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Was the annotator of Hall's Chronicle the author of *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*?

In 1940, Alan Keen discovered a copy of Hall's Chronicle in which many passages had been annotated in a handwriting dating from the latter half of the 16th century. Keen's attention was attracted by the fact that the underlined and annotated passages deal principally with the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V, and thus pertain to many of the events portrayed in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* (Parts I and II) and *Henry V*.

However, the annotations correspond as closely to events portrayed in the anonymous Elizabethan play *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* as they do to Shakespeare's histories. Pitcher noticed this fact several decades ago, and analyzed the relationships which exist between the anonymous old play and the annotated passages in Hall's Chronicle. The result was the identification of no less than twenty-four incidents portrayed in *The Famous Victories* which reflect specific comments made by the anonymous annotator (233-49). For the convenience of the reader, Pitcher's examples are reprinted below:

1. **Annotator:** *King Henry, being but Prince, strake the Chief Justice on the face for imprisoning of a wanton companion of his.*

Famous Victories, Scene 4. The Prince strikes the Chief Justice and is committed to the Fleet.

2. **Annotator:** *King Henry seemeth to confess that he had the crown wrongfully and died Anno Domini 1413.*

Famous Victories, Scene 8. King Henry: *God knows,*

my son, how hardly I came by it [the crown] and how hardly I have maintained it.

3. **Annotator:** *Sage councillors chosen.*

Famous Victories, Scene 9. Henry V chooses the Chief Justice to be Protector of the realm.

4. **Annotator:** *All flatterers and old companions banished X mile from the court.*

Famous Victories, Scene 9. King Henry: *Ah, Tom, your former life grieves me, and makes me to abandon and abolish your company forever. And therefore, not upon pain of death to approach my presence by ten miles space.*

5. **Annotator:** *Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham, condemned for heresy.*

Famous Victories: Sir John Oldcastle is a minor character in the play.

6. **Annotator:** *Queen Isabel, daughter to King Philip, heir to three Kings dying without issue, by whom King Henry claimed.*

Famous Victories, Scene 9. Archbishop: *Your right to the French crown of France came by your great grandmother Isabel, wife to King Edward the Third, and sister to Charles, the French king.*

7. **Annotator:** *He that will France win with Scotland he must begin.*

Famous Victories, Scene 9. Archbishop: *I think it therefore best to conquer Scotland, and then I think that you may go more easily into France.*

8. **Annotator:** *He that will Scotland win, with France*

must begin.

Famous Victories, Scene 9: Oxford: *He that will Scotland win must first with France begin, according to the old saying.*

9. **Annotator:** *The commission to require the crown of France, etc.*

Famous Victories, Scene 9. Jockey: *Did you not see with what grace he sent his embassage into France to tell the French King that Harry of England hath sent for the crown, and Harry of England will have it?*

10. **Annotator:** *A tun of tennis balls sent as is reported.*

Famous Victories, Scene 9. King: *What, a gilded tun! I pray you, my Lord of York, look what is in it. York: If it please your Grace, here is a carpet, and a tun of tennis balls.*

11. **Annotator:** *An offer of the Lady Katherine and other base countries for peace.*

Famous Victories, Scene 9. Archbishop: *My lord and master, the most Christian king, Charles the Seventh, the great and mighty King of France, as a most noble and Christian King not minding to shed innocent blood, is rather content to yield somewhat to your [King Henry's] unreasonable demands -- that, if fifty thousand crowns a year, with his daughter, the said Lady Katherine, in marriage, and some crowns which he may well spare without hurting of his kingdom, he is content to yield so far to your unreasonable desire.*

12. **Annotator:** *A stout bishop of France so in defiance of a prince to speak.*

Famous Victories, Scene 9. The Archbishop delivers the insulting message which accompanies the Dauphin's gift of tennis balls.

13. **Annotator:** *The answer of the King of England.*

Famous Victories, Scene 9. King Henry: *Priest of Bourges, know that the hand and seal of a king, and his word, is all one. And, instead of my hand and seal I will bring him [the French King] my hand and sword. And tell thy lord and master that I, Harry of England, said it; and I, Harry of England, will perform it!*

14. **Annotator:** *The King's mother-in-law governor of the said realm in his absence.*

Famous Victories, Scene 9. King Henry: *I have chosen you [the Chief Justice] to be my Protector*

over my realm. [The playwright substitutes the Chief Justice for King Henry's mother-in-law.]

15. **Annotator:** *Mountjoy, King-at-Arms, sent in defiance to King Henry.*

Famous Victories, Scene 12. King Henry: *How now, what is that? York: I think it be some herald of arms. Herald: King of England, my Lord High Constable and others of the noblemen of France send me to defy thee as open enemy to God, our country, and us.*

16. **Annotator:** *Great odds between the English army and the French.*

Famous Victories, Scene 14. King: *They threescore thousand horsemen, and we but two thousand! They forty thousand footmen, and we twelve thousand! They are a hundred thousand, and we fourteen thousand! Ten to one! My lords and loving countrymen, though we be few, and they many, fear not.*

17. **Annotator:** *The French man noteth the nature of the English man./ An oration of their Captain against the English army much courageous, first affirming the English army weak.*

Famous Victories, Scene 13. Captain: *And, on the other side, a site of poor English scabs! Why, take an Englishman out of his warm bed and his stale drink but one month, and, alas! what will become of him!*

18. **Annotator:** *A notable order of King Henry's battle./ The inventing of stakes which now I think be morris pikes.*

Famous Victories, Scene 14. King Henry: *Now, my lords, I will that my uncle, the Duke of York, etc. [King lists the order of battle.] Then I will that every archer provide him a stake of a tree, and sharpen it at both ends, and, at the first encounter of the horsemen, to pitch their stakes down into the ground before them, that they may gore themselves upon them.*

19. **Annotator:** *At the end of King Henry's oration, he concludeth that England prayeth for their success.*

Famous Victories, Scene 14. King: *Then is it good time, no doubt, for all England prayeth for us.*

20. **Annotator:** *A triumph of the Frenchmen before victory.*

Famous Victories, Scene 14. King Henry: *Well, my lords, our battles are ordained, and the French making of bonfires, and at their banquets.*

21. **Annotator:** *A cowardly act of 600 horsemen of France.*

Famous Victories, Scene 16. Soldier: *Are you Englishmen? Then change your language, for the King's tents are set afire, and all they that speak English will be killed.*

22. **Annotator:** *The castle of Agincourt gave name to the battle.*

Famous Victories, Scene 15. King Henry: *But Herald, what castle is this so near adjoining to our camp?* Herald: *If it please your Majesty, 'tis called the Castle of Agincourt.* King Henry: *Well then, my lords of England, for the more honour of our Englishmen, I will that this be forever called the Battle of Agincourt.*

23. **Annotator:** *A marvelous number of dukes, earls, lords and knights of the French army slain./ Some write that only 25 Englishmen were slain, but some other say that 5 or 600 were slain.*

Famous Victories, Scene 15. Oxford: *If it please your Majesty, there are of the French army slain above ten thousand twenty-six hundred, whereof are princes and nobles bearing banners; besides, all the nobility of France are taken prisoners. Of your Majesty's army are slain none but the good Duke of York, and not above five or six and twenty common soldiers.*

24. **Annotator:** *A peace with condition that our King should marry the Lady Katherine, daughter of the French King, and be heir of France after him./ King Henry and Lady Katherine married the 3rd of June.*

Famous Victories, Scenes 18 and 20. King Henry woos and is betrothed to Princess Katherine, and forces the French King to agree that Henry will be his heir.

It is clear from the examples given in the foregoing passages that the incidents and details which struck the annotator -- those on which he chose to make notes -- appear in virtually identical form in *The Famous Victories*. The parallels between the annotator's comments and the incidents in the play thus provide convincing support for the hypothesis that the annotator was gathering material for a play, and that *The Famous Victories* was the end product of his labours.

This hypothesis is supported by Keen's assessment of the anonymous annotator's *modus operandi*. According to Keen, the annotations are systematic and

purposeful in nature; in his view, the annotator seems to have had "an approximate idea of what he wanted to get from the book". Keen refers to the annotations as "signposts left by a thoughtful and methodical reader, who was planning to use a selection of the material for some purpose of his own" (7, 9, 11). The nature of the annotations is thus strongly indicative of the possibility that the annotator was gathering material for *The Famous Victories*.

In issue #32 of the *Edward De Vere Newsletter*, the suggestion was put forward that the annotator of Hall's Chronicle was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. It follows from the arguments advanced in the foregoing paragraphs that Oxford was also the author of *The Famous Victories*, and this conclusion accords with what we know of his youthful fascination with history. A striking indication of Oxford's interest in history even as a youth is given in the dedication of Arthur Golding's translation of Justin's *Trogus Pompeius*, published in 1564. Golding, who was Oxford's maternal uncle, dedicated this work to his fourteen-year old nephew Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, in the following words:

I have had experience thereof myself, how earnest a desire your honor hath naturally grafted in you to read, peruse, and communicate with others as well the histories of ancient times, and things done long ago, as also of the present state of things in our days, and that not without a certain pregnancy of wit and ripeness of understanding (Ward 23-4).

In evaluating the possibility that Oxford, as a very young man, wrote *The Famous Victories*, it is instructive to dwell upon the wording of Arthur Golding's dedication. Golding mentions not only Oxford's natural inclination to "read and peruse" history, but also his desire to communicate that knowledge to others. *The Famous Victories* -- an attempt to "communicate with others . . . the histories of ancient times and things done long ago" -- fits Golding's description perfectly. It would be difficult indeed to find another Elizabethan playwright whose interest in reading and writing about history has been spelled out in such unequivocal terms to whom we could ascribe the authorship of *The Famous Victories*.

Works Cited

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