

## CHAPTER XVI

### WELL-A-DAY!

THAT Christmas Cuthbert performed the one daring act of his life and gave London a nine days' wonder. The business took exactly nine days.

The old Theatre had stood deserted and empty since the Company had returned from its summer tour, and actors in rival playhouses were making japes about it. When Cuthbert got private intelligence that Alleyn, his landlord, was plotting to seize the building and hold it by law, he lay awake for a night and then went to see that rare woman, his mother. When he had been closeted with her an hour a messenger was sent to summon Peter Street, head carpenter, to join the consultation, and presently Peter Street arrived, a small bandy-legged man with enormous rust-coloured knuckles and eyes fierce as those of a ban-dog peering out under shaggy brows.

The lease of the Theatre was up, and Alleyn had gone into the country till the New Year. There was no time to be lost. Next morning Peter Street engaged his gang and at dusk Ellen Burbage, as well as the most of the Company, arrived to see plot defeated by counter-plot. The Theatre was swiftly and skilfully dismantled and its makings carried to the Bankside. The mother of the Burbages stood in her steeple hat and muffler watching her husband's darling structure being knocked to pieces against a sunset sky and stoutly remarked that

## WELL-A-DAY!

this doing liked her well. Some adherents of Alleyn arrived too and tried to come to blows with the workmen, but Cuthbert had forbidden bloodshed. Anyone that interrupted the proceedings was told that Master Burbage had the law on his side and these timbers fell heavy. The truth of the last comment was obvious and no broken heads were reported. Everyone would get the pottle of sack promised by Dick. Prentices ran by the side of the wagons carrying the swaying timbers of Burbage's old playhouse over the river. They cast up their flat knitted caps and cheered so that people put their heads out of windows to ask what the matter was. When Alleyn entered Shoreditch on a smoking steed a fortnight later, there was not enough left of the Theatre for two dogs to quarrel over. He retired to set down his case upon paper and the Burbages wished him joy of it. The Theatre had been pulled down in nine days. The Globe took five months a'building and Peter Street, that man of few words, smiled to see that nearly a quarter of a century later the first playhouse he had helped to build was still being used as a model. The Globe had a roof of thatch instead of tiles, which he did not approve; he acknowledged that its sea-water coloured paint and malachite tinted pillars were a change from the old dogged red, and certainly there was much more gilding everywhere. He thought it too large and doubted morbidly in old Mistress Burbage's hearing whether Master Dick would ever be able to fill it. She often came down from Halliwell Street on spring afternoons to keep an eye on the workmen, which she did, sitting upon a pile of timber and solemnly knitting, as undisturbed as one of the swans sailing down the river of which the new playhouse would have a lovely view. When a Shoreditch gossip wondered if

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

she did not find the Bankside a nasty quarter she looked over her spectacles and said with dignity: "Neighbour, we are altering that." In her opinion there was nothing that her family could not do. She declared that the success of the drama in London was entirely due to the labours and infinite pains of the Burbages; if William Shakespeare's name was mentioned she said: "He is a civil young fellow and writes fast, scarce blotting a line. I found him."

It was to her that Peter Street came one morning turning his hat in his hands to growl out at length that Master Henslowe wanted him to build a theatre for the Admiral's Company, like the Globe only away up in Cripplegate. The Globe had eclipsed the old Rose and the Admiral's men would have to move and build again. The contract would mean a great deal to Peter, but he dared not accept it without asking permission from the Family. The Family, relieved at having ousted all formidable opposition from the Bankside even before they had opened their own house, gave Peter his leave and settled down to success.

At last they had got what old James had died working for, good premises, a united Company and fair plays to show. The golden stream that had only needed a channel began to flow in through the painted portals of the new Globe, and the sharers began to grow rich quickly, a state of affairs that had only one disadvantage. Will, who was their mainstay for plays, persisted that as soon as he had made a sufficiency to retire upon he was going to do so. He said that this life was killing him, but he had always said that. Well, belike he would not make old bones. One could not see him sleeping under the mulberry tree after dinner or teaching the grandchild to walk. Cuthbert tried to move

## WELL-A-DAY!

him by common sense and Dick by pathos, but he could meet them both on their own ground.

One day when Dick had asked him what on this earth he thought he could find to do when he had left writing, he said gently that he would show him. The Company had been on tour in Stratford at the time and the hour was three o'clock on Sunday afternoon. Will led Dick down to the river bank. Now the Bancroft at Stratford on Sunday afternoons always presented the same picture, and this is what Dick saw. At intervals of ten yards solemn citizens in their sabbath blacks, each with his pot felt tited over his nose and his chin well ground down into his clean ruff, sat enthroned upon cross stools with fishing rods between their fingers, their unblinking gaze fixed upon the glassy stream before them and by each one's side a watchful cur and a glass preserve jar hopefully filled with water. They stayed like that for hours and hours, shouted Dick waving his arms about. He gave Cuthbert his word that Will and he had stood watching them for nigh twenty minutes, and during that time not a single figure had stirred. A man that had been the companion of the first wits in London! The thing was pitiful!

Stratford had begun to follow him to London too, and he encouraged it. There were two old schoolmates of his, aldermen now, and the most long-winded ever vexed the dull ear of a drowsy man with a twice-told tale. They came up and stayed at the Bell for weeks together plaguing Will to help them get their town exempted from the malt tithe. He entertained them at the best taverns, and once at the Falcon when there was a sudden cessation of general talk the voice of the elder—Quyny—was heard asking with his best eagerness yet, how cheap were women's knit hose sold

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

in this town? They sat mum but seemingly content, country town fashion, for long periods together and then came out with things like this:

"Will! your mare hath been put in Sturley's pasture, but will not tarry there preferring Master Perry's flower garden. Ay, and at dawn 'twas, last time she wandered. He gets out o' bed and I gets out o' bed and through the broken hedge we curses one another, the dewy nettles stinging our bare shanks meanwhile. Will! you must have her put elsewhere, that you must!"

The younger worthy kept an account book hanging from his girdle in which he publicly entered every penny as he spent it. "My own diet this Shrove Tuesday. Item, one shoe to my mare." He was bashful and led Will aside to hear a piece of good news. Into a window he stumped and then holding out a hand to be shaken blurted: "Judith's big! Ay!" Nodding and grinning as if no man's wife had ever waxed heavy before.

Will instructed them how they must offer fees to the Master of Requests and his clerks, and the Queen's solicitor and his clerks, and the Officers of the Signet, and packed them into a barge to take them down to Richmond, and at last complaining that their purses were much weakened with long lying in this town, they went home with their petition granted. Eight months later Quyny was back needing a loan of thirty pounds.

Will went no more to Southampton House. It was shut up as the Earl had never lived permanently in London since his marriage. As might have been expected, the lady in that match was proving far more beloved than the lady. Eight weeks after their wedding she had been disappointingly brought to bed of a daughter, whose portion the young sire had mended

## WELL-A-DAY!

by losing eighteen hundred crowns at play to the Duc de Biron in Paris on the night that he got the news of her birth. This was a fair specimen of what was to follow. Adonis, who had honourably wedded a fair and gay mistress, found himself saddled for life with what he had never wanted, a slavishly adoring wife. It was said now by her false companions in the Coffer Chamber that the Countess had long desired her husband and been ready to go to any lengths to achieve him. Like the lapwing she had piped in other places to draw attention from her nest. But for the strong aid lent her by her cousin Lord Essex and his sister she would never have succeeded in her passionate quest.

Lord Essex had accepted the post of Deputy in Ireland, which had been cautiously refused by Sir Walter Raleigh and two other gentlemen. He took with him to Tyrone his new kinsman Lord Southampton as Master of Horse, an appointment cancelled by the Queen who gave ear to her favourite's enemies as soon as he was out of her sight. Letters to and from Essex House were opened, for it was suspected that Lady Rich was in treasonable correspondence with the King of Scotland. The Countess of Southampton's epistles to her Adonis made rare reading.

She spent her days, it would seem, living mumpishly down in the country, worshipping her husband's portrait, and washing away her beauty with an infinity of tears. She yearned to bring her absent lord an heir, thought she was doing so, had to confess her mistake and humbly beg his pardon and patience. She mourned that his letters to her were so strangely holden by winds and bad weather. When she got one she sent a thousand thanks for such a jewel of content. His little

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

daughter, who after him was her only joy in life, was growing like him, she dared to hope. Lady Rich, who was the child's godmother, said it was of great beauty. Page upon page she blotted begging him excuse her bad writing, her lack of news, her poor jests, her longing for his bodily presence and anxiety for his well-being and comfort. She signed herself his faithful and obedient wife.

The two Earls were no more fortunate in Ireland than they had been upon their last expedition together. They ran into a quarrel with Lord Grey de Wilton, were conciliatory to the nation they had been sent out to oppress and evaded orders from home. When they returned Lord Essex was imprisoned by the Queen's command, and only released upon plea of extreme illness. In the dark days of the next winter London was full of disappointed soldiers of the Irish campaign and those of highest birth held meetings in one another's houses, which were noted by the Queen's spies.

Death was busy clearing the stage of the great characters of her reign. Within a few weeks she had lost her best counsellor, Lord Burleigh, and her best enemy, Don Philip. A false report of her own death got about, and as she tapped up and down her gallery aiding herself by an ivory crutch she was heard to mutter in Latin: "dead but not buried." She seemed to be losing her courage and listened to absurd stories of conspiracies against her person. Her favourite's ill-wishers told her that he had designed to bring over a wild army from Ireland to depose her. The fate of Richard II fascinated her and when a learned historian was brought into her presence she asked him if he knew of any true picture or lively representation of that monarch.

Christmas was kept with more than ordinary festivity.

## WELL-A-DAY!

There was ingenious entertainment of Dutch ambassadors that before dinner spoke not very wisely and after dinner not very warily. The maids of honour performed a mask after supper one night, the lady maskers each choosing a partner to dance a measure with her. The fair Fitton, who had her own reasons for wishing to appear merry, went across boldly to the Queen and wooed her to dance. The Queen looked up with a haggard and searching eye and asked her maid what character she personified. "Affection," laughed Fitton, smoothing her blooming flower-wreathed skirts. "Affection," said the Queen. "Affection is false!" Yet she rose and danced.

Court ladies, the only female-kind in the world that dared attempt so scandalous a thing, acted so well when they performed a mask, that one day Dick Burbage, pondering the matter, asked Will what he truly thought would be the result if women played on the common stage. Proper Cuthbert put a stop to that sort of talk, saying quickly: "Scratched faces."

Will at this time lodged with a Huguenot family in Cripplegate, and it was his daily custom after performances to walk back from the Globe over London Bridge, supping in Bread Street on his way. He never spent more than an hour in the tavern, and if he was invited to join a party that would sit late sent civil answer that he was in pain. His mornings were often claimed by rehearsals and he never could dine in company on the day of a performance. The hours between supper and midnight were his own for work. He had only endured six months of living a player's life amongst players on the Bankside. The noise of that quarter and the continual interruptions by fellows who dropped in to pass an hour had helped to drive him

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

out. Now he seemed to have settled into a sedate and frugal habit of life, working industriously towards the goal of his retirement. Already when the players had first come to know him he had presented the appearance of one who has been through the mill. Those seven years of dark struggle before he had got advancement at the Theatre had marked him, sapped him. And then in the hour of his success he had fallen into the net of that darker amour and had not spared himself.

He had emerged now a most agreeable companion, very good company, of a ready and pleasant smooth wit, keeping his fracture to himself like a gentleman of the great world. He had given the servants of the Globe two polished comedies this season, one of which had been shown in Middle Temple Hall on Twelfth Night.

He was just quitting the playhouse on a mild February evening when the book-holder came running to ask him return to the tire-room. A party of noblemen had arrived and he was asked for by Lord Southampton.

The company played that fire-brand play *Richard II* by special request the next day, and the day after that the very gentlemen who had asked for it were themselves acting in a tragedy. Lord Essex's plot, so long smouldering, had come off at last—like a damp rocket. From an early hour on that black Sunday morning the streets of London were disturbed, and the wildest tales filtered down to the Globe playhouse.

The plot was doomed from the first, for a traitor had betrayed the rebel Earl's projects to Sir Robert Cecil. Already at ten o'clock the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice with their men were applying for entrance in the Queen's name to Essex House. They

## WELL-A-DAY! ,

were admitted and held for hostages, while the Earl sallied out into the streets at the head of about three hundred of his deluded followers crying aloud that England had been sold to Spain by Raleigh and Cecil. "They will give the crown to the Infanta. Citizens of London, arm for England and the Queen!"

The fallen favourite wanted them to assist him in forcing his way to the Queen's presence, but the citizens of London refused to be interested in the quarrels of Lord Essex. Some stray shots were fired, one of which passed through the favourite's hat.

With cold dusk his followers began to desert him. The streets were barricaded with chains and carts and he had been proclaimed a traitor in three-quarters of the City. There was nothing left for him to do but to make his way home.

Essex House was now besieged on all sides and his hostages had been released. A wondering mob gathered in the Strand to behold the strange sight of the Queen's favourite and his boon companion Lord Southampton standing on the leads of Essex House, waving their naked swords against a smoky sunset sky. Night fell and the artillery arrived prepared for action. At Whitehall the Queen was refusing to go to her bed until she knew that the traitors were taken. About ten o'clock on promise of civil treatment for himself and his friends, Lord Essex surrendered his sword to the Lord Admiral and there were white-faced leave takings of tearful ladies in the hall of Essex House. The next day all the prisoners were carried by water to the Tower awaiting arraignment.

Their trial which came on eleven days later, was the best free Show offered to London since Sir Philip Sidney's funeral, and drew audiences from the play-

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

houses. It drew one of the sharers from the Globe, for the Company that had played *Richard II* was concerned to clear itself as to that suspect proceeding. The Lord Admiral's men were chanting that the new Globe would be razed to the ground by Royal order. Farewell, Will Shakespeare!

The trial was staged in Westminster Hall, and for days before a fascinated mob watched planks, scarlet cloth and canvas properties for this tragedy being carried in, and listened to the dull clamour of mallet and chisel. The Show lasted from nine o'clock in the morning until six at night, and a world of people forewent their dinners sooner than lose a word of it. When the Earl of Essex perceived his great enemy, Lord Grey de Wilton, amongst the judges he jogged Lord Southampton's arm and laughed. He was in a brave mood, but the younger earl appeared very downcast.

Mr. Augustine Philipps was called about noon.

"You are Augustine Philipps a sharer of the Globe Playhouse, Southwark?"

The audience craned to perceive an olive-hued long-faced gentleman of middle-age, black-haired, black-eyed, dressed in a black doublet slashed over knitted red silk, with onyx buttons, and a falling collar of lawn so clear that you could see the pattern of the figured damask shining through it. On the little finger of one of his long hands he wore a gold signet ring. There were lines running from his sensitive nostrils to his severe mouth, but he carried a clear brow. His appearance was in his favour, nothing raffish or down-at-the-heel about this player. Until he opened his lips and spoke in thrilling tones that carried better than those of any former witness you would have written him down a lawyer, or a doctor of repute.

## WELL-A-DAY!

He was asked to describe what had happened in the tire-room of the Globe Playhouse on the night of February the eighth.

He said that he had been on the eve of departing after that day's performance, when he was summoned to the tire-room by the book-holder. There he had found Sir Charles and Sir Joscelyn Percy, Sir Gelly Meyrick, Sir Charles and Sir Henry Danvers, Lord Monteagle and several other gentlemen speaking to some players of the Company to which he belonged. The visitors said that they had all dined together at Gunters under Temple Gate. Ay, their condition had betrayed excitement. He had thought that mayhap they had some merry wager toward. They had come to ask for a certain play to be given at the Globe the next night.

Was this a usual request?

• Very usual from great gentlemen.

At such short notice?

The notice would not be too short if the play was one to which the Company was already accustomed.

What was the name of this play?

It was an historical piece drawn from the chronicle of Holinshed, publicly acted by the Right Honourable the Lord Chamberlain, his Servants, above forty times during the past nine years. It was entitled *Richard II.*

Was it true that when this play had been published a certain scene in it had been omitted?

In the playhouse actors only got their own parts and cues copied out for them. Until a piece came to rehearsal they often did not know its drift. He had never had in his hands either the whole book or a printed copy of this play.

Was Mr. Philipps the chief person in authority to whom this request was made?

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

He was a senior sharer in the Globe Playhouse. The actors to whom the visitors had been addressing themselves previously were not sharers. The gentlemen probably had not understood this difference. They had all been conversing confusedly when he entered to them.

What gentleman had asked him to order this play?

He had spoken mostly with a jolly knight whom he believed to be Sir Gelly Meyrick. He had never seen this gentleman before.

And what had been his reply to their request?

He had endeavoured to dissuade them.

For what reason?

He had told them that King Richard was a piece so old and so long out of use that they should have small or no company at it.

How was it that he described this play as out of use when it had been performed above forty times during the past nine years?

"When a piece is too old for London we frequently perform it in the courtyards of inns and in halls of country towns during the summer."

Did Mr. Philipps know that this play was one held offensive by many persons?

It had never taken so well as some other chronicle plays. He had attributed that to the absence of fooling.

What part had he played?

Bolingbroke.

Was he aware that that was a character unpopular in some quarters?

He held it abhorrent himself, and believed that all loyal persons must do so.

Was that his reason for attempting to dissuade the visitors from demanding this play?

## WELL-A-DAY!

Nay. He had himself been playing Cassius that murdered Cæsar that afternoon. "I thought it too old a play to fetch an audience."

"Yet you consented that the Company should play it, at short notice and at the request of strangers?"

"We were offered forty shillings beyond our profits. Thus we should not lose by the affair even if we got small attendance."

"Was there any disorder in the playhouse on the occasion of this performance?"

"There was some complaint in the gallery that we had abandoned a comedy formerly promised for that day."

Mr. Augustine Philipps was dismissed unshaken, having saved his Company from suspicion of seditious intent and craftily avoided having to utter either the name of William Shakespeare or of Harry Wriothesley, Lord Southampton.

He then sat down to watch the remainder of the trial, oblivious of the fact that down on the Bankside there were eyes and ears straining for his return and several of his fellows unable to eat a morsel until they heard how things had gone. He told them when he did arrive that it had been an actor's duty to stay in that hall and hear the Show out. He had learnt more of use to him that day than in ten years past.

He said that it was the fairest hall in which ever he had played, and of the best size, nigh three hundred feet long and seventy broad. The eye could not penetrate on that day of February river-mist to the height of its noble oaken roof given to it by Richard II who had been deposed within its walls. Wallace, the Scots hero, Lord Cobham, the Lollard and Chancellor More had heard their death sentences here. He watched little

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

Cecil shifting his uneven shoulders in his fox-furred gown, his liquid eyes large with the pain from which he was not often wholly free, having been slightly deformed from birth. Master Bacon who had received many kindnesses from the accused earl, and now appeared against him, had a lively hazel eye with a reptile's look, he thought. Lord Oxford still careless and comely, but growing stout, wore a doublet of shot green and purple taffeta well buttoned, that changed colour with every breath he took. He kept on his knee his tall bonnet with a tufted plume at the back, shifted and yawned and whispered continually to Lord Grey that ninny soldier.

The rebel Earl had been the hero of the piece though. While he had held the stage nobody had looked or listened elsewhere. His enemies had brought him to bay, he was a lost man and he knew it, yet he defended himself boldly, short and straight of speech as those of reckless physical courage are in general. When he heard his doom he crossed his arms on his violet doublet, with his red beard and superb sapphire eyes he made the best picture of manhood in that stately hall. It was darkling by then, and from the great waterway of old London crouched in fog on her mud banks, came riverside noises and the cries of urchins running with torches. The Earl cast his sparkling eye over the many tiers of scarlet-clothed seats, the beards black white and parti-coloured, the baleful faces of all this assemblage arrayed against him. He said: "I am not a whit dismayed to receive this doom. Death is as welcome to me as life. Let my poor quarters which have done Her Majesty true service in divers parts of the world, be sacrificed and disposed of at her pleasure."

Everyone had been struck by Lord Southampton's

## WELL-A-DAY!

look of youth. "The poor young Earl. What age hath he?" He had eight and twenty years and was the father of two daughters. He looked more like a bachelor of one and twenty. He had spoken well but much too long, and as a man that fain would live. He had pleaded hard to acquit himself, but all in vain, whereat he had descended to entreaty and moved great commiseration, but though he was generally well liked he was held somewhat too low and submissive, too loath to die before a proud enemy. It was remembered that he was of the new nobility. His title was but two generations old.

"Good Master Attorney," said he, "what do you think in your conscience we would have done to the Queen if we had gained her presence?"

"I protest upon my soul and conscience," quoth Master Attorney, "I do believe she would not have lived long after she was in your power. How long lived Richard II after he was surprised in the same manner? The pretext there also was to remove certain counsellors, yet it shortly cost him his life."

"I never drew my sword all day," said the young Earl. "I am charged with having carried a pistol. I had none when I went out, but being in the street and seeing one that had, I desired it of him and had it, but it had no stone and could not have harmed a fly. At my return to Essex House I did what I could to hinder shooting. We are accused of having attempted both the Court and the Tower. Neither was done. Where then is our treason? It is true we did consult together at divers houses about my Lord of Essex, his freedom from impediment, and that there was no hope for him to reach the Queen's presence and give her true information."

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

He was attired in a satin doublet of a honeysuckle shade called lady's blush, much liked that season, but carelessly arrayed. When he heard his death sentence he crossed himself after the manner of Papists and his fingers found a small cross of garnets which he wore inside his shirt. He said in a famished manner: "Her Majesty being God's Lieutenant on earth, I hope she will imitate Him in looking into the heart."

There was a mighty rabble waiting to hear the event of this trial which had lasted nine hours. When the news came out many ran hastily into the streets to see the Earls taken to the Tower with the edge of the axe carried turned towards them. The Earl of Essex walked a swift pace, bending his face towards the earth and would not look up although some spoke directly to him. Lord Southampton bowed from time to time in answer to salutations and appeared bewildered.

The favourite's death was appointed for Ash Wednesday. Up to the last moment few believed that the Queen would sacrifice her Essex. The eve of his execution came, and she sent for the Lord Chamberlain's Company to divert her with a comedy. Ash Wednesday dawned, a raw morning of yellow fog with moisture dripping from bare branches and such a cold air puffing in that those who opened casements thinking: "This is the day," shut them again hastily and set them down to eat their breakfasts in silence. While the deed was done on a damp swollen scaffold on Tower Hill, the Queen amused herself by playing diligently upon the virginals.

Sir Charles Danvers and Sir Christopher Blount were next beheaded: Sir Gelly Meyrick and Master Cuffe were hung, drawn and quartered. Still there was no date advertised for the death of Lord Southampton.

## WELL-A-DAY!

He was lodged in the Tower, the Tower where his father had suffered alienation of mind from long detention. His wife, once so well known by the Queen, could only harm him by asking for an interview with her old mistress. She was advised it would be fatal. His lady mother drove distractedly from one great house to another. Sir Robert Cecil sent down a secretary asking her to write. She hurried home and tried to do so, but had to explain: "God of Heaven knows I can scarce hold my hand steady to write." People passing over London Bridge looked eastwards and wondered whether the last execution within those heavy walls had already taken place.

After a weary period of waiting it was announced that the Queen had graciously commuted the Earl of Southampton's death sentence into one of imprisonment for life, and the silence of the grave closed over him. Presently there was a rumour that he was very sick, and the Countess-Dowager entreated that a doctor acquainted with her son's body from birth might be allowed to succour him. The old doctor was admitted, and reported that the prisoner was afflicted with a quartern ague and swellings in the legs. An elbow also was affected, and he must keep his arm in a sling.

There was a song sold in the streets of London deploring the fate of the traitors. "Well-a-day!" it was called, and being set to a taking catch was speedily popular. It was declared treason and some arrests were made, yet after dark it was still to be heard for many a month.

Hatched in that hard winter of discontent came a piece of drama well suited to the times, *The Tragical History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, an old play that had belonged to several Companies and suffered

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

various revisions. It was years since James Burbage had passed it to a poor player, bidding him make what he could of it. This one now took it up together with an enormous weight of sorrow, touched it and it lived. . . .

There was a thief at the Globe! Someone who must be a member of the Company was selling mangled versions of its most popular plays to pirate printers, who were producing them without licences. Now the book-holder's copy of a manuscript was, as a rule, the only complete text in existence. No actor had more than his own part and cues. Yet three years ago a corrupt form of *Romeo and Juliet* had appeared, palpably set up from the book-holder's copy. Where he had scribbled stage directions, such as *Whistle, boy! Knock!* and *Play, Music*, the idiot printer had put them all in. Once or twice he gave the name of an actor instead of the character he was playing. *Enter Will Kempe*. The effect was mirth-provoking, but Heminge who now managed the finances of the Company laughed less than the author who had the right to be the more affronted. Heminge gave orders for the book-holder's copy to be kept under lock and key and that trouble ceased for a while.

Heminge was proud of the way he had ousted the brachygraphy men and the listeners from the Globe. The brachygraphy men were poor devils who arrived with a pad of paper done up innocent so as to look like a bag of nuts or such like. They chose a dark corner in the uppermost gallery and, keeping their pads on their knees, took down as much as they could of a piece as it was performed. They came night after night and since no pen could hope to keep pace with the actors' speech they had a system of dots and dashes represent-

## WELL-A-DAY!

ing whole words and letter sequences, quite unintelligible to the general eye. When Heminge had caught one of these wretches and seized from the whimpering fellow a toss of papers, he had no notion whether he was holding stuff belonging to his Company or scraps of half a dozen plays culled from all over London. He was one for work and liked puzzles. He sometimes spent an evening engaged upon the cabalistic pages of the brachygraphy men.

Listeners were more difficult to deal with. They put nothing down on paper, trusting to prodigious and highly-trained memories. If you found the same fellow goggling over the gallery listening with all his ears to the same piece seven times over, you might feel a producer's pride. But if he came to the same piece more than seven times he was a listener, depend upon it. Heminge said with feeling that nobody could come to the same play above seven times without he was paid for it.

His lynx eye, his tap on the shoulder and whispered request to come outside into the yard for a moment were the terror of the pirate-printers' devils. When he had got them outside he accused them of all the seven deadly sins. They always told the same tale of course—starving—wife and children—could have written fine plays themselves, had been actors in Tarleton's days, or till they lost their teeth, or, if they were younger than that, till mother had become bedridden or father taken to the drink.

Now a worse trouble than any of these had arisen. A thief from inside was at work. There were, said Heminge, only two remedies, either they must catch him red-handed or they must get before him and themselves print their own plays. No Company liked to have

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

its new plays printed. They thought it against their profit that people could enjoy in the study what they ought to be paying for at the theatre. Heminge tried craft. He got Roberts, who printed their playbills to apply to the Stationers' Office for licences for many of their best pieces. Roberts was not to publish them, he was not a publisher, but his action served to make what was called a blocking entry. Pirate publishers would not pay for pieces that might appear in an authorized edition at any moment. To Heminge's disappointment, *Henry V*, one of the plays for which he had taken out a safeguard licence in May, was being hawked in the streets in June. There was no choice but to go to a genuine publisher and unload a dozen or so of the Company's best plays while money could yet be made from them.

Very few of Will's works had been given to the public. After the Oldcastle trouble he had been obliged to allow printing of his amended version of that chronicle piece with the fat knight's name altered to Falstaff. Getting a play ready for the press was a weary business and the author made nothing out of it himself. When he had once sold his manuscripts to a Company he had parted with all rights in them. He was now asked to revise five of his works for publication. The day of his retirement seemed to be receding.

On an April morning Heminge came to him in triumph to tell him that he thought he had got the thief at last. *Hamlet*, their latest and best success, had appeared in a pirates' edition and he had got hold of a copy. By comparing it side by side with the author's manuscript he had been able to trace what portions of the play the thief had got perfect. There were big patches of the wretched old play exactly as it had been

## WELL-A-DÁY!

before Will had touched it. But there were also long perfect passages. Heminge had worked out that the pilferer had acted as Marcellus, Voltimand, one of the players, the second grave-digger, a soldier in Fortinbras army and an ambassador from England. He seemed to have played or understudied Laertes too, but Pope was always so careless; he might have left his part lying about.

Delivering to Will the book-holder's copy, bound in an old vellum wrapper once part of a thirteenth century Latin manuscript, and stitched together by bodkin and thread, he asked the author to run through it together with the pirate's effort. Will knew the Company as well as he did, and would be able to remember who had played the parts perfectly reproduced. Within a folded paper, which he begged Will not to open until he had drawn his own conclusions, came his list of suspects.

A sickening business, and one that would eat time. Will limped up the stair of his Silver Street home, threw open the door of his outer chamber and cast down upon the table the twin *Hamlets* and his cap. As he did so a young fellow lounging in the window-seat turned round and gave him a shame-faced good morning. For a dreadful moment he thought that he had got the pilferer in person come to offer himself up and plead for mercy. Then with a pang of scarcely less dismay he recognized the features of his own youngest brother.

Ay, it was Num, run away from Stratford. "As thou didst thyself," he explained waggishly. His bashfulness soon wore off. It had only been caused by watching Will coming up the street looking so much like all the rest of them here in his London clothes. Num was in love with London and wanted to be shown Harry

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

Hunkes, the new performing bear at Paris Garden, the outside of the Tower, the Star, the Pheasant, and the Two Cats gaming houses and, civilly, a piece at the Globe. And what did he propose to do when he had seen all these wonders, asked Will with a sinking heart. The answer was as he feared. "Become a player," nodded Num. "I think," with a glistening eye, "that I could act."

The lad was distressingly well favoured as he sat swinging his legs in the window-seat dressed in his best Sunday suit that seemed to have thicker seams and rounder corners than those worn in London. His shoes were patched and his ruff was unclean, there were country roses in his cheerful cheeks, and on the bridge of his round boy's nose a sprinkle of freckles brought by country sun. A better example of your simple young master come up to be plucked by the jays of a wicked city could not have been created. A good-looking younger brother of guileless aspect was a luxury that Will could not afford.

He asked with severity: "How camest thou to quit thy home?" The answer to that was easy. Num was nigh one and twenty now ("Thou hast the air of sixteen," said Will brutally), and there was nothing for him to do in the shop which was, he said loftily, but a small business. He had left behind him a message acquainting his mother with his intent ("which is more than thou didst"), had haggled with Greenaway the carrier, hiked from Oxford and arrived in London two days ago. "Where hast thou dwelt?" "Down on the Bankside nigh thy own new playhouse. There are some strange guised companions there, and bona-robas ready to pluck a man by the girdle, the handsomest ever I have seen. I devise to live there."

## WELL-A-DAY!

"Thou wilt dwell with me," said Will heavily.

"I should be a great care to you," said Num. Only he had but sixpence left.

There seemed no more to be said upon that point for the time being, so Will called over the banister to beg Madame Mountjoy send up some pippins with his bread and cheese—he had a performance at two—and settled down to ask for tidings from home. Num was not communicative. New Place was the only thing in Stratford of which he cared to talk.

"The staircase is finished in thy great house. It looks brave."

Will asked after his parents, his children and his sister Joan. She was as merry as ever she would be, said Num, until she got a husband. Will said that it was a marvel to him that she had never married. "Marry, how can she?" said Num, "without Hart can scrape together the fee for the hired wench?" Asked to translate this Greek, he said that Joan would be wrath if she knew that he had blabbed, but she was safe in Stratford, praise be God,

Marry, this was the long and the short of it. Hart was the little hatter that had affected her this ten years past. He had a little wee face, a small hay-coloured beard and the spirit of a mouse. Joan and he wept together on the stairhead when he came to departure from his Sunday evening visits after Mother had gone to bed. Joan was a dutiful daughter and had said that until a wench could be hired to take her place she could not leave a house in which both parents were ailing and aged. Little Hart was trying to save up towards this end and Joan tried to do fine sewing and got Goody Clerk the pedlar woman sell it for her on the sly.

And can she sew?" asked Will, remembering his

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

sister's ten thumbs. Num said: "I pretend to no skill in these matters, but all that she does looks woollen at the edges to me. If I were a gentlewoman (God be praised!) I would as soon hang myself as spend money on it. She pricks herself and bleeds upon it and then weeps to wash it belike. The parents know nothing." "Why didst thou never break this matter to me before?" asked Will. "Why didst thou never break any of thy privy concerns to us?" said Num. "When I have made a great fortune as a player mayhap I too will send home sums a quarter. Pah! I know thou dost." "This must be remedied," said Will. Num nodded, tired of the subject.

Will had reason to write to his mother. He had recently received from the Heralds' Office something which gave him far more pleasure than the original coat of arms granted three years ago. He had again made application in his father's name, this time for permission to quarter Shakespeare with Arden. His mother who had forfeited her birthright by wedding one who was no gentleman might now demand to be restored to her old dignity. She was now the wife of a gentleman approved.

It was easy when writing upon such an occasion to say that a gentlewoman ought not to wait overmuch upon herself.

The sending of money to provide Henley Street with a second servant worked like alchemy. Within a fortnight he got a reply in the hand of Judith Sadler, but dictated by his mother, telling him that his sister Joan, now in her thirty-third year, was towards a husband at last. Mother took great pride to herself that she had never interfered to spoil this matter which had now been hanging on and off full many a season.

## WELL-A-DAY!

At one time the bridegroom's father had wished him to wed elsewhere, getting better dowry but less of good birth mayhap. Master Hart was an honest little creature though no eagle; he had spoken to your father with proper observance. They were going to church next Wednesday nothing hindering them.

Will wrote again asking what his sister would like for a wedding gift, and Joan, very much herself, sent back open word by Greenaway the carrier that she would be needing a bed. Hart and she were going to live under his father's roof, so they would have no lack of furniture, but if it were not too much to ask she had a high fancy to bring with her her own Great Bed. Wagging a finger at Will, Greenaway delivered the last of his message; "Cherubs," she says.

Joan got her bed, carved and painted with cherubim. There was one at each corner within the canopy, so that she could lie and look at them. Their cheeks were hawthorn red, and they had fine black moustachios, altogether a look of the Italian quartette that performed in the musicians' gallery at the Globe. Will took Num down to the warehouse in the City where all the best beds in London stood ranged in rows, an expedition which wearied the bride's youngest brother unspeakably.

This young man was showing himself fully as great a burden upon a careful elder brother's conscience as ever Will had feared. Three times during his first month in London he came home to Silver Street roaring drunk, and once came not at all for two nights. After great difficulty Will had rather bought than begged for him a place in the Company performing in Henslowe's new playhouse safely beyond the northern walls outside Cripplegate. Num was slow in studying his parts, and

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

amazed at the inescapable hard work awaiting any junior member of a Company. When July came he refused to return with Will to Stratford, and went upon tour with the Lord Admiral's Servants to Bridgnorth and Shrewsbury. He was still in London eighteen months later when there came a holiday for all players, as the theatres were ordered to close in view of the Queen's illness.

She was dying at last. When people heard that she had not changed her gown for a week they knew that this must be the end. She could not eat. She held in her hand a golden cup which she often put to her lips, but in truth her heart seemed too full to need more filling. She would not go to bed. Sir Robert Carey, a kinsman of hers on the mother's side was sent to persuade her to take to her couch. She had shrunk so that she seemed no larger than a monkey as she lay twisting, fully dressed, upon a pile of many coloured cushions heaped on the floor of her withdrawing room. Sir Robert made the customary courtier's speech of hoping he found Her Majesty well. She took his hand and wrung it hard. "No, Robin," said she. "I am not well." A great confession from her. At length they got her to bed, but she refused all medicines.

Her ladies revealed that she had fallen of late months into a settled melancholy, sitting withdrawn for hours together staring at the floor with rayless eye, her finger in her mouth. They began to see things.

Lady Guildford, half crazy with long watching, went out of the sickroom one night to take the air, leaving her mistress asleep, her breathing scarcely audible. Three rooms off she heard the tap-tap of an ivory cane and saw advancing towards her a figure she thought she knew. She did not linger! She shut half her hoop

## WELL-A-DAY!

in the bedchamber door and thought talons were clutching her. On her brow the pendant pearl leapt no wilder than her heart in her fair bosom. Disengaging herself she tip-toed to the canopied bed. The figure there was still lying as she had left it, sunk in the same motionless lethargic slumber. Her rushing entrance had disturbed the dying creature. Its lips moved. Lady Guildford bent her ear and fancied she caught the name of Essex.

At three o'clock in the morning two whole days later it was discovered that the Queen had ceased to breathe. Sir Robert Carey's sister drew something from a listless long finger within the curtained Great Bed, stepped quietly to the window and dropped down to a gentleman who was lurking in the shadows below the death-chamber a sapphire ring.

It must have been a sign long agreed upon. For years past everyone of prescience in the south had been in correspondence with the King of Scotland.

This prince was just going to his rest for the night when he was told that a messenger stained with blood from a fall and nigh daft from sleeplessness had arrived out of England.

Sir Robert Carey had ridden a better race to the north than ever gentleman before, and had outstripped the express of the Privy Council by twelve hours.

He was led reeling down cold passages in a palace whose windows looked out on hills jagged and lion-shaped. The air up here was nimble, and the gentlemen who hurried him along spoke with strange accents.

In a gaunt bedroom where candles were almost burnt out and the mirrors on the walls were dark as lake water he found the prince he sought, standing unbraced in front of a spluttering fire. He fell upon his

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

knees and saluted his new master by the titles of King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland.

King James lolled his tongue and asked, like a Scot, how should he know this thing was so.

"Sire," said Sir Robert, "I bring you a blue ring from a fair lady."

And when he had looked upon the sapphire the King said: "It is enough. By this sign I know you for a true messenger."