CHAPTER EIGHTY-SIX

WE HAVE ELSEWHERE NOTED and deplored the fact that Camden was obliged to write his history from the documents furnished him by Lord Burghley and that these had been ruthlessly edited to discredit, if not virtually to obliterate, the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, while glorifying the House of Cecil. In following Burghley's policy, the antiquarian was, of course, following England's policy, which was signally to foster and maintain the legend of Elizabeth's virginity. But that he was well aware of what he was doing and why it must be done is attested by

[17] Col. B. M. Ward: *The Mystery of Mr. W. H.*; pp. 81-2.

a daring performance upon Camden's part. He published a picture of the funeral procession of Queen Elizabeth which, by means of the symbolism so captivating to the minds of her people, made what seems to have been an extraordinary revelation.

We can do no better than to quote Mr. Percy Allen's comments upon this astonishing performance:

> Immediately behind the royal standard bearing the Queen's motto, *"Semper Eadem,"* with the Tudor Rose below it, comes the royal charger plumed on head and back, and led, as the inscription above the horse tells us, by "two Querries." (*sic.*)
>
> Directly upon seeing them, I asked myself, "Why two Querries, instead of Equerries?" Very soon I hit upon the reason. The elder "Query," a bearded man of mature age, is *not* holding the horse, but seems to be pointing, with his right hand, to his companion, a beardless youth dressed somewhat as "Shakespeare" is in the Droeshut portrait. Moreover, the two pennons upon the charger's head seem to point to the two Queries? Further, remembering that V and U, in 1603, were interchangeable letters, "Two Querries" anagrams "Q. E.'s two Verri," or "Two Q. Verries."
>
> Again, as when examining the Ditchley portrait of the Queen, wherein Gloriana stands upon Oxford and Southampton, we found it necessary to carry our glance from the top of the picture to the bottom before the full meaning could be grasped, so here, directly below the *"Semper Eadem"* and the Tudor Rose stands the Young Man, whom I confidently identify as the Fair Youth, Southampton.

We have examined this picture, "supposed," as the inscription says, "to be by the hand of William Camden, Clarencieux King at Arms," and believe Mr. Allen's interpretation to be in the main correct, certainly provocative. The fact that another charger is pictured farther along in the great procession, also led by two Querries, this time merely conventional bearded figures, does not, it would seem to us, affect the significance of the first pair; for, after all, Camden had to be as discreet as possible.

A series of verses accompanies the pictured procession, the burden of which is that everyone must perforce weep at the death of the great Queen. The two final stanzas, addressed to the hypothetical weeping audience, read:

> Loe heere are all that in blacke weedes do morne,
> And now methinkes I see thy count'nance turn:
> What trill thy tears? nay (Reader) then *adon.*
> The firmament contains but one cleare Sun.
>
> And since that *Delia* is from hence bereaven,
> We have another Sun ordain'd from Heaven.
> God grant his virtues may so glorious shine,
> That after death he may be crown'd divine.

Camden's meaning certainly seems to be that although Southampton ("adon.") is the "one cleare Sun," Delia-Elizabeth is succeeded by "another Sun" ordained to be *le roi soleil.* (The inescapable implication is "Adon," but the word can be taken, one supposes—for safety—to mean something like "have done.")

It seems incredible that Camden would have dared take the risk of publishing so bold a revelation; but the fact is that he was firmly rebuked for doing this very thing in Wilder's Satire, *The Great Assizes Holden at Parnassus,* which, though published in 1645, was doubtless written much earlier, and which transparently refers to the processional picture:

> But when old Camden thought to take his place,
> *Apollo* him repulsed with dire disgrace,
> For he of late received had: a complaint
> From hands of credit which did him attaint
> Of misdemeanours acted in a story
> Which did detract from a great lady's glory;
> Wherein he was accused to have revealed
> Some things which better might have been concealed.
> Had they been truths—what madness him misled
> To asperse the ashes of that Phoenix dead
> With notes of infamy?

From this it would appear that Oxford himself or Southampton ("Apollo") had "repulsed" Camden for his revelation, prompted by "hands of credit" (Robert Cecil's perhaps, manipulating the Council's), for having disturbed the legend of chastity; for England was solidly behind that. And Allen very properly asks:

> What conclusion from all these correlated facts can any percipient reader draw, save that Camden knew all the facts concerning the Queen's son by Oxford, and, at some risk to himself, set them down with an openness that is surprising even in that heyday of rash and temerarious allusion?

In our opinion, Camden had taken this risk in order to make amends for the injustice he had been forced to perpetrate against his great countryman. He would surely have expected posterity to understand his meaning and honor the man he had been obliged to slight. Even the originators of the great hoax must have believed that the world would not be deceived for long. *How could it have been deceived, and for so many centuries?*

James's restoration of Southampton to freedom and eminence was made with no little fanfare. Before his departure from Edinburgh on April 5, he wrote a letter ordering the Earl's release from the Tower. That was effected on April 10; and on the 16th King James granted Southampton a special pardon, with restitution to him and his heirs of his title, lands, and property of all kinds, investing him "with his

own hands and with great pomp" with the Order of the Garter—this as part of the coronation celebration; he also appointed him to the captaincy of the Isle of Wight and the Stewardship of the Royal Demesnes of the Island, a post worth six thousand pounds a year. At the "solemn tilting" which was a feature of the coronation ceremonies, the magnificent young Earl rode "with great commendation."

Fifteen months to the day after Elizabeth's death, the Earl of Oxford died, on June 24, 1604. Suddenly and inexplicably, the Earl of Southampton was clapped into the Tower again. The only reasonable explanation is the timid James's fear that his great popularity, the love of "the distracted multitude," might occasion an uprising more successful than the one in which the dashing young Earl had seconded Essex. After a short time Southampton was released. And we concur unqualifiedly with Mr. Allen that, as a condition of his freedom and continued prestige, Henry Wriothesley, the Fair Youth, must thereupon have renounced forever not only all claim to the throne of England and "other prerogatives of royal estate," but—we go further—also his claim to the illustrious name of "William Shake-speare." We believe that he was forced by Authority—Robert Cecil working through James—to relinquish the personal immortality the great poet had so lovingly bequeathed to him. The alternative he faced was imprisonment and an even more complete oblivion than that of the true Shakespeare.

After death, the Earl of Oxford had, indeed, been left "naked" to his "enemies." James owed his accession to Robert Cecil. Need more be said?

Soon Ben Jonson was writing sycophantic Epigrams to the crafty hunchbacked Secretary, who was created Earl of Salisbury in 1605. And Southampton's biographer records that the young nobleman did not spend much time at the court: Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, "kept him at bay." All the pieces of external evidence fit together to reveal the pattern, quite as the internal features do. The picture appears, integrated, clear, shadowed by malice, but glowing with truth. Edward de Vere had known that this would happen one day, because "time cannot make that false which was once true."

From the very first, King James bestowed his patronage upon the theatre. Of course, notwithstanding all the admiration and honor he felt for "great Oxford," as he called the Earl in a letter to Cecil, James was unable to give undue—or should we not say, due?—official notice to his death. In any case, he would have feared to do so; his summary arrest of Southampton demonstrated that fact definitely enough. But he did order, in tacit tribute, the presentation at court of eight Shakespearean dramas. The response of the audience upon these occasions must have been varied and profound; many sighs

would have been uttered and many tears shed. Not a few persons would have felt, with Gabriel Harvey: "God knows what is good for the world, and fitting for this age." In 1612, upon the death of the Countess of Oxford, James caused fourteen of the Earl's plays to be performed at court.

That the Earl of Oxford was unable to celebrate the accession of King James the First with some stately and eloquent work is understandable. He was a broken man. Six years before he had written Burghley that he had not "an able body." And now he had been shaken to his depths by terrible and conflicting emotions. He paid the young monarch, summoning his waning strength, all the public honor he could, as Lord Great Chamberlain. And in the retirement of his quiet home at Hackney, he set himself to add passages to *Hamlet* and to *Antony and Cleopatra,* identifying his benefactor first with the noble Prince of Denmark and then with the conquering Octavius Caesar. It was Antony, remember, who had said,

> Now my spirit is going.
> *I can no more.*

The state of the great poet's tired mind and heart at this time is almost more than one can bear to think of. Perhaps he took up his pen for one last line:

> *The rest is silence.*

The Earl of Southampton became a member of the Privy Council in 1619, and two years later he sat at the head of the Commission of the House of Lords appointed to try Francis Bacon, the Lord Chancellor, for bribery, of which he was found guilty. He had more than one brush with the King, who objected to the Earl's independence and anti-Spanish sympathies. Both Southampton and the Eighteenth Earl of Oxford were sent to the Tower for a brief period for purposing to go to the aid of the King of Bohemia against Spain. In his later years, he became more active in affairs of state and antagonized the jealous Buckingham, James's "male varlet," by his pride and independence of spirit. Fighting in the Low Countries, the Earl died of a fever, November 10, 1624, five days after his son had succumbed. Dr. Eglisham, one of James's Scottish physicians, was quoted as saying that Buckingham had had Southampton poisoned.

As Treasurer of the Virginia Colony and founder, with Sir Edwin Sandys, of the charter of liberties of Virginia,[1] the Third Earl of Southampton was one of those responsible for saving the colony from destruction. King James was at one time actually arranging with the Spanish Ambassador to have the English withdraw from America,

[1] Charles Mills Gayley: *Shakespeare and the Founders of Liberty in America;* cit. Brown: *Eng. Pol. in Virginia;* p. 147.

leaving it to Spain, when Southampton stepped in with decision and frustrated the plan. It is interesting that his descendants, the Dukes of Portland, Devonshire, and Northumberland were, in the House of Lords, "three devoted defenders of American liberty." [2] A strange poetic irony is implicit in the fact that to this son of the Virgin Queen is largely due the preservation of the colony which took its name from her legend. "Beauty's successive heir," though robbed of his heritage by the necessity of maintaining the legend, played a distinguished part in support of one of its mose celebrated memorials. In one particular, the incalculable Elizabeth Tudor was thoroughly consistent: she always exacted more than she gave.

The year 1619 saw Anthony Munday publishing a second edition of *Primaleon of Greece* and dedicating it to the Eighteenth Earl of Oxford, as the original had been dedicated to the Seventeenth Earl. This, Ward observes, indicates a close association with the father and son for at least forty years.

> Sir [wrote Munday], having sometime served that most noble Earl your father of famous and desertful memory; and translating divers honourable histories into English out of French, Italian, and other languages, which he graciously pleased to countenance with his noble acceptance; among the embrions of my younger brain these three several parts of *Primaleon of Greece* were the tribute of my duty and service to him, which books, having long time slept in oblivion . . . by favour of these more friendly times coming once more to be seen on the world's public theatre, in all duty they offer themselves to your noble patronage: for you being the true heir of your honourable father's matchless virtues, and succeeding him in place of degree and eminency, who should inherit the father's trophies, monuments, and ancient memories but his truly noble, hopeful, and virtuous son? In whom old Lord Edward is still living and cannot die so long as you breathe.[3]

There would have been many more such outspoken testimonials to Lord Edward's "famous and desertful memory," to his honor, nobility, and "matchless virtues," had not powerful hands been dedicated to erasing his memory from the knowledge of man.

Among those that have survived is an important statement which appears in a scholarly book by Henry Peacham, "Mr. of Arts, Sometime of Trinity Coll. in Cambridge," entitled *The Compleat Gentleman,* "Imprinted at London for Francis Constable, 1622." In praising the reign of Queen Elizabeth as "a golden Age," distinguished by poets "whose like are hardly to be hoped for in any succeeding Age," Peacham lists those "who honoured Poesie with their Pennes and practice." Lord Oxford's name comes first:

> Edward Earle of Oxford, the Lord Buckhurst, Henry Lord Paget, the noble Sir Philip Sidney, M. Edward Dyer, M. Edmund Spenser, Master Samuel Daniel, with sundry others whom (together with those admirable wits yet living and so well knowne) not out of Envy, but to avoid tediousnesse, I overpasse.[4]

[2] Op. cit.; p. 199.
[3] Ward; p. 202.

It will be noted that the afterwards famous man from Stratford is not mentioned by the Master of Arts of Cambridge, who was covering the whole reign of Elizabeth and nineteen years of James, though he only refrains from listing "those admirable wits yet living" in 1622. Having mentioned the Earl of Oxford, Peacham does not name Shakespeare, who was admittedly the star of the Elizabethan golden age.

Peacham, a man of high standards, moral as well as literary, would have been incapable of Jonson's species of complacent "double-talk." Like Harvey, Nashe, Farmer, Munday, and other men of arts and letters, he was shocked by the power of the Philistines to denigrate, if not, indeed, obliterate, the memory of England's noblest genius, a decoration to knighthood no less than to his country's culture. But Peacham, though merely a Cambridge Master and obliged, because of the vigilance of the autocrats, to employ caution, was nevertheless a man who had the courage of his principles. A decade before the appearance of *The Compleat Gentleman,* he had published a noteworthy volume entitled *Minerva Britanna,* and not to be overlooked is the significant fact that this was done in the very year of Robert Cecil's death, 1612. The Earl of Oxford had been dead eight years.

Every feature of this work is, in truth, significant, beginning with the title itself; for *Minerva,* it will be noted, is the Roman name for Athena, the *hasti-vibrans* (spear-shaking) patron goddess of the Greek theatre:

> MINERVA BRITANNA or a Garden of Heroical devises, furnished, and adorned with *Emblems* and *Impressa's* of sundry natures, newly devised, moralized, and published, by Henry Peacham, Mr. of Artes. [Original italics.]

It is clearly evident that Peacham had set himself to record, by means of *Emblems,* etc. the secret identity and dramatic prestige of the man he was later to accord first place among those who had made the reign of Elizabeth "a golden Age." For beneath the title is a picture the frame of which is the proscenium arch of a theatre. The picture itself, an oval, set within a laurel-wreath, shows a hand holding a quill pen reaching from behind a curtain to inscribe a Latin phrase upon a scroll, while on the left of the curtain is revealed a background-glimpse of a Greek scene. The bordering laurel-wreath is wound round with two other scrolls, upon which the following words are inscribed: VIVITUR INGENIO on the left, and CAETERA MORTIS ERUNT on the right.

[4] From *The Remarkable Testimony of Henry Peacham,* by Louis P. Benezet, M.A., Ph.D.: *Quarterly* of the Sh. Fellowship, Am. Br.; Oct., 1945.

These Latin sentences have been translated by Mr. John L. Astley-Cock [5] thus: "His genius abides"; and, "Everything else will be obliterated by death." [6] Mr. Astley-Cock makes the point that *Caetera* is a much stronger, more inclusive, term than *Alia* would be; the latter would merely mean "all the rest," whereas *Caetera* implies all that his life included. So we have here a definite statement that the hidden dramatist's authorship, his high position, his paternity of the Fair Youth, and so on—in short, all he stood for, all he had attained, all he was—*will be obliterated by death.*

The other Emblem reveals its significance upon one's examination of the words which the hand of the concealed person is inscribing. These words are upside-down to the reader. The last word, as it stands, is incomplete, the pen arrested upon what is obviously the penultimate letter; thus affording a perfect anagram. The Latin sentence as it stands is as follows: MENTE.VIDEBORI. the peculiar position of the period draws the eye immediately to the central letters which it separates: E.V.

Now, according to Mr. Astley-Cock, "the second person singular of the Latin future indicative passive had two inflections, either *-e,* or *-is";* and "the latter is used here since the letter *i* is essential to the Anagram. Thus the completed word would be *Videboris*—'Thou shalt be seen.'" Therefore the translation is, "In the mind thou shalt be seen." That is, in the mind of the reader shall E. Vere be seen through the medium of his works; or, in the imaginings and recordings of his mind shall the concealed author be made manifest.

The anagram in MENTE.VIDEBORI [7] is unmistakable: TIBI NOM. DE VERE: THY NAME (IS) DE VERE. The fact that *nom.* is a common abbreviation for *nomine* explains the period, of which clever use is made, as we have said, to separate the most conspicuous letters on the scroll, the secret dramatist's initials.

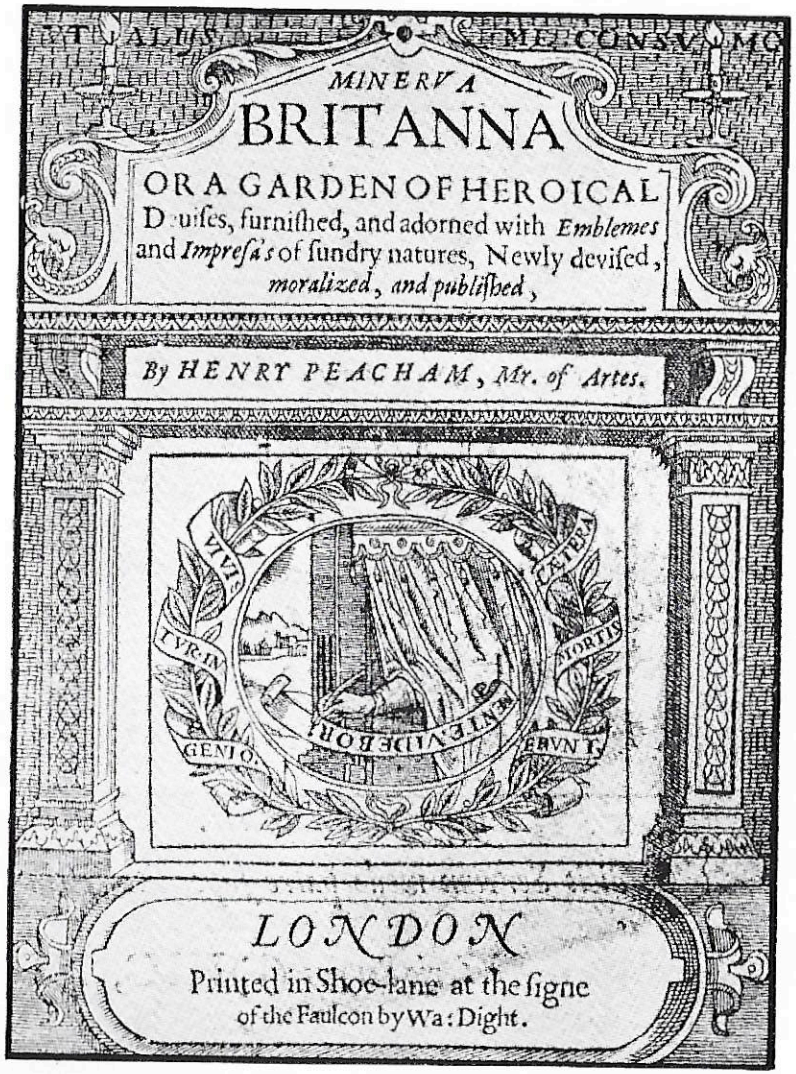
In his dedication to Henry, Prince of Wales, Peacham, according to the fashion of the day, uses an anagram pointedly: *"Epigramma Authoris se dicit servum modo patre superstite Princeps, Primus et Imperio Servus,* HIC, INDE *regit.* ICH DIEN *Anagramma."* He has anagrammatized the Prince's motto, ICH DIEN, *I serve.*

Prince Henry—like the Earl of Oxford's son, another Prince Henry—was an enthusiast of the stage and would have well understood the Master of Arts' scholarly innuendo made in tribute to England's greatest dramatist. But the author went considerably farther in a set

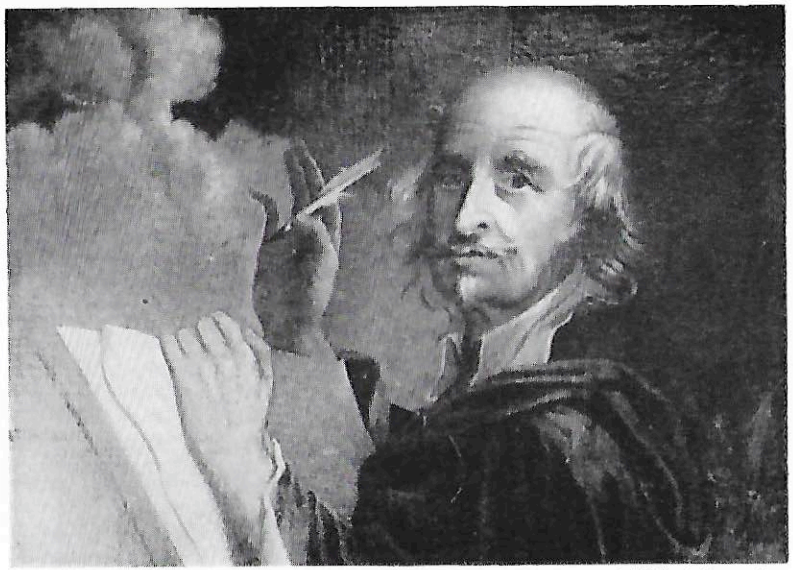
[5] *Quarterly* of the Sh. Fellowship, Am. Br.; Autumn, 1947.

[6] Mr. Astley-Cock explains that *vivitur* can be regarded as a Middle, producing "a *latent* interpretation by which *Vivitur Ingenio* would mean, 'By his genius he is brought to life': Latin verbs inflected with the sense of a Greek middle [being] common in Elegiac poetry."

[7] First solved by Mrs. Clark, to whom the discovery of the book is due, as well.

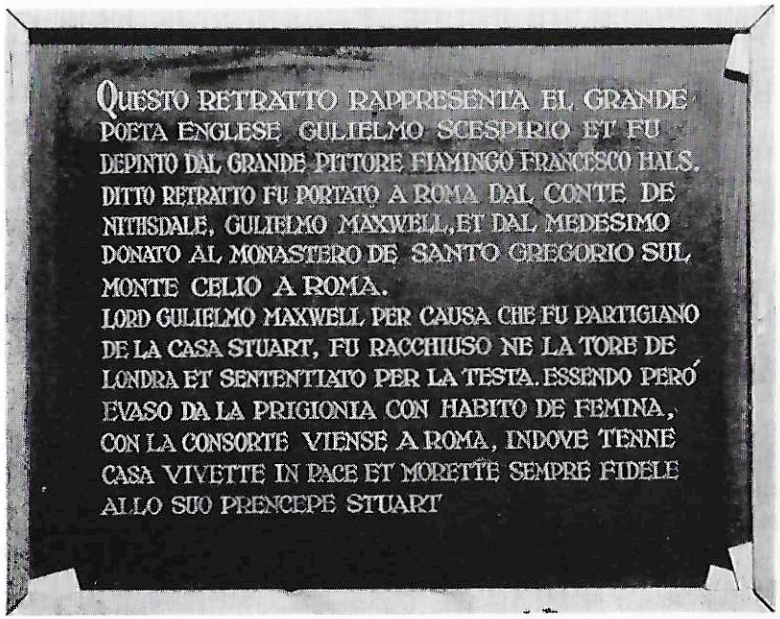


Title page of *Minerva Britanna.*



Courtesy of Clifford Bax, Esq.

William Shakespeare.



"This portrait represents the great English poet William Shakespeare and was painted by the great Flemish painter Franz Hals. It was taken to Rome by the Earl of Nithsdale, William Maxwell, and given by him to the Monastery of Santo Gregorio on Monte Celio in Rome. Lord William Maxwell, because of his partisanship for the House of Stuart, was imprisoned in the Tower of London and sentenced to execution. Escaping however from the prison in the costume of a woman, he came with his wife to Rome where he set up house, lived in peace and died ever loyal to his Stuart prince."

of outspoken verses on Page 169, under the Latin phrase, *Haud conveniunt* (*Out of harmony*):

> I much did muse, why Venus could not brooke,
> The savadge Boare, and Lion cruell fierce,
> Since Kinges and Princes, haue such pleasure tooke,
> In hunting: haply cause a Boare did pierce
> Her *Adon* faire, who better lik'd the sport,
> Then spend his daies, in wanton pleasure court.
>
> Which fiction though devis'd by poets braine,
> It signifies unto the Reader this;
> Such exercise Love will not entertaine,
> Who liketh best, to live in Idleness:
> The foe to vertue, Cancker of the wit,
> That brings a thousand miseries with it.

This comes through *Venus and Adonis*, out of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and refers, of course, to Oxford's story in the symbolism by now made familiar through the poems and the plays. (He speaks of "Adon," just as Camden did.) The second verse lucidly states that the poet has fictionalized his experience; the Reader can understand that "love-in-idleness" (which produced the purple flower) was the enemy to Vertue, poisoning his wit—or hampering his genius—and resulting for him in "a thousand miseries."

The Countess of Oxford also died in the year that *Minerva Britanna* was published; and, as it happened, the young Prince Henry died soon afterwards. Three years earlier *Shake-speare's Sonnets* had been published, with their noncommittal dedication, causing no extraordinary concern. Southampton had remained true to his compact with James. All was so safe that Peacham's sincere and dignified tribute to the anonymous genius of Elizabeth's reign and the flower of her court could be sanctioned by the monarch. The waters of oblivion, parting momentarily, closed once more over the "wounded name."

* * * * * * *

Ben Jonson, able, aggressive, ambitious, played his cards well. Drummond said of him,

> He is a great lover and praiser of himself, a contemner and Scorner of others, given rather to loose a friend than a jest, *jealous of every word and action of those about him (especially after drink), which is one of the elements in which he liveth, a dissembler of ill parts which raigne in him, a bragger of some good that he wanteth . . . vindicative* [sic], but if he be well answered, at himself for any religion as being versed in both.[8]

From the beginning to the end, Jonson was—as he was all too ready to accuse others of being—"his own promoter in every place."

[8] *Discoveries;* Ben Jonson's Conversations with Drummond of Hawthornden.

Whether through flattery of Robert Cecil or otherwise it cannot be told (Drummond quotes him as saying, "Salisbury never cared for any man longer nor he could make use of him"), Jonson became in time *persona grata* with the Pembrokes and the Montgomerys, all closely allied to Lord Oxford. He wrote one of his famous Epigrams to the Countess of Montgomery, Oxford's daughter; and there is a drawing of her by Inigo Jones as she appeared in costume for one of Jonson's masques.[9]

These masques were very popular. The titled ladies enjoyed taking part in them at court, relishing the opportunity to parade their charms and talents. As the romantic drama of Elizabeth's era began to be replaced by the more realistic type—satires on personal eccentricities and domestic situations, lively jibes at human weaknesses, so pleasing to Queen Anne and the women at court, women being ever the realistic sex—Jonson's popularity increased.

Although he did not specify at what period it was, Jonson told Drummond that "every first day of the new year he had 20 lb sent him from the Earl of Pembrok to buy bookes." In 1615 the Earl of Pembroke became Lord Chamberlain. It would necessarily have been with his approval and consent, if not at his instigation, that Jonson was named for the office of Master of the Revels. In 1616 the Earl is recorded as having given Jonson a pension of 100 marks a year. There seems to be some confusion about this; it may well have been the salary of the Revels office. But it is to be especially noted that *in 1621* Pembroke increased this "pension" *temporarily* to 200 pounds a year —about $8000 in our money. Evidently the Elizabethans used the word *pension* where we speak of a *stipend:* it will be recalled that Oxford had at one time referred to his annual payment from the Secret Service Fund as a "pension"; and he obviously did not mean by the term what we mean today. In 1629, in the reign of Charles I, Jonson's pension became 100 pounds a year. The author of the satires upon Lord Oxford had improved his opportunities and could be said to have come into his own.

Ben Jonson had long since been taken up by Lady Mary Pembroke, a gifted and highly cultured woman, not only an accomplished Latin and Greek scholar, but a translator of De Mornay and conversant with Italian as well. Her library at Wilton was richly stocked, containing a number of Italian works, for which she had shared an enthusiasm with her old friend, the Earl of Oxford. A sister of Sidney and a collaborator with him, she was a poet in her own right, a sponsor and friend of literary men.

The "Incomparable Paire of Brethren" to whom the First Folio was dedicated, were the Countess of Pembroke's two sons, William

[9] *Shakespeare's England;* vol. II, Chap. VI

Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery. Of these the elder had been for a time betrothed to Lord Oxford's daughter, Bridget Vere, but the match was broken off—it may have been because of a scandal which involved the young nobleman with Mary Fitton; the younger son had married Oxford's daughter, Susan. This little circle, together with Oxford's other daughters, Elizabeth, Countess of Derby, and Bridget, now Countess of Berkshire, and their half-brother, the Eighteenth Earl, were undoubtedly the "grand possessors" of the manuscripts of the plays alluded to in the Preface of *Troilus and Cressida.* Southampton had evidently renounced his share in the works of Shakespeare, as he had in the name; but his interest would not have diminished.

Because certain features of *The Tempest* have convinced students that the play was written after 1609—though parts of it could only have been *re*written then, since the original play had been produced many years before—it may be well to speak of Lady Mary Pembroke's connection with and possible hand in a revision made for the First Folio. It seems that certain supposed "coincidences" between the play and the report of conditions obtaining in Virginia in 1609–10 "have their common source," according to one authority at least, in a "private letter from Virginia . . . [from one Strachey] sent from the Colony July 15, 1610, addressed to 'an excellent Lady' in England. It is confidential and, from June 2, 1609, up to the time of its dispatch, describes with vivid fidelity and unvarnished detail all the happenings of the intervening period—discouragements, mutinies, and murders. . . . It was not made public until 1625, after the dissolution of the Virginia Company"; [10] which was of course subsequent to the publication of the First Folio. Gayley had not discovered the identity of this "excellent Lady"; but she could have been no other than the Countess of Pembroke, who, with her sons, the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, as well as the Earl of Southampton, Sackville, Neville, and others, all intimately connected with the Earl of Oxford, constituted the Virginia Company. It may have been Lady Mary's idea to place *The Tempest* at the beginning of the Folio; it is an artistic concept thus to present the conjurer as Prospero (Pro-spero: for hope; or Pro-spear-O), with all the symbolism of the storm, the enchanted island, Ariel, and Miranda, as a kind of Introduction or Prelude, setting the key for what follows.

For all we can know, unless somewhere revealing documents come to light, Lady Mary Pembroke may have been responsible, in the first place, for the plan of publishing the great works in folio, although

[10] C. M. Gayley: *Sh. and the Founders of Liberty in Am.;* p. 49. He speaks of the Bermuda storm; but we cannot go into that here. This was not, of course, the first storm which ever occurred there; in fact Ariel says, "the still-vex'd Bermoothes."

Lord Oxford's widow might have had a hand in the initial activities, since she left, in her will, a bequest of blank pounds to be paid "to my dombe man." (This could, however, have been something to do with the Sonnets.) We can be sure that the Countess of Oxford would have done everything in her power to carry out her beloved husband's wishes. Horatio and Francis Vere may, of course, have had a hand in the enterprise. Oxford's daughters, if deeply inoculated with the Cecilian attitude, might have felt considerable reluctance toward perpetuating the plays which seemed to them so flagrantly revealing.[11] There is little to be gained by speculating about all this. But the fact remains that Jonson had already demonstrated in *The Poetaster* his ability to confuse the public—"the sluggish, gaping auditor"—by making it believe the true Crispinus was the Poet-ape; and if persuasion were necessary, his method offered a safe disguise and an assurance of anonymity. It must have afforded "old Ben" no small satisfaction finally to have effected the suggestion he had given Carlo Buffone to make in *Every Man Out,* the one which had so infuriated Puntarvolo-Oxford:

> . . . flay me your dog presently (but in any case keep the head) and stuff his skin well with straw . . . [or] . . . get me a somewhat less dog, and clap into the skin.

The "humorous knight" was no longer there to seal up his traducer's lips with wax.

In any case, we have clear evidence relating this group of Lord Oxford's intimates with Ben Jonson and identifying them as the "grand possessors." There is still another member who undoubtedly had something to do with editing the First Folio, and this is Francis

[11] One straw, in fact, showed the way the wind blew in this regard. Sir Robert Naunton, whose daughter married the son of one of Lord Oxford's daughters, slighted the Earl publicly in his *Fragmenta Regalia,* published in 1630. Except for the "anecdote" quoted by Nichols, which was repeated as fact by Wright and elaborated by Sidney Lee, this is the only positive slur—apart from the accusations of the cornered traitors in 1581—that we have encountered; and this is merely an omission and an implication. In a collection of forty-seven brief sketches of "servants of Queen Elizabeth's state and favour," Lord Oxford, the most gifted and distinguished of them all, is mentioned only incidentally. In the final paragraph of his book, Naunton states:

"Modesty in me forbids defacements of men departed, whose posterity yet remaining enjoys the merit of their virtues, and do still live in their honour. And I had rather incur the censure of abruption, than to be conscious and taken in the manner of eruption, and of trampling upon the graves of persons at rest, which living we durst not look in the face, nor make our addresses to them otherwise than with due regard to their honours and renown of their virtues." (Cf. *Macbeth:* V.3.24-8.)

To which we can only say, "Smacks it not something of the policy?"—the powerful Cecilian policy? William Cecil Lord Burghley may be said to have been the first representative, the ancestor, indeed, of the great English middle class, whose god is respectability, whose ritual conventional propriety.

Bacon, a cousin of the Cecils. We find Jonson recorded in 1619 as giving highest praise to Bacon—*"Dominus Verulamius"*—for his effectiveness, his eloquence, "his graces," as a speaker. According to Judge Webb,[12] "Bacon was on intimate terms with Jonson long before he was created Lord St. Albans. In 1617, when he was Lord Keeper, he engaged Jonson to compose a masque for the Christmas Revels." From then until Jonson wrote his panegyric on Bacon upon the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, in 1621, they seem to have been close friends. What could be more suspicious than the fact that, although Bacon is bound to have known Lord Oxford well and, indeed, shows himself thoroughly conversant with his work, the Earl's name is not mentioned throughout the seven volumes of the *Letters and Life of Francis Bacon* (Spedding's edition) except once, and that is in the formal list of peers who sat as Commissioners at the trial of Essex and Southampton. (The Eighteenth Earl's name occurs three times. Bacon requests his help towards readmission to the House of Lords some time after his disgrace.)

In a thousand years, one could probably not find three more brilliant and artful contrivers than Robert Cecil, Ben Jonson, and Francis Bacon. These three men are, in our belief, fundamentally responsible for the great hoax which has done such incalculable discredit to the true William Shakespeare. They must early have succeeded in persuading the Countess of Pembroke and perhaps the Countess of Oxford, too, that, if the work were to be preserved at all, it must be done by the method Jonson had formulated. The preparation of the First Folio evidently proceeded slowly over a period of years; and there can be small doubt that Jonson had the directing hand. The temporary increase of his "pension" by the Earl of Pembroke in 1621 is highly significant.

As he had done in *The Poetaster,* Jonson continued to "speak with two voices" about the poet and dramatist. In his conversations with Drummond, he declared that "Shakspear wanted arte"; again he said Shakespeare's "wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too!" In the *Discoveries,* he states, under the caption, *de Shakespeare nostrati,*

> I remember, the Players have often mention'd it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penn'd) hee never blotted out a line. My answer hath beene, would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this but for their ignorance, who choose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted. And to justifie mine owne candour, (for I lov'd the man, and doe honour his memory (on this side Idolatry) as much as any.) He was (indeed) honest, and of an open, and free

[12] *The Mystery of William Shakespeare.*

nature: had an excellent Phantasie; brave notions and gentle expressions. . . .

In the Introductory poem of the Folio, Jonson refutes all this. He apostrophizes the dramatist as "Soul of the age!" calls him

> The applause, delight, and wonder of our Stage!

He reminds himself that he must not attribute all Shakespeare's greatness to Nature:

> Yet must I not give *Nature* all: thy *Art,*
> My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
> For tho the *Poets* matter *Nature* be,
> His *Art* doth give the *Fashion.* And, that he,
> Who casts to write a living *line,* must sweat
> (Such as thine are) and strike the second *heat*
> Upon the *Muses* Anvile: turn the same,
> (And himself with it) that he thinks to frame;
> Or for the Lawrel, he may gain a scorn,
> For a good *Poet's* made, as well as born.
> And such wert thou. [Original italics.]

In this, Jonson is telling the truth about the Earl of Oxford. He knew well enough how sedulously Oxford had reworked, recast, and revised his plays. They all knew. Harvey had written of him:

> No marvell, though Axiophilus be so slow in publishing his exercises, that is so hasty in dispatching them: being one that vigorously censures himself; unpartially examines other; and deemes nothing honourable, or commendable in a poet, that is not divine, or illuminate; singular, or rare; excellent, or sum way notable.

Ben Jonson is consistent only in his inconsistency. He is the Janus of modern times. Millions of words have been written about his paradoxical estimate of Shakespeare. Why is he taken so seriously when, whichever way he is facing, he obviously has his tongue in his cheek?

He certainly has in his lines, *To the Reader,* beneath the Droeshut engraving which forms the frontispiece of the Folio. This grotesque "portrait" is perfectly in keeping with Jonson's deceptive words. Sir George Greenwood describes the picture as that "of a sheepish hydrocephalus simpleton with leering eyes," and he quotes Steevens's amusing comment,

> Shakespeare's countenance deformed by Droeshut resembles the sign of Sir Roger de Coverley when it had been changed into a Saracen's head; on which occasion *The Spectator* observes that the features of the gentle knight were still apparent through the lineaments of the ferocious Mussulman.[13]

This picture seems to offer almost the crowning indignity, the *reductio ad absurdum* of the noble dramatist. And that had been from

[13] *The Sh. Problem Restated;* p. 468.

the first Jonson's aim in all the plays in which he had satirized the man of whom he was so bitterly jealous: "gentle" Shakespeare.

> This Figure that thou here seest put,
> It was for gentle *Shakespear* cut;
> Wherein the *Graver* had a strife
> With Nature to outdo the Life.
> O, could he have but drawn his Wit
> As well in brass, as he has hit
> His Face; the Print would then surpass
> All that was ever writ in Brass.
> But since he cannot, Reader, look
> Not on his Picture, but his Book.

There may be a *sous-entendu* in the expression hit "his Face"; but that need not detain us here. The final couplet is all that is worth noting; and that offers good advice. *Lines* 3 and 4 are of course a paraphrase of *Venus and Adonis, line* 11. A habit of so many years' standing was hard to break.

It has long ago been established—first by Malone, then with additional comment by others—that Ben Jonson wrote the dedicatory Letter "To the most Noble and Incomparable paire of Brethren," as well as the one "To the Great Variety of Readers," signed by the "stooges," Heminge and Condell. We shall not expatiate at much length upon this threadbare subject. Our concern is with Edward de Vere, the true Shakespeare, not with Ben Jonson's accomplished guile and the hoax which has for more than three hundred years dishonored the memory of England's greatest genius. However, a brief statement is perhaps in order.

When the sponsors and editors of the First Folio decided to assure Lord Oxford's anonymity by following Jonson's precedent of posing as the dramatist another man whose name was similar to the Earl's *nom de plume,* they implied for their substitute a valid and prominent connection with the stage by boldly listing him at the head of a column of established London actors; then they identified him with Stratford-on-Avon by means of Digges's phrase, "thy Stratford Moniment," and Jonson's "Sweet Swan of Avon"—Oxford's estate, Bilton, on the Avon providing an excuse for this bit of duplicity. There is no record whatsoever published *during the lifetime* of William Shaksper of Stratford to indicate that he was *ever assigned a part in any play.* It was at some date subsequent to the writing of his will that a bequest of a few shillings to Heminge and Condell was *interlined,* in order to make it appear that he had been a friend of the two actors who were to be presented as intermediaries for the publication of the Folio. Except for the suspicious fact that when Jonson's plays were published as part of his collected works in 1616, the name "Shakespeare" was listed in the cast of characters of two of them—

though significantly, *with no part assigned to the supposed actor*—it is not until seven years after his death that this man is mentioned as one of the well-known actors of the period. The records of the Lord Chamberlain's Company do not once list his name as an actor—either as Shaksper or Shakespeare—although time and again the names of the members of this company *are* listed. Shakespeare's name is given as one of three payees of the Lord Chamberlain's Company in a dubious, post-dated entry for performances at court, Christmas 1594. Shaksper of Stratford was *in some capacity* connected with the London theatre, but certainly *not as an important actor or as a playwright.* Jonson has undoubtedly given us the truth about his status in *Every Man Out* and *The Poetaster;* for even the contradictory Jonson was honest in spurts.

The stratagem employed by the sponsors of the First Folio to present this Stratford citizen as a leading actor was in itself suspicious enough to have provoked incredulity, and no doubt it did among contemporary Londoners, since it was *more than a generation* before any reference appeared to the dramatist as a resident of Stratford. As late as 1640 the couplet which we have quoted elsewhere appeared in *Wit's Recreation:*

> Shake-speare, we must be silent in our praise,
> 'Cause our encomiums will but blast thy bays.

This shows clearly enough that the truth was still taboo and still powerfully guarded.

That Jonson had the ordering of the presentation in folio of "Mr. William Shakespear's COMEDIES, HISTORIES AND TRAGEDIES" (the Sonnets not being sanctioned) is further manifest in the fact that the contributors of the signed verses, Digges, J.M. (supposed to be James Mabbe), and Hugh Holland, are all intimately linked with Ben Jonson, either as school-fellows or associates in literary work.[14] We cannot be persuaded that he had much part in the actual editing of the plays. Bacon may have had and may, indeed, have ciphered his name into some of them. The proper sequence of both the tragedies and the comedies was as artfully altered as that of the Sonnets had been. Had the plays been printed in the order of their writing, their personal and historical significance would have been more readily perceived.

The cost of the publication of the Folio would necessarily have been borne by the "grand possessors." As Canon Rendall observes, it was "not designed as a commercial speculation, nor even as a literary venture, for which the times were not yet ripe." He puts it thus:

[14] Canon Rendall discusses this subject in detail in his brochure, *Ben Jonson and the First Folio Ed. of Sh.'s Plays.*

> Financially, the Folio implied expenditure on a large scale, in addition to the heavy costs of actual printing, production, and distribution; these alone were far beyond the means at the command of William Jaggard, who at this stage of his career was in no position to embark capital in so large a venture. From 1612 onwards, when Jaggard himself was stricken with blindness, the firm declined in productive energy and enterprise, and from 1617 to 1621 were further embarrassed by bad debts and lawsuits. . . . In 1621 printing of the Folio had already been put in hand, and Jaggard himself died before its issue in 1623. As a business proposition the published price of 22*s.* for an issue of (say) 500 copies, even if realised in full, must have resulted in a deficit, far beyond the resources of the avowed Editors, Heminge and Condell.[15]

Not only was Ben Jonson well compensated for his valuable offices over a period of years: he has continued to be rewarded for a long time.

In 1622 William Basse wrote his famous lines which begin:

> Renowned Spenser, lye a thought more nye
> To learned Chaucer, and rare Beaumont lye
> A little nearer Spenser, to make roome
> For Shakespeare in your threefold, fowerfold tomb.

Of this someone has said that it was merely silly, since Shakespeare was not buried in Westminster Abbey. But, as we have seen, the record shows that he was; and it may well be that Basse knew this. Jonson, however, takes exception to Basse's suggestion in his long introductory poem:

> My Shakespeare rise; I will not lodge thee by
> Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie
> A little further, to make thee a room:
> Thou art a Monument without a Tomb.

Since the man to whose "Stratford Moniment" Digges refers in his contiguous verse had a tomb as well as a monument, in which he was portrayed in effigy, his hands resting upon a well-filled sack (of grain?), the whole affair shows up as altogether disingenuous. (We speak of the original, not the present, effigy.)

So, of course, does Jonson's purposely obscure passage about "small Latine and less Greek," which seems to have been taken in high places not only as a simple declarative sentence, but as gospel:

> For if I thought my judgment were of years,
> I should commit thee surely with thy Peers,
> And tell how far thou didst our *Lily* outshine,
> Or sporting *Kid*,[16] or Marlow's mighty Line.
> And tho thou hadst small *Latine* and less *Greek*,
> From thence to honour thee, I would not seek

[15] Op. cit.

[16] "Sporting" is a peculiar epithet to apply to a man known chiefly as the author of *The Spanish Tragedy!*

For names; but call forth thund'ring *Aeschylus,*
Euripides, and *Sophocles* to us,
Pacuvius, Accius, him of *Cordove* dead,
To live again, to hear thy *Buskin* tread.

In the first place, the meaning must be that "Lily," "Kid," and "Marlow" were Shakespeare's "Peers" *in time,* since he so far outshone them in quality. Therefore, if Jonson's "judgment" were being made in terms "of years," he would compare the poet with his contemporaries of the 1580's.

Now, Jonson could be as lucid as any man when he wished to be. Why should he have expressed the ensuing idea in such roundabout *language* unless his *intention* was devious? If he had been sincerely and spontaneously honoring a distinguished, "beloved" poet-dramatist—as, of course, he was not, since there was no reason to wait seven years, much less nineteen, to utter publicly the first word of praise for a deceased poet who had been the "Soul of the Age,"—he would have expressed himself in the eloquent terms he used for Virgil-Oxford in *The Poetaster.* It becomes almost unbearably tedious to attempt to analyze Jonson's pronouncements. He has diddled us all quite long enough. However, in case we may be accused of dodging the issue by some antagonistic reader who has not followed our argument but instead has begun at the end with a hope of puncturing our conclusion and so settling the matter, we shall quote a learned German scholar, Dr. Konrad Meier,[17] upon this point.

After observing that the "small Latine and less Greek" passage is usually lifted from its context and made a bare statement of fact, Dr. Meier asserts that it must be read in full, when it is seen that "the conditional word *would* . . . indicates that we have here a concealed relation, annexed to a conditional one; and, as in every conditional sentence, the conditional word *would* points to an *unreal* alternative, which is to be taken as the opposite of the actual fact." The idea therefore is, "even if it had been true that thou hadst but small Latin and less Greek, even so I should not be at a loss for names but would still place thee side by side with the great poets of antiquity."

Those who quote Jonson as an authority for an unlearned Shakespeare have myopically consulted the critic without going to the source. Shakespeare's work—to say nothing of his enormous contribution to the English language—is sufficient proof of his scholarship. Jonson was a classicist and a pedant, but he was not a University man. Perhaps his attitude here arose from what modern psychologists call a compensation neurosis. He himself told Drummond that he

[17] The passage in question is taken from *Baconia,* Oct. 1907; tr. by Theobald; cit. by Greenwood: *The Sh. Problem Restated;* p. 475.

was "taken from school and put to a trade," and that his University degrees came "by their favour not his study."

The truth is—one is struck with it again and again—the Elizabethans were altogether too subtle, too unhampered by abstract morality, and far too complex for the Victorians. It is the pious Victorians who are largely responsible for the sanctification of the myth. The best of the critics, Coleridge, though pre-Victorian, was a Puritan and *ipso facto* to some extent disqualified. What did these scholars think of the list Jonson made in 1619 of the most notable persons of his acquaintance in England which did not include Shakespeare's name, although four years later in the Folio he called him "My beloved"?

Greenwood credits Jonson with "knowing that while the multitude would complacently take his criticism *au pied de la lettre,* the enlightened few would recognize that it has an esoteric meaning." Does he not indeed convey a broad hint in the letter, "To the Great Variety of Readers," when he concludes:

> *Read him therefore, again and again: And if then you do not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to understand him. And so we leave you to other of his* Friends, *who, if you need, can be your* guides: *if you need them not, you can lead your selves, and others. And such* Readers *we wish him.* [Original italics.]

In a word, the Sponsors of the Folio "wish him" to have Readers who can "understand him." Jonson becomes, moreover, increasingly outspoken in the latter part of his introductory poem; and surely no one would have been more astonished than "old Ben" himself to know how flatly his acute lines have struck against credulous ears.

In according high praise to Shakespeare as an actor—evidence that he had seen Lord Oxford perform on the stage of a private theatre, or perhaps in some nobleman's house—Jonson dates him as an early dramatist, not, it should be noted, as a contemporary of his own:

. . . Or when thy Socks were on,
Leave thee alone for the comparison
Of all, that insolent Greece, or haughty Rome
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.
Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show
To whom all Scenes of Europe homage owe.[18]
Has was not *of an age,* but *for all time!*
And *all the Muses still were in their prime,*
When, like *Apollo,* he came forth to warm
Our ears, or like a *Mercury,* to charm!

[18] He means this also in two ways. That one facet of the statement is literally true we have shown in quoting from the pamphleteers of the early seventeenth century, as well as from D'Aubigné and Mathieu, who adopted Oxford's symbolism in their own writings. (From this point italics are ours.)

Ben Jonson knew this great poet's worth, that his fame would be eternal. The reason why the Earl of Oxford had been called Phoebus at court was that Phoebus Apollo was the god of music and poetry and medicine as well; like the Bastard in *King John,* he had administered "Sweet, sweet, sweet poison for the age's tooth," besides coming forth when "all the Muses still were in their prime," to create and foster poetry and music in England.[19] As the gay and charming Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet,* he had been an incarnation of Mercury. Jonson was thoroughly conversant with all the Oxfordian imagery and symbolism.

> . . . Look how the *Fathers face*
> Lives in *his Issue,* even so the *race*
> Of Shakespear's *mind and manners* brightly shines
> In his well turned and true filed lines:
> In each of which he seems to *shake a Lance,*
> *As brandish'd at the eyes of Ignorance.*

Since Jonson has just used the "Apollo" symbolism, we are justified in assuming that he is here glancing at the Sun-son idea celebrated in the eternizing Sonnets to the Fair Youth when he speaks of the "Fathers face" living "in his Issue." He is, moreover, definitely stating that an aristocrat's "mind and manners," his noble "race" and culture "brightly shines" in his courtly dramas. Jonson, as an Elizabethan, would have expected sophisticated readers to take it for granted that no ordinary, underprivileged man could possibly have written in the "high style" Shakespeare did. He himself could never have done so, clever, adaptable, imitative though he was.

He goes even further when he frankly alludes, in the last couplet above, to Crispinus, the Spear-shaker. We are being told as plainly as possible, in view of the secrecy to which this publication was dedicated, that throughout his work, in each of "his well turned and true filed lines," the dramatist is revealing himself—brandishing his Lance, or Spear, at ignorant eyes, pointing his truth. Perhaps the "grand possessors" were here saying, through Ben Jonson, "The truth is yours, if you perceive it."

[19] Byron, who was in some ways a spiritual descendant of the Earl of Oxford, might actually have been eulogizing the brilliant, exuberant young courtier of Elizabeth's heyday in *Childe Harold:* IV.161.

> The lord of the unerring bow,
> The god of life, and poetry, and light,
> The Sun, in human limbs arrayed, and brow
> All radiant from his triumph in the fight.
> The shaft has just been shot; the arrow bright
> With an immortal's vengeance; in his eye
> And nostril, beautiful disdain, and might
> And majesty flash their full lightnings by,
> Developing in that one glance the Deity.

Jonson was saturated with the Earl of Oxford's language: his plays give ample testimony to this fact. Thus we may be sure that this man, who so ironically had the last authoritative word upon the immortal Shakespeare, was taking cognizance of the poet's self-characterization in the concluding lines of his tribute:

> But stay, I see thee in this *Hemisphere*
> Advanc'd and made a *Constellation* there!
> Shine forth, thou *Star* of *Poets*. . . .

One can almost forgive Ben Jonson his questionable behavior, his deceptive half-truths and exasperating paradoxes when, in this final generous and sincere gesture, he presents to the otherwise "evermore unknowing world" the true identity of

This Star of England.