

## GILBERT TALBOT, SEVENTH EARL OF SHREWSBURY (1553-1616): THE 'GREAT AND GLORIOUS EARL'?

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On the 9th of February 1568 a famous double wedding took place in the parish church of St. Peter and St. Paul, now the Cathedral, in Sheffield.<sup>1</sup> Henry Cavendish, the eldest son of 'Bess of Hardwick', was married to Grace Talbot, the eldest daughter of George, the sixth Earl of Shrewsbury, and his first wife, Gertrude Manners, who had died just over a year before, and Gilbert Talbot, the Earl's second son, to Mary Cavendish, the youngest daughter of Bess. It has long been accepted that these marriages were a condition of Bess's acceptance of the Earl of Shrewsbury as her fourth husband, but, as Miss Carleton Williams remarked in her biography of Bess, 'the most diligent search has failed to reveal when and where the ceremony took place'<sup>2</sup> between the Earl and, as J. D. Leader called her, 'one who ranks with the Queen of Scots as the torment of his existence'.<sup>3</sup> Nathaniel Johnston, the Pontefract physician-antiquary who rescued so many Talbot Papers from destruction in the later 17th century, states that it did not occur until the following Michaelmas, but offers no clue as to its location.<sup>4</sup>

Gilbert, at 14,<sup>5</sup> and Mary, at 11, were too young for their marriage to be more than nominal for a few years, but the intermarrying between the two families meant that the young Talbots and Cavendishes shared experiences, interests, and, at least until the birth of Arabella Stuart in 1575, ambitions. Gilbert had a particular affinity with Bess's third son Charles, the most flamboyant of the Cavendish brothers, who was much of his age<sup>6</sup> and with whom he formed, in the words of Charles' daughter-in-law, 'such an entire friendship which lasted to their death'.<sup>7</sup> It was, however, with Henry Cavendish that Gilbert was sent on his foreign travels in April 1570.<sup>8</sup> They visited Hamburg and other places in northern Germany that summer before arriving at Padua on the 9th of October. As Gilbert reported to the Earl and Countess, Padua was 'such a convenient place for our study, or any other good exercise'. In addition, 'we fulfil your Lordship's commandment in writing the discourse of our travels'.<sup>9</sup> By the November of 1571, they were in France and Sir Edward Osborne, the London alderman and merchant who had been arranging the finances of the tour, was warning the Earl that 'they cannot live so good cheap in France, as they live in Italy'.<sup>10</sup>

In 1573 Gilbert joined his elder brother, Francis, Lord Talbot, at Court and quickly proved himself both a shrewd observer of political life and a born letter-writer. He painted a series of succinct word-portraits of the chief characters in an early letter to his father from the Court, dated 11th May 1573. 'My Lord Treasurer, in the old manner, dealeth in matters of state only, and beareth himself very uprightly. My Lord Leicester is very much with her Majesty, and she sheweth the same great good affection to him as she was wonting . . . . My Lord of Sussex goeth with the tide . . . . My Lord Oxford is lately grown into great credit . . . . If it were not for his fickle head, he would sure pass any other very shortly . . . .' It was in this same letter that Gilbert reported telling Mr. Secretary Wilson, in response to questions about the Earl's removing Mary, Queen of Scots, to Sheffield Manor while her rooms at the Castle were being cleaned, that she was so well guarded 'both under her windows, over her chamber, and of every side of her; so that, unless she could transform herself to a flea or a mouse, it was impossible that she should escape'.<sup>11</sup> A fortnight later, he told his father of his exhortations to his brother to be discreet and asked his father's approval of a maid he was thinking of engaging to attend his wife.<sup>12</sup> It is not surprising to find the Earl's good friend Leicester writing to him on 1st June of 'her Majesty's good liking and most gracious using of both your sons' and telling him that 'they win the good opinion of all sorts'.<sup>13</sup> Nor is it surprising to learn, from a letter from the Earl to Leicester a year later, that it was

found necessary to keep Gilbert away from Court for a while 'because (as it hath been informed me) his being there heretofore hath been judged by some, only to be my spy'.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, both Gilbert's own inclinations and the evident needs of the family for representation at Court at a time when the head of the family was virtually imprisoned with Mary, Queen of Scots, whose custody the Earl had from January 1569 to September 1584, meant that from this time on he was often to be found there, interpreting the vicissitudes of diplomatic and political activity, furthering suits in law and family business, and learning the latest fashions in dress and manners.

There is no doubt that Gilbert rendered his father a real service deputed for him at Court or elsewhere, as for example when the Earl of Leicester visited Buxton in the summer of 1577 and Gilbert entertained him in the Earl's house there.<sup>15</sup> Leicester's visit was the occasion of a letter from the Queen to the Earl and Countess in which she thanked them for their hospitality to Leicester 'not as done unto him but to our own self' and acknowledged her debt for their services in relation to Mary, Queen of Scots, 'as great as a sovereign can owe to a subject'. The letter was signed and superscribed in the royal hand and the Earl marked it 'to be kept as the derest jewel'.<sup>16</sup> Often Gilbert displayed definite discretion, as when in 1579 he arranged for Thomas Baldwin, a trusted servant of the family, to deliver ten fother of lead to Lord Burghley 'very secretly'<sup>17</sup> and, on another occasion in the same year, suggested 'that it would please your Lordship to remember my Lord Chancellor with some gift; it would be very well bestowed'.<sup>18</sup>

From an early stage, however, relationships between father and son were strained. A central issue was money. The Earl believed Gilbert and Mary to be impossibly extravagant; Gilbert found the Earl irritable and mean. As Gilbert wrote to his mother-in-law in 1575: 'My Lord is continually pestered with his wonted business and is very often in exceeding choler of slight occasion'.<sup>19</sup> Bess was helping the young couple to furnish a London house, presumably Shrewsbury House at Charing Cross, but the Earl proved very parsimonious towards them, as Gilbert complained in a letter to Bess from Sheffield on Friday, 13th October 1575: 'Presently after your Ladyship's departure from hence, my Lord appointed him of the wardrobe to deliver us the tester and curtains of the old green and red bed of velvet and satin that your Ladyship did see; and the cloth bed tester and curtains that we now lie in, and two very old counterpoints of tapestry; and forbade him to deliver that bed of cloth of gold and tawney velvet that your Ladyship saw. That which your Ladyship hath given us is more worth than all that is at Goodrich or here of my Lord's bestowing'—the Earl had provided Goodrich Castle, Herefordshire, as a residence for the young couple. Worse still, Gilbert went on, the Earl refused to buy housewives' cloth at 12d. a yard for making sheets. 'In all my life I never longed for anything so much as to be from hence; truly, Madam, I rather wish myself a ploughman than here to continue'.<sup>20</sup> Yet the Earl had been overjoyed at the birth of 'a jolly boy', named after him, to Gilbert's wife the previous February, and when the child died suddenly on 12th August 1577 he told Lord Burghley that the baby was his 'dearest jewel under God, next to my sovereign', adding 'he surely was a toward child'.<sup>21</sup> The grief occasioned by the loss of their only Talbot grandson brought about a temporary reconciliation between Bess and her husband, whose relationships had deteriorated from the time that the marriage of Bess's daughter Elizabeth with Charles Stuart, Earl of Lennox, Darnley's younger brother, had inspired the Countess with royal aspirations for her progeny.

Gilbert had always had good relations with Bess and the dispute with his father came to a climax when the Earl's marriage foundered after Bess and her sons William and Charles spread rumours of undue intimacy between the Earl and Mary, Queen of Scots, in an attempt to have an obviously ailing and ageing man relieved of what was aptly termed his 'charge' before he damaged the prospects of Cavendish advancement. Gilbert was now the Earl's heir, for his sickly brother Francis had died in 1582 without issue, while he and Mary had had three daughters and a son since they had lost their first son George—Mary, born 1580, to whom Mary Queen of Scots had stood godmother;<sup>22</sup>

Elizabeth, born 1582, to whom the Earl was godfather;<sup>23</sup> John, born 1583, who died before the end of the year;<sup>24</sup> and Alatheia, born 1584.<sup>25</sup>

On a number of occasions the Earl explained himself at length to various friends of the family, for there seems to have been widespread sympathy for Gilbert and stout-hearted persons like the Earl of Leicester, Roger Manners the third brother of Earl George's first wife, and Sir Henry Lee remonstrated with him over the years. When Leicester reproved the Earl for forbidding Gilbert to visit his wife at Chatsworth during her confinement for the birth of Alatheia, for instance, the Earl replied: 'This I think is his duty: that, seeing I have forbid him from coming to my wicked and malicious wife, who hath set me at naught in his own hearing, that contrary to my commandment, hath both gone and sent unto her daily by his wife's persuasion, yea and hath both written and carried letters to no mean personages in my wife's behalf . . . . the best ways I have to content myself is to think it is his wife's wicked persuasion, and her mother's together, for I think neither barrel better herring . . . . to be plain, he shall either leave his indirect dealings with my wife . . . . or else indeed will I do that to him I would be loath, seeing I have heretofore loved him so well . . . . He hath been a costly child to me, which I think well bestowed, if he come here again in time. He takes the way to spoil himself with having his wife at London; therefore, if you love him, persuade him to come down with his wife, and settle himself in the country; for, otherwise, during his abode with his wife at London, I will take the £200 I give him yearly, besides alienating my good will from him.'<sup>26</sup>

Gilbert admitted that he had been extravagant, but he remained a frequent visitor to London; soon after this letter, indeed, he witnessed his father's reception at Court at the end of his custody of Mary, Queen of Scots. In 1585 Gilbert's financial position was evidently desperate; he wrote to his father on 27th August 'most humbly beseeching your Lordship, on my knees, to pardon my fault of overspending hitherto', but declared that 'rather to remain still so far behind hand as I am . . . . I would wish . . . . to end my life'.<sup>27</sup> Some relief came, for on 24th September the Earl was able to tell him: 'You have had of me, as you know, in money and lead, and by my toleration, this year past, or little more, £2,000, besides that maintenance and yearly allowance you have which is as good as £800 p.a. These are no small matters, and how you should so spend all this, and bring yourself so far into debt, I cannot but marvel, and with grief think of it.' The Earl had discovered that Gilbert owed some £5,000 and again he demanded that Gilbert come away from London, but Gilbert argued that he had to stay to settle his debts and to attend to business.<sup>28</sup> Although Sir Christopher Hatton wrote at the New Year to convey a message from the Queen that 'the more you shall cherish and favour such a son, the more your Lordship shall advance her honour and your own reputation',<sup>29</sup> the wrangle went on. The Earl admitted to Sir Henry Lee in September 1586 that Gilbert had many good parts, that he could speak and write well, for instance, but again demanded him home.<sup>30</sup> In June 1587, when Gilbert was again financially embarrassed, the Earl paid his half-yearly allowance early and wrote to the Privy Council on his behalf, but flatly refused to pay his debts or increase his allowance and would not yield that autumn, despite further representations from Sir Henry Lee, who pointed out the advantages of Gilbert's being at Court and the expenses necessarily involved.<sup>31</sup> As the Earl wrote to Sir Henry on 6th September 1587: 'He knoweth whereof his grief grew: let him henceforth avoid the occasions'.<sup>32</sup> In July 1588 he welcomed a forthcoming visit from Gilbert, but asked him not to bring his wife 'for her sight cannot as yet content me' and a reconciliation with her does not seem to have occurred until the spring of 1590 when the old man wrote to condole with her over a sickness, a letter which Gilbert endorsed 'My father's kynde letter to my wyfe'.<sup>33</sup>

Earl George died on 18th November 1590, but even before he was buried on the 13th of January following, with much honour, beneath the monument which, in accordance with the custom of the age, he had erected for himself in the Shrewsbury Chapel in Sheffield Church, family feuds had broken out. On 23rd December Roger Manners wrote to his brother John: 'You know that the late Earl of Shrewsbury was accounted for

cattle, corn, wool, lead, yarn, lands, revenue and of ready money the greatest and only rich subject of England. Yet now he is dead he was so poor as no executor will take upon him to perform his will, and the Earl that now is, the poorest that ever was of that name'.<sup>34</sup> Gilbert's younger brothers Edward and Henry were appointed executors; when they refused to act, Bess was made executrix, but that was revoked at Gilbert's instigation and he became the executor. The death of Earl George created hostility between Gilbert and Bess where previously there had been friendship and exacerbated the bad blood between him and his younger brothers which had long existed. The family quarrels came to a head, of course, with the challenge to a duel which Gilbert made to Edward in 1594—'The company to be one gentleman a piece. The furniture rapier, dagger, and short gauntlet, and no other weapons, ordinary garments and no other. The place a mile south from Doncaster, which is two from his house and twelve from mine, Worksop. The day Wednesday 26 of June at 11 o'clock forenoon.'<sup>35</sup> The immediate cause of the quarrel was an alleged statement by Edward that a lease Gilbert had made of his lands was fraudulent, but the long-term causes were explained by Gilbert in a letter to the Earl of Essex of 13th July 1594. 'In my father's lifetime, both my younger brothers, by most vile means, did not only procure to themselves greater proportions of my father's lands, than he left to my present possession, (all which in effect they may dispose of at their pleasure, but also caused the most of that which descended to me, to be so entangled with entails, and such condition of forfeitures, as have not been seen, and can hardly be performed, and whensoever my father's unkindness against me lessened, then my brother Edward always used the matter so as my father was verily persuaded, that he would be at my devotion'; further, after his father's death, Gilbert claimed that he was led 'to compound unadvisedly with them for the executorship and other things of greater moment at such a rate, as I protest upon my soul and honour I lost as I verily think £10,000 by that bargain at least.'<sup>36</sup>

When Edward steadfastly refused to fight, Gilbert went further and suggested that his brother had planned to murder him. One John Wood, a pharmacist, alleged that Edward had promised him an annuity of £100 to poison Gilbert by giving him a pair of gloves impregnated with poison. Edward took the matter to Star Chamber on a writ of slander, Wood was found guilty, sentenced to be branded on the forehead, lose both ears and undergo life imprisonment, but it seems that this was commuted to a fine of £500 and his being stood in the pillory for four hours, while Edward Talbot and some friends threw rotten eggs at him!<sup>37</sup> Even Roger Manners was out of patience with Gilbert over the affair and it brought him discredit at Court.

Gilbert's violence was also displayed to his disadvantage in his quarrel with Sir Thomas Stanhope which was the subject of an article by Professor W. T. MacCaffrey in the *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* in 1960.<sup>38</sup> We know from a letter from Sir Thomas' younger brother, Michael, who with another brother John was at Court and therefore in a good position to put the Stanhope point of view to the Queen and her councillors, that the quarrel dated from before Earl George's death.<sup>39</sup> Apart from any personal issues, the quarrel seems to have stemmed from Gilbert's failure to secure the succession to his father as Lord Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire, a failure he attributed to Stanhope influence, although Gilbert tried to centre the issue on the matter of a weir built by Sir Thomas all of 20 years before across the Trent near his house at Shelford. On the lieutenancy, the Earl told Lord Burghley on 20th September 1592 that 'so long as her Majesty, for any respect whatsoever, shall not hold me worthy of the place, I will not desire it. Only with all humble earnestness I must crave, that I may not be forced, to swallow up such indignities, in my country, as never any of my ancestors did, and which would make me contemptible to the world.'<sup>40</sup> Three days later, his servant Alexander Ratcliff was writing to him from Woodstock that the Queen blamed him for stirring up the difficulties over the weir and had remarked: 'It is not my Lord's doing, but my Lady's; my Lady leads my Lord, in all things, as she likes'.<sup>41</sup> In January, when Sir Thomas stood in a Parliamentary election alongside another erstwhile friend of Gilbert's, Thomas Markham of Ollerton, Gilbert so manoeuvred things that the Stanhope

faction sat in the empty shire hall at Nottingham while his candidates, Sir Charles Cavendish and a local squire, Philip Strelley, were being elected elsewhere.<sup>42</sup> In February, the Countess showed her venom, sending a message to Sir Thomas on 10th February that he was a reprobate and on 15th February that he was 'more wretched, vile, and miserable, than any creature living, and, for your wickedness, become more ugly in shape than the vilest toad in the world'.<sup>43</sup> At Easter the Shrewsburys' agent, Nicholas Williamson, who lived at Sawley, nine miles from Shelford, organized rioting at night against the weir and, as that did not demolish it, launched a bigger attack in broad daylight on 10th May. Ultimately, the matter went to Star Chamber where Sir Thomas was vindicated.<sup>44</sup>

One can have more sympathy with Gilbert over his troubles with Mistress Eleanor Britton, to whom Earl George had turned for solace after he had dismissed Bess from his life. Gilbert charged her and her nephew Thomas with felony before the Council of the North, they countercharged him with depriving them of their rights, and the matter, was transferred to London since the Privy Council held it to be improper that it should be dealt with at Pontefract, where the Earl was chief officer to the Crown. Gilbert accused her of sending Earl George's old plate to London to be exchanged but never delivering the new; of embezzling Earl George's money; of taking his George. 'It is well known that one deep chest, which did always stand near unto the late Earl's bed, and was continually removed with him . . . . being able to contain near £8000 in silver . . . . was at his death made empty, and two other black coffers, wherein he never put anything but gold, one whereof would contain about £10,000 in gold, out of which she confesseth she took £400 and there remained not above £200, or thereabouts . . . . and divers empty bags, which he was never known to keep in any of these coffers, and one other less black coffer . . . . which was also found empty.' Nevertheless, Gilbert offered to give her, if she would restore everything, 'a new frieze gown, and £1,000 in her pocket, and find her men and horses to carry her away, which is too good a recompense for her service'.<sup>45</sup> This was 1591, but litigation was still taking place as late as 1595.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the damage done to his reputation by these various disputations, Earl Gilbert was appointed to succeed his father as Lord Lieutenant of Derbyshire in 1591,<sup>47</sup> made a Knight of the Garter in 1592, and chosen to go on an embassy to Henry IV of France in 1596 to present the Order of the Garter to the French King, secure the ratification of the treaty against Spain, and introduce Sir Anthony Mildmay as the resident ambassador,<sup>48</sup> but he did not become a Privy Councillor until 1601, nor did he succeed to his father's office as Justice in Eyre beyond the Trent until December 1603.<sup>49</sup> Apart from deficiencies of character, a cause of distrust must have been the recusancy of his wife. Mary's religious allegiance was openly acknowledged, it seems; the Earl of Salisbury, for example, wrote in 1606 to them: 'I . . . . assure both the Protestant, and Catholic, or rather Papist, that they neither have nor ever shall have a truer friend'.<sup>50</sup> On another occasion, Elizabeth, Lady Russell, called upon Mary not to be 'deaf like the adder' to reasoning in religion.<sup>51</sup> Gilbert probably agreed with Robert Cecil when, as Viscount Cranborne, he told Archbishop Matthew Hutton 'that the Papists were carried in the left hand with superstitious blindness, and the Puritans, as your Lordship termeth them, were transported on the right hand with unadvised zeal'.<sup>52</sup> Certainly, Gilbert was scathing in his rejection of the protests of Sir William and Lady Bowes in 1603 about the petition of the Universities against the toleration of Puritans, telling Sir William 'I wish with all my heart that neither you nor my lady your wife were so partially affected to these busy headed precisians as I fear you are'.<sup>53</sup>

Earl Gilbert was absent from Parliament on 5th November 1605, but could explain that a commission was sitting at the time on his disputes over properties with Bess and the charges levied against him by John Clay of Crich did not stick. Clay alleged that he 'had received an advertisement, out of the love that the Papists bore unto him, so that under the colour of his happy gout, cloaking his not appearance at the Parliament house, neither himself nor any of his favourites of account within the said county [of Derby] should have been by the said treason endamaged'—Clay meant Sir Charles



Cavendish and Sir John Harpur, 'a man wholly devoted to the said Lord body and soul'.<sup>54</sup> Arabella Stuart had been a possible claimant for the throne and when she went south after James' accession in 1603 she acknowledged that she owed a great debt to Gilbert's Countess 'whose skilful directions I will observe as far as they are Puritanic', as she told Mary on 14th August, but her association with Mary did not preclude her from kindly treatment at James' hands—James referred to 'that unpleasant life which she has led in the house of her grandmother, with whose severity and age she, being a young lady, could hardly agree'.<sup>55</sup> For her part, Arabella tried to effect a reconciliation between Gilbert and her formidable grandmother, telling him that 'you cannot devise to do me a greater honour and contentment than to let me be the only mediator . . . . betwixt you and her',<sup>56</sup> but that did not come about until the birth of a first son to Gilbert's youngest daughter Alatheia and her husband Thomas Howard, second Earl of Arundel, a little before Bess's death on 13th February 1608.<sup>57</sup>

Gilbert had neither the public standing nor the private wealth of his father. Where his father had a net income from land in 1586, as known from a settlement proposed to Earl George by Gilbert and his brothers at the time, of well in excess of £10,000,<sup>58</sup> a breviary of the rents received by Gilbert in 1592 totals, after deductions, a little over £5,300.<sup>59</sup> Even within the long lifetime of Bess, who as Earl George's widow would have received a third of his landed income, and despite the sundry encumbrances of which he complained so bitterly, Gilbert's income must have improved markedly by the early 1600s, for his steward's accounts between 1600 and 1606 show receipts of over £48,000<sup>60</sup> and his subsidy payments in 1601 and 1605 suggest a rental of £7,000 and £7,500 respectively.<sup>61</sup>

What was clearly an aggressive management policy contributed to the improved rents. As Gilbert argued to the Privy Council, in answer to complaints made by some of his tenants in Glossopdale where there was trouble between the Earls of Shrewsbury and the tenants over a period of at least 30 years from 1578, 'it cannot be in reason thought unmeet that he should raise the rents accordingly as his farms are increased in value, and as his farmers do increase the price of their commodities which they have thereby; and especially having no other help towards his maintenance, and the discharge of his great debts, but his lands, and not near a third part of those livings his father possessed'.<sup>62</sup> In an age of rising prices, there was every justification for increased rents as leases fell in, and the Privy Council was more sympathetic to the seventh Earl than it had been in the same matter to the sixth Earl 15 years before.<sup>63</sup> If, however, there was any truth in the claim of Nicholas Hatfield early in James' reign that Gilbert had raised the rent of his tenement, Priest Pastures, from 15s. a year, with the finding a man and his armour for the King's service when called upon, to £16 a year,<sup>64</sup> no wonder it was 1608 before Sir John Bentley could tell the Earl that 'those giddy headed people' were 'now thirsty of their quiet'.<sup>65</sup>

Gilbert, like his father before him, was clearly conscious of the advantages of exploiting the mineral resources of his estates. In the 1600s, for example, he was corresponding about the possibility of extracting precious metals from the ore on his estates near Sheffield; he had Richard Brown, the bailiff of Barlow, enquire of Robert Eyre the whereabouts of a 'golden hill' but Eyre wisely denied all knowledge of such a place. These enquiries did not prove fruitful but they are indicative of the Earl's technological awareness, as is his involvement, in partnership with Bevis Bulmer, Lord Buckhurst, Sir Robert Cecil, and others in a mine on the Borders of England and Scotland in 1597.<sup>66</sup> The Talbots' financial papers do not survive adequately for it to be possible to calculate over a period of years what their profit was from mineral wealth, but a breviary of accounts for commodities for the year 1590, taken December 1591, affords revealing clues. In round figures, lead works yielded £672 against charges of £624, but 179 fother of lead remained which were estimated as worth £619; glass works yielded only £82 against charges of £382 but 342 cases of glass remained in hand; iron work, selling at between £11 6s. 8d. and £13 a ton, brought in only £104 in cash against charges totalling £1,649 but stock in hand represented some £2,996; and steel work, at £28 a ton, cost £333 and

yielded no ready money, but 68 firkins had been produced, valued at £546. 'Commodities' also included wool, corn, hides, coal, iron stone, slate stone, perquisites of mills, and the rest, often considerable contributions to income, if variable from one year to the next, and, by the very nature of the contemporary accounting, difficult to separate out. According to this breviat, wool sales in 1590 had amounted to £229 against charges of £2 and 575 stones of wool remained unsold. The profits of Sheffield steel, corn, fines, joist mill, tithes and other incidental perquisites were listed as £4,819 against charges of £1,432.<sup>67</sup>

Gilbert's income, even before the death of Bess restored to the patrimony her jointure, was, then, substantial. It was, for instance, comparable to that of the Percies, Earls of Northumberland, in the period and more than most noblemen of his rank could boast.<sup>68</sup> There seems to have been an element of exaggeration in his repeated statements that he had lost two-thirds of the income enjoyed by his father, but there is no doubt that he did have serious debts both when he succeeded and later. Notably, he owed no less than £5,000 to the Earl of Huntingdon, which he repaid in 1594 only at the price of mortgaging lands to Sir Horatio Palavicino and others,<sup>69</sup> and he seems to have been in very real straits in 1611 and 1612. Sir Charles Cavendish complained to Gilbert's steward Henry Butler in February 1611 that the Earl's servants had neither clothes nor money and Mary wrote to Butler in April 1612 that unless he sent money before midsummer Gilbert and his son-in-law the Earl of Pembroke, who had married the eldest daughter Mary in 1604, would forfeit a debt of thousands of pounds upon a statute.<sup>70</sup> Gilbert and his Countess were notorious as bad payers, it would seem. John Swinnerton, a London merchant, threatened to approach Lord Buckhurst, the Lord Treasurer, over the non-payment of a debt which had been outstanding for five years in 1602 and had previously threatened similarly in 1598, evidently to no avail.<sup>71</sup>

It was commonplace for Elizabethan noblemen to be short of ready money and to be obliged to raise considerable short-term loans from such sources as London merchants, but Gilbert's debts were at any rate at times serious. Nevertheless, they did not preclude his making substantial purchases of lands, as when in February 1604 he bought the estate at Hartington which had been leased to his father in 1585 in consideration of the diet money for Mary, Queen of Scots, and paid £12,000, a thousand pounds more than he had anticipated.<sup>72</sup> Nor did his debts prevent him from maintaining a house in London, at Broad Street, or from building at Shifnal Manor, Shropshire, and at Worksop Manor, which he made his principal seat in place of Sheffield Castle and which Sir Robert Cecil declared to have 'the fairest gallery in England' even before Gilbert's improvements.<sup>73</sup> Sheffield Castle itself, William Dickenson the bailiff of Sheffield told Gilbert's secretary and confidant Thomas Cooke in 1595, cost £50 a day to maintain.<sup>74</sup>

These expenses palled into insignificance when special hospitality was involved. Gilbert and Mary spared no expense on such occasions. When Arabella Stuart and other company was expected at Sheffield Castle and Buxton in the late summer of 1609, for instance, Gilbert wrote to his steward to send Peter Peryns to Hatfield to take fresh pike and bream and to buy eels and lampreys. 'If any can be got for any money, let him get all that he can buy, setting fishers on work, for he must needs send great store of the best to me'.<sup>75</sup> The entertainment of James I and his Queen Anne of Denmark on their separate entries into England in 1603 were naturally very special occasions. James I rode from Doncaster towards Worksop on Wednesday, 20th April 1603. 'By the way, in the Park he was somewhat stayed, for there appeared a number of huntsmen, all in green, the chief of which, with a woodman's speech, did welcome him, offering his Majesty to show him some game, which he gladly condescended to see; and, with a train set, he hunted a good space, very much delighted: at last he went into the house, where he was so nobly received, with a superfluity of all things, that still every entertainment seemed to exceed other. In this place, besides the abundance of all provision and delicacy, there was most excellent soul-ravishing music, wherewith his highness was not a little delighted.' James stayed the night and took breakfast, 'which ended, there was much store of provision left, of fowl, fish, and almost every thing,

besides bread, beer and wines, that it was left open for any man that would, to come and take'.<sup>76</sup>

The Queen came in June, attended by a considerable entourage including six Ladies of the Cabinet, other ladies, half a dozen Scottish lords and a similar number of English lords, and gentlemen of her household. All, the Earl was told in a note giving advice of the visit, 'are to be lodged two and two in a chamber and more if need require . . . . If your Lordship have not convenient rooms to lodge them severally you may lodge many of them upon pallets in one chamber, especially the Scotch men—they love to be together.'<sup>77</sup> Gilbert returned from the Court to do honour to the Queen, his friends sent delicacies—Richard Topcliffe, for instance, sent 'the best and highest fallow deer that is in Somerby Park or I think that is in Lincolnshire wild fed', as well as four pies of stag baked by a cook trained in Earl George's household during his guardianship of Mary, Queen of Scots, and eight young herons 'out of the nest new killed which well boiled is excellent meat cold or hot better than roasted',<sup>78</sup> and in addition provisions were bought in, including pickled oysters, anchovies, Bologna sausages, Westphalia bacon, dried tongues, broom buds, oranges, lemons, and pineapple kernels.<sup>79</sup> Gilbert maintained a sizeable household—a check-roll of 1604 lists some 96 persons—but, in addition to the clerk of the kitchen he borrowed for the occasion from the Earl of Kent, whose nephew Henry Grey had married Gilbert's second daughter Elizabeth in 1601, he hired ten cooks and two Frenchmen 'folding of the diaper' at 5s. a day for 16 days and five labourers at 1s. a day.<sup>80</sup>

Munificence and extravagance went hand in hand in Gilbert's conduct as Earl and in this he was always supported and sometimes led by his Countess—Mary is said to have spent some £4,000 on the building of the middle court of St. John's College, Cambridge, between 1598 and 1602, when all the evidence suggests that they needed money badly.<sup>81</sup> Nathaniel Johnston wrote of him that he was 'a learned, wise, magnificent, and generous nobleman',<sup>82</sup> but J. D. Leader's summing up of him seems nearer the truth when he said: 'Gilbert, the seventh wearer of the coronet, has been named by the populace of Sheffield the "great and glorious earl", chiefly because of his foolishly prodigal expenditure'.<sup>83</sup> Small in physical stature,<sup>84</sup> he was great only in his style of living and giving. He died on 8th May 1616 in London and was buried, as he declared to be his wish in his will made only four days before, beside his grandfather, his parents and his elder brother in Sheffield Church 'in such sort as befits my rank and calling' on 12th August following.<sup>85</sup>

Typically, want of assets precluded his executors, Sir Ralph Winwood, principal secretary of state to James I, and Sir William Cavendish, Gilbert's nephew, from carrying out his bequest to Sheffield of a hospital 'for perpetual maintenance of twenty poor persons' and it was his great-grandson Henry Howard, Earl of Norwich and later sixth Duke of Norfolk, who actually established the charity in his name in 1673.<sup>86</sup> The Hospital of Gilbert, Earl of Shrewsbury, was destined to be the only memorial to the colourful life of the last male of the Talbot family to play any significant part in the affairs of Sheffield, where the Earls of Shrewsbury had been lords of the manor for more than two centuries.<sup>87</sup>

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- 3J. D. Leader, *Mary Queen of Scots in Captivity* (1880), 18.
- 4N. Johnston, *Lives of the Shrewsburys* (Chatsworth MSS.), vol. vii, 413.
- 5J. Hunter, *Hallamshire*, ed. A. Gatty (1869), 98, suggests his date of birth as 20th November 1553; cf. also 101, Gilbert's will. 20th November 1552 is suggested, however, by H.M.C. *Salisbury* MSS. xvi, 360, letter of Gilbert to Viscount Cranborne, 20th November 1604: 'these 52 years which this very day I live to see'.
- 6Charles was born 28th November 1553, Carleton Williams, 29.
- 7Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, *The Life of William, Duke of Newcastle*, ed. C. H. Firth (1906), 2.
- 8Talbot Papers (College of Arms), H17.
- 9Shrewsbury Papers (Lambeth Palace), MS.697, f.83; Talbot Papers, P.571.
- 10Johnston, vol. vi, 3.
- 11Talbot Papers, F 79.
- 12Talbot Papers, F 83.
- 13Talbot Papers, F 107.
- 14Talbot Papers, P 701.
- 15Hunter, 115. For a description of the Earl's house at Buxton, see Leader, p.303.
- 16Talbot Papers, P 819. See also Leader, 385–86, for a draft of this.
- 17Talbot Papers, F 307.
- 18Talbot Papers, F 331; at this time the Earl was in dispute with his tenants in Glossopdale.
- 19Hunter, 114.
- 20Hunter, 114.
- 21Talbot Papers, P 719 and 1,023; Leader, 393 n.
- 22Leader, 444.
- 23Talbot Papers, G 120.
- 34Talbot Papers, G 124.
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- <sup>55</sup>H.M.C. *Salisbury Papers*, XV, 65.  
<sup>56</sup>B.M.Add.MS. 22,563, f.51.  
<sup>57</sup>Carleton Williams, 265.  
<sup>58</sup>Talbot Papers, G 335.  
<sup>59</sup>Johnston, vol. vii, 249–53.  
<sup>60</sup>Talbot Papers, L 81.  
<sup>61</sup>Talbot Papers, M 235 and 453, at 2s. 8d. in the £ on respectively £700 and £750. As Johnston comments, vol. vii, 233: 'In these subsidies every £100 in the subsidy was generally £1,000 and oftentimes more in land rent besides fines, perquisites, etc.'  
<sup>62</sup>Johnston, vol. vii, 237.  
<sup>63</sup>Talbot Papers, H 571.  
<sup>64</sup>Shrewsbury Papers, MS.708, f.147.  
<sup>65</sup>Talbot Papers, M 521.  
<sup>66</sup>Talbot Papers, K 5, I 266.  
<sup>67</sup>Johnston, vol. vii, 259–61.  
<sup>68</sup>G. R. Batho, *The Household Papers of Henry Percy* (1962), xxi, 1.  
<sup>69</sup>Shrewsbury Papers, MS. 707, f.215; Talbot Papers H 659.  
<sup>70</sup>Shrewsbury Papers, MS. 694, f.90, and MS. 709, f.60.  
<sup>71</sup>Shrewsbury Papers, MS. 698, f.153, and MS. 702, f.9.  
<sup>72</sup>Shrewsbury Papers, MS. 702, f.59b; Talbot Papers, G 278 and K 181.  
<sup>73</sup>Shrewsbury Papers, MS. 700, ff.69, 101, and MS. 707, f.189; Talbot Papers, I 231. Worksop Manor was destroyed by fire 20th October 1761.  
<sup>74</sup>Talbot Papers, H 831.  
<sup>75</sup>Talbot Papers, M 580.  
<sup>76</sup>*The Progresses . . . of King James the First*, ed. J. Nichols (1828), i, 85.  
<sup>77</sup>Shrewsbury Papers, MS. 703, f.70.  
<sup>78</sup>Shrewsbury Papers, MS. 708, f.141.  
<sup>79</sup>Shrewsbury Papers, MS. 694, f.63.  
<sup>80</sup>Talbot Papers, M 282; Shrewsbury Papers, MS. 694, f.63.  
<sup>81</sup>Johnston, vol. vii, 281–83.  
<sup>82</sup>Johnston, vol. vi, ii.  
<sup>83</sup>Leader, 14.  
<sup>84</sup>Leader, 14n.  
<sup>85</sup>Hunter, 101–02.  
<sup>86</sup>Hunter, 314–18.  
<sup>87</sup>Edward, eighth Earl of Shrewsbury, died without issue on 8th February 1617/18. The title passed to a cousin, George Talbot of Grafton.