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AN INQUIRY  
INTO THE PARTICULARS CONNECTED WITH THE  
DEATH OF AMY ROBSART

(LADY DUDLEY),

AT CUMNOR PLACE, BERKS, SEPT. 8, 1560.

BEING A

REFUTATION OF THE CALUMNIES CHARGED AGAINST SIR ROBERT DUDLEY, K.G.,  
ANTHONY FORSTER, AND OTHERS.

Read at the Congress of the British Archaeological Association,

HELD AT NEWBURY, 1859.

BY

THOMAS JOSEPH PETTIGREW, F.R.S., F.S.A.,

VICE-PRESIDENT AND TREASURER OF THE ASSOCIATION.

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"We find but few historians, of all ages, who have been diligent enough in their search for truth: it is their common method to take on trust what they distribute to the public; by which means, a falsehood once received from a famed writer, becomes traditional to posterity."—DRYDEN.

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TO

THE EARL OF CARNARVON,

PRESIDENT,

THE OFFICERS, COUNCIL, AND MEMBERS,

OF THE

BRITISH ARCHÆOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION,

THE FOLLOWING INQUIRY

IS INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR FAITHFUL AND ATTACHED COLLEAGUE,

THE AUTHOR.





# AN INQUIRY,

ETC.

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THE object of an archæological congress, in making inquiry into the history and antiquities of any special locality, entails upon the associates the important duty of detecting and correcting any errors that may have been long entertained; whether arising from misconception or mistranslation of ancient documents, or the too frequent belief in traditions which may have been handed down to us, and obtained currency from generation to generation. There are few counties in which instances of this description do not occur; and our members will recollect that, at the Norfolk Congress, I endeavoured to relieve the memory of sir John Fastolfe<sup>1</sup> from the imputation of cowardice, which had been almost indelibly affixed to it by our immortal bard in his play of *Henry VI*; and last year Mr. Henry Harrod completely dispelled the opinions entertained in regard to the supposed monument of the duke of Buckingham in Britford church, Wiltshire.<sup>2</sup>

I propose, on the present occasion, to occupy your attention for a short time, upon a subject connected with the county of Berks, in relation to the particulars of an event reported to have occurred at Cumnor Hall Place,—a building of which few remains are now to be seen. The circumstances to which I allude have obtained a very general notoriety, and been strongly impressed upon the memory of all, having been essentially promoted by the united exertions of the antiquary and the poet. Every production issuing from the pens of Elias Ashmole and Walter Scott must be deemed entitled to our best consideration; and any attempt to inva-

<sup>1</sup> *Journal* of the British Archæological Association for Sept. 1858, vol. xiv, pp. 230-237.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal* of the Association for June 1859, vol. xv, pp. 199-202.

validate what has been recorded on their authority, must be regarded worthy of the most intimate scrutiny.

It appears that, by the perusal of a ballad by Mickle, entitled "Cumnor Hall," inserted in Evans' *Collection of Ballads* (iv, 130), sir Walter Scott was incited to employ the materials traditionally established for the romance of *Kenilworth*, one of his many highly graphic and most distinguished productions. Turning from the perusal of Mickle's ballad, and moved by those interesting reminiscences of its character, when perused by him in his youthful days, when imagination held its sway supreme, sir Walter recurred to the authority upon which the narrative was presumed to rest. This will be found in Ashmole's *History and Antiquities of Berkshire* (i, 149), which it is necessary here to premise in detail.

"Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, a very goodly personage, and singularly well featured, being a great favourite to queen Elizabeth, it was thought and commonly reported that, had he been a bachelor or widower, the queen would have made him her husband. To this end, to free himself of all obstacles, he commands, or perhaps with fair, flattering entreaties desires, his wife to repose herself here at his servant Anthony Forster's house, who then lived in the aforesaid manor house; and also prescribed to sir Richard Varney (a prompter to this design), at his coming thither, that he should first attempt to poison her, and if that did not take effect, then by any other way whatsoever to dispatch her. This, it seems, was proved by the report of Dr. Walter Bayly, some time fellow of New College, then living in Oxford, and professor of physic in that university; whom, because he would not consent to take away her life by poison, the earl endeavoured to displace him the court. This man, it seems, reported for most certain that there was a practice in Cumnor, among the conspirators, to have poisoned this poor, innocent lady a little before she was killed, which was attempted after this manner:—They, seeing the good lady sad and heavy (as one that well knew, by her other handling, that her death was not far off), began to persuade her that her present disease was abundance of melancholy and other humours, &c.; and therefore would needs counsel her to take some potion, which she absolutely refusing to do, as still suspecting the worst: whereupon they sent a messenger on a day (unawares to her) for Dr. Bayly, and entreated him to persuade her to take some little potion by his direction, and they would fetch the same at Oxford; meaning to have added something of their own for her comfort, as the doctor, upon just cause and consideration, did suspect, seeing their great importunity, and the small need the lady had of physic, and therefore he peremptorily denied their request; misdoubting, as he afterwards reported, lest, if they had poisoned her

under the name of his potion, he might after have been hanged for a colour of their sin; and the doctor remained still well assured, that this way taking no effect, she would not long escape their violence, which afterwards happened thus. For sir Richard Varney above said (the chief projector in this design) who, by the earl's order, remained that day of her death alone with her, with one man only and Forster, who had that day forcibly sent away all her servants from her to Abington market, about three miles distant from this place; they, I say (whether first stifling her, or else strangling her) afterwards flung her down a pair of stairs, and broke her neck, using much violence upon her. But, however, though it was vulgarly reported that she by chance fell down stairs (but still without hurting her hood that was upon her head), yet the inhabitants will tell you there, that she was conveyed from her usual chamber where she lay, to another, where the bed's head of the chamber stood close to a privy postern door, where they in the night came and stifled her in her bed, bruised her head very much, broke her neck, and at length flung her down stairs; thereby believing the world would have thought it a mischance, and so have blinded their villainy. But behold the mercy and justice of God in avenging and discovering this lady's murder; for one of the persons that was a coadjutor in this murder was afterwards taken for a felony in the marches of Wales, and offering to publish the manner of the aforesaid murder, was privately made away in the prison by the earl's appointment; and sir Richard Varney, the other, dying about the same time in London, cried miserably, and blasphemed God, and said to a person of note, who hath related the same to others since, not long before his death, that all the devils in hell did tear him in pieces. Forster, likewise, after this fact, being a man formerly addicted to hospitality, company, mirth, and music, was afterwards observed to forsake all this, and with much melancholy and pensiveness (some say with madness), pined and drooped away. The wife also of Bald Butler, kinsman to the earl, gave out the whole fact a little before her death. Neither are these following passages to be forgotten, that as soon as ever she was murdered, they made great haste to bury her, before the coroner had given in his inquest (which the earl himself condemned as not done advisedly), which her father, or sir John Robertsett (as I suppose) hearing of, came with all speed hither, caused her corpse to be taken up, the coroner to sit upon her, and further inquiry to be made concerning this business to the full; but it was generally thought that the earl stopped his mouth, and made up the business betwixt them; and the good earl, to make plain to the world the great love he bore to her while alive, and what a grief the loss of so virtuous a lady was to his tender heart, caused (though the thing, by these and other means was beaten into the heads of the principal men of the University of Oxford) her body to be re-buried in St. Mary Church

in Oxford, with great pomp and solemnity.<sup>1</sup> It is remarkable, when Dr. Babington, the earl's chaplain, did preach the funeral sermon, he tript once or twice in his speech, by recommending to their memories, that virtuous lady so pitifully *murdered*, instead of saying pitifully slain."

Thus far Ashmole, the only authority given by sir Walter Scott, an authority which to the present day has been admitted and received,<sup>2</sup> and even as late as the month of July last accepted by, and upheld in, the *Quarterly Review*, in which, the writer of an article expressly on Berkshire, says, "the story of the murder of the poor young countess, as told in *Kenilworth*, is for the most part faithful, though sir W. Scott has needlessly, we think, altered the character of Forster." The reviewer repeats the statement of the countess's father having caused the body of his daughter to be taken up, the burial in St. Mary's, and the trippings of the chaplain in the funeral sermon; "trippings (he adds), let us hope, not thrown away upon the good earl sitting below in widower's weeds."

A more circumstantial history of iniquity than that given by Ashmole could not be more positively or distinctly detailed. In it we have, in the first place, Dudley's personal accomplishments set forth to establish grounds for the queen's favour and her attachment to him; then the opinion

<sup>1</sup> In a letter dated October 6, 1560, from W. Honyng, addressed to the earl of Sussex, then lieutenant of Ireland, preserved in the British Museum (Cott. MSS., Vesp. F., xii, f. 151), the following notice occurs: This sayd beror seeth the corte (Hampton Court) stuffed with morners, yea many of the better sorte in degree, for the I. Robertes wief, who was uppon the mischaunceng deathe buried in the hed-churche of the university of Oxford, the cost of the funeralles esteemed at better than ij m<sup>l</sup> marks." The diary of Henry Machin, a citizen and merchant taylor of London from 1550 to 1563, published by the Camden Society under the editorship of Mr. John Gough Nichols, gives also some account of the funeral: "The — day of August" (this must be in error for September) "was bered my lade Dudley, the wyff of my lord Robart Dudley, the master of the queen horse, with a grett baner of armes, & a vj baners rolles of armes, & a viii dosen penselles, & viii dosen skochyons, & iiij grett skochyons of armes, & iiij heroldes, master Garter, master Clarenshux, master Lanckostur, & ..... with ij haroldes, master Clarenshux & Ruge-Crosse, & a standard & a pennon of armes, a cot armur, helmett, & crest, & mantylles, & sword, & a viii dosen of skochyons of armes & vj of bokeram, & [many] mornars in blake, & ther was grett [dinner and] dole of mones [money], as many as cam." (P. 243). Among the Dugdale MSS. (T. 2, fol. 77), at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, is a specific detail of the funerall of the ladye Amye Robsert, wife of the lord Robert Dudley, knight of the garter, anno 1560; which conclusively disposes of the statement of the previous burial and exhumation of her body.

<sup>2</sup> Lodge (*Illustr. of British History*, i, 308) refers to Ashmole's account for the particular narrative of the murder of Anne, daughter and heir of sir John Robsart, and the suspicions that fell on her husband.



generally entertained, that were there no impediment in the way the queen might be willing to gratify his ambition, and even to unite with him in marriage; the obstacle which exists is stated to be his wife, and a seclusion and removal of her is therefore deemed indispensably necessary, which is arranged to be attained in the house of one of his servants. The design entertained is to effect her death by poison; but should that not be able to be carried out, then any other mode of destruction is to be resorted to. A servant, styled "a prompter to this design," and "the chief projector in this design," is introduced to aid in the horrible iniquity. Attempts are made to cause her destruction through the medium of a medical practitioner. A man of eminence is resorted to; but his suspicions are aroused and he declines to be concerned in the case. An animosity for, and an opposition to, the court interests of this physician by the earl is avowed as the consequence of his failing to promote the object entertained, by participating in such a transaction. Then follows a specific detail of the mode employed for her destruction; the forcible abstraction of all the servants about her, or attached to her; the arrangements devised and adopted; the proceedings at the murder; the condition in which she was found after the horrid event; the means taken to give to it the appearance of accident; the severe and fatal injuries inflicted upon her person whilst her habiliments were little disordered; thus conveying an impression that her death had been effected previously to her being thrown down stairs. The object thus completed, the compunctious visitings of those concerned in it ensue; a convicted felon threatens to make known the particulars of the tragedy; another murder follows—he is quickly, by the earl's authority, despatched, to prevent the disclosure of the deed or giving publicity to the act. Contrition is also expressed on the death-bed of him who was held to be chief prompter to and projector in the design—his horrors at the prospect of death. Then follow an expressed knowledge of, and belief in, the dreadful tale by an old woman called a kinswoman of the earl, when also at the point of death; to which succeeds a picture of the altered condition of the servant in whose house she had been placed—the conversion of his former hilarious and gay state to that of misery and melancholy, not to say madness,

at having been an actor in so sad a tragedy. To give still further colour to the picture, it is narrated that indecent haste had been shown to enter the body and stifle inquiry; but that an inquest is compelled to be held through the interposition of her father; the body is exhumed, and the anger and revenge of her parent are assuaged or put aside by some inferred benefit bestowed on him by his son-in-law. Then follows a detail of the affectation of sorrow on the part of her husband; her splendid funeral and the chaplain's sermon on the occasion, in which he is made involuntarily to describe the death of the lady as having been one of pitiful murder rather than accident. All these statements, taken in combination, present to us the portraiture of one of the most cruel, elaborated, and wicked deeds ever contemplated or consummated by man upon record. It is very remarkable that Ashmole renders no authority for his statement; he refers neither to any individual nor to any publication. Camden, who lived a century earlier than Ashmole, hints at the attachment entertained for Dudley by the queen, and alludes simply to the death of his wife as occasioned by a fall—"ejus uxor Roberti heres jam pridem præcipitio perierat."<sup>1</sup> Kippis assigns the particulars to have been obtained from Aubrey, but his reference applies to Ashmole's *History and Antiquity of Berks*.<sup>2</sup> Aubrey has frequently been named in error for Ashmole, yet it is not improbable that Ashmole may have derived much of his information from Aubrey's MSS. The particulars recited by Ashmole are, however, to be found in a well known work with which both Aubrey and Ashmole must have been acquainted. In this book, entitled *Leycester's Commonwealth*, the charge of the murder of Amy Robsart, together with a variety of others of a not less heinous character, against the earl of Leicester, are put forth. Indeed, I do not hesitate to avow that Ashmole must have derived his material entirely from that book without acknowledging the source whence it was obtained, and the extracts which I herewith submit from that envenomed publication cannot fail to carry conviction on that head to any one who will take the trouble to compare them with the narrative as given by Ashmole.

<sup>1</sup> Annales, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> In the "Life of Robert Dudley" in the *Biographia Britannica*.

[Extracts from "LEYCESTER'S COMMON-WEALTH": conceived, spoken and published with most earnest Protestation of all Dutifull good will and affection towards this Reader, for whose good onely it is made common to many. Job the 20, verse the 27: "The heavens shall reveale his iniquity, and the earth shall rise up against him." Printed 1641. 4to and 8vo.]

"His lordship hath a speciall fortune, that when he desireth any woman's favour, then what person soever standeth in his way, hath the luck to die quickly for the finishing of his desire. As for example: when his lordship was in full hope to marry her majesty, and his owne wife stood in his light, as hee supposed, hee did but send her aside, to the house of his servant, Forster of Cumnor, by Oxford, where shortly after shee had the chance to fall from a paire of staires, and so to breake her neck, but yet without hurting of her hood, that stood upon her head. But sir Richard Varney, who, by commandment, remained with her that day alone, with one man onely, and had sent away perforce all her servants from her, to a market two miles off, hee (I say), with his man can tell how shee died, which man being taken afterward for a felony in the Marches of Wales, and offering to publish the manner of the said murder, was made away privilly in the prison. And sir Richard himselfe dying about the same time in London, cried pitiously, and blasphemed God, and said to a gentleman of worship of mine acquaintance, not long before his death: that all the divells in hell did teare him in peeces. The wife also of Bald Buttler, kinsman to my lord, gave out the whole fact a little before her death. But to return unto my purpose, this was my lords good fortune to have his wife die, at that time when it was like to turne most to his profit." (P. 23.)

"True it is (said the lawyer<sup>1</sup>), for hee doth not poison his wives, whereof I somewhat marvaile, especially his first wife, I muse why hee chose rather to make her away by open violence, than by some *Italian* confortive.

"Hereof (said the gentleman) may bee divers reasons alleadged. First, that he was not at that time so skillfull in those Italian wares, nor had about him so fit physitions and surgions for the purpose: nor yet in truth doe I thinke that his mind was soe settled then in mischief, as it hath beane sithence. For you know, that men are not desperate the first day, but doe enter into wickednesse by degrees, and with some doubt or staggering of conscience at the beginning. And so hee at that time might bee desirous to have his wife made away, for that shee letted him in his designements, but yet not so stony hearted as to appoint out

<sup>1</sup> The work is printed in the form of a dialogue between a gentleman and a lawyer on the "Defence of the Public Justice done of late in England upon divers Priests and other Papists for Treason."

the particular manner of her death, but rather to leave that to the discretion of the murderer. Secondly, it is not also unlikely that hee prescribed unto *sir Richard Varney* at his going thither, that hee should first attempt to kill her by poison, and if that tooke not place, then by any other way to dispatch her, howsoever. This I prove by the report of old Doctor *Bayly* who then lived in *Oxford* (an other manner of man then he who now liveth about my lord of the same name) and was professor of the physick lecture in the same university. This learned grave man reported for most certaine, that there was a practize in *Cummer* among the conspirators, to have poisoned the poore lady a little before shee was killed, which was attempted in this order. They seeing the good lady sad and heavy (as one that well knew by her other handling that her death was not farre of) began to perswade her, that her disease was abundance of melancholly and other humours, and therefore would needs counsaile her to take some potion, which shee absolutely refusing to doe, as suspecting still the worst: they sent one day (unawares to her) for Doctor *Bayly*, and desired him to perswade her to take some little potion at his hands, and they would send to fetch the same at *Oxford* upon his prescription, meaning to have added also somewhat of their owne for her comfort, as the doctor upon just causes suspected, seeing their great importunity, and the small need which the good lady had of physick, and therefore hee flatly denied their request, misdoubting (as he after reported) least if they had poisoned her under the name of his potion, hee mighte after have beene hanged for a cover of their sinne. Marry the said doctor remained well assured that this way taking no place, shee should not long escape violence as after ensued. And the thing was so beaten into the heads of the principall men of the university of *Oxford*, by these and other meanes: as for that shee was found murdered (as all men said) by the crowner's inquest, and for that shee being hastely and obscurely buried at *Cummer* (which was condemned above as not advisedly done) my good lord, to make plaine to the world the great love hee bore to her in her life, and what a griefe the losse of so vertuous a lady was to his tender heart, would needs have her taken up againe and reburied with great pomp and solemnity. That Doctor *Babington* my lords chaplaine, making the publique funerall sermon at her second buriall, tript once or twice in his speech, by recommending to there memories that vertuous lady so pitifully murdered, instead of so pitifully slaine."

"A third cause of this manner of the ladies death, may bee the disposition of my lord's nature: which is bold and violent when it feareth no resistance (as all cowardly natures are by kind) and where any difficulty or danger appeareth, there, more ready to attempt all by art, subtilty, treason and treachery. And so for that hee doubted no great resistance in the poore lady to withstand the hands of them which should



offer to breake her neck : hee durst the bolder attempt the same openly." (Pp. 34-37.)

It is not surprising that one so violent in his animosity to Dudley, so virulent in his abuse, and so acrimonious in his charges as the author of this work, should revive the current reports of the day as genuine truths, embellish them after his own manner, or even create them to answer his own purpose. The bitter invectives and unbounded accusations of poisonings, thefts, and other villanies, in which he indulges against the earl, are, however, not admitted to be of authority, and with us, at this day, ought simply to operate as warnings to guard against receiving as recognised truths charges which cannot be substantiated by evidence. What authority can possibly be attached to a writer who indulges in a paragraph envenomed like the following?—

“ You have heard before somewhat said and proved, but yet nothing to that which is thought to have beene in secret committed upon divers occasions at divers times, in sundry persons, of different calling in both sexes, by most variable meanes, of killing, poisoning, charming, enchanting, conjuring and the like : according to the diversity of men, places, opportunities and instruments for the same. By all which meanes, I thinke, hee hath more blood lying upon his head at this day, crying vengeance against him at God’s hands and her Majesty, then ever had private man in our countrey before, were hee never so wicked.” (P. 173.)

The history of this book is deserving of further investigation. As far as I am able to ascertain, it first appeared under the title of “The cobby of a L’re written by a M<sup>r</sup> of Artes in Cambridge to his frende in London concerning some talke past of late between worthie and grave men aboute the present state and some proceedings of the earle of Leicester and his frends in Englande, conceived, spoken and published with most earnest protestacion of all dutifull goodwill and affeccion towardses her most excellent Majestie and the Realme for whose good onelie it is made common to many.” This is also the title prefixed to a MS. formerly belonging to the hon. Thos. Grenville, and now in his library at the British Museum. The MS. came from the collection of the rev. Mr. Watson, author of the *History of Halifax*, who has written at the end—“ It has been pretended that Wm. Cecil lord Burleigh furnished Parsons with hints for composing this celebrated libel. This assertion was never

proved,—it ought to be, before it deserves any credit. Leicester was a bad man; but would that justify Cecil in employing one of his mistress's bitterest enemies to write against one of her ministers?<sup>1</sup>

The first printed edition is of the greatest scarcity, and Mr. Grenville writes—"I never heard of more than one copy having been seen in print of this first edition, so carefully was it suppressed." It is a 12mo., well printed, and of the date of 1584. It has neither place of publication nor name of printer.<sup>2</sup> It is the same work so well known in the next century as *Leicester's Common Wealth*. In the Grenville library is also a well printed 8vo. edition, in French, of the date of 1585, to which no name of place or printer is attached. It is a curious volume, and bears the following title:—

"Discours de la Vie Abominable, ruses, trahisons, meurtres, impostures, empoisonnements, pailliardises, atheismes, et autres tres iniques conversations, desquelles a usé et use journallement le my lord de Lecestre, Machiaveliste, contre l'honneur de Dieu, la Majesté de la Royne d'Angleterre sa Princesse, et toute la Republique Chrestienne. 1585." (s. l.)

At the head of an Address to the Reader is a large wood-cut, representing various figures. First there is a bear (Leicester's cognizance) tied to a stake worried by dogs, and a bird at the top of the stake about to peck at the animal. An ape on horseback with a whip is flourishing it over the bear's back—bees are scattered about—a man wheeling a barrow by the side of the bear, and on the ground the word VENGEANCE. From the clouds issues

<sup>1</sup> There are two manuscript copies of this work among the Harleian MSS. (See catalogue, Nos. 405 and 557.) In the former it is stated to have been written by father Robert Parsons, the Jesuit. There are also two manuscripts of the work in the Bodleian. (C. W. Rawl. Misc., 9, 10.)

<sup>2</sup> There is a copy in the Bodleian Library. Most of the books were said to have been sent into England bound, with the outside of the leaves coloured green, and they were in consequence familiarly called "Father Parsons' Green Coat." Upon the authority of Dr. Farmer's sale catalogue, Dr. Bliss has given 1583 as the date of the first edition. It is probably an error. I find it sold for £1 : 11 : 6. The name of the purchaser has not descended to us. Chalmers (*Biog. Dict.*, Art. "Parsons") places the copy of the first edition (probably upon the authority of Farmer's catalogue) at 1583, and calls it "Father Parsons' Green Coat." Sharon Turner (*Hist. of Engl.*, iv, 411) quotes from Murdoch's *Papers* (p. 437), that, on 14 January 1585, C. Paget wrote to Mary that Leicester supposed her to be privy to the setting forth this book against him, and that he would persecute her to the uttermost.

forth an arm carrying a scourge. The Address to the Reader is in verse, abusive of Leicester, and consisting of twelve stanzas. Another poetical address, "A La Royne d'Angleterre," of four stanzas. Then another address to the reader, of the most violent abuse and defamation of the earl, who is described as exceeding in wickedness and iniquity all the worst characters in history. He is stated to surpass Nero, Heliogabalus, Sardanapalus, Midas, and Julian the Apostate. He is depicted as despising God, and at the same time accused of being an atheist. The devil is charged with having made so complete a monster. To sum up all his bad qualities, he is called the lieutenant and sovereign protector of the Puritans. There are other three verses, addressed to the reader, and the book then follows, which is a close translation of the English edition of 1584.

To some of the copies of *Leicester's Commonwealth* a poem has been added, called "Leicester's Ghost." There are two editions in 1641, one in 4to., the other in 12mo. To the title page of the latter is affixed the name of "Robert Parsons, Jesuite," as the author. The poem is a versification of the events described in the *Commonwealth*, and put forth as an attempt to appear in justification of them. There is little merit in the performance, and it is sufficient, as examples, to cite the two following passages:—

“My wife first fell downe from a paire of staires  
 And broke her neck and so at Cumnor died,  
 Whilst her true servants led with small affaires  
 Unto a faire at Abbingdon did ride  
 This dismal hap unto my wife betide:  
 Whether yee call it charm or destinie  
 Too true it is shee did untimely die.

O had I now a showre of teares to shed  
 Lockt in the empty circles of mine eyes,  
 Or could I shed in mourning for the dead  
 That lost a spouse so young, so faire, so wise,  
 So faire a corps, so foul a corse now lies;  
 My hope to have married with a famous Queene  
 Drove pittie back and kept my teares unseene.”

We have the authority of Dr. Bliss for stating that the jesuit Parsons was no poet, and that his name attached to the piece has no foundation.

Dr. Bliss has a curious note in relation to Leicester and the countess Lettice, which he found as part of a supplement attached to a MS. copy of the *Ghost*. He says:—

“Chance threw in my way a MS. copy of the *Ghost*, which contained a *Supplement* of a very curious and interesting nature. This MS. was delivered to a person in Oxford, with orders to transcribe it; and from the marks on the volume I conjecture it came from some college library. The transcriber could not read it, and brought it to me for assistance in decyphering the abbreviations. I immediately knew it to be a MS. copy of *Leicester's Ghost*, and lent the writer my own printed copy on condition of being allowed to transcribe the *Supplement*. The person who paid for his transcript has probably been deceived by the substitution of a text already printed (for I do not accuse the transcriber of a collation of the text, although I recommended it to him), whilst I obtained the following contemporary statement. ‘The author hath omitted the end of the earle, the which may thus and truely bee supplied. The countess Lettice fell in love with Christopher Blunte, gent. of the earle’s house, and they had many secret meetings, and much wanton familiarity, the which being discovered by the earle, to prevent the pursute thereof, when generall of the Lowe Countreyes, he took Blunte with him and their purposed to have him made away, and for this plot there was a ruffan of Burgondy suborned, whoe watching him in one night goeing to his lodging at the Hage, followed him, and strucke at his head with a halbert, or batleaxe, intending to cleave his head. But the axe glaunced and withall pared of a greate peace of Blunte’s skull; which wound was very dangerous and longe in healeing, but hee recovered and after marryed the countess, who tooke this soe ill, as that shee, with Blunt, deliberated and resolved to dispatch the earle; the earle not patient of this greate wronge of his wife, purposed to carry her to Kenelworth and to leave her there untill her death by naturall or by violent meanes, but rather by the last. The countesse also having suspition or some secrett intelligence of this trechery against her, provided artificiall meanes to prevent the earle, which was by a cordiall, the which shee had noe fit opportunitie to offer him, till he came to Cornbury hall in Oxfordshire; wheare the earle, after his gluttonous manner, surfeting with excessive eating and drinking, fell so ill that he was forced to stay there. Then the deadly cordiall was propounded unto him by the countesse. As Mr. William Haynes, some tymes the earle’s page and then a gent. of his chamber, tould me, who protested hee saw her give that fatall cup to the earle which was his last draught, and an ende of his plott against the countesse, and of his journey, and of himselfe; and soe

‘Fraudis fraude sua prenditur artifex.’<sup>1</sup>”

<sup>1</sup> Athenæ Oxonienses, vol. ii, pp. 75, 76. Bliss’s edition.



In a *Life of Robert earl of Leicester*, the favourite of queen Elizabeth, published at London, 1727, in 8vo., without name of the author, the preface has the following remarks:—

“Parsons, or whoever else was the author of *Leicester's Common Wealth*, has drawn together a heap of the blackest enormities that the most malicious imagination could invent to lay to his charge. View him in the light that he has represented him and he will appear to have been a monster of ingratitude and treachery, dissimulation and pride, irreligion and injustice, aggravated with the repeated commission of adultery and murder, without the least intermixture of one good quality. But as many of his calumnies are evidently to be disproved, their discovery must bring a discredit upon the rest of his performance, and render the whole narrative uncertain. And, as he is farther said to have been supplied with materials from the lord treasurer Burleigh, this may furnish us with another reason to suspect his veracity. Parsons, himself, seems to have been so thoroughly convinced of the falsehoods contained in it as to have been ashamed of the composition, for when Sutcliffe<sup>1</sup> had objected to him that he was author of certain infamous tracts, and amongst the rest this libel against the earl of Leicester, he endeavours to evade the charge by an ambiguous answer.”

Parsons was never brought to acknowledge the work, and it is omitted by Pitseus and Ribadineira<sup>2</sup> in the list of his works. The life repeats the tragic tale of Cunnor.

But Mr. J. Gough Nichols has, in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for Dec. 1845, p. 599, made us acquainted with a MS. in the British Museum<sup>3</sup> which, in point of libellous character, exceeds even that of Parsons, as it applies to another world. The MS. is entitled “A Journey to the World of Spirits,” and is in the form of dialogue. It was written soon after the earl of Leicester's decease, and recounts, that upon his quitting this earth his spirit was met in the air by an evil spirit named SARCOTHEOS, who deceived him by inscribing

<sup>1</sup> “A full & round Answer to N. D., alias Robert Parsons the Noddie, his foolish & rude Warnword to Sir Francis Hastings' Wastword, &c., by M. Sutcliffe,” p. 243, 339. There were several pamphlets published at this time, with titles of “Warnword”, “Wastword”, “Wardword”, to “Watchword”, etc., 1599-1602.

<sup>2</sup> The Jesuits' hatred of the earl of Leicester is apparent from Ribadineira's description of him. He says he is a man without God, without faith, without law. (“Hombre sin Dios, sin fe, sin ley.”) Leicester was decidedly known as their declared enemy, and this fact should be borne in mind during the investigation of any calumnies that have been put forth respecting him.

<sup>3</sup> MS. Addit., 1926.

on his forehead the words LETTICE-AMYS, as a passport to heaven; but that on arriving at the portal he was there accosted by St. Peter in the following manner:—"Sarcotheos hath wrighten upon your forehead the names of both your wiefs, namely of the lady Amy your first wief and of the lady Lettice your last wief, and he hath written them both in blude, to shew that you lefte the one and got the other with murder and blude."

It is a judicious remark of sir Walter Scott, that slander very seldom favours the memories of persons in exalted stations, and that the character of Leicester may have been blackened with darker shades than really belong to it. He, however, admits that the general voice of the times attached the most foul suspicions to the death of the unfortunate countess, as he styles her, though she never could have borne that title, as sir Robert Dudley was not created an earl until September 29th, 1564, four years subsequent to the death of Amy Robsart. Let us now, however, calmly and dispassionately examine into the validity of the statements made by Ashmole, a full century posterior to the occurrence of the events he undertakes to detail, and apparently from no other sources than oral tradition, and commonly reported and received information.

From Ashmole's narrative, then, we gather, first, as a prelude to, or as the motive occasioning what is to succeed, that sir Robert Dudley, entertaining the most lofty and ambitious views—views so exalted as to lead him to contemplate the possibility of contracting a marriage with the queen of England; but being at the time already wedded to Amy, or Anne,<sup>1</sup> daughter of sir John Robsart, of Sedis-

<sup>1</sup> In the funeral certificate (Harl. MSS., 897, f. 80b) she is styled "LADY AMIE ROBERT, late wyff to the right noble the lord Robert Dudley, knight, and companion of the most noble order of the garter, and master of the horse to the quenes moste excellent majestie, dyed on Sondag the 8th of Septembre, at a howse of Mr. Foster, iij myles from Oxford, in the 2 yere of quene Elizabeth, 1560; and was beryed on Sondag the 22 of September next enshewenge, in our Lady Churche of Oxford." The rev. Joseph Hunter has pointed out, that, in *Chart. Misc.*, in the Augmentation Office, there is an original instrument, under the hand of sir John Robsart, dated May 15th (4th Edward VI), by which he settles upon her and Robert Dudley (the marriage being then agreed upon) an annuity of £20; and her name is there written ANNE. The discrepancy between *Amy* and *Anne* has been endeavoured to be accounted for by mistake, as *Amie* and *Anne*, in ancient caligraphy, may easily be confounded. Brooke, in his *Catalogue of Nobility* (p. 136), calls her *Amy*; Vincent, in his *Errors in Brooke's Catalogue* (p. 310) condemns this as an error. A single autograph is all that is known of lady Dudley; and in this (a letter

tern, Norfolk, he endeavoured to keep that union a secret from the queen and the public, and therefore placed his wife

in the British Museum, among Le Neve's MSS., Harl. MS. 4712, addressed to Mr. Flowerdwe, one of a Norfolk family), and in this she signs herself "AMYE DUDDELEY." A fac-simile of the signature is given in the *Retrospective Review* (vol. ii, p. 134, New Series), and also in the *Royal and Noble Autographs* (Lond., 1829, folio). The following is the letter:

"Mr. Flowerdue,—I understand by Gruse yt you put him in remembrance of yt you spake to me of consarning ye goying of sertayne shepe at Systorne; & althow I forgot to mowe my lorde thereof before his departyng, he beyng sore trubeled wt wayty affares, ane I not being alltogether in quyet for his soden departyng; yet, not wt standing, knowing your acostomid fryndshype towards my lordchip and me, I nether may nor can denye you yt requeste, in my lordes absence, of myn own awtoryte, ye & yt war a gretar matter, as, if any good occasyon may serve you, so trye me; descyryng you furdar yt you wyll mak salle of ye wolle so sone as ys possyble, althowe you sell yt for vjs. the stone, or as you wolde sell for your sealf; for my lorde so ernystly requered me at his departyng to se those poore men satsfyed, as thowe yt had bene a matter dependyng uppon lyff; wherfore I force not to sustayne a lyttell losse, therby to satsfy my lordes desyer; and so to send yt mony to Grysse's house, to London by Brydwell, to whom my lorde hath geven order for ye payment therof. And thus I ende, alwayes trobelyng you, wyssyng yt occasyon may serve me to requyte you. Untyll yt tyme, I must pay you wt thankes, & so to God I leve you.

"From Mr. Heydes this vij of Auguste.

"Your assured duryng lyffe,

"AMYE DUDDELEY."

"To my veary frynd, Mr. Flowerdwe the elder, Norff geive this."

The above letter is considered to have been written in 1556-7 (the 3rd Phil. and Mary), as in this last year, and after the demise of her father, the grant of Siderston in Norfolk was made to her and her husband Dudley. Flowerdew was steward to the duke of Norfolk. He resided at Hethersett. His fourth son, Edward, was, in 1584, made a baron of the Exchequer. I see no evidence of loss of Dudley's affection for her displayed in this letter. There is no complaint of it; she anxiously desires to do what he was anxiously concerned about amidst the distractions attendant upon public life and business; and she shews strong obedience to his wishes. I cannot, as others have pretended, see in it anything injurious to the character of Dudley; on the contrary, I infer from it a meritorious desire on his part that some poor man concerned in the matter of the wool should not suffer in regard to any delay in the disposal of it. Mr. Heydes, whence it is written, was a person of great respectability, residing at Denchworth, Berks, about four miles from Cumnor. Ashmole records many inscriptions to members of the family of Hyde. On a brass plate is the following ludicrous epitaph, punning upon the name,—a practice not uncommon at the period to which it belongs:

"Here lye we two enclosed now in erth, not far a part,  
 Husband and wife, whiles we had lyfe, whom only death could parte;  
 My name WILLIAM, hers MARGERY, by surname called HYDE;  
 Whych name accord to us live & dead, whom now the erthe doth hyde;  
 Whyle we dyd lyve God gave us grace to harbour, clothe, & hyde,  
 The naked poore folkes: injuries we did defend & hyde;  
 Now being dead, we crave mercy of God, that he will hyde  
 Hys face from our synnes, & with hys arme he from the devyll us hyde;  
 And that with saints and happy soules our sely soules may byde  
 In heaven with God, good folkes we pray to pray to God for HYDE."

His figure, in armour, is engraven on a brass, and also that of his wife, both

in retirement, or confinement, contemplating her destruction, and thereby removing an insuperable obstacle to his advancement with his sovereign.

Although the circumstances connected with history in relation to the family of Dudley have, no less than their genealogies, been the subjects of much misconception, and of grave errors, it must be admitted that no one has excited so serious an attention, and been received under so iniquitous an aspect, as that which concerns the melancholy death under consideration. Of lord Robert Dudley, the peculiarly distinguished favourite of queen Elizabeth, we are not in possession of the precise date of his birth, which is, however, conjectured to have been either in 1531 or 1532. He was the son of John, duke of Northumberland, and brother to Ambrose, earl of Warwick. He has invariably been spoken of as one possessed of high attainments, profoundly learned in Italian and well acquainted with Latin, and having a goodly person. He received the honour of knighthood from Edward VI, at an early period of life, and he seems to have been so greatly in favour with his sovereign<sup>1</sup> as to have his nuptials solemnised at the royal palace of Sheen, in Surrey, which occasion was honoured with the royal presence, and that of the court, on the 4th of June, 1550. Of this we have evidence of the most satisfactory nature. His marriage is proved to have been well known, and to have taken place under circumstances of extraordinary publicity and distinction. Burnet,<sup>2</sup> and others, have referred to it from the journal of the reign of Edward VI, written by the king,<sup>3</sup> and in which occurs the following curious entry:—

kneeling at a desk. Behind him are the figures of eleven sons, and behind her, of nineteen daughters, all kneeling. Wm. Hyde ob. May 2, 1557; Margery, June 27, 1562.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Robert Dudley was master of the buckhounds to Edward VI. (Pat., 4th Edw. VI, § 6.) On the 15th August, 1551, he was made one of the six gentlemen of the king's chamber in ordinary, and in October following appointed to wait on the queen dowager of Scotland, and take share in the king's diversions. On the accession of queen Elizabeth he was made master of the horse, knighted at her coronation, and made lord Robert Dudley. June 4, 1559, he was admitted a knight of the garter, and sworn of the council. In 1562 he obtained from the queen the castle and manor of Kenilworth, together with Astel Grove, in Warwickshire, and the lordships, manors, and castles, of Denbigh and Chirk. He was also made high steward of the university of Cambridge, and obtained further grants from the crown. September 28, 1564, he was created Baron Denbigh; and on the day following, earl of Leicester. This year also he was made chancellor of the university of Oxford.

<sup>2</sup> History of the Reformation, vol. ii, Appendix, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> In the Cotton Library, Brit. Mus., Nero, c. 10.



“1549. June 4. S. Robert dudeley, third sonne to th’ erle of warwic, married S. Jon Robsartes daughter, after wich mariage, ther were certain gentlemen that did strive who shuld first take away a goses heade wich was hanged alive on tow crose postes.”

This clearly shews that Dudley’s union with Amy Robsart was public and distinguished.

With respect to the statement of his intention to poison her, there is not a single proof advanced; on the contrary, the mention of the names of persons in good position in life, being implicated in such a conspiracy, tends to negative the assertion. It may justly be inferred that they would neither be made privy to such base designs, nor likely to participate in them, nor to allow the suspicions they are reported to have entertained to be treated with utter disregard.

DR. WALTER BALEY, or BAYLEY, the physician specially mentioned, was a native of Dorsetshire, born in 1529, a man of character and distinction. He was a perpetual fellow of New College, Oxford, admitted in 1550, took a degree in arts, “entered upon the physic line,”<sup>1</sup> was admitted to practise that faculty while he was a proctor of the university, in the year 1558, and at that time was made prebendary of Dultingcote, *alias* Dulcot, in the church of Wells; which preferment he held until 1579, when he resigned it. In 1561, he was appointed queen’s professor of physic; proceeded in that faculty two years after, and at length became physician to the queen Elizabeth, and was much resorted to for his practice. He was author of various treatises,<sup>2</sup> and died in 1592, at the age of sixty-three years.

I am unable to find the slightest evidence to substantiate the display of any degree of opposition to his interests, or animosity of any description whatever, on the part of sir Robert Dudley, to Dr. Bayley, in any public or private transaction. On the contrary, we see that in the year following Amy Robsart’s death, at Cumnor, he was made the regius professor of physic, and, subsequently, physician to her majesty. With regard to the health of lady Dudley, it is not at all unlikely he should have been consulted, and appli-

<sup>1</sup> Wood’s *Athenæ Oxon.*, i, 586. Bliss’s edition.

<sup>2</sup> “A brieve Discours of certain Bathes, or Medicinall Waters, in the County of Warwick.” 1587, 12mo. “A short discourse of the Three Kinds of Peppers in common use, & certaine special Medicines made of the same.” 1588, 12mo. “A brieve Treatise touching the Preservation of the Eye Sight.” 1602, 1673, 12mo. “Directions for Health, Natural and Artificial.” 1626, 4to.

cation may have been made to him without her privity or consent ; a matter not at all uncommon in nervous cases ; and it is also probable that, without having an interview with his patient, he may have declined prescribing for her ; but this in no way warrants the statement that he entertained suspicions of any unfair conduct towards her, or of any intention to poison her by the addition of anything intended to be put into his potion, or that he should express his fears that he might thereby become implicated in her death, be charged with poisoning her, and incur the risk of being hanged for his conduct. This is altogether so improbable, that it must be dismissed as unworthy of attention. Had apprehensions of this kind any foundation, means would unquestionably have been taken to bring them to public notice, and there would have been upon record some evidence as to the circumstances.

Of SIR RICHARD VARNEY I can ascertain no particulars. He is mentioned, in no measured terms, as an instigator to baseness—as the chief prompter to the murderous design, and as having been left with a man servant, an underling, and Anthony Forster, to effect the diabolical business. We know nothing of Varney, save the mention of him in Ashmole's narrative, drawn by the Jesuit, as I have shown in *Leicester's Common Wealth*, and by the very important role he is made to play in the novel of *Kenilworth*. His name does not occur in any authentic documents connected with sir Robert Dudley or Amy Robsart, nor, indeed, does he appear to have had any real existence.

A woman, whose name has been printed as Bald Butter, and Bald Buttler, and styled "a kinswoman of the earl," is asserted to have been acquainted with, and a voucher for the truth of the iniquity. In the account of lady Dudley's funeral, "Mrs. Norrys,<sup>1</sup> the daughter and heyre of the lord Wylliams of Thame," is noted down as "the chieffe morner," and her trayne is therein said to have been borne by Mrs.

<sup>1</sup> She was the wife of Henry Norris, of Wytham, who figures in association with Anthony Forster upon an occasion of great notoriety at Oxford, accompanying him to demand admission for Dr. Mann, who had been appointed warden of Merton college by the archbishop of Canterbury. This was in 1562 ; and it forms the only instance in which, in connexion with the university of Oxford, Anthony Forster's name appears. It also shews clearly that he had espoused the Protestant cause, and had renounced the religious creed of his forefathers, Hence probably the Jesuits' animosity towards him, and the propagation of calumnious statements affecting his honour.

Buttelar, the younger; whilst a Mrs. Buttellar, the elder, attended as a mourner, along with Mrs. D'Oylly, Mrs. Wayneman, lady Pollard, Mrs. Blunte, and Mrs. Mutlowe. Mrs. Buttellar, the elder, is probably the Bald Butler alluded to in the statement.

Of Anthony Forster it is necessary to inquire more fully, inasmuch as he is put forth as the servant and the tenant of sir Robert Dudley, and his abode is made the place for the execution of this alleged tragedy.

ANTHONY FORSTER was the fourth son of Richard Forster, of Evelith, in Shropshire, by Mary, daughter of sir Thomas Gresley, of an ancient family. The earliest Forster of whom any information is to be obtained, was Roger le Forestarius<sup>1</sup> de Welington, whose name occurs 6° Edward I, as holding the office of forester, and having the care of a haia (a paled place of inclosure) extending within the forest of Wreken. His family is always designated as Forester until the 21° Richard II (1398), when the name appears in the abridged form in which it afterwards always continued. The Welington lands were possessed by the family until the 5° Edward IV, at which time they were escheated to the crown. Anthony Forster is supposed to have been born about 1510. He had a relative, Thomas, the prior of an ecclesiastical establishment, at Woombridge.<sup>2</sup> He was also the warden of Tong, and the vicar of Idsall (deceased in 1520, as appears by his altar-tomb, in Shifnal church) and he is conjectured to have attended to the early education of Anthony, by which he obtained information superior to the majority of those who lived in his time. Anthony Forster, however,

<sup>1</sup> In Burke's *Peerage*, lord Forester, created a baron, July 17, 1821, is noted as descending from an ancient Shropshire family springing from Richard Forestarius, who lived in the reign of Henry III. A John Forester, of Watlingstreet, co. Salop, is distinguished by a grant from Henry VIII, giving [to him] the privilege of wearing his hat in the royal presence, the original grant for which is in the possession of the present lord Forester. From this John Forester, lord Forester's pedigree is traced. It is very probable that the Roger le Forestarius living in the 6th Edward I, was the son of Richard Forestarius of the time of Henry III, mentioned by Burke.

<sup>2</sup> This was an Augustinian priory of black canons, said to have been erected by William Fitz Alan, *temp.* Henry I. Dugdale (*Monast.*, vi, 388) gives a confirmation charter of Edward II. It was called the priory of Wombridge or Wambrugge. The names of three priors only are given,—John Langley; John de Watford, who succeeded in 1373; and Thomas Forster, who died in 1520. His funeral inscription is copied into Cole's MSS., xxvii, fol. 85b,—“Here lyeth the body of Thomas Forster, sometime prior of Wombridge, warden of Tonge, and vicar of Idsall, A.D. 1520.” The site of the house, upon its dissolution, was granted, 31st Henry VIII, to James Leveson.



does not appear to have been either possessed of high taste or distinguished position; neither do his talents seem to have been of any remarkable character. Still, his family must be admitted to have been highly respectable, and his tastes, for his age, must be regarded as of a superior description. He married, somewhere between 1530 and 1540, Ann, daughter of Reginald Williams, of Burghfield, Berks, the eldest son of Sir John Williams, of that place, and the elder brother of Lord Williams of Thame, who was created by queen Mary, and was the lord chamberlain of the household to Philip II. In 1569 he was made president of the council in the principality of Wales, and in this year he died, in Ludlow castle. This connection brings Anthony Forster into the county of Berks, and would necessarily place him in good society. It also accounts for his intercourse and intimacy with the Norrises.

Anthony Forster had a grant from the crown of the manor of Sidilmington, jointly with a Richard Ingram, and he held other estates in the counties of Worcester and Warwickshire in 1544; in 1545 he obtained the manor of Little Wenlock and other property in Shropshire. He purchased the estate of Cumnor Place, in Berks, of William Owen, son of Dr. George Owen, physician to Henry VIII, who had settled it upon his son at the time of his marriage with Ursula, daughter of Alexander Fettiplace. William Owen sold it to Anthony Forster, at that time residing at the Manor House as Owen's tenant. Forster was, therefore, not the tenant of Dudley, but of Owen. Forster's property must have rendered him of importance in the neighbourhood of Cumnor, and by the superiority of his education, and the tastes he cultivated, must have been regarded as no mean individual. That he, therefore, should have rendered himself subservient to any iniquitous design on the part of Dudley, or attempt the commission of the most horrid of crimes, as that with which he has been charged, is utterly incredible; and this, too, at a time when Mr. and Mrs. Owen, as it appears, were with him in his abode. That he sent away the servants to Abingdon fair can be also distinctly disproved.

Forster evidently grew in favour with the people of Abingdon, as he succeeded to the representation of that borough in 1570, upon the death of Oliver Hyde, esq., and continued such during the remainder of his life.

By his marriage with Ann Williams he had issue five children,—three sons and two daughters. They are all mentioned on his tomb in Cumnor church: John, Robert, Henry, Cynthia, and Penelope. The interesting Jeannette of sir Walter Scott is a pure fiction. The children of Forster all died young, and during the lives of their parents. As no entry of their burial occurs in the register of the parish church, which commences in 1559, it is to be presumed they died prior to Forster coming to, or taking possession of, Cumnor. Anthony Forster died in 1572. This is known by his will and the date of his burial. It is not distinctly known whether he died at Cumnor, but it is probable he did so. The will is dated November 5, and the entry of his burial is November 10, so that he may be esteemed to have died on the 7th or 8th of that month. By his will he left Cumnor Place to his friend and patron, the earl of Leicester; but it was continued to be inhabited by his widow and her sister. The former remained there during twenty-seven years,—in short, until her decease in 1599, when, on the 10th April of that year, she was buried in the tomb of her husband in the chancel.

The character of the man may be somewhat estimated from the description of his will. Equitable distribution of his property is there displayed. His wife is amply provided for, as being the first to demand consideration. Then follow his relations and dependents: they are all particularized. His godchildren are not overlooked, and some old acquaintances are remembered. These circumstances are worthy of note, inasmuch as they shew his nature to have been kindly and considerate, and the reverse of what he has been depicted by the Jesuit, the antiquary, and the novelist. I derive the following particulars from a publication<sup>1</sup> with which I was unacquainted prior to the reading of this paper to the British Archæological Association.

The will is dated November 5, 1572, and by it, as I have already stated, he gives and bequeaths to “lord Robert, earle of Leicester, my mannor and lordshipe of Comenore, in the said countie of Barke, w<sup>th</sup> all the proffits and comodities therunto belonging, w<sup>th</sup> all & singler their appurtinances, together w<sup>th</sup> Comenore Woode and the Hundred of Horne-

<sup>1</sup> Historical and Descriptive Account of Cumnor Place, etc., by A. D. Bartlett (Oxf., 1850, 8vo.), in which the will is printed entire, pp. 120-124.

more,<sup>1</sup> and my lease of Whitley Leaze, in the saied countie of Barke; to haue and to holde the saied mannor, & all other the premiss's, to him & his heires for euer, upon condicon that the saied right honorable earle, his heires & assignes, shall paie, or cause to be paid, one thousande twoe hundreth poundes of lawfull Englishe money for the same, in maner and forme followinge, that is to saie, to my welbeloued wief Anne, five hundreth poundes," etc., etc.

In this instrument, in addition to those already stated, he makes mention of his nephews, his great nephews, his cousins, his sister-in-law, his brother-in-law, his godsons, Dr. Robert Bellamie, the physician in attendance upon him during his last illness; his servants, male and female, specifying them by their names and offices; his four musicons, his butler, his warryner; the mayor of Abingdon and his brother, for sermons; Robert Rhodes, an old acquaintance, his 6 songe bookes, which he himselfe did prick; the master, fellows, and scholars, of Baliol college, Oxford, etc. He also annuls the payment of various debts due to him; and leaves Thomas Salman and his wife residuary legatees and executors. Dr. Renall and Adam Squier are the overseers of his will and testament, and to them he makes bequests of his horses.

The tomb of Anthony Forster was executed during his lifetime, and is placed against the north wall of the chancel. It is an object of much attraction at Cumnor church, composed of Purbeck marble, and elevated on a basement of freestone. The plinth of the monument has for ornament a small arched trefoil panel at each extremity, the space between which is filled by a series of circles, enclosing quatrefoils. The front of the tomb is divided into three several compartments, of a square shape, enriched with elaborate tracery. The sides also each contain one panel similarly adorned, whilst the centre of every compartment holds a small brass plate, on which appears a shield of arms. There are several brass plates likewise inserted in the masonry at the back of the monument, the largest of which represents Anthony Forster as an esquire, clad in complete armour, with the exception of his head piece, which is deposited near his feet. He is kneeling on a cushion before a faldstool in an attitude of prayer, and upon the cushion a book lies open. His wife and three children are in the

<sup>1</sup> The Hundred of Hormer, anciently written Hornemere.

same posture, and habited in the dresses of the Elizabethan period.

At the corners of the slab of Purbeck marble which covers the tomb are placed four small ill-proportioned pillars of the Ionic order, sustaining a large canopy, the roof of which is sculptured into fourteen circular panels, with quatrefoil tracery disposed in two rows. Over each pillar there is a small circular pinnacle, and the front of the canopy is divided into two compartments by a fifth, which terminates beneath in form of a boss, and is charged with three hunters' horns stringed, carved in relief. The front is adorned with panels similar to those which decorate the roof, and is terminated by a neat foliated cornice.<sup>1</sup>

On a brass plate over the figures are the following arms:— In the centre *quarterly*, 1 and 4, three huntsmen's horns stringed. 2 and 3. Three pheons with their points upward. The crest is a stag lodged and regardant *gules* vulned through the neck with an arrow, *argent*, charged on the side with a martlet *or* for a difference.

Behind the lady is the following coat:—*Quarterly* 1 and 4. Two organ pipes in saltire between four crosses *paté*. 2. A raven. 3. Within a bordure charged with roundells three lions' heads erased, a chevron *ermine* between them and on a chief bar nebule, surmounted by a pale charged with a pelican. 4. The same as the first.

Behind the esquire are the arms of Forster impaling those of Williams. The other shields are repetitions of these three. The epitaphial inscriptions have been given by Ashmole, and are as follow:—

“ ANTHONIUS FORSTER, generis generosa propago,  
 Cumneræ Dominus Barcherensis erat;  
 Armiger, Armigero prognatus patre Ricardo,  
 Qui quondam Iphlethæ Salopiensis erat.  
 Quatuor ex isto fluxerunt stemmate nati,  
 Ex isto Antonius stemmate quartus erat.  
 Mente sagax, animo præcellens, corpore promptus;  
 Eloquii dulcis, ore disertus erat.  
 In factis probitas fuit, in sermone venustas,  
 In vultu gravitas, religione fides;  
 In patriam pietas, in egenos grata voluntas,  
 Accedunt reliquis annumeranda bonis :

<sup>1</sup> See *Gent's Mag.* for 1821, Part II, p. 598.



Sic quod cuncta rapit, rapuit non omnia Lethum,  
Sed quæ Mors rapuit, vivida fama dedit.”<sup>1</sup>

Then follow these laudatory verses :—

“ Argute resonas Citharæ prætere chordas,  
Novit et Aonia concrepisse lyra.  
Gaudebat terræ teneras defigere plantas,  
Et mira pulchras construere arte domos.  
Composita varias lingua formare loquelas,  
Doctus et edocta scribere multa manu.”<sup>2</sup>

Beneath the woman is the following :—

“ Anna Rainoldo Williams fuit orta parente,  
Evasit meritis Armiger ille suis,  
Sed minor huic frater, præstante laude Baronis,  
Thamensis viguit gloria magna soli.  
Armiger ergo pater, Dominus sed avunculus Annæ,  
Clara erat his meritis, claruit Anna suis.  
Casta viro, studiosa Dei, dilecta propinquis,  
Stirpe beata satis, prole beata satis.  
Mater Joannis, medioquæ ætate Roberti,  
Et demum Henrici nobilis ille Parens.  
Cynthia Penelope tumulo clauduntur in isto.  
Anna sed hoc tumulo sola sepulta jacet.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “ Anthony Forster, esq., the generous offspring of a generous race, lord of the manor of Cumnor, Berks; son of Richard Forster, of Salop, esq., who had four sons, the youngest whereof was Anthony :

“ In person fair, and of the brightest sense,  
Where wisdom joined with smoothest eloquence ;  
In action, justice, speech, a flowing grace ;  
Faith in religion, gravity of face ;  
A patriot firm, and to the needy kind,  
With numerous graces more adorned his mind.  
Death took too much (what can his power survive ?)  
Yet spite of death his fame shall ever live.”

<sup>2</sup> “ Skilled in the softest notes the Muses sing,  
Or on the harp to touch the sounding string ;  
Pleased with the florist’s tender, nursing care,  
Or architect, stupendous piles to rear.  
Read in the tongues the ancient sages taught,  
And learned works confess how well he wrote.”

<sup>3</sup> “ Ann, daughter of Rainolde Williams, esq., whose younger brother, a baron, shone the glory of Berkshire; though her father was but a squire, her uncle was a lord; chaste to her husband, devout towards God, and beloved by her neighbours. Sufficiently happy in her progenitors, happy enough in her offspring. Mother of John; in her middle age, of Robert; and lastly of Henry; Cynthia and Penelope are enclosed in that tomb, but Ann alone lies buried here.”



To the late lord Braybrooke<sup>1</sup> we are indebted for the transcription of some original letters deposited in the Pepysian library at Cambridge, which were lent by the celebrated John Evelyn to Samuel Pepys, who, it appears, did not return them.<sup>2</sup> These are letters which passed between sir Robert Dudley, afterwards the earl of Leicester, and Thomas Blount, relating to the death of Amy Robsart; and as they seem to dissipate in some measure the mystery in which that event is involved, and also to relieve Dudley from a suspicion of iniquity too readily entertained against him in regard to his connexion with this melancholy event, cannot but be looked upon with much interest.

As in these letters names are introduced bearing essentially upon the inquiry in which we are engaged, it will be necessary, prior to proceeding to their recital, to direct attention to a few particulars in relation to the family of the unfortunate lady concerned. Her father, sir John Robsart, of Sidestern, Norfolk, was descended from sir Canon Robsart, knt., a great commander under Edward III. He left three sons—sir John, sir Lewes, and sir Terry. Sir John, the eldest, attended Henry V on his first landing in France, and was a knight of the garter. He died 29th Hen. VI (1451) and was buried at the Grey Friars, in London. Sir Lewes, the second son, was standard bearer to Henry V, and also a knight of the garter. He married Elizabeth, daughter and heir of sir Bartholomew Bouchier, and was summoned to parliament as lord Bouchier in the 3rd, 4th, etc., of Henry VI. He was buried in Westminster Abbey. Sir Terry, the third son, married Elizabeth, daughter of sir Thos. Kerdeston. He died 12th Henry VII (1497), and left two sons, William and John, also a daughter Lucy. William died a minor, and the property went to his brother John,

<sup>1</sup> Diary and Correspondence of S. Pepys, F.R.S. Vol. i, Appendix, pp. 381-388. 3rd ed. Lond., 1848.

<sup>2</sup> Pepys did not hesitate to take advantage of Evelyn's permission made upon lending to him his books and manuscripts. In the postscript to a letter to Pepys (Sayers Court, 5 Dec., 1681, printed in Evelyn's *Diary*, vol. ii, p. 219, 4to. edition) he says: "These papers, mapps, letters, books, and particulars, when you have don with, be pleas'd to take your owne time in returning." And in the margin is written,—"which I afterwards never asked of him." Among those included in the list appears "the earl of Leycester's will." In the Pepysian library they are bound up with other MSS., commencing on page 703, and are lettered as "Papers of State." These copies are conceived to have been made towards the close of the sixteenth century, being about twenty or twenty-five years subsequent to the occurrence to which they relate.

who thereby became lord of the manor of Sidestern. He was sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk 1st Edward VI (1547, and again in 1550-51). Upon his decease he left by his wife Elizabeth, daughter of John Scot, of Camberwell, Surrey, a son and daughter, Arthur and Anne, or Amy. Arthur appears to have died unmarried, but was living at the time of his sister Amy's decease. Lucy, the daughter of sir Terry, and aunt of Amy, married Edward Walpole, esq., of Houghton. Amy, the only daughter of sir John Robsart, married, as we have seen, in 1550, sir Robert Dudley, who had a grant of the manor of Sidestern, together with that of Hernesby, and other property, to hold with Amy his wife and the heirs of their bodies *in capite*; and to hold Sidestern, Newton, and Great Bircham, during life by a grant dated Jan. 30th, 3rd Philip and Mary (1556). The earl held this manor for his life, dying lord of it in 1588, when it descended to John Walpole, esq., son and heir of Edw. Walpole, esq., of Houghton, and Lucy his wife, the daughter of sir Terry Robsart.

Sir John Robsart, the second son of sir Terry, dwelt, according to Blomefield,<sup>1</sup> with dame Elizabeth his wife, in Stanfield Hall in 1546. The historian has fallen into a grave error in regard to this marriage, as he states that Elizabeth, the relict of sir John Robsart, married Roger Appleyard, of Braconash, Norfolk, and that she had by him a son, John Appleyard, born not two years before his father's death, which took place in 1528. If this were to be admitted, it follows that Roger Appleyard could not have been the husband of sir John Robsart's widow, as she was not such until the year 1553, upwards of twenty years subsequent to the decease of Roger Appleyard. John Appleyard is, however, stated to have been the son of Roger Appleyard, and to have served the office of sheriff of Norfolk in 1558. Lord Braybrooke has accepted this, which is quite irreconcilable when dates are considered. Sir Robert Dudley, however, in one of the letters which I shall presently refer to, expressly says,—“I have sent for my brother Appleyard, because he is her brother.” These conflicting circumstances involved me in much perplexity, and in my difficulty I applied to my friend Mr. Hudson Gurney, so intimately acquainted with all matters relating to the history of Norfolk,

<sup>1</sup> History of Norfolk, i, 743, fol. ed.

and sir Charles Young, garter king at arms, to reconcile, if possible, the circumstances and the discrepancy of dates caused by Blomefield calling Elizabeth, wife of Roger Appleyard, "the relict of sir John Robsart." Upon due consideration, and with a precise agreement of dates in all matters, we are entirely disposed to admit that Roger Appleyard was the *first*, not the *second*, husband of Elizabeth Scot. John Appleyard was therefore the brother of Amy Robsart, and Amy Robsart was unquestionably the daughter of sir John and lady Elizabeth, as is shown by the inquisition upon her father's decease, 1 and 2 Philip and Mary (1553-4.) She was then twenty-three years of age, and must have been born subsequently to her uterine brother John Appleyard, who was under two years of age in 1528. This view explains the residence of sir John and lady Robsart at Stanfield Hall in 1546, that property having been left to her by her husband Appleyard for life, together with other manors. Sir John Robsart was therefore here residing in his wife's jointure house. The family of Appleyard is one distinguished in Norfolk history. It is to be traced from Richard, son of William de Applegart, of Dunham, in Norfolk, *temp.* Stephen. Bartholomew Appleyard was a citizen in Norwich, bailiff of the city in 1372, and a burgess in parliament in 1374, and again in 1412. He was succeeded by William his eldest son, who was nine times burgess in parliament, bailiff in 1386 and 1395. He is known also as the first mayor of Norwich, an office he filled on six several occasions, namely, in 1403, 1404, 1405, 1411, 1412, and 1418. He died in 1419, leaving by Margaret his wife, Nicholas, then twenty-five years of age, who married Margaret Thornbury, of London, who survived him. He was succeeded by John, his son and heir, who built Brakene Hall (now demolished). His decease occurred in 1473, and by it Nicholas his son and heir succeeded, who married Agnes, daughter of William Rookwood, of Warham, and Alice his wife, with whom he had several manors and a good estate. He was knighted in 1511. His son died without issue, and Roger Appleyard, of Brakene, inherited as son and heir. He married Elizabeth, daughter of John Scot, of Camberwell, in Surrey, and died July 8, 1528, leaving John, his son and heir, not then two years old. By will Roger Appleyard left to his wife Elizabeth for life his

manors of Stanfield in Windham, Newton Flotman, Hethill, and Ketteringham, and £200 to each of his daughters Frances and Bridget. John Appleyard his son succeeded, and was high sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk in 1588, and married Elizabeth, daughter of Robert Hagen, of East Bradenham.

LORD ROBERT DUDLEY TO THOMAS BLOUNT.

COSIN BLOUNT,

Immediately upon your departing from me there came to me Bowes, by whom I do understande that my wife is dead, &, as he saithe, by a falle from a paire of stayres : little other understandinge can I have of him. The greatness & the suddennesse of the mysfortune doth so perplex me, untill I do heare from you how the matter standeth, or howe this evill doth light upon me, considering what the malicious world will bruyte, as I can take no rest. And, because I have no waie to purge myselfe of the malicious talke that I knowe the wicked worlde will use, but one, which is the verie plaine truth to be knowen, I do praye you, as you have loved me, & do tender me & my quietness, & as nowe my special truste is in you, that will use all devises and meanes you can possible for the learning of the truth, wherein have no respect to any living person ; and as by your owne travell and diligence, so likewise by order of lawe, I mean, by calling of the coroner, & charging him to the uttermost, from me, to have good regard to make choyse of no light or slight persons, but the discreetest & substantial men for the juries ; such as for their knowledge may be able to search honorablie and duellie, by all manner of examynacions, the bottom of the matter ; & for their uprightnesse will earnestlie and sincearlie deale therein, without respect. And that the bodie be viewed & serched accordinglie by them, & in everie respects to proceede by order & lawe. In the mean tyme, cosin Blount, let me be advertysed from you, by this berer, with all spede, howe the matter doth stande ; for, as the cause & the manner thereof doth marvelously trouble me, considering my case many waies, so shall I not be at rest till I may be ascertyned thereof ; prayinge you ever, as my truste is in you, & as I have ever loved you, do not dissemble with me, neither let anythinge be hid from me, but sende me your trewe conceyt & opinion of the matter, whether it happened by evill chance, or by villainye ; & faill not to let me heare contynewallie from you. And thus fare you well, in moch haste from Windsore, this ixth day of September in the eveninge.

Y<sup>r</sup> lovinge frend & kynsman, moch perplexed,

R. D.

I have sent for my brother Appleyarde, because he is her brother, & other of her frendes also, to be theare, that they may be previe, & see how all things do proceede.



## THOMAS BLOUNT TO LORD ROBERT DUDLEY.

Maie it please y<sup>re</sup> lordshipe to understande that I have receyved your letter by Brys, the contents whereof I do well perceyue: & that y<sup>re</sup> lordshipe was advertised by Bowes ymediatelic upon my departinge that my ladie was deade. And also y<sup>re</sup> straite charge geven unto me, that I shulde use all the devices & policies that I can for the trewe understanding of the matter; as well by myne owne travell, as by the order of the lawe, as in calling the coroner, gevinge him charge that he chowse a discrete & substancial jurie for the view of the bodie, & that no corrupcion shuld be used, or persons respected. Y<sup>re</sup> L. great reasons that maketh you so earnestlie searche to learne the trothe, the same with your earnest commandement, dothe make me to do my best herein. The present advertisement I can give to youre l<sup>p</sup> at this tyme is, to trewe it is that my ladie is dead, & as it seamethe, with a fall; but yet how, or whiche waie, I cannot learne. Y<sup>re</sup> l<sup>p</sup> shall heare the maner of my proceedinge since I cam from you. The same nyght I cam from Windsore I laie at Abington all that nyght, & because I was desirous to heare what newys went abrode in the countie, at my supper I called for myne hoste, & asked him what newys was theare about, taking upon me I was going into Glocestershire. He saide, "theare was fallen a greate mysfortune within three or iiii myles of the towne." He saide, "my lorde Robert Duddeley's wyfe was deade"; and I axed howe; and he saide, "by a mysfortune, as he heard: by a fall from a payre of stayres." I asked him by what chance. He saide "he knewe not." I asked him what was his judgment and the judgment of the people. He saide, "some weare disposed to saie well, & some evill." What is your judgment? said I. "By my trothe," said he, "I judge it a mysfortune because it chanced in that honest gentleman's house. Hys great honestie," said he, "dothe moche curb the evill thoughts of the people." Mythinkes, said I, that some of her people that wayted upon her should somewhat saie to this. "No, sir," said he, "but little; for it was said that they were heare at the fayre, & none left with her." How myght that chance? said I. Then said he, "it is saide heare that she rose that daie verie earlie, & commanded all her sorte to go to the fayre, & wold suffer none to tarrie at home." And thereof is moche judged; & trewlie, my lorde, I did first learne of Bowes, as I met with him coming towards y<sup>re</sup> l<sup>p</sup>e, of his owne being that daie, & of all the rest of them beinge, who affirmed that she wold not that daie suffer one of her owne sorte to tarrie at home; & was so earnest to have them gone to the fayre, that with any of her owne sorte that made reason of tarrying at home, she was verie angrie; and cam to Mrs. Odingselle, the wedowe, that liveth with Anthony Fforster, who refused that daie to go to the fayre, & was verie angrie with her also, because she said it was no daie for gentlewomen to go in,

but said the morrowe was moche better, and then wold she go; whereunto my ladie answered and saide, "she mighte chowse & go at her pleasure, but all hers shuld go;" & was verie angrie. They asked who shuld kepe her companie if they all went. She saide, "Mrs. Owen shuld kepe her companie at dyner." The same tale dothe Pinto, who dothe dearlie [love] her, confirm. Certenly, my l<sup>d</sup>, as little while as I have bene here, I have harde divers tales, that maketh me to judge her a strange woman of mynde. In askinge of Pinto what she might thinke of this matter, either chance or villany, she saide, "By her faith, she dothe judge it verie chance, & neither done by man nor by herself. For herself," she said, "she was a good, vertuous gentlewoman, & daily would praie upon her knees;" and divers tymes, she saith, that she hath heard her praie to God to deliver her from disperacione. Then, said I, she myght have a evell eye in her mind. "No, good Mr. Blount," said Pinto, "do not judge so of my wordes; if you should so gather, I am sorrie I saide so much." My lord, it is most strange that this chance shuld fall upon you, as it passeth the judgment of any man to saie how it is; but then the tales I do heare of her make me to thinke she had a strange minde, as I will tell you at my cominge. But to the inquest you wuld have so verie circumspectlie chosen by the coroner for the understandinge of the truthe, y<sup>re</sup> lordshipe nedethe not to doubt of their well chosinge. Before my cominge, the inquest were chosen, & part of them at the house. If I be able to judge of men, & of their ableness, I judge them, & speciallie some of them, to be as wise and as able men to be chosen on such a matter as anie man, beinge but countrymen, as ever I saw, & as well able to answeare for there doing before whosoever they shall be called, & for there trewe search without respect of persons. I have done youre message unto them, & I have good hope they will conceal no fault, if any be; for as they are wise, so are they, as I heare, part of them verie enemies to Anthony Fforster. God give them, in there wisdom, indifference, and then be they well chosen men. More advertisement at this tyme I cannot give your l<sup>p</sup>; but as I can lerne, so will I advertyse, wyshinge y<sup>r</sup> l<sup>p</sup>e to put away sorrow, & rejoyce, whatsoever fall out, of your owne innocency; by the which, in time, doubt not but that malicious reports shall turn upon their backe that can be glad to wish or saie against you. And thus I humblie take my leave. From Cumnor, this 11th of September.

Y<sup>r</sup> l<sup>p</sup>s life and loving

T. B.

Y<sup>r</sup> l<sup>p</sup>e hath donne verie well in sonding for Mr. Appleyard.

THOMAS BLOUNT TO LORD ROBERT DUDLEY.

I have done y<sup>r</sup> lordship's message vnto the iurye, you nede not to byde them to be carefull; whether equitie is the cause or mallice to Fforster do forbyd it, I knowe not. They take great paynes to learne

the truthe: to morrowe I will wayte upon y<sup>r</sup> L. & as I come I will brake my faste at Abington, and there I shall mete w<sup>th</sup> one or two of the iurye, and what I can I will bringe. They be verie secrete, and yet do I heare a whysperinge that they can find no presumpcions of evill. And if I maie saie to yo<sup>r</sup> L. my conscience, I thinke some of them be sorie for it, God forgive me! & yf I judge amysse, myne owne opinion is much quieted; the more I heare of it, the more free it doth appeare to me. I have almost nothing that can make me so much to think that any man should be the doer thereof, as when I think yo<sup>r</sup> L. wife before all other women shuld have such a chance: the circumstances & the many thinges w<sup>ch</sup> I can learne doth persuade me that onelie mysfortune hath done it, & nothing els. Myself will wayte vpon yo<sup>r</sup> L. to morrow, & saie what I knowe. In the mean tyme, I humbly tak my leave from Comner, the 13<sup>th</sup> of September.

Yo<sup>r</sup> lshipe loving

T. B.

LORD ROBERT DUDLEY TO THOMAS BLOUNT.

I have reseved a letter from one Smythe, one that seamethe to be foreman of the iurye. I prseve by his letter that he & the rest hathe & do travill verie diligentlie & circumspectlie for the tryall of that matter whiche they have charge of; & for any thing I hear, that by any serche or examinacone they can make in the world hitherto, it doth plainlie appeare he saithe, a verie mysfortune, which, for my owne parte, cousin Blount, dothe much satisfie and quiet me. Nevertheless, because of my thorou quietnes and all others hereafter, my desire is that they may contynowe in there enquiory & examynacone to the vttermoste, as longe as they lawfallie maie: yea, & when they haue geven there verdyt, though it be never so plainlie found, assuredlie, I do wishe that another substantiall company of honest men might trye againe for the more knowledge of truthe. I have also requested s<sup>r</sup>. Ric. Blount, who is a perfite honest gentleman, to helpe to the furtherance thereof. I trust he be w<sup>th</sup> you, or with Mr. Norris likewise, and Appleyarde, I heare, hath bene there, as I appointed, and Arthure Robsart, her brothers; yf any more of her frendes had bene to be had, I wold also haue caused them to have sene and bene previe to all the dealinge there. Well cosin! God's will be done; and I wishe he had made me the porcest (worm) that crepeth on the grounde, so this myschance had not happened to me. But, good cosin, according to my trust, haue care above all things that there be playne, sincere, and direct dealing for the full tryall of this matter. Concerninge Smythe and the rest, I meane no more to deale w<sup>th</sup> them, but let them proseade, in the name of God, accordinglie, and I am ryght glad they be all strangers to me. Thus fare you well, in much hast, from Windsor,

Y<sup>re</sup> loving frend and kinsman,

R. D.

## LORD ROBERT DUDLEY TO THOMAS BLOUNT.

COSIN BLOUNT,

Vntill I heare from you againe howe the matter fallethe out, in verie truthe I cannot be in quiet, & yet you do well satisfye me w<sup>th</sup> the discrete iurie you saie are chosen already; vnto whome I praie you saie from me that I require them, as ever I shall think good of them, that they will, accordinge to there duties, earnestlie, carefullie, and trewlie, deale in this matter, to fynde it as they shall se it fall out. And if it fall out a chaunce or mysfortune, then so to fynde; & if it appeare villanye, (as God forbid so myschievous or wicked bodie shuld lyve!) then to fynde it so, & God willing, I shall never feare the daie of prosecution accordinglie, what person soever it maie appeare any waie to touche; as well as for the iust punnyshment of the act, as for myne owne trewe iustification; for as I wold be sorie in my hearte any such evill shuld be comytted, so full it will appeare to the worlde my innocensie, by my dealing in the matter, if it shall so fall out. And therefore, cosin Blount, I seke cheifly truthe in that case, which I would you still to haue mynde vnto, w<sup>th</sup>out any favor to be shewed either wone waie or other. When you haue done my message to them, I require you not to staie to search thorolie yo<sup>r</sup> selfe, alwaies that I may be satisfied. And that w<sup>th</sup> such convenient spede as you maie. Thus fare you well, in hast, at Kewe, this 27th of September.

Yo<sup>r</sup> l<sup>s</sup> frend

R. D.

From these letters<sup>1</sup> (which I have thought it improper to abridge) being contemporaneous authority, not statements like to those of Ashmole, put forth a century or more posterior to the occurrence of the transactions to which they relate, we find many essential points given upon his authority, and received by nearly all subsequent writers, distinctly contradicted. The letters disprove the assertion that Forster had *sent away all the servants*. It is shewn to have been lady Dudley's own act; and one which, from Mrs. Odingselle's<sup>2</sup> statement to Bowes, as reported to Thomas Blount, was pro-

<sup>1</sup> Their order of sequence is probably not accurate; some being undated, it is rendered uncertain. The subject of their contents is, however, in no way affected by the omission.

<sup>2</sup> The family of Odingsels was one of consequence in the county of Warwick. (See Dugdale's *Warwickshire*, p. 343.) Their armorial bearings are in the east window of the chancel of the church of Long Ichington. Edward Odingsell was gentleman usher to Henry VII. Mrs. Odingsell was a daughter of William Hyde, a relative of Oliver Hyde, representative in parliament for the borough of Abingdon.



tested against as being upon an improper day.<sup>1</sup> In her resistance to the opinion of Mrs. Odingselle, lady Dudley evinces, to say the least, an obstinacy upon the matter; and firmly continuing in her resolve, she selects a Mrs. Owen<sup>2</sup> to dine with her. The letters also disprove the asserted *eagerness to put away the body*, for an inquest was immediately summoned; they therefore decisively contradict the statement that *her father ordered the corpse to be exhumed, and demanded that the coroner should sit upon it*. This is, in short, to assert an utter impossibility, inasmuch as sir John Robsart, her father, died seven years prior to the event. He could not, therefore, have executed these things, nor “stopped the earl’s mouth,” so maliciously conjectured, to get rid of an otherwise insurmountable difficulty. Not only do these letters disprove or contradict these points, but they also depict Forster as a man of probity and good character, which is in accordance with his epitaph at Cumnor.<sup>3</sup> They show also that lady Dudley was surrounded by her own attendants and friends, to whom she was attached, and those by whom she was “dearlie loved.” Lord Dudley, upon being made acquainted with the death of his wife, manifests the greatest anxiety in regard to the coroner’s inquiry, and to its being carried out in its fullest extent to ascertain whether her death was the consequence of accident or design; and he writes also as one fully alive to the ill feeling existing towards himself (not unusually nor unnaturally entertained towards favourites), and anticipates the suspicions likely to be engendered by the event. He therefore calls in the aid, and entrusts to the guidance and supervision of a discreet kinsman,<sup>4</sup> of what degree beyond that of his being styled “cousin,” I know not, to attend to all things, to take care of his interests, and to develop the truth to the uttermost; and he likewise,—in my opinion, the most satisfactory part of all in his conduct,—sends to her own brother Arthur, and also for her half brother Appleyard, and

<sup>1</sup> Abingdon fair, in 1560, fell upon a Sunday; and the objection to allowing the servants to go to it on that day would be such as would occur to a Protestant, regarding such entertainments as a desecration of the Sabbath.

<sup>2</sup> Ashmole mentions an Owen as possessor of Godstow at the dissolution. He was a physician, and with Dr. Bridges purchased the site of Cunnor Place. (See Letters Patent, Oct. 8, 1546.)

<sup>3</sup> See p. 23 *ante*.

<sup>4</sup> A Thomas Blount was one of the gentlemen of the horse to queen Elizabeth. He died in 1569, and was not unlikely the person here alluded to.

would have sent for more of her connexions and friends to assist in the inquiry if they had existed. The Appleyard in 1560 (the year in which her death occurred) must have been John Appleyard, who was sheriff of the county of Norfolk in 1558, and therefore to be presumed a fit as well as most highly interested person to inquire into the circumstances. Sir Richard Blount and Mr. Norris, names of no little celebrity in Berkshire, persons of high character, are solicited to attend to the business, the result of the whole being, in my judgment, favourable to the death of lady Dudley having been caused accidentally. Thomas Blount's description of lady Dudley's conduct, and his allusion to the tales he had heard of her, which made him to think her of *strange mind*, would lead me to infer that she was labouring under some mental infirmity, and that care and seclusion in the house of Forster might have been rendered necessary, seeing the inconvenience her presence or conduct might have occasioned to sir Robert Dudley when in attendance upon the queen at Windsor<sup>1</sup> and at Kew, whence his letters are directed.

If further evidence be necessary to disprove the charges made against Dudley, it is, perhaps, to be obtained from queen Elizabeth herself. In Peck's *Desiderata Curiosa*, No. LVI, p. 158, is printed—

“A proclamation<sup>2</sup> addressed to the lords and others of the council, to Ferdinando Stanley, lord Strange; William Chaderton, lord bishop of Chester; and to all the other justices of Lancashire and Cheshire; signifying that several libels having been formerly published against the queen; and now lately a most vile book [*Leicester's Commonwealth*] against Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester; the queen cannot forbear rebuking some for their great slackness in not suppressing the former libels, and to require them to be now more diligent in taking care of this last; both the queen and they knowing the E. of Leicester to be perfectly clear of those aspersiones it contains.

Jan. 25, 1585. 27 Eliz. “1. After our very heartie comendations.

MS. Chaderton, fol. 29b.

“2. Upon intelligence geven to her majestie last past, of certeine seditious & traiterous books & libells covertly spred & scattered abroad in sondrie parts of her realmes & dominions, yt pleased her

<sup>1</sup> He had a large grant of Windsor park, as ample as he could desire, or the queen could give. Pat., Q. Eliz., 3rd, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> This proclamation is not included in the extraordinary volume of proclamations in the reign of Elizabeth, in the Hon. T. Grenville's collection.

hignes to publish a proclamation throughout the realme for the suppressing of the same, & [for the] due punyishment of the authors, spreaders-abroad, & deteyners of them, in such sorte & forme as, in the said proclamation, is more at large conteyned :

“3. Sythence which tyme notwithstandinge, her highnes hath certainly knowne that the very same, & divers other such like most sclanderous, shamefull, & divellish books and libells have bene contynuallye spread abroad & kepte by disobedient persons, to the manifest contempt of her majesties regall auctoritie : & namely, amonge the rest, one most infamous, containinge notoriouslie sclanderous & hatefull mattre againste her righte trustie & rigt welbeloved cozen the earl of Leicester, one of her principall noblemen & chief councillors of estate ; of which most malicious and wicked imputations, her majestie, in her owne clear knowledge, doth declare & testifie his innocencie to all the world ; &, to that effecte, hath written her gracious letters, signed with her owne hand, to the lord maior, sheriffs, & aldermen of London, where it is likely these books would chiefly be cast abroad.

“4. We therefore [to follow the course taken by her majestie, & knowinge manifestlye the wickednes & falsehood of these sclanderous devises against the said erle], have thought good to notifie her further pleasure, and our owne conseyences, to you in this case.

“5. First, that [as in truthe her majestie hath noted great slacknes & remissnes in the formere execution of her commandment], forasmuch as the said sedicious libells have beene suffered since that tyme to be spread abroad, devided and kepte by contemptuous persons, without severe & due punishment inflicted for the same ; so now, upon this second charge and admonition geven unto you, she verelie loketh for the most stricte & precise observation thereof, in the sharpest manner that may be devised ;

“6. Testifyinge in her conscience before God, unto you, that her highness not onelie knoweth in assured certaintie the books and libells against the said erle to be most malicious, false, & sclanderous, and such as none but a . . . . devill himself could dreame to be trewe ; but alsoe thinkethe to be of the fullnes of malice, subtilie contrived to the note & discreditt of her princelie government of this realme ; as though her majestie shold have failed in good judgment & discretion in the choise of so princypall a councillor about her, or be without tast or care of all justice & conscience in suffrynge suche heynous & monsterous crymes, as by the said books and libells be infamouslye imputed, to passe unpunished ; or finallye, at the leaste, to want either good will, habilitie, or courage, if she knewe these enormities were true, to call anie subjecte of hers whatsoever to render sharpe accompte of them, according to the force and effecte of her lawes :

“7. All which defects, God be thanked, we & all good subjects, to our unspeakable comforts, do knowe & have founde to be farre off from the nature & vertue of her most excellent majestie.

“8. As, of the other side, both her highnes, of her certeine knowledge, & we [to] do his lordship but right, of our synceare consciences must needs affirme these strange & abhominable crymes to be raised of a wicked & venomous malice against the said erle; of whose good service, sinceritie of religion, & all other faithfull dealinges towards her majestie & the realme, we have had longe and true experience.

“9. Which things considered, & withall knowinge yt to be an usuall trad of traiterous mynds, when they wold render the princes government odious, to detract & bringe out of creditt the princypall persons about them, her highnes, taking the abuse to be offered to her owne selfe, hath commanded us to notifie the same unto you; to thend that, knowinge her good pleasure, you maie proceed therein as in a matter highlie touchinge her owne estate & honor.

“10. And therefore we wish & requier you to have regard thereof accordingle, that the former necligence & remisseness shewed in the execution of her majesties commandement maie be amended by the diligence & severitie that shalbe hereafter used. Which amendment & carefulnes in this cause chieflie her majestie assuredlie lookethe for, & will call for accompte of, at all your hands.

“11. And so wee bid you hartelie farewell. From the courte at Greenwich this xx. of June, 1585.

“Your very lovinge frends,

“T. Bromley, <i>Cunc.</i>	J. Hunsdon
W. Burghley	F. Knollys
Geo. Shrewsbury	H. Sydney
H. Derby	Chr. Hatton
F. Bedford	Fr. Walsingham
C. Haward	Wal. Myldmay.”

“To our verie good lords, the lord Strange, and the bishoppe of Chester; and to our lovinge frends the rest of the justices of the peace in the counties of Lancaster & Chester.

That suspicions injurious to Dudley’s honour and character were rife in the neighbourhood at the time of his wife’s death is most certain; he himself was evidently alive to them from the manner in which, in his letters to Blount, he writes of the “untoward accident;” “what the malicious world will bruyte;” “the malicious talke that I knowe the wicked world will use,” etc. So also in a letter by Thomas Lever, an eminent puritan preacher, a prebendary of Durham, and master of Sherborne hospital, who wrote from Coventry to sir William Cecil, and also to sir Francis Knollys, of the



date of Sept. 17, 1560, nine days only after the occurrence, in which he says,—“here in these partes seemeth unto me to be a grevous and dangerous suspition and muttering of the death of her that was the wife of my lord Robert Dudlie. My desire and trust is, that by your discreet device and diligence, through the queen’s authority, earnest searching and trying out of the truth, with due punishment, if any be found guilty in this matter may be openly knowne.”<sup>1</sup> And in the Hardwicke *State Papers*:<sup>2</sup>—on 28th Oct., 1560, sir Nicholas Throckmorton, her majesty’s ambassador to the queen of Scots, to dissuade her from a marriage with lord Darnley, wrote from Paris,—“The bruits be so brim and so maliciously reported here touching the marriage of the lord Robert and the *death of his wife*, as I know not where to turn me, nor what countenance to bear. Sir! I thank God, I had rather perish and quail with honesty, than live and beguile a little time with shame.”

The reports prejudicial to the character of Dudley in connexion with the decease of his wife must have been very generally inculcated, and as generally believed. A reference to it was made in a dramatic publication of spurious authorship, which at one time excited much curiosity, being put forth as “The Yorkshire Tragedy. Not so new as lamentable and true. Written by W. Shakspeare. Printed for T. P., 1619.” The subject of this melancholy tale was a Yorkshire gentleman named Calverley, who, in a paroxysm of passion, apparently excited by jealousy, murdered two of his children, attempted the life of a third, and also that of the mother and nurse. The passage having reference to the death of lady Dudley runs thus:—

“Down stairs,  
Tumble, tumble, headlong. So—  
The surest way to charm a woman’s tongue  
Is, break her neck. A politician did it.”

In the absence of precise and positive information, and the knowledge of essential particulars, which it is now impossible to obtain, I am aware that it will be a matter of no inconsiderable difficulty to disabuse the public mind of a sense of Dudley’s liability to be implicated in this event;

<sup>1</sup> Haynes, in Burleigh State Papers at Hatfield, p. 362, edited by Murdin.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. i, p. 122.

and that by the adoption of the case as the subject of a romancé, in which employment even of the names of several of the parties or actors therein is made, it will, with the aid of the powerful pen of the novelist, the most celebrated and most fascinating writer of his age, not fail to make an impression which the sober truths of history will be unable to efface. It is, however, seriously to be regretted that historical truth should be subjected to such a violation, as details communicated in powerful language, and invested with highly wrought imagery, must necessarily create an undue bias in the mind of the reader, and, as in this case, reflect an injury and leave a lasting stain, perhaps undeserved, on the part of those to whose memory it attaches.

From a careful perusal of the preceding pages, I think it will be apparent to any dispassionate reader that the statements made in reference to this melancholy event are, as far as they reflect upon Dudley, loose and improbable; unsupported by any authority, and where particulars could be ascertained, they have been shown to be absolutely false or thoroughly inconsistent. The allegations of crime are without support, and in a case in which so many points are capable of refutation, no dependance can be placed upon the narrative itself in any particulars.

Much of the success attending the promulgation of such calumnies is doubtless to be attributed to the incessant and systematic perseverance and persecution by the Jesuit Parsons, or whoever may have been the author of the *Leicester's Common Wealth*. The Jesuits were busy and indefatigable in maligning all who were opposed to their opinions upon religious matters. That at Paris, whence sir Nicholas Throckmorton writes, the impression created should have been unfavourable to Dudley, is not at all surprising. Elizabeth herself was, as well as Dudley, the object of hatred in regard to her religious opinions, and the cause and interests of Mary were there strongly advocated. The French were greatly incensed against the queen of England, and were active partisans of the queen of Scots; they would therefore gladly seize upon any opportunity to avenge themselves by defamation of her favourites. Sir N. Throckmorton, who communicates to the government the strong feeling prevailing in France upon the death of Dudley's wife, and the rumours of his probable marriage with the queen, it must

be recollected was himself a strong Roman catholic, firmly adherent to his creed and inimical to Protestants. At home Cecil, lord Burleigh, was no friend to Dudley; and it is not a little singular that, as appears by a minute made by the secretary of the privy council, April 1566, when a meeting was held to consider the propriety of giving sanction to the marriage between the queen and the then earl of Leicester, among other items urged in objection to such an engagement there should occur the following:—"He is infamed by the deth of his wyff."

Anthony Wood, who visited Cumnor a century after the death of lady Dudley, notices the reports then rife against Dudley. He adopts all the twaddle of the village, and does not think it beneath his dignity as an historian and antiquary to record it:—

"In this house (Cumnor Place) is a chamber called Dudley's chamber, the reason of which is, y<sup>t</sup> w<sup>a</sup> Dudley, E. of Leicest. was 1<sup>d</sup> hereof, his wife would often retire to this place to live, Forster abovesaid being then tenant. At this time y<sup>e</sup> E. of Leicest. then lived att y<sup>e</sup> court, being one of the chiefe under Q. Eliz.; & being a very handsome, proper man, it was rumor'd y<sup>t</sup> he was to marry, and thought y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> Q. (if he was a batchelour or widower) might expect to make him her husband: to effect which he layed a plott with y<sup>e</sup> abouesaid Forster his tenant, to make away his wife; & upo y<sup>e</sup> condition he would doe it, he would give y<sup>t</sup> l<sup>d</sup>ship soe long as he live. Y<sup>e</sup> plot being laid, & y<sup>e</sup> night appointed, they make advantage to convey her to another chamber, where her bed's head should stand just against a doore which she did not know off. In y<sup>e</sup> middle of y<sup>e</sup> night cae a man with a spitt in his hand, open the privy doore, run y<sup>e</sup> spitt into her head, & tumbled her downe staires, to make y<sup>e</sup> people believe she had killed herself. They bury her immediately; but her father caused her to be taken up again, enquires into y<sup>e</sup> business, and prosecutes it."

Every means had been taken to give currency and stability to these unfounded calumnies; and as nothing is so powerful in effecting a purpose and establishing a charge with the vulgar, as the introduction of supernatural aid, so we accordingly have a ghost story connected with this event. The narrative is absolutely current at this day; and I have received a drawing of a pond in which the disturbed spirit of the unfortunate lady is said to have at length obtained quiet and repose. The peace of the village, it is reported, was destroyed by the wanderings of lady Dudley's ghost,

and the villagers were afraid to be about after daylight. The chamber in which it was so positively asserted the murder had taken place, received the denomination of the Dudley Chamber; and the entire building, as it proceeded to decay, obtained the distinguished appellation of Dudley castle. The unfortunate lady appeared to all whose imaginations were ready to receive the vision in the shape of a most beautiful woman clothed in superb attire, and was to be seen, as a matter of course, at the foot of the stone staircase at the north-west angle of the building, where her body was discovered lifeless. Such apprehensions speedily became contagious; the panic spread, and the dread connected with the unearthly visitation induced the inhabitants of the village to apply to some learned doctors of the university of Oxford to exorcise and expel the intruder. The tradition still remains, that it required the powers of no less than nine parsons to effect this purpose; and that they, in the end, succeeded in laying the disturbed spirit in a pond in the adjoining close. To give credence to the success of their operations, and to connect it with whatever is marvellous, to this day it is asserted that the water of this pond never afterwards became frozen: physical causes ceased to operate, and natural effects were suspended, as regarded the abode of the spirit of lady Dudley. All kinds of tales, the product of superstitious terror, had doubtlessly been circulated by the villagers of Cumnor; but, indeed, there scarcely exists an ancient mansion in which something of the kind, some white lady or other appearance, is not reported to have been seen, and as firmly believed to have some reality for its foundation. It is, therefore, perfectly in accordance with received custom and practice, that Cumnor Place should be possessed by the spirit of lady Dudley; and that, when falling into decay, after the death of its owner, the mansion should obtain the name of Dudley castle.

Great cruelty has been exercised towards Anthony Forster. The narratives regarding him abound with falsehood, and the reports of his condition subsequent to the death of lady Dudley are most calumnious. His excess of misery, his melancholy, nay, his madness, do not appear by any particulars that can be traced in connexion with his history. The period during which he is stated to have so miserably languished seems to have been one of long duration, for we



find that he survived from 1560, the date of lady Dudley's decease, to the year 1572, being twelve years. Neither were his usual pursuits abandoned, nor his habits changed. His love of music appears to have been sustained to the last, as in his will he makes a bequest of his music books to an old acquaintance. His favourite horses are also left to other friends, and in his last testament their qualities are distinguished. The building of his mansion proceeds, he makes great alterations and additions. His initials appear on several portions, showing that he carried out his purposes to the last, and to crown all, upon the death of his friend Oliver Hyde, two years only preceding his own decease, he enters into public life, becomes the representative of the borough of Abingdon, and dies holding that position. Surely these circumstances must relieve Forster from the wicked reports which have been circulated against him, and excite the regret of all lovers of truth and justice, that his name should have been thus defamed, and his memory blasted by the foulest of accusations and most infamous of charges made current by the pen of any eminent writer, whether it be of fiction or of history.











