I HAVE put myself down to talk to you to-night on "The Taming of the Shrew." It is the third of Shakespeare's early comedies which I have been privileged to make the subject of a Rylands lecture. For this occasion, therefore, I have presumed to take liberties with the advertised topic. Instead of presenting to you a general view of all the more important critical questions which emerge from "The Taming of the Shrew," I have sought to use the play only as a further development of the argument I tried to lay down in my previous lectures to you, to make my treatment of it, if the arrogance of the claim be overlooked, the third chapter in a study of the evolution of Shakespearean comedy. Hence I have jettisoned much which the fashion of current Shakespearean scholarship makes most interesting in "The Taming of the Shrew," and have, for instance, allowed myself no concern with the textual problems which are raised by the play. I mention this in particular, because, although my argument will require me to make use of another play of shrew-taming, "The Taming of A Shrew" as well as of Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew," I shall entirely omit any consideration of their textual relationship, occupying myself exclusively with the way they stand to each other in the idea of comedy. Fortunately, the proposition I shall put forward does not appear to depend at all on whether one accepts the modern view (and I confess myself unpersuaded) that "A Shrew" is a textual adaptation of Shakespeare's play, or whether one retains the older opinion that "A Shrew" is an older play which Shakespeare used as a source for "The Shrew." And if in phrase I may seem to assume a historical

1 An elaboration of the lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library, on the 14th October, 1931.
priority for *A Shrew*, I trust that such an assumption has been without influence in my general argument. Similarly I have assumed that *The Taming of the Shrew* is Shakespeare's play; and though for my own part I am disposed to lament the concessions which such a stalwart as Sir E. K. Chambers has made to the disintegrators of Shakespeare, again I am not aware that my faith in it as a play by Shakespeare has any essential bearing on my handling of it for the present purpose.

That purpose, briefly, is to consider what light is thrown by the *Shrew* play on the growth of Elizabethan comedy, and in particular to see how far it carries Shakespeare towards the idea of comedy which he realised most triumphantly with such of his maturest achievements in comedy as *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and *Much Ado*. Though there is ample justification for our continuing to label as romantic comedies these consummate embodiments of the Shakespearean comic spirit, the romanticism in them has been submitted to a severe discipline since it wrought such dramatic havoc as we found in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: it has indeed made its submission to that tradition which ancient Roman dramatists passed on to modern Europe, but it has secured such concessions in the settlement as amply satisfy its own romantic intuition. England and Shakespeare obtained the best terms possible in this compromise between Renaissance romance and the enduring classical realism which still persists through and informs the comedy of twentieth-century Europe. England drove the hardest bargain: but other European countries were consciously or unconsciously affecting in their own comedies the compromise between romanticism as they felt it in their own time and the dominant classicism or the enduring realism embodied in comedy as it had come to them. The history of sixteenth-century comedy in Europe is a record of the encroachment of romance on the ancient domain of comedy. But the invasion is almost entirely the result of circumstance, and hardly at all the consequence of deliberate attack. The gap between Plautus and *Twelfth Night* seems at first an unbridgeable chasm severing irreconcilable opposites. But, in fact, the way from one to the other was solidly laid by dramatists who never realised how far circumstances were leading them from the beaten track. When Bibbiena in his *Calandria* (1513), whilst modern comedy was in its swaddling clouts, seized on the Plautine motive of lost twins, he took
the first decisive step towards Shakespeare by making a boy and a girl twin out of Plautus's boy twins.

This may sound like a cryptic or a paradoxical remark, or even a ludicrous proposition, in view of the palpable differences between the comedy of Shakespeare and that of Plautus. In spirit, the Latin type is realistic, satiric, earthy; Shakespeare's, poetic, sentimental, romantic. Plautus is full of sex; Shakespeare is all for love. Plautus weaves plots of cunning intrigue; Shakespeare chooses simple tales of wooers and their wooing, "it was a lover and his lass." In the people of their plays there is striking difference in the types characteristic of the one and of the other, and an equally marked difference in the characteristic importance assumed by corresponding figures in the two sorts of play. With Plautus, it is the old men and the rascally men-servants who come first to mind: then the young sparks lusting for illicit liaisons or trafficking without delicacy for possession of attractive concubines; and the girls they pursue flit across the scene, mere accessories to the plot, permitted to make our personal acquaintance only in direct proportion with the extent of their alleged impropriety. In Shakespeare all is different. Old men withdraw to the wings. Cunning servants, deprived by his plots of extensive opportunity to acquire skill in scheming, survive mainly as natural clowns. It is the young folk who occupy the centre of his stage, and the hero, gaining grace in the mysteries of wooing, discards many of the traits of his Plautine ancestor, and replaces them by the finer susceptibilities of feeling, the nobility of mind, and the sweetness of soul which more closely reflect the romantic ideal of manhood. An even greater change is suffered by the girls of the older tradition. They are transmuted both in quality and in significance. They are promoted from supernumerary parts to play the all-important rôle,—the heroine, in the technical sense, now first emerges. Moreover, that she may worthily acquit herself in her new office, she is gradually taking on a personality for which the whole of ancient comedy had no proximate parallel. The clue to the history of sixteenth-century comedy is to watch for this heroine's appearance in its drama, to follow her through the century, noticing how she increases her sway over the plays in which she appears, and how, as time goes on, she acquires those qualities of hand, of heart, and of head which are at length to be most magisterially embodied in a Rosalind, a Beatrice, or a Viola. For then the
heroine has in fact become the very incarnation of the spirit of Shakespeare’s Comedy.

This is the process by which Elizabethan comedy evolved. In manner, it was largely unconscious, but in determining its direction, the part played by the comic dramatists of Italy has hardly received adequate notice. However, *The Taming of the Shrew* directly prompts an attempt to estimate Italy’s share in the formation of a type of comedy like the romantic variety which our Elizabethans made peculiarly their own. The sub-plot of *The Shrew* is one of the few English plots immediately traceable to a sixteenth-century Italian comedy. The Bianca episodes in *The Taming* are taken over either straight from Ariosto’s *Suppositi* (1509) or from Gascoigne’s English version *The Supposes* (1573-75).

At the outset, however, it is well to remember that no Englishman reading *The Taming of the Shrew* would at first incline to think of it as having any conceivable bearing on the development of any kind of comedy which could be called romantic. Its prevailing temper is so rollickingly anti-romantic that one may well take it as Shakespeare’s boisterous revenge on the romantic spirit which had led him the terrible dance he had trod in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. One might indeed be persuaded to regard *The Shrew* as Shakespeare’s antidote to his *Two Gentlemen*. Valentine in the latter avows his capacity to dine, sup, and sleep upon the very naked name of love. But in *The Shrew*, such ambrosial menus are unknown. From beginning to end there is a hearty appetite for bread, beef, and beer. Sly knows by instinct that a pot of even the smallest ale is no inconsiderable item of well-being; stone jugs and duly sealed quarts are the palpable pillars of his universe. Petruchio, too, has a native intuition of the stomach’s sway, and a sure sense of its strategic uses; he deploys adroitly the promise of good eating and drinking. But most marked of all is Gremio’s instinct for gastronomical realities. He is the forlorn suitor, rejected by his lady and mocked by his rivals. But his broken heart is amenable to culinary recipes; and we take leave of him at the end of *The Shrew*, reconciled to the loss of a lady by the prospect of a feast, stumping off eagerly, though it be to the wedding breakfast of his fortunate rival.

“My cake is dough; but I’ll in among the rest; Out of hope of all but my share of the feast.”
Although he is cast for a dotard, Gremio excellently serves our immediate purpose. For he belongs, not to the story of Katherine's violently unromantic taming, but to the germinally romantic story of the wooing of Katherine's sister, Bianca. It is this wooing which forms the sub-plot of the Shakespearean play; and it is this which Shakespeare took from Italy. This is the part of The Taming of the Shrew which links it most closely to the development of sixteenth-century comedy in Europe.

There are in English three dramatic handlings of this tale. There is Gascoigne's translation of Ariosto's Suppositi in which it is the main and only plot. There is The Taming of A Shrew, in which it is substantially the main plot, bulkier than the other set side by side with it, the plot of the taming of her ladyship's sister. And there is Shakespeare's Taming of the Shrew, in which the wooing of the Shrew's sister is a sub-plot, of which the subsidiary nature is more evident in its quality and its function than in its bulk, for although it suffers little diminution in length as compared with its size in A Shrew it is markedly subdued to the temper of the main taming plot. Between them, these versions offer a unique illustration of the progress of sixteenth-century comedy and of the circumstances most vitally effecting that progress.

Of the first of these plays, The Supposes, these are, so to speak, four texts. Ariosto wrote it first in prose, calling it Gli Suppositi, and in that form it was acted in 1509. Later he rewrote it in verse, this time under the title I Suppositi. Gascoigne, knowing and using both the verse and prose versions of the original, made his translation, The Supposes, which was acted in 1566, published pseudo-surreptitiously in 1572 or '73, and this text, "corrected, perfected, and augmented by the Author," was issued again in The Posies of George Gascoigne, 1575. We need not, however, concern ourselves with these bibliographical differences. For our purpose, the four versions are one play, and that one play will adequately illustrate the circumstances in which Renaissance comedy was born.

Ariosto's Supposes is primarily a play of masquerading, the plot turning on a scheme of disguise to bring about mistakes in identity, whereby a young man may secure access to his mistress. The young man changes place and clothes with his own servant; then hires himself as a servant into the household of his mistress's father. When
the play opens, this liaison has subsisted in secret for a considerable time. But it is now threatened with exposure; an elderly and wealthy suitor has found favour with the girl's father, and the plan for playing against him another pretended suitor (in reality the young man's disguised servant) is becoming more difficult to maintain, for the father of the young man himself is shortly due to arrive. Here clearly is much Plautine and Terentian matter: "vi confessa," wrote Ariosto in his Prologue, "vi confessa l'autore havere in questo et Plauto et Terentio seguitato." The plot is a succession of dilemmas from which only cunning devices and intrigues can rescue the hero. In temper, too, it is sufficiently classical; and though one need not be alarmed to find that its first performance was at the charges of a Cardinal, one is somewhat surprised to learn that a spectator, reporting the performance to a distinguished lady, the Marchioness of Mantua, strongly recommended the play to her as "piena di moralità." For though its dialogue is comparatively inoffensive, the whole situation depends on securing the sympathy of the audience for clandestine lovers whose love has dispensed with the normal sanctions of the moral code.

The Supposes does not, indeed, break very considerably from the Latin comic tradition. But there are features in it which point to the future. It is, for instance, a play of love rather than of sex: the lovers mean honest matrimony and would welcome the ceremony which circumstance forbids. It is, however, not a play of wooing. The young people had lived in irregular union for some time, and in the play itself there is not a single scene in which they are together. Yet there is in the play something of the comedy of wooers; the lady has three wooers,—her unofficial husband, his servant who is pretending to woo, and the third, the traditional elderly lover of the comic stage, deprived, however, of the goatishness, if not of the folly, of that genus. Clearly, modern sentiment has not eaten deeply into Ariosto's play. Even so, it has at least brought about certain changes which are making along the line of the future development of comedy. The germ of romanticism is beginning to leaven the classical tradition. The heroine is not yet installed; but she is beginning to qualify herself for the part: "it pitieth me to see the poore yong woman how she weepes, wailes, and teares hir heare: not esteming hir owne life halfe so deare as she doth poore Dulipos; and hir father, he weepes
on the other side that it would pearce an hart of stone with pitie” (Act III, sc. v). And she has already earned a public reputation altogether different from the kind which any of Plautus’s girls could have claimed or would, indeed, have aspired to: “Aske the neighbours, and you shall heare very good report of hir: marke hir behaviors, and you would have judged hir very maydenly; seldome seene abroade but in place of prayer and there very devout, and no gaser at outwarde sightes, no blaser of hir beautie above in the windowes, no stale at the doore for the bypassers: you would have thought hir a holy yong woman” (Act III, sc. iv). Moreover, though older folks bulk as largely in Ariosto’s play as in Latin drama, and often, too, for the same comic purpose, that is, to be gulled in the interests of gaiety, yet one or two of them here have affections and sentiments which anticipate the more benign function to be found for them in future comedies. Naturally one will not expect a Countess Rousillion or a Lafeu; for to no motive did the comic tradition stick more tenaciously than to this of the folly of old fools. But the father of Ariosto’s young man shows the metamorphosis beginning. He tells of the plans he had had for his son: “I thinking that by that time he had sene the worlde, he would learne to know himselfe better, exhorted him to studie, and put in his election what place he would go to. At the last he came hither, and I thinke he was scarce here so sone as I felt the want of him, in suche sorte as from that day to this I have passed fewe nightes without teares. I have written to him very often that he shoulde come home. . . . I would not be without the sighte of hym againe so long for all the learning in the worlde. I am olde nowe, and if God shoulde call mee in his absence, I promise you I thinke it woulde drive me into disperation” (Act IV, sc. iv). The young lady’s father, too, is different. He is not merely enraged at his daughter’s seduction, he is heartbroken by it, in the modern way: “Yea, what should it prevayle me to use all the punishments that can be devised? the thing once done can not be undone. My daughter is defloured, and I utterly dishonested: how can I then wype that blot off my browe? and on whome shall I seeke revenge? alas, alas, I myselfe have bene the cause of all these cares, and have deserved to beare the punishment of all these mishappes. Alas, I should not have committed my dearest darling in custodie to so carelesse a creature as this olde Nurse: for we see by common
proofe that these olde women be either peevishe or pitifull: either easily enclined to evill, or quickly corrupted with bribes and rewards. O wife, my good wife (that nowe lyest colde in the grave), now may I well bewayle the wante of thee, and mourning nowe may I bemone that I misse thee! If thou hadst liven (suche was thy governement of the least things) that thou wouldest prudently have provided for the preservation of this pearle . . . etc." (Act iii, sc. iii). Even the man-servant of The Supposes, required by the plot for the Davus-like trick of fooling his old master for the profit of his young one, is given to quite un-Plautine qualms of conscience and sentiment: "Alas, he that of a little childe hath brought me up unto this day, and nourished me as if I had bene his owne: and in deede (to confess the trouth) I have no father to trust unto but him" (Act v, sc. i).

Clearly, changed habits of mind and different ideals of conduct are inevitably creeping into sixteenth-century plays; and though at the outset the traditional classical machinery of the comedies will confine their action to devising assignations, outwitting rivals, and overcoming other material obstacles, they will in time throw off the formal inheritance which denies them opportunities to exhibit the whole ritual of wooing, and to express the spiritual ecstasies of the beloved. So far at least, they are providing the situations which in due course will serve as an essential setting for romance. The process will naturally be gradual and largely unintentional. One can indeed see developments of that kind even within the course of Ariosto's brief career as a comic dramatist; and the Scolastica which he left unfinished might have led him to an even more clearly romanticised completion than the one which was given to it by his son. Here, at all events, love was discovering its own romantic terms, and the heroine was growing in the grace by which she would reach her romantic triumph in the future.

The future clearly was with her. It is doubtless very difficult nowadays for us to realise how serious were the obstacles which stood in the way of woman's power over comedy. We recognise her dominion in Shakespeare's maturest comedies, and take our Rosalinds and our Violas for granted. Sometimes a Beatrice, by the plenitude of her wit, the adroitness of her intellect and her relative independence of what we choose to call the attributes of femininity, leads us to
suggest, half-mazedly, half-apologetically, that Shakespeare’s women were made to be played by boys. But such implication of restraint is in part delusory, and in part inadequate. It is a general plea that the girls of Plautus were what they were because no Roman could present a decent girl in the spectacle of public life required by the stage-conventions of his day. Thinking of famous or notorious women of the sixteenth century, Tudors or Borgias or Medicis, Duchesses of Malfi or Moll Cutpurses, knowing, too, of Renaissance ideals in the education of women, one is disposed to assume that sufficient emancipation was a recognised fact of the social system. Yet even in Italy, which was giving Europe the first of its modern women, dramatists were still hampered by the persistence of older taboos both in the traditions of drama and in the conventions of society. The emergence of the heroine was still impeded by the conscious and unconscious habits of the general will. Even as late as the middle of the century, one of the acutest of Italian men of letters, Cinthio, who was critic and dramatist, comedian and tragedian, and whose critical insight had much to do in determining the direction of sixteenth-century tragedy in Italy and thence in Europe, recognised the difficulty and sought a way out of it. In his Discorso sulle Commedie e sulle Tragedie (1554) he records that in comedy it is as an article of religion (“serva la comedia una certa religione”) that no well-born, well-mannered, and innocent girl shall be allowed to act and speak in the play. He admits that there is ample warrant for the proscription, since in the main comedy traffics with the lasciviousness of disreputable folks—“e però non pare che convenga al decoro di una giovane vergine, venire a favellare in tale scena, e tra queste persone.” Even if a particular comedy is without the customary nastiness of matter, the prohibition still holds: “e ancora che la comedia fosse onestissima, come noi veggiamo essere i Captivi di Plauto, non vi s’introdurrebbe anco vergine alcuna; perché è già così impressa negli animi degli uomini che la comedia porti con esso lei questi sorti di genti, e questi modi di favellare, pieni di licenza che ciò non sarebbe senza pregiudizio della polcella.” But Cinthio had already urged that tragedies on ancient themes would not strike directly to the hearts of his contemporaries; they must reject ancient mythologies and turn to more vital sources in contemporary love-stories. A critic like this was not likely to accept a perpetual prohibition of romantic tales of lovers from the scope of
contemporary comedy. He had, incidentally, protested against Bibbiena’s perpetuation of the ancient Roman trick of making the elderly lover a senile idiot: “dee adunque l’amor del vecchio non esser di mal esempio. E quantunque sià egli innamorato e cerchi di goder della cosa amata, non gli si debbono però far far quelle sciocchezze per venire al fine del suo amore che fe’ fare al suo Calandro il Bibbiena, e hanno dopo lui fatto alcuni altri de’ nostri tempi, perché è fuori di quel che conviene.” Naturally, one who had qualms about profaning the display of love even when it was an old man’s passion, would eagerly seek for opportunity to exhibit it in its congenial atmosphere, the ideal passion of noble girl. His solution was, in effect, the establishment of tragi-comedy, the acceptance of plays he calls “tragedie di felice fine,” “tragedie liete,” tragedies with a happy ending. “E non tengo io biasimevole che’n questa specie di tragedie vergine reale sfoghi in iscena da sé (per esser tutta la scena di persone grandi, e per farsi per la maggior parte le cose nella corte) le, passioni amorose, dogliendosi o lamentandosi onestamente.” Plays of this kind are really Italy’s nearest approach to our English romantic comedy: Greene’s James IV. of Scotland is built on one of Cinthio’s own novels, just as Cinthio himself dramatised certain of his own prose tales. In these, the heroine had full dignity of status and the whole armoury of romantic charm. She had, however, paid for her admission to the stage in such dignified company by forswearing the simpler, more natural, more domestic, and even more worldly attributes which are an indispensable part of the power of Shakespeare’s heroines in comedy.

Cinthio conferred a stage-right on the romantic heroine, and went some way towards equipping her to exercise it effectively, though, on a mere matter of terminology, he still regarded comedy as outside her liberty. One has therefore to see how she fared in comedy itself. Ariosto’s immediate successors, like Bibbiena and Machiavelli, can hardly be said to mark any decisive change. The motive of sex-disguise used by Bibbiena in his Calandria, whereby twin brother and sister each dresses in the clothes of the other sex, is not employed by the dramatist to evoke particularly romantic sentiments, though future borrowers of the device found it a prolific source of such congenial material. Bibbiena’s hero can pay tribute to the new sense of love—“i compagni d’amore sono ira, ’odii, inimicizie, discordie, ruine, povertà, suspezione, inquietudine, morbi pernizios
nelli animi de' mortali. . . . Alla potenzia sua ogni cosa è suggetta. E non è maggior dolcezza che acquistare quel che si desidera in amore, senza il quale non è cosa alcuna perfetta né virtuosa né gentile” (Act i, sc. ii). But the idealism is mainly the matter of a few phrases. The hero is carrying on an intrigue with a married woman, who in her turn can also utter the hallowed phrases, but she is almost Plautine in her plans to make for her own son a marriage which will give her lover ampler opportunity to enjoy her company.

Nor will one expect much concession to romantic sentiment in the comedies of Machiavelli. His merit rests rather in the sting of his satire, and for this he found the older Roman tradition a sufficient comic instrument. But even Machiavelli endeavours to add a kind of moral recommendation to the unmoral figures he takes over from his Latin models. His Clizia, for instance, is the Casina of Plautus: but the young hero of it is not only given a much more extensive part to play, he is also favoured by a persistent moral justification. In his most effective comedy, Mandragola, Machiavelli’s story is as salacious as antiquity had demanded. But the lascivious persons in it are not held out for our approval; their doings are generally the occasion for direct satire. The plot tells how a husband is duped into urging his wife to accept the embraces of a lover; and it is at least significant of the times that Machiavelli, who could easily have made the wife a conventional consenting party, is at pains to have her trapped into innocent infidelity by the lying injunctions of her confessor.

It is in these ways that the prevailing sentiments and the current ideals of society were gradually creeping into comedy. In the upshot they transformed its governing spirit. Hardly ever are serious changes in Italian comedy consciously instituted. Yet in a generation or so, dramatists saw that the plays they were writing were in a sense new dramatic kinds. A dramatist like Gelli admits in the dedication to his La Sporta (1543) that he imitates Plautus as much as is possible (“il quale io ho il più ch’io posso imitato”); he confesses in the Prologue that there is ground for saying “ch’egli ha tolto a Plauto e Terenzio la maggior parte de le cose che ci sono.” But he immediately goes on to say that he brings into his play nothing but things which are a common feature of the life of his own time (“non tratta d’altro che di cose che tutto’l giorno accaggiono al viver nostro”). He commends himself especially for omitting such things as the
conventional mistaken identities and the recoveries of long lost children. “Non ci vedrete riconoscimenti di giovani o di fanciulle, che oggidi non occorre.” In practice, however, his plays are not dissimilar from those of his contemporaries—and they are the majority—who acclaim themselves for novelty, and for not stealing from Plautus and Terence. Occasionally their plea has considerable substance in it. Grazzini, for instance, in almost all his prologues, attacks those who stick to the mechanical devices and conventional situations of Latin comedy. He claims credit for his *Gelosia*, “perchè in essa non sono ritrovamenti. Chè, a dirne il vero, è gran cosa, gran meraviglia, anzi grandissimo miracolo, che di quante comedie nuove dallo assedio in qua, o publicamente o privatamente si sono recitate in Firenze, in tutte quante intervengano ritruovi, tutte forniscano in ritrovamenti: la qual cosa è tanto venuta a noja e in fastidio ai popoli, che, come sentano nell’argomento dire che nella presa d’alcuna città o nel sacco di qualche castello si siano smarrite o perdute bambine o fanciulli, fanno conto d’averle udite, e volentieri, se potessero con loro onore, se ne partirebbero; sapendo che tutte quante battono a un segno medesimo. E di qui si può conoscere, quanto questi cotali manchino di concetti e d’invenzione, veggendosi per lo più le loro comedie stiracchiate, grette e rubacchiate qua e là: e peggio ancora, che essi accozzano il vecchio col nuovo, e l’antico col moderno, e fanno un guazzabuglio e una mescolanza, che non ha né via né verso, né capo né coda; e facendo la scena città moderne, e rappresentando i tempi d’oggi, v’introducono usanze passate e vecchie, e costumi antichi e tralasciati: e si scusano poi col dire: Così fece Plauto, e così usarono Terenzio e Menandro; non si accorgendo che in Firenze, in Pisa, in Lucca non si vive come si faceva anticamente in Roma e in Atene. Traduchino in mal’ora, se non hanno invenzione, e non rattoppino e guastino l’altrui e il loro insieme: il senno, e la prudenza degli uomini è sapersi accomodare ai tempi.” There is a briefer statement of the same point of view in his prologue to *La Spirita*, which was one of the few plays translated into the corpus of Elizabethan comedy. And *La Strega* has an introductory scene between Prologue and Argument as interlocutors in an almost Jonsonian manner, which is a comprehensive plea for modernity and for a proper independence of ancient authority, whether that of critic or of dramatist. The case turns on the fundamental claim that the whole object of comedy is to
give its hearers an immediate and recognised pleasure: "oggi non si va più a veder recitare comedie per imparare a vivere, ma per piacere, per spasso, per diletto, o per passar maninconia e per rallegrarsi." So modern times must have modern comedies, adapted to contemporary habits. "Aristotile e Orazio viddero i tempi loro, ma i nostri sono d’un ’altra maniera: abbiamo altri costumi, altra religione e altro modo di vivere, e però bisogna fare le comedie in altro modo: in Firenze non si vive come si viveva già in Atene e in Roma; non ci sono schiavi, non ci usano figliuoli adottivi; non ci vengono i ruffiani a vender le fanciulle; nè i soldati dal di d’oggi nei sacchi delle città o de’ castelli pigliano più le bambine in fascia, e allevandole per lor figliuole, fanno loro la dote, ma attendono a rubare quanto più possono, e se per sorte capitasser loro nelle mani, o fanciulle grandicelle, o donne maritate (se già non pensassero cavarne buona taglia), torrebbero loro la virginità e l’onore.”

After such an emphatic assertion of the comic dramatist’s liberty, it is disappointing to find that his comedies avail themselves so little of the rights claimed. Grazzini was fond of writing prologues, and his Gelosia, amongst its three, has one specially addressed to the ladies in the audience, which, despite the conventional phrases in it, excellently indicates the probable consequences on comedy of the kind of society for which it was written. It compels conjecture about the influence of such “bellissime e onestissime donne” as appear to have prevailed on the audience. Italian comedy, one suspects, would inevitably adapt itself to the conditions which were bound to make room for the romantic heroine, the ideal, that is, of contemporay womanhood. She is indeed almost ready to step into the scenes of such a notorious unromantic as Pietro Aretino. His Ipocrito ends with a quintuple peal of wedding bells—“consento che Porfìria, Tansilla, Angizia, Svera et Annetta siano mogliere di Corebo, di Artico, di Tranquillo, di Prelio e di Zefiro” (Act V, sc. xxiii)—the very names defy the prosaic customs of the world; and in the course of the play its people have ardently delivered themselves of ecstatic romantic sentiments: “a chi ama è facile l’impossibile.” Zefiro speaks of his Annetta as “vita, luce et anima de la mia anima, de la mia luce e de la mia vita”: and seems to mean it. Naturally, Aretino must occasionally thrust his tongue into his cheek; but the smile is not necessarily a sceptic’s nor a mocker’s, for one of his own characters, devoutly reciting the articles of his faith,
admits the place of laughter in the service of love: "ma tornando a Cupido, non lo prenda a servire chi non ha valore e pazienza, perocché egli è un Dio che si alimenta non meno di generosità e di fatica che di riso e di pianto" (Act ii, sc. iv). And the speaker goes on to recount how he has served love with propitiatory quests and ventures which would have qualified the bravest mediaeval knight to expect reward from the most exacting mediaeval maiden: Aretino, indeed, clearly merits the casual epithet our Gabriel Harvey applied to his "courting" comedies. But with all his audacity, Aretino too easily accepts the restrictions which kept the parts of his ladies small in extent and insignificant in effect, although he allows himself at times the sixteen-century device which was meant to accept the traditional usage and yet extend to women a larger liberty for appearing in comedy: they are debarred from a free appearance on the streets of the stage, but they may appear freely at the windows of their houses and discourse with those below.

In fine, then, though Italian comedy in the sixteenth century never emancipated itself sufficiently from its inherited Roman tradition and from its conventional schemes and practices, to become the mirror of the contemporary ideals and sentiments which were freely reflected in English romantic comedy, it nevertheless provides ample indication of the trend in development, and of the inevitability of some such accommodation as was attempted in the romantic comedy of Shakespeare.

Not many English comedies of the sixteenth century are built directly on Italian models. But besides the three printed in Mr. Warwick Bond's *Early Plays from the Italian*, there is a fourth, *The Two Italian Gentlemen*, printed probably in 1584, and translated with considerable adaptation from Pasqualigo's *Il Fedele* (c. 1575) which had also served Abraham Fraunce as a source for his Latin play, *Victoria* (c. 1583). The remarkable fact about the English translators' adaptations is that in almost every respect they excise the more squalid and unromantic episodes of the original, to convert the story into a romantic play of love, rivalry and reconciliation. The juxtaposition of the Italian and the English versions excellently indicates the rôle of Italian drama in the sixteenth century. Debarred by its own conventions from achieving a definitively romantic comedy, it is nevertheless providing an assortment of circumstance and situation which cry out for such romantic development as English
dramatists were congenially inclined to supply. This makes no particular claim for *The Two Italian Gentlemen* as a play; it is indeed a crude and unsuccessful attempt to impose romantic sentiment on a tale originally invented to express the coarser animal passions of men and women.

But there are in Italian one or two plays, apart from the so-called tragi-comedies, in which the movement towards romantic comedy is particularly marked. There is Piccolomini’s *Amor Costante* (1536) and the anonymous *Gli’Ingannati* (1537). *Amor Costante* is literally what its title implies, the representation of ideally constant lovers. The academicians who presented it, duly avowed themselves corporately “esser sciavo, servo affezionato e svizzerato di queste donne” who were their guests at the performance, and for whom the comedy was written. Their choice of theme is in accord with the principle enunciated in the play:

“Oh felicissima coppia d’amanti! oh amor costante! oh bellissimo caso da farni sopra una comedia eccellentissima!” (Act ii, sc. iii).

The comedy is not, however, well provided with essentially dramatic matter. There is much discourse at length, and a deal of sentimental narrative. But it represents its heroes and their ladies as true patterns of lovers in romance. Ferrante, one of its heroes, has suffered adventures in the right romantic key. “Con questa resoluzione, montati, una notte, in una barchetta preparata da due amici miei, per gran pesa di mare felicemente navigammo. Ma la fortuna, che sempre s’oppone ai bei disegni de li inamorati, volse che, come funnó nei mari di Pisa, fussemo assaliti da quattro fuste di mori da le quali funnó messi in mezzo e, doppo che i miei compagni, valorosamente combattendo, furon morti ed io gravemente ferito, venne ogni cosa in man de’ mori. E già, in quel mezzo che combattemmo, avea una fusta di quelle, in mia presenza, rapita per forza la mia Ginevra e portata via, non giovando alla meschina el pregarli o che l’uccidessero o che non la dividessero da me” (Act ii, sc. iii). Love is the object of life, and its manifestations, its effects, and its obligations are told much in the way of Shakespeare’s *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Of one young hero we hear from his servant—“egli pochissimo mangia, la maggior parte del tempo piange e si lamenta; sempre sta fisso in un medesimo pensiero il quale, profondissimo, continuamente gli rode l’animo; non dorme un’ora di tutta la notte, e quella in mille pezzi, perciòché non
The young man himself tells us how he feels: "Io so pur ch'io l'amo quanto amar si possa già mai. Io so pur che non è rimasto altro pensier in me che di servirla e odorarla con quella nettezza di fede che per me sia possibile, tener sempre spogliata l'anima dell'amor di ogni altra donna, aver fermo proposito, o bene o male ch'ella mi faccia, che tanto duri in me l'amor di lei quanto la vita, esser sempre diffensor dell' onor suo, non pensar mai cosa che le dispiaccia, spendere tutti quegli anni che mi restano per amor suo, con tanta fermezza che in rarissimi si troverebbe" (Act I, sc. ix). And another of these fine young men rhapsodises of himself—"che tu sei pur el più felice uomo del mondo. Oh beato te! oh consolazion grandissima! lieto, divino, fortunatissimo! oh allegrezza incomparabile! O Dio, o stelle, o sole, o luna!" (Act II, sc. iii). Though we are not vouchsafed much direct knowledge of the heroines of the play, we are given to understand that they too live for true love alone. Suited to this exalted sense of fidelity in love, there is an absolute recognition of other loyalties in life, private and political, and friendship imposes a lifelong and unquestioning devotion: "non si trova al mondo il maggior tesoro che la pura, Vera e libera fedeltà" (Act III, sc. xiii). There is a soldier in Amor Costante whose service to his friend and whose shock at the suspicion of his friend's disloyalty is not unlike that of the sea-captain who brings Viola into Twelfth Night. A no less striking feature of Amor Costante is that, as in Shakespeare's comedies, the lower characters are allowed to display their inferiority by humorous mocking of the faith in which their masters live. The parasite Squazza, for instance, is almost Falstaffian in his contempt for what to him are the unsubstantial recompenses of a life of love. "Quanto io mi rido di questi locchi innamorati che si lassan perdere tanto in questa lor pazzia che non mangiano e non beon mai! Oh poverelli, di quanto ben son privi! ... Questa è la beatitudine che si può aver in questo mondo. Tutti gli altri piaceri son cose vane. Perché, se tu pigli la musica, tutto è aria e fiato, che niente t'entra in corpo. L'aver denari confessò che gli è piacere, perché quelli tu puoi proveder da mangiare; chè, altrimenti, io non saprei che farmene. Se noi parliam dell'amore, peggio che peggio; ch'io non so, per me, considerare che consolazion che s'abbin costoro di spender tutto il lor tempo in andare stringatelli, sprofumati, con le calze tirate, con la braghetta in punto,
con la camiscia stampata, con la persona ferma acciò che, torcendosi
una stringa, non toccasse l'altra; fare una sberrettata alla dama, dirgli
un motto per una strada cogliendola all'improvista ad un cantone,
mirandola un tratto sott'occhio, e lei miri te, gittarli quattro limoni,
farsene render uno e baciarlo... etc. Tutte queste cose io no so
a che diavol di fine che se le faccino, i merloni... Ma del mangiare
tutto el contrario interviene, ché tuttavia ti sa meglio" (Act 11, sc. viii).

In some ways, Gli Ingannati is even closer to the English type.
Like Amor Costante, it is an offering by an Italian academy to the
ladies of its district. At points it is so close to the English kind that
Shakespeare is alleged to have reflected something from it in his
Twelfth Night. But the matter of it had wide European currency.
It was translated into French (1543), adapted for the French stage
(1549), and for the Spanish (1556). A Latin version appears in
England as the Laelia played at Cambridge in 1595, whilst its story
is also to be found in the novels of Italy and France and in our
English Historie of Apolonus and Silla, by Barnabe Riche (1581).
It is, perhaps, the best of sixteenth-century Italian comedies, early in
date though it be. Not only does it employ its story to excellent
dramatic effect; it infuses into its romantic incidents something of the
sanity of a mature comic spirit. Its Cesario, moreover (who, of
course, is not so called), not only has the active rôle assigned to Viola
by Shakespeare, but has also something of Viola's capacity for profiting
from her rich and romantic intuitions without endangering the
native sanity of her comprehension of circumstance.

But now to return from the Italians to our English plays, and
particularly to the Shrew series, or at least to that part of the Shrew
plays which tells of the wooing of the shrew's sister. It is in this part
that The Taming of A Shrew differs most extensively from The
Taming of the Shrew. The non-Shakespearian version is artistically
the crudest kind of medley. Though its other half is the boisterous
taming of a shrew, its wooing plot is in the most flagrant or even
fatuous romantic manner. The shrew in it has two sisters, not one,
as has Shakespeare's Katharine. These two are wooed in stilted
romantic sentiments by two conventional lovers. There is no dramatic
rivalry, nothing to impede the steady flow of high falutin' literary
devotion. It includes from The Supposes the further motive of a
servant deliberately disguised as an additional wooer; but he is only
employed to pay suit to the shrew, and so leave her sisters free to enjoy the uninterrupted cooing of their lovers. Every comic incident of its original in Ariosto is either dropped or clumsily perverted to a use which enlarges the fatuous romanticism of its dominant temper. The lover's old father, for instance, is taken over; but only to add to the conventional harmonies of the concluding marriage feast. And already one has endured a surfeit of these romantic wooings. This, for instance, is how they do it:

**Polidor.** Come faire Emelia my louelie loue,  
Brighter then the burnish pallass of the sunne,  
The eie-sight of the glorious firmament,  
In whose bright lookes sparkles the radiant fire,  
Wilie Prometheus silie stole from Ioue,  
Infusing breath, life, motion, soule,  
To everie obiect striken by thine eies.  
Oh faire Emelia I pine for thee,  
And either must enjoy thy loue or die.

**Emelia.** Fie man, I know you will not die for loue.  
Ah Polidor thou needst not to complaine,  
Eternall heaven sooner be dissolvde,  
And all that pearseth Phebus silver eie,  
Before such hap befall to Polidor.

**Polidor.** Thanks faire Emelia for these sweet words,  
But what saith Phylena to hir friend?

**Phylena.** Why I am buying marchandise of him.  
**Aurelius.** Mistresse you shall not need to buie of me,  
For when I crost the bubling Canibey,  
And sailde along the Cristall Helispont,  
I filde my cofers of the wealthie mines,  
Where I did cause Millions of labouring Moores  
To undermine the cauernes of the earth,  
To seeke for strange and new found pretious stones,  
And diue into the sea to gather pearle,  
As faire as Iuno offered Priams sonne,  
And you shall take your liberall choice of all.

(Sc. vi.)

Or in more settled moods of unmitigated rapture:

**Polidor.** Faire Emelia sommers sun bright Queene,  
Brighter of hew then is the burning clime,  
Where Phæbus in his bright æquator sits,  
Creating gold and pressious minnerals,  
What would Emelia doo? if I were forst  
To leave faire Athens and to range the world.
Emelia. Should thou assay to scale the seate of Ioue,
Mounting the suttle ayrie regions
Or be snatcht up as erste was Ganimed,
Loue should give winges unto my swift desires,
And prune my thoughts that I would follow thee,
Or fall and perish as did Icarus.

Aurelius. Sweetly resolued, faire Emelia.

and so on for fifty more lines of golden syrop as glucosic and as sticky, ending:

Sweet Phylena bewties mynerall,
From whence the sun exhales his glorious shine,
And clad the heaven in thy reflected raies,
And now my liefest loue, the time drawes nie,
That Himen mounted in his saffron robe,
Must with his torches waight upon thy traine,
As Hellens brothers on the horned Moone,
Now Iuno to thy number shall I adde,
The fairest bride that ever Marchant had.

(Sc. xiv.)

Even the two gentlemen of Verona are nearer humanity than these, and the ludicrousness of their performance is emphasised by its juxtaposition with such men and women as a tamer and a shrew to be tamed. Yet even at the end of The Taming of A Shrew the taming makes not the slightest diminution of her sisters' conjugal felicities.

There is a far finer dramatic instinct in Shakespeare's Taming of the Shrew. Bianca is never set adrift in the wide ocean of romantic emotion. She is not allowed to grow too far beyond the stock from which she springs, the heroine of Ariosto's Suppositi. Her retinue of admirers is a little larger than is that of Ariosto's lady, for all her three are genuine wooers. But almost as much as Ariosto's, her wooers are deprived of the licence, so riotously enjoyed by those in The Taming of A Shrew, to dissolve their sugary hearts in luscious volubility. Bianca's lovers are indeed granted somewhat larger liberty of romantic utterance than are their counterparts in Ariosto's Suppositi. Lucentio is enthralled when he sees her coral lips to move: everything attaching to her is sweet and sacred, and the very air about her is perfumed by her breath. Hortensio, loving with all affection, and with his lute, has but two notes of the gamut—"show pity, or I die." But clearly these Anglo-Italian lovers are not yet
initiated into the full ritual. They are mostly occupied with planning opportunities to express a faith which has not yet become articulate. Love remains more an intrigue than a religion. Hence the convenience of the classical machinery. Wily, scheming men-servants, disguises to procure mistaken identifications, inopportune coincidences to be encountered by still further reaches of unfeeling cunning—these are the traditional weapons of classical comedy. Though the old men of the piece are much more sympathetic and amenable than Latin comedy made them, they are still treated with the brutal callousness which formerly had its legitimate occasion. Fathers in Roman comedy deserved the disciplinary measures which Vicentio has now to suffer, though here his behaviour is exemplary. Tranio is straight from Plautus and from Terence, still practising his customary rôle of beguiling the old folks in the interests of their amorous sons and daughters. If at the outset of the play Lucentio allows Tranio less initiative than is commonly possessed by his ancient prototype (for the disguise is Lucentio’s own idea, and his having the wits to come by it, is part of the unconsciously increasing importance of the amorous young man as he grows from his subordinate part in Roman comedy to the predominant one in modern plays) yet the course of the incidents draws more and more largely on Tranio’s own ingenuity. Crumio and Biondello bear their Roman origin unmistakably stamped on their features. Theirs is the traditional stupidity of “fond reasoning,” and of clumsy and occasionally unclean quibbling. Theirs, too, are the customary rewards of their type, good sound thwackings with stick or rope. Crumio is Petruchio’s servant, however, and not Lucentio’s. But his fellowship with Tranio is a strong link between the wooers of Bianca and the tamer of Katharine. Through such alliance, Tranio is a curb on their romantic sentiments. His natural task is to stir his master from futile trances of ecstatic adoration:

I pray, awake, sir, if you love the maid,  
Bend thoughts and wits to achieve her.

It is Tranio, too, who encourages the rival lovers frequently to dispense with prescribed forms of jealous enmity, for the more congenial ways of passing an afternoon in quaffing carouses to their lady’s health:

Do as adversaries do in law,  
Strive mightily, but eat and drink as friends.
There is virtue in this plan. For even though the rival lovers who maintain it so far forth as friends are not completely cured of the desire to have to’t afresh in the conventional tilts of rivalry in love, there is bound to be some mitigation of their knight-errantry. Gremio will find a feast no little compensation for the loss of a mistress, and Hortensio will discover that a widow who is wealthy and loving, if not a paragon of beauty, is nevertheless a worthier prize than a disdainful maiden who gives her favours elsewhere. Thus is Thurio of the Two Gentlemen of Verona so soon justified of his descendants. Bianca herself suffers a surprising metamorphosis when she frames her manners to the new regime. She begins as the retiring maiden whose modesty and silence stand as pattern of “maid’s mild behaviour and sobriety.” She cowers timorously before he cantankerous sister, humbly subscribing herself in a quite uncovenanted submission to Katharine’s pleasure. Yet in the end, she has acquired a most unmaidenly taste in repartee, and a stiff-necked reluctance to do anything her lawful husband lovingly entreats her to do.

But if romance in Bianca’s wooing is thus largely attenuated, it is completely destroyed in Katharine’s. Pollution penetrates to the innermost sanctum of romantic holies. The ritual of wooing is exposed to boisterous mockery. It was a stroke of audacious profanity to take the brutal rollicking temper of classical comedy which knew not love, and to impose it as the ruling air on a story which comprises nothing but the incidents of courtship. Love becomes a matter of business, not of sentiment. “Wealth is the burden of my wooing dance” declares Petruchio, who has come to wive it wealthily in Padua. Courtship should be set within a lawyer’s office, not in moonlit pleasances. “Let specialties be therefore drawn between us, that covenants may be kept on either hand.” Wooing itself is not with flowers and song and sonnet, but with discordant argument and fistcuffs. At times in the procedure the wooer may find it opportune to use the traditional flattery of the code, but this is merely a matter of tactics, not of faith. The atmosphere of devotion has entirely disappeared. Even the marriage ceremony is riotously profaned. Obviously there is here no bid for love, but for subjugation.

Naturally, a tale of taming makes both the tamer and the tamed more like dwellers in a menagerie than in the polite world. Yet even such a brutal insistence on the animal in man is no unhealthy symptom
in an author whose Gentlemen of Verona had been built on the facile assumption that men are near allied to angels. Petruchio is a madcap rufian and a swearing Jack. His life has been a boisterous one. An adventurer on land and seas, whose music is the roar of lions, the chafe of waves puffed up with winds, great ordnance in the field and heaven's artillery thundering in the skies, he has the swaggering insouciance, the brutal strength, and the animal preferences which fit him for the tamning. Katharine is less intelligible. She is intolerably curst and shrewd and froward so beyond all measure, that although her extravagant bullying of her sister and of her teacher is within her physical compass, her complaint that her father is committing her to an old maid's life, and her lament that she will sit and weep until she finds occasion of revenge, seem widely out of character. Even more disconcerting are the tears she sheds because she anticipates that Petruchio will fail her at the church, or will surely overlook some item or other of the arrangements ordained by fashionable propriety for a bourgeois wedding. A Katharine of such nature needs no taming. She needs a dietary. After that, a moderate dress-allowance will bribe her into absolute submission. She will place her hands below her husband's foot in token of her duty.

Petruchio is different from the wooers of romance, because he remembers the grocer, the butcher, and the tailor. He drags love out of heaven, and brings it down to earth. To the chivalrous, love is a state of worship; to him, it is a problem of wiving. Its object is not primarily a search for spiritual bliss in the contemplation of the beloved. It seeks merely a guarantee of domestic comfort, by securing a Kate conformable to other household cates, a wife who will be as "his house and as his household stuff." A condition of this is naturally, that he must be master of what is his own. Courtship is merely incidental to the attainment of this ease and settlement. It is not of itself the business of a life-time—"I come not every day to woo." And as the world knows, it may be the matter of a casual moment—"I knew a wench married in an afternoon as she went to the garden for parsley to stuff a rabbit." But casual or deliberate, it keeps a main eye on the state to which it is itself merely preparatory—"there be good fellows in the world, an a man could light on them, would take her with all her faults, and money enough." Whether it proceed by sweet words and by kisses, or by combing noodles with
a three-legged stool, the test of its worth is invariable and plain; it is its worth as a method of securing a guarantee of "peace and love and quiet life" at the domestic hearth of man and wife. The mind which takes its love and courtship so is one which claims to take the world for what it is and to accept the conditions life imposes on the living of it. It is a matter-of-fact recognition of the practical and the expedient. It is rudimentary common sense—rudimentary, however, because though at some stage in his development, man may have been able to conduct his wiving so, it is apparent that, except in moments of temporary revolt, no Elizabethan and no modern could really hold to the underlying assumption that marriage is mainly an economic arrangement. The Taming of the Shrew gives Shakespeare momentary ease of the burden of romance; but only by denying its existence. It does not solve his problem; it merely shelves it. But he will return to the facts of Elizabethan experience in the more characteristic mood which we shall find in A Midsummer Night's Dream. In the meantime, this at least can be claimed: that though for the moment his mood was to exhibit the love of woman more in the spirit of the Roman market-place than in that of his own modern Europe, he has at least allowed his artistic sense to make the proper accommodation in the temper of every part of his play. No such claim can be made for the author of The Taming of A Shrew.