Prince Hal, the Hero of King Henry IV Part I

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PRINCE HAL, THE HERO OF

KING HENRY IV PART I

by

George Edward Von Kaenel, S.J.

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of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
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LIFE

George Edward Von Kaenel, S.J., was born in Chicago, Illinois, October 15, 1927.

After his elementary education at St. Hilary's Grammar School, Chicago, he attended Loyola Academy, Chicago, graduating in June, 1945.

In August of the same year he entered the Society of Jesus at Milford Novitiate, Milford, Ohio, and was enrolled in Xavier, University, Cincinnati, Ohio.

In June, 1949, he transferred to West Baden College, West Baden, Indiana, for his three year course in Philosophy, at which time he was enrolled in Loyola University, Chicago. In June, 1950, he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

He taught at St. Ignatius High School, Cleveland, Ohio, from September, 1952 to June, 1955.
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INTRODUCTION: THE BASIS OF THE PROBLEM

In drama one can readily see the need of a dramatic hero. A play without a dramatic hero is like a wheel without an axle. Without a hub there is nothing about which the wheel can revolve, and it collapses. So with the play.

The dramatic hero of a play is commonly described as "a noble person who is the principal male character." This description has two parts. The first is that the hero must be "noble." He must be a worthy and prudent man who strives to follow the call of conscience. The second is that the hero must be "the principal male character." This means that the other characters must be subordinated to him in such a way that there is no question of his preeminence in the play.

Our purpose in this thesis will be to prove that the hero of King Henry IV, Part I was Prince Hal, the Prince of Wales.

There are few who would doubt that Macbeth was the dramatic hero of Macbeth, or Prospero of The Tempest, but the consensus of opinion among Shakespearean critics is by no means unanimous in favor of Prince Hal as the dramatic hero of King Henry IV, Part I.

The difficulty is apparent to anyone who has made a study of the play. Shakespeare, as it were, overdid himself by sketching four gigantic personages in that single play. These four were King Henry IV, the dominating Bolingbroke in Richard II; Sir John Falstaff, who is without doubt the greatest comic figure ever drawn by Shakespeare; Henry Percy, called Hotspur, one of the most romantic figures of that age; and finally Prince Hal himself.

Throughout the centuries Shakespearean critics have had difficulty deciding which of these actually was the hero of the play. In general they admit that Shakespeare wished Prince Hal to be the hero, but the question is not what Shakespeare wished to portray in his presentation of Prince Hal, but what he actually did portray. Producers of King Henry IV have found a similar difficulty. They had the intention of preserving Prince Hal as the hero; however, in many productions of the play there has seemed to be a lack of balance in the characterization. So often it happened that the character of Prince Hal was overshadowed; the play was, as it were, stolen by Hotspur or Falstaff.

This was well exemplified in the Old Vic Company theatrical perfor-

formance of both parts of *Henry IV* in 1946. In Part I of the play Maurice Evans played Hotspur, while Ralph Richardson assumed the rôle of Falstaff. A critic commented on their performances: "(T)he characters got out of hand. Hotspur, the impetuous rebel, and Falstaff, the bibulous buffoon, take the play away from the title character in the first part." The question immediately arises, "Why this lack of balance?" There are two possible answers.

The first is that the actors performing the parts of Hotspur and Falstaff overplayed their parts, or that the part of Prince Hal was underplayed. In the Old Vic Company production there well might have been a bit of both. Maurice Evans and Ralph Richardson used all their dramatic ability in the rendition of their respective parts. On the other hand K. Phelan commented in *Commonweal* on Michael Warre's portrayal of the part of Prince Henry in this same production: "The enduring childishness of Michael Warre's Prince Hal seemed to me an inconsistency, even for that inconsistent rôle." It should be noted however that this could not be the basic reason, because this same disproportion has been seen in many other performances of the same play. Also it has been a point of dispute among renowned Shakespearean critics throughout the centuries.

There remains the second reason for this misrepresentation of the hero. It is that Shakespeare drew Hotspur and Falstaff to magnificent

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stature. If all three, Prince Hal, Falstaff, and Hotspur, are dominating personalities, it is easy enough, even for professionals, by a slight twist of the true mind of Shakespeare, to make Hotspur or Falstaff the hero of the play. This is the basic reason for the lack of balance in characterization.

Let us now look at the opinions of outstanding Shakespearean scholars, who have commented on this problem.

Many critics readily admit that both Hotspur and Falstaff are magnificently sketched, still they do not consider either as the hero. However, there are those who take the extreme positions. Some are convinced that Hotspur is the hero of the play, while others are venomous in their defense of Falstaff or King Henry IV. A few excerpts will be quoted from the more noteworthy commentators to show how startling are the differences of opinion.

The traditional opinion has been that Prince Hal is the hero. However, there are many, especially among the more modern critics, who hold radically different positions.

When one reads Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's analysis of Hal's character, one begins to wonder if Matthews and he are speaking about the same person. Referring to the first soliloquy in King Henry IV, Part I, he does not restrain himself.

5 Brandes Matthews, Shakespeare as a Playwright, New York, 1923, 118.
This, if we accept it, poisons what follows, poisons the madcap Prince in our imagination for good and all. Most of us can forgive youth, hotblood, riot; but a prig of a rake, rioting on a calculated scale, confessing that he does it coldly, intellectually, and that he proposes to desert his comrades at the right moment to better his own repute—that kind of rake surely all honest men abhor.  

Many commentators are struck by the chivalry and charming vigor of Hotspur. His death at the hands of Hal seems to them to turn an historical play into a tragedy. Mark Van Doren tells us that, "We shall not end by liking Hal better than the Hotspur whom he challenges and kills."  

E. M. W. Tillyard wastes no words in condemning this conception.  

I fancy there are still many people who regard Hotspur as the hero of the first part of the play. They are wrong, and their error may spring from two causes. First they may inherit a romantic approval for mere vehemence of passion, and secondly they may assume that Shakespeare must somehow be on the side of any character in whose mouth he puts his finest poetry.  

One of the most stimulating and by far the best comic character ever formulated by Shakespeare is Sir John Falstaff. Commentators have been so enthralled with him that sometimes they cannot see how even Shakespeare himself could subordinate "plump Jack" to Hal or any other personage in the play. They admit that according to dramatic principles Falstaff should not be the hero, but hold strenuously that according to the presentation of

Shakespeare there is no other possible conclusion to draw.9

A. C. Bradley states: "In the Falstaff scenes he overshot his mark. He created so extraordinary a being, and fixed him so firmly on his intellectual throne, that when he sought to dethrone him he could not."10

Yet according to others Falstaff is subordinated to the Prince on all counts. According to John Bailey: "However much Falstaff may get in the last word in wit, and he does not quite always do that, the Prince maintains throughout an ascendancy over Falstaff which is not merely one of birth and rank but one of mind and will and character."11

These are the main opinions concerning the hero of the play; yet there are a few who maintain that King Henry IV is at the play's center. Perhaps they are of this mind because the play bears his name; but, whether this is the reason or not, there are still supporters of this opinion.

Forrest S. Lunt admits that King Henry does not dominate the play as the hero usually does; yet he strongly intimates that the King is the title character.12

Augustus Ralli13 in answer to this assertion holds that the King is not the principal character. His reason is that the personal interest

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12 Forrest S. Lunt, Shakespeare Explained, New York, 1915, 82-83.
13 Augustus Ralli, A History of Shakespearean Criticism, 1932, II. 119.
in *King Henry IV, Part I*, and not the political element is the important issue. The King, therefore, would not be the hero, since he is in no way at the dramatic center of the play.

We have seen the varied opinions of critics. It will be our purpose to weigh these opinions, while making a careful study of the text, to determine who is the dramatic hero of the play. Taking the description of a dramatic hero, "a noble person who is the principal male character," we will attempt to show that it fits the character of Prince Hal and no other.

In the two remaining chapters it will be our purpose to prove that the title of hero can truthfully be applied to Prince Hal alone. In the second chapter we will show that Hal is "noble"; in other words, virtuous, prudent, and brave. In the third chapter we will prove that he is the "principal male character" by showing that the other characters are subordinated to him.
CHAPTER II

THE NOBILITY OF PRINCE HAL

As we have seen in the first chapter, there are many contradictory opinions concerning the dramatic hero of King Henry IV, Part I. Our purpose in this chapter will be to verify the first part of the definition of a dramatic hero, nobility, of Prince Hal. The difficult part of the proof will be in the first two acts where Hal was continually found in the company of Falstaff and the Eastcheap crowd. After Hal's so-called conversion his nobility is rather apparent to all. Therefore the major portion of this chapter will deal with Hal's nobility in the first two acts of the play.

We will consider the comments of Shakespearean critics to arrive at a true evaluation of the character of the Prince. For a more faithful interpretation of the true mind of Shakespeare, we will keep as close as possible to the text of the play.

Mr. Tillyard holds that Prince Hal was the hero. To support this opinion he maintains that the Prince throughout the entire play was not only noble, but almost perfect. He attempts to justify any failings that have been attributed to him, and wipe away any spot that might tarnish Hal's character. An instance of this can be quoted.

Shakespeare knew the legends of the Prince's
wildness and he adopts them, but in so doing he justifies them psychologically by relating them to the conditions in which the prince was brought up . . . Unable under his father's eye to face being the impeccable prince, he compensates by practicing the regal touch among his inferiors and proving himself the king of courtesy. His irony, though practiced on so humble an object as Poins, springs from his recognition that the conscientious ruler must always be detached and isolated.  

Tillyard attempts to vindicate the young Prince, but he seems to distort Hal's true character by overkindness. In this opinion he stands alone, the majority of commentators attributing to the Prince at least a certain frivolity and carelessness.

Some critics, such as Quiller-Couch, Bradley, Charlton, and Masefield not only slightly disagree with Tillyard's interpretation of the "perfect" Prince, but tend to the other extreme. They say Hal's actions were in no way noble. Since they deny that Hal possessed nobility, one of the prerequisites of the hero, they would naturally deny that he was the hero.

When considering the character of Prince Hal in the earlier part of the play, some critics deny the nobility of Hal's character by establishing a dilemma. On the one hand, they say, if the Prince continually associated with Falstaff and the Eastcheap crowd, entering into their rioting, drinking, and general scurrility, he made himself just as common and vulgar as the worst among them.

On the other, they say, if Hal did not mix with them because he

1 Tillyard, Shakespeare, 261.

2 John Dover Wilson, The Fortunes of Falstaff, Cambridge, 1944, 8.
enjoyed their base, loose-living way, he did it solely for his own selfish ends. He wished to abscond his greatness by a cloak of mischief and vulgarity until the proper moment when he would reject his Eastcheap comrades and, as if from nowhere, arise to the dignity worthy of a king's son. He then would show himself to be a "prig." To uphold this second part of the dilemma they quote Hal's own words in his first soliloquy.

In brief, Hal is either as vulgar and base as Falstaff and his rough crowd, or he is a "prig," using Falstaff for his own selfish ends.

Let us first consider the opinion that Prince Hal makes himself just as common and vulgar as Falstaff and his companions.

Some critics condemn Prince Hal even before the opening of *King Henry IV, Part I*. Speaking of the Prince in Richard II, Frederick S. Boas comments: "The first action reported of him at the close of Richard II is a coarse and wanton travesty of the custom of chivalry."³

The reader is introduced to Hotspur and Prince Hal even before the play opens. In *Richard II* Hotspur, though young and inexperienced, showed himself a valiant and willing defender of Bolingbroke.

Percy. My gracious lord, I tender you my service,
Such as it is, being tender, raw and young;
Which elder days shall ripen and confirm
To more approved service and desert.⁴


Though Hal himself did not appear in Richard II, we hear his father inquiring concerning his whereabouts.

Bolingbroke: Can no man tell me of my unthrifty son?
'Tis full three months since I did see him last;
If any plague hangs over us, 'tis he.
I would to God, my lords, he might be found;
Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there,
For there, they say, he daily doth frequent,
With unrestrained loose companions,
Even such, they say, as stand in narrow lanes,
And beat our watch, and rob our passengers;
Which he, young wanton and effeminate boy,
Takes on the point of honour to support
So dissolve a crew.5

Bolingbroke's description of his son is often used to show Hal's carelessness about the nobler things of life,6 but it should be noted in the same scene after the King's outburst he spoke in a more thoughtful and calm tone. "As dissolute as desperate; yet through both I see some sparks of better hope, which elder years may happily bring forth."7

Boas continues in King Henry IV to condemn Prince Hal's actions:
"When he appears in person in Henry IV he seems to fully merit his father's curt censure 'as dissolute as desperate.' We see him an hail-fellow of a crew of roisterers."8

Though Gervinus does not hold this opinion, he puts the argument of the adversaries quite plainly.

5 Ibid., Richard II, Act V, Scene 3, ll. 1-12.
6 Boas, Shakespeare and His Predecessors, 269.
8 Boas, Shakespeare and His Predecessors, 269.
The young son of the king stands depreciated among his companions, by his relatives, and by his foes. A notorious offence disgraces him in the eyes of the world, even Poius interprets his character badly, his brothers give him up, his father considers him capable of every misdeed, the honour which Percy heaps upon his own head eclipses him all the more. On which shall we rely in this character—on the evil appearance, which we have exhibited, or on the sparks of honour and of a better nature which throughout we see glancing forth, and which might indicate a kernel of the rarest quality?

It is evident that this objection demands a response, if Hal's nobility is to be preserved.

Beverley Ellison Warner is convinced that "while the wild Prince was often in the Eastcheap Tavern, he was never of it." Warner then continues,

He is banished by his own restlessness from the solemn ceremonies of his father's court. He has not part nor lot with his eminently proper and respectable brothers. He seeks in dissipation, which it will be noted is never more than reckless and indifferent, never vile, the change such natures amidst such surroundings have ever sought; more's the pity. But he looks on the antics of his pot-room companions with a heart and forces smile, valuing them, and through them the shams they represent in higher quarters, at their true worth.

This statement needs to be proved. In our proof we will first of all investigate why Hal ever joined Falstaff. Then we will study the individual incidents where some critics believe Hal's relationship with Falstaff deprived him of his noble qualities.

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10 Beverley Ellison Warner, English History in Shakespeare's Plays, New York, 1894, 125.
11 Ibid., 125.
Our first consideration will be exactly why Prince Hal ever took up his alliance with Falstaff and his Eastcheap company. This is an extremely important question, because, if Hal was not of Falstaff's level, why should he ever have associated with him in the first place?

The answer lies in King Henry's attitude toward his son, and the attraction of Falstaff and all he represented.

King Henry wished Hal to fulfill the title of Prince in every degree. Hal was regularly to participate in court functions and be bound by the conventions of the court. For one of Hal's age and temperament this was quite a bit to ask. Hal was young and light-hearted, and could not as yet resign himself to the affairs of state. "The high ceremonial life of the court sickened his energies, and wearied him to the marrow." When he would be a little older and the times would demand, he would readily and effectively rule the kingdom, but for the time being the Prince sought to enjoy life and rebelled against this confinement. Gervinus tells us: "It appears as if he only wanted, so long as there was time, to create an antidote to that conventional life and its poison, which is strongest on the throne; he vents himself in a youthful paroxysm over the commonplace of the vocation of his life."13

Opposed to the pomp of the court, Hal discovered Falstaff and his Eastcheap comrades. Anyone who has met Falstaff in Shakespeare's plays can

13 Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, 315.
readily see why the youthful Prince was attracted to him. Who would not be
drawn by "a man at once young and old, enterprising and fat, a dupe and a
wit, harmless and wicked, weak in principle and resolute by constitution,
cowardly in appearance and brave in reality; a knave without malice, a liar
without deceit; and a knight, a gentleman, and a soldier, without either
dignity, decency, or honour." 14

Prince Hal chose to spend his time with this bibulous vagabond
rather than with the stuffy noblemen of King Henry's court. We grant that,
despite the almost irresistible natural pull toward the free and enjoyable
life with Falstaff, it would have been better if Prince Hal had stayed at his
father's side. But who would condemn him for seeking relief from the affairs
of court with the exuberant Falstaff? Who would say that he was not noble
when he sought the company of a happy-go-lucky group of rascals to that of a
suspicious and disgruntled father? If the King had been in urgent need of
his son's help during this period and Hal still preferred to enjoy himself
with Falstaff, then there would be no question of Hal's guilt. But, as we
know, this was not the case. When his father finally called upon Hal, he did
not remain with Falstaff, but returned to King Henry's side without a moment's
hesitation.

The King, however, could in no way sympathize with his son. He
interpreted Hal's departure from the procedure of court life as a breach of
discipline that made him unworthy to inherit the crown. He actually prefer-

14 Hardin Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, New York, 1940, 140.
red the rebel, Hotspur, to his own son. "Thus Henry IV distinctly tells his son that, unbridled and self-forgetful as he then was, he was only 'the shadow of succession;' that the honourable Percy, though a rebel, deserved rather to be the heir."\textsuperscript{15} The King went so far in his preference of Henry Percy that Gervinus did not hesitate to say that "his father indeed calls the prince in contrast to that king of honour, almost a king of ignominy."\textsuperscript{16}

In Hotspur the King believed he saw himself in his younger days, while Hal was to him another Richard. This surely was an injustice to his son.\textsuperscript{17}

Why was it that King Henry was so intolerant of his son's actions? They were in no way worthy of these censures. We must remember that Henry was plagued with the multifarious worries of a newly conquered kingdom. He was distraught with the thoughts of revolution. Being in the eyes of many a usurper of the throne, his title was daily in danger. He was suspicious of everyone, but especially those who did not follow out his wishes to the letter. When Henry Percy made his demands concerning the Scottish prisoners, King Henry was mandatory and harsh. By his actions he turned a loyal and courageous subject into a wild and fearsome rebel. He did not realize that Hotspur was so simple and forthright that a little bit of gentle persuasion would have settled the argument and kept the young Hotspur on his side.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Ibid., 313.
\item[17] Ibid., 306.
\end{footnotes}
Now his suspicion stretched as far as his own son, when Hal did not jump when he tugged at the strings. Because Hal was enjoying himself with Falstaff, King Henry grew suspicious of him as being a rebel. "Wasted as he is by painful anxiety, consumed by suspicion, not alone of the pretender to the throne, who is weak, not alone of Percy, who is simple-hearted and honest, but also of his own son, who in his youthful pleasure is far enough from all political plots."18

These were the unfounded worries and fears of a King worn out with the cares of his kingdom. So disturbed was he that "he completely misunderstands his eldest son, and we hear him lamenting that unkind fate has given him as heir his young Harry instead of Hotspur."19 Later, when he would call Hal before him for a reckoning, he would realize his mistake in judging Hal so unjustly and readily manifest his forgiveness.

Brooke sums up the argument succinctly.

The son separates himself from his father because he understands his father's character and is out of harmony with it. The father feels apart from the son because he does not understand his son's character. Then the King is old before his time, mustering his forces with difficulty to face his trouble, longing for peace; but the Prince is passionately young, unwearied as an eagle, and to rest seems to him to die. There is too great a space of feeling between him and his father for them to live together, save in time of war when in action they are united.20

Now let us study Hal's relationship with the Eastcheap crowd. We

18 Ibid., 305.
19 Boas, Shakspere and His Predecessors, 262.
20 Brooke, Ten More Plays of Shakespeare, 263.
do not attempt to prove that Hal was perfectly justified in leading this sort of life, as some would like to think, nor do we say that he emerged from his experience with Falstaff entirely un tarnished. Still we do not admit that because of this contact Hal was dragged to their level and his noble character was permanently scarred.

The objection of some critics is that Hal showed a certain meanness and vulgarity in his dealings with Falstaff; a fact which, if true, degrades the Prince and seriously endangers his claim to remain noble throughout. Mr. Hudson denies this supposed vulgarity: "Whatever bad or questionable elements may mingle with his mirth, it must have some fresh and rich ingredients, some sparkling and generous flavour, to make him relish it. Anything like vulgar rowdyism cannot fail of disgusting him." 21

The very first words that Hal addressed to Falstaff might be interpreted by some to be vulgar.

Thou art so fat-witted, with drinking of old sack and unbuttoning thee after supper and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten to demand that truly which thou wouldst truly know. 22

By itself and without consideration of how quick-witted are the two who are bantering, one might consider it vulgar. Let us consider it in context. The section quoted is addressed in answer to a query concerning the time of day. Falstaff's reply to these words shows that Hal's words were not taken at all seriously.

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21 H. N. Hudson, Shakespeare: His Life, Art, and Characters, ed. 4, Boston, II, 1872, 83.

22 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act I, Scene 2, ll. 2-6.
Falstaff. ... And, I prithee, sweet wag, when thou art a king, as, God save thy Grace,—Majesty I should say, for grace thou wilt have,—

Prince. What, none?

Falstaff. No, by my troth, not so much as will serve to be prologue to an egg and butter.23

From the trend of the conversation, it is obvious that it was neither meant nor taken seriously.24

Time after time the Prince made jokes about Falstaff and almost always with reference to his physical characteristics and uncomely habits. This would indeed have made Hal a vulgar boor, if he had held Falstaff as a close friend, but, as we will see, no love was wasted between them. Again, if Falstaff were one to be sensitive about his drinking habits and his way of life in general, then Hal would have been wrong joking about them. But anyone who has read anything of Falstaff knows that, if he was sensitive about anything, it was not these. Finally, Hal would have shown vulgarity if he were addressing a slow witted person, such as Poins or Bardolph, who not only would be afraid to reply but would not be capable of any answer. Rather he was crossing swords with Falstaff, the knight of mirth who had a reply for any remark ever made to him.

This ability of Falstaff to banter is well brought out after the Gadshill robbery. After showing the absurdity of his tale by his gross exag-

23 Ibid., Act I, Scene 2, ll. 17-23.

24 Wilson, The Fortunes of Falstaff, 37.
gerations, "eleven buckram men grown out of two," when faced with the embarrassing truth, without a moment's hesitation he changed his entire stand to defend himself. "By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you, my masters. Was it for me to kill the heir-apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules; but beware instinct; the lion will not touch the true prince."26

When Hal began joking with Falstaff, he well knew that he would have to be wide awake if he were to finish the victor of the episode. His motives then in raillery were anything but derision of one inferior in wit, but the pleasure of the "give and take" and the intellectual retort that would result.

The Gadshill Robbery, just mentioned, could be quoted against the nobility of Prince Hal. Some commentators might argue in this manner. The Prince eagerly entered upon a malicious deed that had as its sanction hanging. In those days highway robbers were not even brought to trial. Hal knew, however, that being the King's son, even though he were apprehended, he would be safe. Therefore in this act he broke the law and then laughed at its infraction; he knew he was above the law.

When responding to this objection first of all it should be noted that Hal never engaged in the robbery itself. Also the suggestion that he participate in the robbery was "received at first with something like indig-

25 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act II, Scene 4, ll. 143-144.

26 Ibid., Act II, Scene 4, ll. 295-300.
nation, even with a touch of haughtiness, and only consented to when Poins intimates, by nods and winks behind Falstaff's back, that he is planning to make a practical joke of it."27

Hal therefore did not scoff at the law. He saw the robbery only as an opportunity to play a good trick on Falstaff. When Hal with the help of Poins engaged Falstaff and his ruffians, he was intent upon taking the loot for only one reason, so that they might have a hearty laugh on Falstaff at his return. It is highly probable that it never even entered his mind that he would be considered an accomplice in a crime that had hanging as its penalty.

During the first scenes of the play, Hal's real nature was shrouded; it did not show itself in the Eastcheap existence, to which he had been driven by the conditions which surrounded him as the King's son. He fled into the streets and taverns where he mingled with all sorts and saw life as it was lived. It can be granted that Hal did not rise from this environment absolutely unspotted, but it is evident from what we have seen that the strain was only a superficial one and never penetrated to the core of his nature. Shakespeare was at pains to show that the Prince stopped short of any serious scandals and gave his deeds rather the color of a reckless hilarity. For this reason Hal on the eve of the campaign could stand in his father's presence and, while entreating pardon for all his misdeeds, in truth declare that he was never a scoundrel.

27 Wilson, The Fortunes of Falstaff, 38.
Brandes puts our position briefly and forcefully.

We see him, indeed, plunging into the most boyish and thoughtless diversions, in company with topers, taverne-wrenches, and pot-boys; but we see, also, that he is magnanimous, and full of profound admiration for Harry Percy, that admiration for a rival of which Percy was incapable. And he rises, ere long, above this world of triviality and make-believe to the true height of his nature. His alert self-esteem, his immovable self-confidence, can early be traced in minor touches . . . At bottom he is a good brother, a good son, a great patriot; and he has the makings of a great ruler.28

William Tucker comes to the same conclusion concerning Hal’s actions in the early part of the play. “The Prince is introduced to us as a roistering madcap . . . But Shakespeare is careful to show that Prince Hal is not enslaved by the profligacy of his companions, that while he is exposed to every form of vicious contagion he is quite unaffected by it."29

So far we have disproved the first horn of the dilemma; namely that Prince Hal sank to the level of Falstaff and the Eastcheap crowd. Let us now consider the second: Hal’s supposed “priggishness.” It has often been a topic of discussion among critics.30 Wilson mentions three who are convinced of Hal’s “priggishness.” There are A. C. Bradley, Masefield, and Charlton. Speaking of Prince Hal they say he is “so ready ‘to use other people as a means to his own ends’; so common, selfish, and without feeling; so priggish

28 Brandes, _Shakespeare_, 197.


Their arguments are based principally on Hal's first soliloquy. The first time we meet Hal in Henry IV, Part I he has a noisy scene with Falstaff and Poins in which the Gadshill Robbery is formulated. After Falstaff leaves, Poins tells Hal of his plan to steal the loot from the unwary Falstaff. At the end of the scene Poins finally departs. This sets the stage for our first inward view of the Prince.

Prince. I knew you all, and while awhile uphold
    The unyoked humour of your idleness;
    Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
    Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
    To smother up his beauty from the world,
    That, when he please again to be himself,
    Being wanted, he may be more wonder'd at,
    By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
    Of vapours that did seem to strangle him . . .
    So, when this loose behaviour I throw off
    And pay the debts I never promised,
    By how much better than my word I am,
    By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
    And like bright metal on a sullen ground
    My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,
    Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
    Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
    I'll so offend, to make offence a skill;
    Redeeming time when men think least I will.32

Although a few commentators pass over the soliloquy in silence,33 most of them at least mention it. Some of these have no adverse criticism,
such as Gervinus and Parrott, who says, "[I]t is Henry's avowal that he is content to play the madcap for a time, but that when the call comes he will rise and shine."35

Granted the easiest way to avoid the difficulty which the passage presents is to refrain from any comment, yet as will be evident from some of the commentators to be quoted, it needs at least some justification, if the Prince is to be regarded as anything more than a "prig."

Darrell Figgis speaks of Hal's "priggishness" in his book, Shakespeare a Study. G. F. Bradby berates Hal for his soliloquy, saying that "As a candidate for our sympathies . . . Prince Hal was handicapped by the fact that he was destined to become King Henry, and was therefore condemned to carry on his back all label (the soliloquy of Henry IV, Part I, Act I, Scene ii), which makes his high spirits a condescension and his good-fellowship something of an hypocrisy."37

F. W. Chandler can find only two passages where the character of the Prince is displeasing and this is one of them.38

34 Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, 314.


37 G. F. Bradby, Short Studies in Shakespeare, New York, 1929, 73.

38 Frank W. Chandler, First Part of Henry IV, New York, 1929.
Mark Van Doren’s explanation of Hal’s actions, though unique, would seem to be untenable. He admits that Hal is a “prig,” but instead of condemning him for it he says that “we must remember how conscious Shakespeare’s princes always are of their careers, and we must remember that the uppermost drift of ‘Henry IV’ is steadily in the direction of Hal’s regeneration as Henry V.”

There are others who are vehement in their condemnation of Hal for this first soliloquy. Brandes tells us:

Yet the son is not so unlike the father as the father believes. Shakespeare has made him, in his own way, adopt a scarcely less diplomatic policy: that of establishing a false opinion about himself, letting himself pass for a frivolous debauchee, in order to make all the deeper impression by his firmness and energy as soon as an opportunity offers of showing what is in him. Even in his first soliloquy (I,2) he lays down this line of policy with a definiteness which is psychologically feeble.

Bradley agrees that the soliloquy is “where the prince describes his riotous life as a mere scheme to win him glory later. It implies that readiness to use other people as means to his own ends.”

When commenting on this soliloquy Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch offers one of the most powerful and “damning” evaluations given by the character of Prince Hal.

But anyhow I would see him relieved of the most damnable piece of workmanship to be found in any of his plays. I mean Prince Hal’s

39 Van Doren, Shakespeare, 118.
40 Brandes, Shakespeare, 200
41 Bradley, Oxford Lectures, 257.
soliloquy at the close of the second Scene of The First Part of King Henry IV... This, if we accept it, poisons what follows, poisons the madcap Prince in our imagination for good and all. Most of us can forgive youth, hot-blood, riot: but a prig of a rake, rioting on a calculated scale, confessing that he does it coldly, intellectually, and that he proposes to desert his comrades at the right moment to better his own repute—that kind of rake surely all honest men abhor.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch sums up the arguments of the other critics rather succinctly. His condemnation of Hal for being "a prig of a rake" is twofold. Referring to the soliloquy, he first objects to Hal's "rioting on a calculated scale... coldly, intellectually." This is his argument. Hal joined the Eastcheap company and entered into their rioting solely to further his own designs. He would for the time being pretend to be a rioter, so that when he did show his capabilities he would all the more surprise the world.

The second objection proposed is that Hal "prepares to desert his comrades at the right moment to better his own repute." What lower type of life is there than the person who would acquire the friendship of a certain few, use these boon companions to better his own reputation, and then, when he had no more need of them, unhesitatingly reject them? According to Quiller-Couch Prince Hal is supposed to be just such a man. Though Tillyard does not hold this opinion, he expresses the thought of those who do clearly and briefly: "Those who cannot stomach the rejection of Falstaff assume that in some ways the Prince acted dishonestly, that he made a friend of Falstaff, thus deceiving him, that he got all he could out of him and then repudiated

42 Quiller-Couch, Shakespeare's Workmanship, 121.
The first argument of Quiller-Couch is that Prince Hal is "rioting on a calculated scale . . . coldly, intellectually," so that at a later date, when showing himself in his true colors, he can appear the greater. Let us study this condemnation and evaluate its worth.

He speaks of Hal's "rioting." To "riot" is "to act in an unrestrained or wanton manner." Now anyone who has read the play will admit that Hal was enjoying himself and at times acting wildly, but from what Shakespeare tells us we find it difficult to say that he was "rioting." All Hal's connections with Falstaff in the first part of the play have been discussed earlier in this chapter; from that discussion it is easily seen that Hal's relationship with Falstaff was nothing more than an indulgence in jests. The reader would hardly consider the banterings of Hal with Falstaff and Falstaff's fabulous tale of his valiant exploits against the eleven men in buckram to be "rioting."

What sort of "rioting" is attributed to Prince Hal? Quiller-Couch calls it "rioting on a calculated scale . . . coldly, intellectually." He believes it was Hal's purpose to do this so that he might enhance his glorification later on. If Hal was such a cold, calculating schemer it is difficult to picture him a short time later humbly begging his father's pardon and promising to reform.

43 Tillyard, History Plays, 271.
44 Webster's Dictionary, 2152.
The solution of this problem comes down to a correct understanding of the first soliloquy. Quiller-Couch interprets it literally. According to him Hal riots with Falstaff, being one of his level in the eyes of all, so that, when he must again return to his father's side, he may appear all the more glorious because of his previous "riots" with the Eastcheap crowd. In this way Hal "uses" Falstaff.

This is what seems to me the strongest objection to this literal interpretation of the soliloquy. It seems that if we accept this soliloquy literally it becomes somewhat illogical. One can see how it might make a person all the more glorious, if, previous to his glorious deeds, he kept out of the public notice. In this way he would, as it were, appear from nowhere taking the entire country by surprise. However, this is not what Hal says he will do. He declares he will:

Prince. 
imitate the sun, 
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds 
To smother up his beauty from the world, 
That when he please again to be himself 
Being wanted, he may be more wond'red at 
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists 
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him. 45

If interpreted literally, where is the logic of this statement? Who was there that lived a reprobate youth, so that he might heighten his reputation later on? Does the community respect an ex-convict more than a man who has proved himself an honorable and upright citizen throughout his life? Obviously not. Only a fool would think along such lines and the Prince of Wales was no fool.

Let us view then what seems to be a more logical, though a less literal interpretation of the first soliloquy. As we have seen, Hal was irked by the seemingly false and frivolous affairs of court in which his father wished him to partake; instead he chose the delightful, though boisterous, company of Falstaff. Hal never sank to Falstaff's level; yet he realized this was not the place for him. Even though the pomp of court procedure sickened his youthful spirit, and even though he knew he was not disgracing his father by any shameful deeds, still he felt as though he were acting like a wayward son. The logical interpretation of the soliloquy, considered in context with rest of the play, seems to be a youth vainly trying to rid himself of a guilty conscience.

It is a common failing of most of us, but especially of youth, first to decide upon something then find some reason for it. This Hal did. He was enjoying himself with Falstaff when the worm of conscience began to gnaw. He had to find a reason for his conduct, which he revealed to us in the soliloquy. It no doubt appeared as weak to him as it does to us, but it was sufficient until the time would come when his father would need his help. At that time there would be no quibbling excuses, but action worthy of the Prince.

We must not suppose that Henry formed a deliberate plan for concealing the strength and spendour of his character, in order afterwards to flash forth upon men's sight and overwhelm and dazzle them. When he soliloquizes . . . we are not to suppose that he was quite as wise and diplomatic as he pleased to represent himself, for the time being, to his own heart and conscience. The Prince entered heartily and without reserve into the fun and frolic of his Eastcheap life . . . But Henry, at the same time, kept himself from subjection to what was really base. He could truthfully stand before his father
(I Henry IV, III, 2) and maintain that his nature was substantially sound and untainted, capable of redeeming itself from all past, superficial dishonour. 46

Someone may say that this is reading into the lines of the play. Perhaps it is, but one is forced to interpret the lines less strictly when a literal interpretation would make them illogical.

Now let us consider Quiller-Couch's second argument in his attempt to establish Hal as a "prig" by this soliloquy. He says that Hal "proposes to desert his comrades at the right moment to better his own repute." We know that no one is more detestable than a man who cultivates the friendship of others merely for the use he can make of them, and then rejects them. The question is whether this was true of Hal, as Quiller-Couch indicates.

Quiller-Couch presupposes two things in his statement. The first is that Hal and Falstaff were "companions;" in other words there was an intimate friendship between them. The second concerns Hal's desertion of Falstaff.

The first question is whether Prince Hal and Falstaff were "companions" or close friends. The opinion of Lunt is that they were close friends. Speaking of Falstaff he says, "he makes his first appearance in I Henry IV as a boon companion of Prince Henry." 47

This however is by no means the last word on their friendship. John Bailey thinks the very contradictory. "It is not true that he ever was


47 Lunt, Shakspeare Explained, 83.
a mere boon companion of Falstaff and his company, their equal and their life. 48

A little later Bailey comments on the very point we have just been discussing (Act I, Scene 2). "Again and again Shakespeare is seen marking the separation of the Prince from Falstaff and the rest. 49

From a study of the play it is also evident that Hal never was Falstaff's "comrade." We do not say that Hal did not enjoy his company. Who is there that could fail to do so? This however does not make them boon companions. One never saw them talking over their ideas, discussing their problems, giving each other friendly assistance. Friendship can be defined as an "attachment to a person, or between person; affection arising from mutual esteem and good will. 50 This can be applied in no way to the relationship between Hal and Falstaff.

We see them bantering, each attempting to get the upper hand in the verbal battles.

Falstaff. But, I prithee, sweet wag, shall there be gallows standing in England when thou art king? and resolution thus fobbed as it is with the rusty curb of old father antic the law? Do not thou, when thou art king, hang a thief.
Prince. No; thou shalt.
Falstaff. Shall I? O rare! By the Lord, I'll be a brave judge.
Prince. Thou judgest false already. I mean, thou shalt have the hanging of the thieves and so become a rare hangman.

48 Bailey, Shakespeare, 130-131.
49 Ibid., 132.
50 Webster's Dictionary, 1009.
Falstaff. Well, Hal, well; and in some sort it jumps with my humour as well as waiting in the court, I can tell you.

Prince. For obtaining of suits?

Falstaff. Yea, for obtaining of suits, whereof the hangman hath no lean wardrobe. 'Sblood, I am as melancholy as a gib cat or a lugg'd bear. 51

The give and take pleased the both of them, as it does us, but in no way proved they were boon companions. Similarly in the Gadshill Robbery there was much joking, but here again we see no signs of devoted friendship. True "comradeship" shows itself in deeper, more intimate ways than the verbal bouts engaged in by Hal and Falstaff.

If we cannot find grounds for "comradeship" in these scenes, surely we will not find them later on in the play, where the so-called friendship between the two is more completely dissolved. We may therefore conclude that Hal and Falstaff were never boon companions.

Now let us proceed to the second part of Quiller-Couch's objection. He says that Hal "proposes to desert his comrades at the right moment to better his own repute".

Can we truly say that Hal "deserted" Falstaff? It is rather difficult to uphold this contention, if no real friendship ever existed between the two of them. One can be said to "desert" a bosom friend, but not an opponent in battles of wit.

We should also consider this from another aspect. Hal did not leave Falstaff merely because he tired of him and sought another source of diversion. He received a command from his father, that he should appear

51 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act I, Scene 2, ll. 66-83.
before him on the following morning. Once this was announced to him there was no question of remaining with Falstaff. Hal's chivalrous nature realized the sacred obligation imposed upon him and hurried to his father's throne.

Having finished the discussion of Hal's supposed "priggishness" and having proved that this is a misconception of his true nature, it seems to be apparent that Hal was noble in the earlier part of the play. Granted his nobility did not show itself as lucidly as in the latter part, still it was apparent.

As we have seen, certain commentators did not see in Hal the true seeds of nobility which sprouted, grew, and bloomed during the last three acts of the play. They would have Shakespeare miraculously transform a "prig" into a dashing hero for no better reason than that the dramatic structure of the play demanded it.

With our interpretation of the character of Hal in the early part of the play there is little or no difficulty in the transition to the "noble Hal" of the latter part, since he was noble from the very beginning.52 "The change which effected itself in the Prince, as represented by Shakespeare, was no miraculous conversion, but merely the transition from boyhood to adult years, and from unchartered freedom to the solemn responsibilities of a great ruler."53

Our conclusion is well expressed by Tillyard. "From what I have

52 Brandes, Shakespeare, 197.
53 Dowden, Shakspeare, 211.
said so far about the Prince it turns out that far from being a mere disso-
lute lout awaiting a miraculous transformation he is from the very first a
commanding character, deliberate in act and in judgment, versed in every
phase of human nature." 54

During the first two acts of the play there was undoubtedly an in-
ward struggle between the ease and pleasure of the Eastcheap life and the
life of action and chivalry. "In one scale is Hotspur, challenging him to
honour with a provocation purposely made exorbitant; in the other, packed
into Falstaff, all that is sensuous--this also exorbitant." 55

Prince Hal realized all along that within a short time he would
have to give up this life of frivolity; yet how long it would have taken him
before he would finally have decided to relinquish it and return to the
strictness that was demanded of an heir of the throne, would be difficult to
ascertain. However, the occasion was presented him while in the very midst
of his revels.

The insurrection of the Percies obliged the King to summon the
Prince of Wales, so that he might find out exactly where he stood, and if he
could be made use of in the crisis which threatened the newly established
kingdom.

King Henry called Hal before him. He began to chide him bitterly,
the burden of his charge being that Harry had made himself cheap in the eyes

54 Tillyard, History Plays, 277.
55 Quiller-Couch, Shakespeare's Workmanship, 113-114.
of men, which was the very last thing the representative of a family with a doubtful title to the throne should permit himself.

From the beginning to the end of the interview Hal's attitude was admirable. He accepted the blame as in part deserved, though protesting that the charges had been exaggerated. He promised with a noble and touching simplicity: "I shall hereafter, my thrice gracious lord, be more myself."56

The King then came forth with the fear that had been eating at his heart all the while. He turned upon his son and said:

Why, Harry, do I tell thee of my foes,
Which art my near' st and dearest enemy?
Thou art like enough, through vassal fear,
Base inclination and the start of spleen,
To fight against me under Percy's pay,
To dog his heels and curtsy at his frowns,
To show how much thou art degenerate.57

The Prince was stung by this last bitter taunt. After his humble admission of his misdeeds and avowal of loyalty one might expect from his father a forgiving embrace instead of a harsh retort. One of less dignity and nobility might well have been tempted to return the indictment that had been hurled at him with such force. The return Hal made to his father however was indicative of his noble character. "Do not think so; you shall not find it so: and God forgive them that so much have sway'd your majesty's good thoughts away from me;"58 Hal then promised to reinstate himself by

57 Ibid., Act III, Scene 2, ll. 122-127.
58 Ibid., ll. 128-131.
meeting Hotspur on the battlefield and wrestling the crown of chivalry from his brow. The words of Hal have the solemnity of a knightly oath. Though the speech is rather lengthy, it should be quoted not only because it shows Hal's earnestness and sincerity, but because it sets the theme for the rest of the play.

I will redeem all this on Percy's head
And in the closing of some glorious day
Be bold to tell you that I am your son;
When I will wear a garment all of blood
And stain my favours in a bloody mask,
Which, wash'd away, shall scour my shame with it;
And that shall be the day, when'er it lights,
That this same child of honour and renown,
This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised knight,
And your unthought-of-Harry chance to meet.
For every honour sitting on his helm,
Would they were multitudes, and on his head
My shames redoubled! for the time will come,
That I shall make this northern youth exchange
His glorious deeds for my indignities.
Percy is but my factor, good my lord,
To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf;
And I will call him to so strict account,
That he shall render every glory up,
Yea, even the slightest worship of his time,
Or I will tear the reckoning from his heart,
This, in the name of God, I promise here:
The which if He be pleased I shall perform,
I do beseech your majesty may salve
The long-grown wounds of my intemperance:
If not, the end of life cancels all bands;
And I will die a hundred thousand deaths
Ere break the smallest parcel of this vow.59

The King, convinced by the fervor of the vow, restored Hal to his favor, and confidence, and even put him in command of the royal army in the

59 Ibid., II. 132-159.
It was not the "Eastcheap" Hal who moved up with his father and the royal troops to the plain of Shrewsbury. Sir Richard Vernon recounted to Hotspur what he saw as the King's army approached.

All furnish'd, all in arms;
All plumed like estridges that with the wind
Baited like eagles having lately bathed;
Glittering in golden coats, like images;
As full of spirit as the month of May,
And gorgeous as the sun at midsummer;
Wanton as youthful goats, wild as young bulls.
I saw young Harry, with his beaver on,
His cuisses on his thighs, gallantly arm'd,
Rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury,
And vaulted with such ease into his seat,
As if an angel dropp'd down from the clouds,
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus
And witch the world with noble horsemanship.

A few months before Hotspur would have scoffed if someone had said that the Prince had come to meet him in battle. In the meantime he had learned Hal's true worth. In a speech of which only Hotspur was capable, he spoke of the battle which was about to decide the fate of England. He climaxed it with a vow to meet Prince Hal in a fight to the death.

No more, no more: worse than the sun in March,
This praise doth nourish agues. Let them come;
They come like sacrifices in their trim,
And to the fire-eyed maid of smoky war
All hot and bleeding will we offer them;
The mailed Mars shall on his altar sit
Up to the ears in blood. I am on fire
To hear this rich reprisal is so nigh
And yet not ours. Come, let me taste my horse.
Who is to bear me like a thunderbolt

60 Ibid., Act IV, Scene 2, ll. 97-110.
Against the bosom of the Prince of Wales:
Harry to Harry shall, hot horse to horse,
Meet and ne'er part till one drop down a corse. 61

The scene was set for the battle. Hotspur's forces, though badly outnumbered due to the sloth and tardiness of their would be comrades in arms, engaged the royal army. Though history in this great battle did not bring together these youthful foes, Shakespeare for dramatic purposes had them encounter.

Each claimed the honor and courage that had been attributed by the majority of Englishmen to Hotspur. This was the moment when it was to be decided once and for all whether Hal ever was one of the Eastcheap crowd, unskilled in arms, who would cringe at the sight of a foe such as Hotspur, or whether he was the noble Prince he had promised his father he would show himself to be.

In the midst of the fray these two warriors at last met.

Hotspur. If I mistake not, thou art Harry Monmouth.
Prince. Thou speakest as if I would deny my name.
Hotspur. My name is Harry Percy.
Prince. Why then I see
A very valiant rebel of the name.
I am the Prince of Wales; and think not, Percy,
To share with me in glory any more;
Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere;
Nor can one England brook a double reign,
Of Harry Percy and the Prince of Wales.
Hotspur. Nor shall it, Harry; for the hour is come
To end the one of us; and would to God
Thy name in arms were now as great as mine!
Prince. I'll make it greater ere I part from thee;
And all the budding honours on thy crest
I'll crop, to make a garland for my head.

61 Ibid., II. 111-123.
Hotspur, I can no longer brook thy vanities. 62

The stage direction following merely said "they fight." The reader, however, can imagine for himself what a combat it was, seeing that the winner could rightly claim himself to be the greatest warrior of England. The dramatic importance of this battle was just as significant.

At last Hotspur, mortally wounded, slumped to the ground. He gasped out his final words to the weary victor standing over him.

O, Harry, thou hast robb'd me of my youth!
I better brook the loss of brittle life
Than those proud titles thou hast won of me;
They wound my thoughts worse than thy sword my flesh;
But thought's the slave of life, and life time's fool;
And time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop. O, I could prophesy,
But that the earthy and cold hand of death
Lies on my tongue: no, Percy, thou art dust
And food for—(he dies). 63

Hotspur's last words bitterly lamented the loss of the honor so precious to him. But what of Hal at the most honorable and glorious moment of his career? In that moment of signal triumph, far from gloating over his victory, with the true simplicity of a noble Prince, Hal uttered a eulogy over the fallen Hotspur.

For worms, brave Percy: fare thee well, great heart!
Ill-weaved ambition, how much thou art shrunk!
When that this body did contain a spirit,
A kingdom for it was too small a bound;
But now two paces of the vilest earth
Is room enough: this earth that bears thee dead

62 Ibid., Act V, Scene 4, ll. 59-74.
63 Ibid., ll. 77-85.
Bears not alive so stout a gentleman.
If thou wert sensible of courtesy,
I should not make so dear a show of zeal;
But let my favours hide thy mangled face;
And even in thy behalf, I'll thank myself
For doing these fair rites of tenderness.
Adieu, and take thy praise with thee to heaven!
Thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave,
But not remember'd in thy epitaph.  

"No sooner had Prince Hal slain the valiant Percy than he fell at once to
doing him the offices of pious and tender reverence."  

His noble heart spoke again when he finally turned away from the
body of Hotspur and spied Falstaff lying on the ground as though dead.

What, old acquaintance! could not all this flesh
Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!
I could have better spared a better man:
O, I should have a heavy miss of thee,
If I were much in love with vanity!
Death hath not struck so fat a deer-to-day,
Though many dearer, in this bloody fray.  

Deep in this thoughts he walked off without a sign to those ap-
proaching to indicate the glorious deeds that had crowned his head that day.

"He knew that the killing of Hotspur would be enough of itself to wipe out
all his shames, and restore him unto the good thoughts of the world again."

Hal's willingness to forego all the honors that were so justifiably
his, shows without doubt his nobility. How many of the world's great men

64 Ibid., 11. 86-101
65 Hudson, Shakespeare, II, 123.
67 Hudson, Shakespeare, II, 123.
would have been willing in their hour of glory to allow the story of their valorous deed never to pass their lips? It would have been perfectly legitimate for Hal to have spoken of his victory, but he showed his humility and selflessness by his silence.

As though this were not enough to prove his noble character, Prince Hal did not even argue with Falstaff when he claimed to have killed Hotspur. Red-faced and puffing under the weight of Hotspur's mutilated body slung across his shoulders, Falstaff came to Hal to claim a reward for having killed the valiant rebel. It is difficult to imagine Hal's feelings at that moment. Here was Falstaff before him; the same Falstaff who had always claimed to be his friend, the same Falstaff who had offered him a bottle of sack when Hal had asked for a sword, the same Falstaff who had fallen down as though dead when Douglas sought to fight with him and had allowed Hal to utter a touching eulogy over him, the same Falstaff who knew Hal had killed Hotspur. Now, instead of proclaiming to the world the honors due his Prince, he sought those honors for himself. With hardly a protestation Hal forfeited to Falstaff all the glory he himself deserved.

Tillyard has a very worthy comment on this very incident. "Near the end of the play the Prince ironically surrenders to Falstaff the credit of having killed Hotspur, thus leaving the world of arms and preparing for the motives of the second part."

On this note the play ends. We have seen Prince Hal from the

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68 Tillyard, History Plays, 265.
taverns of Eastcheap to the blood soaked ground of Shrewsbury; we have seen
him associating with the lowest of Falstaff's companions and with the royalty
of England. We have seen him in all those varied circumstances and yet we
have seen him throughout as the noble Prince Hal.
CHAPTER III

PRINCE HAL AS THE PRINCIPAL MALE CHARACTER

Up to this time our study has been limited to a study of the character of Hal with only occasional reference to the other important characters in the play. We have already seen that Hal was noble; however, this is not enough to prove he was the hero. We must also prove that Hal was the principal male character; in other words, that the other characters in the play were subordinated to him. As Tillyard says: "Of what use thrusting the Prince into the centre, if all the time we look to left and right at Falstaff and Hotspur."¹ Once this is accomplished, we can acclaim Prince Hal as the dramatic hero of King Henry IV, Part I.

In this chapter we will consider the three other important characters: King Henry IV, Falstaff, and Hotspur, attempting to prove that each was subordinate to the Prince of Wales.

King Henry is considered by a few to have been the dramatic hero of Henry IV. In the introductory chapter we quoted lulm as intimating that the King had the leading role. Warner puts the statement a little more forcefully when he says, "The Prince is as important a figure on the stage

¹ Tillyard, History Plays, 269.
where his father plays the chief part as was his father in Richard II's time.2

One reason for this selection might be the fact that Shakespeare named the play after the King, but the reason he chose that title was because it was a historical play and therefore should be named after the most prominent political figure of that time, the King. This proves nothing concerning the dramatic hero of the play.

There are really no critics who actually attempt to prove that the King was the dramatic hero. They call him the "title character" or the "titular hero"3 because the play was named after him and not because the play revolved around him and the other characters were subordinated to him. From the play itself it seems rather evident that he played a subordinate role. When the King appeared in the earlier scenes of the play, he never dominated the stage. Rather he seemed to be a "tool" of Shakespeare to narrate what had happened or to highlight Henry Percy or Prince Hal.

In Act I, Scene 2 the King tells us of the revolutionary uprisings and his disquiet at Prince Hal's actions. In Act I, Scene 3 he appears only long enough to incite Hotspur to rebellion by refusing to ransom Edmund Mortimer. King Henry does not appear again until Act III, Scene 2 when, after rebuking Hal for his wild ways, he forgives the Prince and puts him in command of part of the royal forces.

2 Warner, English History in Shakespeare's Plays, 110.
3 Boas, Shakespeare, 261.
During the battle of Shrewsbury (Act-V) the King is seen only three times: in Scene 1 to narrate the situation before the battle, in Scene 4 briefly to enter into some sword play with Douglas, and in Scene 5 to end the play on a formal note.

With this brief analysis we may dismiss King Henry as a contender for the title of "principal male character."

Falstaff is another character who has been held to be the dramatic hero of the play. The reason is because some commentators have been so fascinated by his wit and lively spirit that they are blind to Falstaff's failings and the good points of the other characters. An excellent example of this idealization of "plump Jack" is Quiller-Couch's comment on his character. "We note how Falstaff is no sooner introduced than he takes charge and establishes himself as the real hero of the play; how he compels everyone into his grand circumference."4

Quiller-Couch is not alone in this stand. Van Doren agrees that "His enormous bulk spreads through 'Henry IV' until it threatens to leave no room for other men and other deeds."5 Hazlitt adds: "Whatever terror the French in those days might have of Henry V, yet to the reader of poetry at present, Falstaff is the better of the two."6

Some critics admit that Shakespeare meant Prince Hal as the hero

4 Quiller-Couch, Shakespeare's Workmanship, 104.
5 Van Doren, Shakespeare, 127
but "He created so extraordinary a being, and fixed him so firmly on his intellectual throne, that when he sought to dethrone him he could not." They are, of course, referring to Sir John Falstaff. Parrott utters the same sentiments. "To the reader of to-day King Henry IV is the play of Falstaff. It is more than doubtful whether this was Shakespeare's purpose. The character of the fat knight, Oldcastle-Falstaff, seems to have grown on his hands until it tended to dominate the play."

Other critics, however, differ radically with those so fascinated by Falstaff. Wilson says, "It is they and not Shakespeare who have been swept off their feet by Falstaff. Bewitched by the old rascal, they have contracted the disease of not listening to the play, even the malady of not marking all the actions he himself perform."

Tillyard expresses our opinion well. "Like the fool the adventurer is an eternal stock figure, and we take sides temporarily with him and ultimately against him. We love him to have his day but we admit with decision, if with regret, that his day must end."

The question we are to consider is whether Falstaff really was the hero of the play. If Sir John is to bear this title, as many critics seem to wish, he must fulfil the definition of a hero. He must be "noble" and

7 Bradley, Oxford Lectures, 259.
8 Parrott, Shakespeare Twenty-Three Plays and the Sonnets, 345.
9 Wilson, The Fortunes of Falstaff, 11.
10 Tillyard, History Plays, 287.
"the principal male character."

It is our contention that Falstaff lacked a prerequisite for the hero, which Prince Hal possessed to such a preeminent degree—nobility. We also hold that he was subordinated to Hal.

Instead of making a separate study of Falstaff's lack of nobility, we will treat it when we prove that he was not the principal male character. In this way we will prove that Falstaff lacked both the requisites of the dramatic hero.

In the first scenes of the play the only way we were able to preserve the nobility of Prince Hal in his relationship with the Eastcheap crowd was to prove that he was there due to extraneous circumstances and never intended to make a profession of carousing. There is no similar reason for Falstaff's actions; he freely chose the life of a rogue and all the scurrility, robbing, and lying that went along with it.

As an example we can consider the Gadshill Robbery. The only reason Hal agreed to involve himself in the robbery was for the joke that would result from it. "Well, then once in my days I'll be a madcap."11 Falstaff's reason was to obtain more money to buy more sack. For Hal it was a temporary refuge from the affairs of state; he would soon abandon it for a kingly dignity. For Falstaff "Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal; 'tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation."12

12 Ibid., 115-116.
As the play progressed a continually sharper distinction was drawn between the two. "All through the period of King Henry the Fourth he keeps growing worse and worse, while the Prince is daily growing better. Out of his sport-seeking intercourse he picks whatever is bad, whereas the other gathers nothing but the good."13

After Hal's talk with his father his true nobility did not fail to shine forth; Falstaff however was not changed in the least, rather he seemed to get worse as the play progressed. "Falstaff continues to trifle even in the battle, but not he Hal, in the presence of his father he is grave and full of childlike devotion."14

When the all important battle between the forces of Henry Percy and King Henry was imminent, Hal sought to put some trust in Falstaff. He put Falstaff in charge of recruiting a company of soldiers for the King. The Prince told him, "I have procured thee, Jack, a charge of foot."15 What was Falstaff's reply to this vote of confidence? "I would it had been of horse. Where shall I find one that can steal well? O for a fine thief, of the age of two and twenty or thereabouts! I am heinously unprovided. Well, God be thanked for these rebels, they offend none but the virtuous. I laud them, I praise them."16

13 Hudson, Shakespeare, II, 305.
14 Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, 314-315.
15 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act III, Scene 3, ll. 209.
16 Ibid., ll. 210-215.
We are really not surprised when we see what sort of a group Falstaff finally procured for the battle of Shrewsbury. Falstaff himself cannot refrain from some remarks about them.

Falstaff. No eye hath seen such scarecrows. I'll not march through Coventry with them, that's flat. Nay, and the villains march wide betwixt the legs, as if they had gyves on; for indeed I had the most of them out of prison. There's but a shirt and a half in all my company; and the half shirt is two napkins tack'd together and thrown over the shoulders like an herald's coat without sleeves; and the shirt, to say the truth, stolen from my host at Saint Alban's, or the red-nose inn-keeper of Daventry. But that's all one; they'll find linen enough on every hedge.17

Falstaff failed to realize that there are times when one can joke and be irresponsible without harming anyone, but that there are also times when one is expected to be serious and dependable. His failure to respond to the seriousness of the situation established him as a buffoon, who passes in and out of the play to provide comic relief, and not as the hero.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, during the battle of Shrewsbury Hal proved himself not only a valorous knight, but a noble gentleman. What do we see of Falstaff? He was just not prudent enough to grasp the seriousness of the situation, and not brave enough to act as the hero would under such circumstances.

Prince. What, stand'st thou idle here? lend me thy sword:
Many a nobleman lies stark and stiff
Under the hoofs of vaunting enemies,
Whose deaths are yet unrevenged: I prithee, lend me thy sword.
Falstaff. O Hal, I prithee, give me leave to breathe awhile.
Turk Gregory never did such deeds in arms as I have done this day.
I have paid Percy, I have made him sure.

17 Ibid., Act IV, Scene 2, ll. 40-51.
Prince. He is, indeed; and living to kill thee.
I prithee, lend me thy sword.
Falstaff. Nay, before God, Hal, if Percy be alive, thou get'at
my sword; but take my pistol, if thou wilt.
Prince. Give it me: what is it in the case?
Falstaff. Ay, Hal; 'tis hot, 'tis hot; there's that will sack a
city. (The Prince draws it out and finds it to be a bottle of
sack).18

The Prince's reply was "What, is it a time to jest and dally
now?"19 This was a perfect summation of the way any chivalrous soul would
have felt toward Falstaff at that moment.

While Hal engaged in the deciding duel with Hotspur, Falstaff
looked on encouraging the Prince, but only by his words. Then Douglas ap-
peared on the scene. Was Falstaff so aroused by the bravery of the Prince
and Hotspur to engage in combat with Douglas? Far from it, as a lowly coward
after a blow or two he fell to the ground as though dead. What a tremendous
study in contrast!

To climax the day Falstaff mutilated the still warm body of Hotspur
and claimed the killing of the rebel for himself. We have already seen the
ignominy of such an assertion. As Falstaff followed after Hal with the body
on his back he announced that this would work a change in his life. "I'll
follow, as they say, for reward. He that rewards me, God reward him! If I
grow great, I'll grow less; for I'll purge, and leave sack, and live cleanly,
as a nobleman should do."20 One has only to look to the Second Part of King

18 Ibid., Act V, Scene 3, ll. 41-56.
19 Ibid., l. 57.
20 Ibid., Act V, Scene 5, ll. 166.
Henry IV to see how ironical that statement was.

At the close of the First Part of the History, the Prince freely yields up to him Falstaff the honour of Hotspur's fall; thus carrying him to him such an example of self-renouncing generosity as it would seem impossible for the most hardened sinner to resist. And the Prince appears to have done this partly in the hope that it might prove a seed of truth and grace in Falstaff, and start him in a better course of life. But the effect upon him is quite the reverse. Honour is nothing to him but as it may help him in the manner of sensual and heart-stealing self-indulgence . . . His thoughts dwell not at all on the Prince's act of magnanimity, which would shame his egotism and soften his heart, but only on his own ingenuity and success in the stratagem that led to that act . . . The result is that Falstaff soon proceeds to throw off whatever of restraint may have hitherto held his vices in check, and to wanton in the arrogance of utter impunity. As he then unscrupulously appropriated the credit of another's heroism; so he now makes no scruple of sacrificing the virtue, the honour, the happiness of others to his own mean and selfish pleasure. 21

From this study of the play it would appear that Falstaff, although witty and heartwarming at times, in no way fulfils the definition of the hero.

Now let us study the opinions of critics concerning this most controversial comedian.

For all the failings attributed to him some would conclude that "Falstaff is, and was meant to be, a coward, a liar, and a boaster, 'a false, fat, tavern rogue, dissolute, scurrilous and worthless.'" 22

When speaking of Falstaff's supposed cowardice, Alfred Harbage says, "His is the larger guilt of having no principles." 23

21 Hudson, Shakespeare, I, 305-306.
22 Logan Pearsall Smith, On Reading Shakespeare, ed. 4, New York, 1933, 25.
23 Alfred Harbage, As They Liked It, New York, 1947, 75.
Gervinus is not repressed when he comments on Falstaff's moral stature.

In truth, if we pass on to Falstaff's moral being, the words no conscience and no shame express all that we require for acquaintance with him . . . The poet has permitted disgrace, want, and honour, debasement and encouragement, to aim at his moral elevation, but to use Pistol'd words, he remains semper idem. Dead to the law of morality, he would fain also remove the law of right . . . He needs a store of good names, but he has no earnestness in procuring them. Dull and devoid of feeling, he plunders even the poor; he is scornful towards inferiors, cringing towards those whom he fears, and possessing so little sense of gratitude and fellowship that he plays the culminator behind the back of his friends and benefactors. To what extent all shame is deadened within him is most glaringly depicted when he hacked his sword as an evidence of his heroic deeds, and by this baseness and by his shameless swearing makes even a Bardolph blush.24

There are several critics, however, who readily admit all Falstaff's failings and weaknesses, and yet do not condemn him for these faults. Instead they say he cannot be damned for these misdeeds because he amuses the reader. A. C. Bradley's argument is that Falstaff is bad if you take him seriously. This however you must not do. "Yes, it makes an ugly picture when you look at it seriously. But then, surely, so long as the humorous atmosphere is preserved and the humorous attitude maintained, you do not look at it so."25 Mark Van Doren asks "What now of his vices, and why is it that they have not the sound of vices? None of them is an end in itself— that is their secret, just as Falstaff's character is his mystery. He does not live to drink or steal or lie or coin o' nights. He even does not live in order

24 Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, 326.
25 Brandes, Shakespeare, 270.
that he may be the cause of wit in other men. We do not in fact know why he lives. It seems to be taking the easy way out to say that it is all a big "mystery."

The following comments of Brandes and Hazlitt on Falstaff's moral character, I think, need little criticism to show their weaknesses. Speaking of Falstaff, Brandes says, "He has neither soul, nor honour, nor moral sense; but he sins, robs, lies and boasts, with such splendid exuberance, and is so far above any serious attempt at hypocrisy, that he seems unfailingly amiable whatever he may choose to do." "He is represented as a liar, a braggart, a coward, a glutton, etc., and yet we are not offended but delighted with him; for he is all these as much to amuse others as to gratify himself."

The whole trend of these critics seems to be that Falstaff should not be reprehended for his faults, because he always has a witty remark on his tongue when he is lying or robbing or showing his cowardly nature. It is obvious that this does not justify his failings. There are many examples of this. When Hal asked Falstaff for his sword, Falstaff produced a bottle of sack instead. As the Prince reached for what he thought was a pistol, Falstaff cried out, "Hal; 'tis hot, 'tis hot. There's that will sack a

28 Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, 158.
We all agree that the pun was clever, and most probably brought a chuckle from the audience; however, this does not justify Falstaff's cowardly attitude. Again a little later when Falstaff demanded the reward for having killed Hotspur, he employed another pun. "I'll follow, as they say, for reward. He that rewards me, God reward him! If I do grow great, I'll grow less; for I'll purge, and leave smok, and live cleanly as a nobleman should do." Here again we enjoy the pun, and yet we condemn Falstaff for claiming the honor which Prince Hal so well deserves.

Bradley makes the following paradoxical statement: "That Falstaff sometimes behaves in what we should generally call a cowardly way is certain; but that does not show that he was a coward." He attempts to justify this by examples. It would seem, however, that these examples prove little. Speaking of Falstaff he says, "When he saw Henry and Hotspur fighting, Falstaff, instead of making off in a panic, stayed to take his chance if Hotspur should be the victor." According to Bradley, Falstaff would have willingly taken up the battle against Hotspur if Prince Hal had been downed. He waited his chance to fight with Hotspur who was inferior in arms to no one in the entire kingdom except the Prince. Why was it then that Falstaff, when confronted by Douglas, after exchanging a few blows fell to the ground as though

30 Ibid., Scene 4, 11. 166-170.
31 Bradley, Oxford Lectures, 266.
32 Ibid., 267.
he were dead? Bradley has an answer ready for us.

'when Douglas attacked him he fell down and shammed dead.' Yes, I am thankful to say, he did. For of course he did not want to be dead. He wanted to live and be merry . . . naturally he avoided death when he could do so without a ruinous loss of reputation, and (observe) with the satisfaction of playing a colossal practical joke.33

Bradley attempts to prove Falstaff's courage by having him ready to fight Hotspur, then praises him for playing the part of the coward before Douglas. This does not seem to be too adequate a justification of his actions.

Another example of Falstaff's courage given by Bradley is that "He led his hundred and fifty ragamuffins where they were peppered, he did not send them."34 Falstaff seems to have lost his ragamuffins somewhere along the way, since Hal found him alone. The Prince cried aloud: "What, stand thou idle here? Lend me thy sword."35 After some bantering Hal left Falstaff to his sack. The only other time we see Falstaff in the battle is when he met Douglas and fell down, as though dead, to save his life.

Fripp comments on Bradley's statement. "Falstaff's humour, when it is awake and vivid, is so brilliant that it is apt to turn our heads. I am afraid it has confused and dazzled Dr. Bradley."36

Bailey adds his own criticism.

33 Ibid., 268.
34 Bradley, Shakespeare 267.
35 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act V, Scene 3, 11. 41-42.
We owe him too much pleasure to be patient when we see him dismissed. Indeed some of us who have a special turn for intellectual pleasure are so carried captive by his wit that we will not even see him for what he is and will not allow that he was either liar or coward. Against such blindness, even when it is Mr. A. C. Bradley's it is really not necessary to argue. It is true that there are passages in which Falstaff appears to be treated as a soldier of importance. But these are, like the similar inconsistencies in so many other plays, almost certainly unassimilated survivals of Shakespeare's authorities.37

As we have just seen there are a few critics who are so enthralled by "plump Jack" that they overlook all his failings and make him the hero of the play. We may ask ourselves why it is that so many of their defenses of Falstaff tend to be illogical. We must realize that they are faced with a serious case. On the one hand, they see Falstaff lying, stealing, acting cowardly, being a drunkard and a glutton; on the other they enjoy his wit, humor, gaiety, and general light-hearted spirit so much that they want to forget all about his misdeeds. How are they to resolve these two?

One way would be to admit that Falstaff sometimes committed crimes that cannot be justified and at other times tried to be humorous when the situation demanded a serious attitude; then, after these admissions, to say that somehow despite these misdeeds Falstaff still seems to captivate us by his wit and humor.

However, most of the followers of Falstaff try to justify his faults merely because Falstaff committed them. As Gervinus says: "It seemed as if cowardice, lying, sensual gratification, baseness, robbery, ingratitude, and all the crimes in the world were to be made absolvable just

37 Bailey, Shakespeare, 127.
because they are thus accumulated in Falstaff. Bradley tells us how Falstaff looks upon truth, honor, patriotism, duty, courage, and war.

He will make truth appear absurd by solemn statements, which he utters with perfect gravity and which he expects nobody to believe; and honour, by demonstrating that it cannot set a leg and patriotism, by filling his pockets with the bribes offered by competent soldiers who want to escape service, while he takes in their stead the halt and maimed and the gaol-birds; and duty, by showing how he labours in his vocation—of thieving; and courage, alike by mocking at his own capture of Colvile and gravely claiming to have killed Hotspur; and war, by offering the Prince his bottle of sack when he is asked for a sword.

Bradley does not even consider Falstaff's attitude, so contrary to what the ordinary man's conscience would demand, to be at all wrong. On the contrary he replies: "These are the wonderful achievements which he performs, not with the sourness of a cynic, but with the gaiety of a boy. And, therefore, we praise him, we laud him, for he offends none but the virtuous, and denies that life is real or life is earnest, and delivers us from the oppression of such nightmares, and lifts us into the atmosphere of perfect freedom." This is the attitude that not only should be condemned, but which condemns itself because of its own extremeness.

In this chapter it is not our purpose to decide to what extent Falstaff should be censured for his actions, but only whether or not he was the hero of the play. For this it is sufficient first of all to show that Falstaff's actions throughout the play manifested his lack of nobility. We

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38 Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, 329.
39 Bradley, Shakespeare, 263.
40 Ibid., 263.
have given manifold examples of this. Secondly we have proved that Falstaff was always subordinated to the Prince. We have seen this in the comic banterings of the two. Hal was almost always Falstaff's equal, if not his superior. Again, Hal delved into the common life of Eastcheap, for which later on he would call himself a "truant to chivalry," while Falstaff considered it his vocation. Though Hal's superiority may not be so evident to all in the earlier scenes, after Hal's talk with his father there can be no question of his supremacy. During the ensuing battle of Shrewsbury it would seem that Hal did everything that was noble and chivalrous, while Falstaff performed every ignominious and cowardly deed imaginable.

Our last consideration will be whether Henry Percy, called Hotspur, was subordinated to Prince Hal.

It would seem that some critics cannot conceive of any greater hero than Hotspur. Many of them would agree with us up to this point in the thesis, saying that Hal was noble and that he surpassed Falstaff and King Henry IV. However, when we would subordinate Hotspur to the Prince they would object strenuously. Though Gervinus does not hold this opinion he confirms that there are many who do. "It would be difficult to any poet to produce a hero superior to this. But least of all should it appear that Shakespeare wished or ventured to place his Prince Henry before him. Thus at any rate it could not have appeared to those interpreters who discovered a king of in-justice and an inconsistency in Percy's fall through Henry, after the early
elations between the two."41

Hazlitt would seem to place Hotspur and the Prince on a par. "The characters of Hotspur and Prince Hal are two of the most beautiful and dramatic, both in themselves and from contrast, that ever were drawn. They are the essence of chivalry."42 But then he intimates that the reader would naturally prefer to have Hotspur win the duel with Prince Hal and become the hero of the play.43

Other commentators are not so restrained. In their minds there is no question but that Hotspur was the dramatic hero of Part One.

Courtenay tells us, "The most popular and striking of the heroes of this play is to be found among the Percies... this northern hero is sustained with consummate skill as an impetuous, hot, and haughty, but generous as well as brave and skilful warrior.44 Brandes is of the same opinion. "Shakespeare has thrown himself so passionately into the creation of this character that he has actually painted for us Hotspur's exterior, giving him a peculiar walk and manner of speech. The warmth of the poet's sympathy has rendered his hero irresistibly attractive, and made him, in his manliness, a pattern for the youth of the whole country."45

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41 Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, 313.
42 Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, 166.
43 Ibid., 167.
45 Brandes, Shakespeare, 187.
These critics have made a thorough study of the play including the characters of Prince Hal and Hotspur. Therefore, they cannot be entirely wrong in their interpretation. If Hotspur does not show himself to be more of a hero than the Prince, at least he had many of the noble and chivalrous qualities of a hero.

If the thesis is to be proved, we must show that these critics are mistaken when they call Hotspur the hero. The question is how will we accomplish this?

The easiest way to eliminate the possibility of Hotspur's being the hero would be to deny that he had one of the prerequisites—nobility. There are a few commentators who are of this mind.

Mr. Van Doren would condemn Henry Percy in the play, Richard II.

His earliest appearance in Shakespeare was during the rebellion in "Richard II", when, entering to his father without a nod for Bolingbroke who stood by, he was asked whether he had forgotten the noble Duke. His answer was in some indefinable way impertinent, as if the contempt he was to feel for Bolingbroke as Henry IV already simmered in his blood.

No, my good lord, for that is not forgot
Which ne'er I did remember. To my knowledge,
I never in my life did look on him. (II,iii,37-9)46

Let us study the scene. Northumberland and Bolingbroke were talking when Northumberland's son, Henry Percy, entered. Northumberland told Bolingbroke that, "It is my son, young Harry Percy, sent from my brother Worcester, whencesoever."47 Then before Hotspur could even have a chance to

46 Van Doren, Shakespeare, 121-122.
say a word, Northumberland began a barrage of questions. "Harry, how fares your uncle? . . . Why, is he not with the Queen? . . . What was his reason?" 48

Immediately Northumberland gestured toward Bolingbroke and said, "Have you forgot the Duke of Hereford, boy?" 49 Obviously the boy did not have a chance before this to speak to Bolingbroke, seeing he was so busy answering the questions of his father. Now was his answer impertinent? It would seem to be no more than the poetic way of saying, "No, my good lord. I did not know it was he since I have never had the pleasure of meeting him." What would seem to confirm this interpretation are the words that followed. They are not in the least impertinent. "My gracious lord, I tender you my service, such as it is, being tender, raw, and young; which elder days shall ripen and conform to more approved service and desert." 50

Tillyard would have us consider Hotspur a "provincial boor" and a "country bumpkin," as the Prince supposedly did. He quotes one of the Prince's speeches dealing with Hotspur and comments on it.

Hotspur . . . is satirised by the Prince for the extreme clumsiness of his would-be non-chalence in the very scene where the Prince takes the news of the rebellion so coolly.

Prince: I am not yet of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the north; he that kills me some six or seven dozen Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife, 'Fie upon this quiet life! I want work!' 'O my sweet Harry,' says she, 'how many hast thou killed today?' 'Give my roan horse a drench,' says he; and answers

48 Ibid., 11 23, 25, 28.
49 Ibid., 1. 36.
50 Ibid., 11. 40-44.
'some fourteen' an hour after; 'a trifle; a trifle.'

The Prince here is the complete, sophisticated, internationally educated courtier ridiculing the provincial boorishness of Percy, the Hotspur of the north, much like a character in Restoration Comedy ridiculing the country bumpkin.51

There is no doubt that Shakespeare meant Hal to be sketching a caricature of Hotspur, as Hotspur had caricatured him. "In scenes of comedy this method of showing people reflected in each other's eyes is often used to enhance the comic effect; and when, as sometimes happens, Shakespeare's people caricature each other, with what vigorous strokes these caricatures are drawn!"52 Still it would not appear that Hal meant it as contemptuously as Tillyard has indicated. It is more likely that Prince Hal caricatured Hotspur because he had a certain respect for him, rather than because he looked down upon him. At that time when the name of Hotspur was mentioned one pictured him with a mighty sword in his hand surrounded by gallant warriors. When Hal's name was mentioned a bottle of sack replaced the sword and the group around him changed from gallant warriors to drunken tavern rogues. If Hal did speak in a sarcastic manner, there was more of awe than contempt in his words. Gervinus comments on this passage: "In jesting exaggeration the prince well characterizes him with the one touch, that he kills six or seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast and says to his wife, 'Fye upon this quiet life! I want work!'"53 A little later he continues.

51 Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, 200
52 Smith, On Reading Shakespeare, 123-124.
53 Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, 308.
He appeared to wish to insinuate that Percy's example was not to be lost upon him, when he tells Poius that he is not yet of Hotspur's mind, with whom a breakfast of slain Scots proclaims an idle day's work. But that at some future time he might attain to this humour seems to lie in his very nature; for even his father says of him that in early youth he was indeed wanton and effeminate, but desperate also.\textsuperscript{54}

Hotspur indeed was noble. He had his faults, as we shall see, but basically he was a chivalrous youth. "Never was a more living character delineated in poetry; ballads designed to sing his glory might have borrowed their boldest traits and images from this drama."\textsuperscript{55} Considered by himself Hotspur was admirable, but he was all the more glorious when compared to his fellow conspirators.\textsuperscript{56} We see his charm in his relationship with his wife, Kate.\textsuperscript{57} We mention this just in passing now, since we shall quote a conversation between the two of them later on which brings out our point forcefully.

As we have said before, the easiest way to reject Hotspur as the hero would be to deny him any nobility of character. However, this decision would manifest either a total misunderstanding of the text or a misrepresentation of it.

If this is true, why are all those, who consider Hotspur the hero, wrong? If he had all these wonderful traits, why was he not the hero? We

\textsuperscript{54} Gervinus, \textit{Shakespeare Commentaries}, 316.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 307.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 311-312.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 310.
answer with Tillyard.

I fancy there are still many people who regard Hotspur as the hero of the first part of the play. They are wrong, and their error may spring from two causes. First they may inherit a romantic approval for mere vehemence of passion, and secondly they may assume that Shakespeare must somehow be on the side of any character in whose mouth he puts his finest poetry. 58

Tillyard gives two reasons why people consider Hotspur to be the dramatic hero of the play. In our discussion, for convenience sake, we will use this same division.

Let us now consider Tillyard's remark that "they may assume that Shakespeare must somehow be on the side of any character in whose mouth he puts his finest poetry."

There is no doubt that Henry Percy did speak the finest poetry. He tells us how he despises the sound of poetry; yet we see him standing before the King describing in some of the best poetry of the play the situation after the battle when he was said to have refused to surrender the prisoners. Though the speech is long, to show the beauty of his poetry, it should be quoted in full.

My liege, I did deny no prisoners. But I remember, when the fight was done, When I was dry with rage and extreme toil, Breathless and faint, leaning upon my sword Came there a certain lord, neat, and trimly dress'd, Fresh as a bridegroom; and his chin new reap'd Show'd like a stubble-land at harvest-home; He was perfumed like a milliner; And 'twixt his finger and his thumb he held A pouncet-box, which ever and anon He gave his nose and took 't away again;

58 Tillyard, History Plays, 282-283.
Who therewith angry, when it next came there,
Took it in snuff; and still he smiled and talk'd,
And as the soldiers bore dead bodies by,
He call'd them untaught knaves, unmannerly,
To bring a slovenly unhandsome corpse
Betwixt the wind and his nobility,
With many holiday and lady terms
He question'd me; amongst the rest, demanded
My prisoners in your majesty's behalf.
I then, all smarting with my wounds being cold,
To be so pester'd with a popinjay,
Out of my grief and my impatience,
Answer'd neglectingly I know not what,
He should, or he should not; for he made me mad
To see him shine so brisk and smell so sweet
And talk so like a waiting-gentlewoman
Of guns and drums and wounds,--God save the mark!--
And telling me the sovereign'st thing on earth
Was paracelsus for an inward bruise;
And that it was a great pity, so it was,
This villanous salt-petre should be digg'd
Out of the bowels of the harmless earth,
Which many a good tall fellow had destroy'd
So cowardly; and but for these vile guns,
He would himself have been a soldier.
The bald unjointed chat of his, my lord,
I answer'd indirectly, as I said;
And I beseech you, let not his report
Come current for an accusation
Betwixt my love and your high majesty.59

Again we see Hotspur in this unforgettable scene with his wife, Lady Percy.

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59 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act I, Scene 3, ll. 29-69.
I fear my brother Mortimer doth stir
About his title, and hath sent for you
To line his enterprise; but if you go,

_Hotspur._ So far afoot, I shall be weary, love.

_Lady._ Come, come, you parakeet, answer me
Directly unto this question that I ask:
In faith, I'll break thy little finger, Harry,
An if thou wilt not tell me all things true.

_Hotspur._ Away,
Away, you trifler! Love! I love thee not,
I care not for thee, Kate: this is no world
To play with mammoths and to tilt with lips;
We must have bloody noses and crack'd crowns,
And pass them current too. God's me, my horse!
What say'st thou, Kate? what would'st thou have with me?

_Lady._ Do you not love me? do you not, indeed? . . .

_Hotspur._ Come, wilt thou see me ride?
And when I am o' horseback, I will swear
I love thee infinitely. But hark you, Kate;
I must not have you henceforth question me . . .
No lady closer; for I well believe
Thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know;
And so far will I trust thee, gentle Kate.

_Lady._ How! so far?

_Hotspur._ Not an inch further. 60

_Hotspur's beautiful poetry cannot be doubted. However, Tillyard's statement, that this does not make him the hero of the play, seems sensible enough. I think there are few if any who would doubt it. Shakespeare's_ plays are too full of magnificent poetry to make any such theory even plausible._

Now let us consider the other part of Tillyard's statement; namely that there are some who "may inherit a romantic approval for mere vehemence of passion." If we can prove that Hotspur really was ruled by passion in-

stead of prudence and common sense, these supporters certainly should relinquish their opinions and agree that he was not worthy to be the hero.

What we mean when we say one is ruled by "vehemence of passion" is that one refuses to think things out coolly, but rather carries them out rashly. When the situation arises where "prudence is the better part of valor," the man led by passion often enough chooses the valorous way. A passionate man is one who refuses to proceed with moderation, but rather tends to extremes. He is one who is quick to be overwhelmed by anger or jealousy. He is obstinate in maintaining his opinion and then for no plausible reason may change it at a moment's notice. Finally the passionate man supplants counsel and discretion with foolhardiness and hasty action.

What we shall attempt to prove is that, although Hotspur was basically noble, still he was ruled by a passionate nature, which shrouded all his actions throughout the play and finally led to his untimely death by Prince Hal.

Gervinus is definite in his stand on this point.

This blind passion throws the spotless hero into traitorous connections, it leads the resolute man into league with the undecided and the weak, the warrior and soldier into schemes with artful diplomatists, the man of valour and fidelity into alliance with traitors and cowards, and the man imprudent himself into undertakings imprudently designed . . . This passionateness, this want of penetration and knowledge of human nature, prove the ruin of the trustful man.61

Tillyard is of the same opinion as Gervinus. "Hotspur, however

captivating his vitality, verges on the ridiculous from the very beginning, through his childish inability to control his passions. 62

Craig shows how Hotspur manifests his passion by going to extremes.

Hotspur is prone to go to extremes. His courage runs readily into foolhardiness, and his indignation into rage, excessive anger. According to doctrine, reason dwells with the golden mean. Hotspur continually acts unreasonably. He has charming traits of character; he is noble in principle, generous to a fault, witty in speech, and brave as a lion. This conception of the way in which the faults of Hotspur serve to undo him is manifested over and over again. Hotspur has also the quality of being impatient and splenetic, and, since he is also witty, he does himself and his cause harm by over-indulging his turn for satire. In this respect also he shows his lack of balance. 63

These are the opinions of critics. Now let us look to the play itself to see whether these opinions are based in fact.

Hotspur is first presented in Act I, Scene 3. He had taken some Scottish prisoners at the battle of Holmedon, but refused to surrender them to the King unless Henry would ransom Lady Percy's brother, Edmund Mortimer. King Henry was blunt in his refusal. As the King departed, his last words were "Send us your prisoners, or you'll hear of it." 64

Hotspur's retort was typical of the vehemently passionate man.

Hotspur. And if the devil come and roar for them, I will not send them. I will after straight And tell him so; for I will ease my heart.

62 Tillyard, History Plays, 283.
63 Craig, Shakespeare, 144.
64 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act I, Scene 3, 1. 124.
Albeit I make a hazard of my head.  

Because of the King's harsh response, Hotspur's pride was wounded. He decided upon rebellion. A prudent man at this time might well be irate, but he would consider the circumstances. Undoubtedly the King was in argumentative mood; on another day he might be more willing to listen to the proposition. However, even if he would be firm in his resolve, still the ransom of Mortimer would not be worth open rebellion. Also there might be another way of retrieving his brother-in-law. These reasoning processes Hotspur never took. His hasty judgment was open rebellion against the King.

Hotspur.

'Zounds, I will speak of him; and let my soul want mercy, if I do not join with him.

Yes, on his part I'll empty all these veins,

And shed my dear blood drop by drop in the dust,

But I will life the down-trod Mortimer

As high in the air as this unthankful king,

As this ingrate and cank'red Bolingbroke.

It is difficult to believe, but this one blow by the King was the reason for Percy's insurrection. "[T]he thing that sets him off on the wrong course in his encounter with King Henry IV."  

At a meeting of the rebels, a vicious argument arose over the division of the kingdom after Henry's defeat. It would seem that Glendower and Hotspur were about to come to blows when Glendower finally acceded to

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65 Ibid., 11. 125-128.

66 Ibid., 11. 130-137.

67 Craig, Shakespeare, 144.
Hotspur's claim, "Come, you shall have Trent turned." Instead of being pleased at having won his point, Henry Percy stated that he cared not whether he got the land or not. This shows the inconsistency of a youth led by passion. Hotspur gave his explanation for his actions.

"Hotspur. I do not care. I'll give thrice so much land to any well-deserving friend; But in the way of bargain, mark ye me, I'll cavil on the ninth part of a hair."

Hotspur's excuse was rather weak when one considers what might have resulted from the quarrel between these two rebels. This was not the time for dis- sention. At this moment they needed perfect union.

This passionate nature expressed itself with jealous outbursts when anyone was praised or would seem to surpass him. Gervinus tells us: "When he only forbodes a rival, as in the Prince, a grudging jealousy provokes him to the unknighthly expression of a resolve, the execution of which would be impossible to him, and he declares that he would have him poisoned with a pot of ale!" Gervinus continues: "The impatience of his ambition, and his jealousy of honour, is expressed in this, that he is on fire when he only hears Prince Henry praised."

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69 Brandes, Shakespeare, 191.
71 Brandes, Shakespeare, 191.
72 Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, 308.
73 Ibid., 311.
Hal on the other hand showed no signs of jealousy. Before the battle the Prince spoke to Worcester and Vernon concerning a personal combat with Hotspur. Even when speaking to this traitor, he was lavish in his praise of Hotspur, while he admitted his own failings. Vernon showed his astonishment when he related the incident to Hotspur.

Vernon. No, by my soul; I never in my life
Did hear a challenge urg'd more modestly,
Unless a brother should a brother dare
To gentle exercise and proof of arms,
He gave you all the duties of a man,
Trium'd up your praises with a princely tongue,
Spoke your deservings like a chronicle,
Making you ever better than his praise
By still dispraising praise valued with you;
And, which became him like a prince indeed.
He made a blushing cital of himself,
As if he mast'red there a double spirit
Of teaching and of learning instantly.
There did he pause; but let me tell the world.
If he outlive the envy of this day,
England did never owe so sweet a hope.
So much misconstrued in his wantonness.

Even after Hal killed Hotspur in their duel at Shrewsbury "He shows no ungenerous exultation, for his feeling of triumph is stifled in his mourning over the fall of this great heart." Before the battle of Shrewsbury a messenger delivered a letter to Hotspur from his father, saying that sickness had prevented his arrival in

74 Boas, Shakspere, 271.
75 Warner, English History, III.
76 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act V, Scene 2, 11. 52-69.
77 Boas, Shakspere, 271.
time for the battle. As if this did not sufficiently deplete his forces, he learned that Glendower also has failed him. Hotspur immediately inquired about the strength of the enemy. The reply came back, "thirty thousand." This meant that they were hopelessly outnumbered. The other confederates stood about waiting for Percy's answer, expecting that he would ask for terms of surrender or make a hasty retreat and fight another day. Hotspur shot back, "Forty, let it be: my father and Glendower being both away, the powers of us may serve so great a day. Come let us take a muster speedily: doomsday is near; die all, die merrily."78

No words are more inspiring, when the medal of honor is pinned on a hero's chest, than "for bravery above and beyond the call of duty." However, bravery and foolhardiness are worlds apart. We can imagine how utterly hopeless and senseless Hotspur's position must have been when the most inspiring words he could say to his fellow rebels were "Come, let us take a muster speedily: doomsday is near; die all, die merrily."

Boas tells us why Hotspur insisted upon entering into the unequal battle. "He hazards the success of his enterprise to gratify his personal eagerness for an encounter with the sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales."79

Craig explains that the letters from his father and Glendower "ought to have discouraged him, yet the quality of his unreason is such that the more he stands alone the more determined he becomes to fight. Prudence

78 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act IV, Scene 1, ll. 130-135.
79 Boas, Shakspere, 268.
is another name for reason, and Hotspur is totally lacking in prudence."80

Hotspur was an impetuous soldier, but when it came to prudent planning, the duty of a captain, he was utterly lacking. His judgments, in fact, were so hasty and foolish that most of the common soldiers, since they did not have Hotspur's spirit, could have seen the absurdity of the engagement.

Warner is convinced that Hotspur "is a soldier, not a captain. His heady temper brought about the defeat at Shrewsbury. He was a perfect type of the titled bravado. He fought valiantly, and died on the field of battle honorably, but not all the glamour of poetry thrown over him by the power of genius, can make him an ideal man."81

As Hotspur was making last minute preparations for battle, a final messenger rushed up to him with a bundle of letters. To anyone in his desperate straits these dispatches could have contained only good news. Nevertheless we will never know what news they did contain, because without even a glance at them, Hotspur said, "I cannot read them now."82

Gervinus sums up Hotspur's weakness.

Danger has ever an alluring charm for him; when the goad of emulation is added to it, it decides him completely to venture on the unequal fight, and with the most painful impatience he leaves explanatory letters unread, and every earnest appeal to

80 Craig, Shakespeare, 145.


82 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act V, Scene 3, l. 80.
his military talent, to his foresight, and to his honour
undeeded. 83

Hotspur's passionate nature is manifested in his wholehearted
petition of honor. 84 As Brandes says, "Percy is above everything and every­
one avid of honour." 85

Boas tells us that "Honour is to Hotspur the end and aim of life;
honour blazes on his brow, and makes him the lode-star of all the noble
youths of the time." 86 We may then ask, as Boas does, why Hotspur's death
does not seem to be a violation of poetic justice. Surely to seek honor is
not a sin, because, as we will see later, Hal was one of its most avid
seekers. The reason of Boas is that "Hotspur's honour is based upon a self­
fish principle, which never hesitates to sacrifice the general good to his
sense of personal dignity, while this sense is apt to be constantly inflamed
by the play of an impetuous imagination." 87 Boas then enumerates the exam­
ple of Hotspur's selfish pursuit of honor. We conclude by saying that
Hotspur seeks the "glorification of individual 'honour' and prowess at the
expense of national well-being. The champion of chivalry fascinates all
eyes, but the moral order of society demands that he should go down before

83 Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, 308-309.
84 Ibid., 310.
85 Brandes, Shakespeare, 187.
86 Boas, Shakspere, 266.
87 Ibid., 266.
All through his life Hotspur had one ambition, and that was to be praised and honored by men. His desire was selfish, since he sought this praise for himself alone and at the expense even of the lives of others. We have seen many examples of this, but all these were climaxed when we had our last glimpse of Hotspur. He had just fallen at the feet of Prince Hal. He looked up at his victor, while, as he tells us himself, "the earthy and cold hand of death lies on my tongue." He cried out:

Hotspur. O, Harry, thou hast robb'd me of my youth!
I better brook the loss of brittle life
Than those proud titles thou hast won of me.
They wound my thoughts worse than thy sword my flesh.
But thought's the slave of life, and life time's fool;
And time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.

His thoughts were not of the safety of his soldiers, or of his wife, or of the bravery and courage of Prince Hal, nor even of his own death, but of the "proud titles" that were snatched from him that day. Life for Hotspur was nothing more than the selfish amassing of glorious titles. Once these were gone, life was gone and Hotspur wanted only death.

Hotspur was not alone in his petition of honor. Hal says, "If it

88 Ibid., 269.
89 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act V, Scene 4, ll. 84-85.
90 Ibid., ll. 77-83.
be a sin to covet honour I am the most offending soul alive."92 Although Hal's idea of honor may at first seem to be the same as Hotspur's; it is entirely different.93 Chandler puts it briefly: "Whereas outward honor is the quest of Hotspur, the essence of honor has become the quest of the prince."94

Having studied the character of Hotspur both through the eyes of critics and the lines of the play, there should be no doubt that Prince Hal was far superior to the gallant rebel. Again let us repeat that we by no means deny all nobility to Hotspur, but we do say that his uncontrolled nature definitely placed him on a lower level than the Prince.

In this thesis we have attempted to show that Prince Hal was the dramatic hero of King Henry IV, Part I. To do this we have applied the definition of a dramatic hero to him. In the second chapter we have showed that Hal was noble throughout the play. We never tried to prove that he was without failings, but we strenuously maintained that these were very slight blemishes on a basically noble and chivalrous character. In the third chapter we applied the second part of the definition to Hal; namely that he was the principal male character. To achieve this it was necessary to show that King Henry IV, Falstaff, and Hotspur were subordinated to him. The King was easily disposed of because of his few and unimportant appearances in the

92 Shakespeare, Henry IV, Act IV, Scene 3, 11. 28-29.
93 Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, 322.
94 Chandler, Henry IV, xxii.
play. We then showed that Falstaff lacked the nobility and Hotspur the prudence and self-control of the hero, while Prince Hal all along possessed these traits in an exceptional degree.95

He has to choose, Morality-Fashion, between Sloth or Vanity, to which he is drawn by his bad companions, and Chivalry, to which he is drawn by his father and his brothers. And he chooses Chivalry. The action is complicated by Hotspur and Falstaff, who stand for the excess and the defect of the military spirit, for honour exaggerated and dishonour. Thus the Prince, as well as being Magnificence in a Morality Play, is Aristotle's middle quality between two extremes.96

This is Prince Hal, whom we present as the hero of Shakespeare's

King Henry IV, Part I.

95 Wilson, Fortunes of Falstaff, 17.

96 Tillyard, History Plays, 265.
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The thesis submitted by George E. Von Kaenel, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

July 14, 1954

[Signature of Adviser]