

SHAKESPEARE AND A YORKSHIRE QUARREL

BY VIOLET A. WILSON

At the beginning of 1602 Londoners had the opportunity of seeing a new play by William Shakespeare, for on February 2 John Manningham, a student in the Middle Temple, noted in his diary:

At our feast we had a play called *Twelfth-Night, or What you Will*, much like the *Commedy of Errors*, or *Menechmi* in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called *Inganni*. A good practise in it to make the Steward believe his Lady widdowe was in love with him, by counterfeyting a letter as from his Lady in generall termes, telling him what shee liked best in him, and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparaile, etc., and then when he came to practise making him believe they tooke him to be mad.

Various sources have been suggested for the main plot of the play, but none for the scenes between the jovial, hard-drinking fox-hunters and the Puritan steward, Malvolio. It is very probable, however, that Shakespeare got the idea from a contemporary quarrel which was tried in London shortly before the production of the play.

While doing research work for a book on *Society Women of Shakespeare's Time*, I was trying to trace the life of Margaret Dakins, a much sought after, three times married, Yorkshire heiress. Her most persistent suitor appeared to have been Sir Thomas Posthumus Hoby, younger son of the Puritan Lady Russell, who organized the petition which prevented Shakespeare and his associates from occupying the Blackfriars Theatre. Thomas Posthumus, so called from his having been born after his father's death, was a puny, undersized youth, so small that he had been "reputed a child" and entirely dependent on his mother. Margaret refused him after her first husband's death, and again during her second widowhood, only accepting her unfortunate suitor when she found her inheritance threatened by

a law suit, and wanted to have Hoby's powerful uncle, Lord Treasurer Burghley, on her side.

Thomas Posthumus was a Londoner, and when he went to live at his heiress-bride's estate, Hackness, in Yorkshire, the part of a country gentleman fitted him very ill. To begin with, he was a Puritan, one of those cold-blooded men who would sing "psalms and horn-pipes", and wanted to put down the "sweet and comfortable" sport of bear baiting, not because it gave great pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators. The country gentlemen who, in rare moments of reflection, would say, "I would that I had bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing and bear baiting," were highly indignant at the very suggestion. "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" asked the sport-loving squires, aroused to wrath by the name of Puritan. One convivial party of boon companions, who came to Hackness uninvited after a day's sport, were so greatly incensed at the lack of hospitality and drink offered them that they revenged themselves upon Sir Thomas Posthumus in no uncertain manner.

Shakespeare and Ben Jonson "did gather humours of men dayly where ever they came", frequenting the fashionable meeting place of St. Paul's Cathedral where men of all classes congregated daily to hear the latest gossip and intelligence. "How do you? What's the news?" was the accustomed salutation in a time when there were no newspapers, and current topics of the day circulated by word of mouth. News from Court, news from the city, news from great houses, news from abroad, news from the law courts; true news, false news.

When they had collected their news, the Elizabethan dramatists made good use of it, well knowing that their audience delighted in topical allusions and personalities. In 1601 the Privy Council requested the Middlesex magistrates to examine all plays before production, in order to prevent the abuse levelled at people of "good desert and quality", who were being caricatured on the stage.

Obviously the playwrights had to make certain modifications to avoid being called to legal account by their victims, but con-

SHAKESPEARE AND A YORKSHIRE QUARREL 655

trived none the less to retain sufficient characteristics to enable playgoers to fit the cap themselves. In *Twelfth Night*, though the action of the play takes place in Illyria, according to the playbill, the reference to two London churches, St. Anne's and St. Bennet's, would enable a London audience to locate the position in the neighbourhood of Blackfriars, where lived Lady Russell and her Puritan friends. The Hobys, who had no town house of their own, either stayed with Lady Russell or rented a house for the time being.

It was Lady Russell's son, Sir Thomas Posthumus Hoby, who brought the lawsuit which set all London talking in the winter of 1601-2. Sir Thomas, a townsman and a Puritan, had nothing in common with the Yorkshire Squires, who for their part returned his dislike with interest. Sir Richard Cholmley, mentioning various "cross accidents" of life, says: "A chief one was a troublesome, vexatious neighbour, one Sir Thomas Hobby, who having married a widow, the inheritor of Hackness lordship, having a full purse, no children, delighted to spend his money and time in suits. . . ."

On August 26 Sir Richard Cholmley, William Eure and other sportsmen were out hunting in the neighbourhood of Hackness, and sent word to Sir Thomas that they desired to stay the night with him. Sir Thomas showed no cordiality at the prospect; he accused his guests of drunkenness; they accused him of lack of hospitality; and the visit resulted in a lawsuit.

In Yorkshire, Sir Thomas Posthumus would get scant sympathy, but, like his mother, Lady Russell, he counted on the influence of his powerful relative, Sir Robert Cecil. The defendants, too, tried to gain Cecil's ear, so that both sides of the quarrel are found among the *Hatfield State Papers*, though, unfortunately, the Star Chamber verdict has not been found. From the *Hatfield State Papers*, Vol. X:

Sir T. Posthumus Hoby to Sir Robert Cecil

Impute my presumption to my urgent cause, which for justice' sake I cannot swallow. There has been some dryness in the Lord Eure (whose tenants are my next neighbours) almost ever since I was employed as a commissioner in these parts; which, if it has been for my partiality, or injustice, I desire on proof thereof to be punished; if it be for want of partiality

(as I shall rather prove) I hope my wrongs will appear in time which I have sustained. On 26 August last, his son and brother came to my house at Hackness, whose visit I have related in the enclosed complaint to the Council, which I beseech you to read and to have delivered to the Council. I assure you it is not otherwise for me to remain in these parts, nor for any other but their own followers, that will fashion justice to their greatness. If the matter may come to judicial hearing, I shall prove all my complaint, and shall lay open the partial customs of these frozen parts. I crave your pardon for appealing from the Council here, which I did in respect of my Lord President's absence, to whom I have sent a copy of the misdemeanour; and in respect that our vice-President (the Lord Eure) is father, brother, and cousin to the offenders, and who has showed natural affection already in the cause. My house at Lynton, 5 Sept. 1600.

The Same to the Privy Council

1600, Sept. 5.—I beg leave to inform you of a great misdemeanour offered me in mine own house at Hackness by Mr. William Eure, son of the L. Eure, Sir William, his brother, and others whose names and facts are expressed in this enclosed. My suit is that the parties be bound before the Council at York to appear before your Lordships to answer my complaint, for it is not for me to serve any process upon them in these parts, in respect of my L. Eure's greatness, who is vice-President, and hath summoned me to appear at York, to exhibit my complaint, though he is father, brother, and cousin, to the offenders. If you shall please to send commission to the Bishop of Lymryke, Mr. Heskett, and Dr. Bennett to examine my witnesses, your Lordships shall find somewhat more than I can deliver at this instant. I shall easily derive this outrage against me conceived from envy and malice for want of partiality in me in the executing of my place and calling. From my house at Lynton in the East Riding of Yorkshire, 5 Sept. 1600.

The Enclosure.

The manner of the riotous assault on Sir Thomas Posthumus Hoby, Knight, at his house at Hackness in the N. Riding of Yorkshire, by William Eure, Sir William Eure, Richard Cholmley, William Dawny, William Hylliarde the younger, Stephen Hutchenson, and — Smyth, yeoman falkner to the L. Eure.

On Tuesday, Sir Thomas Hoby was standing in his hall at Hackness, when there came in Sir W. Eure's footboy and said that his master and sundry other gentlemen would come that night. Sir Thomas answered that he was sorry, his wife was ill and he not so well provided for them as he wished, and desiring the footboy to tell his master as much, he answered that his master was hunting in the forest of Pyckering Lythe, so he knew not where to find him. About two hours after, the above-named, Mr. Dawny excepted, came to Hackness with sundry other servants and boys, and Sir Thomas hearing they were come into his dining-room went to them and told them they were

SHAKESPEARE AND A YORKSHIRE QUARREL 657

welcome. Presently after this Sir William Eure's footboy took forth cards and laid them on the table, wherewith some of the gentlemen exercised until supper. In the beginning of supper, Mr. Eure pretending he had come to hunt, Sir Thomas sent for his servant that had charge of his deer, who dwelt three miles from him, to come the next morning, and so continued with them all the time at supper, which was spent by the gentlemen partly in discoursing of horses and dogs, sports whereunto Sir Thomas never applied himself, partly with lascivious talk where every sentence was begun or ended with a great oath, and partly in inordinate drinking unto healths, abuses never practised by Sir Thomas. In supper-time came in a footboy whom they had sent for Mr. Dawny, and brought word he would come in the morning. After supper Sir Thomas willed to have their chambers made ready, and came himself to bring them to their lodgings, but they being at dice told him they would play awhile, so he did leave them and went down and set his household to prayers as they were accustomed. When Sir Thomas and his family had begun to sing a psalm, the company above made an extraordinary noise with their feet, and some of them stood upon the stairs at a window opening into the hall, and laughed all the time of prayers. The next morning they went to breakfast in the dining-room, and Sir Thomas hearing them call for more wine, sent for the key of the cellar and told them they should come by no more wine from him. Presently Sir Thomas sent to Mr. Eure to know how he would bestow that day, and told him if he would leave disquieting him with carding, diceing, and excessive drinking, and fall to other sports, they should be very welcome. After this message Mr. Eure sent to Sir Thomas's wife that he would see her and begone, whereunto she answered she was in bed and when she was ready she would send him word. At his coming she prayed him to depart the house in quietness, and going to the rest of the company, he called a servant of Sir Thomas, and said, "Tell thy master he hath sent me scurvy messages, and the next time I meet him I will tell him so, if he be upon the bench, and will pull his beard." Coming to the uttermost court Mr. Eure said he would go to the top of the hill and fling down mill-stones and would play young Devereux, at the same time throwing stones at the windows and breaking four quarrels of glass.

Proceedings were taken before Lord Eure, the Vice-President, Sir William Mallory (whose eldest son married Lord Eure's sister), Messrs. Heskett, Stanhope, Bevercoats, D. Bennett, and Fearne. Hoby was charged with wronging certain gentlemen, unnamed, by charging them to the Council with bearing murderous minds, committing atheistical contempts, and to have exceeded in drink. A pacification was arrived at, which resulted in the gentlemen protesting their innocence, and that they never meant anything in disgrace of Hoby's wife.

The following passage occurs:

Sir T. Posthumus Hoby to Sir Robert Cecil

The Lord Eure told me a long tale of Duello, and that your Honour, whom he knew to be my most honourable friend, would but make the matter a jest to be sport at: for that you made sport with his son Will Eure about the last unkindness between us, that fell forth the last year, about his son's bringing cards into my house: in which matter he told me before all the Council that your Honour did make his son imitate my preacher, by using such gestures as my preacher did use in his evening exercises, and that your Honour did laugh very heartily at it.—York, 26 September 1600.

Ralph, Lord Eure, to Sir Robert Cecil

[1600–1], Jan. 16.—You know how Sir Thomas Hobbye is renewing before the Star Chamber, the complaint which he made before the Council at York, against my son and other gentlemen, for having misconducted themselves in his house. Be pleased to read the truth, which my son, the bearer, did affirm before this Council.—Inglebye, this 16th January.

The Enclosure.

Statement by William Eure of such things as passed in Sir Thomas Hobie's house in August last, whereupon myself and divers other gentlemen then in my company are drawn in question in the Star Chamber.

Being myself accompanied with six other gentlemen hunting at that time near to Sir Thomas Hobie's house in Yorkshire, and purposing to lodge with him in kindness, I sent beforehand my footman to signify so much unto him, and some three hours after we followed. Finding none of his servants ready to receive us, we sent our horses into the town, and went into the house ourselves. First, into the hall where we found nobody. Then into the great chamber, where we stayed some quarter of an hour or more before Sir Thomas came to us, which seemed to us strange and not answerable to our northern entertainments. Coming at last he bade us coldly welcome, and accompanied us till after supper, when he retired to his chamber. We fell to cards to beguile the time and continued to play the longer for that none of his servants came to show us any lodgings. At last, being sleepy, and understanding that his servants had been at prayer in the hall under the great chamber where we were, and were gone to bed, we were forced to seek out lodgings, which we found prepared, and so we rested that night. The next day we rose early to hunt, and word was brought by one of his servants that breakfast was ready. Whereupon I willed one of his men to entreat Sir Thomas' company, who returning answered that Sir Thomas was not yet stirring; so to breakfast we went. Which being done, we fell again to play, expecting Sir Thomas' coming forth. Shortly after one of his servants came and told me peremptorily our play was offensive to his lady, and therefore

SHAKESPEARE AND A YORKSHIRE QUARREL 659

willed us to depart the house. I told him our stay was only to take leave, and he repeating the former words, I said the message was a scurvy message, and willed the servant to tell Sir Thomas I would gladly speak with him before I went. I wished to understand whether the message had proceeded from him, or that the fellow of himself had abused us. Whereupon the servant departed, and presently returning told me my lady was willing to speak with me, and guided us into an inner room next adjoining to her chamber. I going into my Lady, the others withdrew themselves into the great chamber again. Sir Thomas Hobie had shut himself into the study, being unwilling to be spoken with, but watching there, as now I may conjecture, to take advantage if I should use any unseemly speeches. I expostulated a little with my Lady about the message and entertainment, whereupon she, with some show of dislike of her husband's strange fashions, entreated me with patience to depart. Which accordingly we did, and going out of the court in some discontent, I took up a little stone and cast it towards the house, not touching any windows, and so I took horse. His suggesting of tearing any commission is merely untrue, neither was any man's heels tript up, as he incerted.

Sir Thomas Posthumus Hoby to Sir Robert Cecil

1600-1, Feb. 10.—Understanding that Richard Cholmly, son and heir apparent of Henry Cholmly, Esq., one of the outrageous defendants to my bill in the Star Chamber, is apprehended as one of the rebellious Earl's assistants, and hearing that his friends would have it thought that he was there by chance, and that he was a man of no power, I thought it my duty to certify your Honour my knowledge of him.

For himself, he is able, within the liberty whereof his father is bailiff by inheritance, to raise 500 men, if they should show themselves as traitorous as they do already show themselves disobedient unto her Majesty's laws. He is able to raise some of his confining neighbours where his living, named Groman Abbey (a place famous for priests), doth lie. For his estate, his father hath some 1000 marks by year entailed upon him and his heirs males. All which lieth in the most dangerous parts of Yorkshire for hollow hearts, for popery. The most part thereof with his chief house, lieth along the sea coast, very apt to entertain bad intelligenced strangers. All this estate is part in his possession upon his marriage, and part is to come to him in reversion after his father, which his father cannot otherwise dispose of, and this young man hath issue.

The reason that moved him to assist the rebellious earls were, I think, his father's desperate estate, who doth owe more than he can pay, his backwardness in religion and to embrace civil government, and his alliance and love to the Earl of Rutland.—This 10 of Feb. 1600.

P.S.—Henry Cholmly, father to this Richard, doth claim to have the mustering of her Majesty's subjects within the liberty of Whikby Strand, and hath taken my warrants which I have sent forth for her Majesty's service, I

being the commissioner for musters, and did send forth warrants in his own name by virtue of his bailiwick, when he was not commissioner.

Ralph Lord Eure to Sir Robert Cecil

1601, Oct. 19.—Give me leave, by the presenting of this and this messenger, to recommend all in one, my promise of faith, my service in my son, and the remembrance of all thankfulness for your favours to my dear brother, Sir William Eure.—Mantor, xix. October 1601.

Sir T. Posthumus Hoby to Sir Robert Cecil

1601, Oct. 29.—I have presumed (in a cause whereon my poor credit doth wholly rely) to fly unto you for assistance and redress. And because you shall see my cause is honest and my wrongs sustained too injurious to be smothered, I send here enclosed a short brief of my whole complaint, according unto my proofs already published. And although I might have been not a little discouraged by some reports published in the country by Mr. William Dawny, Mr. Richard Cholmly (two of the defendants), and their friends, how far you were satisfied by them in the cause; yet resting very assured of your just inclination, I assure myself you ill afford me your favourable countenance, according to the uprightness of my honest cause, how far soever the same hath been formerly extenuated by any.—29 October 1601.

Proofs made by Sir Tho. Posthumus Hoby, Knight, plaintiff, against William Eure, esquire, and others, defendants.

[1601].—Plaintiff is a commissioner of peace in the North and East Ridings of Yorks; of oyer and terminer; for ecclesiastical causes; for musters; and thrice a commissioner for subsidy. On August 26, 1600, defendants came to his house at Hackness, Yorks, and were well entertained by him, notwithstanding which, they committed many foul misdemeanours and outrages: namely, in making rude and strange noises in the nature of “a black santes” as it is termed, when the plaintiff’s family were at prayers: in bringing cards and dice: in excessive carousing and charging the plaintiff to drink healths, contrary to his disposition: in sending word that they would set horns at his gate, and pull him by the beard: saying that they would keep his house by force: throwing his servants forth: calling the plaintiff “scurvy urchin,” and “spindle-shanked ape”: and divers other reproachful names, in the presence of his wife: breaking glass windows; threatening to fire the town and pull down the parish church: breaking the common stocks, &c. These outrages were grounded upon unkindness formerly conceived by Lord Eure against the plaintiff, and for malice for service done by the plaintiff by virtue of his several commissions.

Ralph Lord Eure to Sir Robert Cecil

[1601–2], Jan. 16.—Our house will be ever bounden to you for your favours to myself and my son. As to the slanderous bill which Sir Thomas Posthumus

SHAKESPEARE AND A YORKSHIRE QUARREL 661

Hobby is preferring against us before you and the honourable Council in the Star Chamber, I entreat you to suspend your judgment till the first of this term, when the cause is to be opened, and I shall be pressed in defence of my honour to present the true state of the cause to the open view of the world, which hitherto I have forborne to do in regard of yourself and some other of his friends. If it might stand with your liking to vouchsafe your presence then, I should be happy of so honourable trial.—Birdsall, the 16th of January.

Sir Thomas Posthumus Hoby to Sir Robert Cecil.

1601-2, Jan. 26.—Requesting Cecil's presence in the Star Chamber on the morrow, when the rude and savage wrongs and injuries inflicted on Sir Thomas by Lord Eure's family are to be considered.

Sir Thomas Posthumus Hoby to Sir Robert Cecil

1602, April 13.—I have been so ever bound to your Honour that I have presumed to present my duty and service, etc.

Reading through the different accounts of this quarrel contained in the *Hatfield State Papers*, I was struck by the resemblance to certain passages in *Twelfth Night*, and taking up a volume of Shakespeare I read the play anew. Suddenly it flashed on me that here was no chance similarity, but that I had come accidentally on the source whence Shakespeare drew inspiration for the scene between Sir Toby and his fox-hunting companions, and the Puritan steward, Malvolio.

VIOLET A. WILSON.

SAINTS AND CREAM AND DEVON THINGS

BY ROBERT P. TRISTRAM COFFIN

NORTH DEVON was very lucky in its saints. Its coast was well within reach of the ships of the Irish holy men; so its spiritual weal was assured from the first. And what Brandan and the other longbeards with hearts of children and flowers for tongues could not do, when the weather was inclement and the waves ran high, the saints of Cornwall next door did. So there came in from sea, along with other shining things, white birds blown on the long winds and tropic fragrances and sunny legends of Atlantis and far, fair lands to the South, the Cross that wears the Aureole, the sign of the Celtic Christians. There is no one chief saint whom all Devonians may thank for this early beauty of holiness. Song-birds do not organize as do the crows and rooks. These saints were Irish or Cornishmen; of course they would not agree; church boards and canons and rules were Original Sin to them; they came hither to escape these very things. No, they were free lances in sanctitude; simple souls taking their holiness in their own way, tending their nets and building their churches between the herring schools and the coming of the whittings. Each picked out the little haven of his heart's desire and kept to it. Each kept his peace on his own hearthstone and had his own sweet blue patch of ocean between his own cliffs. And there was to be plenty of mead such as only an Irish saint could brew. Souls there were to save, of course; but in no roughshod harrowing of men's hearts night and day, year out, year in. There were bees to train in the way of turning the golden gorse flower into golden honey, little pigs to be brought up, big blue-eyed men to help at laying over the furrows, children to guide where the apples hung reddest, boats to mend; and now and then, at decent intervals, a miracle or so to do, poor, hungry nets to be filled to bursting with salmon for a king, a widow's loaf to be blessed with offspring of fragrant, miraculous loaves of a whole year's baking. The holy