

# PATRONAGE AT THE COURT OF HENRY VIII : THE CASE OF SIR RALPH EGERTON OF RIDLEY<sup>1</sup>

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IN the church of St. Boniface in the Cheshire village of Bunbury lies the Ridley Chapel. Now an empty shell with only the coloured walls remaining, it was originally a splendid erection.<sup>2</sup> Begun in 1527 by Sir Ralph Egerton of Ridley and completed under the terms of his will, it was served by two priests for whom Egerton built what still survives as the Old School House at Bunbury. The roof of the chantry was decorated with Sir Ralph's shields of arms and those of his wife, Margaret Bassett of Blore in Staffordshire, grouped around the monogram of the Blessed Virgin. Two statues stood by the altar, and in the middle of the chapel was the tomb of Sir Ralph and Lady Margaret with a memorial brass on the top. But the splendour of Sir Ralph's foundation was not to last. The tomb is no more; the statues survive only in their pedestals, and the magnificent roof now adorns a barn on a nearby farm. For Sir Ralph's descendants, too, the bright prospects of 1527 became dimmed, and by the mid-seventeenth century the Egertons of Ridley were bankrupt and gone.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as Sir Ralph's contemporaries would have agreed, it is for history to rescue the great man from oblivion, and in recovering the glory of Sir Ralph Egerton, the twentieth century can discover what the recipe was for success in Tudor England.

Ralph Egerton was only a Cheshireman by the narrowest of margins. The heralds and antiquaries suggest that he belonged to the Egertons of Egerton, but he seem, rather, to have belonged to the Egertons of Wrinehill, a village which

<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was read to the Chester Branch of the Historical Association in May 1968.

<sup>2</sup> M. H. Ridgway, "Bunbury Parish Church", *Cheshire Round*, i, no. 4 (July 1964), 93-94; George Ormerod, *History of the county palatine and city of Chester*, ii (ed. T. Helsby, 1882), 264.

<sup>3</sup> Ormerod, ii. 300; R. N. Dore, *The Civil Wars in Cheshire* (1966), pp. 21-22.

straddled the Cheshire-Staffordshire border.<sup>1</sup> The family was one of standing ; Ralph's father, Hugh Egerton " of the Wryme Hill ", esquire, was the son and heir of Ralph Egerton, M.P. and sheriff for Staffordshire.<sup>2</sup> Hugh served on many Staffordshire commissions and himself became sheriff in 1476 ; he died on 28 April 1505, about eighty years old.<sup>3</sup> The future Sir Ralph was, however, only a younger son, probably by a second wife ; Hugh's son and heir John is described as fifty or sixty years old in 1505, when Ralph was only a young man.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ormerod, ii. 301, 628, makes Ralph the second son of Philip Egerton of Egerton, or of John Egerton of Egerton (d. 1459). *The Visitation of Cheshire, 1580* (ed. J. P. Rylands (Harleian Soc., 1882), pp. 96-97) makes him the son of Philip Egerton of Egerton and the Egertons of Wrinehill descend from a common ancestor in the reign of Edward II ; the latter point appears to be correct. Wrinehill is now in Staffordshire, but cf. *Cal[endar of] Anc[ient] Deeds*, iv. A6766 ; *ibid.* v. A11282, A11283, C3568.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* vi. C6166 ; J. C. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament, Biographies of Members of the Commons House, 1439-1509* (1936), pp. 293-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Cal[endar of] Fine Rolls, 1461-1471*, pp. 100, 105 ; *Cal. Fine Rolls, 1471-1485*, no. 373 ; *Cal[endar of] Pat[ent] Rolls, 1476-1485*, p. 354 ; *Cal[endar of] Inq[uisitions] Post Mortem, [Henry VII]*, ii. no. 933.

<sup>4</sup> *Cal. Inq. Post Mortem*, ii. 933 ; " *Cal[endar of the] Recog[nisance] Rolls [Cheshire and Flint], Hen[ry] VIII* ", *Annual Reports of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, xxxix (1878), App. I, p.110. Hugh mentions Ralph as one of his younger sons in his will, 18 April 1486 (P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice], C146/4583 ; cf. *Cal. Anc. Deeds*, vi. 4583), but Ralph does not appear among the reversionary beneficiaries of the Egerton entail with the rest of Hugh's sons ; Hugh listed his younger sons as Raufe, Rondull and Robert, but the estate passed from the heir, John, to Randolph with reversion to Robert (*Cal. Anc. Deeds*, v. A11247 ; *ibid.* vi. 7003 ; " *Cal. Recog. Rolls, Hen. VIII* ", p. 111. The mention of Ralph in the reversion given in *Cal. Anc. Deeds*, i. C1301 is a mistake for Randolph, see P.R.O., C146/1301). Ralph, son of Hugh Egerton, was alive in the summer of 1504 (P.R.O., CP40/968, m.187) and so cannot be identified with the Ralph Egerton who was active in Northwich in the 1480s and 1490s and died in 1497 (" *Cal[endar of] Recog[nisance] Rolls [of Cheshire], Hen[ry] IV to Hen[ry] VII* ", *Annual Reports of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, xxxvii (1876), App. II, pp. 261, 457, 567-8 ; P.R.O., Chester 3/54, 12 Henry VII no. 1). This Ralph was the father of William Egerton (see p. 369, n. 2) and was probably the brother of Hugh Egerton of Wrinehill (*Cal. Anc. Deeds*, vi. C4197). Confirmation that Ralph son of Hugh, and Ralph Egerton of Ridley are one and the same person is offered by the episode at Blore in 1502 (see p. 348, n.1) and the bequest of Hugh to his son Ralph (see p. 349, n. 4). The only explanation which would make Ralph a legitimate son of Hugh (he is not called *bastardus*, P.R.O., KB27/981, mm. 100, 100d) and yet keep him out of the heirs male is to suppose that he was a son by Hugh's second wife. This would also explain the age gap between John the

Ralph Egerton's first appearance of any importance was in February 1502. With his father and a number of other relations he was present at the home of William Bassett at Blore in Staffordshire when it was overrun by a hundred of the retainers of the Vernon family, led by Roger Vernon, son and heir to Sir Henry Vernon of Haddon. Their objective was Bassett's niece, Margaret, who was later to be Ralph Egerton's wife.<sup>1</sup> The composition of the party of visitors to Blore so violently disrupted, and the fact that Ralph and Margaret were ultimately married, both suggest that the Vernons had forestalled a betrothal or even a wedding. Instead of Egerton, Margaret was now forced to marry Roger Vernon. Margaret was certainly a bride worth seeking. As the daughter and heiress of William Bassett's deceased elder brother, Ralph, she was the inheritor of all of the family's fortune which was not settled on the heirs male, notably the property of her grandmother Joan, the heiress of Sir John Biron.<sup>2</sup> In all, Margaret was to claim later, she was worth £40 a year.<sup>3</sup> To this she had added the profits of an advantageous first marriage. In 1498, or thereabouts, she became the third wife of an important Leicestershire serjeant-at-law, Thomas Kebell, and his death in 1500 had left her entitled to a considerable interest in his estates.<sup>4</sup> Whether Roger Vernon's abduction

eldest son and Ralph; Hugh's marriage to Margaret Dutton took place in 1446 (*Cal. Anc. Deeds*, vi. C4680) and even a late son of this marriage would hardly be only beginning his career about 1500. The hypothesis would also explain the dispensation for Ralph's marriage (see p. 349, n. 3). No second marriage, however, is recorded. Hugh's wife in 1486 was still named Margaret (*Cal. Anc. Deeds*, vi. C4583) and the *Visitation of Cheshire, 1580*, p. 97 (followed by Wedgwood, p. 293) states that his first wife died in 1499. These objections, however, are hardly insuperable.

<sup>1</sup> A full reconstruction of this episode will appear in the author's forthcoming book, *The Common Lawyers of Pre-Reformation England—Thomas Kebell, A Case Study*. The particular association of Egerton with the affair is found in P.R.O., KB27/981, mm. 100, 100d.

<sup>2</sup> *The Visitation of Staffordschire . . . 1583* (ed. H. S. Grazebrook (William Salt Arch. Soc., iii, no. 2, 1882)), p. 46; *Visitation of Cheshire, 1580*, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> P.R.O., C1/329/51; that Margaret's inheritance was from her Biron ancestry is suggested by Ralph Egerton's will, P[rerogative]C[ourt of]C[anterbury], 33 Porch.

<sup>4</sup> The match was arranged by Joan Bassett after the death of her husband William Bassett the elder in November 1497, P.C.C., 3 Moone; Wiltshire Record Office 88:5, 17a.; *Cal. Inq. Post Mortem*, ii, no. 487; P.R.O., C1/329/51-54, C142/56/51; see n.1 above.

was the reaction of a disappointed suitor is not clear, but Ralph Egerton must have been a formidable rival, for Margaret's mother was Ralph's half-sister Eleanor.<sup>1</sup>

After the Vernons had ridden off with their prize, Eleanor Bassett mounted a pursuit, and Hugh and Ralph Egerton both joined in. They were, however, heavily outnumbered and failed to rescue Margaret, and their hot pursuit brought them into difficulty later. Once the charges of riot and abduction which they brought against the raiders had been dismissed with the help of Vernon influence, it became possible to allege that the Bassett pursuit was the real riot and their allegations against Roger and his men the result of conspiracy. The court of king's bench had considerable difficulty with the case, but eventually Margaret's supporters were discharged.<sup>2</sup> Margaret, in the meanwhile, refused to acquiesce in her fate, escaped to London and, after seven years of persistent litigation, eventually secured her freedom. In June 1509, she and Ralph Egerton were dispensed of their blood relationship and married.<sup>3</sup>

While his future wife was struggling to get free from Vernon, Ralph was concerned with the problem of every younger son, what to do for a career. In 1496 his father had made him independent by the gift of some salt pans in Nantwich, but "one wich of six leads" was only a beginning, and by 1501 Ralph is found in the service of Arthur, Prince of Wales, as the marshal of his hall, and receiving the grant of a wardship.<sup>4</sup> Arthur died in 1502, but Egerton succeeded in transferring to the royal court. Assuming, as tradition suggests, that he was a Stanley client, Ralph was probably introduced to Henry VII before 1504 by

<sup>1</sup> For the marriage settlement of Eleanor Egerton and Ralph Bassett in 1474 see *H[istorical] M[anuscripts] C[ommission]*, 11 Rep., App. VII (1888), 136.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., KB27/981, mm. 100, 100d; *Year Books*, Michaelmas 20 Henry VII, fol. 2; Robert Keilwey, *Reports d'ascuns Cases* (1688), fol. 81v.

<sup>3</sup> By the papal nuncio for relationship within three and four degrees (*H.M.C.*, 11 Rep., App. VII, 135). Although Margaret was Ralph's niece by the half blood, the connection is hardly greater than between first cousins.

<sup>4</sup> "Cal. Recog. Rolls, Hen. VIII", p. 110; "Cal[endar of] Warrants [etc.] Chester, [Henry VI to Elizabeth]", *Annual Reports of the Deputy Keeper of Public Records*, xxvi (1865), App. II, p. 22; "Cal. Recog. Rolls, Hen. IV to Hen. VII", p. 784. Ralph Egerton refers in his will to his wich-houses in Nantwich (P.C.C., 33 Porch).

which time Thomas Stanley, Earl of Derby, and his adult son Lord Strange, had both died.<sup>1</sup> Egerton walked with other members of the royal household in Henry VII's funeral procession, and took his place with the "gentlemen ushers, daily waiters" at the coronation of the new king.<sup>2</sup> The accession of Henry VIII, however, revolutionized Ralph's prospects. His physical prowess was bound to appeal to the young king, and the time was opportune for a courtier from the west midlands. Several royal offices in Lancashire and Cheshire had fallen vacant after the disgrace of William Smith, clerk of the wardrobe, on account of his association with Empson and Dudley, and who better for those posts in Cheshire than Ralph Egerton.<sup>3</sup> Within weeks of Henry's accession Ralph had succeeded Smith as keeper of the lordship of Ridley, and in November 1509 as receiver of the lands in Cheshire forfeited by Lord Audley and Lord Lovell.<sup>4</sup> Other opportunities came thick and fast. Already in July 1509 he had a joint grant with Roger Mainwaring for life in survivorship of the post of escheator of the county palatine of Chester.<sup>5</sup> By the end of 1512—two years and eight months from Henry VIII's accession—Egerton was also lessee of the manors of Aldford, Etchells and Alderley, lessee of the prisage on wine and fuel in Chester and Cheshire, constable, keeper and porter of Chester Castle and possessor of an annuity from the fee-farm of Ludlow of £24 13s. 4d., backdated to the beginning of the reign.<sup>6</sup> He also had the reversion of the lease of the manor of Shotwick, near Chester, with its park and Dee

<sup>1</sup> For the Stanley tradition, see pp. 352-54. The new earl was a minor.

<sup>2</sup> *L[etters] and P[apers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII]*, i. pp. 13, 42. The second (1920) edition of this volume has been used.

<sup>3</sup> There can be no doubt that William Smith of the Council Learned, William Smith, groom of the wardrobe and the "Smith" who was implicated with Empson and Dudley were one and the same (C. G. Bayne, *Select Cases in the Council of Henry VII* (Selden Soc., 1958), pp. xxv-xxvi; R. Somerville, "The king's council learned in the law", *English Historical Review*, liv (1939), 428-9 and *A History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, i (1953), 466, 546).

<sup>4</sup> *L. and P.*, i. 94 (14), 257 (65). The patent for Ridley was issued to Smith in 1494 and in 1510 he was pardoned as "late of Ridley" (*ibid.* i. 438 (4m. 26)).

<sup>5</sup> "List of Welsh Officers", *Annual Reports of the Deputy Keeper of Public Records*, xxxi (1870), App. III, p. 195.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 195; *L. and P.*, i. 485(9), 651(2), 924(28), 1365(25), 1462(12).

fisheries, and the next presentation to the rectory of Billing Magna in Lincolnshire, and he had bought a share in the keepership of Wigmore Park, now in Herefordshire.<sup>1</sup>

Rewards at court had, naturally enough, to be worked for. Ralph's first public opportunity to confirm the king's good opinion came in the summer of 1510. On 22 May, two "gentlemen" (one presumes Henry VIII and Sir Edward Knevet), with two others as "aids" (Charles Brandon and Sir Thomas Knevet), challenged all comers at the barriers, the dismounted equivalent of the joust.<sup>2</sup> A green tree was set up on a lawn at Greenwich carrying a white shield for all aspirants to subscribe, and among those who did so was Ralph Egerton. It fell to him to fight Charles Brandon on the third day of the feat, Saturday 1 June, and Ralph clearly acquitted himself satisfactorily.<sup>3</sup> An opportunity of a more serious sort came in 1513 when Henry VIII in person invaded France and appointed Ralph Egerton as his standard-bearer. In past wars this post had been a dangerous one, and Egerton was assigned an infantry company of his own; next to the king, at the centre of the "middle-ward" of the army, the standard was the focus of the host.<sup>4</sup> But in the event, military responsibilities were to be very much second to ceremonial ones; the slow march through Artois and Flanders was for the royal entourage more like a progress than an invasion, and meticulous attention to the sovereign promised greater rewards than martial valour.<sup>5</sup> On 16 August, as the English army besieged Therouenne, occurred the scrambling cavalry skirmish which the Tudors dignified as the "Battle of the Spurs" but Egerton was probably as far away from any actual combat as his royal master.<sup>6</sup> Ormerod is presumably referring to this action when he reports that Egerton took the French standard at Tournai and there certainly were standards taken; John Taylor, however, in his major account of the battle makes no mention of any such exploit.<sup>7</sup> A week after the battle, Therouenne surrendered, and the next objective, the city of Tournai,

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. i. 784(8), 1365(25), 1524(13).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. i. 467.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. i. App. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. i. 2053, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 (i), (ii).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. i. 2295.

<sup>6</sup> C. G. Cruickshank, *Army Royal* (1969), p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> B. M. Cotton MS. Cleopatra C v, fos. 64 ff.

on 23 September. Henry made a triumphal entry, and after a solemn *Te Deum* in the cathedral, marked the victorious conclusion of his campaign by knighting forty-nine "valiant esquires", among them his standard-bearer, now "Sir Ralph Egerton, knight".<sup>1</sup>

It was while the English were encamped at Tournai that news reached them of the Scottish débâcle at Flodden on 9 September. Henry's reception of the news and the dissensions it caused in the English camp gave rise to *A Ballate of the Battalle of Floden Feeld foughte betwene the Earle of Surrey and the King of Skotes*.<sup>2</sup> That there was dissention is beyond doubt, and so too the cause. Hall records that the king "had a secret letter that the Cheshire men fled from Sir Edmund Howard, which letter caused great heart-burning and many words", and this report is probably the extant "Articles of battle between the King of Scots and the Earl of Surrey" which states that 1,000 Cheshiremen, 500 from Lancashire and many gentlemen of Yorkshire deserted.<sup>3</sup> Hall says that "the king thankfully accepted all things and would no man to be dispraised" but not so the ballad. Henry, according to this, examines the bearer of Surrey's letter, asking "who fought and who fled, who was false and who was true", and the messenger reports the flight of the Cheshire and Lancashire troops; none of the Earl of Derby's men "durste looke his enemye vpon".<sup>4</sup> The king sends for Derby who is with the English army, but in the meantime there is an interruption:

Then bespake Sir Raphe Egerton, the knight,  
And lowlye kneeled vpon his knee,  
And said, ' My soueraigne lord King Henry,  
Yf it like your Grace to pardon me,

<sup>1</sup> Edward Hall, *Chronicle* (ed. Charles Whibley, 1904), i. 116; *L. and P.*, i. 2301. The dating of the different accounts does not tally.

<sup>2</sup> One version of this, derived from B.M. Harleian MSS. 293 and 367, was printed as Appendix xii of Henry Weber, *The Ballad of Flodden Field* (1808). The text of the fuller Percy Manuscript with a collation with the Harleian texts appears in [*The English and Scottish*] *Popular Ballads*, iii (ed. F. J. Child, 1889, repr. 1957), 353-62.

<sup>3</sup> Hall, *Chronicle*, i. 113; *State Papers [during the reign of] Henry VIII*, iv (Record Commission, 1830-52), 2.

<sup>4</sup> This report referred to the behaviour of the right wing.

If Lancashire and Cheshire been fled and gone,  
Of these tydings wee may be vnfaine ;  
But I dare lay my life and lande  
It was for want of their captaine.

For if the Erle of Derby our captaine had beene,  
And vs to lead in our arraye,  
Then noe Lancashire man nor Cheshire  
That euer wold haue fled awaye.<sup>1</sup>

William Brereton joins in to support Egerton, but only to receive the contempt of William Compton.

Compton rowned with our king,<sup>2</sup>  
And said, ' Goe wee and leaue the cowardes right ' ;  
' Here is my gloue to thee ' quoth Egerton,  
' Compton, if thou be a knight.

Take my gloue, and with me fight  
Man to man, if thou wilt turne again ;  
For if our prince were not present right,  
The one of vs two shold be slain,

And neuer foote beside the ground gone  
Vntill the one dead shold bee,  
Our prince was moued theratt anon,  
And returned hym right teenouslye.<sup>3</sup>

The Earl of Derby then appears and defends his reputation and those of his men, but the king deprives him of the power to array Lancashire and Cheshire. Derby's friends suggest that Surrey's report is an attempt to work off old scores against the Stanleys, but the earl's long lament is interrupted by the arrival of James Garsye, a yeoman of the guard and a Stanley protégé, who has just killed two of the guard and wounded three more for insulting the earl. The king determines to hang Garsye, but a deputation of Lancashire and Cheshire men with many sympathizers gains Garsye a hearing during which he secures the king's pardon. The next day a new messenger arrives and the king again asks for those who fought and those who fled.

' Lancashire and Cheshire,' said the messenger,  
' They haue done the deede with their hand ;

<sup>1</sup> *Popular Ballads*, stanzas 13-15.

<sup>2</sup> " Rowned "—whispered.

<sup>3</sup> *Popular Ballads*, stanzas 19-21 ; " teenouslye "—angrily.



Had not the Erle of Derby beene to thee true,  
In great adventure had beene all England.<sup>1</sup>

Then bespake our prynce on hye,  
' Sir Raphe Egerton, my marshall I make thee ;<sup>2</sup>  
Sir Edward Stanley, thou shalt be a lord,  
Lord Mouteagle thou shalt bee.<sup>3</sup>

Other honours follow and Derby is made Lord Marshal.

A ballad is not an impeccable historical source, but the events of *Floden Feeld* probably have some basis in fact. That there was some hard speaking about the Cheshire and Lancashire men after Flodden is established, and this ballad is a specific attempt to put the record straight.<sup>4</sup> Not only is it written for this particular controversy, it seems to have been in its present form at least by Henry VIII's death, that is close, in ballad terms, to the event it describes. The likeliest date is between 1521 and 1544, possibly between 1521 and 1528.<sup>5</sup> In some small details

<sup>1</sup> This second report referred to the behaviour of the English left wing under Sir Edward Stanley.

<sup>2</sup> "marshal" used as a synonym for "standard-bearer".

<sup>3</sup> *Popular Ballads*, stanzas 90, 91.

<sup>4</sup> The principal and better known "Ballad of Flodden Field" (see p. 352 n. 2) is also strongly Stanley in its sympathies.

<sup>5</sup> The Percy manuscript has an obvious addition of two stanzas summarizing the victories of Henry VIII (*Popular Ballads*, stanzas 120, 121). The statement that he "kept to Calleis, plainsht with Englishmen/Vnto his death that he did dye", dates the additions after the king's death and probably after the loss of Calais in 1558. This, in turn, suggests that the main poem existed before 1558. Other evidence limits the date further. All versions of the main poem pray for mercy on the earl of Derby or on his soul, implying that they date from after the death of the earl in 1521. The addition dealing with Egerton's reward may be taken to imply that he was still alive, and that its date is, therefore, before 1528. A stronger implication is that Henry VIII was living; the main poem ends "God save/Our nowble prince that weareth the crowne/And have mercye on the Earle of Derby" (*Popular Ballads*, stanza 106). The main text, thus, would date before 1547. It contains no comparison with Henry's second French expedition and the capture of Boulogne (a deficiency remedied in the additional stanzas 120, 121), which suggests a date before 1544. Weber (op. cit. p. 384) reads "prynces" for "prince" in the final stanza, and argues for a date in the reign of Mary. J. W. Hale and F. J. Furnival (*Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscripts*, i (1867), 313) believe the princess is Elizabeth and the poem a piece of flattery to Thomas Egerton, lord keeper from 1596. The better *Popular Ballads* text of the Percy manuscript gives "prince", not "princess", and Weber, also, was incorrect in reading only "prynces" from the Harleian versions; B.M. Harl. MS. 367,

inaccurate (Egerton and Compton were only knighted after the fall of Tournai), in large measure the facts in the poem are correct.<sup>1</sup> While we may reject the main plot of a vendetta between Surrey and Derby, it seems safe to conclude that the quarrel over the battle of Flodden in the camp at Tournai was much more serious than Hall makes out and that Egerton was in the thick of it, probably offering to fight Compton there and then for the honour of the Stanley retinue, and that in the aftermath he was promised tenure of his post as standard-bearer for life.

Tangible rewards certainly followed Egerton's service at Tournai. He returned to England with his company and was paid off in November 1513, but in January 1514 his patent for the office of standard-bearer for life was issued, and with it an annuity of £100 a year to support the dignity.<sup>2</sup> This was followed by the grant for life of the stewardship of Longdendale in Cheshire with £5 a year.<sup>3</sup> The next month, February, Egerton's keepership of Ridley during the king's pleasure was transformed into outright ownership and he became Sir Ralph Egerton of Ridley.<sup>4</sup> One manuscript of *The Ballate of Floden Feeld* includes a dozen or so stanzas which purport to tell the story of how Egerton obtained Ridley.<sup>5</sup> Henry VIII asks Egerton what he wants as a reward for his services, and Ralph replies that he would like something in Cheshire, "ffor that's att home in my owne country". The king declares that, apart fol. 125 has "prynces" but Harl. MS. 293, fol. 61<sup>v</sup> reads "prince". Thus, two texts prefer "prince" and only one "princess". An additional hint of an early rather than a late date for the main poem is that each of the Harleian versions is associated with collections made by John Stowe, the Elizabethan antiquary (John Stowe, *A Survey of London*, i (ed. C. L. Kingsford, 1908), lxxxviii).

<sup>1</sup> *L. and P.* i. 2301. The king did receive a letter criticizing the men of the palatinates (see p. 352 n. 3); there was a yeoman of the guard named James Garside (*L. and P.*, i. 1266(21), 1462(18), 2638; *ibid.* ii. 1473, no. 4527); records in print show that all the courtiers and captains mentioned in the poem as being at Tournai were there, with three petty exceptions—Hassall, Lealand and Trafford—and the manuscript records of the campaign could well yield these.

<sup>2</sup> *L. and P.*, i. 2480(67), 2617(1).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* i. 2617 (20).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* i. 2684 (4).

<sup>5</sup> *Popular Ballads*, stanzas 107-19. The existing text reads "Sir Rowland", but this is almost certainly the consequence of a scribe's error in extending the abbreviation "Rau". The rhythms have become distorted, but are improved by the substitution of Ralph for Rowland.

from five mills on the Dee, he has nothing in Cheshire that would suit Ralph (a preposterous assertion), and when Egerton says that he does not want to be called a miller, Henry promptly gives them to him :

There shall neuer be king of England  
But thee shalbe miller of the mills of Dee.

Henry then offers the rangership of Snowdon, but Egerton says that he does not want to be called a ranger. At this point in the ballad the king becomes angry, but this rage is an obvious misunderstanding of the teasing humour of the king. Being unaware that Egerton did become ranger of Snowdon, the ballad fails to see that Henry is playing cat and mouse with Egerton ; well knowing that Ralph wants Ridley, he begins by appointing him to minor rewards, while Egerton's insistence that he does not want to be " called " a miller or a ranger is not a refusal of either but a reply to keep the auction open.<sup>1</sup> Egerton then claims a hearing and repays Henry in kind. There is, he says, a grange-house, " it is but a cote with one eye ", in the lordship of Ridley where a tanner once lived, and he would be quite satisfied with that. At this point the king surrenders, and Egerton is given his grange-house and the lordship of Ridley as well, which Henry and Ralph had all along known was what was really wanted and would be given. Again a ballad is not the best of sources, but Egerton did get two of the grants it lists, and the story is quite consistent with what is known of Henry VIII's relations with his courtiers.

The grants of January and February 1514 were not all the rewards which Ralph Egerton reaped in the months after Tournai. At the end of 1514 he was appointed ranger of the forest of Delamere for life.<sup>2</sup> In May 1515, his patent as constable of Chester was renewed and later in the same year he became sole

<sup>1</sup> Egerton is noted as forester of Snowdon in 1526 (*L. and P.*, iv. 1941) ; the date of appointment is not enrolled. His right in the mills of Dee is uncertain. Ministers' Accounts for the relevant years reveal no Egerton interest (P.R.O., SC 6/278, 280, 290 for the years 1511-12, 1514-15, 1526-7). There were, however, at least two sets of royal mills on the Dee, the grain mills and the fulling mills, and the history of the latter is less fully documented.

<sup>2</sup> 24 November 1514 (" List of Welsh Officers ", p. 195 ; " Cal. Recog. Rolls, Hen. VIII ", p. 110).

keeper of the park at Wigmore.<sup>1</sup> In April 1516, Egerton was made sheriff of Flint for life, with an annuity of £20.<sup>2</sup> All this made Sir Ralph now one of the most powerful individuals in the county palatine and the northern marches of Wales. He must, however, have exercised most of his duties as he certainly did his escheatorship, by deputy.<sup>3</sup> His position in Cheshire was the consequence of royal favour; if he was to protect, still more to enlarge, this position, it was in the king's service that he must continue to shine.<sup>4</sup>

Early in 1514, there were happy omens of a continued military career. Egerton helped to muster the navy in March, and in April was placed on a commission to prepare the army for the forthcoming campaign.<sup>5</sup> The sudden peace of that same month put paid to these possibilities. Advancement would come through the court, and Egerton was the right man to make the most of the chance. For the next decade he was one of the king's leading courtiers. The Revels accounts for 1515 show him being supplied with a frock of green satin gored with yellow.<sup>6</sup> In the jousts of May 1516 he attended the king on horseback, attired in blue velvet, slashed and panelled.<sup>7</sup> Egerton was clearly one of that company of tilters and boon companions who were so often in the king's company in these years.<sup>8</sup> That Ralph was involved in the disgrace of some of them in 1519 for their over-familiarity with the king and their frenchified manners is unlikely.<sup>9</sup> He does seem to go into

<sup>1</sup> *L. and P.*, ii. 500, 1175.

<sup>2</sup> 21 April 1516 (*ibid.* ii. 1800).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Addenda i. 112, 568; *Cal. Anc. Deeds*, vi. 7433.

<sup>4</sup> He was noted as one of the gentlemen ushers, "daily waytours", for 1514-15 (*H.M.C.*, 12 Rep., App. IV, 21), and probably kept that role until made knight of the body (see p. 359, n.1). He was pardoned in 1514 as "Ralph Egerton, knight, alias Ralph Egerton of our household, knight, alias Ralph Egerton of Ridley, Cheshire, knight" (*P.R.O.*, Chester 29/216 m. 32).

<sup>5</sup> *L. and P.*, i. 2702, 2861(33).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* ii. p. 1504.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* ii. p. 1507.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* ii. App. 3 and p. 1490.

<sup>9</sup> Hall, *Chronicle*, i. 178; one account gives the total involved as nine, and another gives eight, seven of whom are named (*Calendar of State Papers Venetian*, ii. 1220, 1230; *L. and P.*, iii. 246). By and large the culprits would appear to be younger men than Compton or Egerton; Compton was approaching forty in 1519; if Egerton had been twenty-one when given his salt pans in 1496, he was nearer forty-five.

eclipse in 1519, but this may simply be the accident of the records.

Whatever his fortune in 1519, in 1520 Sir Ralph Egerton was definitely in favour with the king for he went with Henry to the Field of the Cloth of Gold.<sup>1</sup> He attended the king and queen at their joint interview with Francis, representing the knights of Herefordshire.<sup>2</sup> He also played an active role in the ceremonies and jousts, his post being with the five other knights deputed to wait upon the king on foot, attired in a half-coat in cloth of silver of damask.<sup>3</sup> A fortnight after the end of the meeting between Henry and Francis, Egerton was escorting his sovereign to meet another European ruler—Charles V at Gravelines.<sup>4</sup> This bout of foreign service brought its rewards. Already his efforts at court had brought Egerton the life appointment as “master de la game” of Shotwick Park where he was already parker, but in 1520 he was granted an annuity of £10.<sup>5</sup> Two years later Egerton was once more in attendance when Henry VIII met Charles V, this time on the latter’s arrival at Canterbury.<sup>6</sup> In June of the same year, 1522, Ralph took part in the jousts at Greenwich, attired in the yellow satin of the king’s party, and in December he received the grant of £4 a year from the lands in crown custody by the minority of the fourteen-year-old earl of Derby.<sup>7</sup> But Egerton’s days in the tilt-yard were numbered, and he had already exchanged his post of gentleman-usher for the more honorific but less personal service of a knight of the

<sup>1</sup> *L. and P.*, iii. 703(3); *Rutland Papers* (ed. William Jerdan (Camden Soc. 1842)), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *L. and P.*, iii. p. 243; J. G. Russell, *The Field of Cloth of Gold* (1969), p. 197.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iii. p. 1556; *Rutland Papers*, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> *L. and P.*, iii. 906.

<sup>5</sup> Patent for Shotwick 1 March 1517 (“List of Welsh Officers”, p. 195; “Cal. Recog. Rolls Hen. VIII”, p. 110). Annuity 1520 (*L. and P.*, iii. 1116). There is, however, a chance that this annuity is the same as Egerton’s fee as escheator.

<sup>6</sup> *L. and P.*, iii. 2288(2). According to the Chronicle of Calais, Egerton attended Henry to Calais in 1521 as one of the knights for Hertfordshire. This is clearly a confusion with the 1520 visit when Egerton represented Herefordshire, but the date could be a hint that Egerton did go to Calais in 1521 but with Wolsey’s delegation of that year (*Chronicle of Calais* (ed. J. G. Nichols (Camden Soc. 1846)), p. 21).

<sup>7</sup> *L. and P.*, iii. 2305, 2749(12).

body.<sup>1</sup> Probably approaching fifty, his role at court was changing. He did not accompany the army to France in 1523 and in September 1524, Ralph surrendered his patent as standard-bearer, receiving, instead, a new grant of the office jointly with Edward Guildford; like so many Tudor courtiers before and after him, Ralph had crossed the divide between royal attendant and councillor.<sup>2</sup>

Public service was, of course, not a novelty to Ralph Egerton in 1524. However efficient his deputies, the many offices which he held of the crown had demanded some attention. There were occasional royal commissions to serve on as well and, of course, the inevitable local offices.<sup>3</sup> He was a justice of the peace for Wales, for half-a-dozen English border counties and for the intervening March, and in 1522 he was appointed a commissioner of oyer and terminer for the same areas.<sup>4</sup> But in 1524 Egerton was called upon to be more, to be a statesman; "in the beginning of thys . . . . yere . . . . sir Anthony Fitz Herbert one of the Justices of the common place, . . . sir Raufe Egerton knyght, doctor [James] Denton, Deane of Lichfeld, . . . were sente as Commissioners into Irelande."<sup>5</sup>

Early Tudor policy towards Ireland had continued the Yorkist recognition that since the English crown had not the resources to establish a strong executive at Dublin, royal authority could only be entrusted to the earls of Kildare, the supreme Anglo-Irish noblemen. From 1518, however, Henry VIII had begun to take a greater interest in Irish affairs. Kildare was called to England in 1519, and in March 1520 the Earl of Surrey

<sup>1</sup> The grant of the Derby annuity was to Sir Ralph, knight of the body. Another possible connection of this grant is with a new patent as keeper of the gate of Chester castle which associated Egerton with Thomas Grymesdiche (*L. and P.*, iii. 2694(29)). Grymesdiche had, strangely, been included in Egerton's first patent of 1511 but not in the second (see p. 350, n. 6 and p. 357, n.1). Grymesdiche was also involved in the Snowdon and Wigmore offices which Egerton had (*L. and P.*, iv. 1941).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 693 (13).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 2533, 3783, 4562; iii. 1451 (15), (26), 3583, p. 1363; iv. pp. 82, 234, no. 1200; *Lanc[ashire] and Ches[hire] Cases in Star Chamber* (ed. R. Stewart-Brown, Record Society for Lancs. and Ches., 1916-17), pp. 114-15.

<sup>4</sup> *L. and P.*, ii. 4141, 4528; *ibid.* iii. 2145(7), 2415(20), 3495.

<sup>5</sup> Hall, *Chronicle*, ii. 15. The regnal year is intended.

was appointed the first lieutenant in Ireland for sixty years.<sup>1</sup> Long before the great moves of the 1530s towards a unitary state, Henry had decided to assert unqualified sovereignty over the most independent of his territories. Surrey's brief expedition proved that quick results were not to be had, but Henry did not abandon his ambitions; he apparently decided to reduce the Pale and the Irish Marches by stages, first to the condition of the Welsh Marches under his father, and then by creating some special conciliar machinery of the sort already tried out at Ludlow and York, and soon to be reactivated. The commission of 1524, therefore, must be seen as part of this deliberate new policy. The very selection of Ralph Egerton himself for the commission is a witness of Henry's adoption of a "Welsh" policy for Ireland; with his offices and commissions in the March of Wales, Ralph had valuable experience to bring to the Irish problem.

"The king's justices, commissioners within the land of Ireland" disembarked at Howth on 18 June.<sup>2</sup> Their ultimate objective was the inclusion of the Earl of Kildare in the government of Ireland once more. After Surrey's departure, Piers Butler, the so-called Earl of Ormonde, had been made deputy, but he had found it difficult to handle Kildare's supporters, and the return of the earl in 1523 made matters worse. Denton, Egerton and Fitzherbert had, therefore, brought with them patents making Kildare deputy, but saving Ormonde's face with an appointment as treasurer, plus some valuable royal grants. Such a change, of course, could not be rushed; Ormonde had to be handled with great tact. It had, also, to be part of a wider settlement; it would have been no success to re-establish Kildare independence, or to leave Kildare's feuds

<sup>1</sup> I have been much helped in what follows by the reinterpretation of Henry VIII's policy proposed by D. B. Quinn, "Henry VIII and Ireland, 1509-34", *Irish Historical Studies*, xii (1961), 318-44.

<sup>2</sup> Quinn, *op. cit.* p. 332. The date of the commission is unknown. Hall (see 359, n. 5) suggests after 22 April, and the letters patent brought by the commission are dated 13 May (see p. 362, n. 1). The title "king's justices, commissioners . . ." is found in [*Calendar of*] *Archbishop Alen's Register* (ed. C. McNeill (Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, 1950)), p. 271. The mission used the style "We, James Denton . . . The King's Commissioners of this his lande of Ireland" (*Register of the abbey of St. Thomas, Dublin*, ed. J. T. Gilbert (Rolls Ser., 1889), p. 424).

with Ormonde unsettled or the Marches in an uproar. In Wales, Henry VII's reliance upon Rhys ap Thomas had been accompanied by increasing royal intrusion by the use of commissions; in Ireland in 1524, the commissioners had the dual role of setting up the local magnate as the king's representative and also of exerting royal authority to circumscribe the deputy's power and to "reform many injuries done in the country and bring diverse of the wild Irish by fair means to a submission."<sup>1</sup>

The Earl of Ormonde, as it turned out, was immediately co-operative; he put up a bond of £1,000 to guarantee his proper behaviour, both as deputy and as head of his clan, and to accept the decrees of the commissioners.<sup>2</sup> Their next task was the settlement of the March. On 12 July they seem to have mustered the English and Irish marchers and exacted bonds for good behaviour from them.<sup>3</sup> While this was going on, the commissioners were also struggling to disentangle and resolve the outstanding grievances between the Butlers and the Fitzgeralds. Significantly, they did this, not by negotiation, but by mounting a full-scale conciliar trial on the pattern of the English council in the star chamber. Both Ormonde and Kildare discharged themselves of all their accumulated grudges in what must have been a formidable set of "complayntes, aunsweres and replicacyons", followed by depositions from witnesses for each party. As in many of the cases before the Westminster council, disclosure of the full story was used at Dublin, not to make possible a judgement, but to enable an arbitration to be arranged. This was drawn up in the form of an indenture signed by Ormonde and Kildare on 28 July, and witnessed by Denton, Egerton and Fitzherbert and the Irish council.<sup>4</sup> The origins of the Irish court of star chamber, alias the court of castle chamber, have been traced to 1534.<sup>5</sup> Here, however, is an obvious "star

<sup>1</sup> Hall, *Chronicle*, ii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *State Papers Henry VIII*, ii. 112-13. The document is dated 10 June, 15 Henry VIII [1523], but obviously dates from after the arrival of the mission in 1524. Perhaps 10 July 16 Henry VIII is meant, i.e. 1524.

<sup>3</sup> *State Papers Henry VIII*, ii. 108-11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 104-8; [*Calendar of*] *Carew Manuscripts*, i (ed. J. S. Brewer and W. Bullen, 1867), 23.

<sup>5</sup> H. Wood, "The court of castle chamber or star chamber of Ireland",



chamber " procedure being imported from England a decade earlier.

With the pacification of the March achieved, and so too an agreement between Ormonde and Kildare, there remained only the acceptance by Kildare of the terms for his restoration to the deputyship. The earl signed indentures with the king on 4 August, agreeing, among other clauses, to maintain the ordinances devised by the three commissioners, and on the same day the new appointments were made public.<sup>1</sup> A few minor disputes were also dealt with; the commissioners' judgement in the case of the Archbishop of Dublin *v.* Christopher Eustace was still being appealed to in 1540.<sup>2</sup>

Having, as Hall puts it, "set al thynges in good ordre", Denton, Egerton and Fitzherbert returned to England in September and went at once to Windsor to report to the king.<sup>3</sup> Ralph probably took with him a memento of his commission, a grey horse which he had been given by Kildare.<sup>4</sup> The trio also brought a more important trophy for Henry, James Fitzgerald, who had been responsible for the notorious murder of an Ormonde supporter and had been surrendered by the Geraldines as a token of their submission.<sup>5</sup> Henry had good reason to give his commissioners "hys hartly thankes for their good doynge". Their settlement was no final solution of the Irish problem; it was not even a solution of the Ormonde-Kildare rivalry. Nevertheless, royal authority had been successfully exerted, and from the continued assertion of this authority over a period of years, what was spasmodic could become permanent.

For the individual commissioners, however, the important fact was that they had proved themselves in a marcher situation.

*Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, xxxii C (1914), 153. Cf. D. B. Quinn, "Calendar of the Irish Council Book, 1581-6," *Analecta Hibernica*, xxiv (1967), 98.

<sup>1</sup> *Calendar of Ormond Deeds*, iv (ed. E. Curtis, 1937), 87, 90; *State Papers Henry VIII*, ii. 113-18; *Carew Manuscripts*, i. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Register of the abbey of St. Thomas*, p. 424; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Ireland*, i (ed. J. Morrin, 1861), 194-5; *Archbishop Alen's Register*, p. 271; *Carew Manuscripts*, i. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Hall, *Chronicle*, ii. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *H.M.C.*, 9 Rep., App. II, p. 284b.

<sup>5</sup> Quinn, "Henry VIII and Ireland", p. 332.

It may have been in anticipation of his forthcoming mission to Ireland that, in February 1524, Egerton had been granted land adjoining and rights over the River Weaver, together with two salt mills.<sup>1</sup> It was, however, without doubt a consequence of this mission that James Denton and Ralph Egerton were both called upon when a council for the Princess Mary was formed in August 1525, to tackle the special problems of the Welsh March. Denton became Mary's chancellor and Egerton her treasurer.<sup>2</sup> The treasurership was a busy post requiring personal attendance upon the princess, and Egerton's signature appears upon a number of the council documents.<sup>3</sup> As a corollary to this appointment, Ralph was given additional powers and offices in the Marches. He joined the commission of the peace for Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, became chief steward for several of the border castles and lordships, and also steward, chancellor and surveyor of Haverford West and Rowse.<sup>4</sup>

In these early days of its existence, much of the council's concern was with the household of the princess.<sup>5</sup> The one piece of evidence of Egerton's activity in the political sphere is, ironically, hardly to his credit. Robert More was granted the lease of a messuage in Peckforton in Cheshire by Sir John Dudley.<sup>6</sup> The previous tenant, Ralph Shipley, "household servant to Sir Rauff Eggerton, knyght", refused to vacate the premises with, More claimed, Egerton's backing for his stand. More secured from the county palatine an order against Shipley who ignored it. More appealed to the council at Westminster which transferred the matter to the council at Ludlow. Again the plaintiff was successful, and again Shipley with Egerton's "meyntenance" refused to budge. Further recourse to Ludlow produced more specific directions; the bailiff in charge of Peckforton was to install Robert More under penalty of £100. Morgan Broghton, the unfortunate bailiff, sent copies of the

<sup>1</sup> *L. and P.*, iv. 137(18).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 1940(2); *ibid.* Addenda i. 458.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 1577 (2,4,7,12), 2331(2).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 1610 (11), (23).

<sup>5</sup> P. Williams, *The Council in the Marches of Wales under Elizabeth I*, (1958), pp. 12-13; C. A. J. Skeel, *The Council in the Marches of Wales*, (1903), pp. 49-54. The princess's household in the Marches lasted only until 1528.

<sup>6</sup> *Lanc. and Ches. Cases in Star Chamber*, pp. 118-20. Cf. the allegations by Sir Gilbert Gerard (P.R.O., St. Ch. 2/26/91).

council's letters to Sir Ralph, asking him to remove Shipley quietly, only to receive the reply that " he shulde have a prowde warne " if he tried to oust Egerton's protégé. Broghton, however, was bound to try. No sooner had he installed More, " then incontynent there came from the hall of . . . Sir Rauff ", only half a mile away, twenty

of his housholde servantes by his commandement, who stode riottously about the said house, with theyre arrowes nykked in theyre bowes.

Morgan read the council letter to no avail, and the messengers he sent to get help were all detained.

And then the said Sir Rauff sent his steward Humfrey Hassall with the residue of his householde servantes as well ploghmen, carpentars and other workemen, riottously with bylles and clubbes and worthyngrokes to have drawn downe the said house or elles to have brent the same.

Hassall allowed the bailiff to leave, and with authority out of the way, Egerton's men went into the house and threw out Robert More and his brother bodily. This picturesque tale comes, of course, from More, but his opponents' stories of unparalleled virtue suggest he was telling the truth. In any case, Egerton the treasurer was hardly exerting himself to enforce the orders of his fellow councillors. It was always difficult for Tudor sovereigns, dependent as they were upon the local gentry, to avoid these gentlemen accepting office and then using this augmentation of power to their own ends.

Ralph Egerton's appointment to the household of the Princess Mary was the climax of his career. He could well look back in 1525 with pleasure upon the distance he had come and the profit he had made. Ralph's success in accumulating fees and offices was the subject of comment and envy, and understandably so. He had at least fifteen crown offices, three valuable leases and three annuities; the total income from only the twelve known fees and annuities was over £300 a year. Of course, as several historians have pointed out, a courtier's offices were not pure profit; they were intended to maintain his " port " in the extravagant life of the royal household. Egerton, however, made substantial gains from his grants; when he made his will in 1520 (when his income was lower than in 1525), he had more

than £400 in cash set aside.<sup>1</sup> The grant of the lordship of Ridley had given him, also, "the fairest gentleman's howse of al Chestreshire", or so John Leland thought it, "a right goodly house of stone and tymbre, builded by Sir William [Stanley]".<sup>2</sup> It had a great gatehouse which Sir Ralph had, it seems, embellished with a pageant of Egerton heraldry, and all around was "a very large p[ark]". But the principal feature of Ridley Hall was its lake contrived out of one of the sources of the river Weaver "a mere of pikes, bremes, tenches and perches, half a mile in bredth and a mile and a half in length, counted for the fairest mere of Chestreshire".

Though outstanding, Egerton's success had a flaw in it. Ralph's ambition was to bequeath his position to his son Richard, but the only assets he could bequeath the boy were the lordship of Ridley and the unexpired portions of his leases. Egerton, therefore, had to secure the reversion of his offices for his heir—already he had placed Richard in the princess's household—and this meant a struggle with other courtiers, especially those from Cheshire, who envied the corner which Egerton had established in the patronage of the county and were determined to prevent this monopoly being perpetuated.<sup>3</sup> Egerton was no stranger to the competition of the court, indeed he had been markedly successful at it, but this time he was at a disadvantage. He was old. His son was still a minor, incapable of performing the duties of the offices. Above all, others were now in the position which had brought him his success. Ralph did attend Cardinal Wolsey on his journey to Calais in 1527, but the old intimacy with Henry was gone.<sup>4</sup>

Even before his appointment to the princess's council, Egerton's stewardship of Longdendale and the lease of Alderley had been granted in reversion to William Brereton; in June 1525, the reversion of the constableness of Chester castle was granted away, and in July 1526, the reversion of Egerton's

<sup>1</sup> P.C.C., 33 Porch. The will was made on 2 March 1520, probably in anticipation of Egerton's journey to the Field of the Cloth of Gold, but remained unaltered; it was proved 26 May 1528.

<sup>2</sup> John Leland, *The Itinerary*, iv (ed. L. T. Smith, 1909), 3; *ibid.* v (1910), 28; Ormerod, ii. 300.

<sup>3</sup> *L. and P.*, iv. 1577 (2 i).

<sup>4</sup> *Chronicle of Calais*, p. 40.

Haverfordwest appointments.<sup>1</sup> From that date the wolves gathered thick and fast. The beneficiaries of Egerton's decline were the new generation of courtiers and royal servants who were taking the places of the veterans of Tournai and the Field of the Cloth of Gold. The person who secured the more substantial of Ralph's offices was William Brereton, page and then groom of the privy chamber. Just as William Smith, Henry VII's clerk of the wardrobe, had seen himself displaced by an intimate servant of the new king, so Egerton, in turn, had to watch his hopes for his son being defeated by William Brereton.<sup>2</sup> What was left was snapped up by other courtiers, Francis Sidney, a royal equerry, James Vaughan, Princess Mary's master of the horse, Antony Knevet, esquire of the body and William Walsh, groom of the chamber.<sup>3</sup>

Something of the bitterness of the struggle for office appears in contemporary documents. The campaign was fought on two fronts, at court and in Cheshire itself. William Brereton of the king's chamber was represented at Chester by his cousin Randolph, while Egerton operated from Ridley, but with a number of local notables to support him.<sup>4</sup> The real combat was in the summer and autumn of 1526 between Egerton and the Breretons, over the issue of Shotwick Park. Ralph had been granted the reversion of the keepership in April 1511 for forty-one years following the expiry of the existing lease which was due in April 1518.<sup>5</sup> It is hard to understand how the lease of 1511 should have come up for discussion in 1526, especially as Egerton had had the additional grant of the mastership of the game at Shotwick in 1517.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the Breretons had impugned the original grant or, more probably, Egerton had attempted to secure a new grant for himself and his son. But whatever the explanation, Egerton and Brereton were locked in competition for the park in 1526.

<sup>1</sup> "Cal. Recog. Rolls Hen. VIII", p. 29; "Cal. Warrants Chester", p. 29; *L. and P.*, iv. 2362(4).

<sup>2</sup> "Cal. Warrants Chester", p. 19; "Cal. Recog. Rolls, Hen. VIII", p. 29; *L. and P.*, iv. 3142 (30), 3622 (15).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 2362(4), 4124(22); "Cal. Warrants Chester", pp. 24, 29.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 368.

<sup>5</sup> See p. 351. n.1.

<sup>6</sup> See p. 358, n. 5.

The key documents which reveal the actual details of this struggle for royal patronage are letters from Randolph Brereton at Chester to William Brereton at court.<sup>1</sup> These probably survive because William was less successful in a later court intrigue and was convicted and executed as one of Anne Boleyn's lovers, with the result that his papers were confiscated. The first thing which these letters do is to dispose of any belief that Henry VIII's patronage was a matter of spontaneous petition and easy generosity; suppliant planned their campaign and the crown was every bit as calculating as an eighteenth-century first lord of the treasury. Brereton, it is clear, had deliberately "medelt" in the grant of Shotwick; some of Egerton's leases had less than ten years to run, he was getting old and the reversions of his offices were beginning to command a market quotation. The first, and easiest, step was to secure the promise of the post, but the Breretons have no illusions about the worth of this; Egerton might secure contrary promises, the king, the cardinal and the princess might each have a candidate and it seems most probable that all promises were of a conditional sort only. Confidence could only come with the signing of the warrant, but this was very much the final stage. Before this, the applicant had to reach acceptable terms with the royal officials responsible, proving to them the previous history of the post, showing the terms that were desired and demonstrating the way in which the crown would benefit by accepting his and not another's offer. Randolph, therefore, sent William copies of the patents of two fifteenth-century parkers as specimens for the grant, and backed this up with copies of the accounts. William was to scrutinize the packet and forward it to Wolsey's servant, Dr. Richard Wolman, who seems to have been acting as the cardinal's patronage secretary. Possession, too, was a valuable aid to securing signature of the warrant, even though this involved an arrangement with the existing holder; with Egerton not resigned to the loss of Shotwick, bluff and horse-trading were at a premium.

Randolph Brereton, however, had no doubt that the key to

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., SP1/39, fols. 96-7 (*L. and P.*, iv. 2431); SP1/59, fol. 141 and v. (*L. and P.*, iv. App. 235 (1)). See appendix pp. 371-74.

success lay with William rather than in the papers he had so carefully prepared or with being "at apoynt" with Egerton. "Syr", he writes, "in anywise get youre warraunt signet in all haste". Egerton has gone to see the Princess Mary, ready, it is said, to spend £1,000 to secure his patents to himself and his son jointly. "Howbeit he spekyth fayre and every day more gently then other, I trust hym the worse. And therefore, prepare the best ye canne for remedy." William, Randolph suggests, should press his suit with the king and the cardinal and especially with the princess who, as Egerton's mistress, is the person who might resist the promises made to Brereton. And William is not only to make suit to Mary but to the Bishop of Exeter and the rest of her council who are well placed to neutralize her treasurer's requests. Most interesting of all, Randolph suggests that Brereton should make common cause with Knevet and the others who have been promised Egerton's offices. Together they can make a pressure-group which Ralph will find it hard to counter. The first surviving letter was written at the end of August, but on 30 September Randolph is still harping on the same dangers. "Maister Eggertones frendes here do say that he wole opteyn to hise sonne all hise fermes and offices." To prevent this, William is advised to spend as much as he can in bribes to the right quarters, and if necessary to borrow from his friends to the extent of £200. Above all, the king must be nursed. Brereton and his friends are to establish a brief ascendancy over royal largesse, in order to counter all Egerton's efforts: "Cyff good attendunce by youre selph and other of youre frendes aboute the kyng, to thentent to haue knoleche what labur Master Eggerton makyth, and like wyse to my lorde cardynall." Here is Tudor faction working at first hand.

As the story of William Brereton's patents has already shown, Egerton lost this last and critical patronage struggle. The subtlety which Randolph Brereton implies Egerton had in full measure did not avail against the pressure of a court where he was now a "has-been". Nor could influence with the Princess Mary (whatever Brereton feared) really replace influence lost with Henry and Wolsey. On 1 September 1526, the president

of her council, John, bishop of Exeter, wrote to Wolsey of an interview he had had with the princess.<sup>1</sup> She was, he wrote, conscious of her indebtedness to the cardinal, while the council was, he assured Wolsey, in receipt of "your most best devised ynstruccions". It is no surprise that the letter ends with the note that the princess's secretary had been told to return the fees which Sir Ralph had paid for his new patents. The final blow to Ralph's influence came sometime in the year Michaelmas to Michaelmas 1527-8. His cousin, William Egerton, had been one of the guarantors of the good behaviour and appearance of a certain Rees ap Wynn, as long before as 1519. Rees had defaulted, and Ralph Egerton's rivals at court took their chance. Sir Ralph Ellercar, one of the gentlemen ushers of the chamber, Antony and James Knevet, esquires of the body, petitioned for £100 to be paid by the chamberlain of Chester and recovered by estreating the forfeited bond.<sup>2</sup> Henry and Wolsey needed Brereton, Knevet and company; they no longer needed Egerton. When the old knight died on 9 March 1528, it was in the knowledge that his son would succeed only to the lesser part of his father's glory.<sup>3</sup>

The Brereton correspondence and the story of Egerton's resistance to the concerted attack of the younger courtiers suggest something of the personal endowments which brought Ralph to his fortune. There is the hint of suavity, of calculation, of a ruthless ambition which made a persuasive tongue and an air things to be feared and guarded against. The ballads suggest other traits: a quickness of response, a fondness for the heroic and a shrewd capacity to judge his master the king. At Ridley these same qualities were allied to substantial local authority and appear in a less favourable light as a complete assurance of the *droit de seigneur*, whether towards a wretched local bailiff or in the more literal sense which brought Egerton a bastard son and daughter, Ralph and Mary, as well as sundry

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., SP1/39, fol. 108 (*L. and P.*, iv. 2448).

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., SC6/290, mm. 13, 13d.

<sup>3</sup> According to the inscription on his monument (see p. 370, n. 4). No *Inquisition post mortem* survives; the inquisition following *mandamus*, P.R.O., Chester 3/85: 40 Elizabeth no. 3, is that of Sir Ralph Egerton, grandson of Randolph Egerton, brother of Sir Ralph of Ridley, who died 9 September 1595.



other bastard daughters whose names he could not remember;<sup>1</sup> Ralph's success in the more extrovert activities of the court suggests, too, the sheer magnificence of the man; clearly he could grace an occasion. His will gives a hint of this; he left a green velvet gown lined with green sarcenet and guarded with cloth of gold, a gown and a jacket of velvet on velvet, pearled with gold and the gown lined with black satin and another jacket, this time of cloth of silver and blue and russet velvet. But even more than magnificence, it was pride that characterized Ralph Egerton.<sup>2</sup> This is supremely demonstrated in the great passion of his later years, the erection and beautifying of his chantry chapel at Bunbury.<sup>3</sup> He laid down meticulous directions about the construction, of the priests' house no less than for the decoration of the chantry. Everything was to be of the finest. The chapel was to be furnished with crosses, two chalices and three sets of vestments, the third one only to be used for solemn high festivals. And on the tomb or large marble stone which covered his grave, and on a gilt plate fixed to the wall were to be proclaimed his name and his arms, with this addition—"The Kinges Standert-bearer and Thresaurer to my lady Princess".<sup>4</sup>

It cannot be argued that Ralph Egerton was a principal figure in the politics of Henry VIII's first twenty years of kingship. At most he was a reliable royal servant entrusted with responsibility in one of the more turbulent regions of the land, and useful when similar situations cropped up elsewhere. At the least, he was one of those decorations of majesty which the

<sup>1</sup> P.C.C., 33 Porch.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the gateway of Ridley Hall (see p. 365, n. 2).

<sup>3</sup> The details of the chantry were set out in Egerton's will as early as 1520 (see p. 365, n. 1). The inscription on the chapel recorded by Ormerod (ii. 264), "This chapel was made at the cost and charg of Sir Rauffe Egerton knight in the yere of owre Lord God A.D. MCCCCXXVII", shows that construction began some seven years later.

<sup>4</sup> Ormerod, ii. 264 gives the following inscription: "Of your charitye pray for the soules of Raphe Egerton, kt., and Dame Margaret hys wife, which Sir Raphe was late standard bearer to our Sovraine Lord King Henry the VIIIth and also treasurer of the Household of the Lady Princes his daughter, and the saide Sir Raphe died the 9th day of March MCCCCXXVIII and the said Dame Margaret died the — day of — in — the yere of our Lord God MCCCC — on whose soules Jesus have mercy". Ralph died in 1528, not 1528-9 (*L. and P.*, iv. 4896 (21). Margaret died in 1534 (P.R.O., C142/56/51).

Tudor court required, but which were as ephemeral as the butterflies they resembled. Yet for the student of history, Ralph Egerton stands as the example of what success at court could mean, how it could be won and how it could be lost. To understand what it was drew the English gentry to the royal court in such numbers and with such persistence, it is hardly necessary to look further than Ralph Egerton of Ridley, knight.

## APPENDIX

Public Record Office, S.P. 1/39 fols. 96, 97 (*L. and P.*, iv. 2431).

[Endorsed] To my singler good Maister William Brereton oon of the gromes of the kynges privey chamber [25 August 1526]<sup>1</sup>

Please it your Maistership, the xxij day of this August I receyued your letter by oon Robert Irneshagh and accordyng to the same I haue written to Maister doctor Hulman, and sende hym copies inclosid in the said letter aswell of the office graunted to Brounwynde as to William Troutebek, whiche be bothe good, and provyn what ffees belonge to the office of parker whiche is jd. by day, viij acres of lande and wyndefallyn wodde, as apperith by the said copies.<sup>2</sup> And also I haue written to hym that all other parkers haue hadde like profettes as ye shall parceyve by my letter sende to hym, whiche I sende youe herin closed, not sealed, to thentent ye may loke upon the same; and there [*recte* where] ye thynke it to be amendet, ye may, accordyng to thentent of the same. Also I haue written to hym the grettist value that the agistament of the parke hathe bene answarid of, And also sende hym copies of the accomptes of the same, subscribed with my hande, wherby he may parceyve the truthe therof. And there is no patent graunted to no parker that hathe the herbage conteyned in hise graunte.<sup>3</sup>

Syr, in anywise get youre warraunt signet in all haste, for Sir Rauff Egerton is ridden upon Ffryday last passed to my lady prynces, and so will cumme vp with her, and intendith to make great labour for all hise officis and fermes to hym and hise sonne ioyntly if it coste hym a m<sup>l</sup> li, as it is me tolde. Howebeit he spekyth fayre and every day more gentely then other, I trust hym the worse. And therefore, prepare the best ye canne for remedy, aswell with the kynges grace as my lorde cardynall and suche other as ye thynke metist. And if ye may,

<sup>1</sup> This letter was written while Egerton was alive and after the appointment of John Russell as secretary to Princess Mary in June 1526, that is in either August 1526 or 1527. The former is preferable because of the apparent connection with the letter of the Bishop of Exeter to Wolsey, 1 September 1526 (see p. 369, n.1). Abbreviations have been extended.

<sup>2</sup> "Hulman" is Dr. Richard Wolman later dean of Wells and "Brounwynde" John Brunwynd; William Troutbeck was chamberlain of Chester, 1412-39. William Troutbeck succeeded Brunwynd as parker of Shotwick in 1430 ("Cal. Recog. Rolls, Hen. IV-Hen. VII", p. 717).

<sup>3</sup> This would appear to be incorrect; Egerton did enjoy the herbage (*L. and P.*, i. 1365 (25)).

as sone as ye can, move my lady prynces to be good to youe in suche offices and fermes as the kyng hathe giffen to youe, and to move my lorde of Exetour and other of her counsell in the same,<sup>1</sup> And also to cause Maister Knevet and other that haue any offices giffen theym of Maister Eggertons to make like labour.<sup>2</sup>

And as anendist warrauntes that cumme downe aswell from the kyng as my lady prynces counsell to be serued in Shotwike parke, let me knowe your pleasure.

There is oon lately commyn fromme my lady prynces for a bucke giffen to Maister Russell hir secretorie, which is not yet serued, and whether it shall or not to sende me worde. And also howe other shalbe answered if they bryng any.<sup>3</sup>

If Maister Russell haue hise bycause he is secretorie to my lady prynces, in my mynde it is well done. I parceyue my lady prynces hathe by the kynges placarde auctoritie to kyll or gyff dere at her pleasure in any fforest or parke within the Rowmes that is appoynted to her,<sup>4</sup> And therefore, if she make warrauntes hidder and they not serued, displeasure will rise by the same, And for remedy therof ye most make summe provision.

And whether the parker that is nowe shall contynue or not, ye most sende me worde. And oneles there be other profettes then jd. by day, he ne non other wyll abyde. Maister Eggerton speikyth fayre nowe, and saith he is gladd that ye haue it. And the soner that ye moue hym for the occupacion of the viij acres of lande and howse with other profettes belongyng to the office, the better the kyng and hise counsaill wyll consider that jd. by day is to litle for a man to lyue apon. Also, Sir, it is well done that ye shewe the copie of the letters patentes made to Brounwynde and all other letters patentes made to all other parkers to your lerned counsell affore the commyng vp of Maister Eggerton, and haue their counsell in the same and to knowe the truthe whether the viij acres of lande and wynde fallen wodde belonge vnto youe by reason of the parkership if ye haue your graunte therof in as large maner as the said Brownwynde or any other parson or parsons afforetyme hath hadde, after which maner in anywise obteyne your warraunt.

Syr, the soner ye be at apoynt for the occupacion and profet of the viij acres of lande it is the better, bycause it is nowe soyn with corne, and the thridde sheffe therof shulde apperteyne vnto [you] or your deputie as parker, like as other haue hadde it affore.

When ye haue sene the latter whiche I sende vnto maister Hulman and the copiez within the same, ye may seale it with your seale and cause oon to delyuer it in my name. I haue mervell that it was so longe or your letter came to my handes.

Sir, I most beseke youe to remember my matter concernyng Robert Johns, and to be good Maister to me therin.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Veysey, bishop of Exeter, was president of the Princess Mary's council (*ibid.* iv. 1940 (2)).

<sup>2</sup> This indicates that Knevet was granted the reversion of the sheriffdom of Flint during Egerton's lifetime (see p. 366, n. 3).

<sup>3</sup> Russell is John Russell, appointed to be secretary and clerk of the signet to Princess Mary 16 June 1526 (*L. and P.*, iv. 2253).

<sup>4</sup> This grant has not been traced.

<sup>5</sup> Johns is (probably) Robert Johns, squire for the body (*L. and P.*, iv. 870 (10); *ibid.* Addenda i. 426).

Hugh Salisbury hathe distreyned the tenautes for theire rentes and I haue done likewise, trustyng the said Robert Johns will kepe the last promise he made affore youe at Grenewiche.<sup>1</sup> And that it wolde please youe to sende me your mynde in the same and howe I shall order me therin. I wolde not be put to rebuke in the matter if it lie in my power to remedie it for a hundreth markes. it may please youe to sende me worde by this beyrer if any warrauntes cumme to be serued in Shotwike parke what shall be done therin, and also of your mynde concernyng Robert Johns.

I delyueryd this beyrer for hise costes viij s., and also haue hired him a horse, for I colde provide of non other messenger.

And oure lord euer preserue youe in good helthe. Written at Chester the xxv<sup>th</sup> day of this August.

Yours to the utterest of hise power,  
Randulph Brereton of Chester.<sup>2</sup>

Public Record Office, S.P. 1/59 fol. 141 and v. (*L. and P.*, iv. App. 235(1))

[Endorsed] To my singler good maister William Brereton, oon of the gromes of the kynges Privey Chaumber [30 September 1526]

Pleise it youre maistership, I haue sende yow by my cosyn William Wodhale this beirer accordyng to youre lettre sende to me, vij li. of your fees of the countrouer, due to youe at michelmas laste passed.<sup>3</sup> And I delyueryd to my cosyn Morgan, to youre vse, of the same fees lx s., whiche makyth your whole ffee due at Michelmas.

Also, I haue sende youe by this seueral beirer, parcell of youre office at Northwyche, x li., whiche is more then as yet is made of the same, for sith I hadde medellyng therin, it was not so little as it is like to be this yere; the best that may be don shalbe.

Sir, I wolde gladly here howe ye do consernyng the parke of Shotwyke And youre other fermes. Maister Eggertones ffrendes here do say that he wole opteyn to hise sonne all hise fermes and offices.

Which I trust he shall not, for if he shuld, I wolde ye hadde not medelt, and better it is, or he shuld so do, that ye spende therapon asmoche as ye may And as youre frendes could help youe, if it were a C li. or ij. And to writte to youe to gyff good attendaunce by youre selph and other of youre frendes aboute the kyng, to thentent to haue knoleche what labur Master Eggerton makyth, I trust it nedyth not, And like wyse to my lorde cardynall. I wole right gladly here summe sertenty in the matter. Whereof I besech youe, by the next that commyth &c. The restreynt at Shotwyk for huntynge indures but oon yere.

<sup>1</sup> Salisbury is Hugh Salisbury of Denbigh.

<sup>2</sup> The Brereton pedigree is confusing. This Randolph may be the Randal Brereton granted the reversion of the office of clerk or baron of the exchequer at Chester in 1529 ("Cal. Recog. Rolls, Hen. VIII", p. 30).

<sup>3</sup> This was probably the post of controller of fines, pleas and amercements in the counties of Flint and Chester granted to Brereton in 1523 ("Cal. Warrants Chester", p. 19; "Cal. Recog. Rolls, Hen. VIII", pp. 29, 208, 305).

I haue sende youe an Indenture bytwix Robert John and me accordyng to hise promyse made affore youe, And I haue sealed the oon parte therof my selph, and beseke youe to be my good Master therin, And that he seale the other, or elles it wolbe to my no little rebuke, consideryng the greit costes labur and busynes that I haue hadde in the same, And also youre greit paynes takyn therin. And oneles it be by your speciale help sure, I am to be put to rebuke, and therefore I moste hertly beseke youe to take the more paynes and labures, as my moste singler trust is ye wol do. And my seruyce to the vtterst of my power shalbe redy at your commaundement, as oure lorde knoth, who euer preserue youe in helth. Writtyn at Chestr, the Sondey next after the ffeest of Seynt Michell.  
Your owne Randolph Brereton of Chestr.