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SHAKESPEARE AND THE LORDS OF COBHAM

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SHAKESPEARE AND THE LORDS OF COBHAM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| PREFACE | iv |
| Chapter | |
| I. FOUNDATIONS IN FACT AND ALLUSION | 1 |
| II. SIR JOHN OLDCASTLE: HISTORY AND LEGEND . . . | 16 |
| III. THE <u>HENRY IV</u> PLAYS | 55 |
| IV. <u>HENRY VI</u> : PARTS 1 AND 2 | 105 |
| V. <u>THE FAMOUS VICTORIES OF HENRY THE FIFTH</u> . . | 144 |
| VI. "ENTER: SIR JOHN RUSSELL AND HARVEY" | 177 |
| VII. <u>THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR</u> | 204 |
| EPILOGUE | 230 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 232 |

PREFACE

Falstaff has been quite literally "the cause that wit is in other men." The voluminous materials written on Shakespeare's most famous comic character equal, indeed, in the twentieth century surpass, the volumes written on Hamlet. It is, therefore, with a marked degree of temerity that I add yet one more study to the overwhelming flood.

To speak of provenance is simple. This study had its origin in a brief paper on the function of the comic characters in Shakespeare's Henry IV plays. That paper was never satisfactorily finished, for I found that the characters were shrouded by historical questions which have remained unanswered in three centuries of scholarship, and I found too that the process of function is uneasily resolved without knowledge of cause and motive. The nucleus of this problem is to be found in the first quartos of the plays where traces of original character names remain. Nicholas Rowe, in the first annotated edition of Shakespeare's plays, printed the story of the noble family who objected to Shakespeare's use of their ancestral name, consequently bringing to pass the renaming of Falstaff and his crew. Writers of the eighteenth century rejected this story; however, with the increase of historical scholarship in the nineteenth

century, Shakespearean critics accepted the story but "denied the minor," turning curtly from the embarrassing question of why Shakespeare chose to portray a Christian martyr as a roisterous buffoon. Twentieth century scholars have acknowledged the facts and concluded that Shakespeare was satirizing the Brooke family, Barons of Cobham, but whether the intended victim was William, Lord Cobham, or his son Henry, is disputed; and as to the question of why they were satirized, there is little in the way of answer.

My own research concerning these problems has led me through many volumes of Calendars of State Papers, chronicles, Historical Manuscripts Commission Reports, Acts of the Privy Council, Elizabethan gossip collections, biographies, histories, and letters. I have found, to my surprise, an abundance of material on the Cobham family, much of it irrelevant, some of it pertinent, and a bit of it vital. This material does, I believe, provide explanations for some of the more exasperating problems and suggests resolutions for many another. It has created for me an irrefragable conviction that two centuries of the Cobham family are satirized in the panorama of the Henry IV and Henry VI plays and in The Merry Wives of Windsor -- a panorama which sweeps from the outlawing of Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham, in 1413, through the Elinor Cobham witchcraft trial of 1441, the Cobhams of Wyatt's Rebellion in 1554, to the Cobhams of the Ridolfi Plot in 1571, and looks forward to the Cobhams of the Main and Bye Plots in 1603 -- wherein lies enough

sedition to break a dozen white staffs. But this is enough of adumbration; I would like to speak briefly of methodology.

To apologize for historical scholarship is ridiculous. We have, I am convinced, advanced beyond that singular era of our recent past which was marked by a peculiar separation of historical scholarship and aesthetic criticism. Mature minds have always acknowledged the interdependence of the two, and this study must necessarily lean heavily upon both methods. The collection of my material has been only half my task; to reveal how Shakespeare used his historical material to mirror current situations, his use of historical allusions as prolepsis, his management of incidents as symbols -- these require a pace beyond historical scholarship. This path is not new. I am following a route which as it were culminates in Lily B. Campbell's Shakespeare's "Histories" Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy. This work presents with perspicuity the complex methods used by the Elizabethan dramatists to present history as a meaningful commentary upon contemporary political, social, and literary life. I believe that Shakespeare was using the Cobham past to indicate both present and future actions, a process which Warwick so painstakingly explains in 2 Henry IV:

There is a history in all men's lives,
Figuring the nature of the times deceased,
The which observed, a man may prophesy,
With a near aim, of the main chance of things
As yet not come to life, which in their seeds
And weak beginnings lie intreasured.
Such things become the hatch and brood of time. . . .
(III. i. 80-86)

I must add in these prefatory remarks a cautionary word for the reader. This study is far from complete. One major hiatus in my research remains because of the incomplete Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series which to date presents materials of the reign of Elizabeth only to the year 1590. More evidence of the friction between Lord Cobham and the Earl of Essex undoubtedly remains uncalendared. The Calendar of State Papers, Spanish Series, for the reign of Elizabeth, has recently been called into question by the Jesuit scholar, Leo Hicks, who, working with the original manuscripts, has found discrepancies and omissions in the editing of this Calendar, particularly in the materials concerned with the relationship of Elizabeth's councillors with Spanish or Jesuit agents.¹ Lacking too are definitive biographies of the Earl of Essex and Sir Robert Cecil. These important figures are still, even in modern scholarship, subject to some degree of partial and emotional treatment. These limitations are at present beyond my control. I plan, if providence favor me, to do further research in England to correct and complete this study.

It is with gratitude and humility that I acknowledge my debts. My introduction to Shakespeare's plays occurred many years ago under the kind tutelage of Professor Sanford M. Salyer. Later, at the graduate

¹Leo Hicks, "Sir Robert Cecil, Father Persons and the Succession 1600-1601," Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu, XXIV (1955), 113.

level, my initial Shakespearean research was guided by Professor Kester Svendsen whose masterful control of Renaissance symbol and meaning is cogently presented in his recent book, Milton and Science. Professor Calvin G. Thayer, who has directed this dissertation, first introduced me to the complex methods of Elizabethan dramatic art. His perception of structure and dramatic methodology is, I believe, unequalled in contemporary scholarship. This is brilliantly documented in his new book, Ben Jonson: Studies in the Plays. Without the careful and considerate instruction of such dedicated scholars I should never have brought this study to completion.

I have other obligations as well for which my gratitude demands expression. Professor Jewel Wurtzbaugh and Professor John M. Raines have given graciously of time and patience in reading my complete manuscript in its early form. Their careful criticism has improved my text in structure and style. The research for this dissertation could not have been conducted without the able assistance of Mrs. Maureen Fiorica, Mrs. Sonja Cutts, Mr. T.H. Milby, and Mr. Harry Brown of the University of Oklahoma Library who have helped me in the last three years to locate materials through the services of the interlibrary loan system. I am indebted to the Henry E. Huntington Library and Harvard University Library for microfilm of rare books and to the Bodleian Library for photostatic copies of George Brooke's poems. In addition the University of Michigan Library and the Libraries of Yale and Cornell Universities have willingly

shipped me many volumes of the Calendar of State Papers. The University Libraries of California, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Missouri, Louisiana, and Texas have sent materials from their rare book collections at my asking. Only with their generous response has my historical research been possible. My typist, Mrs. Jane Adair, has been meticulous. To all, my sincere thanks.

University of Oklahoma

March, 1963

Alice Lyie Scoufos

SHAKESPEARE AND THE LORDS OF COBHAM

CHAPTER I

FOUNDATIONS IN FACT AND ALLUSION

While Shakespearean editors debated the problem of Sir John Oldcastle during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,¹ a small body of positive evidence grew slowly by research and sedulous reading until today we have an accretion of facts and allusions which has transformed theory into acceptable conclusion. There is no longer doubt that Shakespeare used the name of Sir John Oldcastle for his character of Falstaff in an early version of his Henry IV plays. The evidence to support this conclusion is both intrinsic and extrinsic -- evidence surviving within the quarto texts and in various references by playwrights and seventeenth-century commentators. This material has been reviewed many times; however, since it provides the foundation for this study, it is presented again in a succinct and summarized form.

¹ An excellent account of this debate is to be found in Rudolph Fiehler, "How Oldcastle Became Falstaff," MLQ, XVI (1955), 16-28.

The primary evidence of name revision in the Henry IV plays is that of the texts. There remains in the quarto edition (1600) of 2 Henry IV the speech-prefix Old. rather than Fal. (I. ii. 37). This irregularity has been accepted traditionally as an oversight of the transcriber who prepared a copy of the manuscript for the printer. This error was corrected in the folio edition of the plays. In the epilogue of the same play the actor-dancer is made to promise,

If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katherine of France. Where, for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already a' be killed with your hard opinions, for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man.

The phrase "and this is not the man" can be taken two ways, of course, as a flat denial or as a sop for the censor -- the tongue in cheek pose popular with Nashe and Jonson. There are preceding lines in the epilogue which increase this air of ambiguity: "For what I have to say is of mine own making, and what indeed I should say will, I doubt, prove my own marring." This whole epilogue is spoken by way of apology, the actor explains, for "I was lately here in the end of a displeasing play, to pray your patience for it and to promise you a better." This epilogue makes plausible the story printed by Nicholas Rowe in the first annotated edition of Shakespeare's plays (1709), a story in which he recalls that

Falstaff is said to have been written originally under the name of Oldcastle; some of the family being then remaining, the queen was pleased to command him

to alter it; upon which he made use of Falstaff.²

The family "then remaining" was that of William Brooke, Lord Cobham, member of the Privy Council, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, Lord Chamberlain of the Queen's Household, Lord Lieutenant of Kent, Constable of the Tower, and father-in-law to Sir Robert Cecil. Sir John Oldcastle, the fifteenth-century Lollard martyr, had borne, by right of marriage, the title, Lord Cobham, during the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V, and was therefore a titular ancestor of the Brooke family, Lords of Cobham. It is reasonable to assume that Lord William Cobham's position on the Privy Council and his office in the Queen's Household gave him sufficient power to apply corrective measures to any acting group in London.

In 1 Henry IV Prince Hal calls Falstaff "my old lad of the castle" (I. ii. 41) which, among its multiple meanings, includes a pun on Oldcastle; and in the same play two various lines (II. ii. 103; II. iv. 521) are unmetrical with the name Falstaff but regularly decasyllabic with the name Oldcastle.³ In the quarto edition of The Merry Wives of Windsor

²Nicholas Rowe, Some Account of the Life of Mr. William Shakespeare (1709) (London: The Augustan Reprint Society, Extra Series Number I, 1948), p. ix.

³The notes to these lines in A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: Henry The Fourth Part I, ed. S. B. Hemingway (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1936) contain the history of these allusions.

the name Brooke appears but is changed to Broome in the folio edition of the play (II. ii. 159), spoiling Falstaff's joke; and Master Ford's alias, Brooke, also suffers revision to Broome in the folio version. In this same play there is a probably pun on the name of Oldcastle in the line spoken by the Host to describe Falstaff, "Sir John, there's his Castle, his standing bed" (I. 1305). These few tactile clues make up the body of intrinsic evidence of the name revision from Oldcastle to Falstaff at some time prior to the publication of the quarto edition of the Henry IV plays. The extrinsic evidence for this name change is more varied and more salient.

In the early play, The Famous Victories of King Henry the Fifth (c. 1588), Sir John Oldcastle appears as a character in the entourage of young Prince Hal. On coronation day Oldcastle and two other knights are renounced by the new king as maleficent associates whose characters are incommensurate with the new standard of royalty. This anonymous play has long been considered a part of Shakespeare's source material. Its relationship with the Henry IV plays will be discussed in Chapter V of this study. It is mentioned here only as revealing the existence of a dramatic characterization of Sir John Oldcastle at an early date.

In 1599 the Lord Admiral's Men produced a play, an historic compilation by Drayton, Munday, Hathaway, and Wilson, entitled The First Part of the True and Honourable History of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle, in which they defended the Lollard martyr and in which, by

way of prologue, they made an evident thrust at the by now famous

Falstaff:

It is no pamper'd Glutton we present,
Nor aged Councillour to youthfull sinne,
But one, whose vertue shone above the rest,
A valiant Martyr, and a vertuous Peere:
In whose true faith and loyalty exprest
Unto his soveraigne and his Countries weale:
We strive to pay that tribute of our love
Your favours merit. Let faire Truth be grac'd,
Since forg'd invention former times defac'd.⁴

This forged invention idea is repeated by John Weever in a long poem published in 1601 which he called The Mirror of Martyrs written, as he declared in his dedication, "some two yeares agoe." In this poetic eulogy Oldcastle, "that thrice valiant Capitaine and most godly Martyre," is made to complain to the classical gods of the Elysian fields,

Why am I thus in my remembrance rotten,
And in thy sweete saint-pleasing songs forgotten?

Oldcastle suggests a remedy in his apostrophe to the god Mercury who is bidden to descend to earth as a dramatic herald and

Deliver but in swasive eloquence,
Both of my life and death the veritie,
Set up a Si quis, give intelligence,
That such a day shall be my Tragedie.
If thousands flocke to heare a Poet's pen,⁵
To heare a god, how many millions then?

⁴The First Part of the True and Honourable Historie of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle (London: Thomas Pavier, 1600).

⁵John Weever, The Mirror of Martyrs (London: W. Wood, 1601); reprinted in, The Poems of John Weever, ed. H.H. Gibbs (London: The Roxburghe Club, 1873), p. 179.

This reference to the thousands who flock to hear a poet's pen is a possible allusion to the popularity of Shakespeare's Henry IV plays; however, it could as possibly be a reference to the Lord Admiral's play which was paid for in October, 1599. If Weever's poem was written before this date, the allusion is quite probably a Shakespearean one.

Toward the last of February, 1598, the Earl of Essex wrote to Sir Robert Cecil, who was at that time travelling to France on a diplomatic mission for the Queen. Essex included in a postscript to his letter what has been taken as a mocking jest: "I pray you commend me allso to Alex. Ratcliffe and tell him for newes his sister is maryed to Sr. Jo. Falstaff." Leslie Hotson, who discovered this allusion, has suggested convincingly that by "Sr. Jo. Falstaff" Essex meant Henry Brooke, the new Lord Cobham.⁶ We know from the detailed gossip which Rowland White sent to his employer, Sir Robert Sidney, that Margaret Ratcliff, daughter of Sir Alexander Ratcliff of Ordsall and one of the Queen's maids of honor, was a contender for the title of Lady Cobham.⁷ Whether Essex's jest had point in fact or fancy we do not know. There is no evidence of such a marriage. We do know of Queen Elizabeth's peculiar and hostile

⁶Leslie Hotson, Shakespeare's Sonnets Dated and Other Essays (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949), pp. 147-160. Hotson states that Essex's letter was found among the uncalendared papers in the Public Record Office.

⁷Arthur Collins, Letters and Memorials of State In the Reigns of Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, King James (2 volumes; London: T. Osborne, 1746), II, 118; cited subsequently as Collins.

attitude toward many of the marriages of her courtiers and maids: Essex, Southampton, and Raleigh had all suffered periods of disfavor because of their marriages. It is quite possible that Cobham, if there were a marriage or alliance, succeeded in keeping it a secret -- at least from the Queen. There was additional gossip in the following year. On the eighth of July, 1599, the young Countess of Southampton, in a letter to her husband who was with the Essex forces in Ireland, passed on to him a piquant bit of gossip which had reached her at Chartly.

All the news I can send you which I think will make you merry is that I read in a letter from London that Sir John Falstaff is by his Mrs. Dame Pintpot made father of a goodly miller's thumb, a boy that's all head and very little body, but this is a secret.⁸

Scholars have been quick to discover that the "small fish with the big head" (*Uranidea gobio*), also called a "miller's thumb," had the common name of "cob" -- a discovery which explains the Countess' word play on Cobham. It would seem that Henry, Lord Cobham, was being credited with parenthood, at least by the friends of Essex. Whether this was true or not we have no way of knowing. If there were a secret marriage or misalliance between Margaret Ratcliff and Lord Cobham, it was shortly terminated by the mysterious death of that unfortunate young lady in November, 1599. Detailed information of her death is given by Philip Gawdy, who writing from Court to his brother on the sixteenth of November,

⁸Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Honourable The Marquess of Salisbury, ed. M.S. Giuseppi (London: Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1930), part XV, 175-176.

describes the London talk about the tragedy.

Ther is newes besydes of the tragycall death of Mrs. Ratcliffe the mayde of honor who ever synce the deathe of Sr. Alexander her brother hathe pined in suche straunge manner, as voluntarily she hathe gone about to starve her selfe and by the two dayes together hathe receyved no sustinaunce, whiche meeting withe extreame greife hathe made an ende of her mayden modest dayes at Richmonde uppon Saterdaye last, her Majestie being [present?] who commanded her body to be opened and founde it all well and sounde, saving certeyne stringes striped all over her harte. All the maydes ever synce have gone in blacke. I saw it my selfe at court, wher I saw the quenes majestie talke very long withe my L. Henry Howarde and your oncle Fra: Bacon.⁹

Rowland White had also been sending news of Margaret Ratcliff in his steady correspondence to Sidney; in August, 1599, he had informed his employer that "Mrs. Ratcliffe hath kept her chamber these 4 Daies, being somewhat troubled at my Lady Kildares unkynd using of her, which is thought to proceed from her Love to my Lord Cobham."¹⁰ And later in November White sent his own conjecture that "now Mrs. Ratcliffe is dead, the Lady Kildare hopes that my Lord will proceed on his Sute to her."¹¹ Such gossip is worthless but for one factor. It provides us with the information that though the pellucid satire of Oldcastle had been

⁹Letters of Philip Gawdy, ed. I.H. Jeayes (London: J.B. Nichols and Sons, 1906), p. 104.

¹⁰Collins, II, 118.

¹¹Ibid., II, 141. Margaret Ratliff was buried in St. Margarets, Westminster; Ben Jonson wrote her epitaph. A brief biography of this young woman is included in V.A. Wilson, Queen Elizabeth's Maids of Honour (London: The Bodley Head Limited, 1922), pp. 232-248.

suppressed, the new name of Falstaff was being gleefully appropriated, at least by the Essex faction, for a continuing attack upon Lord Cobham.

The playwrights of the Jacobean stage found allusions to Oldcastle or Falstaff as humorous as the gossips of Elizabeth's court. In 1604 an anonymous play, The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinarie, was published which contained these lines:

Shuttlecock: Now Signiors how like you mine Host? did I not tell you he was a madde round knave, and a merrie one too: and if you chaunce to talke of fatte Sir John Old-castle, he wil tell you, he was his great Grandfather, and not much unlike him in Paunch if you marke him well by all descriptions.¹²

Even by 1610 Lord Cobham's complaint of the players' satire seems to have been remembered. Lines from Roger Sharpe's More Fooles Yet allude to the affront taken by that nobleman:

How Falstaffe like doth sweld Virosus looke,
As though his paunch did foster every sinne,
And sweares he is injured by this booke,
His worth is taxt, he hath abused byn.¹³

In 1618 Nathan Field included a reference to Oldcastle in his comedy Amends for Ladies, a reference which evidently alludes to Falstaff's catechism on honor. The humor character, Seldom, speaks the lines to Lord Proudly:

¹²Shakespeare's Centurie of Prayse (Second edition; London: N. Trubner and Company, 1879), p. 65.

¹³Fresh Allusions to Shakspeare, ed. F. J. Furnivall (London: N. Trubner and Company, 1886), p. 69.

Good morrow to your Honor, I doe heare
 Your Lordship this faire morning is to fight,
 And for your honor: Did you never see
 The Play, where the fat Knight hight Old-Castle,
 Did tell you truly what this honor was?¹⁴

At some date before 1634, the year in which he died, the playwright Thomas Randolph composed his comedy, Hey for Honesty, in which he included a somewhat confused reference to Bardolf and Falstaff-Oldcastle in a description of a tavern:

Every Cupbord is full of Custards, the Hogsheads replenished with sparkling Sacks. . . . The Sinke is paved with rich Rubies, and incomparable Carbuncles of Sir John Oldcastle's Nose.¹⁵

The anonymous play, The Wandering Jew (c. 1628), contains an allusion to Oldcastle which is reminiscent of Falstaff:

A Chaire, a Chaire, sweet Master Jew, a Chaire: All that I say, is this, I'me a fat man, it has been a West-Indian voyage for me to come reeking hither; A Kitchin-stuffe-wench might pick up a living, by following me, for the fat which I loose in stradling: I doe not live by the sweat of my brows, but am almost dead with sweating. I eat much, but can talk little; Sir John Old-castle was my greatgrandfathers fathers Uncle, I come of a huge kindred.¹⁶

While the numerous progeny of Falstaff-Oldcastle strutted the stage, men were still to be found who objected to such usage. The poet

¹⁴The Plays of Nathan Field, ed. William Peery (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1950), p. 216.

¹⁵Centurie of Prayse, p. 293.

¹⁶Fresh Allusions to Shakspeare, p. 142.

George Daniel, of Beswick, wrote these lines in 1647:

The worthy Sr. whom Falstaffe's ill-us'd name
Personates, on the Stage, lest scandall might
Creep backward, & blott Martyr, were a shame,
Though Shakespeare, Story, & Fox, legend write:¹⁷

While the poets and playwrights of the seventeenth century were writing allusions and references to the martyr or the comic characterization of him, the historians and scholars were contributing their share to the controversy. The Jesuit writer, Robert Parsons, published a lengthy book in 1603-04 in which his primary aim was to attack John Foxe's extremely Protestant history of the English Church. Foxe had, in his dramatic style, created an epic figure of Sir John Oldcastle and had, by apotheosis, made him the major Protestant martyr of the pre-Reformation era. Parsons, writing under the pseudonym of N. Doleman, describes "the hurtes and dishonor of naughty association" which the Protestants must face because they are brought into the society of

a most impious & infamous companie of condemned heretiks, & wicked malefactors, some condemned for leud life, conspiracies, rebellions, and murder, some for atrocious demeanour, in hurting and wounding quiet and innocent men, some for witchcraft, sorcery, & conjuring even to the destroying of their Princes person. . . . And is not this an honourable communion of Protestants, thinke you? Is not this an holy association for them to bragg of? . . . Heere only in this place it shalbe sufficient to remember for example sake, Syr John Oldcastle, Syr Roger Acton, and above 40 more hanged in Saint Gyles field, for treason and actuall rebellion, &

¹⁷ Centurie of Prayse, p. 266.

for consperinge the death of K. Henry the fifth & of this brethren who yet are made sollomne martyrs by John Fox in this Calendar, & destributed into divers festival daies for celebrating their memoryes.¹⁸

Further on in this work Parsons has cause to refer again to Oldcastle:

He was a most disorderly seditious troublesome man in his manner of life, as also infected with divers heresies in doctrine, different both from the protestants and us, (for which he was condemned by orderly judgment of the church in those dayes, and afterwards of treason and open rebellion, as well by particular arraignment, as also by Act of Parlament).¹⁹

Parson's attack led the historian, John Speed, to make a defensive reply in The History of Great Britaine (1611):

N.D., author of the three conversions, hath made Oldcastle a Ruffian, a Robber, and a Rebell, and his authoritie taken from the Stage-players, is more befitting the pen of his slanderous report then the credit of the judicious, being onely grounded from this Papist and his Poet, of like conscience for lies, the one ever faining, and the other ever falsifying the truth. . . .²⁰

Speed's denigratory phrase concerning Parsons' "Poet" has caused scholars to wince. It refers in all probability to Shakespeare, a fact

¹⁸N.D., The Third Part of a Treatise Intituled: of Three Conversions of Englandd (London: [St. Omer, France?], 1604), p. 8.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 246. Parson's book was answered by Matthew Sutcliffe, The Subversion of R. Parsons his Worke Entituled A Treatise of 3 Conversions (1606) and A Threefold Answer unto the Third Part of A Certaine Triobolar Treatise (1606). I have not found available copies of these books.

²⁰John Speed, History of Great Britaine (Third edition; London: G. Humble, 1632), p. 788.

which I think can be accepted with more equanimity today than in earlier ages. Speed's reference is similar in content to that made by Thomas Fuller in The Church History of Britain:

Stage-poets have themselves been very bold with, and others very merry at, the memory of Sr. John Oldcastle, whom they have fancied a boon Companion, a jovial Royster, and yet a Coward to boot, contrary to the credit of all Chronicles, owning him a Martial man of merit. The best is, Sr. John Falstaffe, hath relieved the Memory of Sr. John Oldcastle, and of late is substituted Buffoone in his place, but it matters as little what petulant Poets, as what malicious Papists have written against him.²¹

Fuller had expended some time and effort in trying to refute the defamatory accusations which had continued to corrupt Oldcastle's fame.

In The Worthies of England Fuller had written of the martyr:

As his body was hanged and burnt in an unusual posture at Tyburn, so his memory hath ever since been in a strange suspense betwixt malefactor and martyr; Papists charging him with treason against king Henry the Fifth. . . . But it hath ever been the practice of the devil and his instruments, angry with God's servants for their religion, to accuse them for sedition. . . . But I have so worn out the nib of my pen in my "Church History" about clearing the innocency of this worthy knight, that I have nothing to add new thereunto.²²

Fuller's pen was not so worn nor his integrity so limited that he could ignore the result of his research in the original papers of the government files. His eventual conclusion concerning the martyr was one of

²¹Thomas Fuller, The Church History of Britain (11 volumes; London: John Williams, 1655), IV, 168.

²²Thomas Fuller, The History of the Worthies of England (3 volumes; London: T. Tegg, 1840), II, 72.

doubt. Speaking of the charges of treason brought against Oldcastle, he wrote,

On the other side, I am much startled with the Evidence that appeareth against him. Indeed, I am little moved with what T. Walsingham writes, (whom all later Authors follow, as a flock the Belweather) knowing him a Benedictine Monk of St. Albanes, bowed by interest to partiality; but the Records of the Tower, and Acts of Parliament therein, wherein he was solemnly condemned for a Traitor as well as Heretick, challenge belief. For with what confidence, can any private person, promise credit from Posterity to his own Writings, if such publick Monuments, be not by him entertained for authentical: Let Mr. Fox therefore, be this Lord Cobhams Cumpurgator, I dare not; and if my hand were put on the Bible, I should take it back again. Yet so, that, as I will not acquit, I will not condemn him, but leave all to the last day of the Revelation of the righteous judgment of God.²³

Another scholar of this period, Richard James, librarian for Sir Robert Cotton, became concerned with the defense of Sir John Oldcastle sometime after 1625 when he was preparing a manuscript copy of Hoccleve's poem on the heretical knight for publication. James considered the poem ample proof of Oldcastle's loyalty, and in his dedicatory epistle to his friend, Sir Henry Bouchier, James declared that Oldcastle "apeeres to have binne a man of valour and vertue" and that he became a martyr because he would not "bowe under the foule superstition of papistrie." James includes in his epistle a reference to Shakespeare's version of the knight:

That in Shakespeares first shewe of Harrie the fift, ye person with which he undertook to playe a buffone was

²³The Church History of Britain, IV, 168.

not Falstaffe, but Sr Jhon Oldcastle, and that offence beinge worthily taken by personages descended from his title, as peradventure by manie others allso whoe ought to have him in honourable memorie, the poet was putt to make an ignorant shifte of abusing Sr Jhon Falstaffe or Fastolphe, a man not inferior of vertue though not so famous in pietie as the other, whoe gave witnesse unto the truth of our reformation with a constant and resolute martyrdom.²⁴

These passing remarks and allusions add somewhat to our knowledge of the tensions which existed in the period in which Shakespeare's history plays were written. These tensions were caused by the religious-political strife of that age. The image of Sir John Oldcastle had become a tangible focusing point upon which the controversialists could maneuver their partial views. Religious tolerance had not yet become a virtue; religion and politics had not ostensibly separated and gone each its own way. The chronicle stories of Oldcastle's life and death were still in an evolutionary stage in Elizabeth's reign, each editor tampering with the materials to present an image to his liking. The growth of the Oldcastle legend is the story of Chapter II.

²⁴The Poems of Richard James, B.D., ed. A. B. Grosart (London: The Chiswick Press, 1880), p. 138.

CHAPTER II

SIR JOHN OLDCASTLE: HISTORY AND LEGEND

The materials for a biography of Sir John Oldcastle must be handled with caution and objectivity for neither the contemporary writers, who were primarily of the orthodox clergy, nor the Tudor apologists were impartial in their views. These fifteenth- and sixteenth-century writers were determined to condemn or commend the Lollard leader according to their own religious convictions; therefore the most reliable information concerning the knight is that drawn from the official government files or from the contemporary writers when no moral or propagandistic point is being made. The government records have been carefully studied by twentieth-century scholars; my information concerning these documents is necessarily dependent upon the scholarly accounts of Oldcastle's life and death given by James H. Wylie, W.T. Waugh, E.F. Jacob, James Gairdner, and the article on Oldcastle in the Dictionary of National Biography.¹ I have of course where possible used the original source

¹James H. Wylie, The Reign of Henry The Fifth (3 volumes; Cambridge: The University Press, 1914-29), cited hereafter as Wylie; W.T. Waugh, "Sir John Oldcastle," English Historical Review, XX (1905), 434-56, 637-58, cited hereafter as Waugh; E.F. Jacob, The Fifteenth Century 1399-1485 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1960), designated

material.

Sir John was born in Herefordshire at a date given variously between 1360 and 1378. His grandfather, John, was prestigious enough to represent Herefordshire in Parliament for the years 1368 and 1372, as was an uncle, Thomas Oldcastle, in 1390 and 1393. The latter was also sheriff of Herefordshire for 1386 and 1391. Sir Richard Oldcastle, father of Sir John, was knighted in 1399; the family seems at this time to have had little in material possessions other than the manor of Almeley near the river Wye.

We know that by 1400 Sir John was also a knight and that he accompanied Henry IV in an expedition to Scotland; he seems from this time forward to have been retained in the royal service. He was employed by the King in the Welsh affairs of the next few years, and it was in these Welsh expeditions that Oldcastle came into close contact with young Prince Henry. At the age of thirteen the Prince had been given partial command over Wales, and by 1406 he had received complete charge of north and south Wales and the Marches with power to receive and pardon all rebels. Among the retinue at his command were Thomas and Sir Richard Oldcastle as well as Sir John, and Sir Roger Acton, Sir Thomas Clanvowe, Sir John Greindor, and others who had or were later to come under the

subsequently by brief title; James Gairdner, Lollardy and the Reformation in England (4 volumes; London: Macmillan and Company, 1908-13), cited hereafter as Gairdner; DNB (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1895), XLII, 86-93.

influence of Herefordshire Lollardy.² In 1404 Oldcastle was returned to Parliament as knight of the shire for Herefordshire; in 1406 he served as justice of the peace, and in 1408 he became sheriff of that county. In the same year he was in the army that was sent against Glendower at Aberystwyth, and he was a witness to the agreement signed on the 12th of September between the two forces.

In June, 1409, Oldcastle, now twice a widower, contracted a marriage with Joan Cobham, the granddaughter and heiress of John, third Baron Cobham. By this marriage Oldcastle gained not only the notable estates of the Cobham family, which included manors and land in five counties, but also the right to attend Parliament as one of the lords temporal. He was so summoned late in 1409 to attend the upper house, and he continued to receive such a summon until his accusation of heresy in 1413. This first Parliament, which Oldcastle attended as Lord Cobham, was the troublesome one of January-June, 1410, in which the Commons proposed sweeping confiscation of church property and a modification of the Statutum de haeretico comburendo. Thomas Walsingham, the St. Albans' chronicler, printed the petition of the "milites Parliamentales, (vel, ut dicamus verius, satellites Pilatales)" who wished to seize possession of the Church -- "ut Ecclesiam Dei per

² The Fifteenth Century, pp. 102-03.

Angliam spoliarent."³ Oldcastle has been suggested as the leader of this anti-ecclesiastical movement in the lower house.⁴ The petitions failed however, and during the Easter recess John Badby, the tailor of Evesham who denied transubstantiation, was burned at the stake for heresy.

The first official record we have of Oldcastle's suspected Lollardy is a letter written in April, 1410, by Archbishop Arundel to the dean of Rochester complaining that an unlicensed chaplain was preaching Lollardy in the churches of Cooling, Halstow, and Hoo.⁵ The dean was instructed to place these churches under interdict and to arrest the chaplain who was presumed to be living with Lord Cobham. Nothing more is known of this incident except that the interdict was temporarily lifted that same month to allow the wedding ceremony for Lady Cobham's daughter to be performed. This marriage between Joan Braybrook and Sir Thomas Broke (Brooke) of Somerset brought the title of Lord Cobham into the Brooke family where it remained for over two hundred years.

³Thomas Walsingham, Ypodigma Neustriae, ed. H. T. Riley (Rolls Series; London: Longman and Company, 1876), p. 429, cited subsequently by brief title. This petition has not been found in the government records.

⁴Waugh, p. 440. This author questions the traditionally accepted view of this Parliament, saying that its notoriety was probably an exaggeration of the chroniclers.

⁵It has been suggested that Sir John was the author of the Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards which was affixed to the doors of St. Paul's in 1395. See J. G. Waller, "The Lords of Cobham, Their Monuments, and the Church," Archaeologia Cantiana, XI (1877), 92.

In 1411 we have direct evidence of Oldcastle's leadership in the Lollard movement. Two letters are extant which were written in September of this year, letters of congratulation sent from England to the leaders of the reform party in Bohemia. One letter was written by Richard Wiche, a former priest of Hereford, and was addressed to John Hus; the other letter was written by Oldcastle and sent to Wok of Waldstein. Both letters mention the receipt of tidings from the brethern of Prague which contain news of the progress of the reform movement there.⁶ Oldcastle's letter is in Latin and is filled with exhortations to perseverance and endurance; it reveals also that Oldcastle accepted without reservation the doctrines of Lollardy.⁷ Sometime later in this year Oldcastle wrote to King Wenceslaus congratulating him (prematurely) upon the support given to the reform party. It is possible too that Oldcastle corresponded with Hus; Thomas Netter of Walden, in his Doctrinale, declared that Oldcastle, at Hus's request, sent copies of Wyclif's writings to Bohemia.⁸

In September of this year the English Council, urged by Prince Henry, agreed to send an expeditionary force to France to assist the Duke of Burgundy in his conflict with the Armagnac faction. This English force

⁶Reginald L. Poole, "On the Intercourse Between English and Bohemian Wycliffites in the Early Years of the Fifteenth Century," English Historical Review, VII (1892), 309.

⁷Waugh, p. 443.

⁸Quoted by Waugh, p. 444.

was placed under the command of the Earl of Arundel, Sir John Oldcastle, Sir Robert and Sir Gilbert Umphraville, and Sir William Bardolph, the brother of the Lord Bardolph who had fallen with the Earl of Northumberland at Bramham Moor.⁹ This English contingent distinguished itself in the victory at St. Cloud and returned home in December, gift-laden. There is no particular mention in the chronicles of meritorious exploits by Oldcastle, but part of his reward seems to have been a jewelled buckle which he sold to Henry V in 1413.¹⁰

We hear nothing more of Sir John until the convocation, which Henry IV called the week preceding his death (March, 1413), met to consider the darkening problem of heresy. On the first day of convocation a chaplain named John Lay, "who had celebrated mass for Lord Cobham," was called before the registrar to produce his ordination papers and his license to preach. He excused himself, saying his papers were in Nottingham, and the case was postponed. We hear nothing more of it, but it seems by now to have been common knowledge that Oldcastle was sheltering the unlicensed preachers. John Capgrave, one of the contemporary writers using the vernacular, describes the heretical

⁹ Ypodigma Neustriae, p. 433; John Capgrave, The Chronicle of England, ed. F.C. Hingeston (Rolls Series; London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), p. 300; The Brut, ed. F.W.D. Brie (Early English Text Society; London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, 1906-08), p. 371.

¹⁰ DNB, XLII, 89.

pastors:

Thei trosted mech on the witte and on the power of a certeyn knyte thei cleped Ser Jon Oldcastelle. He was cleped Cobham for he had weddid a woman ny of the lordis kyn. A strong man in bataile he was, but a grete heretik, and a gret enmye to the Cherch. For his cause the archbishop gadered a Councel at London; for he sent oute prestis for to preche, which were not admitted be non Ordinarie; and he was present at her sermones; and alle thei that seide ageyn his prestis was he redy to smite with his swerd.¹¹

On the tenth of March King Henry IV died, and the business of convocation was not resumed until June. In the continuing investigations of heresy Lord Cobham's name was brought sharply to the attention of the assembly. Some unbound quires of heretical material had been confiscated at a limner's shop in Paternoster Row. When questioned, the limner declared the work belonged to Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham; thereupon the knight was summoned to appear before the King at Kennington.¹² When Henry read aloud the more appalling passages, Oldcastle declared that the ideas were indeed heretical, but that he had never read more than two pages of the book. The members of the convocation were less than satisfied with Lord Cobham's explanation, and charges were brought against Sir John declaring "quod idem Johannes fuit, et est, principalis receptator et fautor, protector et defensor

¹¹Capgrave, pp. 303-04.

¹²C. L. Kingford has suggested that the proceedings against Oldcastle were begun in March before Henry IV's death. See his review of The History of England 1377-1485 in ELH, XXII (1907), 577.

Lollardorum."¹³ Although these charges were duly recorded, cautionary measures were recommended by Arundel, for Oldcastle, as Walsingham describes him, "erat iste Johannis fortis viribus, operi martio satis idoneus, sed hostis Ecclesiae pervicacissimus; Regi, propter probitatem, carus et acceptus. . . ."¹⁴ Archbishop Arundel and others of the clergy returned to Kennington to consult Henry V about proceeding further against Lord Cobham. Henry, optimistically it would seem, determined to apply personal pressure to return the stray lamb to the fold, but during the ensuing midsummer weeks the admonitory advise of the King was heedlessly refused by the obdurate knight.¹⁵ One chronicler goes so far as to declare that Oldcastle attempted to convert the King.¹⁶ Such obstinacy resulted at length in a complete breach of friendship and duty between king and subject. Oldcastle, plenus diabolo,

¹³Ypodigma Neustriae, p. 439; Thomas Netter of Walden, Fasciculi Zizaniorum, ed. W.W. Shirley (Rolls Series; London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1858), p. 434, cited hereafter by brief title.

¹⁴Ypodigma Neustriae, p. 439. It is fascinating to note that both Elizabethan editions of this work omitted from this passage the words of commendation.

¹⁵Fasciculi Zizaniorum, p. 435; Ypodigma Neustriae, p. 439; "Elhami Liber Metricus de Henrico Quinto," Memorials of Henry The Fifth, ed. C.A. Cole (Rolls Series; London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), p. 97. In this latter work Oldcastle is described as Behemoth whose hard scales cannot be pierced by the King's oil.

¹⁶DNB, XLII, 88.

left the Court at Windsor without permission and shut himself up in Cooling Castle. Arundel's summoner was dispatched to cite Sir John to appear and answer to the charge of heterodoxy. The summoner, accompanied by the king's usher, was refused admittance to the castle, and Sir John declared he would allow no man to summon him. On the 11th of September the Archbishop's court met in Leeds Castle. When Oldcastle failed to appear, he was declared contumacious and a warning was sent him to show cause immediately why he should not be declared a heretic. When the Archbishop received only silence for answer, the King sent officers to Kent, and Oldcastle was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London.

On the 23rd of September the ecclesiastical court, with Archbishop Arundel presiding, met in the chapter house at St. Paul's, and Oldcastle was brought before his judges. He had prepared a written statement of his belief which he was allowed to read:

I Johan Oldcastell knyght, Lord of Cobham, wole
that alle crysten men wyte and understonde, that y clepe
Almyghty God in to wytnesse that it hath be, now is, and
ever, with the help of God, schal be myn entent and my
wylle, to byleve, feythfully and fully, alle the sacramentys
that ever God ordeyned to be do in holy chirche.¹⁷

Oldcastle continued in vague and ambiguous language to state his views concerning the sacrament, penance, images, and pilgrimages. Arundel

¹⁷ Fasciculi Zizaniorum, p. 438.

insisted upon a clearer statement concerning the sacrament of the altar and on penance. Oldcastle refused to elaborate on his written confession of faith; however, to Arundel's explanation of the orthodox position according to the Church Fathers, Oldcastle did reply that he thought the popes, cardinals, and bishops were powerless to determine such things. The court was recessed for two days to allow a translation of the Church's doctrine on these points to be made for Sir John so that he might better his understanding of them.

On Monday, the 25th, the court reconvened at Blackfriars, and Oldcastle was asked "the murderous question," did the material bread remain after consecration. His answer was that "evene as Crist whil He went here was God and man; the Manhod mite men se, the bred may men se, but not Cristis bodi."¹⁸ And if the Church taught otherwise, he continued, it was not from scripture but from "venenum infusum in Ecclesia."¹⁹ His answer concerning the adoration of the holy cross was that Christ not the cross should be worshipped. He stated that contrition rather than confession was necessary for salvation, and that for the power of the keys none possessed it unless he followed Christ in purity of life and living, and the Pope himself was a very Antichrist, etc. Then in complete abandonment Oldcastle cried out to the spectators with "alta

¹⁸Capgrave, p. 305.

¹⁹Ypodigma Neustriae, p. 443.

voce, manibus expansis," that the judges "seducent vos omnes . . . et vos ducent ad infernum."²⁰ He was thereupon declared a heretic and handed over to the secular arm.

Through an unexpected leniency Oldcastle was given forty days in which to recant his heresy. This time he spent in the Tower where it seems both Arundel and the King hoped he could be brought to a more tractable state. Thomas Netter of Walden printed the formal retraction of Lollard beliefs which was prepared for the apostate, an abjuration which states that he had now come to his right mind and was willing to acknowledge the authority of the papal see; this seems never to have been signed by Oldcastle.²¹ The knight evidently spent his brief reprieve evolving a plan of escape, for on the night of the 19th of October, 1413, he slipped from the Tower with the aid of Richard Wrothe and William Fisher, the latter a parchment maker in whose house in Turnmill Street Oldcastle hid for some weeks.

With their leader snatched from death's door, the Lollards began an aggressive countermovement which was directed toward the complete overthrow of church and state.²² First, bills were posted upon the church

²⁰Fasciculi Zizaniorum, p. 445.

²¹Ibid., p. 414-416.

²²Wylie asserts that the Lollard strength has been underestimated, that of the laity "almost all England was now on their side." I, 261. Waugh however declares that the sect was by no means popular and was becoming less so every day, p. 646.

doors of London which warned that 100,000 men were ready to rise. Letters and money were then sent throughout England to arouse the followers and to give the date of the planned insurrection. E.F. Jacob, who has examined the numerous reports of the commissions of inquiry which were appointed to investigate the revolt after it had failed, remarks that though the plan for the rebellion was in itself defective, the preparations for assembling forces in each county were made with thoroughness and were patterned upon the revolt of 1381.²³ The insurgents in the distant counties began moving on the third and fourth of January. They were primarily artisans, craftsmen, and husbandmen led by local chaplains; however, gentry names are not missing from the lists: the Cheynes of Drayton Beauchamp, John and Thomas Cook of Essex, Sir Roger Acton of Sutton in Worcestershire, Sir Thomas Talbot of Davington in Kent, Thomas Maureward, ex-sheriff of Warwickshire, and others were involved in the movement. The chronicler of St. Albans watched the insurgents passing by the abbey on their way to London and describes them as crowds drawn by great promise from almost every county of the kingdom, and when asked why they hurried so, they answered they were hastening to London to join Lord Cobham who had sent for them and retained them with wages.²⁴ The designated date for the uprising was

²³The Fifteenth Century, p. 131.

²⁴Thomas Walsingham, Historia Anglicana, ed. H. T. Riley (Rolls Series; London: Longman and Company, 1863-4), II, 298.

Twelfth Night; the Lollards from the outlying districts were told to gather in St. Giles Field and there to meet the "50,000 sympathizers" from London proper. The scheme of a mumming was to be used to cover the approach of the leaders to Eltham where the King and his brothers were celebrating the holidays. The plot may have been only to seize the King, "the priests' prince," and hold him while Oldcastle acted as regent; however, the official indictment, filed on the 11th of January against Oldcastle, stated that the Lollard leader was guilty of treason for conspiring to kill the King, his brothers, the prelates, and other lords of the realm, both temporal and ecclesiastical, and to make himself regent, abolish religious orders, force monks to apply themselves to secular occupations, and plunder and level to the ground the cathedrals and other churches.²⁵

Henry was neither unaware of the plotting against his person and his regime nor impotent in power to act. He moved his retinue to Westminster, sent word to the mayor of London that any congregation of citizens was to be prohibited, suspicious persons were to be arrested, and the city gates barred. Early in the evening of Twelfth Night the mayor arrested several suspected Lollards at the sign of the Axe near Bishopsgate, and from these prisoners exact details of the uprising were learned. The King took his forces to St. Giles Field; the insurgents were scattered,

²⁵Wylie, I, 263-4.

arrested or slain, but Oldcastle managed to escape. Within the next fortnight sixty-nine rebels were executed in London for this insurrection; however, pardons were still being issued eighteen months later. Oldcastle seems to have remained in and about London for five weeks after the failure of the uprising; he was hiding in Westminster when the Duke of Clarence came searching for him. Evidence has been found that the Archdeacon of Westminster, the Abbot of Shrewsbury, and the Cluniac prior of Wenlock were all involved in protecting Oldcastle and aiding his escape.²⁶ Before the first of March Sir John seems to have fled to the hills of Wales where he set up a headquarters for directing his continuing resistance to church and state.

We do not know how much popular sentiment was aligned in favor of the Lollard leader or how much of it predicated his guilt. We do know from two extant poems that the rebel knight's actions were condemned by some as a breach of the code of chivalry. In the anonymous complaint "Against the Lollards" poetic use is made of Oldcastle's name to create an image of desuetude and decay.

Hit is unkyndly for a knight
 That shuld a kynges castel kepe
 To bable the Bibel day and night
 In restyng tyme when he should slepe.

²⁶
The Fifteenth Century, p. 133.

An old castel, and not repaired,
 With wast walles and woves wides,
 The wages ben ful yvel wared
 With suiche a capitayn to abide;
 That rerethe riot for to ride
 Agayns the kynge and his clergie
 With prive peyne and pore pride;
 Ther is a poynt of lollardie. . . .²⁷

In Hoccleve's poem, written to censure the defected knight, we find a *mélange* of disparagement and pity.

Allas that thow that were a manly knyght
 And shoon ful cleer in famous worthynesse
 Standing in the favour of everye wight
 Haast lost the style of Christenly prownesse
 Among alle hem that stand in the cleerenesse
 Of good byleeve, and no man with the holdith
 Saif cursid caitifs heires of dirknesse.
 For verray routhe of thee myn herete coldith.

.....

O Oldcastel how hath the feend thee beent?
 Where is thy knyghtly herte? art thow his thrall?

.....

If yee so holy been as ye witnesse
 Of your self, thanne in Crystes feith abyde.
 The disciples of Chryst had hardynesse
 For to appere, they nat wolde hem hyde
 For-fere of deeth but in his cause dyde.
 They fledden nat to halkes ne to hernes
 As yee doon that holden the feendes syde
 Which arn of dirkness the lanternes.

This poem includes a passage which indicates Hoccleve's belief that Oldcastle was the instigator of the recent insurrection:

²⁷ Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History, ed. Thomas Wright (Rolls Series; London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), II, 243-244.

Ne nevere they in forcible maneere
 With wepnes roos to slee folk and assaill
 As ye diden late in this contree heere
 Ageyn the king stryf to rere and battaill.

Look how our Cristen Prince our Lige Lord
 With many a Lord and knyght beyond the see
 Laboure in armes and thow hydest thee
 And darst nat come and shewe thy visage
 O fy for shame, how can a knyzt be
 Out of thonur of this rial viage.²⁸

Proclamations were sent out to the midlands and the western counties for Oldcastle's apprehension after his flight from London. The King offered a reward of one thousand marks, a tremendous sum in those days, or land worth twenty pounds a year for life to anyone who would capture the Lollard leader; any town, borough, or city was offered exemption from tax during the King's life if they could produce the rebel knight. It availed not. On the 14th of June Oldcastle was formally outlawed for treason at Brentford county court, and the remainder of his lands was seized by the King. However, toward the end of the year Henry, in an effort to harmonize the discordant elements at home in preparation for his French campaign, offered a pardon to the rebel if he would submit to his sovereign. As late as April, 1415, the proclamation of grace was reissued, but Oldcastle, possibly fearing a trap or hoping for success in a newly plotted conspiracy, refused to answer.

²⁸ The Poems of Richard James, pp. 139, 151.

By midsummer of 1415, as premature rumors spread of the King's departure, Oldcastle sent a hostile note to Richard Beauchamp, Lord Abergavenny, threatening an attack upon him; there seems to have been an ancient grudge between the two men. Immediately Abergavenny gathered a strong force from his Worcestershire estates, led them against the Lollard, and, though failing to take the leader, discovered his cache of weapons, money, and standards. Among the latter was a banner bearing the image of the chalice and the host.

During this same summer it was rumored that Oldcastle had met William Douglas at Pomfret, that he had offered the Scots three thousand pounds to bring the pseudo-Richard II, Thomas Trumpington, into England at the head of a strong force. There was evidently some basis of fact in these rumors for the Cambridge-Scrope-Gray conspiracy, which was crushed at Southampton on the first of August as the English forces prepared to embark for France, had ramifications which touched Oldcastle. Richard, Earl of Cambridge, Henry, Lord Scrope of Masham, and Sir Thomas Gray of Heton agreed to combine their forces, declare Henry V an usurper, and place young Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, on the English throne. At the same time they planned to restore young Henry Percy, Hotspur's son, to his heritage, thus incurring the favor of the northern counties. They planned also to let the Scots in at Roxburgh to increase their forces, to arouse the Lollards under Oldcastle, and to draw upon the rebel strength of Glendower if possible. The Lollards,

some of whom were mustered in the army that was ready to sail for France, were to mutiny and assist the Earl of March who was to unfurl his banner with the arms of England upon it. The conspiracy failed when the Earl of March revealed the plot to the King on the eve of the day planned for the assassinations.

Evidence exists that Oldcastle was sheltered at this time, August, 1415, by John Prest, vicar of Chesterton in Warwickshire.²⁹ But for the next year we hear almost nothing of the Lollard rebel. The victory at Agincourt seems to have quieted the rebellious factions at home, at least for a time. In the Christmas season of 1416 a squire of Oldcastle's was caught in an attempt on the King's life as the royal family celebrated the holidays at Kenilworth. Soon afterwards the Abbot of St. Albans learned that Oldcastle was hiding in the house of a peasant near the abbey. A raid resulted in the arrest of some of Oldcastle's followers and the confiscation of some religious books and pamphlets in which the saints' names and pictures had been defaced. It would seem that Oldcastle moved freely from his hiding places in Wales to various sectors throughout central England. He seems also to have continued his negotiations with the Scots after the failure of the Cambridge-Scrope-Gray conspiracy. The chronicler, Thomas Otterbourne, relates that about this time a written agreement between Oldcastle and the Duke of Albany was discovered, and that

²⁹
Wylie, III, 85.

Lollards were busy inciting the men of Northumberland and Yorkshire to proclaim King Richard when he should return from Scotland.³⁰ It is interesting to note that the Scottish Exchequer Rolls contain a memorandum to the effect that Albany had spent in excess of 733 pounds in maintaining the pseudo-Richard.³¹ The Scottish forces, whose movements had been previously planned to coincide with the Cambridge-Scrope-Gray conspiracy of 1415, moved into England in August, 1417, one force under the Earl of Douglas approaching Roxburgh, another under the Duke of Albany threatening Berwick. The regent Bedford and the Duke of Exeter with hastily gathered forces marched northward. The Scots soon abandoned their "Foul Raid" and retired beyond the border.

On the first of December, 1417, word reached London that Oldcastle had been captured at Broniarth in Wales by retainers of Edward Charlton, Lord Powis. Sir Griffith Vaughan and his sons had indeed succeeded in capturing the outlaw after a violent struggle; one story adds that a woman broke the rebel's leg with a milk-stool in the scuffle. Oldcastle was carried to London in a horse litter and presented before Parliament which was in session. On the 14th of December Chief Justice Hankford read the indictment of treason and Archbishop Chichele read the sentence of excommunication; Oldcastle was then asked if he could present

³⁰ Quoted by Wylie, III, 87.

³¹ Ibid., III, 87.

reasons why the sentences should not be effected. It is reported that Oldcastle talked at first of mercy, saying that vengeance belonged only to God. At length, being directed to answer more to the point, Oldcastle declared that the present regime had no right to pronounce judgment, that he was a loyal subject of the true King Richard who was alive and dwelling in Scotland. Parliament immediately declared that the sentence of death should be executed. Oldcastle was drawn to St. Giles Field on a hurdle, hanged in chains, and burned as a traitor to God and the King. Before his death it is reported that Oldcastle asked Sir Thomas Erpingham to secure tolerance for the Lollards if he should return to life in three days. This promise of resurrection brought a considerable crowd of Oldcastle's followers to St. Giles Field on the appointed day where they awaited the miracle; when Oldcastle failed to appear, they gathered his ashes to rub upon their eyes.

Such was the life and death of Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham. The contemporary chroniclers called him Behemoth, Leviathan, faithless knight, perfidious follower of Wyclif, satellite of Satan, and so on. Thomas Walsingham, Thomas Netter, John Capgrave, Thomas Otterbourne, Thomas Eltham, Hoccleve, and the anonymous poet all tell a similar story of the strong soldier who turned against church and King. But from our modern vantage point only the gross inhumanity to man looms large when we read that so stalwart a man (and many another) was burned to death for devotion to his convictions. Our modern sensibilities

are conditioned by what the medieval mind would have, indeed did, call soft and specious reasoning. This medieval tough-mindedness is well documented as late as 1528 when Sir Thomas More, indulging his polemic prose, attacked the inimical problem of heresy in his Dialogue Concerning Tyndale. In this work, written when the Roman Catholic Church was fast losing its grip upon the English nation, More resolved

. . . to aunswere the poyntes whyche ye moved at youre fyrste metynge, when ye sayde that manye menne thoughte it an harde and an uncharitable waye taken by the clergy, to put men convict of heresy sometime to shame, sometyme to death, and that Christ so farre abhorred all such violence, that he would not any of his flocke shoulde fyght in any wyse, neither in the defence of Christ himself, for which he blamed Saint Peter, but that we should all live after hym in sufferance and pacience. . . .

These objections, explained More, are soon answered, for no fault offends God more than heresy. The heretics themselves, he said, had resorted to violence since the early days of the Donatists when Saint Augustine was brought at length to advise the use of force to prevent the tormenting and killing of the true Christian flock; Saint Jerome and other virtuous fathers allowed the use of force against heresy; sore punishment by fire had been necessitated by the great outrages committed against the peace and quiet of the people in divers places of Christendom. Continuing, More cites the burning of Oldcastle as an English example of the wise use of fire to control destructive forces:

In the time of that noble Prince of moste famous memorye Kynge Henrye the fifth, while the Lorde

Cobham mainteined certayn heresies, and that by the meanes thereof, the nnumber so grewe and encreased, that within a while though hymself was fledde into Wales, yet thei assembled themselfe together in a fielde nere unto London, in suche wise and suche nnumber, that the Kyng with his nobles wer faine to putte harnesse on their backes for the repression of them, wherupon they wer distressed and many putte to execucion, and after that the Lorde Cobham taken in Wales and burned in London, the King his nobles and his people therupon considering the greate peryll and jeopardie that the realme was lyke to have fallen in by those heresies, made at a parliamente very good and substanciall provisions beside all suche as were made before, as wel for the withstanding as the repressing and grievous punishment of any suche as should be founded faultie thereof, and by the clergie lefte unto the seculer handes.³²

A heretic, More continued to explain, endangered the whole Christian community with infection. The clergy, though piteous and charitable, had no choice but to turn over an obdurate heretic to the secular arm. The loss of one human soul was infinitely less than the destruction of God's church.

If we are repelled by the asperity of these medieval conceptions, it will add little in the way of palliation to recall that the early religious reformers were seeking not the tolerance and freedom which we prize today (these are Neo-Classical ideals) but the substitution of their own rigorous forms of doctrine and church government. Oldcastle was ready to "smite with hys swerd" those who complained of his priests. The

³²The English Works of Sir Thomas More, ed. W.E. Campbell and A.W. Reed (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1927), II, 274-76.

reformers were equally convinced that God's church was endangered, but for them its salvation lay in complete reformation, and if that reformation required militant action against temporal and ecclesiastical powers, then revolution was to be undertaken for God's glory and the edification of man. The sixteenth-century Protestants (if we may use that term without historical anachronism) had no trouble accepting Oldcastle's revolt against the church, for by 1536 the English Reformation had begun, but they found that Oldcastle's treason to the King rescinded his martyr's glory. Thus we find the Tudor controversialists concentrating on the insurrection of St. Giles Field, either minimizing its importance, re-evaluating its purpose, or crediting its misconception to Sir Roger Acton and others.

Until William Tyndale glorified Oldcastle (c. 1530) the accounts of the rebel knight were derivative versions taken from the writings of Walsingham, Netter, and Otterbourne. Titio Livius, the Italian scholar who had been attracted to England by the fame of Humphrey Duke of Gloucester as a patron of literature, wrote his Vita Henrici Quinti before mid-fifteenth century, using in addition to these sources the official records and The Brut.³³ The fifteenth-century vernacular chronicles of London

³³For Titio Livius' sources see C. L. Kingsford's introduction to The First English Life of King Henry the Fifth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), p. 13. Livius' Vita was edited by Thomas Hearne (Oxford: 1716).

gave brief summarized accounts of the uprising,³⁴ and Caxton, printing his continuation of Higdon's Polychronicon at the close of the century, added his own editorial note of satisfaction at the failure of the rising:

. . . but blessyd be God, the kynge and lordes had knowleche of theyr entente, and toke the felde to fore them, and awayted on theyr comyng, and toke many preestes, clerkys, and other lewd men that were of theyr sect fro alle the partyes of England, wenyng to have founded theyr Capitayne there, Syre Johan Oldcastell, but they were deceyved.³⁵

When the translator of Titio Livius' Vita Henrici Quinti, writing in 1513 to provide Henry VIII with an example of a noble and virtuous prince, came to the "marvelous insurrection of hereticks," he named Lord Cobham as being "amongest the aforesaide," and he too thanked God that "the first victorie of that noble Kinge after his Coronacion was against these cursed supersticious heretiques for Christ and the defence of the Church of God, in the defence and supportacion of our Catholique faith."³⁶

The point of view changed only when the heresiarchs like Tyndale and Bale began to produce their controversial writings. William Tyndale's

³⁴Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles, ed. James Gairdner (London: Camden Society, 1880), pp. 54, 56, 148; The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century, ed. James Gairdner (London: Camden Society, 1876), pp. 107-08, 116; Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London, ed. John G. Nichols (London: Camden Society, 1852), p. 12.

³⁵Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, ed. Joseph R. Lumby (Rolls Series; London: Longman, Trubner and Company, 1882), VIII, 549.

³⁶The First English Life . . ., p. 23.

polemical pamphlets, shipped into England from the Continent where he lived in self-imposed exile, included a small work entitled The Examination of Master William Thorpe . . . and of the Honorable Knight Syr Jhon Oldcastell Lord Cobham. . . . This "Bok of Thorpe" contained an account of Oldcastle's trial before Archbishop Arundel, an elaboration of Oldcastle's belief on the four points of doctrine which had entered his testimony, and a dramatic description of the knight's declaration of faith which Tyndale introduced with certain addenda:

And with that he kneled downe on the pavement/and helde up his handis & said. I shryve me to god and to you all sirs/y in my youthe I have synnyd greatly and grevously in lecherie and in pride and hurte many men & done many other horrible synnes/good lord I crie the mercie.³⁷

To conclude this work Tyndale produced a letter, reputedly Oldcastle's, which contained a warning to the Lollards that any abjuration which the clergy might announce he had made would be a false document design to mislead and destroy them.

Sir Thomas More decried this work of Tyndale's, declaring that any man of natural wit or learning

³⁷The Examination of Master William Thorpe, preste . . . The Examination of the Honorable Knight Syr Jhon Oldcastell Lord Cobham (Antwerp? 1530?), unpaginated. John Bale declared some years later that Tyndale's source had been a manuscript "which was written in the time of the said lord's trouble by a certain friend of his, & so referred in coppes unto this our age." A Breve Chronycle Concerning . . . the Blessed Martir of Christ, Sir John Oldecastell the Lord Cobham (London: Anthony Scoloker, 1544), fol. Aiii^v

. . . shall not onely be well able to perceyve hym for a folysshe heretyke & his argumentes easy to answere/ but shall also se that he sheweth hym selfe a false lyar in hys rehersall of the mater/wherin he maketh the tother parte somtyme speke for hys commodite, such maner thynges as no man wolde have done that were not a very wylde gose.³⁸

Such ridicule was no deterrent to John Bale who, by 1544, had expanded Tyndale's account of Oldcastle's trial into a brawling attack upon the "beastly blockheads, these bloody bellygods" who with their "unsavory interrogations" had put an innocent lamb to death.³⁹ The language of the fifteenth-century chroniclers, who had found Oldcastle's conduct abhorrent, was now turned by the pensman of the new faith with triple invective upon the prelates who had condemned the rebel. Bale's Brefe Chronycle was printed three times within four years though he himself was residing in Basel, returning to London only after the accession of Edward VI. Bale's torrent of abuse continued to flow in the first English edition (1563) of John Foxe's Acts and Monuments of the Church. The martyrologist's primary intention in his relation of the Oldcastle story was to clear the knight's name of the charge of treason, but, following the accepted syllogistic procedure of polemic debate, he attacked the Catholic clergy first:

No small number of godly disciples left that good man /Wyclif/ behind him to defend the lowliness of the

³⁸The Confutacyon of Tyndales Answere (London: William Rastell, 1532), fol. Aiiiii^v.

³⁹A Brefe Chronycle . . . , fol. Aiii^r.

gospel against the exceeding pride, ambition, simony, avarice, hypocrisy, whoredom, sacrilege, tyranny, idolatrous worshippings, and other filthy fruit of those stiff-necked pharisees; against whom Thomas Arundel, the archbishop of Canterbury (as fierce as ever was Pharaoh, Antiochus, Herod, or Caiaphas) collected, in Paul's church at London, a universal synod of all the papistical clergy of England, in the year of our Lord 1413 (as he had done divers others before), to withstand their most godly enterprise. And this was the first year of king Henry V., whom they had then made fit for their hand. The chief and principal cause then of the assembling thereof, as recordeth the Chronicle of St. Alban's, was to repress the growing and worthy lord Cobham; who was then noted to be a principal favourer, receiver, and maintainer of those whom the bishop misnamed to be Lollards.⁴⁰

To the official condemnation of heresy and command to hand Oldcastle over to the secular jurisdiction, power, and judgment, Foxe, following Bale, added the words, "to do him thereupon to death." Foxe then proceeds to argue that it is proof that Oldcastle was not a traitor in the condemnation of the first trial.⁴¹ The insurrection of St. Giles Field is turned by Foxe into an evangelical meeting of the gossellers who sought sanctuary in the groves and byways:

In the Christmas following were sir Roger Acton, knight, master John Brown, esquire, sir John Beverly, a learned preacher, and divers others, attached, for quarrelling with certain priests, and so imprisoned; for all men at that time could not patiently suffer their blasphemous brags. The complaint was made unto the

⁴⁰ John Foxe, The Acts and Monuments of the Church, ed. Josiah Pratt (8 volumes; London: The Religious Tract Society, 1877), III, 321.

⁴¹ Ibid., III, 336.

king of them, that they had made a great assembly in St. Giles field at London, purposing the destruction of the land, and the subversion of the commonwealth. As the king was thus informed, he erected a banner, saith Walden, with a cross thereupon; as the pope doth commonly by his legates, when he pretendeth to war against the Turks, and, with a great number of men, entered the same field, where he found no such company. Yet was the complaint judged true, because the bishops had spoken it at the information of their priests. . . . yet never a blow was given, never a stroke was stricken, no blood spilled, no furniture nor instruments of war, no sign of battle, yea no express signification either of any rebellious word, or malicious fact, described either in records, or yet in any chronicle.⁴²

Foxe suggests then, by way of afterthought, that the "high and tragical words" in the indictment against Oldcastle and his followers

. . . may peradventure seem to the ignorant and simple reader, some heinous crime of treason to rest in them, for conspiring against God, the church, the king and their country. But what cannot the fetching practice of the Romish prelates bring about, where they have once conceived a malice?⁴³

Foxe's adventitious account of Oldcastle's trial and insurrection soon encountered a vitiating attack from the pen of Nicholas Harpsfield, the former Archdeacon of Canterbury under Queen Mary, who was imprisoned in the Fleet from 1562 until his death in 1575 for refusing to subscribe to the new religion. Harpsfield's Dialogi Sex, was published in Antwerp in 1566 under the name of Alan Cope, a young English refugee who saw the work through Plantin's press. In the last dialogue of the

⁴²Ibid., III, 343, 358.

⁴³Ibid., III, 367.

work Harpsfield attacked the pseudo-martyrs which Foxe had installed in his calendar of saints, declaring that Foxe had fraudulently and corruptly commended traitors to the crown.⁴⁴ When Foxe brought out his second edition of the Acts and Monuments in 1570, he added a fifty-page "Defense of the Lord Cobham" in which he attacked not only "Alanus Copus Anglus" for trying to prove him a "liar, a forger, an impudent, a misreporter of truth, a depraver of stories, a seducer of the world" but he also attacked the inaccuracies in the chronicles of Robert Fabyan, Edward Hall, Polydore Vergil, Thomas Cooper, and Richard Grafton to destroy the validity of their accounts of Oldcastle -- the "ready sources" with which Harpsfield had taunted Foxe.⁴⁵ The martyrologist seems to have had in his possession a manuscript copy of Hall's chronicle which contained a cancelled passage on Oldcastle, for Foxe describes it and attributes the emendation to the influence of Bale's Brefe Chronycle which had been slipped onto Hall's desk by one of his servants. Foxe describes Hall's interest in Bale's "true" account of the story and his revision of his own writing:

⁴⁴Dialogi Sex, Contra Summi Pontificatus, Monasticae Vitae, Sanctorum, Sacrarum Imaginum Oppugnatores, et Pseudomartyres (Antwerp: Plantin Press, 1566). This is a rare volume which I have not seen. It is described by R. W. Chambers in his introduction to Harpsfield's The Life and Death of Sr. Thomas Moore (Early English Text Society; Oxford: University Press, 1932), pp. cxcvi-cxcviii.

⁴⁵Acts and Monuments, III, 348-401.

The matter which he cancelled out, came to this effect. Wherein he, following the narration of Polydore, began with like words to declare how the sacramentaries here in England, after the death of John Huss and Jerome of Prague, being pricked, as he saith, with a demonical sting, first conspired against the priests, and afterwards against the king, having for their captains sir John Oldcastle the lord Cobham, and sir Roger Acton, knight; with many more words to the like purpose and effect, as Polydore, and other such like chroniclers do write against him. All which matter, notwithstanding, the said Hall with pen, at the sight of John Bale's book, did utterly extinguish and abolish; adding in the place thereof the words of Master Bale's book.⁴⁶

Hali's account of Oldcastle as a "valiant capitain and a hardy gentleman" is certainly a mitigated version of the original story, but it scarcely "followeth Bale." Hall omits Oldcastle's name in the account of the insurrection and describes it thus:

After this tyme in a certain unlawfull assembly was taken sir Robert Acton knight, a man of greate wit & possession, Jhon Broune Esquire, Jhon Beverly clerke and a great numbere of other whiche were brought to the kynges presence, and to hym declared the cause of their commocion and risyng. . . . Some saie that the occasion of their death was the conveighance of the Lorde Cobham out of prisone. Other write that it was bothe for treason and heresy as the record declareth. Certain affirme that it was for feined causes surmised by the spiritualtic more of displeasour then truth: the judgement whereof I leave to men indifferent. For surely all conjectures be not true, nor all writynges are not Gospell, & therefore because I was nether a witnes of the facte, nor present at the deede I overpasse that matter and begin another.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Ibid., III, 378.

⁴⁷Edward Halle, The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and York (London: R. Graftoni, 1548), fol. xxxv; Hall's Chronicle (London: J. Johnson, 1809), p. 48.

Pynson's edition of Fabyan's Chronicle (1516) contained the standard account of Oldcastle and his adherents who assembled in St. Giles Field where they "entendynge thi destruction of this land/and subvercion of the same."⁴⁸ Rastell's edition of this same work admitted no changes to the story,⁴⁹ and although the 1542 and 1559 editions contained alterations and omissions to bring them into conformity with the Reformation, the history of Oldcastle remained untouched: Sir John, for heresy and treason, is "hanged upon a newe poyer of galowys with chaynes, and after consumed with fyre."⁵⁰

Polydore Vergil's account of Oldcastle followed the Vita Henrici Quinti of Titio Livius, The Brut, and Fabyan, and it blamed the leader, Lord Cobham, for the treasonable uprising.⁵¹ The chronicle of John Hardyng, who was a contemporary of Oldcastle and had spent his youth with the Percy family in Northumberland, was published in 1543 in two

⁴⁸ /Anon./, Prima pars Cronecarum (London: R. Pynson, 1516), fol. clxxvi.

⁴⁹ Fabyan's Cronycle (London: W. Rastell, 1533), fol. clxxi.

⁵⁰ Robert Fabyan, The New Chronicles of England and France, ed. Henry Ellis (London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1811), p. 583.

⁵¹ For an account of Vergil's sources see C. L. Kingsford, English Historical Literature in the XVth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), pp. 254-55, and Denys Hay, The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil (London: Royal Historical Society, 1950), pp. xvii-xx. The middle books of the Anglica Historia which cover the period of the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V have not been published since the Leyden edition of 1651.

dissimilar editions by Richard Grafton. In the Stow-Grafton quarrel which later ensued over editorial policies Stow twitted Grafton about the inconsistencies that occurred in almost every page, but the account of Oldcastle is identical in both editions. Hardyng's history is in verse form and relates the insurrection in three stanzas:

In his fyrste yere, the Lorde Cobham heretike
 Confedered with lollers insapient
 Agayne the churche arose, and was full lyke
 It to have destroyed by theyr entendment
 Had not the kyng then made suppowelment
 And put hym fro the felde, by good direccyon
 That sembled were, by greate insurreccyon.
 Then fled the lorde Cobham hexxorious
 To Wales, so with lollers many one
 Musyng in his opinyon venemous
 Howe that he myght destroye the churche anone
 But God that syt in heven above alone
 Knowyng his herte, naked of all good entent
 Let hym be take, to have his judgement.

.

And brent he was to ashes deed and pale
 Through cursed lyfe, thus came he in greate bale. ⁵²

Sometime between 1536 and 1544 Robert Redmayne composed a Latin life of Henry V which praised the "King of famous memory" but also revealed the author's sympathy with Oldcastle's cause. Redmayne spoke of Oldcastle's family as "militis, fortis viri et optimi equitis descenderint," and that the clergy which pursued him were "perditi homines." This manuscript was dedicated to the Earl of Huntingdon, but

⁵²
The Chronicle of Jhon Hardyng (Londini: Richardi Graftoni, 1543), fol. ccviii.

there is no evidence that it was published in the sixteenth century.⁵³

Thomas Lanquet edited Cooper's Chronicle in 1560; the story of Oldcastle's heresy and treason follows the older accounts of the uprising. There is nothing in this work about Oldcastle's death.⁵⁴ In 1568 Richard Grafton published his own historical work, This Chronicle of Breteyn, but in it we find the author side-stepping the touchy issue of Oldcastle's treason and referring the reader to Foxe's history:

And in this first yere, Sir John Oldecastell, which by his wife was called Lorde Cobham, a valiaunt Captaine and an hardie Gentelman, was accused unto the Archebishop of Cantorbury of certeine poyntes of heresie. But for that I have not purposed in this historie to write of any matter that specially concerneth religion, I will therefore referre you to the booke of Monumentes of the Church, where the whole historie of this Gentelman and many others is at large described and setfoorth.⁵⁵

But by far the most interesting account of the Oldcastle story which Tudor chroniclers printed is that of John Stow. Stow was a tailor for many years, but he pursued his antiquarian interests con amore all his life. Impinged by poverty, he yet managed somehow to buy the collection of rare books and manuscripts of Reginald Wolfe (the projector of Holinshed's

⁵³ Robert Redmayne, "Vita Henrici Quinti," ed. C.A. Cole in Memorials of Henry The Fifth, p. 15.

⁵⁴ Cooper's Chronicle unto the late death of Queene Marie (London: T. Berthelettes, 1560), fol. 255^v.

⁵⁵ Richard Grafton, This Chronicle of Breteyn (London: R. Tottyll, 1568), p. 444.

Chronicles) upon that antiquarian's death in 1573. When Stow published his first account of the Oldcastle affair in A Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles (1565), he listed only Hall as his source, and his brief description of the St. Giles insurrection is called a meeting of "adherents of Syr John Oldcastell" who were, he declared, so numerous that all the prisons in and about London were full.⁵⁶ Although Stow was called before the Privy Council in 1568 for his possession of "curious books" and his "conservatism" in religion, he was befriended by Archbishop Parker. It was Stow who edited the beautiful editions of Walsingham's Historia Brevis (1574) and Ypodigma Neustrae (1574) for the Archbishop.⁵⁷ And when Stow brought out the enlarged edition of his Annales of England in 1592, he dedicated it to Archbishop Whitgift. Stow had by this time examined the available sources and he wrote a lengthy account of the Oldcastle affair. "This John was a strong man," Stow wrote, "and a meetely good man of war, but he was a most perverse enimie to the state of the church at that time." Stow's account of the uprising is detailed. He describes the alacrity of the mayor who

. . . about X of the clocke at night went himselfe with
a strong power, to the signe of the Axe withoute Bishops

⁵⁶John Stow, A Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles (London: T. Marshe, 1565), pp. 138-39.

⁵⁷Thomas Walsingham, Historia Brevis ab Edwardo Primo ad Henricum Quintum (London: H. Binneman, 1574); Ypodigma Neustriae vel Normanniae (London: J. Day, 1574).

gate, where they apprehended the man of the house called John Burgate carpenter and vi other, one of them being a esquire belonging to Sir John Old-castell, and sent them to Eltham, where they confessed before the k. that they were confederate with Sir John Old-castell, to fight against him and his lords in S. Giles field above Holborne.

Stow describes the King's determination to take the field when he heard of the plot to destroy his regime, and his success in defeating the surprised rebels:

. . . he went into the field when it was little past midnight, with a great armie, for hee was warned that Sir John Old-castell, and Sir Roger Acton, would bee in the same field on the next day following with 25000 people: and the same night were taken more then four escore men in armor of the same faction, for many that came fro far, not knowing the kings campe to be in the field, were taken by the same and sent to prison, & being demaunded whom they sought, made answere the lord Cobham. The rumour of this, comming to the eares of the captaines that were the kings enimies, they were woonderfully discouraged, and that the more, bicause none came to them out of London, from whence they looked for many thousands, whereupon they fled to save themselves, and the kings men folowing them tooke some, and slein other, but where their captain was become would not be known.⁵⁸

Stow's account of Oldcastle's final appearance before Parliament and his execution is lengthy and includes much from Walsingham and Otterbourne. This detailed version from Stow's Annals must of course be compared with Holinshed's Chronicles where we find a fascinating example of political

⁵⁸

John Stow, The Annales of England (London: R. Newbery, 1592), pp. 550-51.

and social pressures shaping editorial policy. First, it should be remembered that Stow helped edit the Chronicles after Holinshed's death in 1580, and he wrote the continuation which brought the history up to the date of the second edition (1585-87). The checks and censorship which Stow encountered as co-editor of this work may account for the detailed description of Oldcastle which he printed in his own Annals; and his frustration may also account for the vehemence in his reporting of the Main and Bye plots in 1603 which he indexed, "another Lord Cobham arraigned, and the manner of it is a fine story."⁵⁹ It should be remembered too that both the 1577 and the 1585-87 editions of Holinshed's Chronicles were dedicated "to the Right Honorable and his singular good Lord and maister, S. William Brooke Knight, Lord Warden of the Cinque Portes, and Baron of Cobham." The epistle dedicatory and the Description of England, which is used as an introduction to the Chronicles, were written by William Harrison, the household chaplain of Lord Cobham. Furthermore, the account of Elizabeth's reign in Book III is followed by a seventeen-page "treatise of the Lord Cobhams" written by Francis Thynne, a Kentish antiquarian who later became Lancaster herald. This eulogy contained a history of the three branches of the Cobham family, a history which exaggerated the heroic deeds of the Lord Cobhams but excised all

⁵⁹ John Stow, Annales, or, A General Chronicle of England (London: R. Meighen, 1631).

the treason.⁶⁰ The Privy Council (of which Cobham was a new member) ordered the expurgation of Thynne's treatise and approximately one hundred additional pages from Books II and III. The only explanation that has been suggested for these censures is that Lord Cobham was out of favor at court at this time. We do know that Archbishop Whitgift took an active part in this expurgation of Holinshed's Chronicles.⁶¹

In Holinshed's account of Sir John Oldcastle the knight is called "a valiant capteine and a hardie gentleman." He is made to thank the King for having "lovinglie admonished him," and he offers "an hundred knights and esquires to come to his purgation, or else to fight in open lists in defense of his just cause." The leadership and responsibility for the uprising are attributed to Sir Roger Acton, and Oldcastle's presence at St. Giles Field is questioned:

But whether he came thither at all, or made shift for himselfe to get awaie, it dooth not appeare; for he could not be heard of that time (as Thomas Walsingham confesseth). Although the king by proclamation promised a thousand marks to him that could bring him foorth, with great liberties to the cities or townes that would discover where he was. By this it maie appeare, how greatlie he was beloved, that there could not one be found, that for so great a reward would bring him to light.

⁶⁰ Raphael Holinshed, The Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande (London: J. Harison, G. Bishop, R. Newberie, H. Denham, T. Woodcocke, 1585-87), III, 1499-1516.

⁶¹ DNB, XXVII, 132.

Holinshed's description of Oldcastle's capture and death is simple and heroic:

About the same season was sir John Oldcastell, lord Cobham taken . . . not without danger and hurts of some that were at the taking of him: for they could not take him, till he was wounded himselfe. . . . shortlie after he was brought before the duke of Bedford, regent of the realme, and the other estates, where in the end he was condemned, and finallie was drawen from the Tower unto saint Giles field, and there hanged in a chaine by the middle, and after consumed with fire, the gallowes and all.⁶²

These disparate accounts of the history of Sir John Oldcastle were available to the English dramatists who in the last decade of the sixteenth century were sifting through the chronicles for plot materials which would captivate their audiences and flatter their patrons. The materials for a raucous pasquil of Oldcastle were provided by the conflicting reports of that knight's putative heroism, mundane morality, martyrdom or culpability. Oldcastle's appearance upon the Elizabethan stage is not surprising; it would have been strange indeed had the knight not made his entrance in any dramatization of the life of Henry V. It would be fond and extraneous to state here that Shakespeare's portrayal of comic character is untrammelled by twentieth-century inhibitions (or many sixteenth-century inhibitions for that matter). We will find that a number of the events of Oldcastle's history are subtly suggested in the

⁶² Chronicles (1585-87), III, 544, 561.

actions and characterization of Falstaff; and with these historical allusions are ployed jibes at the contemporary Lords of Cobham -- badinage based upon the questionable loyalty of that family to Elizabeth's crown.

CHAPTER III

THE HENRY IV PLAYS

The great body of paramythic criticism which adheres to Falstaff or to any discussion of Shakespeare's famous comic character is based upon the complex presentation of Sir John in the two parts of the Henry IV plays, so it is with these histories that I wish to begin the discussion of Shakespeare's allusions to the Lords of Cobham, although, chronologically, these plays do not contain the first such references, as we shall see.

Falstaff's initial entrance in 1 Henry IV is in the second scene of Act I; he, Prince Hal, and Poins discuss preparations for the Gads Hill robbery. The circular structure of this scene is contrived by opening and closing references to time, references that are reinforced throughout the Henry IV plays by repetition.¹ If for a moment we can obliterate twentieth-century speculations on philosophical time, I would like to suggest

¹Scholars have provided numerous suggestions as to the meaning of these references to time; see The Variorum Shakespeare, pp. 26-27 and The Arden Shakespeare, pp. 9-11. A discussion of the relationship of Sir Henry Cobham with the School of Night will be found in Chapter VII of this study.

that the repeated idea of Hal's remark to Falstaff, "what a devil hast thou to do with the time of day," is a rather simple aesthetic maneuver to convey an attribute of timelessness to the Falstaff-Oldcastle character, and that character is, as we shall see, one of dishonesty and disloyalty. This aesthetic device emphasizes a thematic statement which threads through the history plays: the progeneration of rebellion or, as the rebels in 2 Henry IV exclaim,

And though wee here fall downe,
Wee haue Supplyes, to second our Attempt:
If they mis-carry, theirs shall second them.
And so, successe of Mischiefe shall be borne,
And Heire from Heire shall hold this Quarrel up,
Whiles England shall have generation.

(IV. ii. 47-52)

The disloyalty of the Cobhams as well as that of the Percies was something that had become hereditary; in these plays allusions to Oldcastle's treason and to that of the later Lords of Cobham appear concomitantly until Falstaff becomes a collective figure that represents the proclivity to treason found in the members of that line.

Shakespeare's allusions to the Oldcastle legend take the form of foreshadowing remarks which are saturated in dramatic irony, for the playwright has given the Prince an awareness (as indeed the Elizabethan audience was aware) of the ultimate end of Oldcastle's actions.² Thus

² The only full-length study of the allusions to Oldcastle in Shakespeare's history plays is that of Wilhelm von Baeske, "Oldcastle-Falstaff in der englischen Literature bis zu Shakespeare," Palaestra, L (1905), 1-119. Baeske describes a steady deterioration in Oldcastle's fame until

in the first comic scene the Prince taunts Falstaff with ambiguous references to the gallows and to Falstaff's having "the hanging of the theeues, and so become a rare hangman," (lines 55, 63-4). When Hal dallies with the idea of the robbery and threatens to tarry at home, "by the lord," replies Falstaff, "ile be a traitor then, when thou art king," (line 141). In dramatic context these lines are comic; in historical context, ironic and true.

Allusions are compounded as the Gads Hill robbery is planned. To Falstaff's threats of amending his loose living Hal suggests the amendment will be one from praying to purse-snatching, and Falstaff rejoins, "why Hall, tis my vocation Hall, tis no sinne for a man to labor in his vocation," (lines 100-101). The "vocation" of robbery at Gads Hill was something the contemporary Elizabethan might justly associate with the Lords of Cobham who held the office of Warden of the Clinque Ports. Gads Hill was a lonely stretch of the main highway from London to Dover, and it lay some two miles northwest of Rochester and three miles north of Cobham, the family manor of the Barons of Cobham. Gads Hill was

the time of the Reformation when the Protestant writers drew "one gold-sized portrait, a sacred picture over which the Renaissance diffused its splendor," p. 69. He suggests that after the 1560's and 1570's Oldcastle's martyrdom faded from view, and therefore Shakespeare relinquished the satirical caricature of the "folk-version" on aesthetic grounds, and that the playwright does not permit a moral judgment to arise, p. 105. Baeske found very few allusions to the Oldcastle legend in Shakespeare's plays; he traces the literary modes of classical and medieval drama as they influenced Shakespeare's creative pen.

notorious for robberies even before Elizabeth's reign. In 1558 Thomas Phaer entered a ballad entitled "The Robbery at Gadshill" in the Stationers' Register.³ We know also that Alexander Nowell, going to his new benefice in Kent in May of 1559, was robbed of his purse, his gown, and his cap at "Gaddy's Hill," and that he warned his friend, a Mr. Abell, to "take heed you come not there."⁴ But the important incidents for this study are those "diplomatic" robberies which occurred in Mary's and Elizabeth's reigns when the couriers of the foreign ambassadors were waylaid by the Lord Warden's men and their packets searched for secret intelligence. Since no courier could leave England without a special passport signed for each trip by the Lord Warden, no packet could enter or leave the country without his knowledge. The first such diplomatic escapade in Elizabeth's reign of which we have evidence occurred in 1562.

William, seventh Baron of Cobham, succeeded to the family title in 1558 on the death of his father, George, sixth Lord Cobham of the Brooke family. The office of the Warden of the Cinque Ports, which the elder Lord Cobham had held, was soon bestowed upon his son. The young Queen Elizabeth trusted the new Lord Cobham, who was a personal friend and follower of Sir William Cecil, and she selected Lord Cobham

³The Variorum Shakespeare, pp. 38-39.

⁴Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1558-1559, p. 288.

as the special ambassador to Brussels to carry the formal announcement of Queen Mary's death and of her own accession to Philip II. Lord Cobham conducted himself well on this trip, and Richard Clough, Sir Thomas Gresham's agent in Flanders, described him as "a very gentle and sage young lord of whom he wished there were more in England."⁵ But the Count de Feria has left evidence that the young Lord Cobham was also ingratiating himself with the Spanish. "Cobham has been, and is, so zealous with his letters from Brussels," the Count wrote, "that it has been necessary to manage him a little, and his lordship has therefore thought well to promise him a pension, although he had not told him how much it will be." The Count added further that the Marchioness of Northampton, Cobham's sister, "has served His Majesty when opportunity has occurred."⁶ By 1562 tension between Spain, France, and England had greatly intensified, and European diplomatic maneuvers were becoming more complex. France was facing civil war after the atrocity at Vassy; Elizabeth was being urged by the Protestants to send tangible assistance to the Prince of Condé in his conflict with the Guise family, while Philip was making every effort to keep Elizabeth neutral. Mary Stuart, now in Scotland, was urging Elizabeth to announce publicly her rightful claim as heir-apparent to the English throne. At the same

⁵Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1558-1559, p. 13.

⁶Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1558-1567, p. 36.

time the Guise faction, to gain double indemnity in their maneuvers to control the English succession, were seeking ties with Lady Margaret, Countess of Lennox, and her eldest son, Darnley, whose claims to the English throne were derived through Henry VII's daughter, Margaret. But Spain too was interested in the claims of the Countess of Lennox, and the Spanish Ambassador, Alvarez de Quadra, Bishop of Aquila, had been instructed to investigate her claims and the potential backing which the English Catholics might be expected to provide for her. De Quadra was living in Durham House in London, and he received there not only the disaffected Catholics who attended mass in his chapel but also information from a wide-spread network of spies and informers. De Quadra had recently suffered a set-back in his secret negotiations to encourage Lord Robert Dudley's marriage with Elizabeth; the untimely death of Amy Robsart and Elizabeth's apparent return to sanity had, by the spring of 1562, placed Cecil once again in control of diplomatic affairs in England. Early in 1562 de Quadra sent Doctor Turner, a Catholic priest, to the Duchess of Parma with information concerning the claims of the Countess of Lennox and with a detailed list of the disaffected Catholics in England who were willing to back those claims. When Doctor Turner died in Flanders, de Quadra's secretary, Borghese Venturini, returned to England with the diplomatic papers, but delivered them to de Quadra only after making secret copies of them, and these he offered to Cecil. On the 30th of April de Quadra sent another Spanish courier to the Continent; at the

instigation of Cecil the courier was robbed at Gads Hill by the Cobham brothers who were disguised as highwaymen. The diplomatic packet was taken, and the next day two of the lesser Catholics were lodged in the Tower. The Catholic noblemen who were implicated by this exposure were Lord Montague, the Earl of Westmoreland, the Earl of Northumberland, and the Earl of Derby.⁷ On the 5th of May, de Quadra wrote again to the Duchess of Parma explaining what had happened:

On the 30th ultimo I wrote to your Highness giving advice of the arrival of the Count de Roussy here from France and the departure of Henry Sidney thither on behalf of this Queen. I thought it was of some importance that your Highness should have timely news of what was going on and, as by waiting for the ordinary post the letters would not reach you for at least 12 days, I despatched a Flemish courier, who is one of the regular men and a trustworthy person, with the idea that, seeing the fine weather we were having, he would arrive in three days. He left London on Wednesday after midnight, and went to Gravesend by water. Leaving his inn next morning he was accompanied by four horsemen in the dress of gentlemen, and these, with two others who had preceded them on foot, stopped him two miles from Gravesend and kept him in a house all Thursday until Friday morning. They signified to him that they were after some money and jewels they said I was sending to Flanders, but really this was only to gain time for my letters to be sent to London and back again, which was done, and in fact the letters were brought to the palace here where they were opened and copies of them taken. The highwaymen were envoys of Secretary Cecil sent for the purpose of stopping the courier and were not common thieves. I could swear that this is the case although, as for proving it by evidence, that I cannot do, but I am certain of it.

⁷James Anthony Froude, History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada (12 volumes; London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1901), VI, 553.

I do not know whether the courier will have dared to recount this insult in Flanders, or if your Highness has heard of it, but I have thought proper to inform your Highness of full particulars and the names of those who attacked him, which he knows.⁸

When de Quadra wrote to Philip, he blamed Borghese for the troubles, and he again describes the Gads Hill attack:

They presently took a courier whom I had sent to the duchess of Parma, and who they thought was Gamboa, one of your Majesty's couriers here. They thought he carried letters of mine for your Majesty and verbal messages which they could get from him by torture. Those who took this courier were two brothers and other servants of Lord Cobham who were ordered to undertake it much against their will.⁹

Lord Cobham was playing both sides of the fence (if indeed the fence had only two sides). We know that six weeks before the robbery in April, de Quadras had written to the King that Lady Margaret's claims were held

⁸ Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1558-1567, p. 236.

⁹ Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1558-1567, p. 241. De Quadra also described to Philip the interview with Elizabeth in which she accused him of the intrigues recently found out. "At last I could not deny," he explained, "that I had sent Dr. Turner to Flanders to try to get her turned off the throne and substitute others (meaning Lady Margaret)." De Quadra remarked further about the list of English Catholics which Cecil now had in his possession, "the evil will greatly increase after the summer because just now they are afraid of a rising and of the aid your Majesty might extend to the Catholics and do not dare arrest those whose names are mentioned in the report. I am informed that the Councillors are much annoyed that the Queen revealed to me the secret of this report, as they think I may warn those whose names are mentioned in it." De Quadra did warn the Earl of Derby so that when he received a letter (Cecil's) reportedly from the Spanish king containing offers of great favor, he dutifully gave it to the Queen. See Froude, VI, 552.

in strong favor "both amongst catholics and others of the highest standing." And he continued with more detail, "I think one of these men called Cobham must have gone very far in this business, as he is very uneasy, and has sought an excuse for going to the baths of Liege."¹⁰ The French interests of the Cobhams ran concurrently with their Spanish intrigues, and were a carry-over from Mary's reign when young George, another of Lord William's brothers, had ingratiated himself with Francois de Noailles, the French Ambassador in London. George Brooke was an under-secretary to the Privy Council. In this position of trust he was able to inform the Ambassador of the business of the Council in the tense days of 1557 which preceded Philip's return to England to persuade the Council that for both duty and expediency England should join Spain in an open declaration of war on France. In January Brooke informed Noailles that orders had been sent out to seize one of the Ambassador's packets on its way to France.¹¹ Noailles supplied some bogus dispatches which were filled with conciliatory announcements and an abundance of praise for Queen Mary. When these papers reached the Council, Noailles was treated with renewed cordiality -- until his deception was discovered when Henry II declared war on Spain. Dr. Nicholas Wooton, the English Ambassador in Paris, discovered a plot in February, 1557, of "some of the best men in

¹⁰ Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1558-1567, p. 231.

¹¹ E. Harris Harbison, Rival Ambassadors at the Court of Queen Mary (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), pp. 317-18.

England" who planned to depose Mary and place Elizabeth on the throne without the "help of any strangers." Wooton's dispatch to the Council was deciphered by George Brooke and passed on to Noailles. In April of the same year Brooke was a witness to the dramatic meetings between the Privy Council and Mary and Philip in which the Queen threatened, cajoled, and pleaded by turns to bring the Council to declare war on France. George Brooke's reports to Noailles and the Ambassador's reports to Paris give us the fullest accounts available of the Council meetings in Mary's reign.¹²

At some time in the fall of 1565 or the spring of 1566 Lord Cobham was placed under house arrest at Cecil's home. We know almost nothing of the nature of his offence other than that he was involved in some intrigue with the Marquis of Baden and his wife, Lady Cecilia, the sister of the king of Sweden. We know that Lord and Lady Cobham met Lady Cecilia at Dover in September of 1565, that after the Marchioness became disillusioned with Elizabeth and the English Court she corresponded with Guzman de Silva, the new Spanish Ambassador in London, and that de Silva received letters from Lady Cecilia and her husband after they left England offering their services to Philip.¹³ We know also that the Lady Cecilia was

¹²Ibid., pp. 320-22.

¹³Margaret Morison, "A Narrative of the Journey of Cecilia, Princess of Sweden, to the Court of Queen Elizabeth," Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, new series, XII (1898), pp. 211-24.

involved with the Flemish alchemist, Cornelius de Alento, who had promised to transmute base metal into gold for the Queen. Cecilia's extravagance in London had placed her at the mercy of her debtors and made her vulnerable to the sharp practices of the alchemist. De Alento was arrested and placed in the Tower in the spring of 1566; the Margrave of Baden, Cecilia's husband, was thrown into a common prison at Rochester for debt.¹⁴ Our knowledge of Lord Cobham's involvement with the Marquis and his wife comes from Francis Thynne who blamed jealousy and envy for Cobham's trouble. Thynne wrote,

So this noble lord Cobham by the complaint of others, was upon the same assigned over to the charge of the honorable lord treasurer, untill further triall were made of his uprightness, but in the end, as gold the more it is purified by the fire the brighter and better it becometh: so the lord Cobham, having well cleered himselfe of whatsoever was laid against him, did like Joseph not onelie receive an honorable libertie, but did also in following time rise to greater honor than he had before.¹⁵

Whatever the nature of the trouble over the Margrave of Baden and his wife, it seems to have furnished neither warning nor deterrent to Lord Cobham in his machinations with the Spanish and French governments; and if Cecil assisted Cobham in "cleering himselfe" in this affair, it was only a prelude to the effort which the Lord Treasurer was to expend in protecting his very foolish and untrustworthy friend when the Ridolfi

¹⁴Ethel Seaton, Queen Elizabeth & A Swedish Princess (London: Frederick Etchells and Hugh MacDonald, 1926), pp. 20-25.

¹⁵Holinshed, 1585-87 edition, III, 1511.

plot broke in the autumn of 1571. The Ridolfi affair was the final incident in a series of crises which erupted in the turbulent years of 1569-1572 -- years which encompassed the failure of the Northern Rebellion and the intrigues of Mary Stuart and the discontented Catholics, intrigues that ended in the execution of the Duke of Norfolk in June, 1572.

Roberto Ridolfi was a Florentine financier who had settled in London; his interests in diplomatic intrigue involved him in the foreign machinations which lay behind the uprising of 1569. In October of that year, when the Duke of Norfolk and the Lords of Arundel, Lumley, and Pembroke were placed under arrest, Ridolfi too was apprehended and detained at Walsingham's house; he was accused of "intermeddling in causes of estate and matters betwixt her majesty and other princes." As early as March 13th of this year, La Mothe Fénélon had written to Catherine de Medici describing the affairs of Ridolfi:

Le Sr. Roberto Ridolfy, Florentin, ayant receu charge et commandement, de la propre personne du pape, de trecter de la restitution et restablissement de la religion catholique en Angleterre avec les seigneurs catholique du pays, il s'est princepallement adressé au comte d'Arondel et à milhord de Lomeley. . . .

La Mothe continues by adding to the names of Arundel and Lumley the names of "les comtes Derby, de Cherosbery, de Pembrot, de Northomberland, et aultres plusiers" who had refused to accept the "nouvelle religion." All these men, he said, were involved in the plot to restore Catholicism

in England.¹⁶ The arrest of the principal Catholic intriguants in October followed closely upon a Gads Hill incident which may or may not have had an important bearing upon the failure of the 1569 rebellion. Mary Stuart had written to La Mothe on the 20th of September that she was being moved to Tutbury where she was to be placed in "les mains des plus grandz ennemys que j'ay au monde," and that the planned revolt must be postponed.¹⁷ Cecil had begun to play his hand. On the 3rd of October La Mothe wrote to Charles IX that his courier had been sent to Lord Cobham's house for a passport and had been delayed there for an hour and a half. On leaving Lord Cobham's, he travelled some three miles through a wood --

. . . à trois mille de la mayson du dict lord Coban, au passaige d'ung boys, quelques ungs, montez à l'avantaige, ayantz les visages couvertz, mais non tant que l'ung d'eulx n'ayt este recogneu, le sont venuz charger à coups d'espee par la teste, l'ont porté par terre, tout follé aulx piedz de leurs chevaulx, et luy ont demandé incontinent les lettres de France, puy les luy ayant ostées, l'ont garrotté et attaché à ung arbre, et l'ont layssé là.¹⁸

This robbery of the French courier was evidently Cecil's arrangement and apparently conducted by Cobham's men, but there is a tantalizing

¹⁶Correspondance Diplomatique de Bertrand de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon, edited by Charles P. Cooper (7 volumes; Paris et Londres: Bethume et Plon, 1838-1840), I, 258-59.

¹⁷Ibid., II, 254-55.

¹⁸Ibid., II, 255-56.

note written by an anonymous hand on the envelope of La Mothe's letter to Catherine de Medici, dated December 5, 1569, which lends complexity and suggests a triple-cross in the undercover intrigues. The note is addressed to Monsieur l'ambassadeur:

Je vous laysse ces lettres, lesquelles ne me peuvent de rien servir, et vous asseure, sur ma foy, qu' elles n'ont jamais esté ouvertes, et le milord Cobham menacoet chacun que s'il pouvoit trouver celluy qui avoit pris les dicted lettres, qu' il le pendroit.¹⁹

It would seem that if Lord Cobham had seized upon a French packet, the packet was in turn seized from him and returned to La Mothe. We know that Lord Cobham's interests at this time were pro-Spanish; the Ridolfi plot itself was essentially an Hispano-papal plot. During 1570 Ridolfi drew together the various threads of his conspiracy. He had brought from Rome a number of copies of Pope Pius V's bull, Regnans in Excelsis, which proclaimed Elizabeth's excommunication and deposition; this, he believed, would free the Catholics in England from their doubts about rebelling against their sovereign and would bring them into a solid rank behind the Duke of Norfolk and the Queen of Scots; Philip and the Duke of Alva were to send expeditionary forces from Spain and the Netherlands to land in England and Scotland; Elizabeth was to be seized or assassinated; Mary Stuart was to be freed and proclaimed Queen; Catholicism was to be restored in England.

¹⁹Ibid., II, 382.

By February, 1571, Mary and Norfolk had agreed to the conspiracy, and Ridolfi left London in March with letters from them to the Duke of Alva, Pius V, and Philip. In April Ridolfi sent a packet of letters from the Continent by a Flemish carrier who was in the employment of the Bishop of Ross, Mary's Ambassador in London. The packet contained letters from Ridolfi to Mary, Norfolk, and Lumley; there were also letters from the exiled Countess of Northumberland and the Earl of Westmoreland in the packet. Lord Cobham's servant apprehended the packet at Dover and sent it to his master at Blackfriars in London. Cobham sent the packet to the Bishop of Ross who, with the aid of the Spanish Ambassador, hastily compiled a bogus packet of old letters of the Queen of Scots which were in cipher, and Cobham sent this counterfeit packet to Cecil, keeping the original packet by him in the event the intrigue should fail. On the 12th of July, Guerau de Spes, the Spanish Ambassador, wrote to Philip relating what had happened:

It was a most extraordinary piece of good fortune to save the packet taken by Carlos /Bailley/, the bishop of Ross's servant, which Ridolfi unsuspectingly entrusted to him at Brussels, knowing that he was the Bishop's secretary. It was written in a different cipher, and Carlos took an alphabet with him in order the more easily to decipher it in future. All of this was recovered through me by the good offices and help of Thomas Cobham /Lord Cobham's brother/ before lord Burleigh heard of it, and another packet was made up with the same cipher characters: Burleigh has had a secretary at work upon it for days and has sent copies to France and Italy, but without effect for there is nothing in it. They are trying to cajole Carlos by means of the good Dr. Story. This Queen had some idea that Ridolfi was writing to certain personages here

and that the Duke of Alva was going to send aid to the queen of Scots, but Carlos did not declare who these personages were for he did not know. I have no doubt I shall be able to throw them still further off the scent.²⁰

Cecil spent weeks deciphering the worthless letters; at last, receiving intelligence from the Regent Lennox in Scotland concerning Mary's relations with Alva, and from the Grand Duke of Tuscany concerning Ridolfi's plans, he had Charles Bailley, the Flemish carrier, racked. Gradually the story unfolded in the depositions of the prisoners. Bailley offered to betray the Bishop of Ross if allowed to be free and pursue his course.²¹ Meanwhile Robert Higford, Norfolk's secretary, was apprehended on a trip to Scotland bearing a large sum of money to the Queen of Scots' followers north of the border. Higford's confession in September implicated Lord Cobham and his brother, Thomas, in Norfolk's plot, and in

²⁰Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1568-1579, p. 322.

²¹William Murdin, A Collection of State Papers Relating to Affairs in the Reign of Elizabeth . . . (London: W. Bowyers, 1759), p. 10, cited subsequently as Murdin. Charles Bailley was released from prison after being racked. He returned to Flanders where he remained in the Spanish service until his death at a great age. On his tombstone in a church in Brussels he is called Secretary to the Queen of Scots. Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1587-1603, p. 146. Francis Barty, who was also working for Ross and frequented Cobham's house at Blackfriars "to sound my Lord on causes at Court," wrote to Robert Cecil many years later (1609) trying to collect a debt of over a thousand pounds "due to him by the King's mother /Mary Stuart/ which he had forborne forty years. Was noticed by the late Lord Burleigh, but got into trouble for Lord Cobham's sake." Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1603-1610, p. 490.

October the Bishop of Ross broke under pressure and confessed nearly all he knew. Norfolk was arrested on the 3rd of October and on the 11th he was conveyed to the Tower; the Earls of Arundel and Southampton, and Lords Lumley and Cobham with Sir Henry Percy and Derby's two sons, and a dozen lesser figures were arrested as well. Burghley wrote to the Earl of Shrewsbury on the 19th of October that

. . . this matter of the Duke of Norfolk grows daily larger upon examination. I am sorry to see so many touched therewith. My Lord Cobham is in my house as a prisoner, who otherwise should have been in the Tower. I loved him well, and therefore am sorry for his offence.²²

Lord Cobham immediately blamed everything on Thomas, his "ingrate brother," but admitted sending the packet to the Bishop of Ross, and admitted also that he had sent Thomas' wife (daughter of Sir William Cavendish) to Norfolk with a warning.²³ Brother Thomas denied many things too; in a letter to the Privy Council on the 2nd of October he declared that both Higford and Bailley were lying, for "I never named either Therle of Westmorland's or Ridolphi's Letters, nor knewe of anye sutch Letters, nor come neere the Mallet/packet/, to do any sutch Thing." Bailley and Higford had repeated Thomas' brag that he had slipped certain

²²Edmund Lodge, Illustrations of British History, Biography, and Manners . . . (second edition; 3 volumes; London: John Chidley, 1838), I, 529, cited hereafter as Lodge.

²³Lord Cobham's deposition is printed in the Calendar of State Papers, Scotland, 1571-1574, pp. 9-10.

letters from the packet while Lord Cobham was talking to Bailley.²⁴

Thomas denied knowing the Bishop of Ross or having any connection with the Duke of Norfolk, but the confessions of others had placed too much evidence in Burghley's hands for him to be further beguiled. As early as October, 1570, Burghley had received a confession from one John Moon, a servant of Lady Lennox, who had been caught dealing in Mary Stuart's intrigues. Moon confessed that Thomas Cobham had offered him one thousand crowns to deliver a certain packet that had come out of Scotland to Alexander Leslie or Andrew Abercrombie.²⁵ But it was the Bishop of Ross's confession that uncovered Thomas Cobham's role in the intrigues of the Duke of Norfolk. Ross confessed that Thomas Cobham's wife had begged him in 1564, when Cobham was in the Tower for piracy, to intervene with the Spanish Ambassador in an effort to have the Spanish charges withdrawn or mitigated. The Bishop of Ross agreed and gave his own bond for surety in 1565, and

. . . so Thomas Cobham comyng fourth, fell with Thanks in Acquaintaunce with this Examinee /Ross/, and so from Tyme to Tyme, he and Francis /Barty/ wold tell this examinee, who were Freends and who were Enemyes to the Scots Quene. . . . ones he /Ross/ sent a letter by Thomas Cobham to the Duke, but the Duke liked not to have hym a Messenger and so he used him no more.²⁶

²⁴ Murdin, pp. 73, 77, 79, 156-57.

²⁵ Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1569-1571, p. 353.

²⁶ Murdin, p. 29.

This last statement was not exactly true; Thomas Cobham's dealings with Norfolk had already been described in detail by Higford, Norfolk's secretary, in his deposition of October 1. Higford described at length how messages or "tickets" were slipped into the Tower to his master in wine bottles, but Norfolk was dissatisfied with this procedure and another method was devised:

Yet not contented with this, for my Lord coulde not be satisfied, I know not upon what Occasion (for it was also before my Returne to my Lord backe from Colde harbor) a Mayde of Mrs. Heyborne's, a Wydowe which kept the Howse adjoyninge to the Prison wheare my Lord then laye, and now lyeth, upon a Pole's End, as I harde, put up a Writing to my Lord's Wyndowe, wheare the Chaplaine was lookinge out. This writinge, as was said, was delivered to the Mayde by Mr. Thomas Cobham, to be conveyed to my Lord. Upon the Perusall of this Letter, which, by like, commanded the Trustines of the Wench, Meanes was founde that Mr. Sewell Norfolk's chaplain/ spake with her downe from a Hoole in a Privie-howse, in an uther Chamber, over a Privie-howse also in her Mistris Howse. And so after this, he used to convey my Lord's Writings to the said Mr. Cobham, who sent them out by a Man of his to Howard Howse, or els delivered them to some of my Lord's Men, I know not wheither. And this was then thought to be the surest Waye from all Daunger, and there fore was bothe longer and more used. The Maide's Name is Nell, and now is Servant to my Lord at Howard Howse.

Higford continued in this deposition to name those to whom Norfolk communicated in this secret manner: "my said Lord hath written owt of the Tower to my Lord Lumley, my Lord Cobham, Mr. Dyer, Sir Nicholas Throgmorton, and others before named; and from them he hathe receaved also Letters againe."²⁷ Proof of Lord Cobham's implication in the plot

²⁷ Murdin, p. 80.

led to his imprisonment in the Tower by late October. The Bishop of Ross's confession had revealed Lord Cobham's actions concerning the packet, but Ross attempted to shield his cohort as much as possible. Ross confessed that through Thomas Cobham and Francis Barty, a Flemish salt-maker who acted as a messenger between the Bishop and Lord Cobham, he had news of the apprehension of Charles Bailey and the letters from the Continent. Ross confessed that the packet contained letters to Norfolk and Lumley and that there were letters for the Spanish Ambassador and the Queen of Scots as well as letters from Lady Northumberland and the Earl of Westmoreland. The Bishop related how the counterfeit packet was made up of old letters and that "yt was devised emongs them, that the French Ambassador should say they were his Pacquet, and so demand it if Nede be." Lord Cobham had demanded to know the contents of the cipher letters, Ross said, and he had insisted that

. . . if there be any Letters in the Pacquet concerning the Queene my Mistris, or hir Estat, he wold not deliver them to hym, nor no other, but to hir Majesty only; but if it were but for small Maters of /hiatus/ or Relief of those which were beyond the Seas, and now in Misery, he would be glad to help them.²⁸

This was not excuse enough of course to vindicate Lord Cobham's actions, and he and his brother joined the other conspirators in the Tower. The

²⁸Murdin, p. 23. Lord Cobham claimed relationship with the Nevils through his first marriage with Dorothy Nevil, daughter of Lord Abergavenny.

Spanish Ambassador wrote to Philip relating the event:

Lord Cobham has been taken to the Tower and the Earl of Sussex is also in danger, being neither a prisoner nor free for Leicester and Burleigh seem to be in accord, for once, that the enemies of both of them should be molested, so that there are people of both ways of thinking in prison.²⁹

La Mothe Fénelon, who had also been implicated in the plot by the confessions of Ross and Higford, sent to Charles IX a detail of Cobham's guilt that is not found elsewhere:

. . . et desjà millord Cobham est miz on arrest, comme ayant esté de l'intelligence, et ayant offert, à ce qu' on dict, quelcun des cinq portz dont il est gardien, pour servyr à la descente des dicts Espaignolz. . . . Les seigneurs catholiques sont observez en leurs maysons, et est l'on après à changer les officiers et gardes des portz.³⁰

²⁹ Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1568-1579, p. 346.

On May, 24, 1572, Antonio de Guaras wrote to the Duke of Alva that "it is generally asserted that when Parliament closes the duke of Norfolk will be executed. The bishop of Ross, the Queen of Scotland's ambassador, the earl of Southampton, son-in-law of Lord Montague, two sons of Lord Derby, the earl of Arundel, are still in prison, the earl of Arundel himself being under arrest in his own house, and Lord Cobham under guard at Burleigh House. Thomas Cobham, brother of Lord Cobham, is in the Tower with over thirty other gentlemen of high position, all of them for being concerned with the queen of Scots and the duke of Norfolk." Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1568-1579, p. 393. The Duke of Norfolk was beheaded on June 2, 1572. Lord Hunsdon wrote from Berwick to Burghley in February with an eye to expediency: "if Lord Cobham's offence is such that Her Majesty thinks him not fit to enjoy his office, he /Hunsdon/ desired that he may have it." Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1572-1574, p. 34.

³⁰ La Mothe Fénelon, IV, 261.

Had Lord Cobham sold out to the Duke of Alva, and were the Cinque Ports being readied for Spanish ships? We do not know for sure; brother Henry Cobham had travelled to the Continent in 1570 on an embassy for Queen Elizabeth. His letters reporting his interview with Alva, intelligence on the English exiles in the Low Countries, and events of his trip to Madrid are extant among the State papers, but these letters, most of which are addressed to Burghley, reveal nothing of double dealing.³¹ Burghley wrote an account of the Rildolfi plot which was intended for publication but which he never published. In it he described the arrest of Bailley and the discovery of the letters of Ridolfi, but he carefully suppressed the part played by Lord Cobham in the affair. Burghley concluded his account with the arrest of Norfolk (October 3), and conceded that the discovery of the whole plot was the result of two accidents, the capture of Bailley and his packet and the apprehension of Norfolk's gold shipment to Scotland. Burghley wrote a second account of the plot in 1595, it too unpublished, which adds nothing to the story.³²

³¹Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1569-1671, pp. 328-29, 330, 335-36, 340, 360, 430, 432, 435.

³²Conyers Read, Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1960), pp. 35-41. Read says Burghley did not tell the complete story because parts of it involved disloyal behavior by some important people whom it was not expedient to expose and techniques which it was not desirable to reveal. Camden had some evidence by him when he wrote that the Bishop of Ross "dealt so carefully and cunningly with the Lord Cobham, who favoured the Dukes purpose, that the sayd packet was delivered unto him." William Camden, Annales . . . (third edition; London: T. Harper, 1635), p. 139.

This whole episode reveals one thing clearly and that is Lord Cobham's close connection with Thomas Howard, fourth Duke of Norfolk. When Shakespeare has Justice Shallow remark in 2 Henry IV that Sir John was a page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk in his youth (III. ii. 27-8), we have, I believe, a topical allusion to Lord Cobham which the sons of the Earls of Derby, Pembroke, and Southampton would recognize. Their fathers had also been "pages" to a Duke of Norfolk. There is no historical evidence that Oldcastle was ever such a page; it has been suggested that Sir John Fastolfe was in his youth attached to Norfolk's household, but again there is no evidence to confirm this speculation.³³ When John Weever included such a statement in his Mirror for Martyrs, he was using information he had acquired from Shakespeare's drama. We may assume, I believe, that Shakespeare fabricated this bit of "history" to bring into his play a meaningful reference to Elizabethan political history; he makes only small use of it, for his patrons' fathers had been as deeply embroiled in the intrigues of the Duke of Norfolk as Lord Cobham.

In the third scene of Act II of 1 Henry IV Hotspur enters the stage with a letter in his hand. This letter, he declares, was written by a "frosty spirited rogue," a "pagan rascall," an "infidell," a "dish of skim milke." These terms are similar to the terms of cowardice which the

³³ The Variorum Shakespeare, p. 238.

Prince and Poins have just heaped on Falstaff's head in the immediately preceding scene of the Gads Hill robbery. We know from Hardyng's statement that in Warkworth Castle, of which he was appointed constable after the defeat of the Percies, there were many manuscripts revealing the fact that various lords of the realm had communicated with Hotspur and planned to join the rebellion against Henry IV.³⁴ Shakespeare had historical grounds for adding such a scene as this to his play, but again I would like to suggest that the scene contains a topical allusion. The Bishop of Ross's confession in October, 1571, revealed enough information to place Sir Henry Percy in the Tower. This was one month preceding the Northern Rebellion. Ross described in detail his interview with Percy and that knight's answer to his suggestion that he attempt to liberate the Queen of Scots:

Then he /Percy/ said he had a Sute at this Parliament, to be Enheritour to his Brother, and if that toke not Effect, he wold do the best he could for the Delivery of the Scots Quene, but if it did, he would not medle because of his nere Children, but he wold loke through his Fyngars if she eskapid away. Then he axid how it might be, and which waies she might eskafe, and what Freends she had, and Sir Thomas Stanley was named.³⁵

We have enough evidence from the Ridolfi plot to know that the Cobhams were involved in the Ridolfi-Norfolk-Queen of Scots affairs in 1570. That they were involved in the preparations for the 1569 rebellion is speculation

³⁴The Chronicle of John Hardyng (London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1812), p. iii.

³⁵Murdin, p. 21.

based upon strong probability. As we shall see later, Lady Frances Cobham, Lord Cobham's wife, had ties with the Scotch Queen which reinforced those of her husband with Norfolk. What I would like to suggest is that Hotspur's reference to the writer of the letter of withdrawal as "my Lord foole" can be used as a reference to Lord Cobham. When Lord Cobham knew that Cecil and Elizabeth had gained intelligence of the plotting between the Percies, Mary Stuart, and certain foreign princes, as he would know from the interception of the foreign packets at Gads Hill, he withdrew from the 1569 rebellion, as did the Lords of Pembroke, Derby, Lumley and Arundel.

Lily B. Campbell has outlined to some extent the relationship between the rebellion of Hotspur against Henry IV and the Northern Rebellion of 1569 against Elizabeth, revealing the similarities in pattern which exist between the two events; her study contains convincing evidence that Shakespeare capitalized on those similarities.³⁶ I would like to suggest further incidents that occurred in the Northern Rebellion which indicate that Sir Henry Percy, who became the eighth Earl of Northumberland, was the prototype for Shakespeare's portrait of Hotspur, the Henry Percy of the Henry IV plays.

³⁶ Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's "Histories" Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1958), pp. 228-38. Miss. Campbell concluded that "the rebellion which Shakespeare drew was motivated and carried out with greater resemblance to the rebellion of 1569 than to the three rebellions under Henry IV, which it telescopes," p. 234.

Sir Henry Percy's wife was Katherine Nevil, daughter and heiress of John, Lord Latimer. In his play Shakespeare gives Hotspur's wife the name of Kate although historically she was Elizabeth Mortimer. It is not irregular, I think, to assume that Shakespeare's change of given name is meaningful; we know that Sir Charles and Sir Josceline Percy, two of Katherine Percy's sons, fought with Essex in Ireland, were involved with Essex and Southampton in the Essex rebellion of 1601, and that both were named as being among those who arranged for the Lord Chamberlain's Men to perform Richard II on the eve of the rebellion.³⁷ We know that Sir Henry Percy's show of loyalty in the 1569 rebellion was subterfuge. Cecil's statement in A True and Summarie Reporte of the Earle of Northumberland's Treasons was that Henry Percy "had his hande in that Rebellion," that he was in effect "as farre plunged into the same, as the late Earle his brother, howsoever he wound himselfe out of the danger thereof at that time."³⁸ We know that he was involved in the Ridolfi plot, involved with the Pagets and other Catholic exiles on the Continent, an involvement

³⁷ Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1598-1601, p. 578. This information appears in the deposition of Augustine Phillipps taken on the 18th of February, 1601: "On Thursday or Friday sevensnight, Sir Chas. Percy, Sir Josceline Percy, Lord Monteagle, and several others spoke to some of the players to play the deposing and killing of King Richard II, and promised to give them 40 s. more than their ordinary, to do so." The same information is given in the deposition of Sir Gelly Merrick, ibid., p. 575.

³⁸ William Cecil, A True and Summarie Reporte of the Declaration of Some Part of the Earle of Northumberland's Treasons . . . (London: C. Barker, 1585), p. 2.

which led to his second arrest, and that he was implicated in the Throckmorton plot which sent him to the Tower for the third time. Sir Henry Percy, the eighth Earl of Northumberland was no stranger to rebellion.

In the scene between Hotspur and his wife (Part 1 . II. iii), Shakespeare seems to have intentionally created a parallel with the action in the opening stanzas of the famous ballad, "The Rising of the North," which was written soon after the rebellion of 1569.³⁹ The ballad begins with Lord Percy and his wife in their garden; the Earl is preparing to ride, and Lady Percy is fearful, being aware of the troubles of her Lord. The Earl calls a messenger to him:

To maister Norton thou must goe
In all the haste that ever may bee.

Commend me to that gentleman,
And beare this letter here for mee;
And say that earnestly I praye,
He will ryde in my companie.

Shakespeare in his version keeps Lady Percy innocent of plans of the rebellion, and he adds humor to the scene. Hotspur calls his servant to him and asks if the packet has been sent, and we assume from the foregoing action that the messages are sent to Percy's cohorts in rebellion. In the rebellion of 1569 "Maister Norton" was Richard Norton of Norton Conyers, generally called "Old" Norton or "Patriarch." He was one of the most important leaders under the Earls. He and his eight sons fought

³⁹Printed by Gerald Brenan, A History of the House of Percy (2 volumes; London: Freemantle and Company, 1902), I, 297-302, cited hereafter as Brenan.

with ardor, but after the failure of the rebellion he escaped to Flanders with two of his sons and was pensioned by Philip. Shakespeare seems to have had Old Norton in mind when he gave the name "Morton" to Northumberland's retainer in 2 Henry IV. That was close enough for anyone who remembered

Thee, Norton, wi' thine eight good sonnes,
 They doom'd to dye, alas, for ruth!
 Thy revered lockes thee could not save,
 Nor them their faire and blooming youth.

Shakespeare went to some lengths to alter one mental characteristic of the historical Hotspur. The chroniclers told of the superstition of the famous Percy, and that when he entered the battle of Shrewsbury, he found he had left his favorite sword at the campsite of the previous night. He accepted this as an omen of his death.⁴⁰ Shakespeare's Hotspur draws his sword at the battle of Shrewsbury and announces, "here draw I/ A sword whose temper I intend to stain/ With the best blood that I can meet withal/ In the adventure of this perilous day," (V. ii. 92-94).

Shakespeare seems to have created the scene between Glendower and Hotspur in which Hotspur ridicules the Welch leader's superstitions (III. i) to enhance the rationalistic makeup of Hotspur's mind. We do not know actually whether Henry Percy, the eighth Earl, was superstitious or not, but we can assume the latter from our knowledge of his eldest son, the ninth Earl, whose rational mind made him one of the principal leaders of

⁴⁰Brenan, I, 79.

the movement for scientific experimentation in Elizabeth's and James' reigns.

In Shakespeare's play Hotspur dies at the hands of Prince Hal, and Falstaff, stabbing the dead Percy, demands credit for the deed. Historically, Hotspur is said to have entered the battle of Shrewsbury with his visor up so that he could be recognized by both his own men and the enemy. He died when a chance arrow, falling from aloft, pierced his brain. Hotspur's body was interred in the chapel of Thomas Nevil at Whitchurch some sixteen miles from the scene of battle, but a day or two later the body was removed from its grave, returned to Shrewsbury, and after being rubbed with salt, was placed upright between two millstones in the marketplace. Later the head was sent to adorn the gate of York, and the quarters were distributed in London, Bristol, Chester, and Newcastle.⁴¹ Shakespeare's version of Hotspur's death is more dramatic; the meeting of the two antagonists has become a necessity in the play because of the antithesis the dramatist has created in the two characters, but Shakespeare's departure from the chronicle stories is, I believe, meaningful with regard to Elizabethan history. Sir Henry Percy, the eighth Earl of Northumberland, died mysteriously in the Tower of London on the 21st of June, 1585. There were at least four different speculations concerning the cause of his death. The official report stated that the Earl "knowing thereby howe haynous his offences were, fearing the justice and

⁴¹Brenan, I, 81-2.

severity of the Lawes, and so the ruyne and overthrowe of his house, fel into desperation, and so to the destruction of himselfe."⁴² Burghley's enemies said the Earl was innocent but, seeing himself helplessly condemned by unscrupulous foes, he killed himself to save his estate for his sons; gossip circulated in which Sir Christopher Hatton was accused of assassinating the Earl; and the Catholic faction at home and on the Continent accused Elizabeth of Northumberland's "foul murder."⁴³ The Earl's body was buried within the Tower grounds after Lord Hunsdon had examined the three bullet wounds found in the Earl's chest -- three gaping wounds it was rumored which made the suicide theory impossible.⁴⁴ The French and Spanish Ambassadors in London wrote to their governments that Northumberland had been assassinated at the connivance of the Queen; at Cologne a pamphlet was published entitled Crudelitatis Calvinianae Exempla duo Recentissima ex Anglia which accused the English leaders of government of murder. This pamphlet was translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, and English and was the cause of Burghley's authorship of A True and Summarie Reporte.⁴⁵ Among the State Papers is a written statement of Attorney General Popham showing that the origin

⁴² A True and Summarie Reporte . . . , p. 13.

⁴³ Brennan, II, 24.

⁴⁴ Ibid., II, 25.

⁴⁵ DNB, XLIV, 410.

of the conspiracy of Francis Throckmorton for the liberation of the Queen of Scots and the toleration of religion could be traced to the Earl of Northumberland. Popham uses the secret visits of Charles Paget to Petworth and various connections between the Earl and Lord Paget and Charles Arundel to further implicate Northumberland.⁴⁶ News of Charles Paget's interviews with Northumberland's son in Paris had been relayed to Walsingham by Sir Henry Cobham, the English Ambassador in Paris, in the spring of 1582. When word of the ambassador's actions reached young Henry Percy in Paris, he wrote to Walsingham:

Righte Honorable: I doe understande that Sir Henry Cobham, Ambassador here for her maieste, hathe not long agoe informed your Honnor, both against me and Mr. Pagett, for conversing some tymes one with the other, and that Mr. Pagett should not onelie seek to dissuade me from the Religion I have been nourished and bredd upp in, but also deale with me in undewtifull Practises. When I hard of this Manner of my Lo: Ambassador's proceedinge, it greved me very muche, in respect of his place, what force his Advertisment might carie against me, to bringe me in Disgrace with her Maieste, and Displeasure with my Lo: my Father. . . .⁴⁷

By the same carrier young Percy sent a letter to his father urging that Cobham be made to prove his loose accusations. Gerald Brenan asserts that this was done, and that the Ambassador was compelled to apologize.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1581-1590, p. 187.

⁴⁷Printed by Brenan, II, 33-34.

⁴⁸Ibid., II, 34.

It seems evident, in spite of apologists, that the Earl of Northumberland was involved in the Catholic conspiracy which Francis Throckmorton was engineering in 1583. Sir Edward Stafford, who replaced Sir Henry Cobham as English Ambassador in France, wrote to Walsingham on the 8th of January, 1584, that his informer in the household of the Duke of Guise had just relayed to him a description of a secret meeting of the Duke with the Bishop of Ross, Thomas Morgan, and the Pope's nuncio. They had, he reported, received news from England that the Earl of Shrewsbury had refused to deliver up the Queen of Scots and that the Earls of Northumberland, Arundel, Rutland, and Lord Montague were expecting beau jeu in England soon.⁴⁹ But before Walsingham received Stafford's intelligence he himself sent news to Paris that the Spanish Ambassador, Bernardino de Mendoza, had been commanded to leave England because of his intrigues with the Queen of Scots, his conferences with Francis Throckmorton on ways and means to invade England, his plans with the Duke of Guise and Philip to finance the plot, and "such other like practices, wherein it is proved that he hath been a dealer against her Majesty and the State." Walsingham concluded his despatch by relating that "my lord of Northumberland was yesterday committed to the Tower, according to a resolution taken about a fortnight since in that behalf."⁵⁰ Walsingham had learned in October of 1583 through one

⁴⁹ Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1583-1584, p. 299.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 301.

of his spies in the French embassy that Francis Throckmorton (nephew of Sir Nicholas Throckmorton) was the intermediary in England for the new Hispano-Guise plot. Throckmorton was arrested, racked, and executed. In his confession he admitted Northumberland and others were relapsed Catholics and sympathisers with Mary Stuart's cause, but Throckmorton retracted his confession on the scaffold. Walsingham found in Throckmorton's possession a list of the major ports of England and a list of the noblemen who would join the plot. The Duke of Guise was to have invaded England from the north; the southern ports were to have been invaded by Spanish forces under the command of Charles Arundel and Thomas Throckmorton.⁵¹ Were the Cinque Ports included in this plot? The list which was taken from Francis Throckmorton was headed, "havens in every coast fitte for the landing of forces," and it contained a description of their capacities, the prevailing winds, etc.⁵² Dover, Sandwich, and Rye were the busiest and best ports in England. Lord Cobham's past machinations would lead us to suspect that he was again vulnerable to treasonable suggestions by the conspirators. We know that his name appeared on a list that is thought to have been compiled by Throckmorton; on the list Cobham's religion is stated as being neither

⁵¹ Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1584-1584, p. 716.

⁵² Q. Z. A Discoverie of the Treasons Practised . . . by Francis Throckmorton (London: C. Barker, 1584), fol. Biii^r.

Catholic nor Protestant but "indifferent."⁵³ We know that Lord Cobham's carelessness in the Ridolfi plot in allowing his servant to apprehend Charles Bailley and the important packet of letters resulted in the downfall of the Duke of Norfolk; it is only speculation that he had a hand in the betrayal of the Throckmorton plot which resulted eventually in the Earl of Northumberland's arrest and death. We do know that Lord Cobham was made Knight of the Garter in 1584, that he became a member of the Privy Council in February of 1586. Elizabeth usually reserved these prize appointments as reward for valorous service; Lord Cobham had done none. When Prince Hal enters the stage after the battle of Shrewsbury, Falstaff exclaims "if your father will doe me anie honour, so: If not, let him kill the next Percie himselfe: I looke to bee either Earle or Duke, I can assure you," (V. iv. 139-41).

Falstaff's "resurrection" on the battlefield of Shrewsbury after he has counterfeited death at the attack of Archibald, Earl of Douglas, is related to the final episode in Sir John Oldcastle's legend. The original chroniclers related that Oldcastle had asked Sir Thomas Erpingham to seek toleration for the Lollards if he came back to life after three days. Stow printed this part of the legend in his account of Oldcastle's history in the 1592 edition of The Annales of England.⁵⁴ Shakespeare makes

⁵³John B. Wainewright, "Two Lists of Influential Persons Apparently Prepared in the Interests of Mary, Queen of Scots, 1574 and 1582," Catholic Record Society, XIII (1913), 140.

⁵⁴John Stow, Annales, 1592 edition, p. 572.

use of the legend with innocuous humor and irony; Falstaff knows his resurrection is counterfeit, but he is quizzical about Hotspur's rising -- "zounds I am afraid of this gunpowder Percy, though he be dead, how if he should counterfet too and rise?"⁵⁵ The irony involved is compounded by the fact that the rebellious spirit of the Percies, as well as that of the Lords of Cobham, was to rise again to plague the rulers of England.

Further Oldcastle allusions can be found in the tavern scene (II. iv. 500-12) of 1 Henry IV. Falstaff has hidden himself behind the arras to avoid the hue and cry of the sheriff, and when Poins discovers the "oily rascall" asleep, he searches his pockets for valuables which turn out to be tavern bills for bread and sack -- "O monstrous! but one halfepeniworth of bread to this intollerable deale of sack?" One primary element of Oldcastle's heresy had been his unorthodox belief concerning the bread and wine of the sacrament of the altar; the Lollards refused to believe the doctrine of transubstantiation. Oldcastle's Lollardy seems to be ridiculed in these lines as well as in the preceding lines when Poins remarks to Falstaff, "Monsieur remorse? what saies sir John Sacke, and Sugar Jacke? howe agrees the Diuell and thee about thy soule that thou souldest him on good friday last, for a cup of Medera and a cold capons legge," (I. ii. 107-11).

⁵⁵The italics are mine; the eighth Earl of Northumberland was covered with gunpowder burns when his body was found in the Tower. Gunpowder, of course, was not in use at the Battle of Shrewsbury.

The tavern scene, in which Falstaff and the Prince act out dramatically "in King Cambyses vein" an imaginary interview between the King and Hal on the merit or lack of merit of the Prince's companion, provides two versions of that fat companion's character. Falstaff, as King, declares that "a goodly portly man i'fayth, and a corpulent, of a cheerful looke, a pleasing eie, and a most noble cariage" is near the Prince, and should be kept there, "for Harry, I see vertue in his lookes," (II. iv. 394-99). Hal in turn portrays the King and declares that "a diuell haunts thee in the likenesse of an olde fat man, a tun of man is thy companion. . . . a rosted Manningtre Oxe. . . . Falstalffe, that olde white bearded Sathan," (II. iv. 419-21, 424, 434). This of course is satire on the two versions of Oldcastle's character that had come down through the chronicles. The Lollard insurrection which planned to make Oldcastle regent seems to be alluded to in this same scene when Falstaff plays the King and declares, "this chaire shall be my state, this dagger my scepter, and this cushion my crowne," and again in the lines preceding which contain Falstaff's braggadocio remark, "if I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath, and driue all thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild geese, ile neuer weare haire on my face more, you prince of Wales," (lines 120-23). This scene contains ironic adumbration in the reference to the hurdle which Oldcastle rode to the gallows. Falstaff himself retorts when the sheriff is at the door, "if I become not a Cart as well as another man, a plague on my bringing up, I hope I shall

as soone bee strangled with a halter as another," (lines 466-68).⁵⁶ There are several references to Falstaff and the gallows in the two plays: Prince John threatens him with breaking some gallows' back (Part 2 . IV . iii . 31), and Prince Hal taunts him in Part 1 with the "ridge of the gallowes" and with being a rare hangman (I. ii . 36, 63). Doll Tearsheet teases Falstaff by calling him a "whorson little tydie Bartholmew Borepigge," and she asks when he will patch up his body for heaven; Falstaff moans, "peace (good Dol) doe not speake like a Deathshead: doe not bid me remember mine end," (Part 2 . II . iv . 231-36). The Prince calls Falstaff a "whorson Candle-myne" (melted tallow) in the same scene (line 304); and in Part 1 he refers to a dish of melted butter and remarks of Falstaff, "behold that compound," (II . iv . 108). This is gruesome satire.

The thousand marks offered as reward by Henry V for the capture of Oldcastle, a reward that Foxe made much of, is perhaps alluded to when Falstaff meets the Lord Chief Justice (Part 2 . I . ii . 175-76), and in bragging of his own youthfulness the fat knight remarks, "he that will caper with mee for a thousand Markes, let him lend me the money, & haue at him." The two men had just been discussing Falstaff's refusal to answer a citation by the Lord Chief Justice to come to Court.

Falstaff's ragged army of "revolted tapsters, and ostlers trade-fallen, the cankers of a calm world" which he leads to Shrewsbury as

⁵⁶Baeske pointed out this allusion in his study, p. 87.

"food for powder" has marched through St. Albans where one soldier has stolen a make-shift shirt from the host of the inn (Part 1 . IV . ii . 43). We are reminded of the chronicler of St. Albans' description of the army of laborers and husbandmen who passed by the abbey on their way to London to join Lord Cobham. The government records listed Oldcastle's followers as bakers, brasiers, carpenters, cordeners, curriers, drapers, dyers, fullers, glovers, hosiers, ironmongers, labourers, mercers, parchmeners, tailors, saddlers, spurriers, smiths, webs, ploughmen, etc.⁵⁷ Shakespeare's satire is two-edged however, for the Cobhams of the sixteenth century led poor soldiers too and their methods of paying as well as mustering soldiers were questioned. In the fall of 1582 Sir John Norris, commander of the English forces in the Low Countries, withheld payment to the troops of Sir John Cobham, Lord Cobham's brother, for what he considered good cause. The troops were being riddled by disease and warfare, and many of John Cobham's soldiers were dead. Cobham had written to Walsingham in August from Dunkirk that "our Englishmen are so ill handled by the better sort both for pay and victuals that, if there be no better order taken, our soldiers will not tarry here."⁵⁸ In October, when Sir John Norris received money from the Estates to pay the English troops, he paid eight of the eleven companies, but he refused

⁵⁷Quoted by Wylie, I, 275-76.

⁵⁸Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1582, p. 240.

to give Cobham the money for his three companies. Cobham wrote to Walsingham in complaint, stating, "he /Norris/ says that rather than I should have the money which remains in his hands for my 'dead pays,' he will deliver it back to the Estates on his account and reckoning."⁵⁹

We do not know whether Sir John Cobham received the money for troops that had been "food for powder" or not. We know from a letter written in November of 1588 that complaint was again being lodged against Sir John Cobham, this time by Thomas Randolph, the English Ambassador to Scotland, a Kentish gentleman, and a friend of Lord Cobham. Randolph's letter is addressed to Walsingham and he complains that Mr. John Cobham was

. . . appoynted to be a captain as others were of divers selected soldiers within Kent -- what benefit he got in the choice of his men, taking up and leaving out as many as for money he liked, I speak not of -- but for that which is complained unto me of by my neighbors of Milton /Kent/ and most of them her majesty's tenants is, that their captain having received pay of her majesty for a time for such soldiers as served under him that he retaineth their whole wages in his hands and payeth them nothing to whom it is due, your honour considereth whether this be born with or not, though I fear it be too common with other captains that use the like.⁶⁰

This was the Armada year in which every able-bodied Englishman had taken up arms. Sir John Cobham seems to have profited with mustering and paying his fellow Kentishmen.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 383.

⁶⁰ Calendar of State Papers, Scotland, 1588, p. 639. This letter was discovered among the State Papers some years ago by Robert B. Sharpe who suggested its relationship with Shakespeare's Falstaff. See The Real War of the Theaters (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1935), p. 72.

The episode in 2 Henry IV in which Falstaff "captures" Sir John Colville of the Dale in Gaultree Forest (IV . iii) is possibly a reference to the Scotch informer, Sir John Colville, and his intrigues in England and on the Continent during Elizabeth's reign.⁶¹ Colville was a graduate of the University of Saint Andrews and had become for a time Chantor of Glasgow. In 1578 he was appointed Master of Requests at the Scottish Court, and it was in this position that he found means of cultivating an intimacy with the English Ambassador and established ties with the English government. Colville was furnishing Walsingham with information from Scotland as early as 1583; in February of that year Walsingham wrote to Ambassador Cobham in Paris that Colville was expected in London soon to "treat of some more inward amity between her Majesty and the king his master."⁶² Colville had been in Paris during Sir Henry Cobham's tenure there as Ambassador, and Colville had been placed on Cobham's list of informers and promised some remuneration, for when Sir Edward Stafford replaced Cobham, he wrote to Walsingham asking which financial account he should use to pay the hundred crowns for intelligence from the Colvilles (Sir John Colville and his cousin, Sir James of Easter-Weemes).⁶³ Sir

⁶¹This topical allusion was suggested some years ago in an unpublished thesis at the State University of Iowa. See M.A. Taylor, Falstaff and Contemporary Life, State University of Iowa Thesis, 1931. There was a Sir John Colville who served as Henry IV's envoy to Pope Gregory XII in 1409. See The Fifteenth Century, p. 92.

⁶²Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1583, p. 139.

⁶³Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1584-1585, p. 322.

John Colville was sent to London in 1589 as an agent for James, and Burghley notes on December 9th that he paid "to John Colville, to the use of the said King of Scottes, MMM li" (three thousand pounds.)⁶⁴ But Colville soon associated himself with Francis Stewart, Earl of Bothwell, an association that was encouraged by Elizabeth, and in 1592 Colville was accused of treason and his lands forfeited. Sir Robert Bowes wrote to Burghley that Colville, now an outlaw, needed to be "comforted and relieved with her Majesty's bounty."⁶⁵ Colville seems to have been responsible for the apprehension of Bothwell's brother, Hercules Stewart, who was executed in February of 1595. This act of disloyalty to his fellow outlaws secured the King's favor again for Colville, and he was granted payment of a debt of over a thousand pounds out of James' annuity from Elizabeth.⁶⁶

In 1597 Colville was acting as an agent for James on the Continent, but something happened of which we have no record, and in 1598 Colville was in London and out of favor with his king once more. James had gained information of Colville's double dealing it would seem, and Ambassador Nicholson wrote to Sir Robert Cecil that James had demanded to know why Colville was so courteously entertained in London, his "good entertaunment,

⁶⁴Original Letters of Mr. John Colville, 1582-1603, edited by David Laing (Edinburgh: The Bannatyne Club, 1858), p. 233.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 235.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 235.

longe staye there, his courtious dispatch, with licence to bring away 3 horse, and lettres to my Lord Willoughby to treat him; and the favour Mr. John findes there to have been better then is, without a great sute, granted to the King's best subjectes, mervayling what it should meane."⁶⁷

Whether the new Lord Cobham was helping entertain Colville or not we do not know; Colville had had ties with Sir Henry Cobham in Paris, and from the apparent jibe at Lord Cobham and Colville in Shakespeare's play, we may at least assume that the informer had frequented Lord Cobham's house in Blackfriars. Sir Robert Cecil ordered Colville out of England in 1599, accusing him of lack of secrecy and belittling his former intelligence:

When your dealing with me was more secret, it gave you better meanes to discover dangerous practises, then now it doth; for when you came to the Erle of Essex, it was in more private formes, then since your continuall aboade hath made it. But if you remember, the wonders offered from Bruce, and what treasures of the Popes should be intercepted, with other such lyke ouvertures, me thinke you might well aunsuer yourself, that your good will is better then your meanes.⁶⁸

Then Cecil sent word to James that "the Queene scorneth to geve credit or suffer any dealinges with any soe turbulent humours."⁶⁹ Colville's servile character can be deduced from his letters to Cecil, his "Mecenas, "

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 235.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 295.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 292.

in which he calls himself a worm and contends that "beat as you will, as a dog I must fawn."⁷⁰ Colville went to the Continent after his dismissal, became a Catholic to further his aims, and died in poverty in Paris in 1605. John Chamberlain wrote to Dudley Carleton in that year that

Old John Colvill, that busy-brain'd Scot, who trubled
our King so much in consorte with the Earl Bothwell,
having an ambition to be made Chancellor of Scotland,
and ever since lived in exile, is dead in this town,
within few dayes, in great want and misery.⁷¹

The allusions to Oldcastle's martyrdom found in Mistress Quickly's description of Falstaff's death in Henry V make a discussion of that famous scene essential to this study. Mistress Quickly remarks that Falstaff died like any "Christome Child," and that he "cryed out, God, God, God, three or foure times," (III. iii. 19-20). Oldcastle was reported to have cried out Jehovah's name three times when the flames began to consume him. Robert Parsons wrote in his Treatise of Three Conversions that William Hacket, the Puritan preacher who was executed in 1591 for his mad attempt against the Queen, died in the same manner as Oldcastle, calling upon God's name and declaring himself a martyr:

For that Hackett said, he should rise againe the third
day, as Oldcastle did: and went as devoutly to the
gallowes, as the other did, cryinge Jhehova, Jhehova,

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 208.

⁷¹Ibid., p. xxxv.

(as Stow setteth it downe) and at the gallowes railed
no lesse bitterly upon Queene Elizabeth, then Oldcastle
did upon that woorthie King Henry the fift.⁷²

Shakespeare's inversion of heat to cold in Falstaff's death is satiric.

This reference to cold brings in a further allusion which is patterned upon another famous martyrdom -- that described in the final pages of Plato's Phaedo. Those of the Elizabethan audience who knew their classical literature would not have failed to recognize a parallel in Mistress Quickly's disingenuous words, "so a' bad me lay more Clothes on his feet: I put my hand into the Bed, and felt to his knees, and so vp-peer'd, and upward, and all was as cold as any stone," with Plato's description of the death of Socrates after he had drunk the cup of hemlock:

. . . and the man who gave him the poison now and then
looked at his feet and legs; and after a while he pressed
his foot hard, and asked him if he could feel; and he said,

⁷²Robert Parsons, The Third Part of a Treatise Intituled: of Three Conversions of England . . . , p. 251. William Hacket was a Puritan fanatic who, like Udall, Barrow, Greenwood, and Penry, felt the full rigour of the law as it was applied to the religious non-conformists in the early 1590's. Hacket had been joined in his plot by Edmund Coppinger, a Kentish gentleman "descended of a good house and lineage, and one of her Majesties sworne servaunts, but a younger brother, having no great livelihood." Coppinger and Hacket were "neither of the coldes or lewke-warme sort . . . but rather of those that more justly may bee said, to be scalding hote in desire of innovation, which they falsely call reformation." Richard Cosin, Conspiracie for Pretended Reformation (London: C. Barker, 1592), pp. 1-2. Coppinger was said to have access to "some great Councillor." Lord William Cobham's eldest daughter, Francis, had married Thomas Coppinger of Alhallowes in Kent. I have not been able to establish a certain relationship here. Lord Cobham did not assist Edmund Coppinger after he was imprisoned, for the man died of starvation before his execution. A discussion of Lord Cobham's anti-Puritan position will be found in Chapter V.

"No"; and then his leg, and so upwards and upwards,
and showed us that he was cold and stiff.⁷³

The "Treatise of the lord Cobhams" which Francis Thynne wrote for Holinshed's Chronicles had an effusive introduction which began with a quotation from Plato's Republic that defined nobility as a class divided into four degrees: those nobles descended from kings and princes, those descended from good and vertuous ancestors, those who performed great feats of war, and those "who excell in the prerogative of the mind." Thynne of course concluded his introduction by remarking that Lord Cobham possessed all these attributes:

. . . that lord Cobham now living, being the glorie of that ancient and honorable familie, not onelie meriteth well of his countrie, as after shall appeare; but is also an honorable Mecenass of learning, a lover of learned persons, and not inferior in knowledge to anie of the borne nobilitie of England.⁷⁴

This must have rankled some of the "borne nobilitie," and it seems also to have irritated Mr. William Shakespeare.

Hostess Quickly's insistence that Falstaff had not gone to hell but was now in Arthur's bosom is possibly a reference to Oldcastle's promised return from the grave, for King Arthur of literature and legend was reported to be in Avalon and would someday return "twice as fair" to rule over his people. Similarly, the page's reference to incarnation and the

⁷³ Five Great Dialogues of Plato, translated by B. Jowett (New York: Walter J. Black, 1942), p. 153.

⁷⁴ Holinshed, 1585-87 edition, III, 1499.

Hostess' uncomprehending reply, "a' could never abide Carnation, 'twas a Colour he never lik'd, " is applicable to Oldcastle's promised re-incarnation, and also applicable to the doctrine of transubstantiation and the incarnate Christ of the host of the sacrament. Indeed, Oldcastle could not abide this "carnation." The whore of Babylon was an ancient term of derision for the Catholic Church of Rome, and Falstaff's crying out upon the scarlet woman is like Oldcastle's final outcry against the "whorish prelates" who condemned him.⁷⁵

Any discussion of Falstaff's death which skirts "a Table of greene fields" is incomplete. Theobald's emendation of this famous crux is so ingenious that editors for many years have substituted it for the Folio reading. I would like however to suggest that the "table of greene fields" is a topical allusion which refers to Lord Cobham's will and to the special endowment that he made for a memorial tablet or "table" to be erected in his honor in Poppynefelde in Kent. Lord Cobham at the age of seventy, being in poor health and despondent at the death of his daughter, Elizabeth, wife of Sir Robert Cecil, wrote and signed his last will on the 24th of February, 1597. He divided his lands, jewels, horses, and books among his three sons and three daughters, but he reserved some five thousand pounds of ready money and certain building materials for the use of William

⁷⁵The whore of Babylon allusion is discussed by the editor of The Arden Shakespeare, p. xliv, and a play upon "rheumatic-Romeatic" is suggested. Cobham's intrigues with the Catholics could well be alluded to in this pun.

Lambarde, Sir John Leveson, and Sir Thomas Fane, his executors, who were instructed to re-establish the ancient College of Cobham as an almshouse for the relief of the poor in Kent.⁷⁶ Lord Cobham died on the 6th of March, 1597, and a few days later William Lambarde wrote to Burghley explaining Lord Cobham's desires:

His Lordship therefore minding an undoubted accomplishment of his godly and fatherly intentions as well towards the Poore as his own children, did in his lifetime put into the hands of Sir John Leveson the sum of 5,600 pounds almost, in ready money, over and above rich furniture of his lady's provision amounting in his own estimation to the value of 2,000 marks. His commandment to us was that with 2000 pounds or more of these monies the late suppressed College of Cobham should be re-edified and endowed with livelihood for the perpetual maintenance of twenty poor.⁷⁷

Special permission to re-establish Cobham College was granted by an Act of Parliament which was passed in 1597 soon after Lord Cobham's death, and it stated that the Royal assent had been given to carry out Lord Cobham's wishes to establish the New College of Cobham in Kent.⁷⁸

The old College at Cobham had been founded in 1362 by Lord John de Cobham who provided an endowment for a perpetual chantry which was

⁷⁶W.A. Scott Robertson, "Six Wills Relating to Cobham Hall," Archaeologia Cantiana, XI (1877), 209-16.

⁷⁷Printed by A.A. Arnold, "Cobham College," Archaeologia Cantiana, XXVII (1905), 80.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 78-9.

to sing praises for the honor of God and the welfare of the souls of the founder and his progenitors. The endowment provided for the maintenance of five chaplains and a number of brothers from the priory of Saint Saviour, Bermondsey. The College flourished, and some hundred and seventy-five years later when the Master signed the bill of the King's supremacy in 1537 that "dissolved, dis-established, and dis-endowed" the College, the fellowship included eleven chaplains, and it had in revenues approximately 142 pounds per annum. After the dissolution the College remained uninhabited, and in this state of abandonment it fell into ruins.

The construction of New College progressed rapidly in 1597, and the establishment with its new rules and ordinances, its order for daily prayers and its code of conduct for the poor, was finished in September, 1598. The memorial tablet with the arms and quarterings of the Cobhams within a Garter was engraved and placed above the south entrance of the College. It stated that

This new College of Cobham in the County of Kent was founded for the relief of the poore at the charge of the late Right Honorable Sir William Brooke, Knight of the Garter, Lord Cobham, late Warden of the Cinque Ports, Lieutenant for the same County to the Excellent Majesty of Elizabeth, Queen of England, one of Her Highnesses Privy Councillors and Chamberlayne of Her most Honorable Household. He died 6th March 1596 /-97/. This was finished 29th September 1598.⁷⁹

The ruins of New College with the tablet intact above the doorway are near Cobham Church in Kent, and a photograph of the fragmentary wall and the

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 81.

plaque was made in 1905 and published in Archaeologia Cantiana.⁸⁰ Lord Cobham had provided magnificent bronze and marble effigies for his parents' tomb in Cobham Church in 1561. The collection of monumental brasses at Cobham has been called the finest family collection in England,⁸¹ but before a worthy memorial was created for Lord Cobham his sons and his estate fell to destruction in the plots of 1603, and so the memorial "table" above the doorway of New College remains his sole monument. That it is also the "table of greene fields" which Mistress Quickly speaks of, we can only surmise; her preceding phrase, "his Nose was as sharpe as a Pen," lends some reinforcement to the connotation of table as tablet or plaque. The description of Falstaff smiling on his fingers' ends creates an image of an effigy; this was the standard pose for memorial brasses.

Thus far we have evidence enough to state without fear of contradiction that Lord Cobham's actions throughout Elizabeth's reign made him a vulnerable target for those who wished to satirize disloyalty and disorder in the political world. The Oldcastle legend had become a point of departure from which the barbed shafts of ridicule could be launched at Lord Cobham. In the next chapter we shall find that the relationship^{*} of this man

⁸⁰ Ibid., facing p. 81. A youthful portrait of Lord Cobham by Holbein is said to be extant in Windsor Castle, see J.G. Waller, "The Lords of Cobham," Archaeologia Cantiana, XII (1878), 126.

⁸¹ Mill Stephenson, A List of Monumental Brasses in the British Isles (London: Headley Brothers, 1926), p. 221.

with Mary Stuart and her keeper, George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, gave legitimate grounds to the playwright for his use of Sir John Fastolfe's betrayal of the first Earl of Shrewsbury as a symbolic action for an episode in Elizabethan history.

CHAPTER IV

HENRY VI: PARTS 1 AND 2

Scholars no longer consider 1 Henry VI a "Talbot play," but the heroic actions of that famous character -- his fight for England's claim to foreign territory, his steadfastness in his contest with the magic of the French "trull" and her followers, his sacrifice of life for honor's sake -- provide an important element in the thematic structure of the play. Talbot's death, like the confusion of England, is the result of a breakdown of order. There is political disorder in the intestine conflict between the English nobles and moral disorder in the cowardice and betrayal of Sir John Falstaff.¹ My concern, however, with the Talbot scenes of the play is primarily with the topical allusions in those scenes which relate

¹Shakespeare's own spelling of Fastolf as Falstaff will be used throughout this study. The fluid orthography of the period permitted great variance; both forms of the name appear in the State Papers, and as late as 1631 John Weever was using the form Falstolfe in reference to the monuments of that family in Norwich. See Ancient Funerall Monuments (London: T. Harper, 1631), p. 863.

For a discussion of the thematic structure and unity of this play see the introduction by Andrew Cairncross in The Arden Shakespeare, pp. xxxviii-lvii. I have accepted the theory of Shakespeare's sole authorship of the play, a theory that is being reinforced by modern scholarship which is concerned with the aesthetic and artistic accomplishments of the play.

the dramatic actions of Lord Talbot with George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, and the actions of Sir John Falstaff with those of William, Lord Cobham in the 1580's.

The Talbot scenes, particularly those concerned with the seige of Rouen, have long been considered topical allusions which refer to the seige of Rouen by the English forces under Essex in the autumn of 1591; and the eulogistic lines spoken over the corpses of the Talbots, "from their ashes shall be rear'd/ A phoenix that shall make all France afeard," (IV. vii. 93-4), has been suggested as a reference to Essex's heroics in France.² The recital of Lord Talbot's titles (IV. vii. 60-71), taken from the epitaph on his monument in Rouen, has been suggested as a device used to compliment the Earls of Shrewsbury of Elizabeth's reign.³ I would like to supply further evidence to support this latter statement and to suggest that the Talbot scenes were written to eulogize George Talbot, sixth Earl of Shrewsbury, who died in 1590 with his honor blemished by the intrigues of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. George Talbot's warfare was not fought on the battlefields of France, but his difficult task of

²See T.W. Baldwin, On The Literary Genetics of Shakespeare's Plays (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959), pp. 334, 353-54; The Cambridge Shakespeare, ed. Dover Wilson (Cambridge: University Press, 1952), pp. xviii-xix. Baldwin comments dryly that Essex was no more successful in capturing Rouen in the autumn of 1591 than he was in bringing back Irish rebellion broached on his sword in the summer of 1599.

³C.W. Scott-Giles, Shakespeare's Heraldry (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1950), p. 150.

keeper of the Queen of Scots had placed him in the midst of international intrigues for over fifteen years, and when he was relieved of his post, it was with a suggestion of dishonor and disloyalty that was neither proved nor disproved in Elizabethan England. Shakespeare's portrayal of the heroic actions of John Talbot, first Earl of Shrewsbury, is a dramatic exaggeration of that hero's deeds as related by the contemporary Elizabethan chroniclers. That the dramatist's intention was, in part, to compliment the sixth Earl can be deduced, I think, from the unhistorical scene (II. iii) which is interpolated but unintegrated into the action of the play. This scene is the chivalric meeting of Lord Talbot and the Countess of Auvergne in which the Countess attempts to capture the English commander by guile, underestimating both his strength and his integrity. It is possible that this scene was suggested to the playwright by the historical fact that Lord Talbot was captured by Joan of Arc's forces at Patay in 1429. In that battle the Maid's stratagem of immediate attack, which gave Talbot and his archers no time to stockade themselves behind their stakes, won the day for her forces and gave her the credit for the capture of Talbot, Scales, and Hungerford.⁴ Shakespeare arranges his chronology to avoid just such an imputation: the defeat at Patay is described by a messenger in Act I, scene i, and the blame for Talbot's capture is placed upon Sir John Falstaff (as both Hall and Holinshed related). But in the following

⁴The Fifteenth Century, p. 247; The Political History of England, IV, 309.

scene (I. ii) the Bastard of Orleans produces the "holy maid" and she is brought before the Dauphin for the first time. This chronological arrangement makes her humiliation of Talbot at Patay impossible. To further avoid such a suggestion, Shakespeare brings the Maid and Talbot together in hand-to-hand combat in scene v which ends with Joan's withdrawal. Moreover, when Talbot confronts Falstaff at Paris before Henry VI, he accuses him of cowardice at the battle of Poitiers, not Patay (IV. i. 19). This again seems motivated by a desire to avoid mention of the fateful battle by name. If the Talbot-Joan scenes are arranged to protect Lord Talbot's reputation, the Auvergne-Talbot scene seems invented to emphasize the chivalry and integrity of its hero. His conduct is discreet and honorable in spite of the faint sexual overtones in Burgundy's preceding speech and in Talbot's final lines in this scene. This unhistorical episode can, I believe, be related to events of 1583-84. In Elizabethan history we find a parallel situation in the life of George Talbot, sixth Earl of Shrewsbury, which provides motivation and explanation for this scene.

As early as May, 1579, Gilbert Talbot had written from London to his father, the Earl of Shrewsbury, repeating a remark made by Leicester, "by the Eternal God, if they /Shrewsbury's enemies at Court/ could ever bring the Queen to believe it that there were jars betwixt them /Shrewsbury and his wife/, she would be in such a fear as it would sooner be the cause of the removing of my Lordship's charge /Mary Stuart/ than any

other thing."⁵ The Earl of Shrewsbury's second wife was the famous Bess of Hardwick, a woman of determined character, a designer and builder of three Elizabethan mansions. She and the Earl had been married but a year when he was appointed the keeper of the Queen of Scots in January, 1569. In the first years of Mary's imprisonment the Countess and the captive Queen were friends, but the mutual devotion ended with the marriage of Bess's youngest daughter, Elizabeth, to Charles Stuart, the Countess of Lennox's youngest son, in October, 1574, and the birth of their daughter, Arabella, in 1575. Because of this marriage, Bess spent a year in the Tower. In this grandchild Bess had a contender for the title of heir-apparent to the English throne, and the jealousy between Mary Stuart and the Countess of Shrewsbury grew as the child developed. The relationship between the Earl of Shrewsbury and Queen Elizabeth had also become tense during these years of his custody of the Scottish Queen. Frequent reports that Shrewsbury's guardianship of Mary Stuart was lax reached London; servants of the Earl as well as his younger sons were thought to be carrying messages to and from the captive Queen; and Henry Cavendish, one of the Countess' sons by her previous marriage to Sir William Cavendish, was reported to be involved in an attempt to convey Mary Stuart to Scotland. Furthermore, Elizabeth had been stinting in her payments to her "good old man" so that the excessive expense of Mary's maintenance had become a heavy burden to the Earl. Elizabeth had also

⁵Lodge, II, 153.

sided with his tenants in a quarrel over rents on his estates. Thus the Earl was not without motive for his actions of 1583-84.

In the summer of 1582 Mary Stuart was visited by M. de Ruisseau, one of her councillors in France. When Elizabeth heard the rumor that Mary had discussed with the Frenchman a proposed plan of the invasion of Scotland by the Duke of Guise and her own plan for escape from Sheffield, she was furious. She was not yet sure of Shrewsbury's infidelity, but she cancelled his permit to come to London (a permit for which he had pleaded a number of years), and she ordered Mary's guard increased and severe limitations placed on her movements. In vain the Earl wrote to London that "I have heard of late her Majesty hath expressed some very hard conceits of me," and he continued, "but I am very well able to prove that she /Mary/ hath showed herself an enemy unto me and to my fortune and that I trust will sufficiently clear me."⁶ Meanwhile, information was coming in to Walsingham and Burghley from Scotland

⁶ Lodge, II, 237. Mendoza was sending Philip a side line account of what was going on in England. He related that Walsingham and Leicester both wanted Mary Stuart placed in more capable hands, but being unable to prevail upon Elizabeth, they suggested a severe curtailment in the 200 pounds per month allotted to him for his expenses, "the idea being that, as Shrewsbury was very fond of money, he would give up the charge, and the Queen might then without apparent offence to him, dispose of the Scotch Queen as she thought best." But when Shrewsbury failed to surrender the custody of Mary after 80 pounds was cut from his monthly wage, Elizabeth told Walsingham, "you do nothing but stir up things to gain other ends, but it all ends in smoke; you see now that Shrewsbury will not leave the Queen of Scotland after all." Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1580-1586, p. 301.

concerning the activities of Esmé Stuart, Count d'Aubigny, whom James had created Duke of Lennox. Esmé Stuart was a cousin of James; his French manners and ingratiating ways had endeared him to the young king, and after the fall of Morton the new Duke of Lennox was virtually in control of Scotland. The English Council was soon aware of the grandiose scheme which Lennox and Guise, with the aid of Philip, the Pope, and the Jesuits, hoped to perpetrate -- the invasion of England through Scotland, and the restoration of Catholicism in the island. But the Protestants in Scotland captured their young king in August of 1582, and Lennox was forced to flee to France, via England. In London he gained an audience with Elizabeth and proclaimed vehemently his loyalty to Protestantism and to the English cause. In France he established contact with Sir Henry Cobham, the English Ambassador. Whether his motive was to double-cross the Duke of Guise or whether he meant to beguile the English with half-truths we do not know, but he began to expose the Hispano-Guise plot to Cobham in March and April of 1583.⁷ Cobham was relaying the information to Walsingham in London; Lennox gave the Ambassador details of Mary Stuart's plans of escape from Sheffield, the plan to kidnap young James and carry him to France, the plan of Guise and the Pope to invade England. Cobham wrote also that Lennox wished to come to London to show Elizabeth a letter he had received from Mary Stuart offering him the

⁷Calendar of State Papers, Scotland, 1581-1583, pp. 292-5, 328-29.

allegiance of her followers in Scotland and the favor of her confederates in England if he would stay in Scotland to direct the forthcoming plan of invasion. Lennox proposed, Cobham wrote, to discover the names of Mary's English adherents if Elizabeth was interested.⁸ Cobham's letter was written on May 1; a few days later Lennox was dead. Dysentery was said to have been the cause of his death, but Mary Stuart said he was poisoned; Froude suggests he was poisoned at the instigation of Guise.⁹ My own suggestion is that Sir Henry Cobham knew his brother's name was on the list of the Queen of Scots's adherents. If Lennox died of poison, the chances are it was of English vintage rather than French.

Lennox's revelations had implicated the Shrewsburies again in a plot for the release of the Queen of Scots. Was the Earl playing a double game with Elizabeth? Recent scholarship suggests that he was. In September of 1583 Shrewsbury moved the royal prisoner to his manor of

⁸ Cobham's letters are quoted by Froude, XI, 306-08.

⁹ Ibid., XI, 308. The news of Lennox's death was related to the French by William Fowler, a spy of Walsingham. On June 4th Fowler wrote to his master, "it did fal out verray opportunlie that I was the first advertiser off the Duik of Lennox his death to the French pairtie." Fowler then related that the "pairtie" had responded with a long discourse of the death and slaughter of noble personages and concluded with these words, "the Queene of Scotland heth lost a great and good freind, and be his death I se doeth ensew an alteratioun and stey off al our purposses." Calendar of State Papers, Scotland, 1581-1583, p. 489. Sir Walter Mildmay wrote to Walsingham in June that he had told Mary of Lennox's death and that she had replied that she had looked for word from Lennox for three months, but had recently been advertised that he was poisoned. Mildmay concluded, "it seems she favored and trusted him much." Ibid., p. 497.

Worksop in Sherwood Forest. While there the Earl was visited by his nephew, the Earl of Rutland, who was a zealous Catholic and reported to be an adherent of the Scots Queen.¹⁰ When Elizabeth heard of Mary's "liberties" in Sherwood Forest, she was incensed; she had already heard during the summer months the unpleasant gossip which Bess had sent to the Court concerning an undue intimacy between the Earl and the captive Queen. Mendoza's quick ear had picked up the gossip, and he had relayed it to Philip in June. The Spanish Ambassador said he had heard that the Countess had sent one of her sons directly to Queen Elizabeth with her complaint, and that Elizabeth referred him to the Council. "He replied that as the matter was one between husband and wife, he did not think this course would be agreeable to his mother." Mendoza proceeded with an account of the gossip:

The substance of the complaint is that, so long as the Queen of Scots was in the hands of the Earl of Shrewsbury, she would never be secure, as he was in love with her, and this the Countess sets forth with a thousand absurdities and impertinences, which the Treasurer and Walsingham have repeated, the Queen having shown them the statement.¹¹

¹⁰A letter of intelligence dated 11th of August, 1583, contains information on the Duke of Guise's plan of invasion; it names Rutland as one of the Earls working to further the plot. Calendar of State Papers, Scotland, 1584-1585, p. 8. The Earl of Shrewsbury's first wife was Gertrude Manners, daughter of the first Earl of Rutland. Gilbert's letter to Bess describing his visit to Worksop and the meeting with Rutland and his father is printed in Hunter's History of Hallamshire, p. 117.

¹¹Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1580-1586, p. 473.

E. Carleton Williams, the recent biographer of Bess, declares that the Countess started the rumors to protect both her life and the Earl's, knowing that Elizabeth would relieve him of his post when she heard it, thus placing Shrewsbury out of the way of the conspiracy.¹² When Mary Stuart heard something of the gossip from the French Ambassador, she commanded Mauvissiere

. . . to publish everywhere as loudly as you can my offers hereupon and their answer, to the end to countermine the false rumors that you tell me they have already spread. You will have somewhat understood by my said letters my intention of touching indirectly the Countess of Shrewsbury, against whom, if I am not afraid of opening my mouth, I am sure that she and all her courtiers will have whereof to repent for having so cruelly and treacherously attacked me.¹³

The Earl's anger was never quenched. He proceeded with the Statute of Scandalis Magnatum against William and Charles Cavendish, Bess's sons, and her steward, Henry Beresford who had helped spread the gossip in the Court. As late as March, 1587, Shrewsbury was demanding of Walsingham some measure to force the Countess to make a "public submission and retraction of her slanderous speeches."¹⁴ And in June, 1587, the Earl petitioned the Queen that the Countess his wife might be "banished the Court now that she hath so openly manifested her devilish disposition and

¹²Bess of Hardwick (London: Longmans, 1959), pp. 160-61.

¹³Calendar of State Papers, Scotland, 1584-1585, p. 5.

¹⁴Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1581-1590, p. 450.

defended her wicked servant Beresford in the defamation of my house and name."¹⁵ The effect of the gossip plus the revelations gained from Francis Throckmorton's confession made it imperative that Shrewsbury be relieved of his position as keeper of Mary Stuart. Sir Ralph Sadleir was commissioned in March, 1584, to replace Shrewsbury as Mary's host and guard. Sadleir spent the summer months with Mary and the Earl at Sheffield. In September he moved the Queen of Scots to Wingfield.¹⁶ The Earl and his Countess had not been reconciled when the Earl died in 1590.

In the brief scene between Lord Talbot and the Countess of Auvergne in 1 Henry VI the Countess attempts to capture the hero by guile. As it has been suggested, this scene gains meaning by reference to the immediate historical context.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid., p. 452.

¹⁶De Tassis, Philip's Ambassador in Paris, wrote to the Spanish King in April, 1584, that Mary's plan of escape should be attempted before her custodian was changed: "perhaps the only real way for her to help herself and get free is the method she has mentioned several times, which she had arranged, and for some time past has been asking for 12,000 crowns to pay for. The day before yesterday her ambassador begged me again very earnestly to ask for this sum to be provided at once, and as he urges it so strongly as he does it may be concluded that the plan is now settled in a way that enables the Queen to be sure of success; unless they take her away from her present abode and place her in the hands of another custodian nearer London, in which case she would of course be lost, which would be a great misfortune, as she is the true instrument to smooth matters there easily and permanently." Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1580-1586, p. 523.

¹⁷The similarity between the names Auvergne and Aubigny, a central vowel shift from e to i and a consonantal shift from v to b, seems suggestive. Esmé Stuart's title was Count d'Aubigny; he was the primary intrigant selected to master-mind the Guise plot of 1582-83 to free the Queen of Scots, etc.

The lines given to Talbot in the preceding scene seem prophetic:

. . . when a world of men
 Could not prevail with all their oratory
 Yet hath a woman's kindness over-rul'd.
 (III. ii. 48-50)

It was not kindness, but the woman in the life of the sixth Earl of Shrewsbury certainly over-ruled.

The cowardice of Sir John Falstaff is described three times in 1 Henry VI, first by the messenger (I. i. 130-34), secondly by Falstaff's flight at the battle of Rouen (III. ii. 105-08), and for the third time in the recital of his base actions by Talbot before the King (IV. i. 13-26). In addition, by bearing Burgundy's letter of defection, Falstaff is implicated in that betrayal. Thus we have four actions in the play developed from one historical event that was related by the Tudor chroniclers who were drawing from the biased account of the battle of Patay given by Monstrelet.¹⁸ I would like to suggest again that the betrayal of Lord Talbot by Falstaff is an allusion to the sixth Earl of Shrewsbury and William, Lord Cobham. Much of the evidence of Lord Cobham's connections with the Duke of Norfolk

His Stuart heritage and name may have suggested to the playwright the title of the Countess of Auvergne for a character whose function was to provide an allusive reference to Mary Stuart.

¹⁸ The most recent study of Sir John Fastolf's life is that written by H.S. Bennett, Six Medieval Men & Women (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), pp. 30-68. Bennett vindicated Fastolf's retreat at the battle of Patay, and he prints the account of Fastolf's actions written by "roy acteur estant present," p. 53.

and Mary, Queen of Scots, has been presented in Chapter III of this study. We know that Lord Cobham's name was on the list of her adherents which is thought to have been compiled by Francis Throckmorton. We know that Sir Henry Cobham sent the details of Mary's escape plan to Walsingham, implicating the Shrewsburies. There is further evidence that Lady Frances Cobham, Mistress of the Queen's Wardrobe and a particular favorite of Elizabeth, was involved in disloyal communications with Mary Stuart.

Early in Elizabeth's reign the Spanish Ambassador had written to Philip that he was receiving intelligence about the English Court from Lady Cobham,¹⁹ and in 1565 de Silva wrote to the King that Lady Cobham had paid him a secret visit to beg leniency for Thomas Cobham, and de Silva spoke of the "affection they all bore toward your Majesty."²⁰ In February, 1575, Henry Cockyn, a prisoner in the Tower, wrote to Walsingham that his reticence was caused by his fear of "touching great personages, indeed, at first I was afraid to discover that which I knew of Lord Henry /Howard, Norfolk's brotherr/ and the Lady Cobham. . . . What

¹⁹Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1558-1567, p. 214.

²⁰Ibid., p. 454. The Earl of Sussex also visited de Silva and begged for moderation of the piracy charges brought by the Spanish against Thomas Cobham. Sussex said Lord Cobham "was a near kinsman of his own and of many of the highest people in the land who were attached to your Majesty," p. 455.

favourers the Scottish Queen has in Court, I know not, other than Lady Cobham."²¹ Frances Cobham's contact with the Queen of Scots had possibly come about through her close friendship with the Countess of Shrewsbury. Lady Cobham had had a hand in arranging the marriage of Bess and the Earl in 1568. It had at one time been thought that Sir Henry Cobham was the suitor most likely to succeed in winning the hand of the widowed Bess, but Lady Cobham seems to have used her talents for matchmaking to help Bess catch the wealthy Earl instead. Shrewsbury, in an endearing letter to his new wife, written from Hampton Court on their first parting, gave Lady Cobham some credit for his happiness:

My Lady Cobham, your dear friend, wishes your presence here: she loves you well. I tell her I have the cause to love her best, for that she wished me so well to speed as I did /his marriage/: and as the pen writes so the heart thinks, that of all earthly joys that hath happened unto me, I thank God chiefest for you.²²

²¹ Calendar of State Papers, Scotland, 1575-1580, pp. 93-94. In July of this year Burghley wrote to Lord Cobham declaring that the Queen of Scots' jewels had been slipped out of England via Sandwich and that Elizabeth had sent out search orders and the customs officials were to be arrested. Burghley added that he regretted the incident and knew that Cobham was innocent. He signed the letter, "your Lordshipp's assured at your Command, as any Brother you can have." Murdin, p. 281.

²² Quoted by M. S. Rawson, Bess of Hardwick And Her Circle (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1910), pp. 42-43. It should be mentioned that the Earl of Shrewsbury's sister, Anne, had married John, Lord Bray. This Lord Bray was sent to the Tower in 1556 for being involved in a plot to overthrow Queen Mary. Lord Cobham's mother was Anne Bray, sister of John, Lord Bray. Lodge, I, 266.

An extant letter written by Gilbert Talbot from Court to his step-mother of whom he was very fond, contains more evidence of the closeness of Lady Cobham and the Countess of Shrewsbury. "My Lady Cobham," he wrote, "asketh daily how your La: doth, and yesterday prayed me, the next time I wrote, to do her very hearty commendation unto your La:, saying openly she remaineth unto your La: as she was wont, as unto her dearest friend."²³ If Lady Cobham dabbled in intrigue, she was justly rewarded with an exquisite humiliation. Her signature appears with those of Walsingham, Burghley, Hunsdon, and Shrewsbury as endorsement on the back of a letter which Walsingham intercepted in 1586. The letter was written by Thomas Morgan in Paris and smuggled in to Mary Stuart via Walsingham's spies. Morgan suggests that Mary resume her contact with Lady Cobham:

My Lady Cobham beareth a great stroke over her Husband, who towardses your Majesty is not evil inclined: Your Majesty may consyder how to revive your Intelligence with my Lady Cobham, and you may take Occasion to congratulate of the Estimation of her Husband /Cobham's appointment to the Privy Council/, and that he had wronge that he was not called to that Place earlier, and that you doubt not but he will use his Creditt in that Place to the Honor and Good of the Realme, and to his own Commendation, and that he will ever favour Equitye and Honor in all your Causes.

Morgan then suggests several ways of contacting Lady Cobham -- through Francis Barty, the Countess of Arundel, or Lord Stourton.

²³ M. S. Rawson, Bess of Hardwick and Her Circle, p. 118.

My Lord Sturton is a Catholike, and married the Daughter of the Lord Cobham; and the Lord Sturton, being in that Degree of Alliance with that Familye, were a fitt Instrument to be employed towards the Lord and Lady Cobham. Sir John Arundell married the Lord Sturton's Mother, being Sister to the Erle of Darbye that now is; and Sir John Arundell were a fitt Man to pushe on the Lord Sturton for your Service.

Morgan at length decided that the Countess of Arundell would be the best means of reaching Lady Cobham, so he enclosed in his letter a note to Lady Arundel which Mary was to copy and send:

. . . We have written herewith a few Lines to the Lady Cobham, which we likewise desire to be delivered to her, and pray you further to buy for us of the best Silkes or Velvets that you can finde, as much as will serve to make her a cople of Gownes to weare for our Sake.

The note continued with a reservation that if Lady Arundel thought the action unsafe she was not to proceed with Lady Cobham. Morgan concluded his own letter with a warning that if the "league" between Lady Cobham and the Countess of Shrewsbury "be still great, then is the Lady Cobham to be delt withall with more Discretion, or perhaps not to be delt with at all."²⁴

These bits of evidence which relate Lord and Lady Cobham with the Queen of Scots' cause do not of course give a complete picture of what happened in the fall of 1583. It was suggested in Chapter III that Lord

²⁴Murdin, pp. 489-505. This letter is summarized in Calendar of State Papers, Scotland, 1585-1586, pp. 268-70, and in Calendar of Salisbury Manuscripts, III, 137.

Cobham withdrew from the Catholic plot to place Mary Stuart on the English throne after the theft of the French packet at Gads Hill and after Throckmorton was apprehended. Lord Cobham's rewards of the Garter and Council membership seem to indicate that he betrayed his fellow conspirators in some fashion. There is considerable evidence that the Earl of Shrewsbury was involved in those conspiracies. We know too that Sir Henry Cobham's letters from Paris were damning to Shrewsbury's name. These fragments of evidence coalesce into a body of information which is strong enough, I believe, to bear the theory which I have suggested: that the Cobhams were in some measure to blame for the embarrassment of the Earl of Shrewsbury.

When Shakespeare's Talbot scenes are placed against this miasmic backdrop of subterfuge and treason, the dramatic actions of a former Lord Talbot and his betrayal by Sir John Falstaff's cowardice and disloyalty become, I think, symbolic drama. That Sir John Falstaff is a symbolic character representing Lord Cobham in the Henry IV plays is fairly well proved. We know that Shakespeare substituted the name of Falstaff for that of Sir John Oldcastle in these plays when the Cobhams complained of such usage in the last years of Elizabeth's reign. I suggest that such a substitution was a facile move on the part of the playwright, for Shakespeare's Falstaff was, it seems, a symbolic character which he had used some years earlier in his drama of 1 Henry VI, a character whose function had been to allude to the actions of Lord Cobham. The substitution was

continua satira.

The question arises, why should the young Shakespeare desire to vindicate the honor of the Earl of Shrewsbury? A simple answer is the playwright's great national pride. There is, however, a suggestion of another answer among the official papers relating to the Somerville-Arden affair of 1583. Hugh Hall, the priest arrested for provoking John Somerville to make his mad ride toward London to kill the Queen, lived with various Catholic families in and about Warwickshire for whom he conducted mass and served as confessor. Among the names listed in Hall's confession as people with whom he had lived were the Ardens, Sir John Throckmorton (father of Francis, the conspirator), and John Talbot of Grafton in Worcestershire.²⁵ Scholars have always quoted the letters of Mendoza and Mary Stuart to prove there was no relationship between Somerville's scheme and the Throckmorton plot. Both Mendoza and Mary denied they had ever heard of Somerville and Arden.²⁶ There is still no valid evidence that Somerville and Edward Arden were working in conjunction with Francis and Thomas Throckmorton for the invasion of England and the rescue of the Queen of Scots, but there is evidence that Hugh Hall was involved in some broader scheme than instigating a neurotic young man to take a dagger and kill a "viper queen." William

²⁵Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1581-1590, p. 142.

²⁶Calendar of State Papers, Scotland, 1584-1585, p. 5; Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1580-1586, p. 512.

Davison wrote to one of the Councillors, probably Burghley, on the 23rd of November, 1584, relating information concerning the evil practices of Archibald Douglas. In his report Davison remarked that:

Francis Flower is deemed to have opened the gats for discovery of Hawll the priest, and others of that family, but not of duty to the King nor of zeal of religion, being an atheist himself and long /one/. His policy is said to have been partly for revenge, but chiefly for sole credit, when the rest are expulsed, and that his master mistrusting Noles, by the skill of his former pranks, would fain be rid of him, saving that he expects time. The matter of Hawll the priest is divided between Sommerfield and him, the deciphering of others of that troop belonging to his master, is ascribed only to him. /In the margin is written: This is a consideration among the best sort of F. Flower. . . . John Gillpin told me 2 years since and more, that when he was sent after his master's son into France, he met at Rome with Hawll the priest, who amongst trees and plants, and under reams of white paper that he brought over hither, there were seditious books packed together very cunningly, that also he was then a minister of messages and practices, and he was suspected to have had Hyde's books then, to be dispersed by his means in England, the method whereof was a description of all the persons of the nobility, councillors, and others well affected to God and our sovereign, in the 'slanderest' manner and most reproachful that might be. Only the Earl of Sussex and some others were reverently spoken of. This remembrance touching Hawll may serve to bring some other thing to light.²⁷

²⁷ Calendar of State Papers, Scotland, 1584-1585, pp. 428-29. This is a singularly difficult passage. I have not been able to trace Francis Flowers or his master, nor do the names of John Gilpin or Noles appear again in the Calendar. The malicious remark concerning Hugh Hall and Sir Christopher Hatton, that was published in Leicester's Commonwealth, has always been considered a bit of ungrounded gossip meant to denigrate Leicester. See The History of Queen Elizabeth, Amy Robsart, and The Earl of Leicester . . . or Leycesters Commonwealth (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1904), p. 202. This famous book also contains the following passage on the Earl of Shrewsbury

Davison seems to have gathered his news from Scotland; his complete report covers recent activities of Archibald Douglas and the Earl of Angus. Hugh Hall's activities seem then to have been more expansive than is usually believed. We know that Somerville was questioned concerning his relationship with Henry Goodyere whom he had visited in Coventry; Goodyere was a partisan of Mary Stuart who had been sent to the Tower for his complicity in the Ridolfi affair in 1571.²⁸

which attempts to place the dishonoring of the Earl at Leicester's door: "What meaneth also these pernicious late dealings against the Earle of Shrewsbury, a man of the most ancient and worthiest Nobility of our Realme? What meanes the practises with his nearest both in bed and blood against him? What meane these most false and slanderous rumors cast abroad of late of his disloyall demeanures towards her Majesty and his countrey, with the great prisoner committed to his charge? Is all this to any other end, but only to drive him to some impatience, and thereby to commit or say something which may open the gate unto his ruine?" p. 203. This book was printed on the Continent in 1584 and re-printed in French in 1585, to Elizabeth's great humiliation.

²⁸Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1581-1590, p. 124. The Warwick indictment of the Ardens and Somervilles has been considered a biased document. It is preserved in the Baga de Secretis in the State Papers. Issued on the 2nd of December, 1583, it reads: "Indictment found at Warwick against the said John Somervyle, Margaret Somervyle, and the said Edward Arden, late of Park Hall, aforesaid, gentleman, and Mary, his wife, Francis Arden, and the said Hugh Hall, for that on the 22nd October, 25 Eliz., at Edreston, they conspired to compass the death of the Queen, and change the pure religion established in the kingdom, as well as to subvert the Commonwealth, and in order to carry such their treason into effect, the said Margaret Somervyle, Edward Arden, Mary Arden, Francis Arden, and Hugh Hall at Edreston, the 24th Oct., 25 Eliz., by divers ways and means incited John Somerville to kill the Queen, and thereupon the said John Somervyle traiterously said, 'I will go up to the Court and shoot the Queen through with a pistol,' and on the following day he took a pistol, gunpowder, and bullets, and journeyed therewith from Edreston towards London, the Queen then being in her house called St. James, in the County of Middlesex, near the same city, in order to carry his treasons into effect." Quoted by C.C. Stopes, Shakespeare's Warwickshire Contemporaries (Stratford-Upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1907), p. 98.

John Talbot's name appears again in a letter written by Lady Throckmorton to her son, Thomas, on the 9th of October, 1583, in which she says she has talked with Owen, Mr. Talbot's man, who recommends that Thomas go to Lady Arundel at Arundel Castle who will obtain a passage by ship for him.²⁹ This seems to have been the means by which Francis Throckmorton's brother escaped to the Continent. John Talbot was the son of Sir John Talbot, brother of the Earl of Shrewsbury.³⁰ It is only conjecture, but the young Shakespeare's relationship with the Talbots may possibly have come through Hugh Hall's visits to the home of John Talbot in Grafton. As a youth Shakespeare may have accompanied the priest there.

It is interesting that Shakespeare gives the name, John Holland, to one of the mad conspirators of Cade's rebellion (2 Henry VI, IV. ii. 1), a character who brandishes a lath and swears to kill the king. John Holland, it may be remarked, was an alias used by John Somerville.³¹ Dover Wilson has suggested that Shakespeare's portrayal of the Cade rebellion is a composite description of elements taken from the chronicle accounts

²⁹Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1581-1590, p. 124.

³⁰The priest, Robert Johnson, was apprehended in the company of John Talbot and his wife in London in 1580 and executed. After that time John Talbot spent most of his life in prison or under house arrest at various points in and near London. He paid great sums in recusancy fines, and was at length arrested in connection with the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, but was later freed. See The Catholic Encyclopedia, XIV, 432.

³¹See the index to Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1581-1590 under Somerville. Shakespeare uses the name, Sir John Somerville, for a loyal character in 3 Henry VI, V. i.

of Wat Tyler's uprising and the Cade affair as well as elements from the play, Jack Straw.³² It is possible that another such rebellion is alluded to in Shakespeare's play. Kent had been the source of a number of such uprisings, the latest in Tudor times was Wyatt's rebellion in January and February of 1554. George, sixth Lord Cobham, was a brother-in-law to Thomas Wyatt, and this relationship plus his recent anti-Marian ties with the Duke of Northumberland and Lady Jane Grey sent him to the Tower after Wyatt's uprising failed. Cobham's sons, William and Thomas, joined the rebellion and rode into London with Wyatt. Thomas Cobham was with the group of rebels that besieged the courtiers at the Gatehouse from Westminster, and he was among the group with Wyatt at Temple Bar when Wyatt surrendered to Sir Maurice Berkeley.³³ Lord Cobham and his eldest son were released from the Tower in March at the intercession of Count d'Egmont. Thomas Cobham was not pardoned until

32

The Cambridge Shakespeare, pp. 174-76.

33 See A Chronicle of England . . . by Charles Wriothesley, Windsor Herald, ed. W.D. Hamilton (2 volumes; London: The Camden Society, 1876-77), pp. 110-25; The Chronicle of Queen Jane . . ., ed. John G. Nichols (London: The Camden Society, 1850), pp. 35-62; Edward Underhill, "Narrative of Wyatt's Rebellion," and John Proctor, "History of Wyatt's Rebellion," in An English Garner (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1903), pp. 170-98, 199-258.

1555.³⁴ Shakespeare makes no specific reference to the actions of Wyatt and the Cobhams, but Wyatt's rebellion was patterned on the earlier uprisings from Blackheath. The rebels marched to Southwark, were delayed at London Bridge, eventually entered London from the east, rode through the city, and at length were defeated by the royal forces. It is possible that Elizabeth's supposed complicity in this affair provided a strong deterrent to the playwright in his management of the montage of Kentish rebellions.

If in 2 Henry VI we find almost nothing of the Cobhams of Wyatt's rebellion, that omission is abundantly compensated in the account given in the play of the actions of Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester. The story of Eleanor Cobham resembles in many ways the history of the Oldcastle legend; it came down through the chronicles as a story of treason, but the later Tudor historians reworked the material until Eleanor became a victim of political forces and at length, like her kinsman, she was enrolled in Foxe's calendar of martyrs. A typical mid-fifteenth-century version of Eleanor's story is described by William

³⁴ Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1547-1580, p. 62. The French intrigues behind Wyatt's rebellion and the premature precipitance of the plot when the French courier's packet was intercepted by the Spanish Ambassador is presented in detail by E. Harris Harbison, Rival Ambassadors at Queen Mary's Court. It is amusing to note that William Lambard, an old friend of William, Lord Cobham, and eventually an executor of his will, refused to include an account of Wyatt's rebellion in his Perambulation of Kent. In this work he describes four earlier uprisings that originated in the county, but on coming to the 1554 insurrection, he stops and remarks that "for pain and pity" he cannot continue. Perambulation of Kent (London: R. Newberie, 1576), p. 276.

Gregory, Mayor of London:

/A.D. 1440-41/ And in the same yere there were take certayne traytourys, the whyche purposyd to slee oure lege lorde the kyng by crafte of egremauncey, and there instrumentys were opynly shewyd to alle men at the Crosse in Powlys chyrche yerde a-pon a schaffolde i-made there-for. Att the whyche tyme was present one of the same traytours, whiche was callyd Roger Bulbroke, a clerke of Oxforde, and for that same tresoun my Lady of Gloucester toke sayntwerye at Westemyster; and the xj day of Auguste thenne next folowyng she toke the way to the castelle of Lesnes. And on Syn Symon and Judeys eve was the wycche be syde Westemyster brent in Smethefylde, and on the day of Symon and Jude the person /parson/ of Syn Stevynnys in Walbroke, whyche that was one of the same fore sayde traytours, deyde in the Toure for sorowe. . . .

Ande in that same yere the Lady of Glouceter for the same treson she was juggyde by the spyrytuale lawe to iij sondys or dyvers placys, that ys to wete, on Mondaye, the xiiij daye of Novembyr, to Powlys, and on the Wanynday i-sygnyd unto Crychyrche; and on the Fryday nexte folowyng to Synt Mychellys in Cornehylle. And on the Satyrday next folowyng was Roger Bulbroke hanggyde and drawe, and quarteryde at Tyburne.³⁵

When Edward Hall related the story of Eleanor Cobham (1548) he may well have kept in mind the fact that George, sixth Lord Cobham, was an influential member of the Privy Council, for Hall's version of the history contains a new emphasis upon the enemies of Gloucester, and it minimizes the treason of Gloucester's wife:

But venyme will once breake oute, and inwarde grudge
will sone appeare, whiche was this yere to all men
apparaunt: for divers secret attemptes were advaunced

³⁵The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century, ed. James Gairdner (London: The Camden Society, 1876), pp. 183-84.

forward this season, against the noble duke Humfrey of Gloucester, a farre of, whiche in conclusion came so nere, that they bereft hym both of lyfe and lande, as you shall hereafter more manifestly perceyve. For first this yere, dame Elyanour Cobham, wyfe to the sayd duke, was accused of treason, for that she by sorcery and enchauntment, entended to destroy the kyng, to thentent to advaunce and to promote her husbände to the croune: upon thys she was examined in saint Stephens chappel, before the Bisshop of Canterbury, and there by examinacion convict & judged, to do open penaunce, in iij open places, within the citie of London, and after that adjudged to perpetuall prisone in the Isle of Man, under the kepyng of Sir Jhon Stanley, knyght. At the same season, wer arrested as ayders and counsailers to the sayde Duchesse, Thomas Southwel, prieste and chanon of sainte Stephens in Westmynster, Jhon Hum priest, Roger Bolyngbroke, a conyng nycromancier, and Margerie Jourdayne, surnamed the witche of Eye, to whose charge it was laied, that thei, at the request of the duchesse, had devised an image of waxe, representyng the kynge, which by their sorcery, a litle and litle consumed, entendyng therby in conclusion to waiste, and destroy the kynges person, and so to bryng hym death, for the which treison, they wer adjudged to dye, & so Margery Jourdayne was brent in smithfelde, & Roger Bolyngbroke was drawen & quartered at tiberne, takyng upon his death, that there was never no suche thyng by them ymagined, John Hum had his pardon, & Southwel died in the toure before execution: the duke of Gloucester, toke all these thynges patiently, and saied litle. . . .³⁶

Fabyan's account of Eleanor's deeds followed the older Catholic version, and he did not hesitate to include a bit of gossip about Lady Eleanor that had circulated in the Court before she became the Duchess of Gloucester:

And firste this yere dame Eleanoure Cobham, whom he /Gloucester/ was to famylyer with, er she were to hym maryed, was arrestid of certayne poyntes of treason,

³⁶ Hall's Chronicle, 1809 ed., p. 202.

and therupon by examynacion convict, and lastly demyd
to dwell as an outlawe in the Isle of Man, under the warde
of sir Thomas Stanley knyght. . . .³⁷

Fabyan continued his account with a description of the execution of Bolingbroke and the Witch of Eye, and he described the wax image of the King and their attempted treason by sorcery. By 1563, as we would by now expect, John Foxe picked up the story of Eleanor Cobham, reknit it into a defense of the lady, and made her as well as her husband a victim of the malice of the unscrupulous Bishop of Winchester. This for Foxe was one more example of the unlicensed depravity of Catholicism in general. But Foxe's account contained a flaw which Nicholas Harpsfield was quick to unravel. The imprisoned Archdeacon taunted Foxe for confusing the priest Bolingbroke with Sir Roger Only, knight, and for placing the Witch of Eye in his calendar of saints. Foxe wrote "A Brief Answer to the Cavillations of Alan Cope's Concerning Lady Eleanor Cobham" which he printed in the 1576 edition of the Acts and Monuments.³⁸ He had not made the witch a saint, he insisted, but he had made an error in the name of Bolingbroke because his first edition was "so hastily rashed up in such shortness of time." And of this little matter "Master Cope, the pope's scout, lying in privy wait to spy faults in all men's works . . . taketh pepper in the nose, and falleth again unto his old barking against me." Foxe then defended Eleanor Cobham by syllogistic reasoning: Eleanor

³⁷The New Chronicles of England and France, 1811 ed., p. 614.

³⁸Acts and Monuments, 1877 ed., III, 704-09.

avored Lollardy, therefore she was hated by the papists; if she had intended treason she would not have made so many persons privy to her intentions; the Witch of Eye lived in the Bishop of Winchester's see, therefore she was probably his instrument; Polydore Vergil omitted the account of Eleanor Cobham from his Anglica Historia. His "mewing up of the matter" indicated he must have found something to make him mistrust the whole story. After ten such conclusions Foxe ended thus:

Although these, with many more conjectures, may be alleged as some part of the defence of this duchess, and of her chaplains and priests, yet, because it may still not be impossible for the matter laid against them to be true, I leave it therefore at large, as I find it; saying, as I said before, that if that be true which the stories say in this matter, think, I beseech thee, gentle reader! that I have said nothing hereof.³⁹

And thus Foxe left it, hanging fire, as it were. The Elizabethan chroniclers followed true to their previous commitments to the Oldcastle story.

Grafton's account of the Eleanor Cobham episode (1569) is based upon Hall; his opinion of the charges of treason brought against the Duchess was that they were part and parcel of the Bishop of Winchester's plan to destroy the Duke of Gloucester.⁴⁰ Holinshed relates the tragedy of Eleanor in which she is the victim of Gloucester's enemies.⁴¹ Stow's version of the story goes back to the pre-Reformation account of the

³⁹Ibid., III, 708.

⁴⁰Grafton's Chronicle, 1809 ed., I, 622.

⁴¹Holinshed's Chronicles, 1808 ed., IV, 808.

affair; he contends that the lady's "pride, false covetise, and lechery" were the cause of her "confusion." Stow denigrates her character further by insisting that she was Gloucester's "paramour, to his great reproch." He describes her apprehension and indictment for treason with the other unholy conspirators, and adds:

There was taken also Margery Gurdemaine, a witch of Eye ny Westminster, whose sorcerie and witchcraft the said Elianor hadde long time used, and by her medicines and dringes enforced the Duke of Gloucester to love her, and after to wedde her, wherefore, and for cause of relapse, the same witch was brent in Smithfield, on the twentie-seven day of October.⁴²

Stow concludes with the standard account of Eleanor's penance and exile and the execution of Bolingbroke. Robert Parsons also used the older writers to attack the "martyrdom" of the Duchess and the account of her tragedy given by Foxe in the Acts and Monuments. Like Harpsfield, Parsons derides Foxe for enrolling a condemned traitor and also a witch as saints in the Protestant calendar.⁴³ But Parsons was writing in 1603-04, some years beyond the period of the production of Shakespeare's 2 Henry VI. Scholars are agreed that Shakespeare read and used the Elizabethan chronicle accounts of Dame Eleanor's tragedy; of equal importance with the chronicle accounts for analogues of the dramatic version is the literary production of the story of the Duchess of Gloucester which appeared in the 1578 edition of the Mirror for Magistrates. George Ferrers' versified

⁴²Annales, 1631 ed., pp. 367, 381-82.

⁴³The Third Part of a Treatise Intituled: Of Three Conversions of England . . . , pp. 267-78.

tragedies of Eleanor Cobham and the Duke of Gloucester were indexed in the 1559 and 1571 editions of the Mirror; they were not, however, included in the text. The 1578 edition of the Mirror indexed only the tragedy of the Duke of Gloucester, but the companion tragedy of Eleanor, his Duchess, was introduced in a cancel for folio 39 of this edition. This unindexed and unfoliated gathering contained a new prose link, the tragedy of the Duchess, and a revised prose link introducing the tragedy of the Duke of Gloucester.⁴⁴ In this tragedy Eleanor's actions are motivated by pride and ambition:

And of pure pittie ponder wel my case,
 How I a Duches, destitute of grace
 Have found by prooffe, as many have & shal
 The prouerbe true, that pryde wil haue a fall.
(lines 4-7)

Her birth is said to be base:

A noble Prince extract of royal blood
 Hunfrey sometyme Protector of this land
 Of Glocester Duke, for vertu cald (the good)
 When I but base beneath his state did stande
 Vouchsafte with me to joine in wedlockes bande
 Hauing in Court no name of high degree
 But Elinor Cobham as parents left to mee

And though by byrth of noble race I was,
 Of Barons bloud, yet was I thought vnfitte,
 So high to matche, yet so it came to passe. . . .
(lines 8-17)

⁴⁴See the introduction to Lily B. Campbell, The Mirror for Magistrates (New York: Barnes and Noble, Incorporated, 1960), pp. 17-18. The following quotations from the Mirror are from this edition.

Eleanor's ambition to wear the crown is described as one of the major reasons for her fall:

For not content to be a Duchesse greate,
 I longed sore to beare the name of Queene
 Aspyring stil vnto an higher seate,
 And with that hope my selfe did ouerweene
 Sins there was none, which that tyme was betweene
 Henry the king, and my good Duke his Eame
 Heyre to the crowne and kingdome of the Realme.
 (lines 78-84)

In this version of her history Eleanor admits that she called in the Witch of Eye, Bolingbroke, and Southwell to cast certain divinations to discover who should succeed to the crown, but she insists that neither by "inchauntment, sorcery, or charme" did they ever plan "to work my princes harme," (lines 111-12). And she furiously denounces Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, as the perpetrator of the plot to destroy both her and Gloucester (lines 176-238). However, in the companion tragedy of the Duke of Gloucester the treasonable sorcery of Eleanor and the necromancers is described by the Duke, and he does not deny the charges made against his wife although he too says that Beaufort, the Bishop of Winchester, used "this haynous crime and open worldly shame" as "a fyne fetch further thinges to frame."

Yet besides this there was a greater thing,
 How she in waxe by counsel of the witch,
 An Image made, crowned like a king,
 With sword in hand, in shape and likenesse syche
 As was the kinge, which dayly they did pytch
 Against a fyre, that as the waxe did melt,
 So should his lyfe consume away vnfelt.
 (lines 274-80)

Against this heterogenic background of source material Shakespeare's management of dramatic character becomes more meaningful. Shakespeare's version of the Duchess' character is quite similar to that portrayed by George Ferrers. The playwright introduces the ambition of the Duchess in her opening lines which are addressed to her husband:

Why are thine eyes fix'd to the sullen earth,
 Gazing on that which seems to dim thy sight?
 What seest thou there? King Henry's diadem,
 Enchas'd with all the honours of the world?
 If so, gaze on, and grovel on thy face,
 Until thy head be circled with the same.
 Put forth thy hand, reach at the glorious gold.
 What, is't too short? I'll lengthen it with mine:
 And, having both together heav'd it up,
 We'll both together lift our heads to heaven,
 And never more abase our sight so low
 As to vouchsafe one glance unto the ground.
 (I. ii. 5-16)

This characteristic of ambition is reinforced in the same scene by Eleanor's description of her dream in which she is crowned Queen in Westminster cathedral (lines 36-40). Her dealings with the Witch of Eye, Roger Bolingbroke, Southwell, and Hume are dramatized in scene iii of Act I; this scene was revised for the folio edition of the play, possibly, as the Arden editor suggests, to remove the direct part taken by the Duchess in the treasonable proceedings.⁴⁵ The burning of the wax effigy is not mentioned in the play. When Buckingham announces Eleanor's apprehension to the

⁴⁵The Arden Shakespeare, p. 31. It should be noted also that John Hume says he has accepted the Bishop's gold to "buz these conjurations in her brain," (I. ii. 99).

King and Gloucester, he simply says,

A sort of naughty persons, lewdly bent
Under the countenance and confederacy
Of Lady Eleanor, the Protector's wife,
The ringleader and head of all this rout,
Have practis'd dangerously against your state,
Dealing with witches and with conjurers:
Whom we have apprehended in the fact;
Raising up wicked spirits from under ground,
Demanding of King Henry's life and death,
And other of your Highness' Privy Council
As more at large your Grace shall understand.

(II. i. 159-69)

And when Eleanor is sentenced by the King, he only says "in sight of God and us, your guilt is great," (II. iii. 2); Eleanor's stoic reply is, "welcome is banishment; welcome were my death," (II. iii. 14). Her last lines in the play are those of acknowledged guilt: when Sir John Stanley tells her to throw off her sheet in which she had done penance and prepare for her journey into exile, she laments,

My shame will not be shifted with my sheet:
No; it will hang upon my richest robes,
And show itself, attire me how I can.
Go, lead the way; I long to see my prison.

(II. iv. 107-10)

Shakespeare's Eleanor is not an innocent victim of either the Bishop or of Fortune's wheel, although Beaufort makes advantageous use of her ambition and pride to undermine Gloucester. Shakespeare's suppression of the wax image which the conjurors made of the King is interesting. Lily B. Campbell suggested some years ago that the tragedy of Eleanor Cobham was written by George Ferrers to mirror the historical episode of 1555-56 in which Princess Elizabeth and John Dee were accused of attempting to

destroy Queen Mary by conjuration with a wax effigy of the Queen. George Ferrers was one of the informers to the Privy Council in the affair.⁴⁶

This earlier allegoric use of the tragedy of Eleanor Cobham provides — some suggestion of why Shakespeare was cautious in his conjuration scene to avoid mention of the effigy.

To understand something of how the contemporary Cobhams were involved in the story of Eleanor Cobham, we must turn to the few biographical facts which are extant concerning George Ferrers.⁴⁷ Ferrers was a native of Hertfordshire; he attended Cambridge, and became a member of Lincoln's Inn. His services as page of the chamber to Henry VIII earned him a legacy of 100 marks which the King left Ferrers in his will. In 1541 he married Elizabeth, widow and executrix of Humphrey Bourchier, illegitimate son of Lord Berners. This marriage brought him kinship with Henry Bourchier, second Earl of Essex.⁴⁸ In this same

⁴⁶Lily B. Campbell, "Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester and Eleanor Cobham His Wife in the Mirror for Magistrates," The Huntington Library Bulletin, V (1934), 119-155.

⁴⁷My information on Ferrers' life is drawn from the DNB article (XVIII., 383-85) and the supplementary material given by Lily B. Campbell in her introduction to The Mirror for Magistrates, pp. 25-31.

⁴⁸It should be remembered that the arms of the family of Ferrers are among the twelve coats-of-arms quartered in the arms of the Earls of Essex. I have not been successful in tracing a relationship between George Ferrers and the nobles of that name. There were Ferrers in Warwickshire; William Somerville, brother of John, married an Elizabeth Ferrers. See C.C. Stopes, Shakespeare's Warwickshire Contemporaries, p. 83.

year Anne Bouchier, daughter of the Earl of Essex, married William Parr, brother of Catherine Parr, sixth wife of Henry VIII. When Henry Bouchier died without male heirs, William Parr became the Earl of Essex through his wife's claims to the inheritance of her father. But in 1547 by an act of Parliament William Parr (now Marquis of Northampton) divorced Anne Bouchier upon grounds of adultery. Before the legal proceedings were properly completed Parr married Elizabeth Cobham, eldest daughter of George, sixth Lord Cobham. The Privy Council was annoyed with Parr's haste, and Elizabeth Cobham was sent to stay with Catherine Parr until a decision was reached.⁴⁹ In 1548 Parr obtained another act of Parliament which made his children by Anne Bouchier illegitimate and denied them their rights of inheritance.⁵⁰ In 1552 a third act of Parliament was procured which legalized his second marriage to Elizabeth Cobham. This young woman, like her father, was a friend of the Duke of Northumberland, and she helped in promoting the marriage of Guilford Dudley and Lady Jane Grey. When Queen Mary terminated the nine day reign of Lady Jane, one of her first moves was to insist that Parliament repeal the act of 1552; the position of the Marchioness was,

⁴⁹This Court gossip was sent to Madrid by the Spanish Ambassador, Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1547-1549, p. 253.

⁵⁰William Parr had no children by Elizabeth Cobham or by his third wife, Helen, lady-in-waiting to Cecilia, Marchioness of Baden. What property he had passed to his nephew, Henry Herbert, second Earl of Pembroke, son of his sister, Anne Parr.

therefore, a dubious one during the reign of Queen Mary.

George Ferrers was the official "master of the King's pastimes" in 1551, and he directed the pageants and masques which were presented at Court during the Christmas season of that year. He remained in this position for the duration of Edward's reign, and Queen Mary retained him as her lord of misrule. It has been suggested that Ferrers wrote the tragedy of the Duke of Gloucester during Edward's reign or shortly thereafter to mirror the fall of the Protector Somerset; Somerset's divorce, his second marriage, the treachery practiced against him, and his fall make such an allegory applicable in every sense.⁵¹ It has also been suggested that the unfavorable presentation of Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, was offensive to Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, and that for this reason the Mirror for Magistrates was suppressed in 1555.⁵² Ferrers was undoubtedly using his tragedies to mirror contemporary political situations, but his presentation of Eleanor Cobham had, I believe, a dual purpose. In addition to a political level of meaning, it was meant to denigrate Elizabeth Cobham who had been the cause of the divorce and humiliation of Anne Bouchier, Ferrers' kinswoman. Like Eleanor, Elizabeth Cobham had married a peer whose former marriage was still a matter of litigation. Contemporary minds would have had little

⁵¹Eveline Feasey, "The Licensing of the Mirror for Magistrates," The Library, III (1922-23), 177-93.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 190-93.

trouble in substituting the name of Elizabeth for Eleanor when that character laments:

His wife I was, and he my true husband
 Though for a while he had the company
 Of lady Jaquet the Duchesse of holland
 Beyng an heyre of ample patrimony
 But that fel out, to be no matrimony
 For after war, long sute in law and strife
 She proued was the Duke of Brabants wife.

(lines 22-28)

It is interesting to note that Justice Shallow remarks that when Falstaff was a youth he broke Scogan's pate at the Court gate (2 Henry IV, III. ii. 33). Scogan was the name of the Court Fool in Edward IV's reign; Ferrers was the lord of misrule in Edward VI's reign. It is not difficult to imagine that William Cobham gave Ferrers a well-deserved blow for the intended insult to William's sister which contemporaries read into Eleanor's lament.

George Ferrers seems to have retired from the Court upon Elizabeth's accession, but he remained active in political affairs. In 1567 he served in the office of escheator for the counties of Essex and Hertford, and in 1571 he was elected to represent St. Albans in Parliament. Unfortunately, Ferrers seems to have been involved with many another Englishman in the Ridolfi affair of that year. In his position as a member of Parliament he was able to relay information of a political nature to Mary Stuart's Ambassador in London, John Leslie, Bishop of Ross. It will be recalled that in October of this fateful year Burghley and Walsingham broke the Ridolfi plot. In his confessions the Bishop of Ross related how George Ferrers had sent him information concerning the affairs before

Parliament, and the Bishop also declared that Ferrers was the author of a book written in Latin which advocated the Queen of Scots's claims to the English throne.⁵³ Lord Cobham's mismanagement of Charles Bailey's packet was one element in the collapse of the Ridolfi plot. This bungling could only have served to increase the hard feelings between Ferrers and Lord Cobham. The index of the 1571 edition of the Mirror for Magistrates contained the two tragedies of Eleanor Cobham and the Duke of Gloucester, but the stories failed to appear in the text. In 1578 Ferrers was successful in bringing his "royal ballads" out in print, the tragedy of Eleanor appearing in a cancelled gathering. His success may have been due in part to the disfavor Cobham was in at Court for the failure of his mission to the Low Countries with Walsingham.⁵⁴ There is no evidence that the Cobhams complained about the publication of the tragedies. The Marchioness of Northampton had died in 1565. Shakespeare, Drayton, and Christopher Middleton wrote versions of the story of Eleanor Cobham in the 1590's. Shakespeare's version is an unflattering portrait of that lady. It would be naive to assume that the playwright was motiveless in his dramatization of the story. That it was designed to further humiliate the Cobham family can be assumed from the playwright's

⁵³ Murdin, pp. 20, 30, 43, 46, 51.

⁵⁴ The disastrous effects of this mission are described by Conyers Read, Mr. Secretary Walsingham (3 volumes; Cambridge: University Press, 1925), II, 393-421.

continued satirical attacks upon William Cobham and Henry, his son. In the years of 1598-1600 when the dramas of Henry IV, The Famous Victories, and Sir John Oldcastle appeared, the story of Eleanor Cobham reappeared in new attire. Michael Drayton published his version of Dame Eleanor's story in Englands Heroicall Epistles. Drayton calls the Duchess "a proud, ambitious woman" who designed "by sorcerie to make away the King."⁵⁵ This unflattering portrait resembles Ferrers' and Shakespeare's versions of the story. In 1600 Christopher Middleton produced a chivalric defense of the Duchess in his Legend of Humphrey, Duke of Glocester. His Eleanor is "a vertuous Lady, one of good account." She is the victim of the hatred and bigotry of the Court; she is sentenced to an unwarranted penance,

And after that perform'd, be banished hence,
 Into the Isle of Man, and there should live,
 A guiltlesse exile, for a small offence
 Or none at all: and who so ere did give
 That unjust sentence, hath ere this his doome,
 Amongst th' condemn'd, where comfort nere shall come.⁵⁶

That such effusive performances as this work of Middleton's and Weever's Mirror for Martyrs salved to some extent the chagrin of the Cobhams is to be doubted. Henry, eighth Lord Cobham, complained in 1603 that "except the house of Norfolk noe house of England received more disgrace

⁵⁵Michael Drayton, Englands Heroicall Epistles (London: Nicholas Ling, 1598), fol. Hii^r.

⁵⁶Christopher Middleton, The Legend of Humphrey, Duke of Glocester (London: Nicholas Ling, 1600), fol. Dii^r.

and jealousy for many years together in the time past than my poor house."⁵⁷

It is to be hoped that the tedium of the foregoing evidence is compensated by the knowledge it provides of the contemporary historical milieu which produced Henry VI, Parts 1 and 2. There is evidence enough in the relationship of the Earl of Shrewsbury and Lord Cobham and Sir Henry Cobham to suggest the dramatist's use of an allegoric pattern in the dramatic scenes of Talbot and Falstaff. Shakespeare's management of the Eleanor Cobham story contains nothing of melioration; he increases that lady's disparagement by his emphasis on her ambition and guilt. The poverty of biographical materials for this period of Shakespeare's life leaves us only conjecture and supposition when we search for the causes which provoked the young Shakespeare to satirize Lord Cobham in the early 1590's. But as the decade passed, the rivalry between literary patrons and dramatic companies provided fuel and flame for a continuation of this battle of innuendo, allusion, and insult.

⁵⁷ Calendar of Salisbury Manuscripts, XV, 290.

CHAPTER V

THE FAMOUS VICTORIES OF HENRY THE FIFTH

In 1598 Thomas Creed published an old anonymous play entitled The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth, "as it was played by the Queen's Majesty's Players." Creed had entered the play in the Stationers' Register on the 14th of May, 1594, but style, structure, and objective criteria date the play as a product of the 1580's. T.W. Baldwin, using the casting pattern of the Queen's Company, suggests the play was written at some time between 1583, when that company was organized, and 1586.¹ B.M. Ward, utilizing topical references, suggests that the play had its origin in some court entertainment given by the Earl of Oxford's players about 1574.² A.E. Morgan has suggested that the play was originally written in verse, then was passed to the Admiral's Men and was revised by them and acted as their Henry V of 1595-1596.³ E.K. Chambers

¹T.W. Baldwin, On The Literary Genetics of Shakspeare's Plays, 1592-1594, p. 210.

²B.M. Ward, "The Famous Victories of Henry V: Its Place in Elizabethan Literature," Review of English Studies, IV (1928), 270-94.

³Some Problems of Shakespeare's Henry the Fourth, quoted in The New Variorum (1 Henry IV), pp. 282-84.

suggests that the play was probably a two-part drama and that it was issued about 1594 when it became the source used by Shakespeare for his Henry IV and Henry V plays; he suggests that perhaps it was used independently by a writer for the Admiral's Men also.⁴ C.A. Greer has suggested that since there is no great similarity in phraseology between Shakespeare's plays and The Famous Victories, there must have been an older play which served as a common source for Shakespeare and the author of The Famous Victories.⁵ And quite recently S.M. Pitcher, using similarities which he finds in phraseology and management of chronicle source materials, has endeavored to build a case for Shakespeare's authorship of the anonymous play.⁶ Let it suffice to say that

⁴William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems (2 volumes; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), I, 383-84.

⁵"Shakespeare's Use of The Famous Victories of Henry The Fifth," Notes & Queries, vol. 199 (1954), 238-41.

⁶The Case For Shakespeare's Authorship of "The Famous Victories" (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1961), cited hereafter as Pitcher. Mr. Pitcher presents his theory as only "reasonably presumptive." While I find his arguments interesting, I do not agree with his thesis. Similarities in the use of source materials, particularly in the Elizabethan era, are not weight enough for authorial conjecture. Shakespeare's dramas are characterized by a complex management of thematic statement; the magnitude of ethos and dianoia in each play is created by a subtle relationship between imagery, symbolism, and thematic idea. This wealth of artistic accomplishment was a product of Shakespeare's genius, and it is his indelible signature in a work of art. The Famous Victories is barren of such artistic qualities. Mr. Pitcher places some importance on Richard James's remark concerning the "first show of Harry the Fifth." He suggests that James was referring to The Famous Victories. Had Mr. Pitcher referred to James's complete statement in its context, the ambiguity would have been dispelled, I think. James was writing to Sir Henry Bouchier concerning the two appearances of Sir John Falstaff,

this saltatory criticism is both speculative and indeterminant concerning the origin of the play.

We know that the Queen's Company of players was formed in 1583.

Stow mentions the formation of that group at the request of Elizabeth:

Comedians and stage-players of former time were very poore and ignorant in respect of these of this time, but being nowe growne very skilfull and exquisite actors for all matters, they were entertained into the service of divers great Lords, out of which companies there were xii of the best chosen, and at the request of Sir Francis Walsingham, they were allowed wages and liveries as groomes of the chamber: and untill this yeere, 1583, the Queene hadde no players. Amongst these xii players were two rare men, viz., Thomas Wilson for a quicke delicate refined extemporall witte, and Richard Tarleton for a wondrous

and he speaks of the reigns of Henry V and Henry VI, thus when he remarks on the "first shew of Harrie the fift," he means the plays of Prince Hal and Falstaff which come first chronologically. I quote the text in full: "A young Gentle Ladie of your acquaintance, having read the works of Shakespeare, made me this question: How Sir Jhon Falstaffe, or Fastolf, as it is written in ye statute book of Maudlin Colledge in Oxford, where everye daye yt societie were bound to make memorie of his soule, could be dead in Harrie ye Fifts time, and againe live in ye time of Harrie ye sixt to be banisht for cowardize? Whereto I made answeare that this was one of those humours and mistakes for which Plato banisht all poets out of his commonwealth: that Sir Jhon Falstaffe was in those times a Noble valiant souldier as apeeres by a book in the Heralds office dedicated unto him by a herald whoe had binne with him if I well remember for ye space of 25 yeeres in ye French wars; that he seemes allso to have binne a man of learning, because in a librarie of Oxford I finde a booke of dedicating churches sent from him for a present unto Bishop Wainflete and inscribed with his owne hand. That in Shakespeares first shew of Harrie the fift, ye person with which he undertook to playe a buffone was not Falstaffe, but Sr Jhon Oldcastle, and that offence beinge worthily taken by personages descended form his title, as peradventure by manie others allso whoe ought to have him in honourable memorie, the poet was putt to make an ignorant shifte of abusing Sr John Falstaffe or Fastolphe. . . ." The Poems, etc., of Richard James, pp. 138-39.

plentifull pleasant extemporall wit, hee was the wonder of his time.⁷

Tarlton's witty extemporizing in the scene following the slapping of the Chief Justice by Prince Hal has set a terminus ad quem for the dating of The Famous Victories. Since there has been some dispute concerning the validity of this reference, I quote the passage from Tarlton's Jests:

At the Bull at Bishops-gate was a play of Henry the fift, wherein the judge was to take a box on the eare; and because he was absent that should take the blow, Tarlton himselfe, ever forward to please, tooke upon him to play the same judge, besides his owne part of the clowne: and Knel then playing Henry the fift, hit Tarlton a sound boxe indeed, which made the people laugh the more because it was he, but anon the judge goes in, and immediately Tarlton in his clownes cloathes comes out, and askes the actors what newes: O saith one, hadst thou been here, thou shouldest have seene Prince Henry hit the judge a terrible box on the eare: What, man, said Tarlton, strike a judge? It is true, yfaith, said the other. No other like, said Tarlton, and it could not be but terrible to the judge, when the report so terrifies me, that me thinkes the blow remains still on my cheeke, that it burnes againe. The people laught at this mightily: and to this day I have heard it commended for rare; but no marvell, for he had many of these.⁸

It has been suggested that Tarlton could not appear as clown and Judge at the same time and that this reference is to some other play in which the double role was possible.⁹ It would have been a simple matter of

⁷Annales, 1631 ed., p. 698.

⁸Tarlton's Jests, ed. J.O. Halliwell (London: Shakespeare Society, 1844), pp. 24-25.

⁹The New Variorum (1 Henry IV), p. 386; also C.A. Greer, "A Lost Play the Source of Shakespeare's Henry IV and Henry V," Notes & Queries, vol. 199 (1954), 53-55.

expedience to delete Dericke's two lines in the scene with the Prince and the Judge to provide for his dual role.¹⁰ The dramatic action described in the jest parallels the scene from The Famous Victories so closely that there is little doubt that the Queen's Company was performing that play before the end of the 1587-88 winter season.¹¹

The primary concern of this study of the play is with the roles of Sir John Oldcastle alias Jockey, John Cobbler, and Dericke the clowne. Historically, as we have seen, Oldcastle was associated with the young Prince in the affairs of the Welsh marches and the Glendower insurrections, so that the inclusion of his name in the entourage of Prince Hal is in one sense historically accurate; there was of course no fifteenth-century analogue for the Gads Hill robbery. The hurtling in Eastcheap is described by Stow, but neither the Prince of Wales or Oldcastle is mentioned.¹² As I suggested in Chapter III, Shakespeare's use of the Gads Hill robbery seems to have been an allusion to more serious diplomatic matters than the simple robbery for money or "a great rase of ginger" mentioned in the plays. I would like to suggest that the mode of allusive satire used

¹⁰Lines 451-52, 456-58. References are to the 1598 edition of the play edited by Joseph Q. Adams, Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), pp. 667-690.

¹¹William Knell and Richard Tarlton were both dead by September, 1588. Knell's widow remarried John Heming, Shakespeare's friend and fellow actor, in March, 1588. See E.K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage (4 volumes; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), II. 107.

¹²Stow, The Chronicles of England, 1580 ed., p. 573.

in the comic scenes of Shakespeare's Henry IV plays was also used by the author of The Famous Victories -- that the character of Oldcastle in this play is a satirical allusion to William, Lord Cobham. To begin, I suggest that the alias given in the play to the character, Sir John Oldcastle, is meaningful in the light of contemporary Elizabethan history. "Jockey" was a derisive term used for a Scotchman. That it was a witty and appropriate alias for Oldcastle can be seen when we recall Lord Cobham's alignment with the Queen of Scots's cause. This is a touch of derisiveness which culminates in the rejection scene on Henry V's coronation day. Romantic critics have long resented Shakespeare's heartless treatment of Falstaff in his description of that episode in the fabulous rogue's career. The famous line, "I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers," cuts quick. But I suggest that there was a contemporary meaning behind this action which prompted its inclusion in both 2 Henry IV and The Famous Victories.

The historical Henry V was said to have renounced his dissolute followers and become a new man on his coronation day. Nearly all the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century chroniclers included some version of the story in their accounts of this famous king's reign, but the most colorful description which I have found is that written by an anonymous author of The Brut:

And before he was Kyng, what tyme he regnyd Prince of Walyes, he fylle & yntendyd gretly to ryot, and drew to wyld company; & dyuers lentylmen and lentylwommen

folwyd his wylle & his desire at his commaundment; & lykewyse all his meyne of his housolde was attendyng & plesyed with his gouernaunce, out-sept iij men of his howsolde, whiche were ful hevy and sory of his gouernaunce. . . . And thanne he beganne to regne for Kyng, & he remembryd þe gret charge & wourship þat he shulde take upon hym; And anon he comaundyd al his peple þat were attendaunt to his mys gouernaunce afore tyme, & al his housolde, to come before hym. And whan they herde þat, they were ful glad, for they subposyd þat he wolde a promotyd them in-to gret offices, & þat they shulde a stonde in gret favyr & truste with hym, & neerest of counsel, as they were afore tyme. & trustyng hereupon, they were þe homlyer & bolder unto hym, & nothyng dred hym; ynsomuche, þat whan they were come before hym, some of them wynkyd on hym, & some smyld, & thus they made nyse semblaunte unto hym, meny one of them. But for al þat, þe Prynce kept his countynaunce ful sadly unto them, And sayde to them: Syrys, ye are þe peple þat I have cherysyd & mayntynyd in Ryot & wylde gouernaunce; and here I geve you all in commaundment, & charge how, þat from this day forward þat ye forsake al mys gouernaunce, & lyve after þe lawys of almyhety God, & after þe lawys of oure londe. And who þat doyth contrarye, I make feythful promys to God, þat he shal be trewly ponised accordyng to the lawe, withoute eny favour of grace. . . . And so he rewardyd them richely with gold & sylver, & othyr luelys, and chargyd them alle to voyde his housolde, & lyve as good men, & never more to come in his presence, be-cause he wolde have noon occasion nor remembraunce wherby he shulde falle to ryot agen. . . . and thus was lefte in his housolde nomo but tho iij men, and meny one of them þat were eydyng & consentyng to his wyldnes, fyl afterward to gret myschefe and sorw.¹³

In The Famous Victories the dissolute knights, Tom, Ned, and Oldcastle, are rejected by the newly crowned King Henry (lines 1004-1039) as in 2 Henry IV Falstaff, Bardolf, and Pistol are repulsed by the new King (V. v).

¹³ The Brut, pp. 594-95.

In 1586 as in 1597 there was reason for the anti-Burghley faction at Court to denigrate Lord Cobham, and it was in these factious maneuvers that I think The Famous Victories and the Henry IV plays had their conception. We know that in February, 1586, William, Lord Cobham, Thomas, Lord Buckhurst, and John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury were appointed to membership in the Privy Council. As Walsingham phrased it in a letter sent to Stafford in Paris, "her Majesty, finding that her Council by the decease of the late Lord Admiral, the Earl of Bedford, and absence of my Lord of Leicester was grown somewhat naked, hath lately made choice of my Lord of Canterbury, my Lord Cobham, and my Lord of Buckhurst to supply the places of councillors."¹⁴ In the political division at Court both Cobham and Buckhurst were considered Burghley's adherents and thus enemies of the Earl of Leicester. Leicester had gone to the Low Countries in December, 1585, and his immediate acceptance of the sovereign command offered by the States had incensed Elizabeth. Her anger may have given Burghley the edge in his fight for the control of power in the Council. We know that one point of attack in Leycesters Commonwealth had been Leicester's control of power in the northern marches (through Huntingdon, his brother-in-law), in Wales (through the Earl of Pembroke, married to Mary Sidney, Leicester's niece), in Ireland (through Lord Grey and Sir Henry Sidney, the latter another brother-in-law),

¹⁴ Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1585-1586, pp. 352-53.

and in the Isles of Wight and Gernsey through additional adherents. The anonymous author of this book also pictured the members of the Council as tools of Leicester:

First, in the privy Chamber, next unto her Majesties Person, the most part are his owne creatures (as hee calleth them) that is, such as acknowledge their being in that place, from him: and the rest hee so overruleth either by flattery or feare, as none may dare but to serve his turne. And his raigne is so absolute in this place (as also in all other parts of the Court) as nothing can passe but by his admission, nothing can bee said, done, or signified, whereof hee is not particularly advertised.¹⁵

Any of the Leicester-Pembroke-Sidney faction would have had a motive for an attack on Cobham after he was appointed to the Council during Leicester's absence. We know that in 1586 Leicester was particularly incensed when he found his diplomatic endeavors to effect a peace settlement with the Spanish forces in the Low Countries were undermined by low-level advances offered through an Italian merchant of London named Agostino Grafigni. Leicester wrote in April, 1586, to Walsingham complaining of Grafigni's actions, "I can assure you, by all faith and trueth, that the brutes of your treating underhande hath done more harme to the

¹⁵ Leycesters Commonwealth, 1904 ed., pp. 61, 76-77. The author concludes this portion of his attack by making an interesting analogy: "This then is the Hector, this is the Ajax appointed for the enterprise, whom the time shall come. This must bee (forsooth) an other Richard of Warwick /Leicester/, to gaine the Crowne for Henry the ninth /Huntingdon/ of the House of Yorke: as the other Richard did put downe Henry the sixt of the House of Lancaster, and placed Edward the fourth, from whom Huntington deriveth his title." p. 77.

cause here then anie one thinge in the world, " and again early in June, "this dealing underhand, and yet most openlie, for peace, doth marr all; yt dishonoreth her majestie, hit overthroweth all here."¹⁶ Grafigni was Lord Cobham's special envoy to the Duke of Parma. This secret conniving on the part of Cobham came near to wrecking the whole enterprise. When Grafigni returned to London with letters from Parma, Elizabeth quickly dispatched a denial to the Prince stating she could not initiate peace procedures.¹⁷ Cobham's meddling was annoying to Leicester, and Leicester had an acting company which could have produced such a play as The Famous Victories, but there is enough internal evidence in this play to suggest that it was written by someone in the entourage of the Earl of Oxford. It can scarcely be doubted that the substitution of historical characters in the play, particularly that substitution which aggrandizes the role of the ancestral Earl of Oxford, was done to complement the seventeenth Earl of that name.¹⁸ Certain events in 1585-86 would

¹⁶Correspondence of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester . . . 1585-1586, ed. John Bruce (London: Camden Society, 1844), pp. 247, 296.

¹⁷Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1585-1586, pp. 379, 527, 674-75. See also Conyers Read, Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth, pp. 334-36. It may have been this meddling which placed Cobham in disfavor at Court in 1586-87; the excision of the "Treatise of the Lords of Cobham" from Holinshed's Chronicles occurred at this time. See Chapter II of this study.

¹⁸This point was established some years ago by B.M. Ward, "The Famous Victories of Henry Fifth: Its Place in Elizabethan Literature," Review of English Studies, IV (1928), 284. See also Pitcher, pp. 183-95.

have provided grounds for just such dramatic procedures. In September of 1585 the Earl of Oxford and Sir John Norris went to the Low Countries with four thousand troops to assist the States in their revolt against Spain. Oxford returned to England late in October for some unknown reason, probably the appointment of Leicester to command the expedition.¹⁹ Oxford's brother-in-law, Peregrine Bertie, Lord Willoughby d'Eresby, remained in the Low Countries, and Leicester appointed him governor of Bergen-op-Zoom in May, 1586. No sooner had he taken his new station than he and his forces were engaged in combat with the enemy. Lord Willoughby's victory gained him praise from his fellow soldiers and commendation from Leicester. In a letter to the Queen Leicester described the heroics of the governor:

I have received even now word from my Lord Willoughby, who writes to me that upon Tuesday, hearing of a great convoy going to Antwerp of four hundred and fifty waggons, he went himself with two hundred horse and four hundred footmen and met with them, being a thousand footmen, and set upon them, slew three hundred, took eighty prisoners and destroyed all their waggons, saving twenty-seven he carried away for his soldiers' relief. This is a notable piece of service, and puts Antwerp in a danger of present revolt, and it is thought it will forthwith send to me and submit themselves, which I pray God grant.²⁰

¹⁹ Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1585-1586, p. 104. See also B. M. Ward, The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford (London: John Murray, 1928), p. 251.

²⁰ Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1585-1586, p. 677.

These heroics may have inspired the author of The Famous Victories to enlarge the historic roles of Oxford and Willoughby.²¹ It is also possible that the Earl of Oxford's earlier alliance with the Duke of Norfolk and his association with the Catholic faction that flourished around Charles Arundel and Lord Henry Howard may have provided sufficient motive for an attack on Lord Cobham via the character of Jockey or Oldcastle. The Earl of Oxford was a kinsman of the Duke of Norfolk; in 1571 rumors floated abroad that young Oxford was ready to "spring" the Duke from his imprisonment in the Tower.²² Cobham's bungling in the management of Ridolfi's packet which contained the letters to Norfolk and the Queen of Scots was one important factor in Norfolk's downfall. We know Oxford's violent reaction to the execution of the Duke; his marital troubles with his new wife, Anne Cecil, were rumored to be caused by the fact that Burghley had refused to save the Duke of Norfolk. A total rift occurred between Oxford and Burghley when the young Earl returned from his tour of the Continent in 1576, and in the following years until 1581 Oxford

²¹In addition to the enlarged roles of Oxford and Willoughby, a number of other unhistorical names are added to the lists of heroic Englishmen at the battle of Agincourt. These names are the Earls of Derby, Kent, Effingham, Huntingdon, and Northumberland (lines 1525-28, 1534-37). See Pitcher, pp. 184-95, for an interesting suggestion that The Famous Victories was used as a propaganda play during the winter months of 1586-87 when the trial and execution of Mary Stuart placed four of these Earls, Derby, Kent, Effingham, and Oxford, in disfavor at Court.

²²B. M. Ward, The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, p. 63; Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1547-1580, p. 478.

associated himself with Lord Surrey, Charles Arundel, Francis Southwell, and Walter Raleigh. Oxford apparently reverted to the old faith, but in 1581 he accused his Catholic friends of a conspiracy against the crown. Oxford himself was arrested and placed in the Tower; he was charged with attempting to murder his former friends and also of plotting to do away with Leicester, Walsingham, Sidney, Raleigh, and Sir Henry Knyvet. He was accused of treasonable correspondence with the Spanish Ambassador as well as the English fugitives in Rome.²³ Oxford was released from the Tower in June, 1581, and he seems to have relinquished all ties with the Catholic faction, a faction to which Lord Cobham secretly belonged.

In addition to this political background there is also relevant for The Famous Victories an interesting conflict between the citizens of Blackfriars and the acting groups which performed there in the 1580's. We know that in June, 1586, Oxford received an annuity of 1000 pounds per year from the Queen. B.M. Ward has suggested that this money was used for the Revels and Court entertainment.²⁴ This suggestion is interesting for we also know that Oxford and John Lyly subleased the old frater of the friars, once the Parliament chamber of the realm, in 1584 to use

²³B.M. Ward, The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, p. 220. The accusations made against Oxford, his "perjury, mercenary habits, butcherly bloodiness, dangerous practices, dishonesty, unnatural propensities, drunkenness, and undutiful dealings toward the Queen," are printed in the Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1581-1590, pp. 38-40.

²⁴The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, p. 270.

for presentation of plays by the boys of the Chapel and Paul's.²⁵ The Lords of Cobham had been inhabitants of Blackfriars from the early years of Henry VIII's reign when they had moved from Cobham Inn in Eastcheap to the buildings of the Dominican friars. With the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538, George, Lord Cobham, gained possession of the property which he was inhabiting there. In Elizabeth's reign William, Lord Cobham, increased his holdings in Blackfriars to almost half of the space in the old cloister next to Water Lane; these holdings included two central halls, the convent kitchen, the rooms over the porter's lodge, parts of the guest house, and a great garden.²⁶ These rooms were in the same building and lying just north of the old Parliament chamber, and during the years 1571-76 Cobham leased the chamber itself from the owner, Sir William More. However, in 1576 More leased the large chamber to Richard Farrant, master of the Children of Windsor and deputy master of the Children of the Chapel Royal. Farrant used the room for both practise space and performances of the plays which were later acted at Court. The boys were noisy and destructive, at least so More declared. He complained that Farrant had leased the space for practise, but now made it "a continuall howse for plays" to the offence of the precinct and the destruction of the property.²⁷ Farrant died in 1580 and his widow,

²⁵E.K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage, II, 497.

²⁶Ibid., II, 492-95. See Chambers' diagram of Blackfriars, facing p. 504.

²⁷Ibid., II, 496.

Anne, subleased the chamber to William Hunnis, Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal. Hunnis in turn leased the space to Henry Evans, and Evans signed the sublease over to the Earl of Oxford and John Lyly in 1583. More was trying through litigation to recover his property during this time, and he complained that the title "was posted over from one to another from me." It seems that Hunnis, Evans, and Lyly were working together under the Earl of Oxford's patronage with a company of boys composed of members from both the Chapel and Paul's children. When Sir William More regained possession of his building in 1584 through the courts, Oxford and Lyly leased the chamber to Henry, Lord Hunsdon, and More seems to have been content to keep this arrangement. There is evidence of continued friction, however, in the building, for Hunsdon complained that the water pipe had been diverted from his rooms to serve Lord Cobham. It seems that Cobham had tried to "dry" the boys up one way or another. The friction in Blackfriars provides us with another tangible factor in the search for motives behind the satire found in the character of Oldcastle, I believe. If Oxford was in charge of the Revels and Court entertainment, as Ward suggests, it would explain how a play from Oxford's acting group, either the boys or the men, was performed at Court by the Queen's Company.

The Oldcastle satire in The Famous Victories seems to have been an imputative campaign which sought the discomfiture if not the degradation of Lord Cobham after his appointment to the Privy Council. He was in

disfavor in 1586 for the Grafigni affair, and the rejection scene in The Famous Victories seems intended to provide a suggestive precedent for Queen Elizabeth. If so, the Queen ignored it. Cobham regained his favor at Court in spite of rumors that through his control of the ports he was secretly carrying on trade with the Spanish.²⁸ In 1588 he was appointed one of the peace commissioners who were sent to the Continent on the eve of the Armada attack, and in 1589 his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, married Sir Robert Cecil, Lord Burghley's son. When in 1596 Henry, Lord Hunsdon, died, his white staff of the Lord Chamberlainship was handed to Lord Cobham. Thus the acting company with which Shakespeare was associated lost at one blow both patron and title. Thomas Nashe described their plight during the late summer and autumn of 1596 in a letter to William Cotton: "now the players as if they had writt another Christs tears, ar piteously psecuted by the L. Maior & the aldermen, & howeuer in there old Lords tyme they thought there state settled, it is now so vncertayne they cannot build vpon it."²⁹ It was during this autumn and the spring of 1597, I believe, that Shakespeare wrote the two parts of Henry IV. There was need again, as in 1586, to denigrate the Lords of Cobham. With the illness and approaching death of William, Lord Cobham, in February and March of 1597, members of Elizabeth's Court began to

²⁸Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1589, p. 35.

²⁹The Works of Thomas Nashe, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow (2nd edition; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), V, 194.

speculate and contest for the important office of Warden of the Cinque Ports as well as the office of the Lord Chamberlain. Henry Brooke, Cobham's eldest son, wanted both, and so did George, Lord Hunsdon. Another candidate for the Wardenship was Sir Robert Sidney who was in Flushing serving as governor there. Thanks to the detailed information which Rowland White sent to his master in Flushing, we have a graphic description of this contest that was going on at Court in the spring of 1597. On the 21st of February Rowland White informed Sir Robert Sidney that,

My Lord Cobham is ill in Deed, and much fallen away, and now as I heare, his Sonne Mr. Harry comes daily to the Queen, and the Father is willing to make Resignacions of such Places he holds by the Queen, to his Sonnes; especially of the Cinque Ports. I doe understande likewise, that my Lord of Hunsdon will stand for yt, and my Lord of Buckhurst.³⁰

Sidney's steward continued by advising his master that if he too intended to be a suitor for the office, then some friend must be found to "compass the matter" for him. White suggests the Earl of Essex as the fittest person, others being too fearful to offend.

On February 27th Rowland White wrote that he had had an interview with Essex and that the Earl had agreed that he would press Sidney's suit for the Wardenship of the Cinque Ports to the Queen. Essex had said, wrote White, that none was so fit for the place as Sidney, and the Earl had

³⁰ Arthur Collins, Letters and Memorials of State . . . , II, 18.

remarked further that,

Neither doe I heare that any Body stands for yt, but 30
/Henry Brooke/, who of all Men, is the unfittest; and
such hath his base Villanies bene towards me, which,
to the World, is to well known, that he shalbe sure
never to have yt, if I can keape hym from yt.³¹

The next day White wrote that "my Lord Chamberlain growes weaker and weaker, and the Doctors are doubtful of his recovery. His eldest Sonne doth, with all the Friends he hath, earnestly sue to be Lord Warden of the Cinq Portes."³² On the 2nd of March White sent the following news to Sidney:

This morning I was at Blackfriars, and there I found my Lord Admirall had bene with my Lord Cobham: yt is now held certain he cannot live. I have here of given Notice from Tyme to Tyme to my Lord Essex, who hath already had you in Remembrance for the Cinq Portes, as I heare. Mr. Harry Brooke stands for that Place, and to be Lord Lifetenant of the Shire; both which Places, I know not how it growes, are wished unto you by the Gentlemen of Kent, as you are born there. Yf my Lord of Essex is able to doe any Thing, yt will now appeare; for certainly he opposes hymself against thother, laying before her Majestie his Unworthines, and Unablenes to doe her Service.³³

On the 6th of March Lord Cobham died, and Rowland White wrote that he had spoken to Essex who was on his way to speak to the Queen in Sidney's favor. "The Court," wrote White, "is now full of who shall have this and

³¹Ibid., II, 20.

³²Ibid., II, 22.

³³Ibid., II, 24.

that Office, but the most Voices say, that Mr. Harry Brooke shall have Eltam and the Cinq Portes, by Reason of the Favor the Queen beares hym." And then he informed Sidney that George, Lord Hunsdon was named for the Lord Chamberlainship.³⁴ On the 7th of March White informed his master that Essex had been to see the Queen again, and that she had refused to consider Sidney for the Wardenship:

This Evening my Lord Essex called me unto hym, and this was his Speech unto me: I moved the Queen this Morning very earnestly in your Masters Behalf for the Cinq Portes. Her Answer was, that he is to young for such an Office. . . . Even now I prest her in it again, and she directly answers me, that your Master shall not have yt, and that she wold not wrong the now Lord Cobham soe much, as to bestow yt from hym upon any that was inferior to hymself.

Essex then informed White that he would stand for the office himself to keep Cobham from it. Essex repeated to White what he had told the Lord Treasurer and other Councillors that morning:

I made it knowen unto them, that I had just Cause to hate the Lord Cobham, for his villanous Dealings and abusing of me; that he hath bene my cheiffe Persecutor most injustly; that in him their is no worth; if theirfore her Majesty would grace him with Honor, I may have right Cause to thincke my self litle regarded by her.³⁵

On the 12th of March White wrote to Sidney that Essex had asked the Queen for the Wardenship, but that her Majesty had told the Earl the office should

³⁴Ibid., II, 25.

³⁵Ibid., II, 26.

³⁶Ibid., II, 27.

go to Lord Cobham, whereupon Essex resolved to leave the Court. He was riding out of London, White said, when the Queen sent for him and made him Master of the Ordinance, "which Place he hath accepted, and receves Contentment by yt," White concluded his letter by remarking that my Lord Cobham, "hearing how disdainfully my Lord of Essex speaks of him in Publiq, doth likewise protest to hate the Earle as much. What will grow of this I will report."³⁶ With Essex out of the contest others of the Court stepped forward to apply for the Wardenship. White names Lord Willoughby, Sir Edward Wooton, and Sir Edward Hoby as contenders for the office. White renewed his pleas with Essex to press Sidney's suit for the place. He reminded Essex of the "litle Assistance that was given by the Lord Warden" when the invasion was threatened from Dunkirk, and "the smale Help your Lordship found in the last Matter of Calais to come from the Warden." Essex must have created every diversion and hindrance he could think of to prevent Cobham's appointment, for on the 30th of April the office was still vacant, and White informed Sidney that Essex had said,

. . . though there be great Meanes made for the Lord Cobham for the Cinq Portes, he hath yt not, and that I keepe yt voyd, till some Tyme may fall out, when her Majestie shall her self perceive, that yt is necessary for her Safety to comytt that Place to a worthy Man.

And White continued that Sir Robert Cecil "doth greatly labor 1500 /the Queen/ for 30 /Cobham/; but yet yt doth litle good."³⁷ It was not until

³⁶Ibid., II, 27.

³⁷Ibid., II, 46.

June that Lord Cobham succeeded in this contest for the Wardenship.

White wrote on the 2nd of June that Cobham's patent was being prepared.

He added that Cobham had complained to the Queen about Essex's conduct and ill speeches:

. . . my Lord Cobham made his Complaint to the Queen, that my Lord Essex's Anger to hym, grew, by doing of her Service, and by obeying her Comandments, and therefore he was assured that she wold protect hym, and grace hym. Her Majesty byd hym not Doubt of yt, and that no Man shuld wrong hym. ³⁸

I believe that the initial attack on Lord Cobham, which was inaugurated by the author of The Famous Victories in or about 1586, was renewed by Shakespeare in the autumn of 1596 when William, Lord Cobham, was Lord Chamberlain; this would appear to have been the most likely time for the appearance of 1 Henry IV, probably with Falstaff bearing the name of Oldcastle. In March of 1597 when Lord Cobham died and the scramble for the Wardenship and the Chamberlainship occurred,

³⁸Ibid., II, 54. Leslie Hotson presented much of this material from Rowland White's letters in his study of Lord Cobham in Shakespeare's Sonnets Dated and Other Essays, pp. 147-60, and he too concludes that the factious events at Court lay behind the Henry IV satire of Lord Cobham. E. G. Clark makes the same suggestion in Raleigh and Marlowe: A Study in Elizabethan Fustian (New York: Fordham University Press, 1941), pp. 242-63. There are some inaccuracies in this latter study of Lord Cobham. Miss Clark ascribes a portrait of Sir Henry Cobham, the English Ambassador to France who was knighted at the Kenilworth ceremonies in 1575, as that of his nephew, Henry, eighth Lord Cobham. She remarks that Henry Cobham's age was a well kept secret; it was published by Holinshed in 1587, and the information appears in Archaeologia Cantiana, XII, 156. Henry Brooke was born 22 November 1564, and thus was the age of Shakespeare.

2 Henry IV was probably written. The tone of decadence and disease increases in this play; the famous rejection scene occurs here too. Like the similar scene in The Famous Victories, it seems to have been written to influence the Queen at a time when she must decide whether to advance the new Lord Cobham in favor or not. And like The Famous Victories, as propaganda it failed.

The character of John Cobbler in The Famous Victories suggests an auxiliary line of satire in that play which was also intended to denigrate the Cobhams. In the nineteenth century the suggestion was made that the use of the diminutive "John Cob" in the printing of The Famous Victories was meant "to traduce" the contemporary Lord Cobham.³⁹ Quite possibly it was. John Cobham (all the sons of George, sixth Lord Cobham, preferred to use the title name of Cobham rather than the family name of Brooke) was another brother of William, Lord Cobham. John was the captain who wanted money for "dead pays" from Sir John Norris in the Low Countries; it was he who refused to pay the soldiers in Kent whom he had enlisted for the defense of the realm in the year of the Armada. John was also the member of the family who favored Puritanism; William did not, though both had been tutored in their youth by Martin Bucer.⁴⁰

³⁹Thomas Gaspey, The Life and Times of Sir John Oldcastle, the Good Lord Cobham (2 volumes; London: W.S. Orr and Company, 1843), I, 49.

⁴⁰In a letter from Strasburg dated 6 May, 1548, Bucer speaks highly of John Brooke's abilities and attainments. Archaeologia Cantiana, XII, 139.

The anti-Puritan satire in the Henry IV plays has led critics to state that William, Lord Cobham, was a favorer of that sect and that because of his religious beliefs he was strongly anti-theater in conviction. This is not true. Lord Cobham had his own acting company in the 1560's and 1570's. They were known as both the Lord Warden's Players and Lord Cobham's Men. Records of their performances at Dover, Canterbury, Bristol, and Gloucester are extant.⁴¹ The animosity shown by Lord Cobham toward the acting companies in London was doubtless caused by their satirical attacks upon the Cobhams and not by Lord Cobham's religious convictions. We know that as a Privy Councillor Cobham was appointed to be one of the chief investigators of the Martin Marprelate controversy. Burghley wrote to Archbishop Whitgift on the 14th of November, 1588, just after the publication of the famous Epistle of Martin Marprelate in which the Bishops and the established Church of England were attacked, directing him to investigate the libelous book:

And for your help as nede shall be, We have required by her Maiesties command our very good Lordes the Lord Cobham and ye Lord Buckhurst with Master Woolley all of her Maiesties prive Counsell, to be aydyng with their advise and assistance to you for ye discouery of ye authors and abettors of the foresayd

⁴¹ John Tucker Murray, English Dramatic Companies, 1558-1642 (2 volumes; London: Constable and Company, 1910), II, 82. The existence of this acting company leads me to suggest that though we have no record of their repertoire, it is conceivable that their plays included an early version of such plays as Sir John Oldcastle or even Henry V in which Sir John was both hero and martyr.

libellous book. . . .⁴²

The names of Cobham and Buckhurst appear in the records of the trials of the religious non-conformists of this period as Councillors who were unwavering advocates of severity of treatment for the accused men.⁴³

It is interesting to note that in the surge of non-conformist publications which appeared in the 1580's and 1590's the famous example of Sir John Oldcastle's perseverance against ecclesiastical tyranny seems not to have been referred to. Evidently the taint of sedition which clung to this famous case prevented the Puritans and other sects from using it. We know that one serious charge brought by the authorities against the religious non-conformists was the accusation of intended sedition. The Bishop of Winchester's answer to the Epistle contained this admonition:

The Author of them /tracts/ calleth himself by a fained name, Martin Marprelate: a very fit name undoubtedly. But if this outrageous spirit of boldness be not stopped speeddily, I feare he wil prove himselfe to bee, not onely Mar-prelate, but Mar-prince, Mar-state, Mar-lawe, Mar-Magistrate, and all together, until he bring it to an AnaBaptisticall equalitie and communitie.⁴⁴

⁴²Edward Arber, An Introductory Sketch to the Martin Marprelate Controversy (London: English Scholar's Library, 1880), p. 108.

⁴³William Pierce, An Historical Introduction to the Marprelate Tracts (London: Archibald Constable and Company, 1908), p. 116.

⁴⁴Thomas Cooper, Bishop of Winchester, An Admonition to the People of England (London: English Scholar's Library, 1883), p. 31.

Lyly and Nashe picked up the cry of sedition in their attacks on Martin Marprelate also.⁴⁵ John Cobham published two early Puritan books in the 1570's before the Marprelate controversy began. His translation of L. Guido's The Staffe of Christian Faith was printed in 1577 and dedicated to the Earl of Oxford.⁴⁶ John Cobham does not mention in this work his famous kinsman, Oldcastle, by name, but he writes a jeremiad against the current burning of non-conformists. "O you Judges and Magistrates, doe you not see dayly in your prisons, the ppore children of God," he laments. When they are brought before wine filled magistrates, those officials "can only crie, To the fire, to the fire with those wicked heretickes. They do not learn this from the prophets, apostles, or auncient fathers." In his final chapter on the persecution of martyrs Cobham seems to have had the accusations of cowardice brought against Oldcastle for his flight into Wales in mind when he wrote:

But he /Christ/ did not suffer him selfe to be taken before the time was come, also he did not hide him selfe, but gave him selfe unto his adversaryes, and enemyes: In like maner the blessed Martyrs, did keepe them selves

⁴⁵The Works of Thomas Nashe, 1958 ed., I, 116; The Complete Works of John Lyly, ed. R.W. Bond (3 volumes; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), III, 412.

⁴⁶John Brooke, The Staffe of Christian Faith (London: John Day, 1577). The "staffe", Brooke informs the reader in his preface, is the knowledge of the true church gathered from the books of the ancient fathers, "to the ende that thereby you may learne wholly to fight against your ennemies, with the same staffe with which they doe fight agaynst you, that is to say, the auncients."

from temporall persecutions, and when they were sought for they fledde into secrete places. But when they were found out, they gave them selves to martyrdome.⁴⁷

Two years later John Brooke (Cobham) brought out his translation of Philip Melanchthon's Of Two Woonderful Popish Monsters.⁴⁸ This work was a satirical attack, via moral allegory, upon "the Pope and his rablement of Cardinals, Abbottes, Bishops, Priests," etc.

John Cobham married Alice, daughter of Edward Cobbe. The two names, Cobbe and Cobham, and the Puritanism of John may well have provided the cue for the satirical character of John Cobbler in The Famous Victories. We know that Robert Wilson's The Cobbler's Prophecy was a pro-Puritan play of this period (Wilson was later one of the co-authors of Sir John Oldcastle). In The Cobbler's Prophecy the cobbler is responsible for saving the country from destruction. He is a "simple witted man" who has been raised up by the gods "in whom they breath the pureness of theyr spirits and make him bolde to speake and prophesie."⁴⁹ John Lyly mentions the preaching cobbler in Pappe With An Hatchet. Lyly declares that he fears neither Martin nor Martin's son, then adds:

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 367.

⁴⁸ John Brooke, Of Two Woonderful Popish Monsters . . . (London: Thomas East, 1579).

⁴⁹ Robert Wilson, The Coblers Prophecie (London: John Danter for Cuthbert Burbie, 1594), fol. Fiii^r.

What newes from the Heraldes. Tush, thats time enough
to know to morrow, for the sermon is not yet cast. The
sermon foole? why they never studie, but cleave to
Christ his dabitur in illa hora. They venter to catch
soules, as they were soles; Doctors are but dunces, 50
none sowes true stitches in a pulpet, but a shoemaker.

Lyly's editor, R.W. Bond, suggests that the reference to the shoemaker
may be a reference to the fictitious cobbler, Cutbert Cliffe, in Hay any
Work for Cooper, a Puritan pamphlet which was an attack upon the Bishop
of Winchester. The poem "Mar-Martine" (probably written by Lyly and/or
Nashe) contains an allusion to the same cobbler:

But (O) that Godly cobler Cliffe, as honest an olde lad,
As Martin (O the libeller) of hangbyes ever had.
.....
These tinkers terms, and barbers jests first Tarleton
on the stage,
Then Martin in his book of lies, hath put in every page. 51

The reference to Tarlton and the references to the cobbler of the Marpre-
late Controversy are slender clues upon which to suggest that the cobbler
of The Famous Victories was part of the anti-Puritan satire of the period.
Whether John Cobham's Puritanism led him to participate in the Marpre-
late controversy or not we do not know. If he did, his role went undetected
by the authorities; as we know, his brother, Lord Cobham, was one of the
official investigators. John died in 1594 and was buried in Newington, Kent,
where his nephews, Henry and George, erected a monument of alabaster

⁵⁰ Lyly, III, 401.

⁵¹ Ibid., III, 426.

to his memory.⁵²

The reference in Pappe With An Hatchet to the Heralds' Office is an important reference which may be used for what I believe lies behind the satire intended in the character of the clown, Dericke, in The Famous Victories. Bond notes that Derby House became the Heralds' Office in 1555, but that he had found no reference to its use as a Puritan conventicle.⁵³ There is an indication in The Cobbler's Prophecy that the heralds were somehow involved in the Marprelate affair. Toward the beginning of the play a herald enters the stage carrying "pensill and colours." He has come, he says, to "decipher a Gentleman from a knave." He then complains that his trade has degenerated:

We now are faine to wait who grows to wealth,
And come to beare some office in a towne,
And we for money help them into Armes,
For what cannot the golden tempter doe?⁵⁴

Oddly enough, this is what Nashe attacks in part in his famous lines in Pierce Penilesse His Supplication To the Devil. The complete quotation should be read.

How would it have joyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to thinke that after he had lyne two hundred yeares in his Tombe, hee should triumphe againe on the Stage, and have his bones newe embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at severall times), who, in

⁵²Archaeologia Cantiana, XII, 140.

⁵³Lyly, III, 401.

⁵⁴The Coblers Prophecie, fol. Di^v.

the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding.

I will defend it against any Colliar, or clubfisted Usurer of them all, there is no immortalitie can be given a man on earth like unto Playes. What talke I to them of immortalitie, that are the onely underminers of Honour, and doe envie any man that is not sprung up by base Brokerie like themselves? They care not if all the auncient houses were rooted out, so that, like the Burgomasters of the Low-countries, they might share the gouernment amongst them as States, and be quarter-maisters of our Monarchie. All Artes to them are vanities: and, if you tell them what a glorious thing it is to have Henrie the fifth represented on the Stage, leading the French King prisoner, and forcing both him and the Dolphin to sweare fealty, I, but (will they say) what do we get by it? Respecting neither the right of Fame that is due to true Nobilitie deceased, nor what hopes of eternitie are to be proposed to aduentrous mindes, to encourage them forward, but onely their execrable luker, and filthie unquenchable avarice.

They know when they are dead they shall not be brought upon the Stage for any goodnes, but in a merriment of the Usurer and the Diuel, or buying Armes of the Herald, who gives them the lyon, without tongue, tayle, or tallents, because his maister whome hee must serve is a Townesman, and a man of peace, and must not keepe any quarrelling beasts to annoy his honest neighbours.⁵⁵

Whether Nashe meant Brokerie as a pun on Brooke or not, I do not know, but the Cobham coat-of-arms included three lions rampant, sable. The Cobhams were certainly not brought upon the stage for any "goodness". The references to Talbot and Henry V seem to indicate that Nashe was referring to 1 Henry VI and The Famous Victories. The Cobhams apparently were voicing complaints about the players as early as 1592, the date of publication for Pierce Penilesse His Supplication To The Devil.

⁵⁵Nashe, I, 212-13. The italics are mine.

We know that Ralph Brooke, York Herald, was married to Thomsin, daughter of Michael Cobbe of Kent.⁵⁶ As York Herald Brooke is famous for his attack on William Camden in A Discoverie of Certain Errours . . . in "Britannia", published in 1596. It was also Ralph Brooke who exposed the "mean" heritage of the Garter Kings-of-Arms, Sir Gilbert and Sir William Dethick.⁵⁷ From Brooke's manuscript we know something of the earlier Dethicks and how they changed their name from Dericke.⁵⁸ With only the most tenuous evidence I would like to suggest that the clown, Dericke, in The Famous Victories is a satire on Sir William Dethick and that this character from The Famous Victories is perhaps the progenitor of Shakespeare's Host-of-the-Garter in The Merry Wives of Windsor.⁵⁹

Something of the madness of Sir William Dethick can be gathered from the following biographical facts. The Dethicks were descended it

⁵⁶ M. H. Ireland, A New and Complete History of Kent (4 volumes; London: George Virtue, 1828), I, 440. I have not been successful in tracing the relationship of Ralph Brooke with Lord Cobham.

⁵⁷ DNB, XIV, 418-20. I regret that I am compelled to rely upon the DNB articles on the Dethicks for the following information concerning father and son. The British Museum contains manuscript materials on the continuous quarrels in the Heralds' Office in Elizabeth's reign. Anstis' Register of the Garter is an important printed source, but I have met with only frustration in my attempts to borrow this rare volume.

⁵⁸ Brooke's manuscript is described in DNB, XIV, 419.

⁵⁹ James Monaghan suggested some years ago that in Shakespeare's Falstaff lies the amalgamation of Dericke and Oldcastle of The Famous Victories. See "Falstaff and His Forebearers," Studies in Philology, XVIII (1921), 353-61.

would seem from the Dutch immigrant, Robert Dericke, who came to England early in the reign of Henry VIII and served as armorer to the King. Shortly after his arrival Robert seems to have changed his name to Dethick, and eventually his three sons were made English citizens by an act of Parliament. The youngest son, Gilbert, married the daughter of a Dutch shoemaker in London and became the father of Sir Gilbert Dethick who was commissioned Garter King-of-Arms in 1550. Sir Gilbert died in 1584; before this date his son, William, had been appointed Rouge Croix pursuivant in 1567 and York Herald in 1570. With the latter appointment William Dethick began to issue grants of arms, a right reserved to Norroy King-of-Arms; and when Dethick was created Garter King in 1586, he arranged to have the traditional commission altered to usurp the privileges of both Norroy and Clarenceux Heralds. The continual quarrelling led to violent and acrimonious disputes in the Herald's Office.⁶⁰ Dethick was accused in 1571 of emblazoning the arms of the Duke of Norfolk and the Queen of Scots together in a pedigree. Dethick's violent temper kept him in continual trouble. He was accused of striking his father with his fist and of wounding his brother with his dagger in Windsor Castle. To his fellow heralds he was a tyrant, "some he beat, others he reviled, and all

⁶⁰Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1581-1590, pp. 214, 322, 636, 690, contains some evidence of the disputes. In 1589 Glover, Somerset Herald, wrote a "breefe rehearsall of the causes of the present disorder in the Office of Armes, and how the same may be reformed." In 1590 Dethick complained to Burghley that the contention in the Office went so far as to question his title of Garter King.

he wronged." He struck the minister at Sir Henry Sidney's funeral, and at the Countess of Sussex's funeral in Westminster Abbey he stabbed two persons with his dagger. He was sent to Newgate prison for this offense but was released by Fleetwood, the Recorder. Soon afterwards he was again sent to prison and fined 100 pounds for striking a clergyman and calling him "a bald, rascally priest." With such a character it is surprising we have not a dozen satires of Sir William Dethick.

In The Famous Victories (line 107) the receivers whom the Prince and his companions rob are called "purseuants" (a term used for officers in the Heralds' Office), and soon afterwards Dericke runs onstage "in silke apparell." John Cobbler and Robin think from his costume that he is a clown. Dericke's reply derides them for their ignorance:

Am I a clowne? Sownes, maisters, do clownes go in silke
apparell? I am sure all we gentlemen-clownes in Kent
scant go so well. Sownes! you know clownes very well!
(lines 179-83)

I suggest that the silk costume that Dericke wears is the herald's tabard; Dericke, like the herald in The Cobbler's Prophecy, goes unrecognized by the cobbler. With such a costume the audience would have perceived immediately the nature and intent of the satire. Dericke carries a dagger and wears an air of bravado, but he is a coward when beaten by Mistress Cobbler and in his interlude in France. Like a herald he plans to return from France marching in front of the Duke of York's funeral. The scene in which John Cobbler sentences Dericke to the Fleet (lines 570-72) may

allude to Dethick's imprisonment, once for striking a man, again for stabbing two others.

I am quite conscious of the fact that the foregoing is slight evidence upon which to base a conjecture. Only a search through unpublished manuscripts pertaining to the Heralds' Office and the Marprelate controversy can supply information needed to verify such a theory. We know there are records in the College of Arms which document the controversy between Ralph Brooke, York Herald, and Sir William Dethick as to the propriety of the arms granted to John Shakespeare.⁶¹ That Shakespeare mollified the satire he found in the character of Dericke to create his Host-of-the-Garter in The Merry Wives of Windsor is a conjecture to be discussed in Chapter VII.

⁶¹ C.W. Scott-Giles, Shakespeare's Heraldry, p. 34.

CHAPTER VI

"ENTER: SIR JOHN RUSSELL AND HARVEY"

With the revision of nomenclature that occurred when the name of Sir John Oldcastle was censored and cut from the text of Shakespeare's Henry IV plays, there seem to have been other name changes as well made in the original script. We find this suggested in Part 1 by Poins's speech (I. ii. 181) in which he mentions "Harvey" and "Rossill" as thieving companions of Falstaff, the Prince, and Gadshill. In addition, the speech-prefix, "Ross.", occurs in the quarto editions at II. iv. 193, 195, 199. In Part 2 a similar clue remains in the stage-direction given at II. ii. 1, "enter the Prince, Poynes, sir John Russel, with others." By substitution the Folio stage-direction becomes, "enter Prince Henry, Pointz, Bardolfe, and Page." It is apparent that the character of Bardolph was at one stage of composition called Harvey, and that Peto was named Sir John Russell. Knowing the personal basis of the satire or lampoon of Shakespeare's character of Falstaff, it is scarcely recondite to suggest that this method of satire extends to other members of the comic crew that provides Prince Hal with raucous companions. In searching for materials concerning the Lords of Cobham, I have found evidence which suggests that there were

personages other than the Cobhams in Elizabeth's Court who felt the sting of caricature in Shakespeare's Henry IV plays.

Neither Harvey nor Russell was a singular name in Elizabethan England; however, I believe that Sir William Harvey and Sir John Russell, the Earl of Bedford's son, were the victims of Shakespeare's untrammelled pen. Sir William Harvey, a member of the Cobham faction in the 1590's, courted and eventually married the twice-widowed dowager Countess of Southampton in 1596-98, much to the chagrin of her young son, Henry, the third Earl. The Countess, Mary Browne, daughter of the first Viscount Montague, had married Sir Thomas Heneage, Elizabeth's Vice-Chamberlain, in 1594 after thirteen years of widowhood, but Heneage died within a year. This second marriage seems to have brought complicated financial problems to the Wriothesley estates, and in 1597-98 a financial settlement still had not been made concerning the inheritance of the young Earl of Southampton. The tensions caused by these financial problems seem to have been heightened by the personal dislike which grew between the Earl and Sir William Harvey.

Harvey had acquired a token of fame as a soldier in his tour of duty in the Low Countries, and his name was mentioned for courageous action in the sea battle against the Spanish Armada:

One of the Spanish Galleasses having lost her Rudder, and floating up and down, was held in fight by Amias Preston, Thomas Gerard, and /William/ Harvie, who slew Captain Hugh Moncado, cast the Souldiers over board, and carryed away a great deal of gold. . . .¹

¹Sir Richard Baker, A Chronicle of the Kings of England (6th edition; London: George Sawbridge and Thomas Williams, 1674), p. 375.

Harvey may have been both soldier and poet, for it has been suggested that he was the author of these lines that appeared in Epicedium, A Funeral Song, 1594, and which seem to be the first reference to Shakespeare's Lucrece:

You that haue writ of chaste Lucretia
 Whose death was witnesse of her spotlesse life:
 Or pen'd the praise of sad Cornelia,
 Whose blameless name hath made her fame so rife,
 As noble Pompey's most renowned wife:
 Hither vnto your home direct your eies,
 Whereas, vnthought on, much more matter lies.²

We know that both Harvey and Southampton accompanied Essex, Howard, and Raleigh on the abortive Islands Voyage in 1597. Essex's implacable rage at Raleigh's unlicensed attack on Fayal resulted in an attempted court-martial of the Rear Admiral. Harvey and Sir William Brooke, Lord Cobham's third son, accompanied Raleigh and participated in this adventurous attack on Fayal:

Sir Walter therefore rowed to Sir William Brooke's ship
 and Sir William Harvey's, and desired them to accompany
 him; to which they willingly assented, and there were made
 ready in addition with shot and pike 160 more men in boats. . . .³

² E. K. Chambers, William Shakespeare, II, 190-91.

³ G. B. Harrison, The Elizabethan Journals, 1591-1603 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1955), II, 224. Sir William Brooke was killed in 1598 in a duel at Mile End Green by the son and heir of Thomas Lucas of Essex. Archaeologia Cantiana, XII, 156.

The hostility and ill-feeling aroused by this adventure were fanned by ensuing events. The hasty marriage of the Earl of Southampton and Elizabeth Vernon, Essex's cousin, in 1598, placed Southampton in disgrace at Court, for the secret marriage angered not only his mother but also the Queen. When the news of the match reached Elizabeth, Southampton was in France with Sir Robert Cecil on a diplomatic mission to Henry IV. Elizabeth ordered Southampton's immediate return to London. Meanwhile rumors had been afloat for some time that the dowager Countess of Southampton was planning to wed Sir William Harvey,⁴ and Essex, in an effort to stay this action, sent Lord Henry Howard to question the Countess about her plans. Lord Henry's letter to Essex is extant.⁵ He reassured Essex the marriage had not taken place, "she did assure me on her honour that the knot of marriage was yet to tie, although she would be stinted at no certain time, but ever reserve her own liberty to dispose of herself when and where it pleased her." Howard declared also that he asked the Countess "not to give any scandal to the world by matching during her son's disgrace." Howard continued by telling Essex that he had explained to the Countess why such a timing was bad:

⁴John Chamberlain wrote to Dudley Carleton in May, 1598, that Harvey had married the Countess. Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1598-1601, p. 54.

⁵Printed from the Salisbury Manuscripts at Hatfield House by C.C. Stopes, The Life of Henry, Third Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's Patron (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922), pp. 132-34.

I told her you thought the world would wonder what offence her son could make to purchase such a strange contempt at a mother's hand, and either make the ground thereof his matching in your blood, which you must take unkindly, or tax her own judgment which you should be sorry for. . . . I proceeded further, giving her Ladyship to understand that your Lordship feared also lest unkindness might hereafter grow between her husband and her son upon the marriage accomplished before order were discreetly taken by her wisdom to prevent the motives of debate.

The Countess told Lord Howard with irony that she "hoped her son would look for no account of her proceedings in the course of marriage that made her so great a stranger to his own."

When Southampton returned to London from Paris, he was sent to the Fleet, and Essex assumed the role of mediator in attempting to soothe the hostile feelings of mother and son. He wrote to the young Earl that he had been to see his mother:

I have according to my promise been this morning with my Lady your mother. I have told her how sad I found you, how the grounds of it were her unkindness, the discomfort and discontentment you took in her marriage and scorn that Sir William Harvey should think to offer any scorn to you.

Essex described the warnings he had given the Countess of future troubles to ensue from such a marriage:

I told her if it had been mine own cause I should have apprehended them as much as you did, and I fortified my opinion that mischief would grow if she did not prevent it, by many reasons. I made her see what a certain pillar and bulk she had to lean to in having so noble and worthy a son, what a fire would be kindled in her house, if she did not satisfy you. . . .⁶

⁶Ibid., p. 134.

The following day Essex talked with Sir William Harvey, and that evening he wrote to Southampton in the Fleet and described the meeting. He had, he declared, "dealt freely" with Harvey, and has accused him of "unkind and unmannerly carriage" toward the young Earl. Harvey had answered by denying that he had spoken disrespectfully of Southampton except "when he was threatened." And he added that "they that were angry without cause, must be pleased without amends." Essex then lost his temper:

After I had told him what I thought of his words, I bade him think advisedly now having given you advantage already, and being cause of mischief to you, how he did cross my solicitation of my Lady giving of satisfaction to you before she married, for I did assure my self they would both repent it.

Essex concluded his letter by stating his own opinion of Harvey's intentions:

He speaks but generally that he will not cross or hinder you, but to deal truly with your Lordship, I think he will not thank my Lady for it if she do it. I concluded plainly what he was to trust unto from me, since now your Lordship and I were thus tied one to the other that, when I was a friend, I went with my friend as far as any bond of honour, nature, or reason could tie a man.⁷

The Countess' actions were not stayed by Essex or her son. On the 31st of January, 1599, John Chamberlain again sent news of the proposed match to Dudley Carleton, "Sir William Harvey's marriage with the Countess of Southampton what hath been smouldering so long comes to be published."⁸

⁷ Ibid., pp. 135-36.

⁸ Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1598-1601, p. 157.

This quarrel and the unpleasantness which grew between the Earl of Southampton and Sir William Harvey started possibly as early as 1596. It provided, I think, a strong motive for the introduction of Harvey's name in the Henry IV plays as one of Falstaff's riotous associates. Shakespeare's devotion to Southampton ("what I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being part in all I have, devoted yours") and the young Earl's love of the plays add strength to this conjecture that Sir William Harvey was lampooned in the comic character of Bardolfe.⁹

Sir John Russell was the eldest son of Francis, second Earl of Bedford, one of Elizabeth's staunchest Protestant peers. John was killed accidentally in a Scotch border incident in 1585.¹⁰ The appearance of his name in the early versions of Shakespeare's Henry IV plays seems to have been planned to annoy his widow, the singular and exceedingly voluble Lady Elizabeth Russell, the author and promoter of the famous petition of November, 1596, which was signed by the residents of Blackfriars and sent to the Privy Council to prevent the opening of the theater which James Burbage was constructing in the old Parliament chamber that lay between Lord Cobham's rooms on the north and George Carey's rooms on the south.

⁹After their return from Ireland in 1599 Southampton and Rutland were described as never coming to Court but "pass away the time merely in going to plays every day." Collins, II, 132.

¹⁰W. C. Dickinson, "The Death of Lord Russell, 1585," Scottish Historical Review, XX (1922-23), 181-86.

Lady Russell's London house was on Water Lane just north of these "fayer great edifices" which housed the former Parliament chamber and the dwellings of Cobham and Carey, and it was she it seems who sponsored the complaint which temporarily stayed the plans of James Burbage and Lord Hunsdon's players, with whom of course Shakespeare was associated.¹¹

We know that on the 4th of February, 1596, James Burbage paid 600 pounds to Sir William More for the old Parliament chamber in Blackfriars.¹² This was the same space that Farrant, Hunnis, Evans, Lyly, and Oxford had leased and subleased between 1576 and 1584 for the practice rooms and performances of the boys' companies. The friction during this period had created tensions in Blackfriars, and the inhabitants seem to have united in signing the petition of 1596 to keep the players out of the district. The petition cited "lewd" crowds and dangers of the plague as reasons for complaint:

One Burbage has lately bought rooms near Lord Hunsdon's, and is converting them into a common playhouse, which will be a great annoyance to the neighborhood, because of the gathering of vagrant and lewd persons, on pretence of coming to the plays; because of its making the place too populous, in case of a return of the sickness; and because the playhouse being near the church, the drums and triumphs will disturb divine service. There has not before been any /public/ playhouse in the precincts, but now that the Lord

¹¹E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage, II, 195.

¹²Ibid., II, 503.

Mayor has banished the players from the city, they
plant themselves in the liberties. . . .¹³

The first two signatures on the petition were those of Elizabeth Russell and George, Lord Hunsdon. Scholars have been puzzled by George Carey's signature, for in November, 1596, he was the patron of the acting company which planned to occupy the new Burbage theater in Blackfriars. We know that the plans for the new theater were made and the purchase completed in February of 1596 when the old Lord Hunsdon, George's father, had been Lord Chamberlain and patron of Shakespeare's company. But Henry, Lord Hunsdon, died on the 22nd of July, 1596, and the theaters in London were ordered closed the same day. The former Lord Chamberlain's players went on tour during the remaining summer and early fall months, returning to London in late autumn for Court performances during the Christmas season.¹⁴ George Carey, the new Lord Hunsdon, owned the rooms adjacent on the south to the old Parliament chamber. Although he was now the patron of his father's acting company, he seems not to have relished listening each night to the turmoil of the battle of Bosworth Field or Cade's rebellion through one partitioning wall. Needless to say, in 1596 Lord Hunsdon's players were simply Lord Hunsdon's players and not yet the company of England's greatest and most immortal bard.

¹³Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1595-1597, p. 310; see also The Elizabethan Stage, IV, 319-20.

¹⁴The Elizabethan Stage, II, 321.

Lady Elizabeth Russell, Dowager, was, one might say, an aristocratic termagant -- a woman of intelligence who so domineered her acquaintances and kin that everyone in London, from Queen to lodge porter, ran to avoid her. Her recent biographer describes her with acid pen:

She was free to interfere with everybody's business, to point out everybody's faults and her own virtues, to lay about her right and left, to let her personality rip, uninhibited, released, without fear or consideration, like some rich, rank vegetation running to seed with an acrid odour in the air. She was one of those old women: a perfect specimen of the female egotist, domineering, not without her good qualities -- plenty of courage and always ready to step into any breach -- whom everyone conspires to circumvent since there is no dealing with them, hence often checked, never wholly defeated. Since she was literate and very expressive she stands out naked in her letters, fully revealed.¹⁵

If the appearance of Sir John Russell's name in the stage plays of the Lord Chamberlain's men was meant to irritate Lady Russell, that seems to have been only the beginning of the satiric lampooning aimed at this lady in the Henry IV plays. I would like to suggest that Lady Russell's overbearing mannerisms, her pretentious intellection, her quarrel with William, Lord Cobham, in 1595, and the gossip that her daughter Bess would marry Henry, Lord Cobham, in 1597, have an important bearing on the creation of that wondrous and voluble character, Mistress Quickly, hostess and friend of Sir John Falstaff.

¹⁵A. L. Rowse, The Elizabethan Past (London: Macmillan and Company, 1951), p. 29.

Lady Russell's dour character was perhaps caused by the misfortune that had overtaken her, or perhaps misfortune had overtaken her because of the dourness -- it is difficult to say. She was one of the three formidable daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke. Her sisters had married Lord Burghley and Sir Nicholas Bacon; all had been trained in classical learning, and all were aggressive and determined women. Elizabeth married Sir Thomas Hoby, translator of Castiglione's Il Cortegiano, in 1558. Thomas Hoby and William and John Brooke were friends and had been together in Strasburg as students of Martin Bucer in their youth. In 1560 Lord Cobham visited the Hoby country home at Bisham with the Marquis of Northampton, Lord Henry Seymour, the Ladies Jane Seymour and Katherine Grey, and others. Elizabeth Hoby accompanied her husband to Paris when he was appointed English Ambassador to France by Queen Elizabeth, but Sir Thomas died of the plague after two years service, and his young widow brought his body home and interred it at Bisham in an alabaster tomb adorned with her own Greek and Latin verses.¹⁶ William Cecil offered the rich young widow as a wife to the Duke of Norfolk in 1570 to relieve the Duke of the pressure of debts and the attractions of the Queen of Scots, but Norfolk declined.¹⁷ Burghley's widowed sister-in-law did remarry in a few years when she accepted the proposal of Lord Russell,

¹⁶Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁷The Political History of England, VI, 298.

heir to the Bedford earldom. But misfortune continued to plague her steps; her two Russell children were daughters, and her husband was killed while the Earl, his father, was living so that Elizabeth Russell never became a Countess nor did she have a son to inherit the title. She took dourly to her widow's weeds, and she set about to place the expense of the care and education of her daughters on the Queen.¹⁸ Her constant and interminable letters to Burghley are extant in the Salisbury Manuscripts at Hatfield House, and a number of them remain among the State Papers. She was involved constantly in litigation, and she supervised her legal affairs with an authoritative hand. Her vocabulary is replete with legal terms, Latinisms, and rhetorical cliches, and her pen, like her personality, was both florid and blunt.

In 1593 Lady Russell was still fighting for a greater share of the Bedford estate for her two daughters, and in one letter to Burghley she demanded that "the judges opinions be delivered singulatim to Her Majesty's own self."¹⁹ She acted frequently as intermediary for persons seeking favors from Burghley and his son Robert Cecil. She insisted that her cousin, Morrice, be made Master of the Rolls;²⁰ and she provoked the Earl of Oxford to anger by meddling in the financial arrangements between Elizabeth Vere and the Earl of Derby.²¹ She was most forward in

¹⁸Calendar of Salisbury Manuscripts, IV, 460.

¹⁹Ibid., IV, 461.

²⁰Ibid., IV, 460.

²¹Ibid., V, 181.

reprimanding Essex for his presumed adultery.²² And she descended full force on Anthony Bacon for his unfaithfulness to his kin by his friendship with Essex.²³ She urged her cripple son, Sir Posthumous Hoby, "to steal away by force" the young widow of Walter Devereux, and she succeeded in this endeavor when the young lady was widowed the second time by the death of Thomas Sidney.²⁴ Lady Russell hauled her neighbors, the Lovelaces, into the Star Chamber for forcibly entering her lodge at Windsor and causing "foul riots against her." (She had locked up two of their servants who had "behaved lewdly" to her.)²⁵ She demanded that the Earl of Kent be made Lord President of the North to replace Huntingdon, but she insisted that Burghley keep her endorsement secret "for he is a widower and I am a widow."²⁶ She took Judge Gawdy to task in no uncertain terms for "committing her man" in the liberty of Blackfriars, and she informed this Chief Justice that she stood as much upon her loyalty and reputation as he did his.²⁷ She wrote Sir Robert Cecil in 1595 that

²²Walter Bouchier Devereux, Lives and Letters of the Devereux, Earls of Essex (2 volumes; London: John Murray, 1853), I, 289.

²³Ibid., I, 297.

²⁴Collins, I, 357, 361.

²⁵Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1591-1594, p. 379.

²⁶Calendar of Salisbury Manuscripts, VI, 31.

²⁷Historical Manuscripts Commission Report, VIII, Appendix, Part 2, p. 158.

she had caught the Queen "as Her Majesty was going to God's house, not being able through malice to see her face else," and in spite of her wealth she signed her letter "by your aunt that hath not above 600 pounds de claro in the world to live on left, Elizabeth Russell, that liveth in scorn of disdain, malice, and rancour, fearing, serving, and depending only upon God and my Sovereign."²⁸

The most descriptive evidence we have of Elizabeth Russell's characteristic behavior is that given in the report of the Star Chamber case in which she sued the Lord Admiral, Earl of Nottingham, for "fowl riots" against her servants at Donnington Castle. This occurred in 1606 when the Lord Admiral's men took the Castle by force. Lady Russell complained first to King James then to the courts and finally to the Star Chamber. In this highest court she out-talked her own counsel and interrupted the judges:

. . . but the Ladye, interruptinge them, desyred to be hearde, & after many denyalls by the Courte, vyolentelye & with greate audacitie beganne a large discourse, & woulde not by any meanes be stayed nor interrupted, but wente one for the space of halfe an howre or more; & in her beginninge of her speache excepted against my Lo. of Nottingham for that he had not aunsweared upon his oathe, but upon his honor. . . . Then shee did with bitternes, objecte that my Lo. Admirall in the begynninge of his aunsweare had denyed her to be Ladye Dowager to the Lo. Russelle, & that he knewe none suche: for shee sayde shee had bene Lady Dowager before Nottingham was, & that if the Lorde Russelle had lyved, bothe for worthe, honor, & judgements, he had farre excelled the Lo. of Nottingham. . . .

²⁸Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1595-1597, pp. 147-48.

The Lady Russell's tirade continued to some length; she declared that the Lord Admiral had stolen the Castle from her, for she had had it as a gift from Queen Elizabeth, etc. In vain the judges tried to stop her:

The Lordes severallye hereupon woulde have stayde her, & muche distasted theise fonde speeches, but shee still wente one, & all the Courte & presence, murmuringe & makinge greate noyse, gyvinge no eare to any thinge shee sayde, her owne Counselle goinge from the barre allso; yet shee wente one without any chaunge, or any waye abashed at all, in a verye bould & stoute manner, withoute any shewe of any distemperature, or any loude speakinge, but shewinge a very greate spirite & an undaunted Courage, or rather will, more then womanlike, whose revenge by her tongue semed to be the summe of her desyre; in a meaner personage it is usuallye termed 'mallice' & 'envye,' but in her, beinge honorable, learned, & indued with many excellente guyftes, wee grace it with 'a great spirite,' which I feare the worlde conceavethe to be more then blemysed, if not utterlye extinguished, with extreame pryde.

Finally the Lord Chancellor edged in a word to inform Lady Russell that none below the rank of an Earl's wife was properly designated as "dowager."

. . . upon that shee plucked him by the cloake, & tolde him the lawe was otherwyse before he was borne: he, much mislyking of that usage, tolde her in manner of a reproffe that it was never offered to the Courte before, such violente interruption of any Judge in delyveringe his sentence when they had bene formerlye hearde, & bidde her forbear, & heare him, "for," sayde hee, "the Lo. Russelle, your husbände, was a noble gentleman, but ill beseeminge you with so many unfittinge detractiōs to compare him to the Earle of Nottingham; & he dyed in his father's lyfetime, so you Coude not be Lady Dowager, for your husbände was never Earle."

The case was decided in favor of the Lord Admiral, and the judges "all wysshed it had bene ended, & never broughte to this, all condemninge

greatelye the pryde & wyllfullnes of the plainteff. "²⁹

This brief resumé reveals something of the character of the Lady who headed the list of petitioners in Blackfriars in November, 1596.

Like many Elizabethans, she was constantly involved in litigation to seek justice for the wrong done her by strangers and friends. Her particular quarrel with William, Lord Cobham, occurred late in 1595. Her house in Blackfriars was but a few steps up Water Lane from Lord Cobham's rooms. Whether her unhappiness was concerned with additional space in Blackfriars or with some other house in London I do not know, but she threatened Lord Cobham with the Star Chamber for his unkind usage of her and her daughters:

You said a year ago that you would not be my daughters' tenant without my good will, but broke your promise. I did not think you would set against Lady Warwick and my daughters, they being so near the Queen. You then promised to discharge yourself of the house, but I find you have put in two of your own men to keep possession; your father would not have thus acted against any of mine. Your motive cannot be affection to the Lord Treasurer or Lord Burghley; but something yet concealed, that must appear on the trial as to who is to bear the loss of 800 pounds arrears of rent for eight years; you offer rent, but it is refused, as no lease has been acknowledged. I think the Queen will not suffer the virgins that serve her to be wronged.³⁰

This quarrel may well have served the dramatist as incentive when he was writing the scene in which Mistress Quickly seeks justice by entering her

²⁹ John Hawarde, Les Reportes del Cases in Camera Stellata, 1593-1609, ed. William Paley Baildon (London: n.p., 1894), pp. 271-77.

³⁰ Calendar of State Papers, 1595-1597, p. 147.

"extion" in court and serving notice on Falstaff with Fang and Snare, the officers of the law, (Part 2, II. i). Lady Russell's misunderstanding with Lord Cobham seems to have been settled before 1597, for Rowland White noted in March of that year that Henry, the new lord Cobham, was expected to marry "Mrs. Russell of the Privy Chamber."³¹ This was Bess, Lady Russell's elder daughter. The young lady's name had also been linked with the names of Essex and Sir Robert Cecil. She married no one, for two weeks after the wedding of her sister Anne to Lord Herbert, the Earl of Worcester's son, in 1600, she was dead. Both Rowland White and John Chamberlain described the "great wedding" which Lady Russell planned for Anne.³² The Queen attended the ceremony and festivities. Gheeraert's famous picture of Queen Elizabeth being borne by six of her courtiers in a covered chair of state was painted at this wedding. Lady Russell's letter to Cecil concerning the event is extant; she invited him to come play host at the wedding and to bring Lord Thomas Howard and Henry, Lord Cobham, "being of our blood" and Lord Cobham's servants needed "to bring up meat."³³

³¹ Collins, II, 26.

³² Ibid., II, 204; The Letters of John Chamberlain, ed. N.E. McClure (2 volumes; Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1939), I, 99.

³³ Calendar of Salisbury Manuscripts, X, 176.

The character of Doll Tearsheet is added to the dramatis personae of Part 2 of Henry IV. If this character was meant as a caricature of young Bess Russell, then we have another bit of evidence which suggests that Part 2 was written in the spring of 1597 after the death of Lord Cobham on March 6. In this month the Court gossips proposed to marry Bess and the new Lord Cobham. The satirical attack on the Cobhams, via Falstaff, remained unchanged in the drama, but to bring the attack to more pointedness the younger woman seems to have been created to keep the topical allusions fresh and incisive.

One brief allusion to the recent Puritan controversy is to be found in Mistress Quickly's remark about her minister, Master Dumbe, having been to visit her (Part 2, II. iv. 95). This is an unobtrusive line to the modern reader, but "Master Dumbe" was a satirical epithet made familiar to the Elizabethans by the famous Epistle of Martin Marprelate (1588). In this initial pamphlet of the Puritan attack on the bishops of the established church, the title "Master Dumbe John" was given to John Aylmer, Bishop of London (1577-1594). The Marprelate author used the term a number of times throughout the work, but one passage in particular was abusive with the derisive title:

Well nowe to mine eloquence, for I can doe it I tell you.
 Who made the porter of his gate a dumb minister?
 Dumb John of London. Who abuseth her Majesties
 subjects in urging them to subscribe contrary to lawe?
 John of London. Who abuseth the high commission, as
 much as any? John of London. . . . Who is a carnall
 defender of the breache of the Sabboth in all the places

of his abode? John of London. . . . Who goeth to bowles
upon the Sabbath? Dumbe dunsticall John of good London,
hath done all this.³⁴

In the margin is printed, "He make you weary of it dumbe John, except
you leave persecuting." The Puritans believed in preaching pastors, and
the fact that the bishops did not preach and refused to license the non-
conformist preachers was one cause of the Marprelate affair. The Bishop
of Winchester in his answer to the Epistle reprimanded the author because
"he courseth the Bishop of London with the lewde lying Epithete of Dumbe
John, fetched I cannot tell from what grosse conceite, " but, as he
supposed, it arose from the fact that Alymer did not preach as often as
the "babbling crewe."³⁵ Lady Russell meddled with church affairs as
well as with every other category of Elizabethan government. In 1595
she was particularly concerned with badgering Burghley and Robert Cecil
to recommend her candidate for appointment to the Bishopric of Durham.³⁶
Whether the clergy agreed with her efforts to prevent the actors from
entering Blackfriars or not, we do not know. Possibly they too found the
trumpets and drums annoying to divine services.

The attack on the Cobham faction which we find in Shakespeare's

³⁴Martin Prelate, The Epistle, ed. Edward Arber (London:
English Scholar's Library, 1880), p. 19.

³⁵Thomas Cooper, An Admonition to the People of England
(London: English Scholar's Library, 1883), p. 46.

³⁶Calendar of Salisbury Manuscripts, V, 121-22.

Henry IV and Henry VI plays was not an isolated affair; in fact, if more of the allegory of the Elizabethan drama and verse satires was understood, I believe it would reveal that a number of the writers of the Elizabethan age spent some time in lampooning that family. Henry Cobham was in all probability near the truth when he remarked that his family was the most maligned in England. Two examples of the circumambience of this satire on the Cobhams can be found in Ben Jonson's Every Man In His Humour and Thomas Nashe's Lenten Stuffe, or Praise of the Red Herring, attacks which seem to have launched because of the stern treatment meted out to the authors of The Isle of Dogs in the summer of 1597.

At some time shortly before the 28th of July in that summer, one acting company, possibly the Lord Chamberlain's, performed "a lewd plaie . . . contanyng very seditious and sclanderous matter" in one of the theaters on the Bankside of the Thames.³⁷ The Privy Council ordered the arrest of the players, and the authorities were successful in apprehending three of the men: ". . . we caused some of the players to be apprehended and comytted to pryson, whereof one of them was not only an actor but a

³⁷Acts of the Privy Council, XXVII (1597), 338. See also Ben Jonson, ed. C.H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1925-1952), I, 15-16; The Works of Thomas Nashe, V, 29-34. The play was generally supposed to have been performed at Henslowe's theater, the Rose, but the reference upon which this was based has proved to be one of Collier's forgeries. Nashe was writing for the Chamberlain's men in 1596, and Jonson's EMI was performed by that company in 1598. Gabriel Spencer, however, seems to have been one of Pembroke's men about this time. The specific acting company involved therefore is not known.

maker of parte of the said plaie."³⁸ The "maker" appears to have been Jonson, for his name is listed with those of Gabriel Spencer and Robert Shaw in an order of October 2 for their release from the Marshalsea.³⁹ From the account of the play which Nashe gives in Lenten Stuffle, he apparently wrote the induction and the first act, and, being frightened by the monster his brain had conceived, "it was no sooner borne but I was glad to run from it".⁴⁰ Nashe fled to Yarmouth in Norfolk, and Jonson seems to have completed the play. The Isle of Dogs is not extant, but judging from the satire on the red herring in Nashe's Lenten Stuffle, the play contained something which irritated Henry, Lord Cobham; it must have been he who prodded the Council to act against the players on July 28, for it is certainly the Cobhams who bear the brunt of the satire on the great herring or cob which was cooked for the pope. If the reader of Shakespeare's satire on Sir John Oldcastle is irritated by the lack of decorum in the playwright's choice of subject matter, he ought not to read Nashe's Lenten Stuffle. Nashe had no scruples at all in satirizing the burning of the Lollard martyr. He meant to put his enemy, "the silliest millers thombe," in "bryne" and pickle him, and he did.⁴¹ The allegory of Lenten Stuffle is

³⁸Acts of the Privy Council, XXVII (1597), 338.

³⁹Printed by Herford and Simpson, I, 218.

⁴⁰Nashe, III, 154.

⁴¹Ibid., III, 153.

built upon the word play involved in "cob" as fish and miller's thumb, a word play that the young Countess of Southampton used in her jesting remark about Cobham in her letter to her husband in 1599.⁴² Nashe begins Lenten Stuffe innocently enough with a description of the city of Yarmouth and its fishing industry, and he praises the hospitality of the town in sheltering him from the tempests recently stirred up by "the turning of the Ile of Dogs from a commedie to a tragedie" and the "troublesome stir which hapned aboute it." After a number of digressions Nashe begins his mock-epic -- like Homer's song of the mice and frogs or the more recent praises of the gnat, the butterfly, the sparrow, or the cuckoo, he plans the song of the red herring.⁴³ The herring is a legate of peace, Nashe insists, and he seems to allude to recent Elizabethan history when he continues that the herring, if he comes near where there are "trials of life & death, there where that hangman embowelling is," he flees the place forever. The "Scotish Jockies" frightened the herrings out of Scotland by their "foule ill feud" among their "sectaries and servitours," Nashe says.⁴⁴ But the essence of his tale is to be the terrible odor which

⁴²See Chapter I.

⁴³Richard Carew's A Herrings Tayle (London: Matthew Lownes, 1598) is mentioned by Nashe in his dedicatory epistle as appearing "foure Termes since." It is a mock-epic about a battle between a snale and a weather cock for the pre-eminent position on the steeple of the cathedral built by Uther Pendragon. It is an allegory which seems to refer to the quarrelling between Essex and Cecil for power at Court.

⁴⁴Nashe, III, 188.

the great red herring, the king of fish, made when broiled for the Pope.

Nashe is here referring to the discomfiture of the Catholics by the Old-castle legend:

The fire had not perst it, but it being a sweaty loggerhead greasie sowter, endungeond in his pocket a tweluemonth, stunk so ouer the popes pallace, that not a scullion but cryed foh, and those which at the first flocked the fastest about it now fled the most from it, and sought more to rid theyr hands of it than before they sought to blesse theyr handes with it. Wyth much stopping of theyr noses, between two dishes they stued it, and serued it vp.⁴⁵

The stench is so terrible that "the Pope it popt vnder boord," and the whole conclave declares the fish must be the soul of some heretic who has escaped from purgatory:

Negromantick sorcery, negromanticke sorcerie, some euill spirit of an heretique it is, which thus molesteth his Apostoliqueship. The friars and munkes caterwawled, from the abbots and priors to the nouices, wherfore tangquam in circo, wee will trowNSE him in a circle, and make him tell what Lanterneman or groome of Hecates close stoole hee is, that thus nefariously and proditoriously prophanes & penetrates our holy fathers nostrils.⁴⁶

Etc., etc., then Nashe brings the cobs up to date by describing the modern variety of the fish: "they are rich cobbes you must rate them; and of them all cobbing countrey chuffes which make their bellies and their bagges theyr Gods are called riche Cobbes."⁴⁷ Nashe's Lenten Stuffle was entered

⁴⁵Ibid., III, 208.

⁴⁶Ibid., III, 209-10.

⁴⁷Ibid., III, 211.

in the Stationers' Register the 11th of January, 1599, "a booke called the praise of the Redd herringe vpon Condicion that he gett yt Laufully Authourised." The book passed the censors; evidently Nashe's passage denouncing "a number of God's fooles" who misread wilfully his works, who "vse mens writings like brute beasts, to make them draw which way they list," had its desired effect.

Jonson's wit is of course more artful in the same vein. The character of Cob in Every Man In His Humour is a caricature of Henry, Lord Cobham; the water-bearer is a mean derivation from the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. The new Lord Cobham was ceremoniously installed in this office for which he and Essex had striven so mightily, in August, 1598. John Chamberlain described the event for Carleton on the 30th:

The Lord Cobham was installed Lord Warden of the Cinque Portes on Barthemew Day at Canterbury, at which ceremonious solemnitie were assembled almost 4000 horse, and he kept the feast very magnificently and spent 26 oxen with all other provision suitable.⁴⁸

Toby Matthew's letter of the 20th of September contains a reference to the new play of "Every mans humour,"⁴⁹ so it seems that Jonson's satire was timely and, if indeed Lord Cobham was responsible for Jonson's imprisonment because of his part in the production of The Isle of Dogs, Jonson's revenge was both swift and keen. Jonson's allusions to Sir John Oldcastle's

⁴⁸The Letters of John Chamberlain, I, 43.

⁴⁹Herford and Simpson, I, 331.

martyrdom, the quick point on which the Cobhams were by now overly sensitive, are made via the broiled herring metaphor. Cob brags of his lineage to Matthew, the town gull, in Act I, scene iv:⁵⁰

Mine ance'trie came from a Kings belly, no worse man:
and yet no man neither (by your worships leave, I did
lie in that) but Herring the King of fish (from his belly,
I proceed) one o' the Monarchs o' the world, I assure
you. The first red herring, that was broil'd in Adam
and Eve's kitchin, doe I fetch my pedigree from, by the
Harrots bookes. His Cob, was my great-great-mighty-
great Grand-father.

(lines 10-17)

When Matthew asks how he knows about his mighty ancestor, Cob replies, "how know I? why, I smell his ghost, euer and anon." And then he explains riddlingly that like a rasher of bacon his ancestor was broiled over the coals, "and a man may smell broyld-meate, I hope? you are a scholler, vnsolue me that, now." Of course Matthew solves nothing; his pun on "Roger-rasher" Bacon is guileless: Roger Bacon was not burned at the stake like Oldcastle, but he was imprisoned for his unorthodoxy.

In Act III, scene iv of Every Man In His Humour Cob burst out in a tirade upon fasting days, and when Cash inquires why he is so out of love with fasting days, Cob rejoins:

. . . they are the only knowne enemies, to my generation.
A fasting-day, no sooner comes, but my lineage goes to
racke, poore cobs they smoke for it, they are made martyrs
o' the gridiron, they melt in passion: and your maides too

⁵⁰The quotations are from the Folio of 1616. The quarto edition of Every Man In His Humour contains essentially the same lines for Cob, but the wit of the 1616 revision is more incisive.

know this, and yet would haue me turne Hannibal, and
 eate my owne fish, and bloud: /he pulls out a red herring/
 My princely couz, fear nothing; I haue not the hart to
 deuoure you, & I might be made as rich as King Cophetva.
 O, that I had roome for my teares, I could weepe salt-
 water enough, now, to preserue the liues of ten thousand
 of my kin. . . .

(lines 48-58)

Shakespeare's Henry IV was entered in the Stationers' Register to Andrew Wyse on the 25th of February, 1598, and the quarto edition of Part I was printed in that year. The textual revision of names had occurred in this first Quarto, so it is safe to assume that the Cobhams had objected to the use of Sir John Oldcastle's name (and Harvey's and Sir John Russell's as well) in 1597. Jonson and Nashe were adding salt to a wound with their satires in 1598 and 1599. John Weeever's erotic poem defending Oldcastle's name seems to have been written in 1599, and the Lord Admiral's men performed the play of Sir John Oldcastle in the fall of the same year. There seems then to have been more than a passive resistance to the propagandizing of the satirists. In 1599 Henry, Lord Cobham, was courting Lord Admiral Howard's widowed daughter, the Countess of Kildare, and in all probability her influence was brought to bear upon Henslowe's writers, Drayton, Munday, Hathaway, and Wilson, to produce a defensive play on the ancestral Cobham martyr for her father's acting company. The courtship of Lady Kildare and Lord Cobham was a lengthy one -- as the wits probably remarked, the cob was bait-shy. John Chamberlain and Rowland White predicted the marriage a number of times,

but added that the nuptials were postponed "till the Lord be made a Councillor."⁵¹ At some date between 1597 and 1600 Shakespeare again lampooned the Cobhams; in the satire of The Merry Wives of Windsor Henry, Lord Cobham, bears the brunt of the jest.

⁵¹Collins, II, 158, 167, 172, 206, 212; The Letters of John Chamberlain, I, 52, 64, 86, 99, 123.

CHAPTER VII

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

Shakespeare's comedy, The Merry Wives of Windsor, which dramatizes Falstaff's amorous exploits, is considered by nearly all modern scholars to be a Garter play.¹ This opinion is based upon the commendatory lines which refer to Windsor Castle, St. George's Chapel, and the Order of the Garter in the fairy scene of the Folio text:

About about:

Search Windsor Castle (Elues) within, and out,
Strew good luck (Ouphes) on euery sacred roome,
That it may stand till the perpetuall doome,
In state as wholesome, as in state 'tis fit,
Worthy the Owner, and the Owner it.
The seuerall Chaires of Order, looke you scowre
With iuyce of Balme; and euery precious flowre,
Each faire instalment, Coate, and seu'rall Crest,
With loyall Blazon, euermore be blest.
And Nightly-meadow-Fairies, looke you sing

¹See E. K. Chambers, William Shakespeare, I, 434; Leslie Hotson, Shakespeare versus Shallow, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1931), pp. 111-122; J. Crofts, Shakespeare And The Post Horses (Bristol: University Press, 1937); William Bracy, The Merry Wives of Windsor (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1952); Hardin Craig, A New Look At Shakespeare's Quartos (Stanford: University Press, 1961), pp. 65-75; William Green, Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor (Princeton: University Press, 1962), cited subsequently as Green.

Like to the Garters-Compasse, in a ring,
 Th' expresse that it beares: Greene let it be,
 Mote fertile-fresh then all the Field to see:
 And, Hony Soit Que Mal-y-Pence, write
 In Emrold-tuffes, Flowres purple, blew, and white,
 Like Saphire-pearle, and rich embroiderie,
 Buckled below faire Knight-hoods bending knee;
 Fairies vse Flowres for their characterie.

(V. v. 59-77)

In addition to the setting of the play at Windsor with the topographical references to the Castle, the Castle Ditch, Datchet Mead, Frogmore, the Park, and Herne's Oak, Mistress Quickly remarks about the town filling with courtiers (II. ii. 64), and "la grand affaires" is mentioned which Doctor Caius plans to attend at the Castle. These suggest the time and the setting for a Garter celebration.

Modern suggestions as to the date of the composition of the play have, since Leslie Hotson's study of The Merry Wives of Windsor was published in 1931, pointed to the Garter Feast or Garter Installation in April and May of 1597 as the most logical time for the appearance of the play.² In April, 1597, the Knights of the Order of the Garter elected five new members to join their honored ranks; these were George Carey, Lord Hunedon, Thomas, Lord Howard of Walden, Charles Blount, Lord Mount-joy, Sir Henry Lee, and one foreign nobleman, Fredrick, Duke of

²Shakespeare versus Shallow, p. 113. Hotson suggests the first performance of the play was at the Garter Feast on April 23; Green prefers the Investment ceremony at Windsor on May 24 as the probable date of performance.

Wurttemberg.³ The Feast of St. George was celebrated at Westminster on April 23 when the Knights-Elect were created; the official investment was performed at Windsor on May 24. By a decree of the Queen in 1567 Windsor had been declared the locale for the investment ceremony; the Feast itself which was far more elaborate was to be celebrated on St. George's Day wherever the Court was in residence.⁴ Leslie Hotson was the first to recognize the "illuminating fact" that Hunsdon's own acting troupe was perhaps in attendance upon their Lord as he "flaunted it gallantly" at the 1597 Garter celebration accompanied by three hundred gentlemen and retainers dressed in their blue and orange livery, and that The Merry Wives of Windsor was in all probability written and performed for this occasion by Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men (Hunsdon had received the white staff on the sixteenth of April, 1597).⁵ This is an acute observation, and in recent scholarship the year 1597 as the date of composition of The Merry Wives of Windsor has replaced Chambers' suggested date of 1600-01. To supplement this theory Hardin Craig has suggested

³George F. Beltz, Memorials of the Order of the Garter (London: William Pickering, 1841), p. clxxxiii.

⁴Cited by Green, p. 25. This study of The Merry Wives of Windsor as a Garter play is excellent and is based upon research among the primary materials in the British Museum, the College of Arms, and the Public Records Office. Mr. Green reviews the Oldcastle-Falstaff-Cobham legend with some scepticism and concludes "that Shakespeare merely took over the character of Sir John Oldcastle from The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth, never realizing that he might cause some wincing among the descendants of the real Oldcastle," p. 114.

⁵Shakespeare versus Shallow, pp. 117-120.

that the provincial tour of the summer and fall of 1597, which the London acting companies made after the closing of the theaters on July 28, was the occasion of the alteration and abbreviation of the original text to provide a compressed script for the tour, and that this cut version furnished the copy for the 1602 Quarto.⁶

As appealing as the date 1597 is for the composition of The Merry Wives of Windsor, such a suggestion overlooks several factors. The characters of Slender and Ford have much in common with Jonson's Thorello-Kitely and Stephano-Stephen of Every Man In His Humor, and Shakespeare's Nym is a new character which obviously satirizes the new humor play of 1598. Nym appears again in Henry V (c. 1599).⁷ My own study of The Merry Wives of Windsor as a part of the Falstaff-Oldcastle-Cobham complex of contemporary satire leads me to suggest that the play is a satire that was written to forestall the election of Henry, Lord Cobham, to membership in the Order of the Garter in April, 1599. As I have suggested earlier, the anonymous Famous Victories and Shakespeare's Henry IV

⁶A New Look At Shakespeare's Quartos, p. 67. The theory of the quarto text as a memorial reconstruction by an actor who played the role of the Host was first advanced by W.W. Greg in his edition of the 1602 Quarto (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), pp. xl-xli. Both Bracy and Green concur with Craig in the theory that the Quarto was an authorized version cut for a provincial tour.

⁷See Sallie Sewell, "The Relation Between The Merry Wives of Windsor and Jonson's Every Man In His Humor," Shakespeare Association Bulletin, XVI (1941), 175-189. This author concludes that Shakespeare was using Jonson's new play.

plays seem to have been written to denigrate William, Lord Cobham, when he was being considered for advancement and favor in Elizabeth's Court. I believe this same method of detraction was used in 1599 when the gossips circulated Henry Cobham's name with those of Robert Radcliff, Earl of Sussex, and Thomas, Lord Scrope of Bolton, as likely candidates for election to membership in the Garter that year.

It may be recalled that George, Lord Hunsdon, and Henry, Lord Cobham, had both sought the white staff of the Lord Chamberlainship in March of 1597. Even after Lord Hunsdon received his patent for the office his poor health and frequent seizures of "apoplexie" made his tenure uncertain. Lord Cobham's name seems to have been next on the list of prospective Lord Chamberlains. Doubtless the players anticipated what would happen in the event of Lord Hunsdon's death. We know that in March and April of 1600, after a particularly severe attack of illness, Lord Hunsdon's offices at Court became the subject of speculation among the courtiers. Rowland White, eager to keep his master in Flushing well informed, wrote the Court news:

My Lord Chamberlain is very sicke at Draiton, being seised with an Apoplexy; if he should die, I heare 400 /Cobham/ wold stand for his Office.

And one month later White wrote again:

My Lord Chamberlain came to Court from Draiton, but removed to London, where he is not very well. At Court they begin to dispose of his Places, and to make Suit for them.⁸

⁸Collins, II, 179, 185.

We know that Essex left for Ireland the last of March, 1599, taking with him Southampton, Derby, Rutland, and others of a distinguished retinue. Departure from Court meant advancement of his foes; he wrote as he was leaving, "I provide for this service a breast plate and not a cuirass: that is, I am armed on the breast but not on the back." Two years earlier during his absence on the Island Voyage (1597), his enemy, Henry Cobham, was made Lord Lieutenant of Kent. A month after Essex departed for Ireland in 1599 Cobham was made a Knight of the Garter. There were in addition other advancements of the anti-Essex faction. Buckhurst was made Lord Treasurer in May, Cecil became Master of the Ward (a post Essex wanted) in the same month, and at midsummer the new Lord Burghley was made President of the North. This pattern of encirclement with territorial powers was completed later in the year when Lord Zouche, Cecil's friend, became Warden of the Welsh Marches. This was a duplication of the power block which Leicester's enemies had bewailed in Leycesters Commonwealth in 1584. Cobham's important position as Warden of the Cinque Ports, his election to the Garter, and his continuous pressing for membership in the Privy Council were part of an overall movement toward absolute control of government which Cecil completed by 1603.

The attack of the players on Lord Cobham in The Merry Wives of Windsor is a montage of satire composed of references to Oldcastle, to Eleanor Cobham or the Witch of Eye, to the lampooning which Henry Evans and the Chapel boys gave William Cobham, to Henry Cobham's philandering,

and possibly to Henry's intended treason. Let us begin with the Oldcastle allusions. The fifteenth-century setting for the play is provided by two references to Prince Hal, first, to the Prince's stealing his father's deer (lines 1522-1523) and later, a reference to Fenton's association with the wild Prince and Poins (III, ii. 76-77). Greg noted in his edition of the Quarto that the Host's line, "Sir John, theres his Castle, his standing bed," is an allusion to the original name of Falstaff.⁹ This I believe is true; it is like Hal's reference to Falstaff as "my old Lad of the Castle" in 1 Henry IV. Certainly the description which Falstaff gives of his experience in the buckbasket is a symbolic reference to Oldcastle's apprehension and martyrdom. For an audience anticipating this type of satire Falstaff's lines are filled with grotesque wit:

But mark the sequel, Master Brooke: I suffered the pangs of three several deaths: first, an intolerable fright, to be detected with a jealous rotten bell-wether; next, to be compassed, like a good bilbo, in the circumference of a peck, hilt to point, heel to head; and then, to be stopped in, like a strong distillation, with stinking clothes that fretted their own grease: think of that, a man of my kidney, think of that, that am as subject to heat as butter; a man of continual dissolution and thaw: it was a miracle to 'scape suffocation. And in the height of this bath, when I was more than half stewed in grease, like a Dutch dish, to be thrown into the Thames, and cooled, glowing hot, in that surge, like a horse-shoe; think of that, hissing hot, think of that, Master Brooke!

(III. v. 110-127)

The detection by a "jealous rotten bell-wether" at its symbolic level refers to Henry V's discovery of Oldcastle's heresy; the confinement "like a good

⁹Greg, p. 84.

bilbo" points to Oldcastle's incarceration: bilbo means not only sword but the term is also that given to the shackles in the Tower of London; the "stewing" alludes to the Lollard's martyrdom. The fairy scene in which Falstaff is "tested" with the candle flame is also an Oldcastle reference. Professor Crofts has suggested that line 1497 in this scene of the Quarto at one time contained an O rather than E, and thus was originally a play on Oldcastle's name:

. . . know his name:
If with an F it doeth begin,
Why then be shure he is full of sin.

This as it stands is pointless, but when altered to O the following speech by Evans becomes meaningful:

. . . know his name:
If with an O it doth begin,
Why then be shure he is full of sin.
Falstaff: Oh, Oh, Oh!
Evans: It is right indeed, he is full of lecheries and
iniquitie.¹⁰

The ritualistic dance around the "man of middle earth" in which the fairies burn and pinch the "corrupt heart" till "candles and starlight and moon-shine be out" is a mythic reproduction of the martyrdom of Oldcastle. This scene also has an element of pre-Christian ritual and pagan sacrifice in it. The cult of the stag king is prehistoric; it survives in the myths of the moon goddess, Britomart, in the Greek myth of Artemis and the metamorphosed Actaeon; in the antlered Gaulish king, Cernunnos, "the horned

¹⁰Shakespeare and the Post Horses, pp. 95-96.

one"; in the horned Dionysus, and even in the image of Alexander wearing the horned crown as shown on Alexanderian coins. The cuckold's branching horns are a survival of the ancient myth of the betrayed stag-king.¹¹ The ceremonial May Day stag-mummers of Abbot's Bromley in Devon are descended from this body of prehistoric myth, and the chase there is sometimes explained as a punishment for trespassing. Falstaff's punishment in the fairy scene is perhaps related to his trespass on Justice Shallow's deer park. This symbolic resolution of that "unfinished" episode may round out the plot of The Merry Wives. The Fairy Queen's directions to her followers to test Falstaff, the horned king, is I suggest a mythic construction used metaphorically to refer to the seditious intention of Oldcastle to usurp Henry V's throne, for when Falstaff as Horne dons the stag's headdress he becomes not only Auld Hornie (a Scotch term for Satan), an outlaw ("put to the horn"), a cuckold, but also a king. In this symbolic context I would like to suggest that Shakespeare was also alluding to certain undercover maneuvers in which Henry, Lord Cobham, and Sir Walter Raleigh were indulging to insure the succession of the crown of England to a candidate of their choice and control. This candidate appears to have been Arbella Stuart.

The succession question was a serious problem in Elizabeth's reign; the Queen was sensitive about its discussion, and she used the

¹¹Robert Graves, The White Goddess (Farrar Straus and Cudahy, 1948), pp. 82, 181-82.

question frequently as a political weapon. Mary Stuart was recognized by many Englishmen and foreigners as the true heir to the English crown after Elizabeth's failure to marry and provide an heir. After the execution of Mary in 1587 the dozen or more contenders for the throne competed for political power and prestige to place themselves at the head of the list. Thomas Wilson, writing in 1600, described the various pretenders to the crown and concluded that "this Crowne is not like to fall to the ground for want of heads that claim to weare it."¹² Wilson listed James VI of Scotland as the leading contender and Arbella Stuart as the second, a "young damesell of 18 yeares who cometh of the same lyne and by some thought more capable then he, for that she is English borne." Arbella was the daughter of Charles Stuart, younger brother of Darnley, James' father, and Elizabeth Cavendish, Bess of Hardwick's daughter. It was Arbella's birth that ended the friendship between Mary Stuart and Bess of Hardwick. The child's name was mentioned in various marriage proposals from her sixth year when she was secretly engaged by her grandmother to Leicester's young son. In Scotland James VI was constantly aware of the young lady as a competitor, and he asked Queen Elizabeth a number of times for reassurance that Arbella would not be matched without his approval. In 1590 the old Earl of Shrewsbury, still full of anger as his death approached, uttered warnings that "he feared the Lady Arrabell

¹²Thomas Wilson, The State of England anno Dom., 1600 (London: Camden Society, 1936), p. 6.

would bring much trouble to his house, by his wife and her daughter's devices they thought him a great block in their way."¹³ As though indeed he were a prophet, in this same year Arbella was imprisoned for listening to overtures of marriage from Henry Percy, the ninth Earl of Northumberland. De Thou, the French historian, said they were married -- his information seems to have come from Sir John Colville.¹⁴ Henry Percy was himself a pretender to the throne through his claim of descendance from Edmund Crouchback, the brother of Henry III. In Parsons' Conference about the Next Succession (1594) Burghley was said to "especially favor Arbella,"¹⁵ and in that year it was also rumored that the Pope was backing a plan of Sir William Stanley, the defected knight, to kidnap Arbella and take her to the Continent for a marriage with the son of the Duke of Parma.¹⁶ In 1595 the new Countess of Shrewsbury (Mary, Gilbert's

¹³Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1581-1590, p. 689.

¹⁴In 1612 James sent Isaac Casaubon to Paris to question De Thou (or Thuanus) about the unflattering description of Mary Stuart that the historian had written. Casaubon returned to London with the information that De Thou had consulted with Sir John Colville, who was he thought a neutral source, about Scottish history. See Original Letters of Mr. John Colville, pp. xxxiii-xxxv; Lodge, III, 28; Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1581-1590, p. 708; and P.M. Handover, Arbella Stuart (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957), p. 89, cited hereafter as Handover.

¹⁵N. Doleman [pseud.], A Conference About the Next Succession to the Crowne of England (Imprinted at N. [Antwerp?], 1594), p. 249.

¹⁶Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1591-1594, pp. 255, 259.

wife and daughter of Bess of Hardwick) was imprisoned for treating in a marriage proposal for Arbella with Catholics on the Continent. Burghley intercepted letters in the same year which stated "the traffic of Arbella is accepted, Allen is the merchant."¹⁷ Elizabeth herself was interested in securing Henry IV of France as a husband for Arbella if the monarch would divorce Margaret of Valois; Gilbert, Earl of Shrewsbury, Arbella's uncle, was sent to Paris with the Garter for Henry IV in 1596, and it was rumored that he was also to offer his niece as a suitable bride.¹⁸ Henry remarked to his minister, de Sully, that he had no objections to "the Princess Arbella of England, if, since it is publically said the Crown of England really belongs to her, she were only declared presumptive heiress of it."¹⁹ Essex too was interested in Arbella's title, and Sir John Harington remarked in his tract on the succession that Essex commended Arbella to such an extent as to have "both himself and his honourable friends to be suspected of that, which I suppose was no part of their meaning."²⁰ Arbella's name was at one time or another linked with most of the great names in Europe -- Parma, Navarre, the Archduke Matthias, Nevers, Lennox, and even Sir Robert Cecil. As late as 1602 Queen

¹⁷Calendar of Salisbury Manuscripts, IV, 625, 627.

¹⁸Calendar of State Papers, Scotland, XII, 267.

¹⁹Quoted by Handover, p. 115.

²⁰Ibid., p. 117.

Elizabeth was overtly bent on a French marriage for the young lady with the Prince of Condé, nephew of Henry IV. In this complex web of schemes and counterschemes we find Arbella developing ideas of her own. She and her grandmother had been approached before 1600 by Edward Kyrton, a lawyer of the Earl of Hertford, who suggested a marriage between Edward Seymour, Hertford's elder grandson, and Arbella. Edward and William Seymour were the grandsons of Catherine Grey, and they derived their claims to the crown from Mary Tudor, youngest daughter of Henry VII. Lawyer Kyrton had married the daughter of Sir William Cavendish, the widow of Thomas Cobham who had been involved in the Duke of Norfolk's affairs. Perhaps it was through Kyrton that Henry Cobham made his contact with Arbella or perhaps it was through his mother's close friendship with Bess of Hardwick. Records of the relationship between Henry Cobham and Arbella are almost nonexistent; for information we must depend upon the evidence brought forth at Cobham's trial for treason in 1603.

The famous Main and Bye plots which interrupted the midsummer festivities of James' pre-coronation days in London are still considered unsolved matters of state. Involved in the plotting were a number of discontents who saw in the coronation of James the end of all their prospects for reward and advancement in England. Chief among these were Henry, Lord Cobham, and Sir Walter Raleigh. A contemporary historian, Sir Richard Baker, wrote an account of the dramatic happenings of 1603:

It was now a time that every man might sit under his Vine, and enjoy the happiness of a peaceable Government: when suddenly like a storm in a fair Summers day, broke forth a Treason of a strange Composition: for where in all Treasons commonly they are all of some one Faction, in this there were people of all sorts, Priests and Laymen, Papists and Protestants, Noblemen, Knights and Gentlemen; that one would think it should be a well managed Treason, and yet was the shallowest that was ever set on foot; so shallow, that it could scarce be observed, either what the Authors of it ailed, or what it was they would have done. Indeed the great favour which King James at his first coming to the Crown, shewed to the Earl of Southampton, was like to breed no good blood to those that were his opposites; and it was said (how true I know not) that as the King had sent to enlarge the Earl of Southampton, and appointed him to meet him upon the way: so when he heard of an intention that the Lord Cobham and Sir Walter Rawleigh had to meet him, he sent them word they should spare their labour. But whether it were so or not, it seems they found some cause of discontentment.²¹

James' disfavor of Cobham and Raleigh stemmed in part from their leadership in the movement to overthrow the Earl of Essex, a movement which succeeded in February, 1601. James' anger was kept smouldering by the secret letters from Sir Robert Cecil and Lord Henry Howard during 1601-1603. Howard's letters in particular are filled with malice and hatred for

²¹A Chronicle of the Kings of England, pp. 404-05. A modern account of the Main and Bye plots may be found in Samuel R. Gardiner, History of England, 1603-1642 (10 volumes; London: Longman, Green, and Company, 1905), I, 79-110. John Manningham wrote of Cobham's rash trip northward to meet James: "There is a foolishe rime runnes up and downe in the Court of Sir Henry Bromely, Lord Thomas Howard, Lord Cobham, and the Deane of Canterbury, Dr. Nevil, that eache should goe to move the King for what they like. Nevil for the Protestant, Lord Thomas for the Papist, Bromley for the Puritan, and Lord Cobham for the Athiest." Diary of John Manningham, ed. John Bruce (London: Camden Society, 1868), p. 168.

Cobham, Raleigh, and Northumberland, the "diabolical triplicity" as he called them. As a clever and capable propagandist, Howard relayed Cecil's messages to James via Edward Bruce:

The thing which Cecil would have me print in the King's mind, is the miserable state of Cobham and Raleigh, who are fain to put their heads under the girdle of him whom they envy most, and that they cannot escape his walk with all their agility, which if you seem in your letter by the King's direction to observe, you tickle the right humour. . . . hell cannot afford such a like triplicity that denies the Trinity.²²

In 1602 Howard informed Bruce that "the league is very strong between Sir Walter Raleigh and my Lady Shrewsbury" and that Cobham was trying to "incense the Queen against the lease which Southampton made years before this mishap for payment of his debts." He commented that "hell

²²The Secret Correspondence of Sir Robert Cecil with James VI King of Scotland, ed. David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes (Edinburgh: A. Millar, 1766), p. 52. The accusations of atheism cast against Raleigh and Cobham were old charges which arose from the scientific experimentations which were conducted by the intellectual group called the School of Night. Raleigh's magnetism had attracted such thinkers as Thomas Hariot, Robert Hughes, Richard Hakluyt, Jacques Le Moyne, and Dr. John Dee to his "little Academe." The literary names associated with the group were Spenser, Chapman, Roydon, Drayton, and Marlowe. See E.G. Clark, Raleigh and Marlowe, pp. 284-286; and M.C. Bradbrook, The School of Night (Cambridge: University Press, 1936). Raleigh's friendship with both William, Lord Cobham, and his son Henry ("I am yours before all that live" Raleigh wrote to the latter) brought both men into the fringe area of this "school." Neither of the Cobhams seems to have offered any contribution to the intellectual thought of the group. The only extant writing of the Cobham family that I have found are two sonnets composed by George Brooke, William's youngest son. These are part of the Ashmole Manuscript in the Bodleian Museum, and they show little merit or originality.

did never spew up such a couple when it cast up Cerberus and Phlegethon -- they are now set on the pin of making tragedies, by meddling in your affairs."²³

Cecil had broken with Raleigh and Cobham in 1600 although on the surface of things the three men were friends. Cobham and Raleigh slipped to the Continent in the summer of that year to observe the fighting in the United Provinces, but evidently at this date they made contact with the Count d'Aremberg, Ambassador for the Archduke and the Infanta in the Low Countries.²⁴ Cecil wrote to his confidant, Sir George Carew in Ireland, that "2 old freends /Cobham and Raleigh/ use me unkindly, but I have covenanted with my Hart not to know it, for in shew we are great, and all my revenge shalbe to heape coales on their hedds."²⁵ In June, 1601, the Earl of Shrewsbury and the Earl of Worcester were made Councillors -- the positions which Raleigh and Cobham had hoped to obtain. Cecil wrote to Carew, "this day hath inflamed their myndes. . . . Credit me, he /Raleigh/ shall never have my consent to be a Counsaillor without

²³The Secret Correspondence of Sir Robert Cecil with James VI King of Scotland, pp. 68, 131.

²⁴P. M. Handover, The Second Cecil, 1563-1604 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1959), p. 217.

²⁵Letters from Sir Robert Cecil to Sir George Carew, ed. John Maclean (London: Camden Society, 1864), p. 116.

he surrender to you the captainship of the Gard." ²⁶ This rift widened, and after James' accession the differences became a "foule jarr."

Manningham heard of the quarrelling and noted it in his Diary:

7 Aprill 1603. I heard there had bin a foule jarr betwixt Sir Robert Cecile and the Lord Cobham, upon this occasion, because the Lords and late Counsell, upon the Queenes death, had thought good to appoint an other Captaine of the Gard, because Sir Walter Rhaley was then absent, which the Lord Cobham tooke in foule dudgeon, as yf it had bin the devise of Sir Robert, and would have bin himselfe deputy to Sir Walter rather /than/ any other. ²⁷

These adverse turns seem to have confirmed Cobham and Raleigh in their plot to overthrow James (he not being King until after coronation, they said) and to place Arbella on the throne of England. The dense entanglement of the threads of both the Main and the Bye plots has never been adequately examined or explained. Two secular priests, William Clark and William Watson, were involved in the archpriest controversy with the Jesuits. Clark's letters written in the spring of 1603 indicate that he was trapped either by Cecil or the Jesuits into taking a part in the Bye plot to expose it. ²⁸ And George Brooke consistently declared in letters to the Lords of the Council that he was betrayed by their promises of reward if

²⁶ Ibid., p. 86.

²⁷ Diary of John Manningham, p. 160.

²⁸ Calendar of Salisbury Manuscripts, XI, pp. 222-223.

he broke the plot.²⁹ The accusations made at the trial were listed by Sir Richard Baker, and he combines the two plots:

Concerning the first Point, it was proved that the Lord Grey intended to obtain the levying of 2000 men, for defence of the Low Countries, and with them to seize upon the King and Prince, and take the Lords of the Council in their Chambers. For the other Points, It was proved, that the Lord Cobham and Sir Walter Rawleigh, met at St. Martins in the Fields, and there consulted about raising Sedition, moving Rebellion, altering Religion, subverting the State, and to set up the Lady Arbella. And particularly for the Point of subverting the State; it was proved, that Watson was designed to be Lord Chancellor, George Brooke, Lord Treasurer, Sir Griffin Markam, Secretary, and the Lord Grey to be Master of the Horse, and Earl Marshall of England. . . . It was proved that Sir Walter Rawleigh was appointed to treat with Count Aremberg for six hundred thousand Crowns, and the Lord Cobham to go to the Archduke and to the King of Spain to persuade them to assist the Lady Arbella.³⁰

Both Cobham and Raleigh broke into violent accusations against each other as the trials progressed. Cobham confessed that he and Raleigh had treated with Aremberg for ten hundred thousand crowns to advance their scheme, but he denied that Arbella had any part in the plot. Cecil proclaimed that lady's innocence at the trial, and the Lord Admiral declared that Arbella

²⁹ *Ibid.*, XV, 282; ". . . your lordships will believe that whilst I breathe, if not after, I shall claim those promises I have received both from the King and your lordships in several manner assuring more than life, and which can have no interpretation in that I have already suffered, much less in that I now expect."

³⁰ *A Chronicle of the Kings of England*, p. 405.

had dutifully handed the letter she received from Cobham to James.³¹

Cobham wrote to Cecil from the Tower that his "conceit" for Arbella was something of the past, and that when he saw the lady "he resolved never to hazard his estate for her," that the "conceit soon died and never had revived since."³² All the intregants were judged guilty of treason. The two priests, Watson and Clark, and George Brooke were executed in December, 1603; Cobham, Raleigh, and Grey were reprieved on the scaffold and received sentences of life imprisonment in the Tower.

These were the political machinations that were budding in 1599 and of which, I believe, Shakespeare had some clue or word of gossip. Only through an ancient symbolism does he make use of the information. As the Fairy Queen gives orders for her followers to pinch and burn Falstaff, she chants a charm to ward off treason:

The seuerall Chaires of Order, looke you scowre
With iuyce of Balme; and euery precious flowre,

³¹Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, X, 117; Lodge, III, 74; Handover, p. 119. William Sanderson's account of the plot, based he said on Raleigh's own discussions of the events with him when he visited the Tower during Raleigh's imprisonment, puts much of the blame on Raleigh's betrayal of Matthew de Laurencie, the go-between used by Aremberg and Cobham. When Raleigh's letter of betrayal was shown to Cobham, it started the chain-like series of confessions and denials. See William Sanderson, A Compleat History of the Lives of Mary Queen of Scotland and of Her Son and Successor, James VI . . . (London: Humphrey Moseley, Richard Tomlins, 1656), pp. 282-87.

³²Calendar of Salisbury Manuscripts, XV, 208. The Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, contains rumors which reached Italy concerning Arbella's practices for the throne. See XI, 554, 566.

Each faire Instalment, Coate, and seu'rall Crest,
With loyall Blazon, euermore be blest.

The Cobham crest and coat of arms with Henry's achievements as Knight of the Garter were taken down and kicked out of the west doors of St. George's Chapel on 16 February, 1604, in a traditional procedure given to those Knights found guilty of treason.³³

When Falstaff disguises himself as the fat witch of Brentford and is beaten by Master Ford, I think the playwright was creating a scene which alludes to the drubbing Lord Cobham took at the hands of the satirists who used the unflattering versions of the Eleanor Cobham story. There was of course a contemporary allusion involved in the "fat woman of Brainford" who kept a tavern at Brentford, and possibly there is an allusion to the obscene "Testament" printed by William Copland.³⁴ But for those of the audience who knew the Cobham history the witch's disguise was more satire heaped on Lord Cobham's head. The Brooke-Broom revision which occurred between the Quarto and the Folio is more satire aimed at the Cobhams whose family name was Brooke. When Master Ford assumes the alias of Brooke, Falstaff willingly accepts him and his proposition,

³³Edmund H. Fellowes, The Knights of the Garter, 1348-1939 (London: William Clowes and Sons, n.d.), p. 80. The ceremony of defacement usually concluded with the servants of the Castle kicking the coat of arms into the Castle ditch. James prohibited this final debasement, doubtless for Cecil's sake since Cecil's wife had been Elizabeth Cobham and Cecil's children quartered the Cobham arms.

³⁴Greg, p. 81.

"such Brookes are welcome to me, that o'erflow such liquor," (II. ii. 159).

Why the Folio substitution of Broom should be published in 1623, some years after Henry Cobham's death, we can only conjecture. It has been suggested that the "notorious old make-bate" Ralph Brooke, York Herald, who was quarrelling with Jaggard, the Folio printer in 1622-23, was alluded to in the Quarto and that Jaggard insisted on Broom to avoid further trouble with the quarrelsome herald.³⁵ It has been suggested also that the change was made before the 4th of November, 1604, when the King's Men gave a Court performance of The Merry Wives of Windsor.³⁶ Cecil was all powerful at this time, and it was doubtless he, not James, who was sensitive about the Cobham satire. In all likelihood this was the time of the name revision from Brooke to Broom, and the latter form remained in the script, thus appearing in the 1623 edition of the play.

I suggested in my discussion of The Famous Victories that Sir William Dethick, Garter King of Arms, is perhaps satirized in the character of the Host of the Garter. We know that in October, 1596, John Shakespeare received a grant of arms from Sir William Dethick. At some date between 1596 and 1599, when an assignment was made to allow the Arden arms to be impaled with those of John Shakespeare and his descendents, quarrelsome Ralph Brooke questioned the arms that had been granted to

³⁵J. Crofts, Shakespeare and the Post Horses, pp. 103-105.

³⁶David White, "An Explanation of the Brook-Broom Question in Shakespeare's Merry Wives," Philological Quarterly, XXV (1946), 280-83; Green, pp. 110-12.

John Shakespeare because they resembled closely the Gold, a bend sable of Lord Mauley's coat. Dethick's reply in the controversy is preserved in the College of Arms; the Garter King wrote that the prominence of the spear on the sable bend distinguished the Shakespeare coat clearly from the other arms which contained a black bend on gold, and that he was of the opinion that Shakespeare's coat would not be confused for a cadet branch of the Mauley family.³⁷ I believe William Shakespeare reworked the character of Derricke in The Famous Victories, which had lampooned Sir William Dethick, and made of it the affable Host of the Garter. In the fragmentary plot of The Merry Wives we find the Host endeavoring to mollify the flaming tempers of Sir Hugh Evans and Doctor Caius by assigning them separate duelling places near Windsor Castle. His reward for his pacific tactics is a revenge plot laid by Evans and Caius which seems to be related to the horse stealing episode of the "Cozen-Jermans." Greg noted in his edition of the Quarto that it was perhaps Falstaff's horses which were pawned to the Host that the Germans took.³⁸ And J. Crofts has suggested that Doctor Caius, Evans, Shallow, Pistol, and Nym masqueraded as Germans and took the horses, thus evening their score with the

³⁷Quoted by Scott-Giles, Shakespeare's Heraldry, p. 38.

³⁸Greg, p. 93.

Host.³⁹ This revenge satisfies the grudge held by Pistol, Nym, and Shallow against Falstaff, and it also evens the score between Caius, Evans, and the Host. In all probability the plot of the original play was completed in this manner.

We know that the traditional fee paid the Garter King by the new Knights (an annuity of 40 s.) was enlarged with a gift of a "fat buck yearly at the season to be taken of my parke at Cobham" by Henry Cobham. Dethick has left us an account of the 1599 installation of the Garter in which Lord Cobham is described as "the bravest one."

³⁹ Crofts, Shakespeare and the Post Horses, pp. 44-46. Crofts supplies accounts also of two contemporary affairs which may well have supplied the incidents which suggested the horse stealing scenes -- the posting scandal concerning the Governor of Dieppe at Gravesend in September, 1596, and the illegal use of post horses at Chard in November, 1597. See pp. 11-21, 32-43. It is interesting to note that the young Prince of Anhalt, who visited England in July, 1596, wrote a poem on his impression of Lord Cobham's house and well filled stables which he visited. A literal translation of the poem is given in Archaeologia Cantiana, XL, 205: "Early on the following morning, we walked to Baron Cobham's house. And in the stable, which was well littered with straw, there were standing many fine horses. For with him splendor was customary, and not occasional." Lord Cobham's horses are mentioned by name in his will: Henry received Gray Canterbury, Gray Mott, Bay Mott, and Quasto; son William received Bay Gaynsforde, Bay Shepey, and Gray Pembrock. Ibid., p. 211. I have found no evidence that any of these fine horses were stolen. There is evidence that in March, 1566, the disguised Margrave of Baden slipped back into England to see his wife, the Lady Cecilia. He "secretly took up post-horses" we learn from a letter to Leicester. Lord Cobham spent some time in the Tower because of his connection with the Margrave and his wife. If this episode is behind the original satire, then Shakespeare's Merry Wives is based upon a very old play.

About a quarter of an hour after him /Lord Scrope/ came the Lord Cobham, although the last, yet most bravest, his gentlemen in purple velvett breeches, and white satin doublette, and chains of gold; and his yeomen in purple cloth breeches, and white fustian doubletts, all in blew coates, faced with taffeta and fethers of white and blewe.⁴⁰

More tangible evidence that the character of the Host of the Garter was a good-humored satire of Sir William Dethick may perhaps be found in the College of Arms; my own research among secondary sources has revealed nothing more. The suggestion that Henry Evans and the Children of the Chapel Royal are portrayed in the character of Sir Hugh Evans and the fairies has more evidence to substantiate it. It will be recalled that in 1583-84 Evans and Hunnis subleased the old Parliament chamber from Farrant's widow under the sponsorship of the Earl of Oxford and John Lyly. They presented performances by a combined group of the Chapel children and Paul's. The drubbing they seem to have given Lord Cobham in the character of Oldcastle in The Famous Victories is, I believe, alluded to in The Merry Wives. In the fairy scene Evans dons a satyr's costume (the traditional mask for satire) and directs the little "elues" to pinch and burn Falstaff. And when the dance is ended and the other characters come on to the stage, Falstaff inquired, are these not fairies?

Fal: Why then these were not Fairies?

Mis. Page: No Sir John but boyes.

Fal: By the Lord I was twice or thrise in the mind
They were not, and yet the grosnesse

⁴⁰Quoted from the Ashmole Manuscript, Archaeologia Cantiana, XII, 156.

Of the fopperie persuaded me they were.
 Well, and the fine wits of the Court heare this,
 Thayle so whip me with their keene Jests,
 That thay' melt me out like tallow,
 Drop by drop out of my grease. Boyes!
 Sir Hugh: I trust my boyes Sir John: and I was
 Also a Fairie that did helpe to pinch you.
 (Quarto, lines 1541-1551)

I believe a contemporary audience would have been aware of the basis of the satire, especially since the players involved in the production of The Merry Wives of Windsor were boys, possibly the Windsor boys in the Garter performance and the Chapel boys in later performances. The boys of the Chapel were under the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain. Henry Evans was again using the Blackfriars theater for play productions in 1600. C.W. Wallace has suggested that the children were performing there again as early as 1597.⁴¹ Perhaps they had revived their satire on Lord Cobham. Satire was not an innovation with the boy companies. Paul's boys seem to have been suppressed for their participation in the Marprelate plays, and Sebastian Westcott, the Master of Paul's boys was imprisoned twice for "being somewhat too clear" with his satire.⁴²

If the production of The Merry Wives of Windsor was an attempt in April, 1599, to forestall the election of Henry, Lord Cobham, to the Order

⁴¹The Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1908), p. 59. Chambers disagrees with this early date, but states he has not seen the evidence. The Elizabethan Stage, II, 41-2.

⁴²The Elizabethan Stage, II, 15, 18.

of the Garter, it failed in its purpose. Cobham was elected on April 23 and installed on May 24. Within four years however Lord Cobham's foolish political machinations brought him downfall and disgrace. He spent the remainder of his life in the Tower translating Seneca and other classical writers. After the Gunpowder plot Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, joined Cobham and Raleigh in the Tower, and later Lady Arbella became a state prisoner for her secret marriage to William Seymour. Cobham died in 1619 and his body lay unclaimed for some time. His wife, Frances, the Lord Admiral's daughter, seems to have taken no note of the event though she was living at Cobham in Kent. King James confiscated the 1000 volumes of books which were left in the Tower; he and Cecil had long before divided the Cobham estates.

EPILOGUE

The evidence presented in the preceding chapters provides some clues to the literal level of meaning which was written into the comic scenes of the Henry IV plays, the Talbot and the Eleanor Cobham scenes of the Henry VI plays, and The Merry Wives of Windsor. As a result this study has presented Falstaff from a harsh and severely limited point of view. I wish to stress the fact that Elizabethan drama had numerous levels of meaning and that topical satire was only one level, the propagandistic intention, only one function of that art. In succeeding ages the character of Falstaff proved to be one of the most successful dramatic images ever created. Writers and critics alike have been intoxicated with Shakespeare's witty rogue. The Romantic critics made of him a demigod of uninhibited pleasures and wit, but then Romantic criticism was itself a form of art. My own study of the historical background which produced the character of Falstaff reinforces the classical conception of that character as a great medieval compound of Vice, Folly, and Wit. This was a view expressed by Samuel Johnson. The good Doctor's pristine bon sens is no where more aptly disclosed than in his summarizing statement concerning Shakespeare's "unimitated, unimitable Falstaff." After editing

the Henry IV plays Doctor Johnson concluded:

The moral to be drawn from this representation is that no man is more dangerous than he that with a will to corrupt hath the power to please; and that neither wit nor honesty ought to think themselves safe with such company when they see Harry seduced by Falstaff.

That this classical view of Falstaff was lost in the surge of Romantic criticism was due in part to a loss of historical information. With the publication of the Calendar of State Papers and other manuscript materials the reconstruction of the historical setting for Shakespeare's plays is possible. This study is one short step in that direction.

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