CHAPTER XVII

O BRAVE NEW WORLD!

A LITTLE before the Gild Chapel, as you went south towards the Old Town, came a long brick wall with a kind of porch in it, under which was a solid oak gate, well studded with nails. The brick wall turned the corner opposite the chapel and ran halfway down a quiet by-street leading to the river. Walker Street after it crossed the Bancroft became a mere yellow lane with dog-roses in its hawthorn hedge and marish flowers in its ditches. A smaller painted wooden gate of narrow slats pierced the Walker Street length of the wall. This was the garden wicket. By which ever entrance you came into New Place a green lawn was the first thing upon which your eyes lit. The Great Gate opened into a small courtyard filled by a square plot of grass, up the middle of which ran a grey flagged walk to the front door. The house stood back inside its high wall, only its dormer windows filled with diamond-shaped panes set in lead, being visible from the street. Directly you stepped inside the gate and closed it behind you a stillness like that in a cloister or a college was noticeable, and the green plot seemed to have the eager tint peculiar to turf in such places.

It was the handsomest house in Stratford, and everyone had been to visit its owner as soon as word had gone round that the workmen were out and he was in at last. Many of the visitors were simple enough to

confess that they had been brought by curiosity to see the house. Will did not resent such frankness. It seemed to him very natural that people should wish to see his Great House, and he took pleasure in leading them over it, displaying everything. He had given up travelling with his Company—now renamed the King's Company —and every year spent the three months while they toured, living at home. June, July and August were his Stratford months. He hoped before long to give up London altogether or perhaps turn the arrangement the other way round and live down here except for the three months of winter when the playhouses were busiest and performances were commanded at Court.

He had made his arrangements very well. The old nurse who had been his wife's companion and reared his children had died a few weeks before they had moved. She had caught cold going over the empty building on a sharp spring evening. She died quite happy, saying that her mistress had got the best house in the town and its most notable citizen to her husband. She had always said that he would prosper, that had she.

The rooms allotted to her mistress in New Place were well designed for an invalid's comfort. They had their own staircase and an exit to the garden, so that their occupant need never pass through the other living-rooms or into the hall. If she cared to come down to dine with the family she was welcome, but almost invariably the meat arrived to table in the dining-room with a hunk cut out of it. Then the master of the house would say gravely to the maid-servant: "Your mistress has been served?" and the maid would answer with a bob curtsey: "Ay, sir. She took a fancy for her food half an hour past." Will always alluded to his wife as

the mistress, although she never did a day's housekeeping. They went for a solemn walk together once a week, always the same day, Sunday, and always the same way—down Walker Street, along the river bank to the church and up through the Old Town back into Chapel Street, a quiet middle-aged gentleman bearing on his arm a haggard wild-stepping creature with remains of a ruined beauty in her prominent features.

When the old woman had died Will had found himself in a difficulty. Her daughter Audrey had gone from Stratford years ago. Soon after the loss of her child—who had been taken at the same time as his only son—she had gone with a soldier to the Irish Wars—poor trollop! Will did not like the idea of leaving his wholly female family alone nine months of the year in a large new house. Besides, there were Susanna's young men. Already his elder daughter had a following. They filed in through the gate of New Place in every stage of hope, dejection and despair. They came with messages from their parents, moribund plants for the garden, the altered date of the churchwardens' meeting, any excuse that would serve to gain them a sight of my young mistress. Will could not see the attraction himself. At least he said that he could not. Susanna discussed her admirers with him, pointing out their defects.

Since his mother had become a widow she lived quite retired in the old home in Henley Street. Part of it had been burnt down in the Great Fire that had wrecked the centre of Stratford. It was therefore not too large for her and her son Gilbert who was still a bachelor, and nothing would persuade them to leave it. In the nick of time Fortune favoured Will.

The newly-appointed Town Clerk was a cousin. He was also a Puritan, which was not usually a commendation to Will's favour, but upon this occasion seemed an advantage. Master Greene had recently married a wife of his own way of thinking, they were poor and Letitia was expecting a child. When Will offered them a home in New Place they jumped at the chance. Letitia undertook to companion Mistress Shakespeare and see that the maids did not neglect her. Susanna was not to be deposed from the post of housekeeper. Thus Will knew that if anything went amiss while he was in London he had a man on the spot who would send him tidings. Greene had no imagination, but he was not easily flurried and he knew how to obey an order. The arrangement worked much better than might have been expected.

Will's girls had both been marriageable some years, and he had not lifted a finger towards making matches for them, a thing for which some people blamed him. Still they would have good portions, and the elder at any rate did not look like being left an old maid. The two girls were, as Ham Sadler had unromantically described them in their youth, hen and dish-faced, all the same they were far from ill-favoured. If you had no prejudice against sharp features Susanna might pass for a right fair maid. She imitated her Puritan cousin's attire, and made herself neat little gowns of dove grey and leaf brown with clean linen collars and muslin caps, which became her very well. She had a demure regard and a mouth so small that it gave her face the effect of being buttoned up. She was much warmer-hearted than she looked, and other maids liked her, in spite of her having too much pocket-money and being able to read Latin. She was a formidable housekeeper and by

no means a contemptible scholar. Her father enjoyed her company.

He had come home in May this year. Last year it had been June. He said that next year he hoped it might be April. Susanna said that it sounded like the cuckoo, and quoted the old rhyme to him:

"'*In April come he will,*
In May he comes to stay,
In June he changes his tune,
In July he makes to fly,
In August go he must.'

"And thou didst lay thine eggs in other folks' nests too," she said clapping two printed books of plays against one another.

As usual he had brought a great box of books down with him, and Susanna was in his library dusting them and putting them into shelves while he looked through the pile of letters waiting on his table. She was having to shift some old volumes onto an upper shelf and was standing on a rush-seated chair with a high back, talking to him as she went about her business. There were no laws at New Place against disturbing the master. At Stratford he rather seemed to welcome interruptions, and if his bat-eared neighbour Combe, or Ham Sadler or even the fellow that cleft wood and tended the garden, arrived in his chamber disposed to talk, he sanded his sheet, put it away and turned to them with a smile.

Everyone in Stratford was going to the new doctor now! (He had been in residence over eight years, but in Stratford that would be accounted new. Not until he had practised for above quarter of a century in their

midst would the citizens regard him as a permanency.) Judith Sadler thought he could work miracles, but then she would. She had made Cousin Greene send for him when things had not gone well after little Anne Greene's birth. He was a Puritan like the Greenes. He would probably be coming in this evening, and would like to see you.

Will who was reading said: "I do not ail. Why should I see a doctor, more especially a Puritan one?"

"Greene," said Susanna, "thinks he saved Letitia's life, eke little Anne's. You might like to thank him. He can talk of other matters besides his science and is held to be a good companion," dusting vigorously she added in a smaller fainter voice, "and very well-favoured. He does not dance."

Will lowered the sheet he was reading and took a glance at her. She flipped open the book she was dusting and began to study its title page.

"Is this yours?" she said stepping down elaborately, bringing it across to him.

It was a copy of Sidney's *Arcadia*, in an edition published in London fourteen years ago. It certainly did not look as if it ought to have found its way to Will's Stratford library. In the top left-hand corner of the title page was an owner's signature, written in a large hand with all letters the same size, capitals no greater than the rest.

"What's down here?" asked Susanna pointing. "Someone has been playing."

At the foot of the page was a long word that looked like gibberish: HEELNIRZYABETH. Two hands had been at work here. The letters in the name "Elizabeth" were much smaller than those of "Henry." After a long pause Will said: " 'Tis a lover's fantasy.

You get him to inscribe his name first, then you slip yours snug between. I brought this book down to work upon. There's a tale from it I need. I never opened this copy before. It must have been lent to me years ago by my lord Southampton. Put it up safe. I must return it to London."

"Who was this love of his so lodged in an amorous twine?" asked Susanna.

"My lady Countess, his wife," said Will disappointingly.

"Oh!" Susanna took it back and looked again. "Well, 'tis a pretty fond conceit, save that her name is too long and hangs out at the end. Mine would do the same. Look, they started amiss down here. They had to scratch out and do again.

"Ay," said Will. "They that did this were making merry. They made a false start."

"There's the doctor," cried Susanna.

A tall man who looked young to Will's tired eyes was shutting the porch gate carefully behind him. His dress was dark and severe and on his head he wore a black chimney-pot hat with plain black tassels overhanging its brim. Dr. John Hall was two and thirty, broad-shouldered, a man of thews. He had the calm eye and wonderfully clear complexion that seem to be the prerogative of his sect. A trifle frigid, mayhap. You could not imagine him in side-coats refusing his porridge or defying his pedagogue. As he drew near to the house he scanned the parlour window, but Susanna was in the library, a room shut up nine months of the year. Looking almighty grave he proceeded up the path and reached the front door. His knock was firm.

"I must go," said Susanna. "They will be wanting

me." She thrust the book upon her father, ran to cast a fresh log on the fire—he always let his fire down—and flew out of the room.

Half an hour later when Dr. John Hall put his head cautiously round the library door he looked into a chamber lit only by firelight. Its owner was lying sunk back in his seat by the writing-table in the night-green window, one hand shading his brow, the other trailing over his chair-arm towards the rushes. Well, the gentleman had been on the road early this morning and by all accounts led a busy life in London. Dr. John made to withdraw but someone outside pushed him in and shut the door behind him. The latch clicked spryly and the figure turned. Dr. John advanced much at a disadvantage. He had never read any of the gentleman's plays and had never entered a playhouse. . . .

It was dreadful waiting out on the cold staircase. Thrice Susanna ran down and laid her ear to the library door. She heard voices, they did not sound as if they were quarrelling, but she could not be sure. She could not imagine what they should have to say to one another that should take so long a time. She fancied her father laying bare a whole family history packed with dark secrets hidden from her inexperience. She knew—old Jugge had told her—how nearly she had been illegitimate.

The chiming clock in the hall told six o'clock, quarter-past. He must be staying to supper. It was while she was in the kitchen giving orders for an extra dish that she heard the front door slam. She caught her father as he limped back across the hall and surprised herself by bursting into tears on his bosom. "Oh! What's the matter? What's amiss?"

Will led her into the library which was pleasant with the scent of a sinking wood fire. They must have been sitting all this time in the chilly window. There were two uncomfortable seats drawn up to the writing-table. The fine new linen curtains worked in coloured wools with designs of fruit and foliage and spotted beasts were still parted.

Nothing was amiss. She could scarcely believe it. "But you talked so long!" Will rubbed his palms gently together and said that they had been having a right interesting conversation. Their subject had been sleep-walking. Dr. John had been able to tell him some things he had been glad to know. He said that it seemed a pity that he had troubled to travel to London for experience, since Dr. John staying in Stratford had found out every whit as much without budging.

"I thought you talked of me!" "Nay," with a smile, "that took us very short time." "And you put him out without sending for me. He went away without bidding me good-den!" "I led him to the door as a host should. We were held fast in talk. Belike he cared not to gainsay my blind intention. But he comes again to-morrow. I have asked him to dine. Come, come, stint those tears for which thou hast no reason." Patting her shoulder Will announced: "I like thy man very well. Certainly thou shalt have him, and take my blessing for bringing me a son that shall make me a good companion."

Dr. John did that. With mixed feelings Susanna watched them during the happy days that followed, pacing the garden side by side deep in consultation. Medicine and the stage had struck up another inevitable friendship. Dr. John seemed to have almost as much to say to her father as to Susanna. Father did not seem

to care a whit that John disapproved of playhouses and John never showed the surprise he must feel at some of father's pleasures which were truly childish, such as planting trees himself, making great labour, while the hired man gave audience and advice.

Will took his daughter on his arm to the church by the riverside on a fair June morning, and Susanna all blushes and tender alarm was given to a grave bridegroom. She settled as blithe as a bird on a bough to the profession of the rising doctor's wife, keeping meals hot till all hours, losing her bridegroom from her bed in the middle of the night, getting him home dog-weary when there was some festivity towards she had much affected. The new mistress at Hall's Croft was always ready to see an untimely white-faced visitor and give soothing promise that the doctor should get the message the moment he came in, she knew where he was and could send him a written word. He should be round directly. Her brisk wit and scholarship stood her in good stead. Dr. John who had done well for himself in choosing a wife liked by everyone, had a home which was the best advertisement for a medical man. By the time that Will went back to London in the autumn he knew that he was to be a grandsire.

London was much changed under her new ruler. Neither the King nor his wife could honestly be called inspiring figures. The queen consort was undeniably inferior both in education and intellect to the royal ladies who had preceded her. She was good-natured, short-tempered and rather handsome in a bold mannish way, with aquiline features, a big nose and a large head of fair frizzed hair. Like her husband, she was devoted to hunting and never happier than when dressed in a man's jacket and a hard grey beaver hat and mounted

on one of her cream-maned sorrel steeds, with half a dozen mud-freaked hounds laying loving paws on her skirts. She had borne seven children and buried four of them with uncontrolled lamentations, was always ready for a Show and always in debt.

Amongst writers she gave her chief patronage to Jonson, that quarrelsome fellow with a broken-up face and a great presence, who had placed his first play with Burbage's company. The servant suited the mistress. Planted in a country town with a basket of eggs on her arm she would have done very well, as a queen she lacked dignity. She set no example either in manners or dress. On State occasions she wore the costume of her predecessor's day, in its highest accentuation with every ugly absurdity exaggerated.

Her spouse was only half her size, which spoiled the look of royal processions, however he was broad enough in his pearl and peach-coloured puffed satin suits and bombasted breeches. They said he always wore a padded doublet for fear of assassination. He had a tongue too big for his mouth, watery eyes, a pug nose, scanty reddish hair and a rolling gait. His wet-nurse had been a secret drinker, but there was nothing secret about his potations. When his dear wife's brother, the King of Denmark, came over on a visit gentlemen had to carry both monarchs to bed.

He had been short of money all his life, and could not order fast enough in his fat new country. The Company at the Globe was said to be the best in England, so it became the King's troupe. He sent for his Servants to perform new plays before him at Whitehall no less than eleven times between All Souls' and Lent. A prince that had been educated by a succession turbulent Scottish divines and accustomed from infancy to endur-

ing sermons of five hours' duration on the subject of hell fire was not likely to yawn at a play. He was a pedantic scholar unappalled by the dryest deserts of research; he never forgot an old friend. London was crammed with gentlemen from the north with thin purses, suspicous natures and wry accents. The late Queen had been sparing of the honour of knighthood but King James found a profit could be made out of the business. The boy actors at the Blackfriars Theatre took their first step towards losing their licence when one of them arrived upon the stage pointing at another and declaring with a wink: "I ken him weel. He's ane on my braw new thirrty pound knights!"

The Royal couple had their differences, but this King never gave his Consort reason to be jealous of her ladies. All his favourites were handsome young gentlemen.

Fortunately there were the children, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, the Princess Elizabeth. Over them loyalty might run riot, and did. They were all somewhat alike and resembled angels, having glistering fair hair, sweet voices and bright azure eyes. They arose in an inky firmament like a rainbow, bringing gracious promise of better weather. The Prince of Wales had attained the height of six feet ere he was sixteen years old. He had a Grecian profile, and a complexion of red and white like a gillyflower. There was a great Show, a Water Pageant made in London when he came in the Lord Mayor's barge from his own palace of Richmond to be invested with his principality. Dick Burbage, the best actor in the kingdom, regardless of his dignity and forty odd years, got himself up as a marine god and had himself pushed out into the middle of Thames at Whitehall mounted upon a

property dolphin from whose bobbing back he made the hope of England a speech of welcome.

Dick who was growing fat with prosperity had married at last, a fair silly widow of better birth than himself who had fallen madly in love with Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and was discovering with dismay that Hamlet liked his bacon well done for breakfast and sometimes did not come home till two o'clock in the morning. Their household was nothing like that of a player. Dick never brought his troubles home. He brought home the Earl of Pembroke, the French Ambassador and Sir Robert Carr. The late supper parties in his richly-furnished small house were affairs of which any host might be proud—Florentine and French dishes accompanied by scented sack, served on a long table alight with Venice glass and gilt framed mazers; musicians playing softly in the window-bow and tawny tapestries glowing on the walls. Often they did not disperse till dawn had turned the glass in the lattices from sapphire to all the colours of a flamingo's wings. His fair wife had a talent for entertainment and dress, all her wits seemed to have gone into these matters. She was pathetically unable to bring her fine husband a child that would live more than a few months. There was always a little funeral or a little supper-party in prospect at Dick's home, and sometimes both. Cuthbert only had daughters. The Burbages looked like dying out.

As might have been expected, old Mistress Ellen disapproved of her favourite son's lady wife. There were a great many things in the world of these days of which this virtuous antique dame did not approve, particularly actors setting up as gentlemen, women wearing men's hats, men wearing stays and ear-rings and the

foul plays that do pollute our theatres. Ned Alleyn and Austin Philips had both bought themselves country houses and set up as esquires, one at Dulwich the other at Mortlake. Austin had died of it, she said. Will who often came to visit his dead master's widow heard meekly her strictures on New Place. She still lived in the old home in Halliwell Street and the room in which she chiefly abode with her books and spindle and spectacles on her nose looked out over a row of poplars that hid the new houses arisen on the site of London's first theatre. One of her pale daughters had married, the other died. She was much alone, and sat grey and worn as a stranded pebble that once jostled in the bed of an upland torrent lit with colour by the waters passing over it. Will had to agree that young women did not seem to be the same shape as in our young days. They were all whey-faced and lank as greyhounds. With their love-locks, loose-bodied gowns and pearl necklaces the size of mistletoe-fruit, one would have fancied them setting up as water-nymphs or goddesses. The old lady, who kept the firm figure of an hour-glass, prophesied the extinction of the human race. Not yet awhile, said her guest, for he had a daughter like all of them nowadays, yet she had whispered in his ear as he left Warwickshire that he was to find himself a grandsire ere the daffodils came again. The old dame was always delighted to hear that manner of news.

Stern unscrupulous relic of a braver age, she could not accustom herself to the ideas of a period of transition which were evincing themselves in manners as much as dress. In the old Queen's days one had known where one stood. Now Puritanism was spreading in one direction and profligacy in another; presently there

would be a storm in England. They told her that now times were freer the old type of play no longer had the power to catch an audience. Stronger meat was called for, headier wine. Let her alone, she knew what they meant and they would be the murder of the Play in England. "What scurrility was ever heard to come out of my husband's mouth," said she, "yet what plays were ever so pleasing as those in which he took the greatest part?" Will had to promise not to attempt to rival the new writers in their own vein. She knew that he patched plays with two of your young gentlemen-born poetasters these days, two heroes of Alsatia who were such inseparables that they shared the same lodgings, the same clothes and even the same mistress.

More than she found the times out of joint. The Earl of Southampton and his lady appeared duly at Court festivities, a saddened prematurely aged couple. He had come out of the Tower with a face like glass. He wore a pointed *pique-devant* beard and his lustreless hair cut short like that of a Puritan preacher. Only the haunting melancholy eyes of this graceful seldom-smiling nobleman remained unchanged in their weary search for pleasure. The little Countess had grown stout and had the commonplace air of a Dutch *vrow*. She tried to disguise her size by dressing in the darkest of rich attires. She tried to sparkle, her gipsy spirits had been her chief beguilement she knew. Her tremulous smile sat on a face from which all beauty had been washed years ago by an ocean of tears. The sadder she grew the stouter she grew, and she had so much to fret her, her husband's unhappy restlessness, his futile quarrels for precedence with start-up noblemen, the terrible delicacy of the heir she had at last brought him. They lived mostly in an Italianate mansion with a

white marble portico built for them by the fashionable architect, Horatio Pallavicino. It rose glimmering out of the Cambridgeshire flats. They had chosen the district for no other reason than to be near the King's hunting-palace of Royston, his most frequented abode. They could not afford to fall out of the graces of a second monarch, and must claim their place, and haunt Court festivities, however little delight this manner of existence brought them. The Gunpowder Plot had set all Papists a'tremble. This sovereign too sent traitors to the Tower and rack. Sir Walter Raleigh was in there now. The Lieutenant of the Tower said that never had he seen a gentleman so distracted as comely Sir Walter when he was carried to the lodging left vacant by my lord Southampton. The patriot knight tried to stab himself, and screamed so, that many heard: "Leave me not to the cruelty of the laws of England!"

Within a year of his release Lord Southampton gave the new Queen a great entertainment in his London house. She would like to see a new play. The Lord Chamberlain sent for Sir Walter Cope and Sir Walter Cope sent for Burbage, as Dick was simply called since his father's death, despite the existence of an elder brother. The trouble was that the Queen had seen so many plays. Sir Walter wrote to the Lord Chamberlain: "Burbage ys com and says there is no new play the Queen hath not seen but they have revived an old one which for wit and mirth will please her exceedingly." Its name was *Love's Labour Lost.*

There was business in plenty awaiting Will in London. He had been away nigh six months, yet when he stabled his horse in Carter Lane at sunset on an October evening it seemed but a few hours since he had got out of that yard at last on an April morning,

with a messenger from the Globe running after him with some documents for his signature ere he left town. He always had to tear himself from London leaving work undone. The truth was that you could not be both a player and a country gentleman. The life of the theatre, fortunately for most players, had enough in it to fill a single existence.

There were messengers and letters awaiting him at the Bell Inn. Dick Burbage wanted to see him as soon as he arrived. The choristers at Blackfriars had given offence to the authorities; they were likely to be suppressed. Dick meant to have that noble hall yet for his own Company as his father had planned when he had furnished it for a playhouse. Evan's lease was up next year, and Dick intended to resume ownership of his own property. Let the old knights and ladies of that choice district grumble never so peevishly, coaches should rattle past their doors and applauding shouts set their casements shaking as they sat mumbling their dead and gone scandals over their endless card games. With an indoors theatre for use during the winter months of hard weather and the finest open theatre in London for summer performances, the King's Company would be well housed.

Burbage, although he was young for it, played with great success this season a part his father had once coveted. *The True Chronicle History of the Life and Death of King Leir* was brought on at the Globe before Christmas. Will had touched another old tragedy, it stirred its giant limbs and breathed again.

He was becoming famous during his lifetime. Gentlemen invited to Burbage's supper parties asked to meet Shakespeare. When they had done so they knew no more than before. Will answered their questions

politely. He had got such and such a plot from such and such a book. He wrote fast and he feared, carelessly. Gentlemen got home and found that they had spent a pleasant evening conversing of hunting or hawking. " 'Tis a happy accident," said they, "he writes well, but nothing magical." And then they went to the Globe again and beheld a scene reflected in the mirror of Truth herself. The bird cannot tell how it flies, and thinks its own performance nothing subtle.

Will was troubled for news of his youngest brother. Num really seemed to have vanished this time. On his return to London Will had sent word to the Fortune Theatre begging Num choose an evening to sup with him. He got no reply and sent again appointing a day and a place for dinner. He mentioned the Pheasant Tavern. When Num was sulking he often left Will's invitations unanswered. A meal with a tired elder brother, even if it meant that you went away with five shillings, was not always to Num's taste. He might consent to come and dine at the expensive tavern he liked best in the town, one much beyond his own means.

Will went up there after rehearsal and sat two hours, but no truant brother came sheepishly lurching through the gaily-painted doors, not though Will waited until he was late for performance at the Globe. He sent a letter to the manager at the Fortune, and got a stilted reply that young Master Shakespeare had left the Company. He had gone with some other fellows on a tour into the Midland counties, Henslowe believed.

Whatever other troupe he had joined, he ought to have been back in London weeks ago. The mention of the Midland counties filled Will with hope that his brother might have reached Stratford tired out and stayed there. He searched every players' lodging that

Num had ever occupied and the bills and offices of every company, forcing his acquaintance on managers and players he scarcely knew by sight. It seemed clear that Num was not performing in London.

When Christmas drew near without a word of him, he wrote to his brother Gilbert saying that he had lost Num. Had they got him at home? Unable to rest until he got his answer he took himself up to the Fortune in person and questioned everyone he could stop. Somebody at length believed that his brother was in London right enough, and had got employment at the Red Bull, an inferior new theatre run up two years ago by an illiterate yeoman who hoped to make money out of players. It stood in St. John's Fields beyond the Revels Office in Clerkenwell.

Will trailed up there twice. On the first occasion the place was locked up; on the second he found an attendant who told him that some poorer members of the Company lived in a certain street in Whitechapel. He appeared at the Globe for rehearsal next morning, but an hour before that afternoon's performance word came that he would not be able to play to-day. Inquiries in Whitechapel had made him aware that his brother had been ill and some confused information led him at last to a dark lane behind the Marshalsea prison.

Num had been living all this time on the Bankside, not half a mile from the theatre where his anxious elder brother had been acting daily. He had known well enough where he could find him at any moment.

But he had been ill and ashamed.

He lay on his bed in an upper chamber with a sloping ceiling and a single dormer window that looked out on prison walls without sight of sun or moon. It was one

of those houses that gave players board but no food; they got their meat outside. A woman came in and cleaned their rooms once a day while they were at rehearsal.

There seemed not a soul in the place when Will made his way upstairs and he knocked on several doors and entered three chambers before he came to the one in which a sick youth was lying on his face on a pallet.

Num, like the late Queen, had not wanted to take to his couch. He lay fully dressed, but for his doublet and shoes. His eyes shone with fever and he talked incessantly, but winced at every question Will asked and could not answer to the point. A ragged beard greatly changed his appearance, even his voice seemed to have altered and gotten a false London twang. Only at the first moment when he started up in bed and recognized the figure in the doorway did he seem glad to see his brother.

By his side was a cup of clouded water that smelt fetid. Will put it aside, shaking his head, and Num cursed competently. One of his fellows had kindly put that water within reach ere they all went off for the day. He was so thirsty. Will touched his brother's arm and felt it blazing hot through the thin shirt. Whether it made him worse or not, he must be moved, Will could not leave him in this place.

"Listen," said Will, bending down and speaking softly, "I am going to take you home." Num began to babble of green fields. He thought that Will meant Stratford. He was like his childish self as he clutched at his brother's girdle and begged him to stay here a little longer. "I go but for a moment," said Will distinctly. "Presently I return."

In the street he hired an urchin to run and get a

coach for him. He returned upstairs and waited an hour while shadows moved around the dirty walls of that ugly, obscure chamber. Going down again he found the same boy whimpering with his knuckles in his eyes. No coachman would listen to him. The audience from the Globe had just been coming out, and all the coaches were taken up. There wasn't one to be got this side of London Bridge. It was very likely true. Will gave him another penny and told him to go to Burbage's stables in Smithfield and order a coach in the name of Master Shakespeare.

It arrived with dusk and Num swung himself into a sitting posture on his bed, and wept, and said that he could not leave this house. Will had to go down and bid the urchin hold the horse's head while the coachman came up and helped him carry down the unshaven young man so much taller than himself. Num was still in his shirt sleeves; it had been in vain to try and get him into his doublet. He shook it off saying it was so hot. The hour was now five o'clock and it was midwinter, the twenty-seventh day of December.

At the street door a termagant appeared, evoked from space by the news that she was losing a lodger that had not paid his shot. They got into the coach, Num sitting forward on the edge of his seat. It was the busy hour on London Bridge and he shrank from the flares of the mercers' shops, screwing up his eyes.

Will said: "Does the light hurt you?" and Num groaned and rocked himself to and fro. "Will you not sit back then?" asked Will, but Num must sit grasping his seat on either side, with his feet braced on the rustling straw-strewn floor.

He asked Will where they were, and when he was told said: "London Bridge!" as if fired by some

memory, "that's a brave sight. When first I came up from home. . . ."

He repeated the last word four or five times, and did not speak again during the drive, except to ask how they got on. It was black dark by the time they drew up at the house on the corner of Monkwell Street and Silver Street and the Mountjoys were at their supper.

The coachman took one arm and Will the other, and they got Num upstairs and into Will's own bed. The coachman was then sent off to fetch a doctor, the worshipful doctor who looked after the health of Burbage's lady wife. Will had met him at one of those lordly supper parties given by Dick in his fair small home, where many candles softly lit silver-gilt platters of trout, game and fruit, and the faces of a few persons of distinguished quality.

For the first time in this long day events moved yarely. The doctor had been at home and came at once in his own coach, very pleased to visit Master Shakespeare of whose plays he was a notable devotee. Will led him into the darkened bedchamber without much explanation, and one glance at the figure in the bed banished the doctor's geniality.

Num had ceased to talk and lay in a stiff position as if he was on the rack. He was fast becoming insensible, only now and then a shudder and a groan ran through him. His face was contorted and his whole torso resembled that of one of a caryatid, one of those wild men that support heavy pillars or fire-places in great houses with a classic look of agony. His colour was now ashen and where he had scratched one of his hands the scarlet blood streak seemed to make the surrounding flesh appear marbled yellowish and green. When the doctor called for more light he did not seem to care; he no

longer feared touch or noise and suffered a bleeding silently.

Madame Mountjoy was outside the door tapping and whispering to know if she could offer any aid. Will opened the door a chink and asked her to make up a truckle bed for him in the next chamber. Yes, he had found and brought home the brother she knew, very ill he feared.

The doctor touched him on the shoulder and they walked together into the day-chamber. A maid-servant who was putting a log on its fire curtsied and withdrew. The doctor went over to the chimney and stretching out his fine hands to the blaze, called to the vanishing maid to bring him some water in which to wash. He then fell silent, pursing his lips, and Will began to ask if his brother should not have some nourishment. He knew that the young man had touched nothing all day.

Looking up, looking him in the face the doctor said shortly: "Your son cannot live."

Like everyone else he had mistaken the relationship between these brothers so widely apart in years, the one so youthfully overgrown and incompetent the other with the sad look of chronic fatigue in his eyes and gait.

The doctor went on to say that he would be sending a skilled servant of his own to help to-night. Their only hope was to reduce this fever. The sick youth must be lapped mother-naked in sheets wrung out in cold water changed at frequent intervals. He made a few more terse inquiries, Will had told him so little. He would call in again later to-night, but . . . but . . . The maid had entered with a basin and ewer from which comfortable steam rose into the cold night air.

Num died between twelve and one that night, even at the turning of the tide, in the presence of a brother

he no longer recognized. The doctor's servant who had announced some time during those four hours of work and waiting that he never missed a first showing at the Globe, packed up his bag and went off, having done his duty by Master Shakespeare's brother that had black finger-nails and unshaven cheeks. He offered to knock up the carpenter on his road home; the funeral was to take place the next day. Will sat down to his desk and wrote a letter to Dick which the man willingly agreed to leave at the house of Burbage.

Next morning Will was down at St. Saviour's, Southwark, before the streets were astir. It gave him pleasure to be able to buy for his brother a grave in the most honourable place in that stately church. Gower, the friend of Chaucer, had an altar-tomb there, on which he lay at length in the long-skirted costume and bifid beard of his day, his burnished head resting on the three books he had given to the world. There were some modern tombs too, ordered by rich merchants who had caused themselves to be depicted life-size and kneeling in the attitude of prayer under canopies, with their sons behind them, and opposite them their dames and daughters in like procession, all coloured most life-like, their gowns indigo, their ruffs chalk-white, and red in their lips.

A vault in the chancel happened to be open and there was an Alderman's funeral coming at noon. Will arranged to arrive an hour before that and paid for a fore-noon toll of the great bell.

When he got back to Silver Street he found his brother Gilbert there already wise as to what had happened. Will's letter asking if they had got Num in Henley Street had brought Gilbert up to London. Mother had nipped and nagged so unconscionably that on a

promise that she would feed the greyhounds with her own hands, Gib had undertaken to get some tidings of her last-born. So there were two elder shorter brothers to follow young Num's long coffin down to the Bankside.

News travels quickly in the world of the theatre. When they came in sight of the Globe there was a black flag flying from the flagstaff, the warning that there would be no play to-day. Dick Burbage had cancelled the performance so there was a great attendance at the funeral, the tribute being truly rather to the living brother than the dead, but Gib did not know that, and when he saw the full church said that mother would be pleased to hear this.

A crowd had collected in the wafer-thin winter sunshine at the south end of London Bridge to watch the players arrive and recognize their favourites. They pushed and whispered: "That's Nid Field!" "Here comes fat Sir John!" "That's Lowin!" When the Burbage brothers stepped out of their coach the craning and shoving was almost as great as to see the coffin itself which was strewn with rosemary in token that the deceased had been a bachelor.

Gib took his youngest brother's death with the rather dreadful philosophy of the country bred. He had, it appeared, counted Num as good as lost from the moment he had heard that the lad had gone to London for a player. "You did the same," said he. "Arr—but you were aye sharper than the rest of us. They're saying up in Stratford now that after all's said and done you'll likely end the best of our family."

On the night of the funeral the brothers dined quietly in the Mountjoys' house. The next day Will asked Gib what he would like to do, and Gib only

slightly shamefacedly said he would like to go to the theatre. They had buried poor lad honourable, and it could bring him no harm, none at home would ever know, and it seemed a pity to let free seats go begging.

Like all outsiders he suffered from the delusion that players are endowed with an unlimited number of free seats for disposal amongst their relatives and friends.

Will went round to the door-keeper at the Globe before rehearsal and bought a seat in the sixpenny gallery. Gib had gone off for the morning alone to get his dry brown beard trimmed and see the sights of the City. He looked what he was, a small tradesman up from a country town, as he strode off defiantly twirling his ash stick, dressed in his winter kersey suit and leather leggings. There was no fear of his getting lost or imposed upon, he knew his north and south and had buttoned his purse inside his shirt when dressing this morning. The only thing about which he seemed to be anxious was his dinner, so Will arranged to meet him at the Mermaid and give him that important meal. Gib inquired suspiciously if that was not a place where all wore silk. "Take me not to any such. I am out of my element amongst lords howsoever kindly they may use me. When young Sir Tom from Charlecote brought his dame into my shop 'twas my nose amongst all that burst out a'bleeding."

Will got them seats in a dark corner whence they could observe without being much observed, and Gib enjoyed himself manifestly. He kept on giving Will covert digs and was deeply moved by the fair painted design of fruits on his pudding platter. When two scented young gallants entered leading a brace of Iceland dogs, he gave himself up to speculation what would be the cost of taking one of those comical curled

monsters home for his sister Joan's boys to play with. Only without the gentleman, at t'other end of the string half the jest would be lost.

He might not wish to attract the attention of lords, but when one or two acquaintances came up to speak to Will he rose to his feet expectantly, and nothing could have exceeded his after interest in their private lives and probable incomes. He took apparent delight in explaining to such as might not have heard of the tragedy, that he was come up from Stratford to lay his youngest brother's head in the grave.

After all this they went on to the Globe, arriving early which suited Gib, as he meant to miss nothing and wanted to watch the audience come in. His first visit to a London theatre made an indelible impression on his brain, so that years after he could still entertain Stratford worthies with memories of how he had seen his player brother Will in his station, acting in one of his own comedies, wherein being to personate a decrepit old man he had worn a long beard and appeared so weak and drooping that he was unable to walk. The name of the piece, which was just one of your catch-penny titles, he soon forgot, but remembered clearly the picture of Will being supported by another person to a table at which there was a company of hunters seated eating and drinking, one of whom sang a song excellently well.

So there was an end of Num, save that one pouring wet night about a month after Gib had returned to Stratford, a woman came inquiring for one Shakespeare at Silver Street.

When she saw Will she cried out that this gentleman was not the manner of thing she sought. Hers had been much comelier.

She called the man who had been the father of her child Edward, whereas Num had been Edmund. She seemed confused when called upon for a description, and said that he had had Judas hair and an accent which she took for Scots. She had believed him to be studying for a clergyman.

The speech of Warwickshire? An actor learning blank verse? But Judas hair—no!

There were many Shakespeares in London as Will, after his late researches, had reason to know. It was a name not so common as Taylor or Wilkinson, but far less uncommon than Juddbudd or Gotobed, about on a par with Strongi'tharm, you might say. In the Midland counties it was far from unusual.

Her child had died, and when she had heard that the only young Shakespeare that had ever lodged here was dead too, she prepared to go off counting her expedition a loss. Nevertheless she did not depart a loser.