

## The History of HENRY IV, PART ONE

### i

IN 1597, two years after *Richard II* had been presented, *Henry IV, Part One* was written. Its action follows almost immediately upon that of the former play. *Richard II* closed with the death of Richard II (see page II-312) in February 1400. *Henry IV, Part One* opens a little over two years later, in June 1402, in the King's palace in London.

The King is Henry IV, who in *Richard II* was Henry of Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, and later (after the death of his father, John of Gaunt) the Duke of Lancaster. In the previous play, his speeches were labeled "Bolingbroke." Now they are labeled "King."

In *Richard II*, Bolingbroke was pictured as a young man, dominating and forceful. Now he is pictured as an old man, tired and worn. Actually, he was still only thirty-six years old when the play opens, but this is actually middle age by medieval standards.

In addition, Henry IV suffered some chronic disease through most of his reign. This grew gradually worse and made him seem older than he was. The disease involved skin lesions as its most notable symptom and many at the time considered it to be leprosy striking him in divine punishment for his crime of taking the throne from the legitimate king, Richard II. It seems very doubtful that this was so, however, and some suggest syphilis instead, though at this time that disease had not yet become prominent in Europe. It may have been something as common and as undramatic as psoriasis.

But even if Henry IV were in complete health, he might well have sunk under the cares of state, for during much of his reign he was occupied with the suppression of revolt, and of wars with the Welsh and Scots, who seized on the confusion of civil war among the English to advance their own national ambitions.

... to the sepulcher of Christ

Henry strikes the theme of his reign in the first line of the play:

*So shaken we are, so wan with care,*

—Act I, scene i, line 1

Then, after bemoaning the continuing disputes that embroil the land, he hopes for respite so that he might embark on an expedition that was a longed-for ambition of his:

. . . Therefore, friends,  
As far as to the sepulcher of Christ—  
Whose soldier now, under whose blessed cross  
We are impressed and engaged to fight—  
Forthwith a power of English shall we levy,  
Whose arms were molded in their mother's womb  
To chase these pagans in those holy fields

—Act I, scene i, lines 18-24

Henry had promised to go to the Holy Land to do penance for the death of Richard II (see page II-314) at the close of *Richard II*, and he is still trying.

It is a forlorn hope and it is quite certain that if he really had attempted to lead a Crusade, it would have led only to disaster, for the Ottoman Empire, which was at that time the principal Moslem power, was far stronger than any army any Western power could send against it.

Yet one can understand Henry's longing to do *something* to convince the nation that he was in God's good grace, *something* to make his rule completely legitimate. Not only would that put an end to civil war, but it would ensure the safety of his line, for it would mean that his son and his son's son would be legitimate kings in their turn.

. . . my gentle cousin Westmorland

Having made this resolve, King Henry turns to the nobleman at his side, and says:

. . . Then let me hear  
Of you, my gentle cousin Westmorland,  
What yesternight our council did decree  
In forwarding this dear expedience.

—Act I, scene i, lines 30-33

The man addressed here is Ralph Neville, 1st Earl of Westmoreland. He had originally been a follower of Thomas of Gloucester (see page II-264) and had been knighted in 1380 by that nobleman.

Young Neville showed a masterly ability to choose the winner. When the showdown came between Thomas of Gloucester and King Richard II, Neville was on the side of the King and against his earlier patron. In 1397, after Gloucester's imprisonment and death, Neville was rewarded with the earldom of Westmoreland.

Meanwhile, he had further advanced his hopes by a marriage to a daughter of the wealthy John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster.

John of Gaunt had had, in addition to his legitimate offspring, several children by his mistress, Catherine Swynford. He later married Catherine and legitimized those children. It was one of these legitimized children—Joan Beaufort—that Ralph Neville married.

This made him brother-in-law (or half brother-in-law) to Henry Bolingbroke, who was John of Gaunt's oldest son by his legitimate wife. When Bolingbroke became King Henry IV, Ralph Neville of Westmoreland became the King's "gentle cousin," for "cousin" in Shakespearean terms was a general term for any relative.

What's more, when Bolingbroke had landed in England and began his rebellion against Richard II (see page II-287), Westmoreland quickly chose the winning side again and once again profited. Under King Henry, he was put in charge of the western frontier and supervised the fighting against the Welsh.

*. . . the noble Mortimer*

Westmoreland, listening to this useless talk of the Holy Land, quashes it at once. Yes, the question of a Crusade was being discussed, but then came news of a serious defeat in the west:

*. . . the noble Mortimer  
Leading the men of Herefordshire to fight  
Against the irregular and wild Glendower,  
Was by the rude hands of that Welshman taken,  
A thousand of his people butchered;*

—Act I, scene i, lines 38-42

Who is "the noble Mortimer"? To straighten that out and see the significance of his capture, let us go back to Edward III and his seven sons (see page II-259).

The first was Edward, the Black Prince, and it was his son who became King Richard II. The fourth son was John of Gaunt, and it was his son, Bolingbroke, who succeeded Richard II and reigned as Henry IV.

But, according to the tenets of strict legitimacy, once Richard II was dead, the next king should be drawn from the line of the second son of Edward III. Failing that, the line of the third son should follow. Only failing that, too, could Henry IV be considered legitimate king.

Edward's second son was William of Hatfield, who died a boy, leaving no descendants of any kind. Edward's third son was Lionel of Antwerp, Duke of Clarence. Lionel died in 1368, but by then he had reached the age

of thirty, had married, and had had a child. It was a daughter, named Philippa.

Philippa married Edmund Mortimer, 3rd Earl of March. ("March" means "borderland" and the name is applied to districts on the Welsh border.) Edmund Mortimer died in Ireland in 1381.

By that time, though, he had a son, Roger Mortimer, who became the 4th Earl of March. This fourth earl, who succeeded while Richard II was still King, was, in point of fact, the heir to the throne if Richard should die without children. March was, through his mother, the grandson of the third son of Edward III; Bolingbroke was only the son of the fourth son of Edward III.

Richard II recognized the 4th Earl of March as his heir and made him his deputy in Ireland after the first and relatively successful royal expedition to Ireland (see page II-277). But then in 1398 Roger Mortimer was assassinated and that was the immediate occasion for Richard's second, and thoroughly disastrous, expedition to Ireland (see page II-292).

Roger Mortimer had, however, left a son, Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March, and him Richard at once recognized as next in line to the throne. However, Richard was deposed the next year by Bolingbroke, who took the throne for himself without regard to young Edmund of March, who was great-grandson of third son, Lionel—but who was only eight years old.

At eight, the "rightful heir" was not dangerous, but he could be used as a puppet by older men who could rebel in the sacred name of legitimacy. Besides, he would grow older. The cautious Henry IV therefore placed the Earl of March and a younger brother in strict custody and kept them thus throughout the reign.

But then, who was this Mortimer who had been defeated by the Welsh? It was *Sir* Edmund Mortimer, an uncle of the 5th Earl of March and not himself the legitimate heir. He is at best third in line, after nephew Edmund and his younger brother Roger.

Holinshed, from whom Shakespeare obtains much historical information for this play, confuses the two Edmund Mortimers, uncle and nephew, and thinks it is the uncle, leading the armies, who is the rightful heir to the throne (as though Henry IV were such a madman as to give an army to the rightful heir).

Shakespeare, following Holinshed, makes the same mistake and throughout *Henry IV, Part One* has his characters act as though the legitimate heir to the throne has been captured by the Welsh.

As for Glendower, he was pictured as heading Welsh forces during the time, two years before, when Bolingbroke had rebelled against Richard II (see page II-294).

Glendower had had an English education, and his serious rebellion against the English began in September 1400, after Henry IV had been King for half a year, partly because of personal feuds with a neighboring English lord and partly because the confusion inherent in the beginning

of the reign of a king considered a usurper by many offered him troubled water to fish in.

Glendower's rebellion did best in south Wales. His capture of Mortimer, which took place on June 22, 1402, not only enhanced his prestige but gave him an opportunity for meddling in internal English politics.

. . . *the gallant Hotspur* . . .

Westmoreland has further news, not quite so bad and yet not good either, for it concerns a battle in progress, with no clear knowledge as yet as to its outcome. This second battle is on the Scottish border. Westmoreland says:

*On Holy-rood Day the gallant Hotspur there,  
Young Harry Percy, and brave Archibald,  
That ever-valiant and approved Scot,  
At Holmedon met. . .*

—Act I, scene i, lines 52-55

Holy-Rood Day (Holy-Cross Day, for "rood" is the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the Latin-derived "cross") is September 14. The day celebrates the anniversary of the return of the Holy Cross (upon which Jesus was crucified) to Jerusalem by the East Roman Emperor Heraclius. This took place in 627, after Heraclius had defeated the Persians, who had captured Jerusalem and taken the Cross thirteen years earlier. (Seven years later the Moslem Arabs took Jerusalem and the Cross was lost forever, so that the celebration of Heraclius' feat was really a rather hollow one.)

This battle with the Scots took place, indeed, after the battle with the Welsh, but nearly three months after. For dramatic purposes, Shakespeare compresses time so as to make it seem that they took place almost together.

Harry Percy, who led the English side in this battle with the Scots, played a small part in *Richard II*. He is the son of Northumberland, who in *Richard II* was the most prominent of Bolingbroke's partisans.

In *Richard II*, Harry Percy was presented as a young man, a teen-age stripling. Now, two years later, he is depicted as a seasoned warrior, though still young, and is given his nickname "Hotspur" (see page II-288). In the interval between the plays he had led the campaign against Glendower and had cleared north Wales of the insurgents (though leaving the Welshman strong in south Wales).

However, he had been fighting long before then, for he was, in actual fact, no young man at all, but thirty-eight years old, two years older than the King himself.

Seventeen years before, Hotspur had been engaged in another battle

on the Scottish border which had gone down in legend. The battle involved the earls of Douglas, who dominated the south of medieval Scotland as the Percys dominated the north of medieval England. The two families engaged in border warfare with scant regard for the central government on either side.

In 1388 James, 2nd Earl of Douglas, invaded England and besieged Newcastle (about forty miles south of the border) for three days. He captured Hotspur's battle flag and Hotspur, to retrieve this blow to his military reputation, forced a battle at Otterburn near the border. The Scots won again and Hotspur was captured—but Douglas was killed. This battle inspired (in a badly distorted way) a well-known ballad, "Chevy Chase."

Hotspur was released on payment of a heavy ransom, much of which was contributed by Richard II, whom Hotspur repaid rather foully ten years later.

James was succeeded by a bastard son, Archibald, the 3rd Earl of Douglas. He died at the end of 1400, and was succeeded by his son, another Archibald, the 4th Earl. It is the 4th Earl of Douglas who is "brave Archibald."

The 4th Earl of Douglas invaded England in 1402 and at Holmedon (Humbleton) in Northumberland met the same Hotspur who had once fought against his grandfather. (Naturally, Shakespeare cannot make use of this interesting fact, since it would wreck the basic interest of the play, which depends on making Hotspur and the Prince of Wales approximately the same age. Hotspur's age may be supposed to be in the early twenties, as far as this play is concerned.)

*Sir Walter Blunt. . .*

Westmoreland's news of an uncertain battle is capped by the King himself, however, for a new messenger has just arrived and has brought later news. The King introduces the messenger, saying:

*Here is a dear, a true industrious friend,  
Sir Walter Blunt, new lighted from his horse,*

—Act I, scene i, lines 62-63

Blunt (his name was actually Blount) is a veteran soldier, who had been with the Black Prince on his victorious foray into Spain thirty-five years before (see page II-260) and had also accompanied John of Gaunt on his much less fortunate Spanish venture (see page II-263). Now he was serving the son as loyally as he had served the father.

*Mordake, Earl of Fife . . .*

The news Blunt brings is good. Hotspur has won a great victory.

Hotspur did it, actually, by the cool use of archery from long distance, while the Scots vainly tried to charge into close quarters, with no archers of their own to cover. It was as though two armies were fighting today and only one had air support. It was a slaughter and the Scots lost ten thousand against very few English. (Even allowing for inevitable exaggeration by the victors, it was a slaughter.)

What was most important was that a number of high-ranking Scots noblemen were captured. The King lists them:

*. . . Of prisoners, Hotspur took  
Mordake, Earl of Fife and eldest son  
To beaten Douglas, and the Earl of Athol,  
Of Murray, Angus, and Menteith.*

—Act I, scene i, lines 70-73

Of these, the most important is the first mentioned, Mordake (or Murdoch, as we would spell it today), Earl of Fife. He was the son of Robert Stuart, 1st Duke of Albany (and *not* the son of Douglas).

This actually makes him a still higher prize, for Robert Stuart's older brother, John, had been reigning as King of Scotland since 1390, under the name of Robert III. The King was old and incapacitated, so that Robert Stuart, the younger brother, was the regent and the actual ruler.

Hotspur had thus captured the son of the regent of Scotland and the nephew of the reigning King.

*. . . my young Harry*

The joy of the victory and the great honor it brings Hotspur forces a sad thought to the mind of the King. When Westmoreland joins in the praise of Hotspur, the King says:

*Yea, there thou mak'st me sad, and mak'st me sin  
In envy that my Lord Northumberland  
Should be the father to so blest a son:  
A son who is the theme of honor's tongue,  
Who is sweet fortune's minion and her pride;  
Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him,  
See riot and dishonor stain the brow  
Of my young Harry . . .*

-Act I, scene i, lines 78-85a

Here is the central conflict of the play. A kind of twin character is presented, both named Harry, both of an age. One is all good: martial, honor-seeking, brave, and knightly to a fault. The other is all bad: dissolute, disregarding his position, the friend of blackguards.

It is in order to set up this conflict that Shakespeare has taken nearly twenty years off Hotspur's age. What's more, he has had to add a few years to the Prince's age (the King's "young Harry," who is the Prince of Wales), for at the time of the Battle of Holmedon, the King's son was, in actual fact, only fifteen years old.

Yet, even at this young age, the Prince of Wales has already been campaigning in north Wales. With whom? Why, with Hotspur himself. In real history, in other words, Hotspur has taken the young Prince campaigning with him and has undoubtedly been like a father to him; he was old enough.

But, however much they made a kind of father-and-son pair in history, they make a brother-and-brother pair in Shakespeare, and so effective is this play under the lash of Shakespeare's transcendent genius, that history is forever thrust out of the arena.

Shakespeare has immortalized the rakehell Prince as he has immortalized the gallant young Hotspur, and no possible debunking in this book or any other can wipe out the Shakespearean picture and replace it with what is, after all, merely truth.

*. . . mine Percy, his Plantagenet*

The sorrowing King can only wish that it could turn out somehow that matters had been reversed. He says:

*. . . O that it could be proved  
That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged  
In cradle clothes our children where they lay,  
And called mine Percy, his Plantagenet!*

-Act I, scene i, lines 85b-88

Edward III had been a Plantagenet by virtue of his descent from Henry II through an unbroken line of males (see page II-212). All the descendants of Edward III, through the male line only, were Plantagenets too. The Prince of Wales was the son of the son of the son of Edward III and was therefore a Plantagenet.

*. . . young Percy's pride*

But then King Henry turns away from his self-pity and approaches

something more important—the insubordination of Hotspur. The gallant young man had taken an important prisoner, and prisoners were valuable, for they could be ransomed for large sums. (Hotspur himself, remember, had been captured and ransomed at a high price after the Battle of Otterburn.)

The King says indignantly to Westmoreland:

. . . *What think you, coz,  
Of this young Percy's pride? The prisoners  
Which he in this adventure hath surprised [captured]  
To his own use he keeps, and sends me word  
I shall have none but Mordake, Earl of Fife.*

-Act I, scene i, lines 90-94

The King apparently feels that a victory by any Englishman was a victory for England and that any prisoners taken were therefore the King's (today we would say "the national government's") and not the general's.

This, however, Hotspur refuses to allow. The ancient practice of the border armies was to make personal profit of the prisoners, and he was not going to be denied his ransoms, which were earned at the peril of his life.

Indeed, this is an example of the kind of quarrel that was bound to arise in a land whose King had come to the throne in the fashion that Henry IV had. The nobles (including Henry IV himself, then Bolingbroke) had rebelled against Richard II's arrogation of too much power to tax and control. The Percys had been foremost in this rebellion and without them Henry could not have reached the throne. Having fought for freedom from centralized "tyranny" (for "states' rights," to use our own nearly equivalent term), the Percys naturally felt they ought to have it and that Henry IV, whom they had helped to the throne in that cause, should certainly not be the one to deny them.

Henry IV, however, once in power, could see no way of conducting the affairs of the kingdom but in the very way Richard II did. He had to increase his powers and get money wherever he could, for he needed money as badly as ever Richard did.

The quarrel was irreconcilable but it must be said that consistency seemed to be on the side of the Percys. Indeed, Hotspur might fairly argue that he was proposing a generous compromise against his own best interest. Mordake, whom he was proposing to surrender to the King, was the most important prisoner he had, and was likely to bring the highest ransom. The King, in rejecting that offer and demanding all, must have seemed simply a greedy tyrant to the Percys.

(Shakespeare followed Holinshed in this matter of the prisoners, by the way, and Holinshed may be wrong. There is reason to think that, in actuality, King Henry grudgingly conceded the point. But if he did so, it didn't change matters. The quarrel between centralization and decentrali-

zation was irrepressible and if it was patched over here, it would simply break out there.)

. . . *his uncle's teaching* . . .

Westmoreland, on hearing the news of the quarrel over the prisoners, considers Hotspur too young to be the true instigator. There are older, more conspiratorial heads behind it. He says, wrathfully:

*This is his uncle's teaching, this is Worcester,  
Malevolent to you in all aspects,*

—Act I, scene i, lines 95-96

Worcester was Sir Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester, who had broken with Richard II rather late in the day (see page II-288). He was the younger brother of the Duke of Northumberland and therefore the uncle of Hotspur.

The fact that he hesitated before joining the rest of the Percys in the rebellion against Richard II may well have meant that he was inclined toward Richard or that he disliked or distrusted Bolingbroke (or both) and that he abandoned the former for the latter only when it became unsafe to do otherwise. It would therefore be quite credible that he should be the readiest of the Percys to consider a rebellion against the new King.

As it turns out, Westmoreland's suspicions of Worcester are quite correct, but we cannot expect the former to attempt to smooth matters over in any case. Westmoreland was of the Neville family, after all, and they are a northern family who had long been enemies of the Percys. Westmoreland would be only too eager to see them in trouble.

*Now, Hal* . . .

The King decides to call the Percys to his palace at Windsor for a conference on the matter, and so ends the first scene, filled with matters of state, with battles lost and won, with warriors and rebels, with anger and danger. That done, Shakespeare switches to the London lodgings of the Prince of Wales.

Here, however, as King Henry had indicated, is no Hotspur; no knight of storybook honor and valor. Instead, we have a gay and thoroughly human youngster, with his boon companion, a grossly fat, dissolute, white-haired old villain, who, without a single saving grace but his wit, manages to be so entirely lovable as to win his way not only into the Prince's heart, but into the audience's as well.

The fat old man is Sir John Falstaff, and though he is not a historical

character, but is an almost whole-cloth creation of Shakespeare's, he is more real to the reader in his gross humanity than anyone else in the play.

He bursts into the scene at once, speaking even before the Prince does:

*Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?*

—Act I, scene ii, line 1

(Because Falstaff consistently calls the Prince by this ultrashort nickname, one less formal, even, than Harry, the Prince is best known in this play as "Prince Hal.")

Now what sparked Shakespeare in the direction of this fat wonder?

One of Shakespeare's sources for *Henry IV, Part One* was a play by an anonymous writer entitled *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, which covered the ground in this play and in the two following, *Henry IV, Part Two* and *Henry V*, but was shorter than any one of these. *The Famous Victories* contained the legend of Prince Hal's wild youth and his sudden reformation at his coronation.

In *The Famous Victories* are the germs of some of the events in Shakespeare's plays, but one has only to read the episodes of the earlier play and the corresponding episodes in Shakespeare to see, with amazement, how much can be done with how little, in the hands of a genius.

In *The Famous Victories*, one of the Prince's companions was Sir John ("Jockey") Oldcastle, and Shakespeare borrowed that name, but nothing else. The John Oldcastle of the older play had not a scrap of wit or of anything worth remembering; whereas Shakespeare's John Oldcastle was and remains one of the greatest comic creations of all time.

Well then, who was John Oldcastle? Is there anyone by that name who was indeed a companion of the Prince and who was turned away after the Prince had become King (which, as we shall see, was the affecting and tragic climax of Falstaff's life)?

There was, as it happens, a Sir John Oldcastle in history, and he was indeed a friend of Prince Hal. He was not, however, an old man, nor was he fat or dissolute. He was no more than ten years older than the Prince and twenty-five years old, perhaps, at the time of Hotspur's victory over the Scots. He was an able warrior who took part in Hotspur's expedition into north Wales, and it was at that time that he grew friendly with the young Prince of Wales, who was also present on that expedition.

Oldcastle kept Hal's friendship throughout the period that he was Prince of Wales and, what's more, continued to keep it after Hal became King Henry V.

In 1408 (six years after the opening events of *Henry IV, Part One* and while Hal was still Prince of Wales) Oldcastle married an heiress of the wealthy Cobham family and eventually could be styled Lord Cobham. He had every right to look forward to honored old age or to an honored death in battle.

There was but one flaw. He was unorthodox in his religion.

Some thirty years before *Henry IV, Part One's* opening events, an English religious reformer, John Wycliffe, had developed a doctrine very much like those developed by the moderate Protestants a century and a half later. Despite the opposition of the orthodox, Wycliffe lived out his life in safety and died a natural death in peace in 1384, because of the protection afforded him by none other than John of Gaunt, the father of Henry IV.

Wycliffe left behind disciples called "Lollards" (from a Dutch word meaning "mumbler," applied to them derisively because they were always mumbling prayers). The church authorities strenuously opposed Lollardism, and Henry IV, whose flawed title made it expedient for him to gather friends anywhere he could, turned against those whom his father had protected.

The Lollards found their converts chiefly among the lower classes, so the movement was fairly easy to oppress and, eventually, suppress, but some few noblemen were converted. One of these was Sir John Oldcastle. What is more, he was a convinced and dedicated Lollard who was determined to keep his faith to the death.

By the time Hal became King Henry V, the oppression of Lollardism had reached the point where Oldcastle's life was in danger. Henry V, who did not want to harm the friend of his youth, but who could not resist church pressures forever (particularly since he needed church funds for his own aggressive designs against France), personally appealed to Oldcastle to submit and to renounce his heresy.

Oldcastle refused and was eventually condemned as a heretic in September of 1413. The King granted him a forty-day stay of execution, hoping he would reconsider. He didn't; he escaped instead, and tried to raise a rebellion. Part of its aim was the kidnapping of the King.

The uprising was pitifully inept and failed, but Oldcastle escaped again and wandered the Welsh hills for nearly four years before he was finally captured. At last, on December 14, 1417, he was executed in the fashion of the time; that is, as a heretic, he was suspended over a slow fire and gradually roasted to death. Henry V could not save him.

Why was Sir John Oldcastle, brave warrior, earnest reformer, and martyr, so scurrilously treated in *The Famous Victories*? He was a heretic, wasn't he? And a traitor too? And the author of the play was, as the play itself shows, an untalented scribbler incapable of rising above the stereotype.

The Cobhams, however, were still a noble and influential family in Shakespeare's time. They might ignore the existence of Sir John Oldcastle in *The Famous Victories*, where he played a small role in a poor play unworthy of notice.

When Shakespeare's play was put on the stage, though, and became an

instant hit, with Sir John Oldcastle the very center of its fun, the Cobhams roared with anger. In addition, England was now largely Protestant and Oldcastle was viewed as a proto-Protestant and martyr, so that the Cobhams were not alone in their indignation. Shakespeare, for all his genius, had a strong commercial sense. He was not going to do anything really unpopular, so he instantly agreed to change the name and made that change before the printed version of the play appeared.

The change in the name did no good at all for the Lord Cobham of Shakespeare's time. His political opponents promptly dubbed him "Sir John Falstaff."

But having erased Oldcastle's name, where did Shakespeare come upon Falstaff?

Well, Prince Hal, after he became King, had another associate, Sir John Fastolfe, who fought with him in France and bore himself well in many battles. There was one occasion, though, when he was accused of cowardice. It was a wrongful accusation and he eventually justified himself. However, in Shakespeare's early play *Henry VI, Part One*, Fastolfe briefly appears as a cowardly runaway.

What more did Shakespeare need? Here was an associate of Prince Hal who proved cowardly. He altered a few letters in the name and so was born Sir John Falstaff.

. . . *old sack* . . .

Falstaff and Prince Hal engage in a battle of wits, which is, as always in the play, a standoff. The Prince is constantly on the attack, for Falstaff is a marvelous target (both literally and figuratively); yet Falstaff can nimbly dodge any blow and turn it back again.

Much of the flavor of these exchanges has dimmed with time and obsolescence, however, to say nothing of changes in fashion as far as what is and isn't considered funny. Matters of obsolescence can be corrected in footnotes and commentary, but this cannot restore spontaneity of appreciation, of course. Still, as examples, Prince Hal's first comments to Falstaff begin:

*Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack. . .*

—Act I, scene ii, lines 2-3

It is clear from the context that sack is a kind of alcoholic drink, yet it is not one that is familiar to us today, even though it is so closely associated with Falstaff that we can scarcely think of one without the other. It is simply any dry wine, which is *vin sec* in French, with "sack" as an Anglicization of the French *sec*. Sack came to be associated in particular with the dry wines of southern Europe, such as the white sherry of Spain.

Then again, Falstaff begins at one point:

*Marry, then, sweet wag. . .*

—Act I, scene ii, line 23

"Marry" is a common Elizabethan interjection that we don't use nowadays and that seems to make no sense. Why "marry"? It is an oath, a shortened form of "By the Virgin Mary" (just as "dear me" is supposed to be from the Italian *dio mio*, or "my God"). Oaths have a way of sterilizing themselves in order that they might enter respectable society.

*. . . my old lad of the castle*

One particular thrust and riposte has more than ordinary interest. Falstaff wickedly deflects some of Prince Hal's jabs by bringing in one of the tavern women as a non sequitur, saying:

*. . . is not my hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?*

—Act I, scene ii, lines 41-42

Prince Hal, twisting agilely, says:

*As the honey of Hybla, my old lad of the castle—and is not  
a buff jerkin a most sweet robe of durance?*

—Act I, scene ii, lines 43—45

Hybla is proverbial for the sweetness of its honey, so Hal is agreeing with Falstaff in most equable fashion—but the sting follows immediately. "The Castle" was a well-known London brothel and Falstaff's propensities are thus hinted at. The play on words would have been perfect if the original name of the character, Oldcastle, had been kept. This play on words now remains as a mere fossil trace, so to speak, of that name. Shakespeare didn't change this passage, either because of negligence or because he couldn't bear to give up the joke.

And then Hal stings Falstaff still harder by bringing in a buff jerkin as a balancing non sequitur. "Durance" means durability but it also means imprisonment. Prince Hal might be innocently commending the good wearing qualities of a garment, but since sheriffs officers wore these buff jerkins (tan leather jackets), he might also be implying that Falstaff would eventually end in prison, if nothing worse.

Falstaff takes it in its worse sense and is jarred out of his good humor. He says, irritably:

*. . . What a plague have I to do with a buff jerkin?*

—Act I, scene ii, lines 47-48

To this, Prince Hal retorts at once with a balancing:

*Why, what a pox have I to do with my hostess of the tavern?*

—Act I, scene ii, lines 49-50

The "pox" is, of course, syphilis; an indication of what might occur to those who have to do with my hostess of the tavern or other such light wenches. The mention is anachronistic, though not as anachronistic as in *Troilus and Cressida* (see page I-106).

Prince Hal's scornful denial of having anything to do with "my hostess of the tavern" is to be noted. Shakespeare is careful of the dignity of the future hero-king.

Hal does indeed consort with low companions, but he does and says nothing really disgraceful. He participates in a robbery, as we shall see, but only as part of a practical joke, and he makes amends for it. He drinks, to be sure, but is never shown the worse for liquor, let alone actually drunk. Most of all, he is never tarred with sexual immorality. Shakespeare never shows him as anything worse than a young man with a keen sense of humor and a liking for horseplay. A little worse than this, perhaps, is the fact that for the sake of amusement, he will tolerate rather disgraceful behavior on the part of those who amuse him.

. . . *wisdom cries out* . . .

But Prince Hal's toleration is not something that makes him blind to wicked behavior. Rather he uses it as a butt for irony. We might speculate that he relishes Falstaff even more for the excellent target he makes than for the wit of his rejoinders.

Thus, Falstaff begins to talk lugubriously of reforming (as he does periodically) and says, in mock sorrow, that a dignified old lord had scolded him in the open street (presumably for corrupting the Prince). Falstaff had not listened. He says, sighing:

*. . . and yet he talked wisely, and in the street too.*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 90-91

Prince Hal seizes upon the expression at once to deliver a devastating biblical jab, saying:

*Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it.*

—Act I, scene ii, lines 92-93

This is a reference to a verse in the Book of Proverbs, which reads:

"Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets" (Proverbs 1:20).

The irony in that "Thou didst well" lies in what follows that verse in the Bible, and what follows must be well known to Falstaff, who is both educated and intelligent. It is a warning that since personified Wisdom has cried out and was disregarded she would in turn desert those who had not heeded her in their hour of need. Personified Wisdom says, "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."

The comment might therefore be regarded as a threat to Falstaff from the Prince; a threat which, in the end, is carried out.

The disconcerted Falstaff manages to return to his protestations of reform, but when the Prince suddenly suggests a bit of purse snatching, avid old Falstaff is ready at once. The Prince laughs and Falstaff says of purse snatching in a tone of wounded dignity:

*Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labor  
in his vocation.*

—Act I, scene ii, lines 108-9

And of course, Prince Hal must laugh and own defeat when faced with so wildly and madly inadequate a defense. For the fun of watching Falstaff squirm out of anything, he will forgive him everything—or almost everything.

. . . *at Gad's Hill* . . .

Yet the reference to purse snatching gets the audience ready for something serious. If there is one definite item in the tales of Prince Hal's wildness (one that is included as the opening episode in *The Famous Victories of Henry V*), it is the legend that Prince Hal was involved in a piece of highway robbery.

Shakespeare cannot do without it—it is too much a part of the story as known to everyone (like Washington and the cherry tree)—but he transmutes it beyond recognition. Falstaff, fencing verbally with the Prince, is looking forward to some more serious action. There is a plan for a robbery on foot and Falstaff means to get a share of the loot.

Poins, another one of the Prince's low companions, enters and announces that arrangements have been indeed made for the robbery. He says:

*. . . tomorrow morning, by four o'clock early [4 A.M.], at  
Gad's Hill! There are pilgrims going to Canterbury with rich  
offerings, and traders riding to London with fat purses. I have  
vizards [masks] for you all; you have horses for yourselves.*

*Gadshill lies tonight in Rochester. I have bespoke [reserved] supper tomorrow night in Eastcheap.*

—Act I, scene ii, lines 128-34

Canterbury lies fifty miles southeast of London, and is the spiritual center of England, as London is the temporal center. Between pious pilgrims carrying offerings to Canterbury and rich merchants carrying money to London, the road between is a gold mine for highwaymen. Poin is promising they can complete the job and be back in Eastcheap (a lower-class district in London) having a good supper by night, and the richer for much loot.

About halfway between Canterbury and London is the town of Rochester, where Gadshill (another of the worthless crew with whom the Prince amuses himself) has arranged all the necessary details and where he is staying.

The similarity between Gadshill, the man, and Gad's Hill, the place where the robbery is planned, is confusing, but the first is derived from the second. In *The Famous Victories* there is a character called "the Thief," whose name is Cutbert Cutter, but who is nicknamed "Gad's Hill," presumably because that is his favored spot for thievery.

Gad's Hill (or Gadshill) itself is a low hill about three miles northwest of Rochester, where, presumably, highwaymen can command a prospect of the road in either direction, and which was notorious for the robberies committed there. (Its greatest fame, next to the fictional events upon it described in this play, is the fact that it was the home of the English novelist Charles Dickens in his later years. He died in Gadshill in 1870.)

. . . *Not I* . . .

Yet although legend makes Prince Hal a participant in the robbery, Shakespeare softens the blow. When Falstaff invites Prince Hal to be a member of the gang, Hal says indignantly:

*Who, I rob? I a thief? Not I, by my faith.*

—Act I, scene ii, line 142

And despite a momentary temptation to waver, he holds fast to his refusal to be a thief, though he makes no attempt to sway the others against the action.

Poin, however, takes an opportunity to speak to Prince Hal alone and induces him to take part in a practical joke. Falstaff and the others will indeed be allowed to hold up merchants and steal their money, but then Poin and the Prince, masked beyond recognition, will rob the robbers in

their turn. The hope is that later that evening, Falstaff will be sure to tell monstrous lies to explain matters and will be trapped in them.

In this way, Prince Hal participates in the robbery only out of an irrepressible desire to play a practical joke, and this is a weakness which men are quite apt to excuse.

*/ know you all. . .*

Yet still Shakespeare seems nervous. He simply cannot allow Prince Hal, the future hero-king, to be too base to begin with, despite all the legends in the world. He must supply him with a motive for his undignified behavior, and one that sounds as noble as possible.

Therefore, when Falstaff and Poins are gone and he is alone on the stage, he looks after them thoughtfully and says:

*/ know you all, and will awhile uphold  
The unyoked humor of your idleness.  
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,  
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds  
To smother up his beauty from the world,  
That, when he please again to be himself,  
Being wanted, he may be more wond'ered at*

-Act I, scene ii, lines 199-205

Prince Hal is pictured as not serious in his tomfoolery, as aware all along of his own greatness, and indeed, as following a deliberate design of increasing that greatness by its contrast with his earlier follies.

This may have gone over with an Elizabethan audience to whom Henry V was a half-divine memory, but it rings completely false to us. It is out of character for the Prince, and indeed, if it were to be taken seriously, it would lessen our regard for him. To play the fool out of high spirits and youthful zest can be endearing; to do so out of deep political calculation is repellent.

However, the speech need not be taken as a real part of the play itself. It is Shakespeare speaking to the audience, assuring them that Prince Hal is really going to be the hero-king someday and that they need not be disturbed at the Gad's Hill incident.

Needless to say, there is nothing at all in the legend of Prince Hal to indicate that he was roistering out of deep policy.

*The scourge of greatness. . .*

Back the scene shifts now to high politics. At Windsor Castle, the King

is confronting the Percys in anger over the matter of the prisoners being withheld from him. He has reached the point, as the scene opens, where he is using threats.

Worcester replies for the Percys and does so intransigently:

*Our house, my sovereign liege, little deserves  
The scourge of greatness to be used on it—  
And that same greatness too which our own hands  
Have help to make so portly.*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 10-13

This is the claim of the Percys to gratitude for their part in placing Henry IV on the throne, a claim they make on several occasions through the play—yet it is this very claim that places them under a permanent pall of suspicion as far as the King is concerned.

The King will not yield to any suggestion that he owes gratitude, for such suggestions are dangerous. The mere act of yielding to subjects for any reason will but give them occasion to ask for more, if that yielding is thought to represent something due those subjects. (In modern terms, we might say that Henry IV appreciated the futility and dangers of attempting "appeasement.")

This harks back to the prophecy of Richard II in *Richard II*, when on the occasion of the deposed King's last meeting with Northumberland, Shakespeare has Richard warn the arrogant nobleman that the tune will come when he will feel any reward too little while the new King will fear that a man who could rebel against one king would easily rebel against another as well (see page II-307).

And indeed, King Henry, quite aware that Worcester's attitude verges on the flatly rebellious, orders him out of the royal presence.

*This villainous saltpeter . . .*

Northumberland, however, having vainly tried to stop Worcester in his defiance, now hastens to conciliate the angry King. He declares the report of Hotspur's withholding of the prisoners to have been exaggerated, and Hotspur himself attempts to justify himself in a famous speech that begins:

*My liege, I did deny no prisoners,  
But I remember, when the fight was done,  
When I was dry with rage and extreme toil,  
Breathless and faint, leaning upon my sword,  
Came there a certain lord, neat and trimly dressed,  
Fresh as a bridegroom. . .*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 28-33

This courtly fop (whose identity it would be wonderful to know if it were not that the whole incident is fictitious), appearing on the scene of the battle, prattles on in so foolish a manner, according to Hotspur, as to induce wild irritation in the wearied fighter. (Of course, Hotspur is shown throughout the play as a person prone to irritation, and from the description of this event, we can scarcely blame him in this particular case.)

As one example of the stupidities uttered by the courtier, Hotspur quotes him as saying:

*. . . that it was great pity, so it was,  
This villainous saltpeter should be digged  
Out of the bowels of the harmless earth,  
Which many a good tall fellow had destroyed  
So cowardly, and but for these vile guns,  
He would himself have been a soldier.*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 58-63

Gunpowder is a mixture of charcoal, sulfur, and potassium nitrate (the last bearing the common name of "saltpeter"). Of the three components, saltpeter is the least common and the most difficult to obtain. It is therefore the bottleneck in gunpowder manufacture and that is why the fop regrets its being mined.

Gunpowder was known to the Chinese long before it came into use in Europe, and there are occasional examples of European knowledge of it in the thirteenth century. Roger Bacon, the English scholar, makes references in 1268 to something that might well be gunpowder. (This was in the time when China and eastern Europe were united into one vast Mongol Empire and travelers from Europe were reaching the Far East by a long overland journey. Perhaps vague word of gunpowder was brought back.)

The first European actually to design a metal cylinder from which a projectile might be hurled by an explosion of gunpowder was a German monk and alchemist, Berthold Schwarz. This first cannon may have been constructed in 1313.

Cannons, to begin with, were clumsy, ineffectual, and far more dangerous to the persons firing them than to the persons being aimed at. They were used for the first time in actual warfare at the Battle of Crecy in 1346 by Edward III (see page II-257) and then by that monarch again the next year at the siege of Calais. At both battles, they served mostly for show and psychological effect, however, and it was many decades before they could be of real use.

In 1402, at the time of the Battle of Holmedon, cannon were still a rarity. Hotspur won the battle with his archers and no cannon were used. As for small handguns, they hadn't even been devised yet. The fop's complaint about saltpeter is therefore anachronistic.

By Shakespeare's time, however, two centuries later, it had already be-

come abundantly clear that gunpowder-fired artillery was taking over the battlefield and was changing the face of war and the very social system of Europe.

Prior to 1400, castle walls were invulnerable to anything but a long siege, and armored knights could fight freely in battle without much fear of being killed (except once in a while by another armored knight—and even then capture and subsequent ransom was the usual procedure). The nobility was safe, in other words, and could well afford to be brave and to despise the lowborn, who were not trained in the complicated use of arms, did not own horses to bestride, and had to fight poorly armored and afoot, so that they were killed in droves.

But then came gunpowder. Now cannon, fired by lowborn men, beat down the castle walls. What's more, a gun in the hand of a cobbler or a peasant could send its bullet through the armor of the best knight in the land long before that knight's lance or sword could reach the gunner. (It would have to be a lucky shot, however, for it was a long time before hand-guns could be aimed accurately.)

Gunpowder made knights and castles obsolete, and it was that, more than anything else, that ended the feudal system. The days of the Percys and the Douglasses passed, when war could only be fought with artillery trains that were so expensive only the King could afford one.

Obviously, the aristocracy, longing for the good old days, would sigh for a time when gunpowder had not been invented to put the lowborn on a par with the highborn, and the fop expresses that view—reflecting not 1402, the year in which the described event happened, but 1597, the year in which the play was produced.

... *the foolish Mortimer*

But now we come to the real point (which remains even if the matter of the prisoners is unimportant and was compromised away). King Henry says indignantly that despite everything Hotspur is not yielding up the prisoners unconditionally:

*Why, yet he doth deny his prisoners,  
But with proviso and exception,  
That we at our own charge shall ransom straight [at once]  
His brother-in-law, the foolish Mortimer;*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 76-79

This is the real point. The sister of the captured Sir Edmund Mortimer is the wife of Hotspur. (Hotspur is thus an uncle by marriage of young Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March, who is the legitimate heir to the throne.)

Henry IV would naturally distrust the relationship, feeling that the Percys, who had helped him to the throne and who now knew the way, would gladly help someone else with a better right from the standpoint of strict legitimacy who was, moreover, a relative of their own. (This would be true whether Hotspur was uncle to the legitimate heir, as is historically the fact, or brother-in-law, as Shakespeare was misled by Holinshed into thinking.)

It was also a matter of money. The restlessness of the times had raised the King's expenses and lowered his revenues, and Henry IV simply could not afford to ransom Mortimer—though naturally he would hate to have to admit this.

From this standpoint, it was clear the Percys were offering no compromise at all. If they kept the prisoners, they would certainly use the money received from the Scots for their return to buy Mortimer back from the Welsh. If they handed the prisoners to the King on the understanding that *he* buy back Mortimer, nothing is really changed. The money still goes from the Scots to the Welsh, and the only difference is that the King has had to play the middleman.

... *damned Glendower*

To defend his refusal to ransom Mortimer, the enraged King goes on to declare that the captured general

... *hath willfully betrayed*  
*The lives of those that he did lead to fight*  
*Against that great magician, damned Glendower—*  
*Whose daughter, as we hear, the Earl of March*  
*Hath lately married. . .*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 80-84

The reference to the Earl of March here is a specific example of Shakespeare's Holinshed-bred confusion. The imprisoned Mortimer is, to repeat, merely the uncle of the young Earl of March, who is (and remains) safe in Henry's hands.

The mention of Glendower as a magician refers to the medieval notion that the Welsh, generally, had access to dark, magic rites. This was partly because of the difference in culture. The Welsh had traditions dating back to before the Anglo-Saxons came, and these mystic, Druid-born matters were strange, and therefore frightening, to the English. There were rumors, for instance, that Mortimer had lost his battle against Glendower because the Welshman had raised storms against the English by means of his magic art. Nor did the Welsh, or Glendower in particular, do anything to allay the English fears, since it was of great psychological help to them.

The fact that Edmund Mortimer had married Glendower's daughter would certainly tend to give some color to the King's outraged (and, to the Percys, outrageous) accusation of the captive as a traitor. However, Shakespeare's compression of events is here unfair to Mortimer.

Mortimer had been captured in June and Hotspur had taken his prisoners in September 1402. For three months Mortimer had already languished in captivity and no move had been made to ransom him. Even after the prisoners were taken, there was no move, and the King, in trying to take the prisoners for himself, was actually preventing the ransom.

One can scarcely blame Mortimer, then, for buying his own freedom at the price of marrying Glendower's daughter in December, after fully half a year of imprisonment. It might even be natural to expect him to remember after that lapse of time that it was not the ungrateful Henry but his own young nephew who was the rightful King of England.

*. . . the gentle Severn . . .*

Indignantly, Hotspur denies the imputation of treason against his brother-in-law, using as evidence a single combat between Mortimer and Glendower. He says:

*. . . on the gentle Severn's sedgy bank,  
In single opposition hand to hand,  
He did confound the best part of an hour  
In changing hardiment with great Glendower.*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 97-100

The Severn (see page II-69) rises in central Wales and flows east then north through eastern Wales, where the battle between Mortimer and Glendower took place. It crosses into western England, then turns southward and flows into Bristol Channel.

The account of the fight on the Severn seems altogether unlikely. Hotspur describes a single combat between generals, which takes place often in knightly romances and epic tales, but virtually never in sober history. He includes details—like three stops by mutual agreement for rest and drink—which are to be found in the tales of King Arthur rather than in legitimate chronicles.

King Henry is not influenced by Hotspur's glowing account. He dismisses the tale as myth, saying that Mortimer wouldn't dare meet Glendower in single combat. He ends the argument by a flat demand for the prisoners and a flat refusal to ransom Mortimer, on pain of strong reprisal otherwise. Indeed, he forbids any further mention of Mortimer; then he leaves.

. . . *the next of blood*

Hotspur, staring after the King, goes almost mad with rage. He thinks at once of rebellion:

*. . . I will lift the downtrod Mortimer  
As high in the air as this unthankful king,  
As this ingrate and cank' red Bolingbroke.*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 133-35

As though the displacement were already made, as though Mortimer were on the King's throne and Henry deposed, Hotspur gives the latter his name of Bolingbroke (see page II-264), by which he was most commonly known before he was King.

Worcester now returns, understands the situation at once, and sets about fanning Hotspur's flame and turning it to use. When Hotspur angrily describes the King's refusal to ransom Mortimer, Worcester responds coolly:

*I cannot blame him. Was not he [Mortimer] proclaimed  
By Richard that dead is, the next of blood?*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 143-44

Here again is Holinshed's error. The young Earl of March, Mortimer's nephew, was so proclaimed. Still, if we accept Shakespeare's version, what Worcester is doing is reminding Hotspur that in yearning to depose Henry for Mortimer's sake, he is no rebel striving to uplift a relative, but a loyal subject fighting for the true King.

And now, for policy's sake, Northumberland begins to make a great reversal. In *Richard II* he was pictured as the most eager of those who wished for Richard's deposition (see page II-304). Now he responds to Worcester's statement with a piece of canting piety, saying:

*He was, I heard the proclamation:  
And then it was when the unhappy king  
(Whose wrongs in us God pardon!) did set forth  
Upon his Irish expedition;*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 145-48

. . . *this canker Bolingbroke*

Both Worcester and Northumberland are dangling the bait before Hotspur. They are old men; it is Hotspur who has the energy to carry through

a violent action. They must take advantage of his anger at the King and not allow him to cool down. Hence the careful explanation that Hotspur's brother-in-law is the true heir and their snuffling sorrow for Richard.

Hotspur (who conveniently forgets that he was himself thoroughly involved in Richard's deposition) takes the bait and berates his father and uncle for their deeds, professing himself appalled

*That men of your nobility and power  
Did gage [pledge] them both in an unjust behalf  
(As both of you, God pardon it, have done)  
To put down Richard, that sweet lovely rose,  
And plant this thorn, this canker Bolingbroke?*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 170-74

Having taken the bait, Hotspur is now ready for instant action, without thought or preparation, impelled only by his hot rage.

*To pluck bright honor . . .*

Worcester stops him at once. He wants Hotspur's enthusiasm, his bravery, his ability to fight a battle. He does not want him trying to plan, but wants him rather to be guided by wiser heads—like Worcester's own. Worcester begins therefore to unfold the conspiracy against the King, a conspiracy which he has already set afoot.

Hotspur, however, having been hotly spurred to emotion, is not so easily stopped. At the first mention of a plot, he at once sees battles, victory, the toppling of a king, the setting up of another, all redounding to his own honor—and he goes off into a paean in praise of honor:

*By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap  
To pluck bright honor from the pale-faced moon,  
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,  
Where fathom line could never touch the ground,  
And pluck up drowned honor by the locks,*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 199-203

This is Hotspur at his most one-sided extreme. Nothing exists for him but "honor," and it is important to realize that what he means by "honor" is a reputation for daring, warlike deeds. To win that reputation he would jump to the moon or dive into the abyss. It is the psychology of the "college try," the drive for the winning touchdown at all costs.

It is admirable, in a way, and it is admired, and our hearts beat faster as Hotspur declaims—and yet it is schoolboyish. There is more to life than touchdowns, and the push for the personal touchdown may lose the team

its game. There are times when great ends must come before the Hotspur version of "honor," and this Hotspur never learns.

Lest the audience mistake the schoolboyishness of Hotspur in their admiration for his speech about honor, Shakespeare has Hotspur follow it immediately by a description of the schoolboy tricks he will play on the King:

*He scud he would not ransom Mortimer;  
Forbade my tongue to speak of Mortimer,  
But I will find him when he lies asleep,  
And in his ear I'll hollo "Mortimer."  
Nay, I'll have a starling shall be taught to speak  
Nothing but "Mortimer," and give it him*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 218-23

Hotspur still keeps his schoolboyish attractiveness, of course, but how does this compare with Prince Hal? It is the comparison of Hotspur and Prince Hal that is the core of the play, and we surely feel that the Prince, however convivial he might be with Falstaff, would never meet a high crisis with the kind of low comedy Hotspur has just offered.

*. . . sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales*

Nor does Shakespeare rely on the audience keeping Prince Hal in mind at this point without help. Hotspur passes on at once to a mention of the Prince—for the first time in this play. He makes the mention with utmost contempt, saying:

*And that same sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales,  
But that I think his father loves him not  
And would be glad he met with some mischance,  
I would have him poisoned with a pot of ale.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 228-31

Part of the contempt lies in the adjective "sword-and-buckler," the typical weapons of the lower classes—which makes it a sneering reference to Prince Hal's well-known penchant for low associates.

Nor does Hotspur offer to fight the Prince; it would stain his honor to take up a gentleman's weapons against such a dishonorable wretch. It would be enough to poison him, and not even with a glass of wine (a gentleman's drink), but with the low-class pot of ale.

*. . . a candy deal of courtesy*

Worcester has borne patiently with Hotspur's ravings, but they show no

signs of stopping. When he and Northumberland try to dam the flood they have themselves initiated, Hotspur breaks away, and in such a fury that he can scarcely speak, recalls the King's softly insinuating courtesies when first they met, on the occasion of the beginning of the revolt against Richard (see page II-291). Hotspur says:

*Why, what a candy deal of courtesy  
This fawning greyhound then did proffer me!  
"Look when his infant fortune came to age,"  
And "gentle Harry Percy," and "kind cousin"—  
O, the devil take such cozeners [deceivers]!*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 248-52

Hotspur, who is incapable of the use of smooth diplomacy, is all the more furious that he should have been made the object of it and been (as he thinks) gulled by it.

### *The Archbishop*

But now Hotspur runs down at last and Worcester has the chance to outline his plot.

The Scottish prisoners are to be given back to the Scots without ransom on conditions that the Douglas power join them in their revolt. Mortimer will, of course, also join them with the power of Glendower at his back.

It is not enough, however.

If the Percys go to war in alliance with Scotland and Wales, national tempers will be stirred against them. Patriotic dislike of Scotland and Wales was dangerously strong. What was needed was some English figurehead of unimpeachable loyalty on their side and this Worcester has also prepared. It will be up to Northumberland to supply one. He . . .

*Shall secretly into the bosom creep  
Of that same noble prelate well-beloved,  
The Archbishop.*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 263-65

Hotspur assumes at once the Archbishop of York is meant, and Worcester says:

*. . . True; who bears hard  
His brother's death at Bristow, the Lord Scroop.*

—Act I, scene iii, lines 267-68

Here once more Shakespeare, misled by Holinshed, makes a mistake, but rather a minor one.

The two "brothers" here referred to are William Scrope and Richard le Scrope, for since both are the sons of the 1st Baron Scrope, they would certainly seem to be brothers.

However, there are two 1st Baron Scropes. One is Richard, 1st Baron Scrope of Bolton, and the other is Henry, 1st Baron Scrope of Masham, and the two are merely first cousins.

William le Scrope is the son of Scrope of Bolton, and it is William who became Earl of Wiltshire (see page II-284) and who was captured at Bristow (Bristol) by the forces of Bolingbroke and executed.

Richard le Scrope is the son of Scrope of Masham, and Richard became Archbishop of York in 1398, in the last year of the reign of Richard II.

The Archbishop of York is thus the second cousin, not the brother, of "the Lord Scroop."

Undoubtedly, grief and resentment over the death of a second cousin is not likely to be as deep and painful as grief and resentment over the death of a brother. And the Archbishop did desert that second cousin to the extent of supporting the rebellion of Bolingbroke. Nevertheless, the family connection did exist, and whatever the motive, the Archbishop was talked into considering joining the plot. It was clear he would make an admirable front man.

With the plot detailed, Worcester leaves to join Mortimer and Glendower. Clearly mistrusting Hotspur's strategic insight, his last warning is:

*. . . No further go in this  
Than I by letters shall direct your course.*

-Act I, scene iii, lines 289-90

*Charles' wain . . .*

The scene shifts to Rochester, where the robbery at Gad's Hill is being prepared. Into the innyard comes a carrier (the equivalent of today's truck driver) anxious to get his horse saddled so that his load of merchandise might move with the break of day. He sets the time by saying:

*. . . And it be not four by the day [4 A.M.] I'LL be hanged.  
Charles' wain is over the new chimney, and yet our horse not  
packed.*

—Act II, scene i, lines 1-3

It was at 4 A.M. that the gang was to meet at Gad's Hill, so it will soon be time for the robbery.

Charles' Wain is the seven stars we usually refer to as the Big Dipper. It looks like a big dipper, to be sure, but to rustic eyes it also looks like a

country cart ("wain" is an alternate form of "wagon") with a long pole to which the horse is to be hitched.

The "Charles" in Charles' Wain is a reference to Charlemagne ("Charles the Great"), who ruled over western Europe from 768 to 814 and was the most renowned of all the Western medieval kings.

Why was the wain that of Charlemagne? Nobody knows. There are theories. One, for instance, is that the nearby star, Arcturus, was considered to be the horse drawing the wagon; Arcturus was confounded with Arturus (King Arthur) and King Arthur with Charlemagne. So it ends with Charles drawing the wagon, which therefore becomes Charles' Wain.

The Big Dipper is close enough to the polestar so that in the latitude of England it never sets. It circles the polestar and is always above the horizon, so that it can be seen at any time of any clear night. Its exact position varies with the time of night, and to those who use no other clock and are frequently astir in the night, as are the carriers, its exact position ("over the new chimney") will tell them the time.

*. . .the Wild of Kent. . .*

After some back and forth banter between the carrier and another who joins him, Gadshill enters. It is he who is arranging the robbery, and an informant assures him that the earlier information still holds good:

*. . . there's a franklin in the Wild of Kent hath brought three  
hundred marks with him in gold. . .*

—Act II, scene i, lines 56-58

A franklin is a free farmer. (The word "frank" is an old word for "free," hence a person who is frank is as honest and open as a freeman is expected to be, not lying and underhanded like a slave—a distinction made by freemen, of course.) A free farmer had much more chance to prosper than did the serfs, who were bound to the land and to some lord (rather like what we would call "sharecroppers"). A franklin therefore came to mean a prosperous farmer.

"Wild" is more commonly spelled "weald" nowadays. The word is akin to the German *Wald* and refers to a forest. There was, in older times, a well-forested region in Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, the area southeast and south of London. This has long since been cleared, of course, but the term still refers to the plain between the North Downs and the South Downs, two low ranges of hills in southeastern England.

A mark was a coin equivalent in value to thirteen shillings and fourpence, so that three hundred of them were equal to two hundred pounds, a tremendous sum in those days.

. . . *Saint Nicholas* . . .

Gadshill's informant knows what Gadshill is planning and makes grim mention of the gallows, adding,

. . . / *know thou worshippest Saint Nicholas* . . .

—Act II, scene i, lines 66-67

St. Nicholas was the patron saint of travelers, and since travelers were the chosen prey of highwaymen, the latter worshiped him in the sense that they hoped he would send them many travelers. In fact, "St. Nicholas' clerks" was a slang term for highwaymen, and in the immediately preceding speech, Gadshill says of the franklin and those accompanying him:

. . . *if they meet not with Saint Nicholas' clerks, I'll give thee this neck.*

-Act II, scene i, lines 63-64

This usage of the name of good St. Nicholas would seem all the more inappropriate these days, for another version of the name, by way of the Dutch "Sant Nikolaas," is "Santa Claus."

. . . *other Troyans* . . .

Gadshill's response to the other's gibe concerning the gallows is a confident

*There are other Troyans that thou dream'st not of, the which for sport sake are content to do the profession some grace; that would (if matters be looked into) for their own credit sake make all whole.*

—Act II, scene i, lines 71-75

The reference to Troyans (Trojans) harks back to the old legends of the siege of Troy (see page I-73). The classical legends depicted them as bravely defending their city, and later legends had them the ancestors of the Romans and the British. With all this favorable notice, the word came to mean "a good fellow" or "a fine chap."

Gadshill's reference is, of course, to Prince Hal.

And now the robbery goes off exactly as planned. Falstaff and the rest (minus Poins and Prince Hal) wait for the merchants and attack them when

they come (the whole being carried through in broad farce, particularly at the expense of Falstaff's fatness).

Once Falstaff has the gold, however, Prince Hal and Poins, thoroughly disguised, fall upon the thieves, two against four, and easily obtain the gold. Falstaff is forced to run clumping away, despite his fat.

*. . . the ninth of the next month. . .*

Hotspur has his much greater plot in action as well, but as is to be expected, it is moving more slowly, for much must be done. In Hotspur's castle in Northumberland, Hotspur is trying to gather together the different forces that might make part of the conspiracy. He comes onstage, reading a letter from an unnamed nobleman who has been approached. The letter writer is cautiously refusing to join the uprising but is trying to make the refusal a very polite one (just in case the Percys win out after all).

Hotspur is, however, characteristically enraged and interrupts his reading with animadversions on the writer's character and courage, and with outcries of firm confidence in the plot. When the letter writer mentions danger, Hotspur cries out:

*. . . / tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle, danger, we  
pluck this flower, safety.*

—Act II, scene iii, lines 9-10

As evidence of the excellence of the plot, Hotspur runs over the list of those involved for the benefit of the letter writer, who cannot hear (and perhaps for his own benefit as well), and says:

*Have I not all their letters to meet me in arms by the ninth of  
the next month, and are they not some of them set forward  
already?*

—Act II, scene iii, lines 26-29

Since the army will be gathered on the "ninth of the next month" and since the rebellion came out in the open in July 1403, it is now June 1403. It is just a year since the defeat of Mortimer by Glendower, the event which opened the play.

Hotspur's musing has him all on fire to get on with the affair and he prepares to leave, scarcely paying attention to his wife, Catherine, who nags anxiously at him to find out what he is doing and where he is going. She guesses close to the mark when she says:

*I fear my brother Mortimer doth stir about his title and hath  
sent for you to Une his enterprise. . .*

-Act II, scene iii, lines 81-83

This is a clear reminder of the relationship between Hotspur and the captive Mortimer, something that is at least part of the motive for the conspiracy.

*. . . the king of courtesy . . .*

The contrast continues. While Hotspur is engaged in foolhardy but romantic knight-errantry, Prince Hal is whiling away his time in a tavern in Eastcheap. He tells Poins, with great delight, that he has made friends with tapsters. The tapsters say, he reports:

*. . . that, though I be but Prince of Wales, yet I am the king of courtesy and tell me flatly I am no proud Jack like Falstaff, but a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy (by the Lord, so they call me!) and when I am King of England I shall command all the good lads in Eastcheap.*

—Act II, scene iv, lines 9-15

Prince Hal, it can be seen, is the pink of courtesy toward those beneath him (though he is not above making a little good-natured fun of the poor tapsters and does so in a passage that follows). Falstaff may stand upon his knighthood and hold himself aloof from the workingman, but not the Prince.

They are fascinated by his graciousness and call him a "Corinthian" in approval. Corinth was the leading commercial city of Greece at various times in its history (see page I-171) and was a haunt of traders and sailors, who brought in wealth and demanded pleasure and relaxation after the rigors and dangers of sea voyage. Corinth was therefore notorious as the home of skillful prostitutes and gay life—the Paris of Greece. In Shakespeare's time and for several centuries more, a "Corinthian" was a pleasure seeker, a gay blade.

*. . . not yet of Percy's mind. . .*

Yet Prince Hal is not unaware of Hotspur. In fact, he mentions him and describes him in such a way as to burlesque the earlier scene between Hotspur and his wife.

After exhausting himself with laughter over the tapsters, the Prince says (ruefully, perhaps, as though knowing that to others Hotspur's ways may seem nobler):

*I am not yet of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the North; he that kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast,*

*washes his hands, and says to his wife, "Fie upon this quiet life! I want work." "O my sweet Harry," says she, "how many hast thou killed today?" "Give my roan horse a drench," says he, and answers, "Some fourteen," an hour after, "a trifle, a trifle."*

—Act II, scene iv, lines 102-9

For the first time the contrast between the two men is put into a less conventional light. Hotspur's chivalry and "honor" becomes a kind of grotesque preoccupation with killing for no reason but to kill. His concern is first for his horse, who is necessary to him for his killing, only later for his wife, who is not.

Coming as it does, immediately after the Prince's foolery with the tapers, we see the contrast particularly clearly. Prince Hal forgets matters of importance in his preoccupation with laughing, but Hotspur forgets matters of importance in his preoccupation with killing. Brought down to this, in the absence of the trappings of battle and with the enlightenment of Prince Hal's sarcasm, we may catch a glimpse of the fact that laughter is perhaps a better reason for which to neglect business than murder is, and that he who delights his "inferiors" is perhaps more to be admired than he who kills them.

*. . . beware instinct. . .*

Now enters Falstaff, ferociously upset over the miscarrying of the robbery. They had the money, after all, and then it was taken away from them, all because the Prince and Poins were not with them to stand against those who had robbed the robbers.

As he sits there, fuming and muttering, Prince Hal asks, with a straight face, for the details. Falstaff begins at once to embroider, and to multiply the number of those by whom he had been attacked.

Having given him all the rope necessary, the Prince confronts Falstaff with the truth; that he and Poins, but two in number, easily took the money from Falstaff and three others.

Now what can Falstaff say?

This is the climax of the jest. Perpetrating the practical joke was fun and listening to Falstaff lie was fun, but surely best of all would be watching Falstaff squirm out of the hole he had talked himself into. The Prince was probably certain that Falstaff's endless ingenuity would meet the challenge most amusingly.

And as for Falstaff, it is quite possible that even in the course of his lying, his quick wit worked out the truth, and that he made his lies all the worse in order to make his escape the more spectacular.

Now it comes. Falstaff, faced with the truth, says:

*By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you, my masters. Was it for me to kill the heir apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules, but beware instinct. The lion will not touch the true prince.*

—Act II, scene iv, lines 268-73

This was an age when the study of zoology was largely the creation of moral myths to edify mankind. The entire world of life seemed nothing more than a schoolroom to educate sinful man. The lion was the king of beasts and therefore, out of the brotherhood of kingship, would not harm a king of men.

. . . a true prince

But Falstaff is not just a figure of fun. We can very easily argue that he can give as good as he gets, and certainly he has been bamboozled most cruelly. He has been mocked, mistreated, forced to walk when his horse was hidden, forced to hand over his ill-gotten gams, forced to flee, and now he was being mocked and derided.

Was there not to be at least some residuum of hard feeling as a result? And though Falstaff could not openly show his displeasure against the Prince of Wales, was there no secret way his wit could find to show it? Surely, he knew Hal well enough to know what might really be bothering him.

Shakespeare nowhere says so in this play, but we might fairly argue that Prince Hal has never really reconciled himself to the manner in which his father attained the throne (see page II-304). Secretly, he may consider his father a usurper and himself merely the heir to a usurped crown. He can scarcely value either his own title or his own position, and it is just this, perhaps, that causes him to pass his time in wasting and roistering. Why behave like a Prince of Wales when, in his heart, he doesn't really feel he is one?

And if that is so, and if Falstaff knows this feeling of Hal's or shrewdly suspects it, it would be precisely on this sore that his wit would land, in return for his own humiliation.

He has already described Prince Hal, in a voice and face that surely seems all respect, as a "true prince." Now he jabs harder and, while remaining in a position in which no one can find the slightest trace of lack of respect, manages to flay the Prince when he says:

*I shall think the better of myself, and thee, during my life—I  
for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince.*

—Act II, scene iv, lines 274-76

Falstaff is saying that his own instinctive shying away from a fight with Prince Hal is overpowering evidence in favor of himself as a lion and Hal as a true prince. But is this not like saying that there is some doubt that Hal is a true prince and that evidence like this is needed to set such doubts at rest? Worse yet, it is notorious that Falstaff is *not* a valiant lion. By equating the two characteristics, is Falstaff not hinting that it is notorious that Hal is *not a true prince*?

And even if this is the furthest thing from Falstaff's mind, would the sensitive Prince Hal not interpret the speech in this fashion and be unable to answer since the doubts as to his own legitimacy cannot be put into words before his future subjects? He must suffer grimly in silence, and from this view, Falstaff has turned the tables neatly.

*. . . made Lucifer cuckold. . .*

And now the harsh world intrudes on this gayest of all Shakespearean scenes. A nobleman has come from court to summon Prince Hal. Carelessly, the Prince sends Falstaff to turn him away, but Falstaff returns with grim news. The conspiracy is now in the open; Hotspur's army is in the field.

Falstaff lists the enemies, and in listing Glendower, he identifies him, indirectly, as

*. . . he of Wales that gave Amamon the bastinado, and made  
Lucifer cuckold, and swore the devil his true liegeman . . .*

—Act II, scene iv, lines 337-39

In other words, Glendower has overpowered the various devils (Amamon is the name of one of the chief devils of hell in medieval demonology, which named hordes of them—see page II-34) and made them his servants. This is a claim Glendower himself makes later in the play.

*. . . kills a sparrow flying*

When Falstaff lists the Scotsman, Douglas, it is his skill as a horseman that seems to be most impressive. Falstaff describes him as:

*. . . that sprightly Scot of Scots, Douglas, that runs a-horse-  
back up a hill perpendicular—*

—Act II, scene iv, lines 343-45

Prince Hal chimes in, setting up Falstaff for a riposte:

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

—Act II, scene iv, lines 346-47

Falstaff eagerly gives him the straight line:

*You have hit it.*

—Act II, scene iv, line 348

And Prince Hal answers at once:

*So did he never the sparrow.*

—Act II, scene iv, line 349

Once again, Prince Hal punctures the pretensions of chivalry. The picture of a doughty knight, utter master of his horse and with an unerring eye making impossible shots with easy grace, is suddenly shattered. (The fact that the pistol didn't come into use till about twenty years after the time of this scene and that the use of the word is anachronistic is not very important.)

*. . . some of thy instinct*

Hal's dry joke also serves the purpose of showing the audience that he is utterly unafraid at this news.

And yet he must be affected. The rebellion must clearly have, as one of its justifications, the claim that Henry IV is not the rightful King and that Hal is therefore not a true prince. Falstaff's jibe is thus repeated and made infinitely stronger by the news.

That Hal may well be brooding about this comes at once. Falstaff, teasing again, asks the Prince if he isn't horribly afraid at hearing this news. Prince Hal answers with a bitter return jab:

*Not a whit, i' faith. I lack some of thy instinct.*

—Act II, scene iv, line 372

He has not forgotten Falstaff's remark.

*. . . in King Cambyses' vein*

But Hal can scarcely turn his anger full upon Falstaff, for if Falstaff is jabbing at him, it is not Falstaff's fault that the situation exists to be jabbed

at. Rather it is Hal's father who is at fault; it is King Henry who usurped the crown and crushed his young son under a burden of guilt.

If this is so, we can understand why, for the rest of the scene, Prince Hal engages in what would otherwise seem an utterly heartless parody of his father, who is now engaged in the crisis of his thus far brief reign.

Falstaff warns Prince Hal that he will get a dressing down when he comes to his father, and they decide to practice an answer. Falstaff himself will play the angry King, and he says:

*. . . / must speak in passion, and I will do it in King  
Cambyses' vein.*

—Act II, scene iv, lines 386-87

Cambyses was King of the Persian Empire from 529 to 522 B.C. His great feat was the conquest of Egypt and the addition of that land to his realm. Herodotus tells the tale in his great history, written nearly a century later, but, getting his information from Egyptian priests, who could scarcely have been sympathetic to the Persian monarch, the Greek historian presents Cambyses as a raging and blasphemous madman.

The first important piece of historical drama in Elizabethan times was devoted to this ancient king. It was *The Life of Cambises, King of Percia*, written by Thomas Preston and put on the boards in 1569. It was a bombastic piece filled with murder and bloodshed and proved a popular success.

Naturally, Cambyses was shown in the play as raging madly across the stage, and his name became one of the bywords for monstrously over-acting. Shakespeare was not too proud to present such tales of blood and gore himself, notably in *Titus Andronicus* (see page I-391), but by 1597 he had matured and was ready enough to poke fun at the practice, caring nothing for the fact that the Cambyses to which Falstaff refers is a character in a play not written till a century and a half after Falstaff was dead.

*. . . I do not only marvel. . .*

Nor is it only ranting passion that Shakespeare aims to satirize. Falstaff begins to speak in intricately balanced sentences:

*Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time,  
but also how thou art accompanied. For though the cam-  
omile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, so youth  
the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 398-402

The style is derived from a book written by an English courtier named John Lyly. The book was *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, published in

1578, when the author was only twenty-four. It was a didactic book aimed at the reform of education and manners, but its contents were unimportant compared to its style. Lyly perfected the balanced sentence; each in two parts of similar length and contrasting contents. He made use of exotic words and farfetched similes often drawn from nature.

Indeed, his style was so tortured and overwritten that it removed the language from the common folk. Only the well-educated could write in his manner or understand it once it was written. It therefore appealed to snobs and for a while had a fantastic run of popularity as those who did not understand it nevertheless pretended to do so in order to be in the swim.

By the 1590s, however, opposition and ridicule began to make themselves felt. A writer like Shakespeare, who aimed for all men and not for the superelegant few, naturally found euphuism (as the style was called) abhorrent, and this is one of the places where he laughs at it with deadly effect. (He gibes at it also in *Love's Labor's Lost*, see page I-426.)

. . . *banish plump Jack* . . .

But Falstaff suddenly turns from his euphuism into a panegyric (in the King's name) on himself. In annoyance, Prince Hal stops him and offers to play the King himself.

Doing so, he turns the tables on Falstaff and (in the King's name) begins to berate Falstaff in colorful style. But Falstaff is perfectly master of the situation. With scarcely the skip of a heartbeat, he seizes the floor and (in the Prince's name, this time) launches into another panegyric of himself, ending:

*. . . for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish plump Jack, and banish all the world.*

-Act II, scene iv, lines 475-80

In the excitement of this peroration, Prince Hal's response is pushed into the background. But it is a somber and serious one and it reflects, perhaps, the Prince's pain over Falstaff's gibing at his status as a true prince. In response to the plea not to banish Falstaff, Prince Hal says:

*/ do, I will.*

—Act II, scene iv, line 481

It is a grim portent of the climax of Falstaff's life.

. . . all *to the wars*. . .

But the fun is interrupted once again. This time the sheriff and his watch are at the door in search of the robbers of Gad's Hill. At least one of the robbers, Falstaff, is unmistakable, and the sheriff is searching for a man of huge fatness. If Falstaff is seen, he is as good as convicted, and highway robbery was, at the time, a capital offense. It was not a fine that Falstaff was risking, or even imprisonment, but the halter and the noose.

Yet either Falstaff is not quite the coward he is usually considered or else he has utter faith in the Prince. He faces the sheriff's entry calmly and at Prince Hal's direction retires behind a curtain and actually goes to sleep there while the Prince fends off the sheriff with ambiguities that hide the truth without actually being outright lies.

But once the sheriff is gone, the fun is over. Prince Hal searches the sleeping man's pockets to see what smiles might be gained at the expense of the contents (a restaurant bill), but then he turns serious. Looking at the sleeping Falstaff, he says to Peto (another of the low crew):

*I'll to the court in the morning. We must all to the wars, and thy place shall be honorable. I'll procure this fat rogue a charge of foot, and I know his death will be a march of twelve score [paces]. The money shall be paid back again with advantage [interest].*

—Act II, scene iv, lines 545-50

The reference to the repayment of money with interest promises to clear up the last trace of guilt on the Prince's part as far as the robbery is concerned. Not only did he not take direct part in it, but he will return the money with additional payment to make up for the bodily fear and the inconvenience which the merchants incurred.

*I can call spirits*. . .

Once again, back to Hotspur. Two scenes before, he had left his Northumberland castle. The lengthy scene between Prince Hal and Falstaff has given him time to reach Wales and now he is in the very lair of the redoubtable Glendower. With him there is Mortimer, earlier a prisoner of Glendower and now the Welshman's ally and son-in-law. With him also is Worcester, the brains of the conspiracy.

Hotspur is impatient. To him, Glendower in particular is a weird and alien figure. Hotspur can be poetic enough in the cause of his monomania, honor, but on all other subjects he is prosaic and literal. Besides, he has

led armies against the Welsh, who were, in their turn, led by the very man who now faces him across the table, and this can scarcely make him comfortable.

Glendower, for his part, has kept his hold over his Welshmen by impressing them with the notion that he has supernatural powers, and apparently he means to do the same in the case of his new English allies.

Thus, when Hotspur tries to flatter Glendower by describing the King's fear of him, Glendower responds with ponderous gravity:

*I cannot blame him. At my nativity  
The front [face] of heaven was full of fiery shapes  
Of burning cressets [beacons], and at my birth  
The frame and huge foundation of the earth  
Shaked like a coward.*

—Act III, scene i, lines 12-16

This is another expression of the common belief that the heavenly bodies have nothing to do but act as gentlemen ushers announcing various events taking place (or about to take place) on our own insignificant earth (see page I-96).

Hotspur takes our modern view of the matter (like Edmund in *King Lear*—see page II-14) and says:

*Why, so it would have done at the same season if your mother's cat had but kittened, though yourself had never been born.*

—Act III, scene i, lines 17-19

With rising anger, Glendower states his claims to supernatural powers over and over, while Hotspur stubbornly continues to sneer. This reaches a peak in a famous exchange indeed. Glendower says, impressively:

*I can call spirits from the vasty deep.*

—Act III, scene i, line 52

And Hotspur answers at once:

*Why, so can I, or so can any man;  
But will they come when you do call for them?*

—Act III, scene i, lines 53-54

However much sensible men applaud this answer and are grateful to Hotspur for making it, and quote him in season and out, it was a dreadful remark to make on this occasion. It was Glendower he was speaking to, and without Glendower the rebellion would not succeed. Was this a time

to cross him? Why not take him at his own evaluation as long as his friendship was necessary?

In this again is the contrast between Hotspur and Prince Hal. The Prince is courteous even to tapsters from whom he has nothing to gain; Hotspur is rude even to Glendower, from whom he has everything to gain.

*Into three limits . . .*

Mortimer, angry at Hotspur's folly, manages to call him off, and turns the meeting to its purpose—an agreement on the division of the kingdom after the conspirators have won a victory over King Henry. (This is a case of dividing the bearskin before the bear is killed, but it is necessary, for none of the parties will fight unless they are satisfied in advance they will not be cheated afterward.)

They hunch over a map and Mortimer indicates the division:

*The Archdeacon hath divided it  
Into three limits very equally.  
England, from Trent and Severn hitherto,  
By south and east is to my part assigned;  
All westward, Wales beyond the Severn shore,  
And all the fertile land within that bound,  
To Owen Glendower; and, dear coz, to you  
The remnant northward lying off from Trent.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 71-78

The Archdeacon here referred to is the Archdeacon of Bangor (a town on the northwestern shore of Wales just across the narrow strait from the island of Anglesey). Presumably the Archdeacon was chosen as a learned man and a neutral who would be fair to all three.

The division is a reasonable one, if a division there must be. Glendower, getting all the land west of the Severn, gets not only the region now recognized as Wales but good English areas including all of Herefordshire and parts of Shropshire and Worcestershire.

If the Percys get the land north of the Trent, then they have all of northern England down as far as Nottingham and Derby. They come as close as a hundred miles to London in places.

The rest of England, south of the Trent and east of Severn, is the part that Mortimer (or rather, his nephew, Edmund of March) will reign over as King. It would be more populous and wealthy than either of the other portions and it might be supposed that both Glendower and Hotspur would swear to some sort of surface allegiance to Mortimer. Still, the conditions of the rebellion are such and the services of Glendower and Hotspur of that sort as to make any control over them impossible. There would be,

essentially, three independent kingdoms: England, Wales, and (to use the Anglo-Saxon name for the old northern kingdom) Northumbria.

Such a situation could not be stable, of course. Inevitably there would be friction; inevitably warfare and blood. England would descend into anarchy, perhaps for generations, conceivably for centuries.

Shakespeare's audience would be bound to listen with indignation to any plan to divide England in three. If they had up to this point admired Hotspur for his bravery and gallantry, they could scarcely admire him any further. It may well be to encourage the audience to lose that admiration more thoroughly that Shakespeare has Hotspur act so childishly in this scene.

*A huge half-moon . . .*

Thus, even while Mortimer and Glendower pass on to the next order of business—when and where the different armies shall meet to form a united front against the King—Hotspur breaks into a pout over the map, which he has continued studying. He says, sulkily:

*Methinks my moiety north from Burton here,  
In quantity equals not one of yours.  
See how this river comes me cranking in  
And cuts me from the best of all my land  
A huge half-moon, a monstrous cantle [section] out.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 95-99

The Burton referred to here is Burton-on-Trent, a town near the southernmost point reached by the curving Trent River. From Burton, the Trent River runs east toward Nottingham, then swings north into the Humber. If the Trent River were to continue eastward, it would enter the Wash, and Lincolnshire would be included in Hotspur's portion rather than in Mortimer's. It is this which Hotspur bemoans, and he actually suggests damming the river in such a way as to make it flow east.

But then Glendower, whose portion is not affected by the Trent one way or another, suddenly objects (even though Worcester and Mortimer are humoring Hotspur in this impossible project just to keep him from going out of control). Again Glendower and Hotspur are at it, to the endangerment of the whole project.

*. . . the dreamer Merlin . . .*

When the two separate at last and Glendower leaves, the others are

free to turn on Hotspur. Mortimer instantly scolds him for baiting the Welshman, and Hotspur replies defensively:

*I cannot choose. Sometime he angers me  
With telling me of the moldwarp and the ant,  
Of the dreamer Merlin and his prophecies,  
And of a dragon . . .*

—Act III, scene i, lines 147-50

Merlin, the ancient sage of the Welsh myths (and a prominent part of the King Arthur legend), was a figure of hope to the late medieval Welshmen, longing as they did for some way of recovering their lost independence. Many prophecies were attributed to him and naturally they were interpreted in such a way as to give the Welsh hope.

According to Holinshed, one of the prophecies current in Wales at this time was to the effect that the kingdom of the moldwarp (mole) would be divided by a dragon, lion, and wolf. To interpret this one, it was necessary to suppose that King Henry was the devious mole, having won the crown by his underground maneuvering. The dragon was clearly Glendower, for it was a creature much associated with Wales and early Celtic legends. The lion was who else but Hotspur, while Mortimer could just as well be the wolf as anything else.

No doubt it was this that Glendower was regaling Hotspur with, along with a good deal more of mystical matter, and it was this that Hotspur couldn't abide.

*Defect of manners. . .*

Despite the harm Hotspur is clearly doing, Mortimer labors to flatter him and keep him in good humor.

Not so Worcester. It is he who has set the conspiracy in motion, and he has said very little while Hotspur was playing the fool. Now he bursts out in anger against Hotspur's tactlessness:

*You must needs learn, lord, to amend this fault.  
Though sometimes it show greatness, courage, blood—  
And that's the dearest grace it renders you—  
Yet oftentimes it doth present harsh rage,  
Defect of manners, want of government,  
Pride, haughtiness, opinion, and disdain;*

-Act III, scene i, lines 179-84

Thus are Hotspur's faults clearly outlined to the audience just in case

they have not picked them up for themselves out of the action. The contrast with Prince Hal continues to swing toward the Prince's side.

. . . at *Shrewsbury*

But the conspiracy is in motion and the meeting place has already been assigned. Mortimer had said, earlier:

*Tomorrow, cousin Percy, you and I  
And my good Lord of Worcester will set forth  
To meet your father and the Scottish power,  
As is appointed us, at Shrewsbury.  
My father Glendower is not ready yet,  
Nor shall we need his help these fourteen days.*

-Act III, scene i, lines 82-87

Shrewsbury is the chief town of Shropshire, on the upper Severn, ten miles east of the Welsh border. It controls the roads into northern Wales and the Percys can wait there in reasonable security, with their backs toward Wales, until Glendower joins them. Then they can advance.

After a scene in which Mortimer's Welsh wife (Glendower's daughter) sings and there is a little comic relief from Hotspur and his wife (Hotspur is always at his most engaging when he is making broad love to his wife—he is the slap-on-the-rump type) it is time to leave. Off they all ride and the rebel army is in the field.

. . . *thy younger brother*. . .

Back in London, meanwhile, King Henry and Prince Hal confront each other in earnest, much as the play acting with Falstaff had presaged. In fact, the King almost sounds like Falstaff as he deplors the Prince's taste for low company. At one point he says:

*Thy place in council thou hast rudely lost,  
Which by thy younger brother is supplied,*

—Act III, scene ii, lines 32-33

This is anachronistic. At the time of Hotspur's rebellion, Prince Hal was, in actuality, not yet sixteen, and had no voice in the government. It was not until 1409, six years after the rebellion, that he demanded and received a place on the council. By that time his father was ailing and the Prince moved naturally into political opposition.

It is easy to account for this. There is the normal rebellion of a son

against parental authority, and the desire for a man soon to be king to begin organizing the kingdom in his own fashion. As for Henry IV, he, knowing he had not long to live, apparently feared the possibility that the Prince might be tempted to seize the throne before it was properly his—and the King's obvious hostility further alienated the son.

For a time, in fact, the King forced the Prince of Wales out of his position and replaced him with a younger brother, as indicated in the verses quoted above. It was the King's hostility, however, and not the Prince's dereliction of duty that brought about the change. What's more, the popularity of the Prince forced the King to restore him to his position.

And who was the younger brother?

Mary de Bohun (see page II-264) had been the wife of Henry IV (then Henry Bolingbroke) for a dozen years before her death in 1394. In that time she gave birth to six children, including four sons. Prince Hal was the oldest of the four, of course. The second, one year younger, was Thomas, who eventually became the Duke of Clarence. It was Thomas of Clarence who replaced Prince Hal on the council for a short time in 1412 when he was twenty-four and Prince Hal twenty-five.

The legends that make Prince Hal wild and dissolute would naturally have it that he was relieved of his council post because of his behavior. In fact, a favorite story is that he struck the Chief Justice of England when that functionary was trying to arrest one of the rakehells whom the Prince had befriended and protected. The Prince was himself arrested in consequence and placed in confinement.

This is almost certainly not so. The legend cannot be traced back further than the sixteenth century and it is probably mere embroidery on the earlier legends—making a good story better. This incident is included in *The Famous Victories*, but Shakespeare does not use it directly, probably because it would present Prince Hal in entirely too gross and bad a light. Shakespeare does refer to this later in the series of plays, though, when it can be used to present the Prince in a noble light.

. . . / *did pluck allegiance* . . .

The King continues to scold Prince Hal, assuring him that by making himself common to every Englishman he will weary them. He holds himself up as an example, explaining how cleverly he won the affection of the people by keeping himself carefully aloof so that the occasional sight of him was impressive—while King Richard bored the populace by being forever in view.

And on those occasions when the people did see him, Henry played up to them. Now, remembering those days, he tells his son:

*. . . I stole all courtesy from heaven,  
And dressed myself in such humility  
That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,  
Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths  
Even in the presence of the crowned King.*

—Act III, scene ii, lines 50-54

Here, clearly, the King proves himself to be incredibly undiplomatic. How can he impress his sensitive son by this open admission that he stole the kingdom and by seeming to glory in the baseness of the theft? If we are correct in interpreting Prince Hal's actions as brought about by his unhappiness over the ambiguity of his title and position, then how must he feel when his father's every word casts mud upon that same title and position?

Prince Hal can only withdraw into himself, and when his father's long, self-serving speech ends, he says coldly:

*I shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord,  
Be more myself.*

—Act III, scene ii, lines 92-93

Is there irony in the adjective "thrice-gracious"?

And what is "myself"? If Hal is not really a true prince in his own estimation or by his father's words, why should he act like one? Why not be "more myself," that is, a mere subject, and enjoy himself like one? The remark might be interpreted as a grim promise to be even more dissolute.

*. . . no more in debt to years. . .*

But then the King finds the proper key to Prince Hal's soul. He compares the Prince to Hotspur, pointing out that in deeds Hotspur has a better claim to the throne than Prince Hal does. He describes Hotspur as being one who:

*. . . being no more in debt to years than thou,  
Leads ancient lords and reverend bishops on  
To bloody battles and to bruising arms.*

—Act III, scene ii, lines 103-5

Having said this, he then goes on to picture Prince Hal as stooping to the utmost in degradation. Wondering helplessly why he bothers to reason with Hal at all, King Henry says, in a moving speech:

*Why, Harry, do I tell thee of my foes,  
Which art my nearest and dearest enemy?*

*Thou that art like enough, through vassal fear,  
Base inclination, and the start of spleen,  
To fight against me under Percy's pay,  
To dog his heels and curtsy at his frowns,  
To show how much thou art degenerate.*

—Act III, scene ii, lines 122-28

Prince Hal cannot withstand that. True prince or not, whatever his status, he is no coward and no degenerate. In an impassioned and stirring speech, he promises that he will yet make his father proud of him:

*I will redeem all this on Percy's head  
And, in the closing of some glorious day,  
Be bold to tell you that I am your son,*

—Act III, scene ii, lines 132-34

So warlike does Prince Hal sound now, so like Hotspur himself and so like what a Prince of Wales should be, that the King joyfully cries out:

*A hundred thousand rebels die in this!  
Thou shalt have charge and sovereign trust herein.*

—Act III, scene ii, lines 160-61

. . . *my son, Lord John of Lancaster*

But the time of battle is at hand. Interrupting the conversation between father and son is Walter Blunt, who comes in with the news:

*. . . Douglas and the English rebels met  
The eleventh of this month at Shrewsbury.*

—Act III, scene ii, lines 165-66

The date indicated is July 11, 1403.

But the King has already taken his countermeasures. He says to Prince Hal:

*The Earl of Westmorland set forth today;  
With him my son, Lord John of Lancaster:  
For this advertisement is five days old.  
On Wednesday next, Harry, you shall set forward;  
On Thursday we ourselves will march. Our meeting  
Is Bridgenorth.*

—Act III, scene ii, lines 170-75

Westmoreland is the real general, and the mention of John of Lancaster has little historical significance. John is the third son of Henry IV and is two years younger than Prince Hal. John was born on June 20, 1389, and had just turned fourteen, actually, when Hotspur raised his rebellion. He too is made some ten years older by Shakespeare.

Bridgenorth, the assigned place of meeting of the royal forces, is on the Severn River, twenty miles downstream from Shrewsbury.

*... paid back again*

Another scene with Falstaff follows, but now the Prince comes in only at the end, for he can find little time for idle amusements.

Remember that after Prince Hal had turned away the sheriff's men and found Falstaff sleeping behind the curtain he had gone through Falstaff's pockets for a lark. Now Falstaff claims pickpockets have relieved him of great, but fictitious, valuables, and a broadly farcical quarrel proceeds between himself and the landlady, Mistress Quickly, complete with ribald allusions.

When the Prince enters, he keeps the two at each other for a while for the fun of it, but when Falstaff finally asks about the situation as far as the Gad's Hill robbery is concerned, Prince Hal says:

*... / must still be good angel to thee. The money is paid  
back again.*

-Act III, scene iii, lines 183-84

Prince Hal's hands are thus cleaned of the one really serious fault Shakespeare can bear to have him commit.

Hal goes on to say that he has procured Falstaff a charge of foot. That is, Falstaff can sign up a group of infantrymen for service in the war and he can lead them as its officer. This is a post of considerable honor for Falstaff.

*... so dangerous and dear a trust*

Hotspur, Worcester, and Douglas the Scot are in camp now near Shrewsbury. So far all has gone like clockwork for them and they are supremely confident.

But now comes the beginning of a check. A Messenger comes with letters from Hotspur's father, the Earl of Northumberland. The Earl is sick, it would appear. Nor can his army come under a deputy, for as Hotspur says, scanning the letter:

*. . . nor did he think it meet  
To lay so dangerous and dear a trust  
On any soul removed but on his own.*

—Act IV, scene i, lines 33-35

This is a severe blow. Northumberland's men are needed to make the army large enough to withstand the King's forces. What is much worse is that men were sure to think the illness was a feigned one; that Northumberland quailed at the last moment and lacked the courage to place himself firmly on the side of open rebellion. Naturally, if Hotspur's soldiers felt that Northumberland thought it safer to be ill than to fight, the heart would go out of them and they would fight half defeated to begin with.

Worcester, clear-thinking, sees this. Probably if he had guided the army, it would now have retreated, waiting some other chance for battle. Hotspur thinks otherwise, however. Anxious always to fight, he counters Worcester's warning of the psychological damage the defection has brought them with a psychological counterattack, saying:

*I rather of his absence make this use:  
It lends a luster and more great opinion,  
A larger dare to our great enterprise  
Than if the Earl were here;*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 75-78

Given Hotspur's character, he feels the fewer his allies, the greater his own share of glory and "honor" if he wins. The thought of this but spurs him on, and thinking that his entire army thinks as he does, he imagines they will all fight with great vigor for this reason.

(Yet it must be added that the time will come when Prince Hal is himself King and is about to face a much larger and much more unequal battle—and in a much greater speech he will reason just as Hotspur does here. But Prince Hal will have better reason to do so and he will win; for he is the greater man.)

*. . . like feathered Mercury*

More bad news arrives, brought by Sir Richard Vernon, a partisan on the side of the Percys. The royal army, he says, is marching toward them with breathless speed. Westmoreland, John of Lancaster, the King himself are all leading contingents that are converging upon the rebel forces.

But there is a personal contrast, one that fills this play, that must be taken care of. Hotspur shrugs these enemies, even the King, all aside, and demands:

*. . . Where is his son,  
The nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales,  
And his comrades, that daffed the world aside  
And bid it pass?*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 93-96

Now for the first time the comparison changes. Until now, whenever Hotspur and Prince Hal have been directly compared, it has always been glory and honor for the first, contempt and disgrace for the second. But now it is another story. Vernon has seen Prince Hal not in the tavern but in the field, and he says:

*I saw young Harry with his beaver [helmet] on,  
His cushes [thigh-armor] on his thighs, gallantly armed,  
Rise from the ground like feathered Mercury,  
And vaulted with such ease into his seat  
As if an angel dropped down from the clouds  
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus  
And witch the world with noble horsemanship.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 103-9

Mercury, the messenger of the gods, is routinely pictured with small wings at his ankles, symbolizing the speed with which he can move. Prince Hal bounds into his saddle as though he, like Mercury, can fly.

His horse too shares in this metaphor, for he is compared to Pegasus, the famous winged horse of Greek mythology.

This description Hotspur cannot face. Earlier, Prince Hal, goaded by his father's contempt, promised to meet Hotspur in single combat and by victory earn his right to be called the King's son. Now, in balancing contrast, Hotspur, goaded by Vernon's description, cries:

*. . . Come, let me taste my horse,  
Who is to bear me like a thunderbolt  
Against the bosom of the Prince of Wales.  
Harry to Harry shall, hot horse to horse,  
Meet, and ne'er part till one drop down a corse.*

-Act IV, scene i, lines 118-22

*He cannot draw his power. . .*

Hotspur can hardly wait for battle now. There remains still one of the rebel contingents to come, and Hotspur longs for it so that the battle may start without further delay. He says:

*O that Glendower were come!*

—Act IV, scene i, line 123

This brings down the worst blow of all, for Vernon says:

*. . . There is more news.  
I learned in Worcester, as I rode along,  
He cannot draw his power this fourteen days.*

—Act IV, scene i, lines 123-25

It would be dramatically interesting if it could be shown that Glendower was pouting because of Hotspur's insults earlier in the play. It could then be seen just how Hotspur's character impeded the conspiracy—but there is no clear hint of that.

In actual fact, Glendower's failure was the consequence of competent action on the part of the royal army. They had moved quickly, more quickly than the rebels counted on, and took Shrewsbury before Hotspur's army could enter. With Shrewsbury in the King's hands, Hotspur was cut off from Glendower. Hotspur now had to fight his battle in an attempt to smash the royal army or, failing that, at least to take Shrewsbury and pave the way for joining Glendower, and do so under heavy disadvantage—or not fight at all.

Yet not to fight at all at this point would be to risk the melting away of his army, disheartened at being outmaneuvered, and might make of Hotspur a hunted fugitive sure to be captured and executed—a most dishonorable end.

*. . . ay ragged as Lazarus. . .*

At least some of the royal forces are not yet at Shrewsbury, however, at least in the Shakespearean view. Falstaff is encountered near Coventry in a long soliloquy that shows him at his very worst, and in a situation where the audience must find it hard indeed to feel anything but disgust.

He has received over three hundred pounds with which to hire 150 soldiers he is to lead into battle. He carefully chooses substantial men who desperately don't want to be in the army and who can bribe their way out of a forced enlistment. Thus, he obtains additional money and ends by enlisting men from the very dregs of society.

Falstaff describes them contemptuously in an address to the audience as:

*. . . slaves as ragged as Lazarus . . .*

—Act IV, scene ii, line 25

This harks back to the very famous parable in Luke about Lazarus, a beggar who waited for crumbs at the gate of a rich man's mansion. After both died, Lazarus went to heaven and the rich man to hell.

It is easy to see that this parable would be much cherished by the vast majority of the poor and oppressed, since it holds out the promise of redress after death and, even more, the anticipation of seeing one's oppressors punished. Consequently, Lazarus, from the frequent references to the parable, became the archetype of misery and pauperdom on earth.

Another reference to the parable, and to its other side, is found earlier in the play. When Falstaff is making elaborate fun of the fiery face of his alcoholic servant, Bardolph, Falstaff says:

*I never see thy face but I think upon hellfire and Dives that lived in purple; for there he is in his robes, burning, burning.*

—Act III, scene iii, lines 32-34

The rich man in the parable is given no proper name, but in the Lathi version of the Bible he is *dives*, which simply means "rich man." It was easy for those who knew little Lathi to suppose that Dives was the proper name of the hell-bound individual.

Falstaff, in describing the miserable wretches he has recruited, uses another biblical reference when he says:

*. . . you would think that I had a hundred and fifty tattered prodigals lately come from swine-keeping, from eating draff and husks.*

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 34-36

Here we have another famous parable from Luke: that of the prodigal son, reduced to misery by his own folly, and then taken back and forgiven. (Naturally, the promise of forgiveness is a source of consolation to all men, so that the parable became popular indeed.)

At the depth of the prodigal's misery he is forced to keep swine for a bare living (a terrible fate for a Jew, who considers swine unclean) and is so famished that he envies the swine their food. The popular version of the parable has him actually eat the draff, or pig swill, but what the Bible says is "And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat" (Luke 15:16). It does not say that he actually ate them.

It is impossible to find excuses for Falstaff in this action of his, which is personally unmoral and nationally treasonable, except the very feeble one that others did the same. Yet perhaps that is what Shakespeare had in mind. In many places in his plays Shakespeare manages to show his distaste for war, and here he bitterly satirizes the kind of corruption which war makes common, the general erosion of human values which it brings about.

At the close of the soliloquy, Falstaff encounters Prince Hal and Westmoreland on their way to the gathering of the royal forces. Falstaff says to the Prince:

*How now, mad wag? What a devil dost thou in Warwickshire?*

—Act IV, scene ii, lines 51-52

They are still some fifty miles east of Shrewsbury, though Westmoreland says his army is there already.

*The number of the King, . . .*

Outside Shrewsbury, Hotspur's incontinent rage and lack of self-control (spurred on, perhaps, by his peevish anger at the fact that the despised Prince of Wales is showing knightly qualities after all) are still working against himself and his allies.

Hotspur wants to attack at once, and in this he is backed by that other border fighter, Douglas. Vernon and Worcester, with more common sense, urge caution—some of the cavalry have just arrived and are tired. Some have not even arrived. Finally, Worcester says desperately:

*The number of the King exceedeth ours.*

*For God's sake, cousin, stay till all come in.*

—Act IV, scene iii, lines 28-29

Hotspur manages to restrain himself, but barely. When Blunt arrives with an offer to negotiate, Hotspur responds with a long list of his grievances and then grudgingly asks for a chance to ponder the matter overnight.

*. . . the fortune of ten thousand men*

The scene switches to the palace of the Archbishop of York, in the city of York. He is sending messages in all directions in the greatest haste, for as he says to the man who will carry them:

*Tomorrow, good Sir Michael, is a day*

*Wherein the fortune of ten thousand men*

*Must bide the touch . . .*

—Act IV, scene iv, lines 8-10

A touchstone is a dark, hard rock upon which the soft metal gold will rub off where it touches and leave a mark. The marks made by pure gold and by gold to which varying amounts of copper have been added differs

in color. A sample of unknown gold alloy can be marked across the touchstone and the color compared to standards. In this way the composition of the gold alloy can be determined.

A touchstone has thus come to mean anything that can be used as a test. The fortune of ten thousand men must bide the "touch," that is, will be tested by the battle to see which side will be victorious, which defeated.

It is now the day before the Battle of Shrewsbury, or July 20, 1403, and the Archbishop is making preparations for strengthening himself against the King in case his ally, Hotspur, is defeated in the battle.

*. . . crush our old limbs. . .*

The scene shifts back to the King's camp near Shrewsbury. It is sunrise and Hotspur has had his night to think things over. He has sent Worcester and Vernon to the King to see what can be done to achieve a peaceful settlement. (He has, as is later made clear, accepted Westmoreland in their place as a surety for the safe return of these negotiators.)

The King greets Worcester, the brains behind the rebellion, most coldly and says:

*. . . You have deceived our trust  
And made us doff our easy robes of peace  
To crush our old limbs in ungentle steel.*

—Act V, scene i, lines 11-13

Since Prince Hal is made ten years older than he really is, for dramatic purposes, his father must be made older too. The vision here is of an old man come tottering out to war, but as a matter of historical fact, the King is actually only thirty-seven years old at this point and is over twenty years *younger* than is Worcester, whom he is now addressing with such self-pity.

*. . . that oath at Doncaster*

Worcester repeats (as Hotspur had in an earlier scene) the Percy litany: how the King had returned from exile with a handful of men; how the Percys had saved him by taking up his cause; how without them he could not have succeeded. Something new is added, however. Worcester says, self-righteously:

*. . . You swore to us,  
And you did swear that oath at Doncaster;  
That you did nothing purpose 'gainst the state,  
Nor claim no further than your new-fall'n right*

*The seat of Gaunt, dukedom of Lancaster.*

—Act V, scene i, lines 41-45

Doncaster is a town in southern Yorkshire, forty-five miles west of Ravenspurgh, where the King (then Bolingbroke) had landed.

Undoubtedly Bolingbroke did so swear in order not to frighten off possible allies who might be reluctant to come out openly in favor of an actual deposition of Richard II. Once the rebellion gained rapid success, however, it was inevitable that the goals be made higher, and certainly, both in history and in Shakespeare, the Percys were not behindhand in helping Bolingbroke to the throne once the path there turned out to be a smooth one.

But now, when the Percys have broken with the new King, they remember the oath and use it to show that Henry had unrightfully usurped the throne. That too is to be expected in practical politics; the King dismisses the whole argument lightly.

... a truant been to chivalry

But Prince Hal answers. He is now going to fulfill the promise he made his father on the occasion of their reconciliation. He praises Hotspur to Worcester and says in frank self-criticism:

*For my part, I may speak it to my shame,  
I have a truant been to chivalry;  
And so I hear he [Hotspur] doth account me too.*

—Act V, scene i, lines 93-95

The Prince then challenges Hotspur to single combat as a way of deciding the battle, rising thus from the depths of Falstaffian frivolity to the heights of Hotspurian "honor."

The King is satisfied with the offer, but will not risk his heir. He offers instead to grant full amnesty to all the rebels, even to Worcester, if they will all lay down their arms.

*Can honor set to a leg*

Worcester leaves, but there is no surety that the offer of amnesty will be accepted. It is necessary that the King's forces prepare for momentary battle, in case the offer is not accepted.

Falstaff, who has been on the scene all this time with occasional bits of comic relief, now betrays nervousness; a nervousness with which Prince Hal refuses to sympathize.

Falstaff, then left alone on the stage, muses on the nature of "honor" as earlier in the play Hotspur had done, but to much different effect. He says, in part:

*Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or lake away the  
grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery then?  
No. What is honor? A word . . .*

—Act V, scene i, lines 131-34

Remember that honor is not to be taken in a broad sense to mean virtue, integrity, honesty, or any of the great moral attributes of mankind. To the Hotspurs of the world, it means merely military prowess and nothing more; it means the reputation of winning in battle and facing the enemy with no show of fear. It is the honor of the pugilist, of the western gunfighter, and—at its worst—of the gangster.

It is this honor which Falstaff derides, pointing out its essential emptiness. It is almost unavoidable to feel embarrassed at Falstaff's "cowardly" downgrading of honor, but as the centuries have passed and as wars have grown steadily more terrible, the Falstaffian view is making sense to more and more men. In fact, we have now reached the point where it would seem that the safety of the human race itself depends on dismissing this kind of "honor" as a mere word.

*. . . so sweet a hope*

Worcester dares not carry news of the King's offered amnesty to Hotspur. He cannot trust the King. Even if the amnesty is given and accepted, the Percys will all live at the edge of a volcano. The King will always suspect them, never trust them, and sooner or later find an occasion to destroy them.

Yet Hotspur the impulsive is perfectly capable of veering from extreme to extreme and may swing from intransigent violence to a sudden snatch at "honorable" peace.

Consequently, Worcester talks Vernon into helping him misrepresent the King's statement, and Hotspur is told there are to be no terms and that the battle must be fought. Worcester does add, however, that Prince Hal has challenged him to single combat.

At once Hotspur is interested. He wants the details, saying:

*. . . Tell me, tell me,  
How showed his tasking [challenging]? Seemed it in con-  
tempt?*

—Act V, scene ii, lines 49-50

But again Hotspur must be disappointed, for the Prince's manner of challenge is praised in highest terms. Vernon speaks highly of the Prince's bearing and behavior, and says of him:

*// he outlive the envy of this day,  
England did never owe [own] so sweet a hope,  
So much misconstrued in his wantonness.*

—Act V, scene ii, lines 66-68

In angry frustration, Hotspur can only promise, once again, that he will kill the Prince.

*. . . all his wardrobe . . .*

The Battle of Shrewsbury was fought in medieval style, with the King himself in the forefront of his forces. This was necessary, for the King was the rallying point and inspiration, and when he charged forward with the cream of his forces serving as his bodyguard, the rest of the army would follow in excitement and achieve the necessary breakthrough.

This was also a great risk. The death of the King would automatically mean the end of the battle with the Percys the victors. When the word went around that the King had fallen, the heart would go out of his army.

It was not unheard-of strategy, therefore, to prepare several soldiers (presumably volunteers) with the royal insignia, to draw the enemy fire, so to speak. It was done on this occasion.

The battle began with the Percy archers repeating the stand they had made at Holmedon ten months before. The royal forces began to fall as the Scots had done on the earlier occasion. The King had numbers on his side, however. Leading fresh forces into the battle in a violent charge, he drove the rebels back.

Shakespeare, who never displays much understanding of battle tactics, confines himself to describing single combats. The rebels bent all their efforts on bringing down the King, and according to Holinshed, Douglas the Scot was particularly active here. Shakespeare follows this. Douglas has killed three men in the King's regalia, including Blunt.

With Blunt dead at his feet, Douglas thinks the battle won. Hotspur, who knows the real King well, disabuses the Scot, who, annoyed at the false Kings in the fight, says in exasperation:

*Now, by my sword, I will kill all his coats;  
I'll murder all his wardrobe, piece by piece,  
Until I meet the King.*

—Act V, scene iii, lines 26-28

. . . *they are peppered*

Falstaff is shown on the battlefield too. His charge of infantrymen has been destroyed, though he himself remains unscratched. In fact, Falstaff has deliberately led his men into the hottest portion of the fight precisely in order to kill them off. He says:

*I have led my rag-of-muffins where they are peppered.*  
—Act V, scene iii, lines 36-37

This seems senseless until one realizes that officers who did this could sometimes manage to draw the dead soldiers' pay for themselves before the statistics caught up with them, and presumably Falstaff plans to do this. Falstaff says:

*There's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive, and they  
are for the town's end, to beg during life.*  
—Act V, scene iii, lines 37-39

This lends an even bitterer point to the comment he had just made on coming across the dead body of Sir Walter Blunt, when he said:

*There's honor for you!*  
—Act V, scene iii, lines 32-33

Military renown, it would seem, leads to disregarded death if one is noble, and if one is a common man, to wounds, disablement, and the dubious privilege of begging for one's livelihood from those who have stayed home and avoided "honor." Advocates of military glory get scant encouragement from Shakespeare really, despite a few resounding speeches here and there.

. . . *to jest and dally* . . .

Prince Hal, without his sword (it is presumably lost in the heat of battle), enters at this point. He tries to borrow Falstaff's sword or his pistol. Falstaff won't yield his sword and his pistol case has a bottle of sack in it. The Prince hurls the bottle at Falstaff, saying impatiently:

*What, is it a time to jest and dally now?*  
—Act V, scene iii, line 55

Falstaff is always Falstaff, just as Hotspur is always Hotspur, but the

Prince can play either role as suits the occasion, and on the battlefield, he must be Hotspur and not Falstaff.

*. . . thou bleedest too much*

In actual history, Prince Hal, even though merely a sixteen-year-old, was on the field and fought well. He was wounded by an arrow in the face (fortunately not much more than a scratch) and refused to retire, insisting that the wound was insufficiently serious and that his retirement would dishearten the soldiers.

Shakespeare keeps the wound and the incident. He has the King concerned over the wound. He says to the Prince:

*I prithee, Harry, withdraw thyself, thou bleedest too much.*  
—Act V, scene iv, line 1

The Prince refuses:

*. . . God forbid a shallow scratch should drive  
The Prince of Wales from such a field as this,*  
—Act V, scene iv, lines 10-11

*. . . another counterfeit*

Douglas, still searching for the King, comes upon the real one at last, but now he is suspicious. He approaches cautiously, saying:

*I fear thou art another counterfeit;  
And yet, in faith, thou bearest thee like a king.*  
—Act V, scene iv, lines 34-35

These two lines represent the turning point of the battle and, in a way, of Henry's reign. Beyond the literal meaning of the lines, one can see the nation's fear that King Henry is but a counterfeit—that he is not the legitimate heir to the crown, so his rule cannot thrive.

But now we have Douglas' word that he acts like a king and looks like one. And, in fact, this is what he proved when he took a firm stand against rebels and won over them.

The King does not retreat before Douglas, as one might suppose he ought to not only because his life is more important to the cause than any knightly gesture could be, but because the King is represented by Shakespeare as an old man, and Douglas as a skilled and almost irresistible warrior.

In actual fact, though, the King was young enough at Shrewsbury to take active part in the fight, and according to Holinshed (who cited stories that were perhaps exaggerated by flatterers), he killed thirty-six men with his own hands. What's more, Holinshed reports that the King did indeed fight with Douglas and was beaten down, but rescued.

Holinshed does not mention the rescuer, but it was probably those who were charged with the King's safety, and who came roaring in as soon as they saw him in trouble. Naturally, Douglas would be forced to retreat.

Shakespeare, however, now begins to produce the climax of the play, using details which are not to be found in Holinshed or anywhere else. It is the Prince of Wales himself who rushes in when the King is about to be slain by Douglas; it is the Prince who, singlehanded, beats back the doughty Douglas and forces him to flee.

The King, rising again, says to his son:

*Thou hast redeemed thy lost opinion,  
And showed thou mak'st some tender of my life,  
In this fair rescue thou hast brought to me.*

—Act V, scene iv, lines 47-49

Thus, the King atones for his earlier picture of the Prince fighting against his father in Percy's pay, and the Prince is just human enough to rub it in a bit:

*O God, they did me too much injury  
That ever said I heark'ned for your death.  
If it were so, I might have let alone  
The insulting hand of Douglas over you,*

—Act V, scene iv, lines 50-53

. . . *those proud titles* . . .

There remains one thing, and one thing only. The two Harrys, Hotspur and the Prince, must meet. Each has sworn to slay the other.

And now they do meet, issue their formal challenges, and begin the duel toward which all the play from the very start has been heading. Falstaff enters too, cheering on his Prince, so that the Prince out-Hotspurs Hotspur with his Falstaff-self-looking on.

The fight ends, as it must, in the Prince's victory, and Hotspur falls. But he is Hotspur to the last and says:

*I better brook the loss of brittle life  
Than those proud titles thou hast won of me.*

—Act V, scene iv, lines 77-78

In Hotspur's sense, "honor" passes from loser to victor. It is the same logic that makes the winner of a prizefight the Heavyweight Champion of the World even though the loser had won a dozen previous fights and the winner just this one. And it is the title of champion that Hotspur bewails the loss of, not life itself.

What's more, it is the same "sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales" that has won all. The tumabout is complete.

*Poor Jack, farewell*

But even while the Prince and Hotspur were fighting, Douglas entered and fought with Falstaff, who could escape only by falling down and pretending to be dead.

Prince Hal, leaving Hotspur's body, now stumbles over Falstaff's, and is struck with regret:

*What old acquaintance? Could not all this flesh  
Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!  
I could have better spared a better man.*

—Act V, scene iv, lines 101-3

It might have made dramatic sense to have had Falstaff really dead here. It would have represented the final death of Prince Hal's gay, misspent ways. In bidding farewell to Falstaff, Hal might have been saying good-bye to youth and carefree joy, and might have taken up the role of Hotspur for the rest of his life.

Yet perhaps not. Prince Hal, in Shakespeare's drawing, never became entirely Hotspur even at the height of his career as hero-king. He never accepted honor as quite the all in all, but remained always human, always well rounded.

*... a long hour by Shrewsbury clock*

This would seem to be made plain in a final bit of symbolism. Once the Prince has left, Falstaff rises cautiously to his feet, spies Hotspur's corpse, stabs it, and impudently carries it off to claim a reward for having killed the chief rebel.

He encounters the two royal brothers, Prince Hal and John of Lancaster, who both stare in astonishment at seeing Falstaff alive.

The Prince protests that he himself killed Percy, but Falstaff calmly insists that he and Percy were both down and out of breath as a result of their respective encounters with Douglas and the Prince:

*. . . but we rose both at an instant and fought a long hour  
by Shrewsbury clock.*

—Act V, scene iv, lines 145—46

Prince Hal, amused as always by Falstaff's ways, lets the matter drop. He is not the glutton for honor that Hotspur was, after all, and he is willing to have Falstaff try to see how much of it he can make stick to himself. Besides, it fits actual history to have Hal not too clearly the slayer of Hotspur.

Hotspur was indeed killed at the Battle of Shrewsbury on July 21, 1403, but his death came at the hands of an unknown man. There is no historical foundation for the Prince of Wales as the slayer. Even Holinshed does not say the Prince killed Hotspur. Shakespeare states it out of dramatic necessity, but he has the Prince make no effort to ensure his own clear credit, so as to account for the lack of historical evidence since.

Falstaff leaves the stage, for the last time in this play, with the body of Hotspur on his back. The two extremes of Hal's personality thus meet and blend together physically at last, as they do (we are expected to understand) in the Prince himself.

*. . . the day is ours*

The death of Hotspur means the end of the battle. Once the word of his death was spread about, the disheartened rebels could only seek safety in flight. The Prince says:

*The trumpet sounds retreat; the day is ours.*

—Act V, scene iv, line 157

Worcester and Vernon are taken and delivered up to execution at once. (In actual fact, they were executed two days after the battle.) Douglas was captured alive, having fallen and hurt himself badly when trying to get away from the scene of battle. But he was a Scot and not an English traitor and he was released without ransom.

That was a good stroke of policy, actually. Hotspur had released his Scottish prisoners to induce them to fight on his side, and the King released Douglas in return for his neutrality and that of those Scots he could influence thereafter.

The battle might be won, however, but the rebellion was not over. The King himself makes that plain in his final speech of the play:

*You, son John, and my cousin Westmorland,  
Towards York shall bend you with your dearest speed  
To meet Northumberland and the prelate Scroop,*

*Who, as we hear, are busily in arms.  
Myself and you, son Harry, will towards Wales  
To fight with Glendower and the Earl of March.*

—Act V, scene v, lines 35-40

So the play ends only in the sense that the Prince versus Hotspur confrontation has reached a final, satisfying climax. The larger tale goes on, without a break, into the next play in the series, *Henry IV, Part Two*.