CHAPTER XI

RIGHT HONOURABLE

WILL's first comedy did not set the Thames on fire, but it brought him a patron.

Whether it was advice or a command from the Great Burbage, he could not go round to watch his play from the front; neither, as it soon appeared, could he stay in the tiring-room, where Mother Spero, the wicked old Italian hag who dressed the players' heads, was sweeping him up with her broom and pan. Old walnut-face wanted to be rid of him, for she had to get the Russian habits laid out ready for the quick change. Taking off his shoes he crept up the back staircase to the side gallery where the musicians sat, and crouched down upon a step at the bend. Rosseter, the only Englishman amongst them (he played the *viol da gamba* and sat at the back) raised his eyebrows and indicated a space between his instrument and the wall, but Will shook his head. From his present perch he got a sidelong view of three quarters of the audience and a quarter of the stage. If he moved up to the back of the gallery he would see nothing of the stage and the audience would be able to see him. Besides, Signor Martinelli, the chief lutenist, a person with a face like a lump of lard with two coals stuck into it for eyes, would be certain to complain.

As he took his seat his play got its first laugh, and forgetting that he was invisible, he drew back with heart thumping and knees shaking. It was a poor jest about

a woman losing her tongue, but Dick who spoke it was in fine fettle, striding about and using his stage as a Burbage should. Some of the green leafage rot it! was falling off one of the side screens. Another laugh came quickly—entry of the comic Constable, but Will could not see—no use counting on a good-tempered audience thus early though. At the beginning of a comedy people were ready to be pleased. It was about the middle of the third act that they began to fidget if they were not being kept steadily amused.

Field was a clear gain for the Company. He had the looks for the King's part, and could make any matter sound well. Probably he had learnt that art from his poor father who was a Puritan preacher. The Braggart was coming next. Would they recognize him? Bryan, another stranger to the company, had taken pains and got himself up the dead spit of that mad Spaniard who used to hang about all the expensive taverns in Bishopsgate, buttonholing utter strangers to hear tall tales about the argosies he had coming into London port, and how the Queen was secretly in love with him. There was a rumour in the Theatre that Burbage had got from an old-clothes-man some of the very garments Señor Monarcho had worn. Surely they could not miss the resemblance. And surely they did not. Before Bryan had spoken a line, people were twisting in their seats and whispering to one another. They made a noise like the flutter in a schoolroom when the master announces a new exercise and every pupil turns over his page at the same instant. The Spaniard was a success as Burbage had prophesied. The groundlings standing in the open yard guffawed at him.

It must have stopped snowing long ago, for nobody looked wet. Too much room in the yard to-day,

though. You could see women's skirts and men were standing with their legs apart and their hands on their hips. At a first showing the yard ought to be so packed that you could only discern a vague pattern of goggling eyes and tilting chins. There were vacant seats in the sixpenny gallery, to which the weather should have driven cautious folk for cover. Will's eye was fascinated by a fat woman sitting sucking a long stick of striped sweetmeat as she feasted her gaze upon the King of Navarre and his witty courtiers. She wore a staring apple-green hood and tippet scalloped round the edges, and over the tippet a black cat's-skin mantle. She was hideous beyond words, with her shiny red cheeks and incipient beard, but she had paid for a tuppeny seat and was enjoying her comedy—kings and princes and love at first sight, you couldn't get all that for tuppence outside the playhouse.

One of the Lord's Rooms was filled, but not by lords. When the best Rooms were not taken up Master Burbage would invite writing gentlemen to witness his new shows. They were seldom complimentary, and often never thanked him, but it was dangerous to affront them by neglect.

Bryan had settled down to his dialogue with his page, cut and thrust stuff to cover the exit of the King and court. As the courtiers came off into the darkness of the wings, Field looked up and winked encouragingly at Will. Dick made a face at him. They all wanted him to descend. He shook his head again. The page was just going to sing, the musicians had raised their instruments and sat awaiting their signal.

There was a calamitous hitch after the Spaniard had withdrawn amidst cheers. The Princess of France and her ladies, escorted by a stock character, one of those

lords who explain the plot to the audience, ought to have been ready to sweep on as soon as the song was ended. Will could not see the entrance where they should have been gathered. He could see nothing save a gaunt empty stage. Jeffes not ready again! He knew it. He could picture the scene behind the opposite staircase, Sinkler tearing his hair, Gabriel yawning insultingly, all the boys biting their lips and all the grown players fuming. Perhaps Jeffes had got nose bleed or hiccups as he did at yesterday's rehearsal. He might have gone out into the backcourt to be sick. The little beast drank spirits. No, at last they came, a rush of coloured silks and flower scents and the incomprehensible audience was clapping. Oh! the carnation silk gowns worn by the damsels in waiting, Burbage had said they would fetch a clap. Burbage had been right about the female clown too. Poor Sly had never got a laugh. They were clapping the carnation silk gowns louder than anything yet in the play.

It was a good thing for Will that he had other irons in his fire these days, for after half an hour of it he knew that his first comedy was not going to shake the town. He was at work on six tumultuous poignant old plays during his evenings at home now. He had been writing when St. Saviour's sounded three strokes this morning, bringing him back to muddy old Bankside from a sunlit land where gondolas swam into the dark mouths of clustering marble gateways and palaces of porphyry and serpentine.

Scene: The frontiers of Mantua. A forest. Enter certain outlaws.

Scene: Milan. Lawn before the Duke's palace.

Scene: A city in Illyria and the sea-coast near it.

Scene: A wood near Athens.

Burbage spoke of using two of these plays this season. One of them was going well, the other had no face—it was a chronicle piece, full of sound and fury signifying nothing—its widowed princess was a puppet. The only moving thing that happened in it was a young prince having his eyes put out, and that never came to achievement. Burbage said no matter, press on and finish, the subject is liked, and we have the clothes in stock.

Home was still the Bankside. Burbage had spoken to him about that, and said that now he got better pay he ought to move to a more reputable quarter. He would have liked to move, but by staying where he was he could just manage to send home twice the sum he had hitherto been able to forward monthly to Ham Sadler for the family at Stratford. He had begun doing that directly he got his wages raised, without much consideration for himself. However, he had satisfied Burbage's qualms by telling the worthy manager that from his window on the naughty Bankside he could see nothing but feet. It was quite true. The single room he hired from a scissors-maker was three parts underground, it must have been part of a wine-cellar once, he supposed. Its window was on a level with his shoulder, and through it he could see the feet of passers by, a quaint spectacle, and one not calculated to upset any man's morals. The wench who made his bed and swept his room was a poor uncouth creature hired to look after the whole house. She seemed to transfer most of the dirt she roused on to her own person. He could honestly say that he scarcely knew Doll's face. He began to write every evening after the heavy traffic and noise in the scissor shop had died down, and before the patter and halt of the street walkers' chopines and the stumble of the drunkards began. It was quiet in

his shadowy Bankside room, that was why he preferred it to any of the other places he had tried. When first he had come to London he had been unable to sleep for the noise. He had stifled in attics and gone singing empty in good ground floor rooms. He remembered the first house he had ever entered on Bankside, such an error. . . . Nowadays people did not seek to impose upon him. He had grown paler, got the London look. He thought he had grown very ugly, his hair so thin on the top and such pouches under his eyes. . . .

He awoke with a start and a pain in his lame leg. A blast of trumpets was sounding, followed by strains of loud music, a French composer's notion of a Russian air played by a band of five Italians, two Germans and one Englishman. But that was the signal for the entry of the Muscovite mummers, Act Five. *The trumpet sounds: be mask'd; the maskers come.*

Fuddled with sleep he sat stroking the ache out of his cramped leg, while it dawned upon him that he had slept, had slept out three acts of the first showing of his own first play. He had slept, crouched on the cold gallery stairs with his arms wound round his knees and his head propped against the hard hand rail, while six feet below him eighteen players had been acting for dear life and at the top of their voices, assisted by incidental music from lutes, hautboys, sackbuts and viols. The thing sounded unbelievable, but he had managed it. Dimly he recalled confused memories of an annoying voice keeping on reciting high flown blank verse, a stupid persistence of clapping and giggling when a man was wanting to get his rest. He looked up and found his bearded lady sitting in the gallery opposite. She had put away her candy bag, her tippet had gone an-

other colour with dusk, and she was thumping with both hands on the gallery rail in front of her as if—God bless her!—she owned the Theatre. It was as he rose to his feet to go downstairs and hear how things had gone that he noticed the chief Lord's Room was now occupied.

In the tiring-room Mother Spero and half a dozen other people were waiting with the King and courtiers' top clothes over their arms, ready to nip the Russian habits off the mummers, who had to re-enter as lords of Navarre within five minutes of their exit disguised as princes of Muscovy.

Something disastrous had occurred in the third act, and Sir Walter Raleigh himself was amongst the audience.

"He's made a quick voyage then," grunted Condell, "for yesterday I heard he was in Guiana."

Will asked what had befallen amiss in the third act.

"Marry, can't you guess? Sly stole the house while Gabriel was singing. Blistered ass! There'll be trouble. Stand aside!"

The Russians charged in, laughing and talking, unafraid of being overheard, for their exit had been the signal for a clamour of applause and there was music to follow.

"The sire was right. 'Twas a riot!" cried Dick, tearing off his outrageous hat and clapping it on Condell's head. "Mouse dear," whistling to Mother Spero, "cast me my bonnet. Gods! how these clothes reek. We shall be followed home by dogs to-night. Bryan I trod on you in the shooting scene. I am sorry."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," begged Sinkler, poking in his head, and in the silence that followed little Jeffes' whine could be heard from the stage questioning the stock courtier.

The maskers accomplished their change in good time, and when they were gone the room seemed empty, though nobody in it could stir until Mother Spero and her minions had gathered up from the floor those wild-coloured robes so stiffly wadded that they stood on their hems as if there were still legs inside them.

Will's first comedy was drawing to its close, and in spite of his phenomenal slumbers he was tired. He sank down on a bench and closed his eyes while little Gilburne's voice, piercingly sweet but produced straight through the nose after the manner of your London urchins, began the first of the Songs of Season which Burbage had shifted from the middle to the end of the play. "Spring," it was called. Before next spring little Gilburne would have coughed his last and be at rest beneath the sod. Will turned his face to the dirty plaster wall scribbled with players' names and messages, and listened to his own words coming from just this side of the grave.

When daisies pied and violets blue
And lady-smocks all silver white
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo! . . ."

Gabriel sang the answer, the Winter Song for bass voice:

"*When icicles hang by the wall*
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail
And Tom bears logs into the hall

And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipp'd and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
Tu whit, tu whoo! . . ."

"Will!" Heminge was shaking him by the shoulder. "Look alive! The Lord's Room is stuffed with earls and they will be round here any moment. They want to come behind and see the tiring-rooms and tread the stage. How the poor live. You know their way."

"Earls?"

"Marry, two of them are earls, the rest may be kings or knaves for aught I know. They came in near the ope of Act Two. Must have their dinner in comfort. Spoilt Bryan's meeting with the Princess. You must have marked them. All the galleries did."

Will said: "I was asleep."

The Jig was being danced now to a merry harmony: *Go from my window,* accompanied by whoops from the audience. The play was ended. In a moment there would be the silence whilst the players knelt upon the stage, and according to tradition, solemnly prayed for a blessing upon their Ruler, their Patron and their Company. Strange voices were coming down the corridor. There was a hiss of silk scraping against plaster walls, a rattle of light spurs.

"Look out," gasped Condell, kicking a pair of pants out of sight. "Here they come."

"Does Burbage know?"

"Couldn't say. Dick's with them, thanks be to God."

Dick was at his best:

"This way, my lord. I must warn your lordship you will find us in a great flux behind here. Nay, Sir Tony,

I do not need warn you. That shift out of the Russian clothes has to be done jump. . . . My father will be heartily glad to hear your honour thought so. Ay, they are tangible. To be sure your lordship shall . . ."

Asking to handle the clothes which looked best at a distance and were commonly not over clean, was one of the worst habits of gentlemen who came round after a show to call upon the players. A marvellous thing the way they always seemed to take for granted that they were bestowing a pleasure, whereas, had they but known, their visits were anything but welcome to most of the hungry jaded performers. Sometimes when they had ladies with them they would send for a chosen player to the Lord's Room, and when they had got him had no word of sense to fling at him—fiddling with their masks and fans: "How is your beard kept on?" "What made you first think of the stage?" Grr! They ought to see Sly, who was so much better off the boards than on, giving his imitation of a great lord visiting a poor player. And they expected you to be witty while they said things like: "And do twelve of you truly change in this small room. Lord! Lord!"

There were but four of them to-night, which was a mercy, and one was the Queen's favourite, a notable triumph for the Theatre, but though the leader he had not been the host of the party.

"Lord Southampton," hissed Dick in Condell's ear, "liked the piece. Get hold of Will."

The Earl of Essex, that gentleman with an alabaster complexion, a head of waving chestnut hair and a scarlet-dyed beard that only served to make his handsome face look the more youthful, disclosed splendid teeth as Mother Spero, curtseying to the ground and muttering in her own soft tongue, gave into his grasp

some of those outlandishly cut and coloured robes that exhaled an Orient perfume. He did not know that the old Neapolitan as she backed from his presence turned towards him a little charm which she wore in her shrivelled bosom, a scrap of coral in the shape of a hand with thumb and two fingers stiffly outstretched; nor in her turn did Mother Spero know that a gentleman who had travelled in her country, saw and smiled to see her action. Sir Edward Hoby, a curly-headed fantastico born dog-weary, leant against a wall with arms folded on his breast and lids drooped. He always left the talking after dinner to Sir Antony Feild, one of your gallants that will not grow old, a haunter of playhouses, indeed he seemed to own the tire-room, for he gave its inhabitants welcome to it.

"Master Bryan! I am glad to see thee well. Oho! thy face is valanced since I saw thee last. Comest thou to beard them all in the Theatre? Welcome my young lady and mistress, welcome! By'r lady your ladyship is the nearer to heaven since I saw you last by the altitude of a chopine. I know thee. Jeffes the name is't not? Nay, I bear a brain." (It was little Gilburne, too shy to say so.) "But where's your best actor, my namesake I would say, your Field? I have been told he is of my house, and I hold it for truth."

Nid Field had been stripped to the skin and washing when the order came for him. In patters poor Nid, with his wet hair hanging in elf locks about his peaked face, one linen shirt tied around him for a loin cloth, and another, richly-embroidered and provided with gold tassels to fasten it at the throat, gaping open and displaying a hairy breast at which the knight stabs laughing. "Fie! fie! what a son for a preacher art thou? When I tell them at Whitehall that I have a

kinsman a player they will never believe me. 'Nay then,' say I, 'and one that acts very well.' But tell me. Here's a thing has long troubled my wits. If you and I shall be kin how come it that I spell myself Feild and you spell yourself Field?"

Something of the old jester's licence was allowed to players. Nid shrugging into his shirt, brought off an answer that turned the laugh right about from his shivering person. "I can't tell, sir—except it be that my branch of the family was the first that knew to spell."

The young nobleman who had been host to-night had not yet opened his lips. He was taller than anyone else in the room o'ertopping even the Queen's glossy favourite, but his inches seemed to make him shy. When Nid brought off that quip he turned sedate eyes of admiration upon the player, eyes hare-coloured and as startled as a hare's. When he was interested their dark pupils dilated flooding the iris. Realizing perhaps that it was his duty to speak first, he bent from the waist and addressing the nearest person to him asked in a quiet voice with great simplicity: "Is it true that this was the first theatre built in London?" Condell made his reply as conversational as he could, and the young man after paying due attention to the answer, carried on bravely: "I have been to the Rose already, but not to the Curtain. I like this house better than the Rose. The acting there is very good, especially Alleyn's, but their pieces are not as good as yours."

Like a true friend Condell inquired quickly:

"May I bring before your honour the author of to-night's piece? He is a new writer and this his first comedy." "Ay," said the young earl, "so I hear. Do so," and a second later: "Master Shakespeare? Sir, I

should like to grip you by the hand in gratitude. You have given me two happy hours."

A wonderful thing the training of young lords. This one could not be nineteen and looked less, yet here he was with a difficult name pat on his tongue, offering his hand like a prince of the blood, throwing into his fresh voice the eager ring of sincerity. Princes who can smile like that have been responsible for thousands of deaths by sword and axe; they should bear labels round their necks: "Beware! Humble folk, take care! Put not your trust in princes."

He had not spent two hours in the playhouse, of course. He had had his dinner in comfort and arrived in time for Act Two. A distinct scent of expensive wine, good leather, sweet hair oil and tobacco had entered the tiring-room with the party from the Lord's Room. The usual smell of the theatre—so unmistakable that you could recognize it with your eyes shut—was composed of garlic, smoke from cressets, damp clothes and ale.

"We came too late," he confessed surprisingly. "I should have liked to have seen the whole of your comedy. When is it to be given again?"

An awkward question that. A new play that had not pleased might never be given again. Will was aware that the bills were out for a fortnight ahead.

"It will be given again next Thursday, my lord," said Dick's voice.

"I must be there," said my lord, "reserve a Room for me," then to the author again: "This was your first play, I hear. How did you like it?"

Will smiled. "My lord! Out alas! I slept."

"Slept?" The pupils dilated in those questing eyes. "What? Did you not care for the fate of your comedy?"

"I prefer to write verse, my lord."

There was a pause, then my lord said, blushing to the roots of his hair: "I should like to see some of your verse. Will you bring some to my house?" He bowed, and the interview was over.

He was over-tall, but the tailors had made a good business of him. Four months of London had taught him something of what was being worn and what was to be done. No doubt he had found willing instructors. Evidently he had come to the playhouse on horseback, for his dress was a riding-suit of water-grey velvet, silver-laced, with boots of Spanish leather, and a gold-hilted rapier slung from a belt of gold links. In his hand he carried a tall white leather hat slashed with grey velvet, with silver thread cable-ends overhanging its stiff brim. His hair did not curl by nature and was not curled by art. He wore it combed back from the forehead with no parting, and it fell below the shoulders behind and on either side, straight as rain and brilliant as a beechwood in autumn. He was lady-faced as yet, without beard or moustache, and had the stainless complexion of one who has lived deep in the country upon the best fare sent up to the Great Hall from a score of well stocked manor farms. His features suited his frame, being thin and fine drawn, there was a flush of colour in his high cheekbones, and a long pensive nose slightly overhung a mouth sentient and supple, of the type that announces the ascetic and also the rake.

He was marked out from his companions by an air of innate courtesy and over-refinement, and nothing could have betrayed his inexperience better than his choice of friends, all men calculated to set him off to the least advantage. Lord Essex, iron-framed, superbly assured, claimed first attention of all in the

room, and when the Owner of the Theatre arrived spoke two sentences typical in their arrogance. "Your little comedy ought to be shown at Court. 'Twill be caviare to the general"—giving with one hand and taking away with the other, giving little in fact except the impression that the speaker was the man who could get things commanded at Whitehall.

The noble guests did not stay long, it was not to be expected in an atmosphere so harassed and steamy, and their departure was certainly hastened by an accident, although they took that as part of the evening's entertainment and went off laughing.

There had been black trouble in the musicians' gallery to-day and Burbage had smoothed a thundercloud from his brow as he entered the tire-room. While he grimaced acknowledgment of the honour done to his house, his house was being shaken by unseemly sounds of dispute, his own name was being invoked louder and louder, and finally flying footsteps approached.

Tearing his attention from Lord Essex, he signalled tremendously "Not in here!" the words even escaped his lips as the door was rent violently open from outside and two weird figures rushed in uttering war cries. Signor Martinelli, the chief musician, in one of his demented furies had chased to bay the young German who played the first lute. The Italian was screeching that if Burbage was closeted with the Queen herself, he did not care, and the young German crouching with murder in his eyes growled: "My lute! Mine! Give back!"

Sir Edward Hoby, never at a loss, though nursing a bruised elbow, was the first to speak, inquiring in perfect Italian what should be the matter here, a question which was answered by the Signor springing

into life and with a triumphant hiss bringing down upon his staring victim's head the fellow's own instrument, a thing fragile and very delicately made, through which the German's thick head made way like a cannon ball through pastry. For an instant the heavy youth stood blinking at the company with the ruins of his instrument sitting round his neck in splinters, then as the Signor was carried out elbow-high, kicking and screaming like a woman, he shambled aside and sat down trembling upon a bench. Dick, improvizing magnificently, said that now their lordships saw how players lived, and Lord Essex leading a laugh, what had looked like being a tragedy was passed off as a second Comedy.

Two mornings later Will took himself to Southampton House. For the sake of appearances he had not gone on the first possible morning after his invitation, but he judged that if he delayed more than two days my lord might have forgotten him. That my lord should have remembered to give orders for his admittance was too much to be hoped for, and he knew that he must be prepared to overcome resistance in getting to his patron.

My lord proved nobly housed and well guarded. His London home, a Gothic framework with Classic overlay, more like a palace than a private residence, stood almost opposite Gray's Inn, its front upon Holborn and its side wall running three-quarters down New Street. Behind it gardens of many acres and a small village of stabling and other offices stretched south towards Temple Bar. Southampton House presented to the eye a gatehouse, two courtyards, a chapel, a forest of massive chimneys all sending up smoke against a pale blue spring sky, and several turrets with curved roofs

of copper weathered to an opaque emerald hue. At the lodge in the gatehouse upon noisy Holborn there was a stout porter slow of hearing; a quick page was deputed to carry the guest through the first courtyard into the second which had grass in its middle, and at the foot of a dark staircase in a corner of this quadrangle a couple of tall footmen were yawning their heads off.

Will was shown into a small chamber just inside this entry. It was on the ground floor, and through its oriel window of leaded glass with a brilliant coat of arms at the top, he could see the soft lawn outside, towards which pigeons were winging from their nests under the turret roofs. A red velvet tablecloth edged with shaggy gold thread, lent a spurious air of warmth to the small wainscoted room which had no fireplace, a disappointing fact considering the number of chimneys visible. A plaster ceiling ornamented with a design of roses encircling a coat of arms shone whitely overhead.

Out of the spring sunshine it was decidedly cold this morning, and at the end of ten minutes Will began to limp up and down the room, chafing his fingers. There were whisperings going on outside. He heard a low voice saying that he had arrived on foot. There was no horse or groom left at the lodge. Presently a figure entered and he swung round, but it was only a middle-aged man of foreign appearance dressed in black, possibly a priest, he thought. He knew the family was Papist. This person stole in, saying that he had come to look for a book which he thought he must have laid down in here. The only book in the room was Will's own manuscript lying boldly in the centre of the red velvet table-cloth. The furtive entrant had a good look at that, and a good look at Will as he slippered round on his mock search. As he took himself out Will turned

to bow to him, and was startled to surprise a glance of definite malevolence.

It was quiet in here after the rush of Holborn; to obtain such peace in London spoke of great wealth. Outside numbers of servants in royal-blue liveries with grey leather belts and leggings passed to and fro across the quadrangle. They bore on their left arms a version of that silver cross between four silver falcons on an azure ground, which was repeated in one quarter of the coat of arms in the dyed glass window and again in the centre of the plaster ceiling.

At the end of half an hour a servant burst in carrying under his arm a bundle of rushes and a short broom. Perceiving Will, he begged pardon and said that he didn't want to hurry him. "You won't," said Will, and that fellow went out in a hurry. Will heard him whispering to the footman on the stairhead that he feared he had made a mistake. It was a gentleman in there waiting for my lord, cursed me to the devil. Best try and find a groom of the chambers perhaps.

They may have tried to do so, it may have been chance; as noon was announced from several churches startlingly near by, there came a sound of footsteps at the run, and a voice that raised echoes in the quadrangle called out to know why he had not been told before. A second voice, at once suave and hectoring begged: "Softly, my lord, softly. In your lordship's own good time," but shaking its owner off, the young earl charged into the room alone.

He had been down at the bottom of the gardens playing tennis with Boretti, an Italian master of the game who came every morning while he was in London to give him an hour's instruction. He had never been told that Master Shakespeare had arrived,

and was horrified to discover that he had been put in a chamber without a fire this sharp morning.

"'Swounds! your fingers are icy. I am heartily vexed. Myself I am somewhat overwarm, as you may see." He had run straight up from the court with his cloak over his arm. He was bare-throated, and his fine linen shirt embroidered with gold thread—just like the one in the property basket which Nid Field wore when he was acting a lord—was sticking to his chest. He was wearing short plain cloth breeches, white stockings and low-heeled white leather shoes stained at the toes. His whole person was glowing and his bright auburn hair, which he tossed back impatiently as he bent to the table, clung damply to his brow. "And is this it? You have brought your poem?"

A servant was hanging in the doorway waiting for permission to speak. Advancing and bowing, he delivered as quietly as possible a devastating message for a patron of the arts to receive. The countess his mother had sent to ask had my lord earl taken care to change his shirt after his exercise?

"Tell your lady I am just about to do so. Dry nursed!" explained my lord as the servant withdrew. "That's how it is here. A man might as well live in a gaol. I must feed God knows how many scores of serving men here because my grandsire who built this house ever did so, yet there is not one fellow to bring me word when a welcome guest arrives. You would squeal to hear what I have to lay out every season patching those roofs, yet when I want some small thing built for mine own pleasure, such as a tennis court, there is, forsooth, no money forthcoming!"

"Nevertheless your lordship has a tennis court."

"Oh! I told them that if I could not have that I

could not stay in London. That fetched them. Abhorred place! Everyone at Whitehall looks fatter and fatter each time I drag myself thither, and small wonder! Even on a horse it takes nigh half an hour to reach true country, and these cobbled streets are the devil on a wet morning with an over-fed steed beneath one. They tried sending out my horses before I rode o' mornings, getting a groom to take the edge off 'em, you know. I soon stopped that. Have you a kindness for a proper steed? I can show you something in my stables then when I have shifted this shirt. We go this way."

Out of the dark room which had seemed much brighter since the entrance of its eager owner, the couple emerged into the sunlit quadrangle and turned left-handed, my lord swinging along until he noticed that his companion limped.

"I am sorry! I go too fast for you!"

"Ay, my lord. This," clapping the short leg, "is the child of a wet morning and a fresh steed."

"Ha! I am sorry. I thought mayhap you had got it in the wars; but there are no wars worth the name these days. Look! My father clapped this arcade on to the face of this sober grey fore-court by way of ornament, like a rich carcanet on to a withered lady. All those bare niches should be filled with classic busts—Dian, Plato and the like—were not the ship that was conveying them from Italy at the bottom of the Mediterranean. We enter again here. Ha! you like this ascent? I believe it is held stately."

He hurried Will up a monumental staircase polished to a mirror-like surface, highly awe-inspiring to a lame man, rising in flights of eight shallow steps, each step cut from a solid block of oak, and supported by massive

hand rails intricately patterned in low relief. At the head of every flight came thick newel posts cut into the likenesses of wild men holding aloft painted shields.

Gigantic tapestries showing emperors at war covered the staircase walls, and a succession of lesser chambers through which they passed on their way to the great gallery were all wainscoted and hung with pictures framed in ebony, ivory, mother-of-pearl and tortoise-shell. Some of the lesser chambers, furnished with soft chairs brocaded in tinsel and velvet, carved daybeds, inlaid cabinets and bouquets of scented flowers standing in vases of gold-dusted Venice glass, had an intimate and charming air, but their owner walked through them finding them unworthy of comment. He wanted to hear things about the Theatre. What had befallen the German musician who had given them all such cause for mirth two days ago? He had to repeat that question twice before he got an answer. One of those tragedies too familiar to players had followed that comic interlude. The young German, whose lute had been his only means of livelihood, had gone home and hung himself that night. Heminge and Will, both misliking his look, had met on his doorstep the next morning, too late. My lord colouring asked whether the man had left any family, but there was nothing of that kind to be done. The morose and sickly young German, a newcomer to the Company, had been quite alone in London.

While he went to change his clothes he left Will in the Great Gallery which ran a distance of some four hundred feet along the whole length of the southern façade and overlooked the flower gardens with their trim beds and cold statuas. Its ceiling was covered by a pattern formed of light plaster ribs, gilded and enclosing lozenges picked out in bright colours; though the

moist spring garden looked chilly it was pleasantly warm in the Great Gallery, for half-way down it came its chimney piece surrounding a rose-red cave in which a tree trunk was burning. Bearded caryatids supported a chimney shelf at the height of a man's head, and above it were the owner's arms in coloured marbles. The many windows of the gallery were vivid with heraldry too. Coats of arms set forth in all the hues of a butterfly's wings cast trembling reflections on the mellow oak floor. Although my lord's father had been of the new nobility, his mother's family claimed descent from the first King Edward and a princess of Castile.

My lord's own coat with a vacant shield of greenish white glass by its side, was the last of the show.

Cuthbert Burbage had said: "A luxurious young dog! Marry, to write your name WRIOTHESLEY and call it 'Rosly,' is that not luxury?"