not silence so; for 't lies in thee
To make him much outlive a gilded tomb
And to be prais'd of ages yet to be. (101.)

And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent. (107.)

These lines give ample and definite testimony that Lord Oxford intended the Sonnets to be preserved and published for posterity. That he left them in Southampton's keeping is suggested in No. 74:

But be contented: when that fell arrest
Without all bail shall carry me away,
My life hath in this line some interest,
Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.
When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
The very part was consecrate to thee.

The earth can have but earth, which is his due;
My spirit is thine, the better part of me;
So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
The prey of worms, my body being dead,
The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,
Too base of thee to be remembered.

The worth of that is that which it contains,
And that is this, and this with thee remains. (74)

How anyone can read this sonnet—which was written by Hamlet himself—and deny that the poet was addressing his beloved son, is more than we can comprehend. "My spirit is thine, the better part of me." No man who had sons and daughters would write thus to a young friend: certainly no man who had the strong dynastic sense that Shakespeare manifests in all his work.

An interesting illustration of Oxford's preoccupation with lineage appears in No. 59, in which, by the way, he speaks in his dramatist's role of rewriting earlier plays as bearing "the second burden of a former child," when "labouring for invention." (He may mean rewriting old tales, but we think he also means revising his own.) It so happens that there is extraneous proof of this practice of his; to quote which we shall make a brief digression.

In his *Marginalia*, Gabriel Harvey writes of Axiophilus (Lover of Truth), who is, of course, the Earl of Oxford, thus:

No marvel, though Axiophilus be so slow in publishing his exercises, that is so hasty in dispatching them; being one that *vigorously censures himself, impartially examines others; and deemes nothing honourable or commendable in a poet that is not divine, or illuminate; singular or rare; excellent, or in sum way notable.* I doubt not, but it is the case of manie other, that have drunk of the pure water of the virgin fountain. . . . And amongst so manie gentle, noble, and royall spirits meethinks I see *sum heroicall thing in the cloudes: mie souveraigne hope.* Axiophilus will forget himself, or will remember to leave sum memorials behind him: and to make an use of so many rhapsodies, cantos, hymnes, odes, epigrams, sonets and discourses as idle howers, or *at flowing fitts* he hath compiled.

He makes it clear that he hopes this "gentle, noble, and royall" spirit may slip, "forget himself"—or give his secret away—and that his monumental accomplishment will be revealed like a glory from the heavens by his leaving "sum memorials behind him."

Even so far back as 1578 Harvey, in his oration at Audley End, had spoken of the Earl's copious, scholarly, and cosmopolitan output:

I have seen many Latin verses of thine, yea, even more English verses are extant; thou hast drunk deep draughts not only of the Muses in France and Italy, but hast learned the manners of many men, and the arts of foreign countries.

But to return to Sonnet 59:

If there be nothing new, but that which is
Hath been before, how are our brains beguiled,
Which, *labouring for invention, bear amiss*
The second burden of a former child!
O! that record could with a backward look,
Even of five hundred courses of the sun,
Show me *your image* in some antique book,
Since mind at first in character was done,
That I might see what *the old world* could say
To this composed wonder of your frame;
Wher' we are mended, or wher' better they,
Or whether revolution be the same.

O! sure I am the wits of former days
To subjects worse have given admiring praise.

If this sonnet were written in 1598, precisely "five hundred" years had passed since Aubrey de Vere had been made Earl of Oxford by Henry II, the son of Queen Matilda, thus founding England's noblest family. Dedicated to Southampton, these words are almost testimony enough to prove the case. It may not be an accident that the dynastic 57 and 58 immediately precede this.

Nos. 57 and 58 are among those in which the poet is too self-abnegating for modern taste. No. 58, which should apparently come first, begins:

That god forbid that made me first your *slave*,
I should in thought control your times of pleasure,
Or at your hand the account of hours to crave,
Being your *vassal*, bound to stay your leisure!

However, it must be remembered that not only a father suffering from a sense of guilt speaks here, but also a feudal lord, to whom "slave" and "vassal" are accustomed terms. If the Elizabethan habit of thought was different from ours—fantastic: clothing ideas and events in symbolism, handling language with the crossword-puzzle technique—the feudal was even more so; and Lord Oxford was speaking to one whom he regarded as the heir by divine right to the throne of England. That he was obsessed by his frustrate fatherhood, his inability to give his son his great name and royal heritage, is demonstrated again and again, and this imposed upon him a humility from which pain and disaster were bound to result unless his "nerves were brass or hammer'd steel." Besides being acutely sensitive, the Earl was capable of the widest extremes of emotion. From exuberant gaiety he passed

into depths of melancholy, from sanguine hope into abject despair, from haughty pride into spiritual abasement. It was his romantic temperament, his passion, his *élan*, as well as his keen perception and observation of human character, which gave him the profound dramatic sense that motivated the plays.

To leave poor me thou hast *the strength of laws*,
Since why to love I can allege no cause. (49.)

He was corroded by his feeling of unworthiness in having failed his son.

But from the introspective melancholy which expressed itself in Timon, Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, and some of the Sonnets, his spirits would rise again; and it was the irrepressible jester mocking his own solemn verses when he wrote Armado's letter in a revision of *Love's Labour Lost* and made sport with his own significant word-play (IV.1.60 *et seq.*):

Boyet [reading.] 'By heaven, that thou art *fair* is most infallible; *true*, that thou art *beauteous*; *truth itself* that thou art lovely. More fairer than fair; beautiful than beauteous, *true* than *truth itself*, have commiseration on *thy heroical vassal*!

There follows a highly allusive passage about the King's marrying a beggar—which means the Queen's "marrying" a subject; and this may have been in the original version. "The catastrophe is a nuptial," he says cryptically, meaning of course the reverse.

Princess. What *plume of feathers* is he that indited this letter? What vane? what weathervcock?

The reply is that it is the court-jester,

... one that makes sport
To the prince and his book-mates.

The lines of Sonnet 106 echo the opening stanza of *The Faerie Queene*, issued in 1596, and the tribute, as Canon Rendall has noted, is addressed almost as much to Oxford's friend Spenser as to the actual recipient:

When in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beauty making beautiful old rime,
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique pen would have express'd
Even such beauty as you master now.
So all their praises are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring;
And, for they look'd but with divining eyes,
They had not skill enough your worth to sing;

912

For we, which now behold these present days,
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

No. 77 patently accompanies the gift of a notebook to the Fair Youth, while presenting him—and us—with advice from the greatest writer the English race has produced. "Keep a notebook," he says, in effect. That he himself did so is implicit in the circumstance that his earliest recorded gift from the Queen was a diamond-studded tablet, and in his references to the use of such "tables" in Sonnet 122, in *Hamlet* (I.5.107), and in Cassius-Burghley's testy speech to Brutus-Oxford in *Julius Caesar* (IV.3.97):

Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear,
Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste;
The vacant leaves thy mind's imprint will bear,
And of *this book* this learning mayst thou taste.
The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show
Of mouthed graves will give thee memory;
Thou by thy dial's shady stealth mayst know
Time's thievish progress to eternity.
Look, *what thy memory cannot contain*
Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find
Those children nurs'd, deliver'd from thy brain,
To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.
These offices, so oft as thou wilt look,
Shall profit thee, and much enrich thy book. (77.)

Here again he speaks of a man's work as his "children," or "child," as in No. 59.¹

Whether Sonnets 71, 72, 74 were written before Nos. 107, 108, 75, and 73 we cannot judge. Our own inclination is to place them a little earlier, during the period of the poet's ill-health which preceded the Queen's death and increased after that event until his own followed a year later. It seems beyond doubt that No. 116 was written to Southampton while he was in serious trouble arising from his ill-advised and reckless adventure with Essex, the uprising of 1601, for which he was committed to the Tower under sentence of death. His father assures him that, in spite of the alteration in him and in his loyalties, his own love will not alter. Long ago the boy's "rosy lips and cheeks" had been the subject of his verse, but now it is the unalterable fidelity of "true minds" which concerns him. There are the usual name-clues and the familiar allusion to the mullioned star of the Veres; for this sonnet is a pledge of faith from a Vere to a Vere:

Let me not to the marriage of *true minds*
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,

¹ In *The Winter's Tale* (III.3.66), the Shepherd says, on finding Perdita (the plays): "A boy or a child, I wonder!"

Or bends with the remover to remove;
 O, not it is an ever-fixed mark,
 That looks on *tempests* and is *never* shaken;
 It is the *star* to every wandering bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error, and upon me prov'd,
 I *never* writ, nor no man *ever* lov'd.

The concluding lines of Sonnet 25 are:

Then happy I, that love and am below'd,
 Where I may not *remove* nor be *remov'd*.

He is saying here again that he cannot really be "removed" from his beloved son nor will his love yield—"bend"—to the circumstances that would "remove" him.

It must have been the ultimate grief to Lord Oxford, frail in health now from his excessive labors, and from excessive emotions too, that his son should have been involved in a conspiracy against the Crown. He himself was obliged to endure the tragic ordeal of sitting with the Commission that passed sentence upon the two rash young Earls, Essex and Southampton; but he must have known that Elizabeth would never allow the death-sentence to be carried out upon their son. Undoubtedly he would have taken desperate measures to prevent this, and well she knew it. He must, indeed, have expected her to release the young Earl from the Tower after a reasonable period, but she did not. Southampton was still there at the time of her death.

The word "tempests" in line 6 is characteristic: for Oxford always saw his disasters as cataclysms of nature, from the time of the first versions of *Timon*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, through Sonnet 34, until the final titanic débâcle of *Lea*, when the betrayed King wanders mindless, lashed by the fury of the storm.

The Third Earl of Southampton sowed his wild oats very much as his father had done in his heyday, but came through apparently without permanent harm. He developed into an admirable man. From having squandered favors upon him in his youth, the Queen changed and grew stern with him at about the time of his majority, often making his life difficult. Mrs. Stopes remarks parenthetically that "It is strange how often the Queen's rights [i.e., prerogatives] interfered with his gifts [of properties, etc.] to his friends." And later she says, "There seems to have been many hitches in his affairs, and he had little power to work his will."² He was at sea with Essex in

1597—on the famous "Islands Voyage"—making attacks on Spain (Sir Francis Vere was in their company); but he "received no recognition whatever for his special bravery in action. Disappointed and embittered, he turned his attention anew to his chief consoler, Elizabeth Vernon, who [a Maid of Honour] noted for his benefit all the Queen's varying and discontented words. The Queen frowned upon matrimony and they took a forbidden path."³

The Queen publicly humiliated him, as she had Leicester a dozen years before, when she summarily ordered Essex to rescind Southampton's appointment as Commander of the Horse, in Ireland; this, although the young Earl had acquitted himself with marked distinction in his command, having made a brilliant and courageous charge. Evidently Essex had protested warmly, informing his royal mistress of the general resentment her injustice had caused, for on July 19, 1599, she wrote him as follows:

For the matter of Southampton, it is strange to us that his continuance or displacing should work so great an alteration, either in yourself (valuing our commandments as you ought), or in the disposition of our army. And when you say further that divers, or the most, of the voluntary gentlemen are so discouraged thereby, as they begin to desire passports, and prepare to return, we cannot as yet be persuaded but that the love of our service, and the duty which they owe us, have been as strong motives to these their travails and hazards as any affection to the Earl of Southampton or any other.⁴

From this, no less than from her abrupt *volte-face* to a seemingly capricious persecution, it is only too apparent that Elizabeth was jealous, that she feared Southampton's popularity (and perhaps Oxford's too) and was determined to keep him down. During the last decade of her reign, her own popularity had visibly waned. She was jealous of her power; and age, instead of mellowing her, had only made her more grasping.

In the matter of her not acknowledging Southampton as her son and heir to the Crown, the fact should not be minimized that Queen Elizabeth had become the victim of her own legend of virginity. The whole nation would have been shocked to learn that their treasured myth was baseless. Strange as it may seem, the nation would probably still be shocked to learn the truth. The English live and die by and for their traditions: it is part of their strength, the inspiration of their greatness. But in the early seventeenth century their fidelity to a national legend led them into an injustice which is a blot upon the nation's integrity.

Such myths grow and proliferate, soon getting out of hand. And

³ Op. cit.; p. 112. Mrs. Stopes never suspected who his "chief consoler" actually was.

⁴ *The Letters of Q. Elizabeth*, ed. by G. B. Harrison; p. 267.

this was no doubt what happened in Elizabeth's case. For instance, in 1582, among the books issued by the Stationers' Company were the following:

The Second Lampe of Virginitie: containing divers goodlie Meditations and Christian Praiers, made by sundrie veruous Queenes, and other devout and godlie Women in our time; and first, a godlie meditation of the inward love of the soule towards Christ our Lord; composed first in French by the virtuous Ladie Margaret, Queene of Navarre; aptlie, exactlie, and fruitfullie translated by our most gracious Sovereigne Ladie Queene Elizabeth, in the tender and maidenlic yeares of her youth and virginitie, to the great benefit of God's Church, and comfort to the godlie;

The Third Lampe of Virginitie: containing sundrie formes of divine Meditation and Christian Prayers, penned by the godlie and learned; to be propertie used of the Queenes Most excellent Maistie, as especially upon the 17 date of November, being the day of the gladness of hir heart, and memorable feast of hir Coronation, so on all other daies and times at her Grace's pleasure;⁵

There was any amount of this sort of thing. Queen Elizabeth's chastity was official; it had become an established tradition; it was sacrosanct. As someone has said, the people had come to identify her idealized personality with their newly acquired greatness. The Privy Council would have insisted upon fidelity to the legend, quite as Cecil did in his letter to Mundt, in 1564.

Since Southampton's status, had he been simply a royal bastard, would have been inconsiderable, we cannot but suppose that his birth, or his parents' union, had in some way been "legitimized," or sanctioned by the Church.⁶

The Earl of Southampton served his country with distinction and grew in stature, becoming one of the most eminent poets of England. In 1598 he finally married Mistress Vernon and, it may be added, lived happily with her and their children until his death in the Low Countries in 1624. He could easily have become permanently embittered, but he did not. Nevertheless, he was very proud and, to the end of his life, disturbed James from time to time by his independence of spirit.

During the latter 1590's, however, the young Earl's position was highly unsatisfactory and would have rankled. Lord Oxford's resentment towards Elizabeth for her treatment of the Fair Youth must have been at times overwhelming. He longed to have the young prince reap his just deserts and shrank from being a hindrance to him. When he was in ill-health, his fond anxiety deepened his melancholy and

⁵ Nichols: *Progresses*, vol. II, p. 396.

⁶ Henry VIII had Parliament pass a law giving him the right to designate his successor, in order that he might name his illegitimate son, Henry, Duke of Richmond, as heir apparent. This came to nothing, because the young Duke died.

his sense of his own unworthiness. It was in such periods of depression that he wrote the tragic sonnets numbered 71, 72, and 74; perhaps 73 also, though that seems softer, more resigned.

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell:
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it; for I love you so
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
O! if, I say, you look upon this verse,
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
But let your love even with my life decay;
*Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
And mock you with me after I am gone.* (71.)

This, from the man whose fiercest pride and most jealous care had been for his "good name," is an expression of utter defeat. "Do not so much as my poor name rehearse." With a renunciation born of selfless love, the greatest of all poets, premier Earl of England and Lord Great Chamberlain, bows his head to anonymity.

O! lest the world should task you to recite
What merit liv'd in me that you should love,
After my death, dear love, forget me quite,
For you in me can nothing worthy prove;
Unless you would devise some virtuous lie,
To do more for me than mine own desert,
And hang more praise upon deceased I
Than niggard truth would willingly impart:
O! lest your true love may seem false in this,
That you for love speak well of me untrue,
My name be buried where my body is,
And live no more to shame nor me nor you.

*For I am sham'd by that which I bring forth,
And so should you, to love things nothing worth.* (72.)

He calls himself "untrue," because, like Tarquin, he had violated the code of knighthood. This was the cause of the Fair Youth's birth. And since he thus fell from his high estate, his very "name" must "be buried." He is "shamed" by having begotten a royal son whom he cannot claim; and he is "shamed" by having created immortal works which he cannot acknowledge. The Philistines have conquered: the artist is vanquished. His tragedy is complete. From the depths of his disillusionment he accepts anonymity.

In No. 81, which was evidently written earlier, he is equally explicit; and it is here that he speaks as the dying Henry IV does, who was also a usurper of royal privilege and place:

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
 Or you survive when I in earth am rotten,
 From hence your memory death cannot take,
 Although in me each part will be forgotten.
 Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
 Though I, once gone, to all the world must die;
 The earth can yield me but a common grave,
 When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie.
 Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
 Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read;
 And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,
 When all the breathers of this world are dead;
 You still shall live,—such virtue hath my pen,—
 Where breath most breathes,—even in the mouths of men. (81.)

But this we have interpolated. It has not the mood of profound personal melancholy pervading the group we are considering. We have already discussed No. 74 in another connection.

In February 1601, Southampton was imprisoned in the Tower for his part in the conspiracy which led to the execution of the Earl of Essex. Undoubtedly Lord Oxford kept in touch with him there and must have written many sonnets to him at that time, which may later have been destroyed, by his or another's hand, as too revealing.

The Queen died on March 24, 1603, and was succeeded by James VI of Scotland. Within a few days of his formal acceptance of the Crown of England, James wrote a letter, dated April 5, 1603, ordering the release of the Earl of Southampton from the Tower.

The Earl was given his liberty on April 10, and on the 16th the King granted him a special pardon, with restitution to him and his heirs of titles, lands and properties, investing him "with his own hand with great pomp," adding "a post worth £6000 a year"—captaincy of the Isle of Wight and stewardship of the Royal Demesnes of the Island. We may be very sure that the nobleman who was by this time acknowledged by his contemporaries as the country's greatest poet and dramatist (although his works were never publicly credited to him by name even then), the dramatist whom James himself called "great Oxford," had much to do with the reinstatement of the young Earl. And it is understandable that the Earl of Oxford should have been willing to make the additions and alterations in *Hamlet* which partially identified the noblest of all his creations with the new young King of England. Such a compliment was duly appreciated by the royal Scotsman, an enthusiast of the theatre, and like Hamlet, a patron of players, as well as a scholar with a speculative turn of mind. In broken health, Lord Oxford was badly shaken by the Queen's death. He celebrated the turn of events, so fortunate for his son, with a sonnet pitched in a minor key though touched with a grandeur appropriate to its subject and to his own indomitable intention:

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
 Of the wide world dreaming on things to come,
 Can yet the lease of my true love control,
 Suppos'd as forfeit to a confin'd doom.
 The mortal moon haith her eclipse endur'd,
 And the sad augurs mock their own presage;
 Incertainties now crown themselves assur'd,
 And peace proclaims olives of endless age.
 Now with the drops of this most balmy time
 My love looks fresh, and Death to me subscribes,
 Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor time,
 While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes.
 And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
 When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent. (107.)

He had been in an anguish of fear regarding the fate of his beloved son, whose life has been "suppos'd as forfeit" to the "doom" of confinement in the Tower for its duration. The world's "prophetic soul" dreaming on the future (of England and its rulers to come) was as little able to "control" his love's fate—or "lease"—as himself was. "The mortal moon" was, of course, Elizabeth, and "her eclipse" her death, the conventional belief being that she would shine again in heaven.

In July 1595, when the Queen was already oppressed by age and in poor health, Sir Thomas Cecil had written his brother, Robert:

I left the moon in the wane at my last being at the Court; I hear now it is a half-moon again, yet I think it will never be at the full, though I hope it will never be eclipsed, you know whom I mean.⁷

Oxford uses the same word when Antony says (*A.andC.*:III.11.153-5):

Alack! our terrene moon
 Is now eclips'd; and it portends alone
 The fall of Antony.

"The sad augurs" had, of course, predicted that the Virgin Queen would die without an heir; and they might now "mock their own presage," for it was not true, although it appeared so. Elizabeth's eternal "incertainties" at last had the seal of assurance: she had allowed her chance to go by for having her son succeed her, and James, with whom she had been dicker ing indecisively for so long, was to be crowned. His program was peace with Spain, his highest ambition to be called *Rex Pacificus*.

"Olives of endless age"—an endless peace—is, according to Canon Rendall, "echoed in Gervase Markham's tribute to 'the incomparable King—entering not with an olive branch in his hand, but with a whole forest of Olives round about him'; and there could be [the

⁷ Slopes, op. cit.; quot. Salisbury Papers, V, 273.

adds] no more telling authentication of the lines than that prefixed by 'the Translators' to the Authorized Version of our English Bible.

Whereas it was the expectation of many, who wished not well unto our Sion, that, upon the setting of that bright *Occidental Star*, Queen Elizabeth of most happy memory . . . the appearance of Your Majesty, as of the *Sun* in his strength, instantly dispelled those supposed and surmised mists, and gave . . . exceeding cause of comfort . . . accompanied with peace and tranquility at home and abroad."⁸

We hope it will not be held too flippanant if we suggest that, since Oxford says here, for the first time in the Sonnets, that he himself will "live in this poor rime," while Death "insults o'er"—or annihilates—tribes of "dull and speechless" men, he was characteristically tucking a pun into "peace proclaims [that] O. lives." For was he not saying that he would live, and was not his son another O., who might be succeeded by a posterity living to an "endless age"?

The two final lines tell his son that, after all, he has been able to give him a surer immortality than his royal and tyrannical mother could have done or than Burghley's "tomb of brass" would provide. This is his amends.

Sonnet 108 followed soon after 107. Southampton looks older after his long imprisonment; the father's relief, love, and loyalty breathe in every line.

The Second Part of *King Henry IV*, which was undoubtedly revised at this time, has many parallels with this and other late sonnets. It is Lord Oxford's, the dramatist's, son, who is in truth Prince Hal, speaking when the newly crowned Henry V addresses the Chief Justice (V.2.70-1):

What! rate, rebuke, and roughly send to prison
The immediate heir of England?

And it was at the time when Death subscribed to him that Lord Oxford wrote in poignant periods of the dying Henry IV.

He must have felt a brief resurgence of pride and joy in the companionship of the Fair Youth after his release from the Tower. Sonnets 108 and 75 seem to belong to this time of uplifted spirits.

What's in the brain, that ink may character,
Which hath not figur'd to thee my true spirit?
What's new to speak, what new to register,
That may express my love, or thy dear merit?
Nothing, sweet boy; but yet like prayers divine,
I must each day say o'er the very same;
Counting no old thing old, thou mine, I thine,
Even as when first I hallow'd thy fair name.
So that eternal love in love's fresh case
Weighs not the dust and injury of age,

⁸ *Personal Chances*, p. 167.

Nor gives to necessary wrinkles place,
But makes antiquity for eye his page;

Finding the first conceit of love there bred,
Where time and outward form would show it dead. (108.)

He has already demonstrated in every way that "ink may character" his fidelity to his son. There is nothing further to say unless he repeats each day the same devotion as one daily repeats a prayer divine. The younger man is now in his thirtieth year, and though he "looks fresh," yet there are, after all he has endured, "necessary wrinkles." However, to love, these—"the dust and injury of age"—are nothing. The poet "makes antiquity . . . his page" to write upon, finding still registered there the "first conceit," the picture, or image, of his love. And there is the characteristic *sous-entendu*: he still thinks of this man now grown older as his eternal little "page," although in "outward form" he no longer exists as such.

So are you to my thoughts as food to life,
Or as sweet-season'd showers are to the ground;
And for the peace of you I hold such strife
As 'twixt a miser and his wealth is found;
Now proud as an enjoyer, and anon
Doubting the flitting age will steal his treasure;
Now counting best to be with you alone,
Then better'd that the world may see my pleasure.
Sometime, all full with feasting on your sight,
And by and by clean starved for a look;
Possessing or pursuing no delight,
Save what is had or must from you be took.
Thus do I pine and surfeit day by day,
Or gluttoning on all, or all away. (75.)

The relief of having his son free again, after two years of agonized suspense, dwarfs every other feeling. All he requires is to bask in the beloved presence. They have come through all the bad times—the times of the youth's wantonness, his rebellion against loving authority, of his temporary arrogance, and finally, of his reckless insubordination and harrowing punishment. No longer does the father concern himself about what "the wise world" may think; he is even proud to have it see the pleasure he takes in his son. His own days are numbered: he lives only in the moment; he has renounced all claims for himself and, like a miser, gloats over "the peace of you"—the tranquil undemanding association with his loved one.

But like everything else, this too will pass. He can see in his son's eyes that the realization of his approaching end is shared by the younger man.

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,

Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang;
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west;
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.

*This thou perceiv'st which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.* (73.)

But approaching death isolates a man from the living. He withdraws into himself, becomes benumbed, as the world and even his loved ones seem to recede. External appearances are of no account. And now the poet communes with himself:

Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
Fool'd by these rebel powers that thee array,
Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
Within be fed, without be rich no more;
So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
And Death once dead, there's no more dying then. (146.)⁹

A few sonnets remain, Nos. 44, 45, 103, 113, 115, all obviously addressed to the Fair Youth and all expressing devotion.

* * * * *

The Earl of Southampton had a close association with Horatio Vere and Francis Vere, Lord Oxford's favorite cousins, fighting with them in the Low Countries and elsewhere. He was also thrown intimately with Henry de Vere, the Eighteenth Earl of Oxford, when the boy grew old enough to take part in martial exploits. (It would be interesting to know whether this son of Lord Oxford's second marriage had been named for his older half-brother, Henry Wriothesley.) In June 1624, when they were both appointed to the rank of Colonel in a campaign in the Netherlands, a difference between these two arose over a matter of precedence. It was finally resolved by the young Earl of Oxford's being given the right of precedence in court and civil entertainments, the Earl of Southampton in military matters. Mrs. Stopes, who never plumbed the mystery of Southampton's origin,

⁹ John Donne's beautiful sonnet, *Death, Be Not Proud*, concludes: "And Death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die."

tells about a print in R. Gouling's Portraits of the Wriothesleys, which shows these two Earls mounted upon their horses side by side, "Oxford with his plump, healthy face, Southampton with his keen experienced eyes, looking towards his rival, a world of pathos in his expression." ("For there can live no hatred in thine eye.")

It is a highly significant fact that, after the death of Lord Burghley—whom, by the way, Southampton had strongly disliked—the hunchbacked Robert Cecil, who had heretofore consistently "kept him at bay," did all he could to balk the younger man.¹⁰ This fact may well account for some of the extra ingredients of malice injected, as a possible afterthought, into the character of Richard III.

A remarkable story is told in *Gods Peace and the Queenes Victissitudes of a House*, 1539-1615,¹¹ in the report made by Sir John Peyton, Lieutenant of the Tower of London from 1598 to 1603, as follows:

That the Earl of Lincoln had come to him about six days before the Queen's death. Knowing the Earl was well-disposed towards King James, Sir John had sounded the Nobleman regarding the succession, and had urged him that, as deeds are better than words, he should, after the Queen's passing, give active support to King James.

Two days before the Queen died, the Earl of Lincoln returned to Sir John, and passed the night at the Tower, when Lord Lincoln said he had discovered opposition against his Maiesties Tytle, and that there was a great Nobleman had opened hym selfe upon that poynt and had delle with hym to Joyne as a partye in the action.

Somewhat alarmed, Sir John had desired more information; whereupon the Earl replied that he had been invyted by a great Noble man in Hackney, where he was extraordinarily feasted, at the which he much marvelled for that there was no great correspondence between them, this Noble man having Precedence of him in Rancke, where he towise me I myght knowe hym there being but one of that qualyte dwelling there.

This Noble man and he, being, after dinner, retired aparte from all companye, began to discourse with hym, declaring that as Peers, they were bound to concern themselves with the Succession to the Crown, and the Earl of Lyncolne ought to have more regard than others, because he had a Nephewe of the bludde Royall, naming my Lord Hastings, whom he perswaded the Earl of Lyncolne to send for; and that there should be means used to conveye hym over into France, where he should fynde friends that woulde make hym a partye, of the which there was a Precedent in former tymes. He also invayed much against the Nation of Scots.

The Earl of Lincoln Brake off his discourse, absolutely disavowing all that the great Noble man had moved.

Sir John Peyton pointed out to Lord Lincoln his folly in silencing the Earl of Oxford, before getting all possible information. Peyton de-

¹⁰ Stopes: *op. cit.*

¹¹ By Norrey's, Jephson O'Connor, *et. al.* original contemporary records by means of connected phrases, etc. (1931). This passage is quoted by W. Kittle, in *Edna de V. and Shu*, though without a knowledge of the Peer proposed.

clared that he was at first much disturbed, but when the Earl had made him understand what *Peer* was meant, Sir John was relieved, for he knew hym to be so weak in body, in friends, in ability, and all other means to raise any combustion in the State, as I never feared any danger to proceed from so feeble a foundation.

Soon after the dinner at Hackney, the King was Proclaimed, and the great Nobleman's name was 'attested in the said Proclamation,' which caused the Earl of Lincoln to wonder.

This, then, was Lord Oxford's final effort to have his and the Queen's son receive his right of succession. What could be more fitting than that the great dramatist, who was probably at this very period writing of an earlier Prince Hal about to be crowned as Henry V—in his last revision of *King Henry IV*—should have reminded the Earl of Lincoln that means might be taken to convey Lord Hastings to France, where he would find friends that would "make him a party" to the cause of placing the rightful heir on the throne? The "precedent in former times" to which he alluded was that established by Henry Bolingbroke.

When Sir John Peyton realized, however, that it was the Earl of Southampton who was meant, he was relieved, for he believed this young man—now for two years his charge in the Tower of London—unequal to the proposed honor. Doubtless disgrace and the death-sentence, followed by two years in prison with no expectation of release, had taken the spirit out of the young Earl; for he was later to demonstrate before the world that he had far more strength, ability, and friends than Peyton had supposed. It is evident from the tenor of this account that neither Sir John Peyton nor the Earl of Lincoln knew the secret of Southampton's parentage.

How infinitely sad it is to picture "great Oxford" making this last dangerous effort to attain recognition for the son whom Elizabeth had so callously left to a bitter fate! Meeting with failure once again, the Earl perforce added his "attestation" to the Proclamation of James as King of England. He must have felt weary unto death as he drew toward him the manuscript upon which he had already poured out his heart and wrote:

... I do prophesy the election lights
On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice.

Although assured that his life was nearing its end, Lord Oxford did not die until the following year. It is noteworthy that immediately upon his death, Southampton was clapped into the Tower again, for no apparent cause. He was almost as suddenly released. And no doubt at this time he signed away for ever his right to the throne.¹²

King James, well knowing who Henry Wriothesley was, seems to

¹² Percy Allen's belief, in which we concur.

have been very fond of him. He stood godfather to the Earl's eldest son and bestowed upon the Earl himself many honorable appointments and benefits. In 1603, Southampton entertained Queen Anne with a performance of *Love's Labour's Lost*. There is no record of whether the author was able to be present.

If the Third Earl of Southampton was the person responsible for the publication of the Sonnets—in fulfillment of what he would have regarded, to say the least, as a sacred trust—and was, therefore, called "the onlie begetter," then "Mr. W.H." was a necessary disguise for the nobleman, H.W.

It seems most unlikely, supposing the bound collection had been preserved at Hackney and Lady Oxford had turned it over to William Hall, that Thorpe would have had the temerity to wish *him* the "Eternitie" which "Our Ever-Living Poet" had promised the noble youth who had inspired the Sonnets. As Sir Edmund Chambers says:

there is some unconscious humour in Thorpe's dedicating the volume to a printer whom he had not employed. To me it seems more difficult, every time I read the dedication, to believe that . . . the person to whom he wished eternitie was any other than the person to whom the 'ever-living poet' promised eternitie. Nor do I feel that in such a document there would be anything very out of the way either in the inversion of initials or in the suppression of an actual courtesy title.¹³

Whoever "Mr. W.H." may have been, however, there is no doubt as to the identity of the Poet. He would perforce be one who, though now deceased, would be in his verse "ever-living." The Sonnets were written to perpetuate the memory of the Fair Youth, the *Vere Youth* (in No. 54 "vade" is used for "fade"). They—most of them—were written "To one, of one, still such, and ever so,"—to the young man of whom the poet had said, "Tis thee, myself, that for myself I praise," and also, "My friend and I are one." They are the most intimate part of the secret story.

The dedication of the Sonnets reads:

TO THE ONLIE BEGETTER OF,
THESE INVING SONNETS,
M^r. W. H. ALL HAPPINESSE,
AND THAT ETERNITIE,
PROMISED.
BY,
OVR EVER-LIVING POET,
WISHEETH,
THE WELL-WISHING,
ADVENTURER IN,
SETTING,
FORTH,
T. T.

¹³ *William Shakespeares Sonnets*, vol. 1, p. 566.

Thomas Thorpe was, indeed, something of an adventurer in publishing these Sonnets!

Mr. Percy Allen writes of the pictorial head-pieces of the first edition (1609) of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*:

At its top [the head-piece to the title-page], in the middle, is seen the face of the Fair Youth decorated with a plume of Prince-of-Wales's feathers, and shewing the half-developed Tudor rose on either side. The Youth seems to be in the grip of two Dragons, and is pointed at by a winged Cupid on either side. Beneath each Cupid is a hare—the same hare, or "heir," that was hunted by Launce and Sir Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen*, while he was being exploited as an actor, *Young Wit*, in *Sir Thomas More*.

While exceedingly grateful to Mr. Allen for calling our attention to this important symbolism, we must take issue with him upon one comment and add another of our own. The two figures he calls Dragons appear to us to be Dolphins. And this is of high significance, since the word Dolphin, as we have said before, was frequently used for Dauphin by Elizabethan writers, including Shakespeare himself. (The Oxford Dictionary gives the derivation of Dauphin, *f.L.dolphinus DOLPHIN*.) We have noted that in his account of the visit of French dignitaries to England in 1581, Holinshed spoke of the "prince Dolphin"; and in *The Famous Victories*, Oxford himself uses this appellation for the Dauphin who sent the tennis-balls to Henry V.

For the other, Mr. Allen seems to have overlooked the Flower decorating each side of the design, suggestive of the "purple flower," or the "little western flower." The coincidence of these identifying symbols cannot be attributed to chance but were obviously intended to furnish the clue. If this is the case, it would have been essential to disguise the name of the person concerned, and the "Mr." was no less of a disguise than the reversal of the initials, "H.W." to read "W.H." "Mr." was the abbreviation for "Master." Furthermore, it must be remembered that the dramatist was called "Master Shakespeare," as Lancelot impressed upon his father that he was *Master* Lancelot, or Launcelot (as the name later became.) If the Fair Youth went by the name of Will Shakespeare, it was by this name that he was to be given the "Eternitie Promised by Our Ever-Living Poet," who had distinctly said, "My friend and I are one."

The second head-piece over the first sonnet [Mr. Allen continues] shews both the *Phoenix* and the *Turtle*, and, in the centre, the same mystical urn that we read of in the concluding lines of the *Threnos*.

To this *urne* let those repair

That are either *true* or *false*;

For these dead birds sigh a prayer.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Dark Lady and Fair Youth*.



SHAKE-SPEARES

SONNETS.

Neuer before Imprinted.

AT LONDON

By G. Eld for T. T. and are

to be sold by William Aspley.

1609. 24



SHAKE-SPEARES,
SONNETS.

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauties *Rose* might neuer die,
But as the ripper should by time decaie,
His tender heire might beare his memory:
But thou contracted to thine owne bright eyes,
Feed'st thy lights flame with selfe substantiall fewell,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thy selfe thy foe, to thy sweet selfe too cruell:
Thou that art now the worlds fresh ornament,
And only herauld to the gaudy spring,
Within thine owne bud burnest thy content,
And tender chorde makst vail in miggarding;
Pitty the world, or else this glutton be,
To eate the worlds due, by the graue and thee.

When fortie Winters shall befeige thy brow,
And digge deep trenches in thy beauties field,
Thy youthes proud liuery so gaz'd on now,
Will be a totter'd weed of final worth held:
Then being askt, where all thy beautie lies,
Where all the treasure of thy lusty daies;
To say within thine owne deepe funken eyes,
Were an all-eating shame, and thus selfe praise.
How much more praise deseru'd thy beauties vife,
If thou couldst answer this faire child of mine
Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse
Proouing his beautie by succession thine.

This



From the portrait at Welbeck Abbey.

Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton.

"Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory."

Sonnet 55

There is a further point. Since Shakespeare and his contemporaries not only played constantly upon the similarity between "son" and "sun," but also spelled son "sonne," we may be sure that the poet thought of Sonnets, or Sonnettes (sometimes Sonettes), as the appropriate form for eternizing the beloved Fair Youth—the Vere Youth. And there is another point still which seems to have been overlooked by the only other Oxfordians—two besides ourselves,¹⁵ so far as we are informed—who have become convinced by careful study and research that Southampton, the Fair Youth, was the poet's son and the Queen's. This is the fact that both Henry Wriothesley's most famous portrait and the portrait of the Earl of Oxford as a young man—the one he sent his wife as a present from Paris, in 1575—are in the possession of the Duke of Portland at Welbeck Abbey. And the owner of these two "Welbeck portraits" is a descendant of the Third Earl of Southampton, who was, indeed, the immortal Youth—how can it be gainsaid?—of our E-Ver-living Poet's deathless verse.