

AN ELIZABETHAN DIARIST

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THE Tercentenary of the First Folio has seen a little group of Shakespeare's faithful servitors emerge, albeit somewhat dimly, from the shades. The printer-publishers, William Jaggard and Edward Blount, both substantial men with records in many other matters, step forth almost visibly—but without quite stirring our pulses. It was all part of the day's work for them. But with Heminge and Condell, co-actors with Shakespeare himself in many a play, and now having collected these same plays "without ambition either of selfe-profit or fame, only to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive, as was our Shakespeare"—the case is altered. These two, indeed, had we sat with Lamb and Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt on that happy occasion when they evoked the shades "of persons one would wish to have seen," these two we should certainly have summoned. Lamb refused to call up the shade of Sir Isaac Newton because Newton was not a *person*, but merely a book; we should reject Blount and Jaggard because they were not so much persons as printing presses; but Heminge and Condell! Fellow members with Shakespeare of the Lord Chamberlain's Company in the old days when they were acting Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* together; fellow actors in Shakespeare's heyday at the Globe; sharers with Shakespeare in various legal actions and transfers of property; heirs by Shakespeare's will of "xxvj^s, viii^d a peece to buy them ringes," and one of them at least an administrator of Shakespeare's Blackfriars property—what a story they could tell! If, that is, they would but emerge. But not all the researches of those who paid honour to them in the Folio year afford us one personable glimpse of either. Honest fellows, no doubt, though Mr. Heminge's legal transactions sometimes seem a little dubious; honest fellows, and worthy vestrymen both, of St. Mary Aldermanbury; but very shadowy at best. It is perhaps no more than we should expect; for the best of this kind, as Shakespeare reminds us, were but shadows even while they lived.

But if Heminge and Condell will not emerge at our bidding, there are others casually crossed by the poet's orbit who are more responsive. If better reasons than Lamb's may be found for not attempting to evoke the shade of Shakespeare himself, it is surely clear gain to find any friend or even chance acquaintance of the poet's who will abide our question.

Certainly one of these attendant spirits deserves more of an evocation than has so far been accorded him. It was in the pages of the Folio that *Twelfth Night* first found its way into print; but it is through the eyes of John Manningham that we first see it where Shakespeare meant us to see it—on the stage. The passage of Manningham's diary, kept while he was a student of the Middle Temple, in which he records his first and our first sight of *Twelfth Night*, has often been quoted, but will bear repetition:

At our feast wee had a play called Twelve Night, or what you will, much like the commedy of errores, or Menechmi in Plautus, but most like and neere to that in Italian called *Inganni*. A good practise in it to make the steward beleeeve his lady widdowe was in love with him, by counterfayting 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, Xc., and then when he came to practise making him beleeeve they tooke him to be mad.

Every editor of *Twelfth Night* has mentioned or quoted this passage as the earliest record of a performance of the play; but, save for those who have turned the pages of Manningham's diary, Manningham himself remains the mere tag of a date. And yet, here is a *person* not wholly undiscoverable in the pages of his own jottings, who saw what most of us would barter a whole library of *biblia a-biblia* to have seen. If Browning could be so moved by meeting one who had seen Shelley plain, surely John Manningham is worth a word or two.

I.

Not much is known about him, outside the pages of the diary. His father Robert lived in Cambridgeshire, but it does not appear that John studied at either Cambridge or Oxford. He was entered of the Middle Temple on March 16th, 1598, kept his terms for seven years, and was called to the degree of an utter barrister on June 7th, 1605. His chamber-fellow was Edward Curle whose sister, Anne Curle, John Manningham married about the year 1607. On April 25th, 1612, he inherited the ample estates of a relative, Richard Manningham. John Manningham made his will on

January 21st, 1622, and died not long afterwards, his will being admitted to probate in the same year.

To all intents, therefore, he lives for us only in the pages of his diary, kept more or less intermittently during twelve months of his residence at the Middle Temple. There is no such personal revelation as we get in Pepys, whose diary was his one intimate, and who felt as if it were to see himself "go into the grave" when he was compelled by failing eyesight to "resolve from this time forward to have it kept by my people in long hand, and must be contented to set down no more than is fit for them and all the world to know." John Manningham was not confessionally minded. He met interesting people, and jotted down what they said to him. He was near at hand when the great Queen died, and has left a record of that event which is valuable to the historian. He was an assiduous church-goer, and with a meticulous thoroughness made abstracts of the sermons. With no less appreciation, he noted the attempted witticisms, the quips and vulgar jests that passed current among his fellows of the Middle Temple. He copied down verses, most of them clumsy and dull. He was given to *facetiae*, but he was neither witty in himself nor the cause of wit in other men.

If, indeed, we could accept mere proportion as a criterion of his tastes, we should be forced to conclude that sermons were his chief concern. Within the brief period during which he kept a diary, Manningham made abstracts, some of them fairly long ones, of more than forty sermons. It is possible that he practiced sermon-abstracting as an exercise profitable to the study of the law; it is possible that, in Stevenson's phrase, it was merely a proficiency that tempted him, and he practised to acquire it as men learn to whittle, in a wager with himself. Anyhow, this little diary is the most comprehensive repertory of Elizabethan sermons that the age has left to us.

Manningham was seldom a critical listener. The prominent Churchmen he usually reports as length and without comment, albeit with an occasional criticism on the manner of delivery: "At the Court at Whitehall—Dr. Thomson, Deane of Windsor made a sermon; he hath a sounding laboured artificial pronounciation; he regards that so much that his speech hath no more matter than needes in it." And of "Dr. Dawson of Trinity in Cambridge, at Paules Crosse His Text, VII, Isay. 10. All the while he prayed he kept on his velvet night cap until he came to name the Queene, and then off went that, when he had spoken before both of and to God with it on his head."

It may be assumed that Manningham, who was certainly not

writing with an eye to posterity, did not think it necessary to describe the better-known preachers. But when an "irregular" came his way, he took a lively interest both in personality and in procedure: "At St. Clements—A plain plodding fellow, sometimes of Queens Colledge in Cambridge, his text Heb. cap. XI, V8." "At Paules—One with a long browne beard, a hanging looke, a gloting eye, and a tossing learing jesture; his text "Take heed of false prophets which come to you in sheeps clothing, but within are ravening wolves; you shall know them by their fruits." "In the afternoon, at a church in Foster Lane end, one Clappam, a black fellow, with a sower look, but a good spirit, bold, and sometimes bluntly witty." "At the Black Friars—Mr. Egerton, a little church or chappel up stayres, but a great congregation, specially of women. After God be merciful, reade after the second lesson; having sat a good tyme before in the pulpit, willed them to sing to the glorie of God and their own edifying, the 66 Psal, 2 part; after he made a good prayer, then turned the glass, and to his text, Acts vii, 23 & c."

Aside from the sermons, Manningham's diary reflects primarily the contacts and the interests natural to a student in the Middle Temple. Of systematic study there is not a trace. Perhaps that would be too much to expect of these casual jottings; but it is probable that there were no systematic studies to record. "Having spent some time in studying upon the first elements and grounds of the law", says Stow in the *Survey*, "they proceed to be admitted. and become students in some of these four houses or inns of court, where continuing by the space of seven years or thereabouts, they frequent readings, meetings, boltings, and other learned exercises, whereby growing ripe in the knowledge of the laws, and approved withal to be of honest conversation, they are. . . . selected and called to the degree of utter barristers." Save for one terse item—"I brought in a moote with Jo. Bramstone"—there is no trace of the "readings, meetings, boltings and other learned exercises" in which he must have taken part; but he is careful to record the names of those residents of the Inns of Court who are from time to time "called by the Queen" to be Sergeants; and à propos of such a list, he adds: "It is said Mr. Snig offers 800 l. to be Sergeant, whereupon Mr. Sergeant Harris said that he doubted not but he should shortly salute his dear brother Mr. Snig. Argent makes Sargent." Not a trace of reprobation in the dry humour of John Manningham's punning aphorism. With all his propensity for theological discourse, argent would probably have made sargent for him too, had not the benefaction of his relative made a country gentleman of him instead.

It would take a lawyer, versed as well in the history of the law, to do justice to the documentary interest of John Manningham's diary. We must be content to catch between the lines a few glimpses of Manningham himself in his unprofessional moments. He emerges as very much the sort of person whom we should expect the average middle-class, moderately educated Elizabethan Englishman to be—a compound of credulity and practicality, of ignorance and shrewdness. He was given to recording strange medicaments for various ills, such as the extraordinary empiricism of the time afforded. He does not believe in Alchemy, but notes with amused interest the activities of the famous Nicholas Hill "a great profest philosopher," who numbered many of the great men of the day among his dupes. He is much impressed with what he has heard of "a certain kind of compound called Laudanum . . . very soveraigne to mitigate any paine; it will for a time lay a man in a sweet trans, as Dr. Parry told me he tryed in a fever, and his sister Mrs. Turner in her childbirth." He is given to gossip, much of it scurrilous, and is fond of recording any sharp deal in money matters that comes to his ears. He has the sturdy prejudices of his class; is critical of the Scotch with their "lisping fumbling language," and explodes against the foreign affectations of travelled Englishmen, as vigorously if not as wittily as Rosalind did to Jacques. And how this redoubtable law student and Churchman despises the Puritans! "Such hypocrites are those professors," he exclaims. "A puritane," he notes, "is such an one as loves God with all his soul, and hates his neighbour with all his heart." He is ready to credit any story against them. "A Puritane" schoolmaster that taught little children in their horne bookes would not have them say 'Christ crosse A,' but 'Black Spot A' ". And he draws a picture of a superstitious pastor which goes far to justify Ben Jonson's mordant study of the Reverend Tribulation Wholesome. This Puritan divine had lost his purse, and resorted to a "figure-caster" to discover the thief. "On the day appointed for the purpose, the other told him that when he caste a paper into the chaffing dish of coales which he placed before them, he should looke in the glass to see the visage of him that had it; but the flame being too short for him to advise well what face it was, he earnestly entreated to see it again. 'Oh,' said the other, 'I perceiue well the cause why you could not discern it was that you trust too much in God.' 'Whoe, I', said the Puritan, 'I trust noc more in God than the post doth. Let me see it once againe.'"

It is curious to note in this connection that Manningham numbered among his intimates in the society of the Middle Temple

young John Pym, who later was to plead for the restoration of the silenced Puritan divines, and who was destined to become the great parliamentary leader in the struggle against the king.

Indeed, Manningham's friends, and those with whom his life in the Middle Temple brought him into casual contact, include many notable figures. Sir Thomas Overbury, poet and apostle of culture in the court, for whom the fates had such a grimly tragic doom in store; Sir John Davies, who had already written his *Nosce Teipsum*, and of whom our diarist speaks exceeding ill; "Jo. Bramstone," the future Lord Chief Justice; Sir Benjamin Rudyard, poet and intimate friend of Ben Jonson, were among his fellow-residents, and are often quoted; he records a chat with Stow, the antiquary, who talked to him about the recently published "Survey" and, quoting his style of *Antiquarius Angliæ*, averred that "he was worthie of that title for his paynes, for he hath noe gains by his travaile." The great Bacon, not yet even knighted and but on the threshold of his career, and Sir Walter Raleigh, recently back from his voyage to the Azores, and enjoying a brief moment of calm before the storm that was to burst upon him at the accession of James, were familiar figures about the purlieus of the Middle Temple. Anecdotes about "Fr. Bacon" and "W. Rawley" abound in the Diary; but of Bacon or Raleigh or any of the rest, Manningham affords us not one right describing word. It was not that he altogether lacked the power to catch a likeness. We venture to think that his picture of the preacher at Paul's, with his long brown beard, his hanging look, his gloating eye and his tossing, learing gesture sufficiently shows the diarist's powers. But it simply did not occur to him (any more, alas, than it usually occurs to us in our own jottings) to commit to paper the familiar and the obvious. What in truth were the

Words that wise Bacon or brave Raleigh spoke

in their hours of ease? With what quick gesture did Bacon point his aphorisms? How did Raleigh look, what tricks of manner had he, as he came swaggering up in peacock plumage from his house in the Strand? When shall we ever learn that the *trivia* of one generation are sure to become the treasures of the next? And by what perversity of fate should a man who was a contemporary of John Marston and Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare and who must have seen them as often as Manningham did in that play-going little town of London—by what perversity of fate should our diarist name these very three only to tell a more or less discreditable story about each one of them?

II.

It is, however, a later entry in the diary that couples Shakespeare's name with Burbage's in an anecdote of amorous rivalry. But on the occasion of the performance of *Twelfth Night*, no names are mentioned. If only the vagrant spirit of Charles Lamb could have found prior lodgment in the breast of this easy-going Elizabethan, what a feast we should have had! There is no play which we should so wish to see through Elizabethan eyes as *Twelfth Night*. There is no setting, no, not even the wooden O of the Globe itself, so alluring as that beautiful old Hall of the Middle Temple. There is no group of Elizabethans whom we should so like to summon in bodily presence as "the L. Chamberleyne his servants" including those "principal Comedians, Will. Shakespeare, Aug. Philips, Hen. Condell, Will Kempe, Ric. Burbadge, Joh. Hemings, Tho. Pope, Chr. Beeston, Joh. Dyke." Nothing short of the most irrefutable documentary evidence ought to shake our belief that on that occasion Will Kempe played Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Ric. Burbadge played Sir Toby Belch and Will. Shakespeare played Malvolio. There is nobody among those ancillary figures who contribute their touches of reality to the scene who had such a chance at immortality as worthy John Manningham. But if the exasperating fellow disregards his obligation to posterity and simply refuses to play up for us, we must read between the lines.

The grave dignity of the noble old Gothic Hall of the Middle Temple somehow commends itself as a setting for the romantic beauty and riotous fun of *Twelfth Night*. There is a kind of whimsical effrontery about the whole affair. High overhead, so high that the players on the stage at one end of the hall are dwarfed by it, spreads the beautiful open-work ceiling of time-darkened oak. Full length paintings of princes of the blood look gravely down upon the antics of these "rogues and vagabonds." Armorial bearings of the Knights Templar, emblazoned upon the windows, commemorate the glory of a mediaeval dream. Built though it was only half a century before Manningham played his little part, it has wholly blended with the ancient pile, and from the near-by Temple Church with its blackened effigies armored ghosts come to haunt the shadows. "What country, friend, is this?" asks Viola as, all semblative a woman's part, she trips forward on the stage. "This is Illyria, Lady," replies the Sea-Captain.

John Manningham, we may guess, was somewhat insensitive to ghosts; and if the verses which he quotes in the diary are a fair criterion of his taste, he was none too responsive to Viola's loyal cantons of contemned love. A sweet youth, no doubt, this Viola,

and a pretty turn of words. But Will. Kempe as Sir Andrew, displaying all the good gifts of nature, and no doubt speaking more than is set down for him; and Ric. Burbadge as Sir Toby, drinking till his brains turn o' the toe like a parish-top—this is something like. A little more of this, my masters, and honest John Manningham himself will go to church in a galliard and come home in a coranto. As for Viola, no doubt she will win her duke in the end. They all do in these Italian stories that are now so popular.

But here, in sooth, is a less conventional story, that seems to be getting off with a good start. Will. Shakespeare is on the stage. "Ho!" says John Manningham, "'A kind of Puritan,' the wench calls him. And 'sick of self love' ". He gives an approving nod, is reminded of a story anent these "silly hypocrites," and imparts it to his neighbour. "Whist, man," calls Thomas Overbury from a bench behind, "you are spoiling the play." John Manningham settles back with a grunt, to savour at his leisure the outcome of this cony-catching trick played on the puritanical Malvolio, and resolves to write out the story of the Steward and his Lady Widdowe in his diary before he goes to bed.

And here we leave him, not sorry on the whole that he was only an ordinary sort of person. He is rather more real for that. Around his solid commonplaceness, the insubstantial pageant becomes for the moment a little less shadowy: The sergeants at law in their parti-coloured robes and capes "furred with lamb!" the junior counsellors in their pleated gowns of "a sad colour;" but all, as Manningham records, "so filled with pride and fantastickness, that every one must have a velvet face, and be tricked with lace;" the students in their robes of sober black; visitors decked in the extraordinary diversity of costume characteristic of the time—great padded doublets glistening with gold and silver lace, French or Venetian hose, silk stockings, shoes gleaming with gold or silver buckles—apes of every continental fashion. John Manningham, bestirring himself on a convivial errand, turns in the doorway to look back. The glittering costumes, individually distinct near at hand, blend into a mere riot of colour down the perspective of the great hall. Untouched by the pathos of Malvolio's explanation, our diarist shoulders his way out. "To be sure!" he says to himself, "That's the way to treat a Puritan—

The most notorious geck and gull
That e'er invention play'd on."