

CHAPTER XIII. - THE GRANDEST SCENE IN HISTORY.

Though Scrymgeour only painted in watercolors, I think--I never looked at his pictures--he had one superb idea, which we often advised him to carry out. When he first mentioned it the room became comparatively animated, so much struck were we all, and we entreated him to retire to Stratford for a few months, before beginning the picture. His idea was to paint Shakespeare smoking his first pipe of the Arcadia Mixture.

Many hundreds of volumes have been written about the glories of the Elizabethan age, the sublime period in our history. Then were Englishmen on fire to do immortal deeds. High aims and noble ambitions became their birthright. There was nothing they could not or would not do for England. Sailors put a girdle round the world. Every captain had a general's capacity; every fighting-man could have been a captain. All the women, from the queen downward, were heroines. Lofty statesmanship guided the conduct of affairs, a sublime philosophy was in the air. The period of great deeds was also the period of our richest literature. London was swarming with poetic geniuses. Immortal dramatists wandered in couples between stage doors and taverns.

All this has been said many times; and we read these glowing outbursts about the Elizabethan age as if to the beating of a drum. But why was this period riper for magnificent deeds and noble literature than any other in English history? We all know how the thinkers, historians, and critics of yesterday and to-day answer that question; but our hearts and brains tell us that they are astray. By an amazing oversight they have said nothing of the Influence of Tobacco. The Elizabethan age might be better named the beginning of the smoking era. No unprejudiced person who has given thought to the subject can question the propriety of dividing our history into two periods--the pre-smoking and the smoking. When Raleigh, in honor of whom England should have changed its name, introduced tobacco into this country, the glorious Elizabethan age began. I am aware that those hateful persons called Original Researchers now maintain that Raleigh was not the man; but to them I turn a deaf ear. I know, I feel, that with the introduction of tobacco England woke up from a long sleep. Suddenly a new zest had been given to life. The glory of existence became a thing to speak of. Men who had hitherto only concerned themselves with the narrow things of home put a pipe into

their mouths and became philosophers. Poets and dramatists smoked until all ignoble ideas were driven from them, and into their place rushed such high thoughts as the world had not known before. Petty jealousies no longer had hold of statesmen, who smoked, and agreed to work together for the public weal. Soldiers and sailors felt, when engaged with a foreign foe, that they were fighting for their pipes. The whole country was stirred by the ambition to live up to tobacco. Every one, in short, had now a lofty ideal constantly before him. Two stories of the period, never properly told hitherto, illustrate this. We all know that Gabriel Harvey and Spenser lay in bed discussing English poetry and the forms it ought to take. This was when tobacco was only known to a select few, of whom Spenser, the friend of Raleigh, was doubtless one. That the two friends smoked in bed I cannot doubt. Many poets have done the same thing since. Then there is the beautiful Armada story. In a famous Armada picture the English sailors are represented smoking; which makes it all the more surprising that the story to which I refer has come down to us in an incorrect form. According to the historians, when the Armada hove in sight the English captains were playing at bowls. Instead of rushing off to their ships on receipt of the news, they observed, "Let us first finish our game." I cannot believe that this is what they said. My conviction is that what was really said was, "Let us first finish our pipes"-surely a far more impressive and memorable remark.

This afternoon Marlowe's "Jew of Malta" was produced for the first time; and of the two men who have just emerged from the Blackfriars Theatre one is the creator of Barabas . A marvel to all the "piperly make-plaies and make-bates," save one, is "famous Ned Alleyn;" for when money comes to him he does not drink till it be done, and already he is laying by to confound the ecclesiastics, who say hard things of him, by founding Dulwich College. "Not Roscius nor Æsop," said Tom Nash, who was probably in need of a crown at the time, "ever performed more in action." A good fellow he is withal; for it is Ned who gives the supper to-night at the "Globe," in honor of the new piece, if he can get his friends together. The actor-manager shakes his head, for Marlowe, who was to meet him here, must have been seduced into a tavern by the way; but his companion, Robin Greene, is only wondering if that is a bailiff at the corner. Robin of the "ruffianly haire," *utriusque academix artibus magister* , is nearing the end of his tether, and might call to-night at shoemaker Islam's house near Dowgate, to tell a certain "bigge, fat, lusty wench" to prepare his last bed and buy a garland of bays. Ned must to

the sign of the "Saba" in Gracious Street, where Burbage and "honest gamesom Armin" are sure to be found; but Greene durst not show himself in the street without Cutting Ball and other choice ruffians as a body-guard. Ned is content to leave them behind; for Robin has refused to be of the company to-night if that "upstart Will" is invited too, and the actor is fond of Will. There is no more useful man in the theatre, he has said to "Signior Kempino" this very day, for touching up old plays; and Will is a plodding young fellow, too, if not over-brilliant.

Ned Alleyn goes from tavern to tavern, picking out his men. There is an ale-house in Sea-coal Lane--the same where lady-like George Peele was found by the barber, who had subscribed an hour before for his decent burial, "all alone with a peck of oysters"--and here Ned is detained an unconscionable time. Just as he is leaving with Kempe and Cowley, Armin and Will Shakespeare burst in with a cry for wine. It is Armin who gives the orders, but his companion pays. They spy Alleyn, and Armin must tell his news. He is the bearer of a challenge from some merry souls at the "Saba" to the actor-manager; and Ned Alleyn turns white and red when he hears it. Then he laughs a confident laugh, and accepts the bet. Some theatre-goers, flushed with wine, have dared him to attempt certain parts in which Bentley and Knell vastly please them. Ned is incredulous that men should be so willing to fling away their money; yet here is Will a witness, and Burbage is staying on at the "Saba" not to let the challengers escape.

The young man of twenty-four, at the White Horse in Friday Street, is Tom Nash; and it is Peele who is swearing that he is a monstrous clever fellow, and helping him to finish his wine. But Peele is glad to see Ned and Cowley in the doorway, for Tom has a weakness for reading aloud the good things from his own manuscripts. There is only one of the company who is not now sick to death of Nash's satires on Martin Marprelate; and perhaps even he has had enough of them, only he is as yet too obscure a person to say so. That is Will; and Nash detains him for a moment just to listen to his last words on the Marprelate controversy. Marprelate now appears "with a wit worn into the socket, twingling and pinking like the snuff of a candle; quantum mutatus ab illo! how unlike the knave he was before, not for malice but for sharpness. The hogshhead was even come to the hauncing, and nothing could be drawne from him but the dregs." Will says it is very good; and Nash smiles to himself as he puts the papers in his pockets and thinks vaguely that he might do

something for Will. Shakespeare is not a university man, and they say he held horses at the doors of the Globe not long ago; but he knows a good thing when he hears it.

All this time Marlowe is at the Globe, wondering why the others are so long in coming; but not wondering very much--for it is good wine they give you at the Globe. Even before the feast is well begun Kit's eyes are bloodshot and his hands unsteady. Death is already seeking for him at a tavern in Deptford, and the last scene in a wild, brief life starts up before us. A miserable ale-house, drunken words, the flash of a knife, and a man of genius has received his death-blow. What an epitaph for the greatest might-have-been in English literature: "Christopher Marlowe, slain by a serving-man in a drunken brawl, aged twenty-nine!" But by the time Shakespeare had reached his fortieth birthday every one of his fellow-playwrights round that table had rushed to his death.

The short stout gentleman who is fond of making jokes, and not particular whom he confides them to, has heard another good story about Tarleton. This is the low comedian Kempe, who stepped into the shoes of flat-nosed, squinting Tarleton the other day, but never quite manages to fill them. He whispers the tale across Will's back to Cowley, before it is made common property; and little fancies, as he does so, that any immortality he and his friend may gain will be owing to their having played, before the end of the sixteenth century, the parts of Dogberry and Verges in a comedy by Shakespeare, whom they are at present rather in the habit of patronizing. The story is received with boisterous laughter, for it suits the time and place.

Peele is in the middle of a love-song when Kit stumbles across the room to say a kind word to Shakespeare. That is a sign that George is not yet so very tipsy; for he is a gallant and a squire of dames so long as he is sober. There is not a maid in any tavern in Fleet Street who does not think George Peele the properest man in London. And yet, Greene being absent, scouring the street with Cutting Ball--whose sister is mother of poor Fortunatus Greene--Peele is the most dissolute man in the Globe to-night. There is a sad little daughter sitting up for him at home, and she will have to sit wearily till morning. Marlowe's praises would sink deeper into Will's heart if the author of the "Jew of Malta" were less unsteady on his legs. And yet he takes Kit's words kindly, and is glad to hear that "Titus Andronicus," produced the other day, pleases the man whose praise is most worth having. Will Shakespeare looks up to Kit Marlowe,

and "Titus Andronicus" is the work of a young playwright who has tried to write like Kit. Marlowe knows it, and he takes it as something of a compliment, though he does not believe in imitation himself. He would return now to his seat beside Ned Alleyn; but the floor of the room is becoming unsteady, and Ned seems a long way off. Besides, Shakespeare's cup would never require refilling if there were not some one there to help him drink.

The fun becomes fast and furious; and the landlord of the Globe puts in an appearance, ostensibly to do his guests honor by serving them himself. But he is fearful of how the rioting may end, and, if he dared, he would turn Nash into the street. Tom is the only man there whom the landlord--if that man had only been a Boswell--personally dislikes; indeed, Nash is no great favorite even with his comrades. He has a bitter tongue, and his heart is not to be mellowed by wine. The table roars over his sallies, of which the landlord himself is dimly conscious that he is the butt, and Kempe and Cowley wince under his satire. Those excellent comedians fall out over a trifling difference of opinion; and handsome Nash--he tells us himself that he was handsome, so there can be no doubt about it--maintains that they should decide the dispute by fist-cuffs without further loss of time. While Kempe and Cowley threaten to break each other's heads--which, indeed, would be no great matter if they did it quietly--Burbage is reciting vehemently, with no one heeding him; and Marlowe insists on quarrelling with Armin about the existence of a Deity. For when Kit is drunk he is an infidel. Armin will not quarrel with anybody, and Marlowe is exasperated.

But where is Shakespeare all this time? He has retired to a side table with Alleyn, who has another historical play that requires altering. Their conversation is of comparatively little importance; what we are to note with bated breath is that Will is filling a pipe. His face is placid, for he does not know that the tobacco Ned is handing him is the Arcadia Mixture. I love Ned Alleyn, and like to think that Shakespeare got the Arcadia from him.

For a moment let us turn from Shakespeare at this crisis in his life. Alleyn has left him and is paying the score. Marlowe remains where he fell. Nash has forgotten where he lodges, and so sets off with Peele to an ale-house in Pye Corner, where George is only too well known. Kempe and Cowley are sent home in baskets.

Again we turn to the figure in the corner, and there is such a light on his face that we shade our eyes. He is smoking the Arcadia, and as he smokes the tragedy of Hamlet takes form in his brain.

This is the picture that Scrymgeour will never dare to paint. I know that there is no mention of tobacco in Shakespeare's plays, but those who smoke the Arcadia tell their secret to none, and of other mixtures they scorn to speak.