

# “Silk? Satin? Kersey? Rags?” The Choristers’ Theater under Elizabeth and James

M. C. BRADBROOK

“Who maintains ’em? How are they escoted?”

HAMLET’S QUESTION about the little eyasses cut deep. The great Princes of the Renaissance built, in the splendor of their chapels, a monument to worldly greatness erected for the honor of God. The sumptuous and Italianate magnificence of the Chapel of Henry VIII, enriched with the spoils of Cardinal Wolsey’s, had made it a natural center for entertainment even after the Reformation, and Henry’s tradition descended to his daughter. The Chapel Royal boasted a musical enrollment which included Tallis and Byrd, Morley, Gibbons and John Bull, even if it no longer was adorned with all the decorative glories of vestments, and filled with incense and candles. It was the choristers of the Queen’s Chapel who in the first half of the reign of Elizabeth, besides serving the court with its favorite entertainment, had taken the revels of the Hall into the closely guarded City of London; here the song school of St. Paul’s Cathedral had already started with the advantage of an intimate acting place within the precincts, safe from the objections of the city fathers. By an ingenious arrangement, the Masters of the Children of the Chapel Royal and of Windsor secured a grander hall within the ancient Liberty of Blackfriars, where the Lord Mayor’s writ did not run.

The choristers’ theater was based on privilege and flourished on social equivocation. Boys of Westminster and Merchant Taylors’ schools were accustomed to give performances of plays; the descent from such exercises, designed to teach “good behavior and audacity” as Mulcaster believed,<sup>1</sup> to scurrility and scandal, had been completed by the choir boys when the First Blackfriars closed in 1590.

Both children’s troupes rise or decay with the appearance or disappearance of some talented and energetic promoter. Their history is the history of the men who trained the children. During the mastership of William Cornish, in the early part of Henry VIII’s reign, the Chapel had led; in the latter part of the reign, Paul’s had a much more distinguished repertory, and when in 1551 or there-

<sup>1</sup>*Liber Familicus of Sir James Whitelocke*, ed. John Bruce, Camden Society, LXX (London, 1858), 12.

abouts, Sebastian Westcote transferred from being Yeoman of the King's Chamber to Master of the Children of St. Paul's, their future as the leading troupe was assured.

At Elizabeth's early Christmas revels "Sebastian's Boys" appeared with Lord Robert Dudley's Men.<sup>2</sup> Westcote was a personal favorite of the Queen, which explains how he contrived to keep office as almoner, vicar choral, and subdean of St. Paul's, even when in 1564 he was excommunicated in the Consistory Court for papistry. A decade later, the City Remembrancer was sent in protest to the Dean of St. Paul's since "one Sebastian that wyll not communcyate with the Church of England kepethe playes and resorte of the people, to great gaine, and perill of the Corruptinge of the Chyldren with papistrie."<sup>3</sup> With the audacity of his art, Westcote, in spite of a spell in Marshalsea prison, kept his position within the ecclesiastical citadel till his death in 1582, when he left handsome legacies to some of the clergy and was buried in the choir.<sup>4</sup>

The master and his ten boys were under the control of the Dean; Alexander Nowell, who held that position for most of Elizabeth's reign, was a more powerful character than many of his Bishops, and had a dislike of singing that might later have been called Puritan. Yet in the very precincts where so many godly preachers at Paul's Cross thundered against plays, the singing boys, led by a papist, in their private quarters piped up at least once a week.<sup>5</sup> These plays must have been given after evensong, which ended by four o'clock, and before six o'clock, when the great gate to the precinct was shut and the daily bustle ended. The boys could never have been more than part-time players. Their living was secured by endowment, as was their master's. The profits which they made must have constituted almost pure gain for him; and when their success led to the kidnapping of the leading player, it became a matter for the Privy Council.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup>In 1560/1, 1561/2, 1562/3. See E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford, 1923), IV, 79-80. For his outline of the history of Paul's Boys, see II, 8-23.

<sup>3</sup>See *Malone Society Collections*, ed. W. W. Greg, II.3 (Oxford, 1931), 309-10. Order of the Court of Aldermen, 8 December 1575.

<sup>4</sup>The explanation is provided in a note from the Vatican quoted by Chambers, II, 14: "tamen tum ita charus Elizabethae fuit . . ."

<sup>5</sup>The Paul's sermons of John Stockwood, himself a schoolmaster, are the most celebrated. For a summary of the evidence for weekly performance, see Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (New York, 1952), pp. 44-45.

<sup>6</sup>Chambers, II, 15, quotes a letter of the Privy Council of 3 December 1575.

Paul's Boys had already enjoyed plays by Heywood and Redford; Westcote's own *Liberality and Prodigality* was revived in Elizabeth's last years.<sup>7</sup> From John Lyly they received the first fine artificial comedy of the age—Italianate and intricate. *Endimion*, *Midas*, *Gallathea*, and *Mother Bombie* were all written for Paul's boys. It was possibly the efforts of Lyly which restarted the Paul's plays in 1587; it was almost certainly his effort that brought about their downfall, when two years later he joined in the Marprelate controversy. For their fourpence, the Londoners could hear the trebles of the boys raised in shrill defence of episcopacy and shrill abuse of their opponents. A general inhibition was followed by the setting up of a commission to censor plays, which included the Archbishop of Canterbury; and where neither Dean nor Bishop had succeeded, the Primate evidently prevailed, for in a note to *Endimion*, published in 1591, the printer declared that Paul's plays had been "dissolved."

It seems likely that Dean and Chapter would do their best to maintain such a dissolution, but early in 1600, a decree of the Privy Council limiting the number of public playhouses to two tempted new promoters of the children to exploit their privileges once more. Paul's reopened and ran a brilliant repertory for six years, although quite early in the revival the Lord Mayor was ordered by the Privy Council to suppress all plays during Lent 1601, especially at Paul's and Blackfriars (where naturally they were most unseemly).

The Earl of Derby had been at great pains and charge to help reopen the theatre;<sup>8</sup> William Percy wrote plays for performance there, and in 1600 Edward Peers had relinquished his position as Gentleman of the Chapel Royal for the richer post of the Master of Paul's Boys. He acquired, quarrelled with, and discarded a variety of business associates.<sup>9</sup> In 1606 he shut down his playhouse and sold off the playbooks; two years later he was paid £20 a year dead rent by one of his former associates, now running a troop at Whitefriars, to keep the playhouse shut. It was a small place,

<sup>7</sup>For Westcote's authorship, see H. N. Hillebrand, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XIV (October 1915), 568. For a recent discussion, see T. W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude* (Leicester, 1958), pp. 16-17.

<sup>8</sup>*Penshurst Papers*, ed. C. L. Kingsford (1934), II, 415.

<sup>9</sup>C. J. Sisson, in *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age* (Cambridge, 1936), writes on *The Old Joiner of Aldgate* and the quarrel between Peers and Woodford. For an account of other quarrels, see H. N. Hillebrand, *The Child Actors*, University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, XI (Urbana, 1926), chapter VIII.

possibly circular, and as Peers controlled it, probably not part of the ecclesiastical establishment.<sup>10</sup>

A writer from Henry VIII's reign recorded how much happier was the life of a chorister at Paul's than the wandering life of the Chapel Children. Thomas Tusser (? 1524-1580) was impressed from Wallingford, where as choir boy he was scantily fed and often beaten:

for sundry men had placards then,  
Such child to take.  
The better brest, the lesser rest,  
To serve the choir, now there, now here,  
For time so spent, I may repent,  
And sorrow make.

But mark the chance, myself to 'vance,  
By friendship's lot, to Paul's I got,  
So found I grace, a little space  
Still to remain.<sup>11</sup>

In earlier times, the twelve children had been taken to France for the Field of the Cloth of Gold, led by their Master Cornish, all gorgeously arrayed in scarlet. In 1544 they accompanied the King once more to France in his wars; although the Statutes of Eltham, made in the seventeenth year of King Henry VIII, provided that whenever the king was not in residence at Windsor or in one of the six great houses where he kept his full state and held his Hall, "and specially in riding journeys and progresses, it is for the better administration of divine service ordained, that the master of the children, and six men, with some officers of the vestry, shall give their daily attendance in the king's court."<sup>12</sup> Six men was a very small proportion of the full thirty-two, and presumably it was left to the Master to decide how many children, if any should travel;

<sup>10</sup>See the Induction to John Marston's *What You Will* (1607), "The Stage is so very little" and the prologue to *Antonio's Revenge* (1602), "this round."

<sup>11</sup>Thomas Tusser, metrical *Life* prefixed to his *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (1573). Tusser went on to Eton, and then to Trinity College, Cambridge. Compare the happy lot of Thomas Whythorne at Oxford.

<sup>12</sup>A *Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household* . . . John Nichols for the Society of Antiquaries, (London, 1790), pp. 160-61. Chambers has made a slip in saying that six children were required to attend (*Elizabethan Stage*, II, 25). Six children were summoned from Windsor "to attend on the Queen at Reading, for which Farrant was paid, 7 November 1577" (Hillebrand, *The Child Actors*, p. 95, note 70) together with fifteen men; and if this were the usual proportion, the Chapel would have sent very few in progress.

perhaps, Thomas Tusser implies, only star performers were taken ("The better brest, the lesser rest").

The history of the Chapel Children, a sad one of growing exploitation and the divorce of some choristers from their duties as singing boys, can be explained, I think, by the fact that Elizabeth appointed no Dean to her Chapels Royal. Presumably she did not wish too closely to define the nature of her private worship. The Masters of her children therefore escaped any effective ecclesiastical supervision. Like the rest of the household the Chapel would have been subject to the lay authority of the Lord Chamberlain, but must have ranked as one of the outlying departments; it does not appear in some lists of household members.<sup>13</sup> Successive Masters lived at East Greenwich and may have boarded the children there when a full chapel was not being maintained. As long as he produced some children to sing when needed, and a full choir for the great feasts, the Master would be free to dispose of the rest as he wished—at all events, much more freely than the Master at St. Paul's.

Upon the death in 1564 of the talented Richard Edwards of the Chapel Royal, the Master of the Children of Windsor Chapel, who combined these duties with being a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal himself, pushed his boys into the lead at court. Richard Farrant brought his choristers down to Whitehall to perform before the Queen; but they were too firmly based at too great a distance from London to give regular performances in the City. Farrant therefore contrived, by being appointed deputy to William Hunnis, Master of the Chapel Royal, to get effective control of two sets of singing boys.<sup>14</sup> The Windsor boys then drop out of the record; but Farrant had two sets to draw on (ten at Windsor, twelve at the Chapel Royal) when in the summer of 1576, fired perhaps

<sup>13</sup>It is not for example in that printed in *Household Ordinances*, pp. 281-96, although an entry appears as Chapter XXVIII in the list given by F. Peck, *Desiderata Curiosa* (London, 1779), p. 61, and in *Household Ordinances*, pp. 252-53.

<sup>14</sup>Neither Chambers nor Hillebrand connect the enterprise at Blackfriars with the double choir, nor consider the suggestion made by C. W. Wallace in *The Evolution of the English Drama up to Shakespeare* (1912), p. 158, that the children lived at Blackfriars during the period of Farrant's theater. The indenture of Farrant's appointment at Windsor on 24 April 1564 is printed by E. H. Fellowes, *Organists and Masters of the Choristers of St. George's Chapel in Windsor Castle* (Windsor, 1939), pp. 25-26. It gives very full details of his duties and privileges, many of which correspond to those sought by Hunnis in 1583 (see below, note 22).

by the success of Westcote at St. Paul's, he launched his venture by acquiring the lease of the great frater at Blackfriars, adjoining St. Paul's on the south side.

Blackfriars had been the seat of the Revels Office between 1547 and 1559, and was later to become the Revels Office again; in time of Elizabeth's predecessors, the hall must have been used for rehearsing plays. Under color of this tradition, Farrant leased it from Sir William More, and kept, as More complained, "a continual howse for plays" there.<sup>15</sup>

The quarter had royal and official associations; the children wore the royal livery. It would have been extremely difficult to organize opposition, even when the performances obviously became something more than rehearsals for court.

Even if they performed only once a week from Michaelmas to Easter, it seems likely that the children were lodged at Blackfriars; this was certainly the case at the Second Blackfriars, whence, at Christmas 1600, Thomas Clifton recovered his kidnapped son.<sup>16</sup> The most ingenious planning and the toughest of children would hardly have allowed Farrant to bring them up and down the river (a trip of several hours, if wind and tide were contrary) considering that they would have to rehearse with the Gentlemen; whereas a division of the children into a Chapel party and a Blackfriars party would have solved the problem, allowing them necessary rehearsals with their properties at the theater.

Difficulties and expense of transportation may be imagined from the account of how at Shrovetide 1574, nine of "Mulcaster's Boys" from Merchant Taylors' school went to play at Hampton Court. Lodged first at the Revels Office in Clerkenwell for their rehearsals, they were then taken from Paul's wharf in two tilt wherries, attended by their tutor and their dressers, with their properties following in a barge. For one night they lay at court and for another at "Mother Sparo's" in Kingston, with the wherries waiting night and day to transport them when it should please the Queen to call for their show. When on Ash Wednesday they returned to London, many of them were "sick and cold and hungry," and they were put ashore at Blackfriars to be warmed and fed, perhaps in the

<sup>15</sup>Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, II, 496.

<sup>16</sup>Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, II, 43-45; Hillebrand, *The Child Actors*, pp. 160-64. "Two bodies of Chapel children were maintained, one at the court for the service of God, and one at Blackfriars for the service of Evans and Giles" (p. 164); cf. William A. Armstrong, *The Elizabethan Private Theaters: Facts and Problems* (London 1958), pp. 2-3.

rooms that the Chapel children were to occupy two years later. Each child received a shilling by way of recompence; Newdigate, who drilled them, received forty shillings, and the Revels Office paid for transport and lodging.<sup>17</sup>

If Farrant did not consider his boys' comfort, he had to think of their voices. Both at this time and also at the period of the Second Blackfriars, one man was in effective control both of the Children of the Chapel Royal and the Children of Windsor; choristers appeared in plays only when this was the case, or when they amalgamated with Paul's. Farrant and Nathaniel Giles after him, I believe, used his twenty-two boys as a team from which he selected players, leaving the singing duties to be carried on by other boys. By power of impressment other children could have been taken up from any establishment in the country but they would have to be supported at the Master's expense.<sup>18</sup>

The Chapel, though the Gentlemen guarded their traditional privileges closely, must have been a very loose kind of corporate association. Much absenting of the Gentlemen appears from efforts to control it by the system of fines.<sup>19</sup> A full choir probably mustered only at great feasts. The rigidity of modern contractual obligation was not part of the ancient notion of gentlemanly service.<sup>20</sup> The double offices at the Chapel Royal and Windsor held by Farrant and Giles must have meant that they could not personally discharge their duties at both.

After Farrant's death on 30 November 1580, the overseer of his will, Henry Evans, a scrivener, took over the theater with the assent of Hunnis, who reassumed control of the Chapel children. The

<sup>17</sup>Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, I, 87; A. Feuillerat, *Documents relating to the Revels in the Time of Queen Elizabeth*, in *Bang's Materialien*, XXI (Louvain, 1908), 218-20. Harbage makes a slip (*Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions*, p. 32) in stating that these were the Chapel children.

<sup>18</sup>This was obviously the case at the Second Blackfriars. During the fifteen-eighties, Paul's also gained the right of impressment. In the Statutes of Eltham, 1526 (*Household Ordinances*, p. 147), Heralds and minstrels were forbidden to bring boys, rascals, or servants to court.

<sup>19</sup>E. F. Rimbault, *The Old Cheque-Book of the Chapel Royal*, Camden Society Publications, (London, 1872) pp. 66-67; order of April 13, 1593. Cf. also pp. 71-73, 79.

<sup>20</sup>See e.g. I.M., *A Health to the Gentlemanly Profession of Serving-Men* (1598) D2<sup>v</sup>. Notice that a petition for increase of pay was sought by the Gentlemen of the Chapel by a delegation consisting of the Subdean and "sixe of the auntientes of our companie (most commonly waiting)" (Rimbault, p. 59). This was on 20 January 1595-6. It seems clear that the children attended at the discretion of their Master, except at great feasts, and that they did not sing at all services (cf. Rimbault, p. 71).

fiction that the boys were merely rehearsing was coolly maintained; in a letter of 19 September 1581, the Earl of Leicester wrote to Sir William More that Hunnis meant only “to practise the Queen’s children of the Chapell, being nowe in his chardge, in like sort as his predecessor did, for the better trayning them to do her Majestye service.”<sup>21</sup>

The death of Westcote led to an attempt to amalgamate with the boys of Paul’s; soon the children of the Earl of Oxford’s Chapel joined the group, as the men’s companies would combine when in difficulties. Then, in November 1583, Hunnis petitioned the Board of Green Cloth that the Children’s allowance of 6d a day apiece for their diet might be exchanged for the ancient right to eat with the royal household “during the tyme of theyr attendance.” This suggests that whereas before it was worth his while to accept an allowance even if inadequate, since it gave at least a subsidy, if most or all of the Children were to leave Blackfriars, it would be to his advantage if they came into residence; perhaps by bringing them to Whitehall he hoped to get lodgings as well as commons, for he complains of being obliged to pay for the children’s lodging “at such tyme as they attend upon the Courte”—which was evidently not continuously by any means. In this lengthy complaint no mention whatever is made of the sum they had been earning for their Master.<sup>22</sup>

In the spring of 1584 More regained possession of the lease and shut down the theater. During the nineties the Chapel boys made a few sporadic appearances in the country during the summer. When the court was in progress, they could go on a little progress of their own and earn some money with old plays.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Hillebrand, *The Child Actors*, p. 91 (quoting from Loseley MSS Letters).

<sup>22</sup>Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, II, 37-38. He does not see the full point of the request, which he takes to be merely a tribute to the boys’ appetites. Printed in full in Hillebrand, *The Child Actors*, pp. 102-04. Both Chambers and Hillebrand seem to think that Hunnis did not succeed; but I do not see why the “traditional” mess of meat allowed for the Children of the Chapel by the Household Ordinances of James I, of 17 July 1604 (*Household Ordinances*, p. 301), should refer as Chambers suggests (*Elizabethan Stage*, II, 50), only to feasts. It is true that the Master still drew an allowance; but he had always had a payment for their breakfasts, and he had to pay for their ordinary clothing and for attendance. I would think this “messing” applied to the custom of the Hall generally, as Hunnis had asked in 1583, and as the Statutes of Eltham had allowed (*Household Ordinances*, pp. 168-69).

<sup>23</sup>Hillebrand, *The Child Actors*, p. 104. I share the scepticism of Chambers about the single possible appearance in the country of Paul’s Boys (*The Elizabethan Stage*, II, 19).

Westcote and Farrant had combined authority over the Children with creative talent, court patronage, and business acumen. Future Masters, who combined with promoters, were led into quarrels through divided aims. The helplessness of the children demanded that their fortunes be linked to the parent institution; in this, Paul's Boys were better protected than the Chapel Children. Any gentlemanly institution like the chapel derived its corporate sense from a common life in the court.

The reopening of the Paul's Boys in 1600 tempted Evans to restart the Chapel Boys at Blackfriars. It was now in the possession of Burbage who in 1596 had bought the fencing hall in hopes to make a theater of it when the men were turned out of the city inns; but the inhabitants of Blackfriars protested that "there hath not at any time heretofore been used any common Playhouse within the same Precinct."<sup>24</sup> Evans found a sleeping partner in Nathaniel Giles, Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal and of Windsor, who lent to the venture his power of impressment. The kidnapping of a gentleman's son proved the undoing of Evans. On 13 December 1600 Thomas Clifton, a schoolboy of thirteen was seized and borne off to exercise "the base trade of a mercenary interlude player." When his father found Thomas at Blackfriars, Evans refused to release the lad, but put a playscroll into his hand and threatened him with a good whipping unless he learned his part. A warrant secured his release from this mockery of impressment to which others including Nat Field, the future playwright, had also been subjected. No attempt was made to teach the boys singing, and they could never have served the choir, being "noe way able or fitt for singing, nor by anie the said confederates endeavoured to be taught to sing."<sup>25</sup>

In fact, a company of sharers had been set up on the model of the men's theaters, for an ambitious and expensive enterprise had been planned. Some of the plays required a cast of more than a dozen children; the productions were grand enough for an innocent visitor to think they were sponsored by the Queen.<sup>26</sup>

These so called "Children of the Chapel" proved little birds of

<sup>24</sup>Hillebrand, *The Child Actors*, p. 157, quoting *S.P.D. James I*, 260, 116.

<sup>25</sup>See note 16 above. Yet a concert preceded the play at Blackfriars in 1602. Among the differences between the first and second Paul's and Chapel theaters this must have been very striking; the Paul's boys still provided music, as the well known passage in the Induction to John Marston, *The Malcontent* (1604) makes plain.

<sup>26</sup>Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, II, 46-47.

prey who did not hesitate to attack the players, their landlords, and Burbage's company in particular; they satirized all and sundry—even, when King James arrived, their sovereign, for which in a fury he threatened that they should be made to beg their bread.<sup>27</sup>

The accession of James, however, had meant the final separation of the singing boys and the players of Blackfriars. The judgment of the British Solomon recognized the facts by creating two groups out of what was still nominally one. For the Chapel Royal now acquired a Dean and the children's Master, a master.

A general reformation at once began at the Chapel Royal. The Children, under Household Ordinances of 4 July 1604, were allowed one mess of meat in court a day. But five months earlier on 4 February 1604, a license had been issued to four "confederates" to bring up a convenient number of children within Blackfriars in the name of Children of the Queen's Revels. They were to practice and exercise plays and shows—music is not mentioned.<sup>28</sup> These children now became simply a certain type of common player, with no rights, no wages, and no powers to secede. At the best they might hope to be treated as apprentices; and in 1606 a certain Alice Cook bound her son prentice at the Blackfriars. The notion of royal service had been completely replaced by the notion of a trade.

Meanwhile on 13 September 1604, his commission for the children of the Chapel was issued to Nathaniel Giles, in which he is made responsible for any actions of his deputy in impressing children, and the Dean is associated with him in providing that the Children's future maintenance should be arranged at one of the universities. It had already been provided that the Dean was to choose the songs for the Chapel but not without consulting the Master on such occasions as the Children would sing.<sup>29</sup> Just before Christmas the whole chapel had an "augmentation" of their wages, and the children's allowance went up from 6d to 10d a day—but at the same time much stricter rules for attendance were imposed on the Gentlemen. The Chapel had been given both rewards and discipline.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, II, 53-54, quoting *S.P.D. James I*, 31, 73.

<sup>28</sup>Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, II, 49.

<sup>29</sup>Rimbault, *The Old Cheque-Book of the Chapel Royal*, p. 71.

<sup>30</sup>Rimbault, *The Old Cheque-Book of the Chapel Royal*, pp. 71-74. The "Ancient tymes of lyberty and playing weekes" are set out very generously—evidently the Chapel's version; five items are then struck out—evidently the Dean's version.

It is therefore a matter of surprise that on 7 November 1606, it was found necessary to re-issue his commission to Nathaniel Giles, stating that the children's future was to be arranged by the Lord Chamberlain, Vice Chamberlain, and the Dean, without Giles's co-operation. A significant addition followed:

Provided alwayes and wee doe straightlie charge and commaunde that none of the saide Choristers or Children of the Chappell so to be taken by force of this Commission shalbe used or imployed as Comedians or Stage players or to exercise or acte anye Stage plays Interludes Comedies or tragedies for that it is not fitt or decent that suche as shoulde sing the praises of god Allmightie shoulde be trayned upp or imployed in suche lascivious and prophane exercises.<sup>31</sup>

Such a specific prohibition would hardly have been issued if occasion had not called for it; if Nathaniel Giles wished to keep his two places, he had to bring up his charges to sing.

This second commission more or less coincides with the shutting down of Paul's, whose last recorded performance was in July 1606; it may well be that the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's took advantage of the royal prohibition to enforce a similar decree, if indeed they were not told to do so.

For some time, the Children of the Revels continued at Blackfriars, with continual reshufflings among their masters. Then the boys growing up, became "masters themselves" and took over the management. Finally, about August 1608, Richard Burbage regained the lease, and Shakespeare's company, along with the theater, took in the best of the actors, while the remnant moved off to a third theater at Whitefriars, replacing another shortlived children's company; eventually they sank to the level of provincial strollers.

*Hamlet* had recorded the men's indignation at the style of the children's plays; but Shakespeare treated the matter lightly enough, tossing the victory to the boys, who "carry it away . . . *Hercules* and his load too." He did not however accord them the publicity of print; the passage does not appear in the Quartos. Had the men seriously feared the children's theater, Burbage would never have

<sup>31</sup>Both commissions to Giles are printed in *Malone Society Collections*, ed. W. W. Greg, I.4 (Oxford, 1911), 359-63. Hillebrand remarks (*The Child Actors*, p. 196) that this is the solitary instance he recalls of the revocation of a former writ issued to the same person. On 8 April 1605 Giles appointed a deputy to discharge his office at Windsor (Fellowes, p. 39).

granted them the lease in the first place; the sharpness of their attack was something he could not foresee.

At the end of his *Apology for Actors* (1612) Thomas Heywood finds only one genuine cause of complaint against the stage:

some abuse lately crept into the quality, as an inveighing against the state, the court, the law, the city, and their governements, with the particularizing of private men's humors (yet alive), noble-men, and others: I know it distastes many; neither do I any way approve it, nor dare I by any meanes excuse it. The liberty which some arrogate to themselves, committing their bitterness, and liberrall invectives against all estates, to the mouthes of children, supposing their juniority to be a priviledge for any railing, be it never so violent, I could advise all such to curb and limit this presumed liberty within the bands of discretion and government.<sup>32</sup>

From the early splendor of their great tradition, with its gorgeous reminiscences of the older faith, the choristers had sunk to receive the well-merited and Puritanical rebukes of their masters and fellow-players. The choristers' theater, based on older forms of service, dwindled and declined as the common players rose and flourished. Though patronized by nobility and though privileged in other ways, it could not compete with the power and range of the masterpieces of ripeness and judgment that were written for the popular stages.<sup>33</sup> And, as an illustration of the social movement of the time, the two stories show a decaying relic of older nobility faced with a new and flourishing estate—the estate of the common player.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Shakespeare Society Reprints (1841), p. 61.

<sup>33</sup>This point was made by Hillebrand, *The Child Actors*, pp. 38-39, 274-75. I have endeavoured to describe the fortunes of the men's companies in an article, "The Status Seekers," which is due to appear in the *Huntington Library Quarterly* for February, 1961.

<sup>34</sup>Nevertheless, as godmother of two Children of Windsor Chapel, I must add that at present the singing boys receive an excellent education and proceed to the University as King James decreed, if not any longer by King James' methods.