

APPENDIX I

RUN-AWAY SHAKSPERE

OF COURSE RUN-AWAY SHAKSPERE was too attractive a figure not to have a long history. As we have seen, Aubrey heard from the Stratford neighbors at some time before 1681 that Shakspeare had assisted his father in the butchering business, but being inclined rather to poetry and acting he had come to London, as Aubrey guessed about the age of eighteen, to begin acting. In 1693, Dowdall was told by the parish clerk, William Castle, that Shakspeare had been apprenticed to a butcher, but ran away to London to begin acting. For the first time, Shakspeare has now actually run away. This is pure fiction, of course, since, as we have seen, it is an inferred addition to Aubrey's form of the story, and since it implies also that Shakspeare was at the time still an apprentice, whereas we can trace Shakspeare in Stratford till he was married, the father of three children, and on the verge of twenty-one. Besides, no critic is willing to permit Shakspeare to come to London before 1587 at the very earliest, when he was twenty-three and should have completed any apprenticeship he may have served to any butcher or anyone else in Stratford. Much less can he be permitted to go to London at eighteen in 1582. So this first Stratford version of the run-away story is clearly an entire fiction.

This legend was to be metamorphosed into a grand story by the time of Rowe's life of Shakspeare in 1709. It was Falstaff who caused the transformation, and by a stroke of good fortune we happen now to know how Falstaff managed to do it. William Oldys c. 1743-61 tells us that

Old Mr Bowman the player reported from Sir William Bishop, that some part of Sir John Falstaff's character was drawn from a townsman of Stratford, who either faithlessly broke a contract, or spitefully refused to part with some land for a valuable consideration, adjoining to Shakespeare's, in or near that town.¹

Sir William Bishop (1626-1700) was of Bridgetown, a hamlet partly in Stratford.²

Another anecdote attributed to Bishop is shown by Sir Edmund Chambers to be without foundation in fact,³ and this one is likely to be no more authentic. But by 1700 it was at least rumored in Stratford that Sir John Falstaff was taken from some one in or near Stratford. This story would inevitably raise the question as to who in or near Stratford had been Sir John Falstaff.

When Thomas Betterton or another gave Rowe the information for the latter's life of Shakspeare which was published in 1709, he had found the story which had resulted from the search for the prototype of Falstaff. It is important here to notice that from 1688 Bowman was a colleague of Betterton's and married his adopted daughter some time after 1692.⁴ So that in

¹ Chambers, *Shakespeare*, Vol. II, p. 279.

² Chambers, *Shakespeare*, Vol. II, p. 272.

³ Chambers, *Shakespeare*, Vol. II, p. 272.

⁴ Chambers, *Shakespeare*, Vol. II, p. 264; Malone, *Variorum* (1821), Vol. II, p. 120.