

HENRY IV—PART I

THE increased volume of work which has recently been devoted to Shakespeare's series of English historical plays has not been without its uses. In particular it has served to bring these works decisively out of the sphere of patriotic commonplace to which they had often been consigned by relating them firmly to the political conceptions of the Elizabethan period. The work, however, is not without dangers of its own. There is a very real risk that erudition, in its efforts to relate the plays to their period, may end by obscuring the personal contribution that makes them most valuable as works of art. For these plays—and more especially those dealing with the reign of Henry IV and his son—contain something of far deeper and more permanent significance than the social and political commonplaces of a departed age; they illuminate these commonplaces by the same profoundly personal vision which, at a more mature stage, developed further to produce Shakespeare's greatest plays. The true artist, when circumstances induce him to approach political problems, brings with him a concern for permanent human values which, while never limited to the momentary issue, may be none the less profoundly illuminating to those who can combine a serious interest in contemporary developments with the preservation, often equally necessary, of a proper detachment. To bear this truth in mind and to trace in detail the unfolding of a personal interpretation of his inherited theme is to throw light upon an important stage in the development of Shakespeare's art.

The broad conception of the whole trilogy, initially accepted by Shakespeare as his starting-point, is clear enough. It emerges generally speaking from historical and dramatic works previously in existence and fits in with the current conceptions of the age. The three plays, as well as *Richard II* which preceded them, are evidently conceived as studies in kingship. The royal office is plainly regarded throughout as basing its claims to obedience upon divine ordination. The power of the King, a power conveyed upon him by God, is conferred as a guarantee of social order and of that acceptance of 'degree' which cannot be denied without plunging society into anarchy and chaos. This conception is already clearly present in the opening scene of the first part of *Henry IV*. Bolingbroke, newly come to the throne, is weighed down from the first by recent memories of feudal anarchy and internal war. His opening speech has for its background the bitter memory of 'civil butchery', of strife between armies 'All of one nature, of one substance bred', clashes within the body politic that can only serve to wound and destroy it. Finding his country still 'shaken' and made 'wan with care' by these civil disasters, it is his desire and duty to propose a higher aim in the following of which the factions

so recently at one another's throats may find a common unity. It is for this reason and in this spirit that Henry calls his barons, united under the 'blessed Cross', to the liberation of the sepulchre of Christ. The crusade will serve both to calm the political passions which Henry himself exploited to reach the throne and to provide a foundation for the national unity which he now as King sincerely desires.

It is at this point that Shakespeare, though still using traditional conceptions, begins to unfold a personal interpretation of his historical material. In calling for a crusade Henry is moved by motives in which selfish calculation are oddly mixed with a true desire for the general good. As crowned King he genuinely wishes to follow his vocation by uniting his subjects in a worthy and religious enterprise; but as usurper he hopes that his proposal will 'busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels' (*Part II*, IV, v) and so distract attention from the way in which he himself came to the throne. In other words—and here Shakespeare's thought is clearly working on traditional lines—Henry's desire to play properly the part of a King is hindered past mending by a flaw in the way in which he came to the throne. His overthrow and murder of Richard II, a crime not only against common humanity but still more against the divine foundation of order centred on the crown, fatally produces the very strife and division which he now aims at ending. No sooner has he stated his purpose than 'heavy news' comes 'all athwart' from Wales to force for the first time what will turn out to be a life-long postponement of Henry's project. The reign which opens with the call to a crusade ends, after years of weariness and disillusion with death in a room 'called Jerusalem' which is fated to be his nearest approach to the Holy Land; and in between it has seen little but rebellion, plot and counterplot, and battles where victory serves only to sow the seed of further domestic strife.

If the whole conception of these plays could be summed up in this way their interest would lie only in the skill with which Shakespeare had unfolded what was, after all, a completely traditional scheme. The fact is, however, that his real conception, far from ending here, has its true beginning at this point. Its true originality begins to appear when the political is over-shadowed by the personal interest. Henry IV is punished for his past sins not only as King in the weariness which increasingly overtakes him and in the growing sense of impotence which sometimes raises him to moments of tragic intensity, but as father in the most intimate concerns of his life. It is here that Shakespeare, still using inherited and familiar material, shows the true originality of his conception. For Prince Hal who is destined to become the incarnation of political competence and to achieve all his father's desires, is at the same time 'a scourge' in the hands of God, a continual reminder to Henry of his 'displeasing service' in the past. This disappointment, which accompanies the father through his own life and is not wholly dispelled by his apparent transformation at Shrewsbury, is related

ultimately to unresolved contradictions in the family character. Henry's first speech to his son (III, ii) is most revealing in its remarkable blend of true personal pathos and political calculation. The former shades indeed almost insensibly into the latter. That the father is genuinely wounded by his son's behaviour, that he is moved with 'tenderness', that he 'hath desired to see' him more often, is certain; but as we read the long speech we cannot help suspecting that the speaker's only true *moral* criterion is *political* success. To say this is to put one's finger upon the motive that impels the House of Lancaster all through these plays. Henry's criticism of the prodigality of Richard, 'the skipping king', is expressed with a linguistic freshness that draws freely upon the vernacular—'*carded* his state', '*capering* wits', 'glutted, gorged, and full'—and reflects the keenness of his interest in the intricacies of political behaviour. That interest is a constant feature of the family. Behind it, however, Shakespeare is careful to convey a significant note of falseness and moral deficiency. Bolingbroke, in his own words, '*stole* all courtesy from heaven', '*dressed*' himself in a humility which is clearly less a moral virtue than the conscious device of policy. For Henry the criterion of morality tends always to be success; and that being so, it is not surprising that his son should have learned from the first to separate the promptings of humanity from the necessities of political behaviour and that filial tenderness in him should exist side by side with a readiness to subject all personal considerations to public achievement. In the realization, born of bitter experience, that the quest for this achievement can be an illusion lies the secret of the tragic note which dominates the father's later years.

These considerations illuminate considerably Shakespeare's conception of Prince Hal and show that the developments later revealed in *Henry V*¹ are already substantially present in his father. It might almost be said, indeed, that the motives which underlie the behaviour of the family throughout the trilogy are revealed in the Prince's opening soliloquy (I, ii). These motives in turn spring at least in part from the nature of the material which the dramatist inherited. In writing his play Shakespeare's freedom of conception was faced by what might have seemed at first sight a grave limitation: the necessity of squaring his account of the Prince's character with a traditional story as naïve in its moral values as it was familiar in all its details. The Prince, as Shakespeare found him in the popular account on which he based his play, was an outstanding example of the familiar story of the dissolute young man who underwent a kind of moral conversion when faced by grave responsibilities and finally made good in the great sphere of political action to which he was called. The story, conceived in these terms, was too familiar and too popular to be ignored by a practical dramatist; on the other hand its conception

¹I have tried to interpret the spirit of this play in a previous article in *Scrutiny*, March, 1941.

of human character and motive was too naïvely optimistic to appeal to a Shakespeare moving at this stage towards the mood that was shortly to produce *Hamlet*. Faced with this dilemma Shakespeare chose to accept the very improbability of the story and to turn it to account. The Prince, from his very first appearance, looks forward to a reformation which, just because it is too good to be true, is seen to be moved by a political calculation which clearly reflects the character of his father. If his character is to change, as he announces in his very first soliloquy, it is because a transformation of this kind will attract popularity: for 'nothing pleaseth but rare accidents'. The whole process of 'reformation', as the Prince himself describes it, has a surface quality which Shakespeare is clearly concerned to emphasize. It is seen 'glittering' with metallic speciousness over previous faults, 'like bright metal on a sullen ground'; and its purpose, above all, is to 'show more goodly' and 'attract more eyes'. The conversion, thus transformed from an edifying example to an instrument of political success, enters fully into the permanent characteristics of the House of Lancaster. The future Henry V, already regarded as an example of the perfect political figure, begins by consciously abstaining from the finer aspects of human nature; for behind Shakespeare's acceptance of a traditional story lies the conviction that success in politics implies a spiritual loss, commonly involves the sacrifice of more attractive qualities which are distinctively personal.

The character of the Prince as it is developed through the play brings home this conception with a variety of detail. It is the character of a man whose keen if limited intelligence is placed consistently at the service of his political interests. If the politician is not so much a man of intellectual subtlety and spiritual discernment as one who can envisage with clarity the practical end of his activities and devote all his faculties without division to its attainment then the Prince is a complete example of the type. His intelligence is of the kind that, operating entirely in the practical order, sees through all pretences and evasions to the concrete issues that underlie them. The reputation of Douglas as a warrior, for instance, does not blind him to his true nature and when he describes him he stresses the same lack of imagination which Shakespeare later found in the Greek heroes of *Troilus and Cressida*. Douglas is the man who 'kills me six or seven dozens of Scots at a breakfast' and then complains of 'this quiet life', the man who is not above filling out his prowess in battle with unimaginative boasting which strikes Prince Henry, in his ironical detachment, as simply ridiculous:

Prince: He that rides at high speed and with his pistol kills
a sparrow flying.

Falstaff: You have hit it.

Prince: So did he never the sparrow. (II, iv).

For the Prince Douglas is an enemy, but his attitude would not have been different had he been an ally. In either case the firm

if limited judgment would be based on the same clear narrow principles of expedience. His intelligence is of the kind that judges all men by their value in relation to a coldly conceived political scheme; that is the reason both for his success and his inhumanity.

This detachment in the Prince's attitude towards friend and foe is based in turn upon a series of moral deficiencies which Shakespeare is concerned to stress from the first moment. His relationship to those around him, invalidated by the peculiar mental reservation which invariably accompanies it, is necessarily unsatisfactory. The Prince is to all appearances capable of sinking himself into his surroundings and meeting his 'low' associates on their own level; but his attitude to them, when he is alone and expresses his inmost feelings, shows a certain false humility that is most revealing: 'I have sounded the very base-string of humility. Sirrah, I am sworn brother to a leash of drawers; and can call them all by their christen names, as Tom, Dick, and Francis' (II, iv). The confidence with which he moves among the 'lower orders'—I choose the phrase, with all its implications, of set purpose—expresses itself, moreover, in a peculiar and typical tone. The quality of many of his observations upon those whom he encourages to regard themselves as his friends reflects a coarseness which is, in the true sense of the word, vulgar and thoroughly characteristic of his entirely amoral personality. Shakespeare brings this home to us in numerous apparently petty turns of phrase: 'If there come a hot June and this civil buffeting hold, we shall buy maidenheads as they buy hob-nails, by the hundreds' (II, iv). Spoken of itself in one of the tavern scenes of this play we might pass over phrasing of this type; but Shakespeare brings us into contact with the kind of feeling that prompted it too often for us to ignore it in the long run. Falstaff, whose relationship to the Prince lies at the heart of the whole play, is the particular butt of a kind of intensity in grossness which is surely revealing. After the trick played on him at Eastcheap, he '*lards* the lean earth as he walks along' (II, ii); and in the great parody of the relationship between the King and his son the Prince heaps upon him such a list of epithets as 'bolting-hutch of beastliness', 'swollen parcel of dropsies', 'huge bombard of sack' and 'stuffed cloak-bag of guts' (II, iv). The insistence upon this type of imagery, so lacking in the spontaneous imaginative warmth that characterizes Falstaff's fleshliness, is certainly intentional. It is as though the Prince, whose every action is based on calculation, felt for Falstaff, who represents in himself the vitality and the weakness of human flesh, the semi-conscious repulsion felt by the cold practical intellect for something which it can neither understand, ignore, nor, in the last resort, use. The Prince, echoing Falstaff's idiom, brings to it a cold, efficient intensity that points to an underlying aversion. The flesh, with which the finished politician needs to reckon, is nevertheless an object of repulsion to him. Beneath the burlesque and the rowdiness we may already look forward to the ultimate rejection of Falstaff. That rejection indeed is actually anticipated in the same scene. Falstaff, in a

plea that is not less pathetic for being a parody based on monstrous presumption, concludes by begging the Prince not to banish him: 'banish plump Jack and banish all the world' (II, iv). Banish Falstaff, in other words, and banish everything that cannot be reduced to an instrument of policy in the quest for empty success. It is true to the Prince's character and to the tragedy of his family that he already replies without hesitation 'I do, I will'.

The tracing of a common destiny working itself out through character in the actions of the family of Lancaster is, then, an essential part of Shakespeare's conception. It is not, however, the whole. In many of the political plays written by Shakespeare at this period we are aware that the individual in whose actions are represented are in fact bound together in character as different aspects of an embracing whole; their virtues and their faults, their successes and failures are inter-dependent parts of a world whose unity is to be sought in the author's experience projected into the complete conception of the play. In *Troilus and Cressida*, as I have tried to show elsewhere,² this unity of characters connected by complementary qualities and related imagery is obviously of fundamental importance; but it exists already in the Second Part of *Henry IV* and is at least foreshadowed in the first. For the rebel leaders in this play, when they attempt to translate their aspirations into action, are affected by a flaw not fundamentally dissimilar from that which dominates the royal camp. If Henry IV's kingship is rendered sterile in its higher aspirations by the fact that his seizure of the crown involved the murder of his predecessor and was prompted by egoism the same is true of those who, having helped to bring him to the throne, now wish to see his power curbed or destroyed. The part played by the rebels in Henry's rise to power is stressed from the very beginning. It is, indeed, a chief point in the presentation of their case. Worcester, whose first appearance involves a clash with the King, refers in his very first speech to:

that same greatness too which our own hands
Hath help to make so portly. (I, iii).

A little later in the same scene Hotspur puts the relationship in less flattering terms. He describes his associates as the 'base second means', 'the cords, the ladder, or the hangman' involved in Richard's murder and is at pains to emphasize that what they have done is criminal, committed in 'an unjust behalf'. The fact is that it was desire for power which prompted the rebel leaders to crime, and now it is mutual fear, itself the consequence of crime, that makes their clash inevitable. Henry, conscious that his own power was criminally obtained, cannot help suspecting that those who once followed their own interest in dethroning a king may do so again; and the rebels (or the more reflective of them) understand that the King must think in this way and that they themselves can

²*Scrutiny*, December, 1938.

therefore never be safe. The result is an endless mistrust, the consequences of which continue until they fatally conclude at Shrewsbury. The preliminaries of that battle are in themselves highly significant. Both sides at heart desire peace, the rebels because they know they are not strong enough to win, the King because he realizes in the light of experience that the disunity in his kingdom is not one which battle, however victorious, can resolve. Reason, indeed, demands peace and unity; but the consequences of the original crime against order and therefore against reason are still there and need to work themselves out in blood. The King makes Worcester and Vernon a generous offer of peace, seeing in peace a restoration of natural order based on the free recognition of just and beneficent authority. His behaviour in doing so is that proper to a King. He uses the familiar image of the planets to drive home his contrast between selfish anarchy and ordered peace:

will you again unknot
This churlish knot of all-aborred war?
And move in that obedient orb again
Where you did give a fair and natural light,
And be no more an exhaled meteor,
A prodigy of fear, and a portent
Of broached mischief to the unborn times? (V, i).

Henry speaks here as he had spoken at the opening of the Crusade, as a King fulfilling the terms of his vocation. He calls for unity, using the accepted imagery; but the origins of his power, which he would now wish to forget, make themselves felt in their endless consequences to frustrate the lawfulness of his intentions.

Worcester's reaction to the offer serves to bring out a parallel weakness in the rebel camp. In the figure of Worcester Shakespeare sought to study the type of the political courtier. Persuasiveness and reason, born of cunning and experience, are his gods; in the early scenes we see him restraining the impetuosity of Hotspur basing his argument on the very appeal to expediency that Henry himself uses to his son; for Hotspur's impatience, he tells him, is such that it 'loseth men's hearts' (III, i) and compromises their chances of success. Yet Worcester, all reason and moderation as he appears, is a rebel and, being a rebel in the name of interest, he is driven to exclude the operation of reason as the most dangerous enemy of his projects. For reason, according to the original conception, is necessarily on the side of order, of kingship, and rebellion owes its origin to the promptings of selfish passion against rational restraint. Worcester stresses this flaw in their position to his fellow-conspirators:

For well you know we of the offering side
Must keep aloof from strict arbitrement,
And stop all sight-holes, every loop from whence
The eye of reason may pry in upon us. (IV, i).

Rebellion, according to the convention which Shakespeare accepted as the starting-point of his political plays, is based upon the exclusion of reason, though it takes a rebel as rational as Worcester so to define it. Priding himself on his realistic attitude to political events, he is yet driven first to shut out reason and then to conceal the fact that peace has been offered by the King and that the battle itself has become unnecessary. The reasons he gives to Vernon are highly significant:

It is not possible, it cannot be,
 The king should keep his word in loving us;
 He will suspect us still, and find a time
 To punish this offence in other faults . . .
 . . . treason is but trusted like the fox
 Who, ne'er so tame, so cherish'd and lock'd up,
 Will have a wild trick of his ancestors. (V, ii).

Worcester's distrust, like Henry's tragedy, has its roots far in the past. It owes its existence to the original crime against Richard by which the bond of freely accepted rule once broken, the seeds of disorder and suspicion are sown to work themselves out on both sides in mutual destruction. The combatants in either camp at Shrewsbury invoke 'honour' and other lofty sanctions to justify their cause; but the reality is that crime born of self-interest on either side has born fruit in unnecessary bloodshed.

Shakespeare's treatment of the rebel leaders is designed to drive home these points as they reveal themselves in the details of character expressed in action. If their handling of the campaign is futile and their motives based on an unhappy mixture of fear and self-seeking the divisions that make their common action impossible spring from the dubious foundations of a cause conceived in egoism and executed without conviction. Of their moral and intellectual qualities we are left in no doubt. Glendower is a mixture of superstition, vanity and incompetence whose self-regard prompts him to look everywhere for insults and makes it impossible for him to collaborate honestly with his fellow-conspirators; Douglas is as the Prince has described him, a brainless butcher as contemptuous of the reasoning of others as he is himself incapable of rational thought. Throughout the rebel camp before the battle there exists the familiar division between the counsels of reason, which cannot see beyond timidity and selfish fear, and those of passion which drive those possessed by them to actions which cannot be justified upon the slightest reflection. Reason prompts Northumberland and Glendower to withhold their forces in order not to commit themselves to the common cause at the decisive moment, just as it has caused Vernon and Worcester to conceal the King's offer of peace; passion drives Hotspur and Douglas to accept battle against better advice on hopeless terms and to despise the reasonable counsels of strategy as inspired by 'fear and cold heart'. In this world of political sordidness and folly Hotspur stands out

as a figure relatively attractive. That he is not without a critical eye is proved by his understanding of the nature of Glendower (III, i) and by his incisive description of the courtly popinjay who brought him the King's demand for his prisoners after his victory at Holmeden (I, iii). In both cases the justice of his comment is reflected in a vivid vernacular phrasing that guarantees its genuineness. Yet, in spite of these qualities, Hotspur remains a rebel and time shows him to be the instrument of politicians more calculating than himself. A warrior and man of action, the cause for which he fights is one whose moral basis cannot be reasonably sustained; so that his motives, far from being adequate, reduce themselves to an acceptance of the rhetorical idea of honour which prompts him, whenever it is mentioned, to emotional outbursts which contrast completely with Worcester's tight-lipped calls to reason and calculation. We are reminded of the Trojans in *Troilus and Cressida* with their facile surrenders to emotion leading to the acceptance of a cause indefensible in reason. At Shrewsbury Hotspur falls on behalf of policies less creditable than those his own nature should have been capable of accepting. His death leaves us with a sensation somewhere between the tragic and the ironic, adequately summed up in the contrasted attitude contained in his conqueror's brief words—'For worms, brave Percy' (V, iv). It is simply one aspect of the futility which is the real meaning of the battle of Shrewsbury, in which the rebels fail to achieve their end and at the same time prevent the King from obtaining the unity for which he is *now*, but too late, genuinely striving.

So far we might call the First Part of *Henry IV* an acute political study based on a personal elaboration of ideas rooted in traditional thought. But Shakespeare's most individual contribution to his material lies in the figure of Falstaff. Falstaff is given in the play a position of peculiar significance which enables him to transcend the political action in which he moves and to provide a sufficient comment on it. He serves, in a sense, as a connecting-link between two worlds, the tavern world of comic incident and broad humanity in which he is at home and the world of court rhetoric and political intrigue to which he also has access. So situated in two worlds and limited by neither, Shakespeare uses him as a commentator who passes judgment on the events represented in the play in the light of his own superabundant comic vitality. Working sometimes through open comment, sometimes even through open parody, his is a voice that lies outside the prevailing political spirit of the play, that draws its cogency from the author's own insight expressing itself in a flow of comic vitality. He represents, we might say, all the humanity which it seems that the politician bent on the attainment of success must necessarily exclude. That humanity, as it manifests itself in the tavern scenes, is full of obvious and gross imperfections; but the Falstaff of the play, whilst he shares these imperfections, is not altogether limited by them. His keen intelligence, his real human understanding, his refusal to be fobbed off by empty or hypocritical phrases—all

these are characteristics that enable him to transcend his world and to become the individual expression of the conscience of a great and completely serious artist. In the elaboration of this point we approach the very heart of Shakespeare's conception in this play.

The true nature of Falstaff becomes most apparent when we realize that he comes to be in this series of plays a complete and significant contrast to the figure of the Prince. The full force of this contrast probably only became apparent to Shakespeare as he proceeded with his trilogy; but something of it is present from the first. It becomes fully clear for the first time in the scene of tavern parody when the two men caricature the relationship of Henry IV and his son (II, iv). Falstaff's behaviour after ascending his mock throne at Eastcheap in a scene which parodies by anticipation the real one shortly to take place (III, ii) envelops that relationship at once in the atmosphere of the popular stage, of the 'harlotry players', to use the Hostess' own words, and provides us with a new standpoint from which to consider the central political theme. The description he gives of the Prince, using his father's supposed words, is in itself a criticism, realistic and sardonic, of the whole family: 'That thou art my son, I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly a villanous trick of thine eye, and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip, that doth warrant me'. It is not thus that Henry does actually speak to his son, nor is it true to say that the relationship between them is of this kind. That relationship is on the contrary truly tragic, and becomes more so as the father grows older and more conscious of the weariness that besets him through life; but the disillusioned clarity, even the coarseness, of Falstaff's description corresponds to something really present, that makes itself felt time and again in the Prince's attitude towards his life in the taverns and is a symptom of the detached inhumanity which is one ingredient of his political sense. This is not the Prince as he is, but it is one true aspect of him as seen by an eye clear and unflinching in its realism in the world in which this aspect is most in evidence. To bring out that aspect in those who surround him is the first of Falstaff's functions in the play.

The second is to provide on the basis of this clarity of vision a criticism of the whole political action, both on the loyalist and rebel side, which leads up to the dubious battle in which it concludes. In this action, and especially in its warlike phases, Falstaff is involved without being of it or subdued to the spirit, now cynical, now wordily 'honourable', in which it is habitually conceived. His comments on the motives of the rebels are characteristically clear-headed; his reaction to Worcester's disclaimer of responsibility for the rising is summed up in the phrase 'Rebellion lay in his way, and he found it' (V, i). More revealing still, because based on sentiments more deeply human beneath the comic vision, is his attitude towards the pressed troops placed under his command to lead into battle. He has, as always, no particular illusion about the nature and the origins of this human material, 'the cankers of a calm world and a long peace' (IV, ii); but his very account of

them in the same speech as 'discarded unjust serving-men, younger sons to younger brothers, revolted tapsters, and ostlers trade-fallen', together with many other references, implies an awareness of social issues possessed by no other character in the play. This awareness is based in its turn upon Falstaff's outstanding quality, the capacity for human sympathy which marks him out in a world of calculation and inspires the respect for human life implied in his magnificent ironic reply to the Prince when the latter sums up his contingent as so many 'pitiful rascals'—'Tut, tut; good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better; tush, man, mortal men, mortal men' (IV, ii). For the Prince as for all his world, soldiers are mere pawns, the wretched instruments of political calculation to be considered from the point of view of their possible efficiency in the tasks imposed upon them by their leaders; for Falstaff alone they are human victims, individuals exposed to the manipulations of discreditable interests, 'mortal men' and as such to be respected after detached and unsentimental scrutiny in the very sordidness of their tragedy. It is his sense of humanity in its weakness and its irreducibility that prompts Falstaff's behaviour in the battle. Precisely because he is so human himself in his very irony he has no desire to die, to pay the debt of death 'before his day' (V, i); and precisely because he can realize in others the human desire to survive which he feels so strongly in himself he is keenly aware that 'honour' in the mouths of politicians who have been brought to battle by a combination of past selfishness and present refusal to face their responsibilities is an empty word and a delusion. 'I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath' (V, iii) is his final comment, at once human and dispassionate, on the waste implied in a battle based on causes so suspect; and inspired by its spirit he moves through the conflict without being subdued to its tone, viewing it and himself with characteristic frankness and dominating it, when all is said and done, by the very force of his vitality.

These observations bring us to a third characteristic of Falstaff, the one which is perhaps the ultimate source of his strength and the key to Shakespeare's deepest conception in this play. There is in Falstaff a true and rare combination of the warm, alert humanity we have already noted with a background, sometimes accepted and sometimes rebelled against, but continually present, of inherited Christian tradition. It is reasonable to suppose that the latter element makes itself felt in a spontaneous acceptance of the inheritance, still not so distant from Shakespeare, of the mediaeval religious theatre. We may sense the presence of this inheritance in the readiness with which Falstaff in his phrasing draws upon images and ideas which derive their force from their relation to crucial moments in the familiar Christian drama. When he calls upon his tavern companions to 'watch to-night, pray to-morrow' (II, iv) the effect of the phrase depends largely upon its relation to the originally Christian ethic; when in the same scene he greets the news of the arrival of the King's messenger with

'What doth gravity out of his bed at midnight?' it is not fanciful to seek in 'gravity' a personification of the kind familiar in the bearded, solemn figures of the old morality plays. Falstaff's utterances, indeed, are steeped in tradition, at once religious and theatrical, of this kind. He shares with his audience a whole world of imagery, drawn upon in such phrases as that in which his troops are described as 'slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth, where the glutton's dogs licked his sores' (IV, ii). This common inheritance itself gives him reality by contrast with the orators and politicians of the verse scenes of this play. The ease with which he passes from the theatrical to the religious reference is never more clearly shown than in his comments on Bardolph's nose (III, iii). After a reference to the play of Beaumont and Fletcher in 'the Knight of the Burning Lamp' we hear it referred to as 'a Death's head or a memento mori'—'I never see thy face but I think upon hell-fire and Dives that lived in purple'. In such phrases we feel what the strength of a still living popular tradition can do. Assimilated into his utterances it enables Falstaff to bring to his criticism of the political action around him a realism that, in its profounder moments, is neither self-regarding nor cynical, but that derives from a balanced view of man's destiny and in particular of the peculiar complexity of spiritual motives. At his best Falstaff, recognizing his own faults, gives them a taste of tragic significance by relating them to the familiar but profound spiritual drama of mankind worked out in the individual between birth and death, in mankind between the Creation and the Last Judgment: 'Thou knowest in the state of innocency Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty' (III, iii). To take this too seriously would be as naïve as it would be short-sighted to deny it all seriousness. Falstaff's tone is in part ironical, mocking as usual; but the reference to the physical flesh here is subsidiary to the spiritual meaning of the word sanctioned by Christian theology, and it is in the sense of the relationship between the two, a relationship comprehending dependence and separation in a single unity, that Falstaff acquires his full stature. Such were the advantages for Shakespeare of inheriting—I say inheriting because the question of personal belief need not arise—a set of spiritual conceptions at once simple enough to be popular and sufficiently profound to cover the wealth of human experience. We need not say—should not say—that Falstaff simply accepts the Christian tradition. Part of him, what we may call the flesh, clearly does not; but the tradition is there, alive in his utterances and giving him even in his refusal to conform a vitality that enables him to dominate the play. We shall see this Christian background deepened and developed in the Second Part of the play.

D. A. TRAVERSI.

[An examination of *Henry IV, Part II*, will appear in the next issue of *Scrutiny*].

MARIVAUD

COMTESSE :

Supportez donc mon ignorance; je ne savais pas la différence qu'il y avait entre *connaître* et *sentir*.

LELIO :

Sentir, madame, c'est le style du coeur.

(*La Fausse suivante*).

I.

ON 4th February, 1743, M. de Marivaux, the celebrated dramatist, took his seat in the French Academy in place of M. l'Abbé de Houtteville, the learned author of *de la Religion prouvée par les faits* to which the new academicien paid a generous tribute in his *discours de réception*.

The election had been a curious one in several ways. Marivaux's defeated rival was none other than Voltaire. The two men had never got on well and the literary history of the period records a number of amusing exchanges between them. 'C'est un homme qui passe sa vie à peser des oeufs de mouche dans des balances de toile d'araignée', said Voltaire contemptuously of Marivaux's plays. 'M. de Voltaire', retorted Marivaux, 'est le premier homme du monde pour écrire ce que les autres ont pensé'.

Their rivalry on this occasion, however, was not purely personal. When they stood for the Academy, Marivaux was the candidate of the *bien pensants* and Voltaire of the anti-clerical party. It was certainly not one of the 'cleanest' elections and skilful manoeuvring led to the unanimous election of Marivaux.

Marivaux's orthodoxy was not in doubt, yet he may well have felt that it was too much of a good thing when he learnt that he was not merely to succeed to the chair of one clergyman but was to be welcomed by another. For the reply to the *discours de réception* was pronounced by the Lord Archbishop of Sens. The Academy could scarcely have made a worse choice. When Marivaux's candidature was first mooted, the Archbishop was one of the signatories of a document which declared that

'Notre métier est de travailler à la composition de la langue, et celui de M. de Marivaux est de travailler à la décomposer; nous ne lui refusons pas de l'esprit, mais nos emplois jurent l'un contre l'autre, et cette différence lui interdira toujours l'entrée de notre sanctuaire'.¹

¹V. Gaston Deschamps, *Marivaux* (Les Grands Écrivains Français) Paris, 1897, p. 78.