HERBERT BERRY

Richard Vennar, England's Joy

RICHARD Vennar was famous in his own time and is (among historians of the stage) famous still for what happened in London at the Swan playhouse on the afternoon of Saturday, November 6, 1602. He had written a play called *England's Joy* and organized its performance there on that afternoon. To whet the public appetite, he had issued a broadside *Plot of the Play Called Englands Joy* declaring that the play would concern famous events of English history in nine spectacular scenes. The first was to concern "by shew and in Action, the ciuill warres of England" from Edward III to 1558, "with the ouerthrow of Vsurpation." All others would concern the reign of Elizabeth, whose coronation brought about England's Joy. The eighth was to be "a great triumph . . . with fighting of twelue Gentlemen at Barriers" and the ninth to show Queen Elizabeth "taken vp into Heauen, when presently appeares, a Throne of blessed Soules, and beneath vnder the Stage set forth with strange fireworkes, diuers blacke and damned Soules, wonderfully discribed in their seuerall torments." In his *An Apology* of 1614, he says that a "report," which was "indeed the flagge to our Theatre," had it that the actions on stage would be carried out by "Gentlemen and Gentlewomen." He says, too, that music would be performed between at least some of his scenes (pp. 24, 25).

According to Vennar in the *Apology,* the rest of the story unfolded as follows. Spectators paid a great price, 1s. each, to get into the Swan, and Vennar's actors, "men of good birth, Schollers by profession"—not, it seems, women—prepared to speak "diuers" choruses. Vennar duly appeared on stage and delivered six lines of the prologue. Then bailiffs also appeared on stage, arrested Vennar for debt, and so "spoke an Epilogue insteed." Vennar pocketed a lot of money, but the authorities did not indict him (pp. 16, 24, 26–27).

Soon, however, a more interesting story circulated in London, and it is still the version of the event usually heard. John Chamberlain best explained it in a letter from London to his regular correspondent, Dudley Carleton, on November 19: "I must . . . tell you of a cousening prancke of one Venner of Lincolns Inne that gaue out bills of a famous play on satterday was sevenight on the Banckeside, to be acted only by certain gentlemen and gentlewomen of account, the price at comming in was two shillings or eighteen pence at least and when he had gotten most part of the money into his hands, he wold have shewed them a fayre payre of heeles, but he was not so nimble to get vp on horsebacke, but that he was faine to forsake that course, and betake himself to the water, where he was pursued and taken and brought before the L: Cheife Justice [Sir John Popham], who wold make nothing of yt but a iest and merriment, and bounde him ouer in fiue pound to appeare at the sessions: in the meane time the common people when they saw themselues deluded, reuenged themselues vpon the hangings curtaines chaires stooles walles and whatsoeuer came in theyre way very outragiously and made a great spoyle: there was great store of goode companie and many noblemen." Thereafter, Vennar's contemporaries "abusiuely" (his word) called him England's Joy.[1]

Vennar was an exact contemporary of Shakespeare, baptised three months before him and buried six and a half months before him. Vennar, too, was a bourgeois from an important provincial town, was well educated there, and abandoned provincial commerce for the attractions of London. He, too, had a way with words. He could write lively prose and respectable verse in the manner of Samuel Daniel and Michael Drayton. But where Shakespeare enjoyed success after success and died owning, among much else, the best house in Stratford-upon-Avon, Vennar's undertakings often proved fiascos that led him to prison, and in prison he died. His *Apology* is not only for the events at the Swan but for his whole life.

His family name was Vennard, but he became universally known as Vennar, and he, or his printer, chose to use that name in the *Apology.* His father was John Vennard (who signed himself "Venarde"), a successful

1. PRO, S.P. 12/285/f. 149v. E. K. Chambers printed this and other accounts in *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford, 1923), III, 500–03. Vennar mentioned twice that the entrance fee was 12d. (*Apology,* pp. 16, 26). He also wrote that the bailiffs came in "before the first entrance" but implied that he had begun the prologue; three pages later he implied that they came in after "six verses" (pp. 24, 27). Presumably Vennar did not count the prologue as an "entrance."

merchant in Salisbury, Wiltshire, who lived in a building part of which was his shop. Nobody explained what he bought and sold, but he had dealings in the port towns of Southampton and Poole and some of his associates were mercers. In the *Apology,* Vennar identified him not as a merchant but as "Esquire, a Commissioner in the Peace"—a justice of the peace (p. 4). His mother's maiden name may have been Harris, since his father mentioned a brother-in-law named Rowland Harris. His father said early in 1588 that he was sixty-eight years old, hence was probably born around 1520.[2]

Vennar was baptized in the parish church of St. Edmund, Salisbury, on January 25, 1564. The conspicuously Protestant Bishop of Salisbury, John Jewell, "administered that Sacrament to mee, witnessed by two Noble," and equally Protestant, "Earles of *Bedford* and *Pembrooke*" (*Apology,* p. 4). He had an older brother, John, and was briefly to have a sister, Anne, baptised on September 7, 1566, buried almost exactly a year later.[3]

"The first part of my education," he wrote, was "committed to" Dr. Adam Hill (*Apology,* pp. 4–5), a clergyman who had been one of Jewell's students and had then gone to Balliol College, Oxford, where he had taken a B. A. in 1569 (*DNB*). Vennar eventually also went to Balliol, as a fellow commoner, a privileged rank, and stayed two years after which he succumbed not to the lure of advanced learning but to "the windy humour of trauell." His father sent him "with an *Italian* for" his "guide and a seruing man and a Page for" his "followers" to the court of Henri III in Paris. There he "purchased such respect that" Henri gave him letters of introduction ("in my large commendation") to Maximilian II in Vienna, from where "after some stay" he returned "through *Germany* home againe" (p. 5). But something is probably wrong here, or the journey more literary than real. For since Henri set up his court in Paris in September 1574 and Maximilian died in October 1576, Vennar would have made the journey when he was ten to twelve years old, having already spent two years at Oxford.

He then "forth-with" admitted himself to Lincoln's Inn in London, as he wrote (*Apology,* p. 5), but something is wrong here, too. For he joined Barnard's Inn, one of the inns of Chancery, and moved from there to Lincoln's Inn, where he was admitted on June 10, 1581, when he was seventeen years old. Six years later he acquired "special admission," which

2. PRO, STAC.5/V.7/17 (depositions of John Vennard and Robert Smyth); and Vennard's will, PROB. 11/74/f. 129.

3. Wiltshire Record Office, Trowbridge, MS. 1901/1.

entitled him to many privileges.[4] In addition to himself, he maintained "sixe men, with horses sutable, in that place" (p. 6). These accoutrements, however, seem not to have facilitated much learning of the law. For despite his years at Barnard's Inn and altogether more than twenty-six at Lincoln's Inn, he was not called to the bar, nor, it seems, did he practice law in any other way.

His father complained about his wasting money at Lincoln's Inn, and about his journeys to Salisbury to demand more, especially when on one occasion he feigned madness to terrify his parents. Eventually his father, at his mother's urging, compounded with him. His father gave him £300 in ready money, and Vennar gave his father a bond that would be worth 1,000 marks (£666 13s. 4d.) if Vennar ever demanded more money. His father said that he meant "to reclayme him if he coulde from suche excesse of expences as" he (his father) "then feared the sayd Richard would otherwise haue entered into." The elder Vennard then drew up a contract giving all his other property on his death to his older son, John, provided that this John did not die first.[5] The younger John Vennard had married Mary Wootton, daughter of Charles Wootton, in the parish church of St. Thomas, Salisbury, on October 8, 1581, when she was about seventeen years old, and they made their home with the elder John Vennard in his house-cum-shop. Perhaps on the strength of his £300, Vennar also married. In 1588, at any rate, he had a wife, Elizabeth, and in 1596 her father lived in Holborn, the area adjacent to much of Lincoln's Inn.[6]

The Vennard parents thought that these arrangements would settle questions about the disposition of their property between their two children, but they were quite wrong. Vennar continued to harass his father (his mother having soon died), and his brother and sister-in-law came to hate him and eventually his wife. For his part, the younger John tried to see to it that his own wife and rapidly increasing family would acquire his parents' property should he die before his father. He drew up a new

4. *Records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn,* Admissions (London, 1896), I, 93, vii.

5. The quotation is from the elder Vennard's deposition, PRO, STAC.5/V.7/17. The Lows and their associates made many remarks about Vennar's "vnthriftynes," and Smyth estimated in June 1588 that Vennar had received 1,100 marks (£733 6s. 8d.) from his father since going to the inns of law in London. See, for example, STAC.5/V.3/13; /V.4/28 (Smyth's answer); /V.5/22 (the answer); /V.1/30 (the bill). In December 1584, Vennar borrowed £100 from Henry Astell, who soon cancelled the bond, having, presumably, been repaid (C.54/1196/last item; C.275/89/p.225).

6. Wiltshire Record Office, Trowbridge, MS. 1900/5. Mary Vennard said on May 3, 1588, that she was twenty-four years old (she was, therefore, the same age as Richard Vennar). See PRO, STAC.5/V.7/17 (Mary Vennard's deposition, and the third set of interrogatories, no. 19).

contract to that effect in his father's name, but his father refused to approve it. As for Vennar, his adversaries said that he struck his father at Christmas 1587 and that both father and brother went in fear of their lives at his hands.[7]

These difficulties soon multiplied because probably in January 1588 the younger John Vennard died, survived by his wife and four children who would soon be five, as well as by his father and brother. His wife assumed that she had inherited an interest in the elder Vennard's property, and when the elder Vennard denied it, in fact returned the first contract cancelled, she demanded her jointure, £200, which he controlled. He then literally drove her out of the house-cum-shop, and as a result she delivered her fifth child before her time and was seriously ill. So in February, 1588, she sued her father-in-law in the Star Chamber. That court, which consisted of the Privy Council, dealt especially in the doubtful ground between common law and equity, and she was accusing him of, among other things, violence. She wanted her jointure, and she mentioned her husband's new contract, which she thought valid.[8] While the case progressed, she married Richard Low, who was from Shropshire, but more importantly, was a lawyer in Lincoln's Inn whom Vennar knew.[9] Low, wrote Vennar, was a man of "small discretion" who had become a lawyer by doing everything Vennar had not done—"prayer and fasting, . . . much entreaty, and with teares" and long combatting "with slender Commons." But, as Vennar ruefully added, Low did have the "wit to defeate mee of my Patrimony" (*Apology*, pp. 9–10).

Vennar hastened to his father's legal defense, prompting if not drawing up one set of interrogatories for him and probably another. One of Vennar's contributions was probably to imply that after her husband's death Mary Vennard had committed adultery with Robert Smyth, a mercer of Salisbury, aged forty, who became one of her most useful defenders. In an interrogatory, she was asked why she had entertained

7. For the new contract, see at the PRO the third set of interrogatories in STAC.5/V.7/17, and /V.3/13. For the animosity between Vennar and his father and brother, see /V.3/13 (depositions of Hobbs, Smyth); /V.4/28 (Smyth's answer); V.1/30.

8. The surviving documents of this lawsuit are at the PRO: STAC.5/V.7/17 (three sets of interrogatories for John Vennard senior, one for Mary Vennard, and five depositions, including those by John Vennard senior, Mary Vennard, and Smyth); and /V.3/13 (interrogatories for Mary Venard and eleven depositions, including one by Anthony Wootton and another by Smyth).

9. Low entered Lincoln's Inn from Clement's Inn on May 12, 1574, and was called to the bar on May 9, 1583: *Records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn*, Admissions, I, 81; Black Books, 1422–1586 (London, 1897), p. 430.

Smyth at midnight and other times in her chamber—"what practizes had you then in hand?" In her deposition, she denied the implication.[10]

For a time Vennar's father may have warmed toward him. Vennar and his wife moved into the house-cum-shop, and he said that "the resolute determinacion of his father tended wholely to the preferment and aduancement of" his now only son. So in October 1588 Vennar drew up a deed of gift like the document by which his elder brother would have had the Vennard property had he lived long enough. The elder Vennard approved of at least part of this document for a time, but he changed his mind.[11] He made a will on July 7, 1589, when he was mortally ill, and he was buried at St. Edmund's ten days later. A week before he died, according to the Lows, he said that Vennar "had broken his harte & was the Cause of his Sicknes." The will, which the parish priest, Alexander Lawes, witnessed among others, provided that Vennar should have £100, "in consideracion that he is my . . . son," provided he delivered up "a forged wrighting whiche he calleth a deede of gifte," and made a bond of £1,000 that he not vex or molest the executor. That was Anthony Wootton, Mary Vennard Low's twenty-two-year-old brother, who proved the will on August 10.[12]

Vennar insisted that his father had left no will, hence that he, Vennar, was the heir, and he and his wife took formal possession of the house in Salisbury. The Lows and friends soon broke into it and removed some legal documents, jewels, plate, and other things. Nothing else seems to have happened for several months, perhaps because Wootton was ill from at least September 1, when he made his will. Wootton died on January 28, 1590, and this event promptly led the Lows and Vennar to the Star Chamber.[13] The Lows sued Vennar on February 17, 1590. Vennar sued them at about the same time and refined his case on May 11 and again on July 7.[14]

10. PRO, STAC.5/V.7/17: the interrogatories in the first set of them refer particularly to Vennar, as do several of those in the third set, where the questions about adultery are nos. 7, 13.

11. PRO, STAC.5/V.5/22 (Vennar's bill), and /V.4/28 (Vennar's bill and Smyth's answer).

12. PRO, PROB. 11/74/f.129 (Vennard's will), and Wiltshire Record Office, Trowbridge, MS. 1901/1 (the record of his burial). In the spring of 1588 Wootton said that he was twenty-one years old (STAC.5/V.3/13).

13. PRO, STAC.5/V.1/30 (Mary Vennard Low's bill); /V.4/28 (Vennar's bill and Smyth's answer); /V.5/22 (Vennar's bill).

14. The surviving documents of these lawsuits are at the PRO: STAC.5/V.5/22 (two of Vennar's bills, one of probably Hilary term 1590 the other of July 7, 1590, and the answer of Charles, Dorothy, and Anne Wootton in Hilary term 1590); /V.1/30 (Mary Vennard's bill, Febru-

They chose that court because they accused each other of felonies. The Lows accused Vennar of two felonies: stealing papers belonging to the younger John Vennard that had been in the house-cum-shop, and forging the deed of gift, by which they meant that Vennar had added things to ("filled vp") the space between the part of which the elder Vennard had for a time approved and the seal. No doubt at their urging, Richard Woodward (another denizen of Lincoln's Inn) swore that Tristram Cottrell (yet another and an acquaintance of Vennar's), had said that Vennar had committed such a forgery.[15] Vennar accused the Lows and associates, especially Smyth, of forging a will for his father, so nullifying the deed of gift, and of forging another for Wootton, who, he said, had died because the forging of the elder Vennard's will had displeased God. Wootton's will was as disastrous for Vennar as his father's will, for Wootton named his sister, Mary Vennard Low, as his executrix, and she now took control of the elder Vennard's estate. Had Wootton left no will, as Vennar pointed out, a statute provided that the elder Vennard's nearest relative should become his executor, and that was not Mary Low but Richard Vennar.

Mary Low had lost no time having a notary prove Wootton's will in London (on February 13, 1590) but it then disappeared from the probate office and her associates accused Vennar of stealing it. It must eventually have reappeared, or had already been copied into the register, but its loss caused the Lows a good deal of trouble. Vennar, who had evidently abandoned the house-cum-shop earlier, seized it on June 19, 1590, only to be speedily removed by the Lows and others, "all armed and weponed with batts bowes giues [gyves] long pike staues and other wepons." They "did . . . beate hurt wound and evell Intrete" Vennar and his servants, and the Lows took, or resumed, possession of the place instead.[16]

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ary 17, 1590); /V.4/28 (Vennar's bill, May 11, 1590, and Anthony Ryvett's and Smyth's answers, May 12 and 14, 1590); /V.2/4 (interrogatories on Vennar's behalf and Ryvett's deposition, May 23, 1590).

15. PRO, S.P. 12/288/f.33. The document is undated and is now included among documents dated from 1601 to 1603 (*Calendar of State Papers, Dom., 1601–03, and Addenda 1547–65*, p. 311), but it obviously belongs to the Lows' lawsuit of February 17, 1590. Cottrell, of Somerset, had entered Lincoln's Inn by way of Thavies Inn on January 17, 1580, and Woodward, of Warwickshire, on February 5, 1585: *Records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn*, Admissions, I, 89, 101. See also STAC.5/V.1/30 (Mary Vennard Low's bill).

16. PRO, PROB. 11/75/ff.78v–79 (and see below); STAC.5/V.5/22 (the Woottons' answer); /V.2/32 (a bill of Vennar's).

The Lows' accusations sent Vennar to prison for the first time. He was in the Fleet prison until he said that he had returned the younger John Vennard's documents.[17] Then within a few months, the Privy Council put him into the Marshalsea prison for a real felony, not merely one alleged in a lawsuit about an inheritance.

Vennar explained. "A youth . . . in the shape of a Gentleman of the Lord Admirals . . . takes a Chamber in Chancery-lane neere my house [in Lincoln's Inn], where in short time hee tooke vpon him the name of sicke." Then, "in the midst of his fained fit, he sends for me without witnesse, deliuering mee" a warrant for £40 due him at the naval store-house at Deptford "and requests my paines in riding to receiue it, as I passed that way to my house at *Lewsham,* in Kent." Vennar performed the favor; but then somebody discovered that the warrant was a forgery to which a silver counterfeit of the Lord Admiral's seal had been applied. The Privy Council ordered Vennar's arrest on September 21, 1590, and he remained at the Marshalsea until May or June, 1591. To Vennar's amazement, the young man, whose name was Garrat Swyft, confidently swore that he knew nothing of the affair. Lord Burghley, the lord treasurer, eventually accepted Vennar's account and released him; but the judges did not believe Swyft, and he was hanged (*Apology,* pp. 13–15). Vennar's uncle, Rowland Harris, was also living in Lewisham when he died in 1603.[18]

On the day that the Privy Council ordered Vennar's arrest, a son, Richard, was baptised at St. Edmund's in Salisbury, but he would not survive his father's latest imprisonment, for he was buried at the same church on October 5.[19]

Vennar and his wife often reminded the Privy Council about his inability in prison to deal with the Lows' legal moves or his own, and in response to one such reminder, the Council ordered the master of the Marshalsea to release Vennar briefly so that he could answer Low: Vennar was to have what was rightfully his, as the secretary of the Council put it, and his examiners were to take "extraordinary Paines for the reliefe of the poore gentleman." But to no avail, for the Council found that the matter "dothe seme to be verie intricate." In June 1591, the Council ordered

17. PRO, STAC.5/V.1/30 (Mary Vennard Low's bill). See also the *Apology,* p. 11.

18. PRO, PROB.11/101/f.222v (Harris' will). Swyft was also in the Marshalsea: *CSP, Dom., 1581–90,* p. 640.

19. Wiltshire Record Office, Trowbridge, MS. 1901/1.

that the case be heard not in the Star Chamber but at common law in Salisbury.[20]

The Privy Council ordered on December 1, 1591, that Vennar be arrested again for, it seems, "Rebellion," and this time the benchers at Lincoln's Inn deprived him of his chamber "for default of continewance in that Howse." He was free late in January when he protested to the Council about his chamber. The Council wrote to the benchers on January 30, 1592, asking them, if they had no other reason, to restore Vennar's chamber so that "he might followe his studie and practize of the lawe."[21]

Later in 1592, Vennar filed two new lawsuits in the Star Chamber against the Lows.[22] He first sued three of their associates, Smyth, Robert Maton, and Roger Blagden, on April 13. His argument was that a John Croocke of Southampton had paid Mary Low money apparently owing to the elder Vennard, and Maton and Blagden had given Croocke an acquittance on her behalf. Vennar declared that the acquittance was another forgery, since he should have received the money and given the acquittance. The acquittance, however, was not uppermost in his mind. In interrogatories, he prompted Maton to admit that he had lied for the Lows previously and that Mary Low had conducted an affair with Robert Smyth, who was the real father of her last Vennard child, Elizabeth. Maton, whose lawyer was Richard Low himself, refused to answer because the matters were "cleane out of the . . . bill." Vennar, curiously, did not mention adultery to Smyth. He wanted Smyth to admit that he had forged Anthony Wootton's will (which Smyth denied) and had said that he could stab Anthony Ryvett, the Lows' legal agent in London, in the heart for letting the will get out of his hands (which Smyth admitted).

Vennar sued Mary Low and Smyth directly about the quarrel on November 8, 1592, but with a new understanding of what had happened. He allowed that his father's will may have been genuine, but if so, the

20. *Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1590*, p. 452; *1590–91*, pp. 97, 173, 196, 202–03, 207, 252, 348–49; *1591*, pp. 42, 168–69, 240–41, 332.

21. PRO, STAC.5/V.5/22, the answer; *CSP, Domestic, 1591–94*, p. 136; *Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1591–92*, p. 218.

22. The surviving documents of the first of these lawsuits are at the PRO: STAC.5/V.4/27 (Vennar's bill, April 13, 1592, and Blagden's and Maton's answers, April 15, 17, 1592); and /V.6/26 (interrogatories for Maton and his deposition, May 1, 1592, and interrogatories for Smyth and his deposition, May 22, 1590). Maton had been one of the elder Vennard's servants (V.7/17) fourth set of interrogatories, no. 18). The only surviving document of the second lawsuit is /V.2/32 (Vennar's bill, November 8, 1592, of which a second sheet is missing). Early in May, Vennar urged the Privy Council to hasten the Lows' response to this and other lawsuits of his: *Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1591–92*, p. 431.

Lows had driven him to make it so that he gave things to strangers, denied the claims of his "only child," Vennar, and made his enemy, Anthony Wootton, his executor. They were able to do so, he said, because his father "could not well indure any greate controversies without great grefe or sickenes," and they deliberately vexed him ("being a very aged man") with "most lewd demenores." They also caused his final illness in this way and in the end may have poisoned him. Vennar now thought his father was worth more than £3,000, (the number had risen to "many" thousands by 1614–*Apology,* p. 10).

With these maneuvers, the case of the Vennard inheritance disappears from the records of both the Star Chamber and the Privy Council, but, as Vennar explains in the *Apology,* the case did go on and did reach a formal conclusion. A judge or adjudicator eventually decided that neither the elder John Vennard's will nor Vennar's deed of gift was a forgery, nor, presumably, was Anthony Wootton's will, which Vennar did not steal. Mary Vennard Low remained executor of the elder Vennard's will, and she and her husband remained in possession of his goods. Vennar received "a composition of" £150, consisting, probably, of the £100 his father had given him in the will and £50 for the deed of gift—quite inadequate sums, Vennar wrote, "which by long imprisonment," including a spell in the King's Bench for debt, "I was enforced to accept of" (pp. 11–12). Vennar also wrote that the quarrel in the Star Chamber "was long, my purse of defence short. . . . I found many sutes begunne er'e the first was ended" (p. 11), implying that the Lows had launched numerous lawsuits against him to which he could not well reply. The surviving documents and the logic of the case, however, suggest otherwise. The Lows sued him once, but he sued them five times; and his father's will and then Wootton's will made the Lows masters of the property needing only to protect themselves, but Vennar needed to dislodge them.

In the late summer of 1594, Vennar was in trouble with the Lord Chamberlain, presumably because of some offense at court, and whatever he may have had to do with rebellion in December 1591, he was now trying to stamp it out. Rebellion was in the air because of the famous trial (on February 28) and hanging (on June 7) of the Queen's physician, Roderigo Lopez, for treason. Vennar wrote to some members of the Privy Council on September 20, 1594, reporting "speeches spoken in my p*resence* against hir ma^{tie} and the state by certayn recusantes." He had been riding in Hampshire from Titchfield to "Whitley," evidently the modern Whiteley two or three miles away, with Tristram Cottrell (who had been

responsible for evidence against him in 1590) and Thomas Dymocke. Vennar was asked the news at court. He replied that he had not been at court lately because "my lo: chamberleyn was Incenced in displesuer agaynst me by reson of an vntrew complaynt made to his lordship where-vnto I was not as yett cawled to myne Aunswer." He had, however, met the Earl of Essex "very latly vppon the water being only accompanyed with the . . . spanyard that is favored at the court." The Earl had discovered and pushed on the case against Lopez. "Yea sayd Tristram Cotterill I would that spanyard had byn hanged before hee came first into England for hee was the man y^{t} first disclosed docter lopus his practis to my lord of Essex." Cottrell added that "ther is a plott in hand more lyke to take effect if good lucke serve shortly If the Queen would com to whytt hall." Dymocke "held vp his finger and winked vppon Cottrill," who asked why Dymocke winked. Dymocke turned to Vennar and said, "I doupt not but you wilbe silent touching any thing here spoken wherof I [Vennar] byd hym not doupt."

Dymocke rode off, leaving Cottrell and Vennar "in the parke," where Cottrell denied the Queen's supremacy "And sayd that in spayn the queen was comonly called the whore of babilon," and that he would have been called to the bar in Lincoln's Inn if he had sworn to her supremacy. They went on to Whitley and then returned to Titchfield. On the return, Vennar asked Cottrell about the plot in hand, but Cottrell said only, "Enquer of you^{r} wyfe and shee can tell you more."[23]

Cottrell, Dymocke, and perhaps Vennar's wife soon took their revenge. They conspired, Vennar wrote, to put him in the Fleet prison again "vnder color of debt," and he was still there on February 25, 1596, when he wrote to Lord Burghley and Edward Coke, the attorney general, enclosing a copy of his report about the events in Hampshire.[24] Because his wife, as she told him, could "discover" the dealings of the recusants Cottrell and Dymocke, they have persuaded her "from coming vnto mee, . . . shee lying at hir fathers howse in holborne." They maintain her there and promise her "great rewardes in tyme to com." They also

23. PRO, S.P. 12/256/f.135. Roderigo Lopez was a Portuguese Jewish physician who had long lived in England and whose patients included the Queen. The "spanyard" was Antonio Perez, a pretender to the Portuguese throne whom the Earl of Essex had brought to England and whom Lopez served as translator. Spanish agents had tried to get Lopez to assassinate Perez and, as the Earl insisted, also the Queen. Lopez was tried on February 28 and hanged on June 7, 1594.

Dymocke evidently had nothing to do with Lincoln's Inn. A farm in the former Titchfield Park is "Whitley" on the one-inch Ordnance Survey map, "Whiteley" on more recent ones; see also VCH, *Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, III, 220–25.

24. PRO, S.P. 12/256/f.134.

promise to pay Vennar's creditors if he can remain in prison. Vennar's loyalty, therefore, has caused him to be "vtterly vndone kept in prison his wyfe kept from hym and his children therby vtterly defamed."

This is the first and last allusion to Vennar's children, apart from the son who had lived for two weeks in 1590. It is also the last allusion to his wife. Despite Vennar's much-asserted Protestantism, she must have had something to do with Roman Catholicism, hencewith why he was riding with two recusants between Titchfield and Whitley. Titchfield was dominated by Titchfield Abbey, which had become Place House, the main country residence of the earls of Southampton. The "parke" was Titchfield Park, which belonged to the earls, and Whitley was a group of buildings within it. In 1594, the Earl was Shakespeare's patron, and he and especially his mother, the Dowager Countess, were Roman Catholics. In any event, Vennar and his wife were obviously estranged in February 1596, and he probably saw little chance of reconcilement since he did not hesitate to tell Lord Burghley and Coke that she knew about the doings of recusants and even about Spanish plots against the Queen.

His spells in prison had taught Vennar to pity "the miserable captiues" in such places, as he grandly wrote in the *Apology.* The Queen appointed him to a royal commission along with the Countesses of Cumberland and Warwick (who were sisters) and London dignitaries, including the justices of the peace for Middlesex and Surrey, "for the speedy enlargement of all vnable debtors." This "mercy" was stopped "by the hand of a seuere Iudge," but Vennar "was not behind hand in recording it to our . . . now King [from 1603], whose speedy re-grant thereof, I doubt not in the generall benefite of this Land, will shortly shew it selfe" (pp. 41–43). Moreover, when the Countess of Warwick, who had died in 1604, asked him to suggest a good work that she might perform, he suggested that she discharge the debts of "imprisoned Gentlemen and men of quality, by her owne . . . singular bounty." She did so for thirty-four of them, but whether one was Vennar he did not say (p. 45).

Vennar continued to pursue his quarrel with the Lows about his patrimony, despite the formal settlement and the "composition" paid to him. The Privy Council had ordered a final end of the quarrel, according to Vennar, and the Queen had ordered the Lord Keeper (Sir Thomas Egerton) to hear the case in, presumably, the court of Chancery. The Lord Keeper, however, had refused. Moreover, Richard Low had managed to put Vennar back in prison by order of the court of King's Bench, and although bail for Vennar had been arrived at in open court, a judge,

Francis Gawdy, had refused to accept it. So from prison on December 16, 1599, Vennar wrote to Sir Robert Cecil, Lord Burghley's son and one of the two secretaries of state. He wanted Gawdy to accept his bail so that he could tell Cecil personally about his "intollerable wrongs" at the hands of the Lord Keeper, wrongs "vnfytt to be permitted in anie Christian Comon welth."[25]

II

The case remained closed, but Vennar did get out of prison, and as the new century began, he took stock of his life. He considered his "vniust troubles," which "had wrapt mee in many debts, and those hardly satisfied. . . . I had onely a younger brothers patrimony left me, my limbes and my wits, (the worst Tenants a Cittizen can let house to)," and "the remembrance of former plenty. . . . I could exclude my selfe from labour, and beggary was shamefull." So in the summer of 1600 he set about the first of several attempts to reestablish himself. "I put new wings to my dull hopes," he wrote, "and resolued to go for *Scotland*." He thought (or so he wrote) that he might get the King of Scotland to persuade the English Privy Council to hear his case about his patrimony again, "the former agreement notwithstanding" (*Apology*, pp. 16–17). But other Englishmen were going or writing to Scotland at the time, and they had in mind currying favor with the man who should soon become King of England as well as Scotland.

Vennar arrived in Edinburgh on August 7, 1600, when "to my hearts Ioy, I beheld" the Scottish King, James VI, riding triumphantly to church "to offer vp his hearty Sacrifice of Praise and Thankes-giuing" for being delivered from the Gowrie plot, "that horrid danger." This scene moved Vennar "to passion," which he manifested by tears, "as outward signes of inward ioy." The next morning while still in bed he wrote a prayer of thanksgiving, which, "without my priuity was presented to" the King. Vennar was "sent for, and graced by kissing his Royall Hand." He accompanied the King on a journey to Falkland (where there was a royal palace) in Fifeshire and "after some stay" returned to Edinburgh. There

25. Hatfield House, Cecil MSS., vol. 75, no. 35 (HMC, *Salisbury*, XI, 24). Vennar added that all these things had "happened vnto me by the Death of" Cecil's father (on August 4, 1598), "To whome I was more bound for his honnors favour in Justice then to all the World." Because Cecil had approached the Queen for him on some occasion, Vennar let Cecil see "a small volume" about "theise late Conspiracies" that he meant to present to her and publish: vol. 83, no. 42 (*Salisbury*, XI, 538).

reality intruded in the form of George Nicholson, the English Queen's agent, who questioned him "touching my Loyalty." Queen Elizabeth was not amused by Englishmen who gambled on her early demise. When, therefore, Vennar returned to the English court, then at Richmond, he "was not onely apprehended and examined, but also committed [to prison] for the same, as a dangerous Member to the State; so that in all my courses, my actions haue beene mistaken, and I vniustly censured" (*Apology,* pp. 17–20).

His journey into Scotland had, he thought, only made him "an eyesore to that barking beast the Multitude, that euer measure things by" how they turn out. Vennar took his "entertainement in *England*" patiently because of his "innated loue" to the King who "should afterwards bee my Soueraigne" (*Apology,* pp. 20–21).

Vennar remained in prison for "a long time as a Bird in a cage," but "at last I got my freedome" (*Apology,* pp. 21–22). If salvation did not lie in Scotland, he now decided, perhaps it lay in the practice of law. The benchers of Lincoln's Inn, however, must have refused to call him to the bar in the ordinary way, for he asked Christopher Yelverton (the Queen's serjeant) to procure a letter from the Queen directing the benchers to call him. Yelverton approached not the Queen but the Solicitor General (Thomas Fleming) to write such a letter. Vennar objected, and on January 28, 1601, Yelverton wrote a letter to Edward Coke and Sir Robert Cecil that Vennar delivered personally. Yelverton told them that the bearer, "a gen*tleman* to vs well knowne . . . doth most humblie desire" that the letter to the benchers "might growe vnto him by her Ma^{ts} favor," not the solicitor's.[26] If, however, such a letter, whether in the Queen's name or not, ever reached the benchers, it did not move them, for Vennar was not called to the bar.

Vennar next decided to pursue a literary career, prompted, perhaps, by the success of his prayer of thanksgiving for James VI.[27] The prayer is probably lost, unless some of it survives in Vennar's *True Testimonie,* but it must have been a skillful and overblown poem written very quickly and much like the things that he would now write. For he embarked on a series of fervent appeals in verse and prose to patriotism, Protestant piety, and civic duty.

26. Hatfield House, Cecil MSS., vol. 180, no. 9 (HMC, *Salisbury,* XI, 24). Vennar signed two Cecil MSS., vol. 83, no. 42, and vol. 75, no 35.

27. He had also written an unpublished poem on the death (August 4, 1598) of Lord Burghley: Hatfield House, Cecil MSS., vol. 75, no. 35 (HMC, *Salisbury,* IX, 413, and *Sixth Report,* p. 196a).

His first work was a book, *The Right Way to Heaven*. It was dedicated to the Queen, entered at Stationers' Hall on November 19, 1601, and bore his full name, Richard Vennard.[28] He described it in the dedication as "this little handfull of my harts labour," and included a poem the first letters whose lines spell out "ELIZABETHA REGINA" (sig. G3v). The book contains three other poems, all in the six-line stanza that Shakespeare used in *Venus and Adonis* and elsewhere and that Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Ralegh, and others of the time also used: "Laudetur Dominus in æternum," twenty stanzas (sigs. A1–A4v); "The Miracle of Nature"—who is, of course, the Queen—thirty-four stanzas (sigs. G4–H4); and "A faithfull Subiects prayer," a poem tipped in at the end, four stanzas (sig. H5). The main part of the work, however, is prose: "The high way to Heaven" (twelve meditations displaying classical and Christian learning); "A most godly and comfortable Praier, in time of Aduersitie," from which the last paragraph was omitted;[29] "An Exhortacion to continew all Subiects in their dew obedience"; and "What a faithfull subiect is" (sigs. B1–G3). All is fervent Protestant Christianity, or equally fervent Elizabethan loyalty, or both at once. The "Exhortacion" is divided into sections addressed to bishops and clergy, the nobility, civil magistrates, and the private subject, in each of which Vennar quite earnestly tells everybody in the land except the Queen how to behave. He specifically praises Lord Burghley ("I speake but what I know," sig. G1v), the Earl of Nottingham, and Sir John Popham. In "The Miracle of Nature," he praises the Queen and her Privy Council ("such a Queene, and such a Counsaile," sig. H2), then turns to poets (like, presumably, Shakespeare) who have not contended for her praise. He concludes that their wits are too weak, for she is the only true subject for poetry (sigs. H3–H3v).

Two copies survive, one of which is at the Folger Shakespeare Library and is described above. Evidently Vennar himself had the other, now at the British Library, greatly enriched for, as one may guess, presentation to a dignitary. The title-page, borders, devices, and large capitals are colored with water colors and gold leaf. At the end is an additional quire in which the main piece is "A prayer for the prosperous successe of hir Maiesties forces in Ireland," consisting of an introduction in prose, an engraving of

28. Vennar wrote that the Queen had reigned forty-four years (sig. H2), which he could not have written until November 17, 1601, when her forty-fourth year began.

29. The "Praier" ends at the bottom of sig. E1v, where the catchword is "Thy," which does not appear at the top of sig. E2. In the edition of 1602, the reprinted part of the "Praier" also ends at the bottom of sig. E1v, and the catchword is also "Thy," but at the top of sig. E2 is a new paragraph beginning with "Thy." See below.

St. George (which had appeared nowhere before[30] and was richly colored), and eight of the six-line stanzas. Then come the poem tipped in at the end of the other copy and a painting of two angels crowning the Queen while five putti watch. Lord Mountjoy led the forces in Ireland, who were fighting Irish rebels and Spanish troops. All this seems Elizabethan enough, but the author wrote these things shortly after, if not before, his release from prison for disloyally attending on the Scottish King, and seven years or so after his wife may have had to do with a Spanish plot against the Queen.

Vennar soon set about improving *The Right Way to Heaven,* a new version of which appeared in 1602. He replaced all the poems of the first version with eight mostly shorter poems, including at the end yet another poem the first letters of whose lines spell out the Queen's name, in this case, "ELIZABETH REGINA," who is "Eterniz'd . . . in Heauens cælestiall booke, / Lady of vertue Englands sacred Queene" (sig. H1v). Again much of the verse is in the six-line stanza (seventeen stanzas altogether), but stanzas of four, seven, eight, and nine lines also occur. Two poems concern Lord Mountjoy's campaign in Ireland, "A Virgin Princesse and a gentle Lambe," and the Queen's Godly counsel given to Lord Mountjoy on his departure for Ireland, in February 1601 (sig. A2v). Another praises the two noble ladies who had helped him alleviate the misery of imprisoned debtors, the Countesses of Warwick and Cumberland (sigs. G3v–G4v). And the first letters of the lines of one poem spell out "EDWARD COKE," the attorney general (sig. H1). Vennar mentions Coke's "favour / Of late reuiu'd in that poore sute I shewd" and tells him to "Kindle your sweet affection to my labour, / Else it will freeze before the best be viewd"—a revival, it seems, of Vennar's case about his patrimony. Most of the book, however, repeats the prose of 1601. "The high way to Heaven" is much the same, but the allusions to Lord Burghley and other dignitaries in the "Exhortacion" have disappeared.

The last paragraph of "A most godly and comfortable Praier," omitted in 1601, appears in 1602, and its main sentence proves to echo, unacknowledged, the Prayer Book version of Psalm 119. "Thy testemonies," Vennar wrote, "shall delight my soule, in the daies of my trouble, thy statutes shall be my songs in the house of my pilgrimage, and thy law shalbe deerer vnto mee then thousands of Golde and siluer." David had written: "thy testimonies are my delight and my counsellors. My soul

30. R. F. Luborsky and E. M. Ingram, *A Guide to English Illustrated Books 1536–1603* (Tempe, 1998), I, 725.

cleaveth to the dust. . . . Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. . . . The law of thy mouth is dearer unto me than thousands of gold and silver" (24–25, 54, 72). Vennar's alterations are telling: David's "the dust" became "my trouble," and David's present and past tenses became the future tense.

Lord Mountjoy won a decisive victory over the Irish and Spanish at Kinsale on December 24, 1601, after which the Spanish agreed to leave Ireland. Vennar responded with his next work, *Englands Joy,* written, evidently, early in 1602 and published soon after. It is undated, signed only "R V" at beginning and end, and has nothing to do with the play of the same title that Vennar would propose to mount at the Swan later in 1602.[31] It consists of three poems. The first, marginally accompanied by the admonition to "Praie faithfully, and neuer cease," is yet another spelling out of "ELIZABETHA REGINA" in the initial letters of its lines, whose first five lines read:

> ENglands blisse, & blessed *Queene,*
> Liue your praises in perfection,
> In your Subiects hearts be seene
> Zeale in humble loues subiection:
> Angels in your loue attend you. . . .

The main poem, twenty of the six-line stanzas, celebrates the Protestant victory (hence England's joy) and departure of the Spanish and blesses the Privy Council and, again, the Queen. The third poem, tipped in at the end, comprises three of the six-line stanzas headed "For all Honourable, Virtuous, and Noble spirited Lords, Ladies, and all other her Maiesties faithfull Subiects whatsoeuer," all of whom were to pray for her.

This year or so of literary exertion did not accomplish what Vennar had hoped, for in the autumn of 1602 he decided to try Scotland again. But, as he wrote in the *Apology,* "to this purpose there wanted Armes, or rather the sinewes of Armes, money." He saw "at the Globe on the Banke-side" a readier source of that for a man of letters than he could get from his books, "much more then would haue supplyed my then want." He saw "euery mans hand ready to feed the luxury of his eye, that puld downe his hat to stop the sight of his charity, wherefore I concluded to make a friend of Mammon." He would "giue them sound" and "words,

31. The work is so like his other work that it can hardly be by anybody else. Moreover, it reprints the engraving of St. George that had first appeared in the decorated version of *The Right Way to Heaven* (1601) and then in the version of 1602, even though one printer (Thomas Este) printed those works and another (Peter Short) this one.

both being but aire." He would write a play beginning with the sounds of war and ending with "the cry of peace," and including both Lopez's hanging and Mountjoy's victory (scenes 5, 7). He would not, however, sell it to a theatrical enterprise as a lesser man might, nor would he have to do with actors in any other way. He would mount it and play a part in it himself, and his associates would be "men of good birth, Schollers by profession," who would play gentlemen and gentlewomen (pp. 22–24). He issued his *Plot of the Play Called Englands Joy* to advertise his production, he hired the Swan playhouse, also on the bankside, and he became famous.

III

He did not go back to Scotland, but four months and eighteen days later Scotland came to him. Queen Elizabeth, lately the miracle who was the only true subject for poetry, died on March 24, 1603, and James VI of Scotland became also James I of England. Vennar eventually congratulated himself on having "liued to see these happy *Halcion* daies" (*Apology,* p. 21).

The King made his first journey to the west country in the autumn of 1603, and at the end of November and beginning of December was staying in Wilton House, near Salisbury. Vennar was there, too, seeking the King's ear, for his "conscience" had awakened him "and told me what seruice I owed the soyle that first felt my weight, and gave me breathing." He was vexed about certain abuses, "so many, horrible, inhumane, and barbarous tyranies . . . suffred, by my innocent Countrey-men, that it would redound to the perpetuall ignominy of our Nation to set them downe." He meant, it seems, corrupt purveyors. The King heard him out, agreed with him, and appointed a commission, consisting of the Earl of Hertford, the Bishop of Salisbury, and others. Presently, after Parliament had taken a hand, "that whole rabble of helhounds, was dispierced, and all this Kingdome, for euer heereafter freed from that intollerable and vnlawfull annoyance, by expresse Edict from the King and Councell."[32]

32. Purveyors were "inferiour Ministers" who bought goods for the use of the Crown. They could "make themselves (under colour of our Prerogative Royall) the instruments of corruption and rapine" by compelling the purchase of goods at low rates and reselling them at market rates. Parliament petitioned the King about the practice in February 1606 and soon passed an act against it. The King then issued a proclamation against it on April 23 (*Stuart Royal Proclamations,* ed. James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes [Oxford, 1973], pp. 118–21). If, however, Vennar had this abuse in mind, he was probably wrong to think that he was mainly responsible for these actions against it.

Vennar boasted that "the like seruice . . . hath not bene done, by any man, of my ranke, within this Kingdome" (*Apology,* pp. 50–53).

He then wrote and published a work apparently meant to please his new monarch. It was probably a broadside, and no copy seems to survive, but Vennar explained it and quoted from it. It had portraits of the King, Queen Anne, and Prince Henry and described "*a Papist Dormant, a Papist Couchant, a Papist Leauant, a Papist Passant, a Papist Rampant,* and *a Papist Pendant* [i.e., hanged], it being foode to strengthen feebler bodies." A "true Subiects prayer," was "inserted vnder it," which began: "The God of all Eternity, / Preserue this Royall Vnity." He showed the work to Dr. Richard Vaughan, bishop of London, who recommended that Vennar distribute it "as well within the Citty of *London,* as through all his Dioces" (*Apology,* pp. 54–55). Vaughan became bishop of London on December 26, 1604.

The Gunpowder Plot, which famously culminated on November 5, 1605, drove Vennar back to his pen, because, as he wrote in the *Apology,* "I haue an English heart yet liues" (p. 53). The result was *The True Testimonie of a Faithfull Subiect* (1605). Vennar again used only his initials, but he was proud enough of the work not only to dedicate it to the King, but to show it to two circuit judges and at their request to distribute it through their circuit of the home counties (p. 54). He quarried four of his prose essays from his *Right way to heaven*—"What a faithful subiect is" and three exhortations (sigs. A3–B3). The rest, however, is new and, except for the dedication, is verse, all in the six-line stanza: the thanksgiving to God for the King's happy deliverance (sigs. B3v–B5v), thirteen stanzas in some of which Vennar remembered the same King's deliverance from the Gowrie plot (sig. B4v); a thanksgiving to God for all our temporal blessings, twenty-eight stanzas (sigs. B6–C2v); and "A Prayer for the Kings most excellent Maiestie, and our gracious Ladie Queene Anne," four stanzas (sigs. C3–C3v). In his dedication, Vennar reminded the King that he had once "in your Realme of Scotland" made "apparant my vnfained loue to your Highnesse," and "on bended knees" he beseeched "your royall Maiestie to accept this little handfull of my hearts most faithfull affection" (sig. A2).

These successes, however, could not keep Vennar out of trouble and prison. He got into a "tempest" at the Inner Temple, "where I moulted in my old age." He was accused of wronging lawyers there, who became "my Iudges" and "Executioners, and I neuer saw the Scale and the Sword pictured in one hand before." He was pursued by William Towse, a

bencher in the house, and after suffering imprisonment, "the most mortall wound in the eye of many," was found guiltless by the Lord Chancellor (Lord Ellesmere), who ordered Towse to recompense him with money (*Apology,* pp. 27–29).

He set out in 1606 to organize a masque that citizens of London were to present at court, and even that venture sent him to prison. The masque was Thomas Campion's *Lord Hay's Mask* for the marriage of Lord Hayes and Honora Denny, the daughter of Lord Denny. Vennar told the King of the project, "who gaue a gracious allowance." He got the Recorder of London, Sir Henry Mountague, to recommend it to the Lord Mayor, Sir John Wattes, who agreed that if Vennar could produce £1,000, he would double it. Vennar secured a promise of £500 from a former mayor, Sir Stephen Soame, and using "an Honourable persons name," approached another former mayor, Sir John Spencer, for the other £500.[33] Spencer, who was very rich (and very careful with his money) at once suspected that Vennar was engaged in a fraud and had him sent to the Fleet prison. Vennar admitted that he had been wrong to use the honorable person's name, but his own "name carried doubt enough in it." At length, Soame and the honorable person cleared him, but in pleading his discharge before Edward Coke, now Sir Edward and Chief Justice of Common Pleas, Vennar spoke "it may be in too rough a phrase" and "was taught manners." He was to be released, but only when he could find sureties for good behavior. People did not hasten to risk money in such a cause, and he "lay long in prison" (*Apology,* pp. 30–31, 33–35). The masque was performed at Whitehall at the King's expense on the day of the marriage, January 26, 1607.

These adventures were too much for Lincoln's Inn. On January 28, 1607, the benchers "expulsed" Vennar "for dyverse notorious publick abuses and great offences and misdemeanors by him committed and done at diverse and sundrie tymes to the great discreditt of this Howse."[34] So "for the better dispach of his necessary busines," as Vennar put it, he "happened to . . . growe in speech" with Roger Cumber, bricklayer, and Rose his wife about a room in their house in Shoe Lane (a little east of the Inn) and rented it. Soon, however, the Cumbers were vexing Vennar and his friends with opprobrious speeches, slanderings, and railings "as well

33. Vennar and Spencer may have known one another for a long time, for Spencer harried recusants in Holborn when he was sheriff in 1583–84 (*DNB*).

34. *Records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn,* Black Books 1586–1660 (London, 1898), p. 103.

in the open street as in ther howse." Vennar went to Sir Stephen Soame, now justice of the peace, who, according to Vennar, found him and friends "gentellmen of good woorth and such as gave no cause of offence." Soame sent the Cumbers to Bridewell but soon released them "in hope of their amendament." They were unimpressed; "yea they did afterwards much more encrease" their abuse. Vennar returned to Soame, who ordered the constable in Shoe Lane, Roger Charme, to take Rose to Newgate "for her intemperatt tongue and vsage against" Vennar, until she could find sureties for good behavior. Charme, however, not only released her but threatened to get a warrant to put Vennar in Newgate. Charme said in the open street that he would "pull his [Vennar's] gilt spures from his heeles." Then the Cumbers with Charme, another tenant, William Keate, who was "a very lewd fellowe," and others locked Vennar out of the room after eight o'clock at night, when he could not get lodgings elsewhere, and disposed of his goods. One may suspect that Vennar had not paid his rent.

Vennar (still giving himself as of Lincoln's Inn) filed a bill on June 5, 1608, in the Star Chamber against Charme, Rose Cumber, and Keate, all of whom demurred. Their lawyers argued that even if the accusations were true, as they were not, the case should not be heard in the Star Chamber. Richard Dover, lawyer for Rose and Keate, added: "it doth argue eyther great presumpcion in" Vennar "or too much neclect of dewtye that he would attempte to preferr such friuolous matters" to the Star Chamber, "not fearinge as it seemeth the punishment vsuallye inflicted vpon such Turbulent and busy" complainants; "In w^{ch} Cause" he "hath Carryed himselfe not much vnlyke his accion in the Comicall or Conicatchinge Conceipte Tearmed by him selfe (Englands ioy) a meere illusion and wronginge" of the King's "lovinge subiects and a devise plotted to gayne monye, by a Colourable Cosenage."[35]

Because Vennar often heard himself "calumniated by" the "impure gummes" of the London multitude, he "of late" forsook London "to make my . . . aboade, in the two Noble Counties of *Kent,* and *Essex.*" There he met "with many Gentlemen of great ranke, and quality, who . . . did vse me nobly, making those Counties, by their generous conuersation, seeme to me a Summer Garden, full of delight and pleasure" (*Apology,* pp. 37–38). Such a gentleman may have been the Earl of Northampton, who had much to do with Audley End, the great house in Essex

35. PRO, STAC.8/288/14.

that his nephew owned. Early in 1614, it seems, Vennar urged the Earl to help "an vnnaturally dispossessed mother (by her owne sonne) from her house and liuing." The Earl communicated with the King, and "this distressed Gentlewoman receiued her hearts desire, in one fort-night," who "had rested whole yeares before afflicted" (*Apology,* pp. 48–49).[36]

The summer garden, however, could not last forever. Probably in the autumn or winter of 1614, Vennar was again in prison, this time in the Wood Street Compter in London, apparently for debt. He was now fifty years old, single, and not only childless but, he wrote, too old to produce heirs. He did not lack energy or schemes for the future, but he decided that the time had come to write a valediction, in which he could protest "my much iniury." The work would be his *Apology,* "this defence of my life" (pp. 3, 56, 58).[37] He probably wrote it quickly: much of it sounds off–hand, and he did not announce that it was to have two parts until page 38 (Part one, pp. 1–38, is "mine owne defence," and part two, pp. 39–59, is "my merite"). It was cleanly printed in octavo and dated 1614. His and his father's surname is spelled "Vennar," and despite changes of address since 1607, he is "of Lincolns Inne." He thought of the *Apology* as a continuation of his literary career but had lost track of when he had last written for publication: "it will seeme strange vnto you," he told his readers, "that after so long a trance of fifteene yeares, I should now start vp with an Apologie" (p. 39). He meant nine years or so, since his last previous work was the *True Testimonie* of 1605, or perhaps the lost and undated broadsheet against Papists. Curiously, when he touched again on his literary career, these two works were the only ones he mentioned and neither by title (pp. 53–55).

The *Apology* is different from anything Vennar had written before. It is not a demonstration of high–flown zeal for religion, monarch, and country, but a stream of demotic, energetic, and witty prose about his own misfortunes. Yet pretension has not entirely disappeared. There are constant displays of classical learning and many densely allusive passages. Moreover, the persona everywhere visible in the work is the man of the

36. This passage dates the writing of the *Apology* to sometime in 1614 after June 15, for Vennar wrote that he had advised "the late Earl of *Northampton* . . . within this tenne months," and the Earl had died on June 15, 1614.

37. Although Vennar was not coy about other imprisonments, he made no great point of saying that he was writing the *Apology* in prison. He wrote only that he was "not free" and neither "amongst the liuing" nor in "dispaire" (pp. 32, 39, 44). He had been in the Compter for some time when he died there in October 1615, and that prison was mainly for debtors. He did not complain that this imprisonment was mistaken and did complain about imprisonment for debt. See below.

lawsuits and, at a remove or two, of the other works. He was obsessed by pride in the social rank he supposed he had acquired by birth and education. His whole purpose in the *Apology* is to state his rank and education and to explain why he accomplished none of the things a reader might expect. He once mentions bad luck—"my malignant starres" (p. 21), and once that he has made mistakes—"I haue beene content to commit folly with fooles" (p. 40), but nearly everywhere else he blames his "knowne disgrace" (p. 28) on others. He has been wronged, cheated, misunderstood. The origin of his "vniust troubles" was losing the struggle for his patrimony. That deprived him not only of the money necessary to put his rank and education to use, but, since it led to prison, of his reputation—"An ill name, halfe hang'd," as he wrote (p. 14). So his first disaster led to the others, and, after Richard Low, his antagonist throughout the *Apology* is "the Pur-blinde Multitude that feede with Spectacles to make their meate seeme bigger" (p. 1), or, for short, "the beast" (pp. 2ff.).

He was, of course, a fabulist. Other well educated people born in houses-cum-shops in provincial towns did not automatically acquire the social rank to which he thought he was entitled, and occasionally he implied as much. He kept "sixe men with horses sutable" during his early years at Lincoln's Inn not for any practical purpose but to answer "my birth, and former Education, so farre, that I dare, my most malicious detractors to paralel my Port and Habite with any Gentleman vnder the degree of Honourable" (p. 6). He equated his social "desert" with that of Themistocles, who, "come vpon the Theater, and being demanded whose voyce hee would heare, answered, his that should speake his praises" (p. 8).

He added: "For as the first part of my life was beneficiall to my selfe by my fathers bounty, so the remainder thereof, hitherto, hath beene so profitable to my country . . . that I may boldly affirme no man of my degree, in this Kingdome, hath with more danger of his person, and aduenture of his estate, brought equall benefite to his Country." And, later: "neuer man of my ranke, considering the late lightnesse of my purse, and now weakenesse of my friends, waded deeper to reach the generall good of my Country" (p. 41). Moreover, nobody could tax him with slander, deceit, or fraud "to the dis-reputation of any man, or detrement, to the value of one Crowne," 5s.—since, presumably, people at the Swan had lost only 1s. each. He desired "not vniustly, to hold the ranke of my place and birth, with the fauour of all deseruing Gentlemen, whom passion cannot sway, and who know" how valueless "the tongues of this beast my enemy" are (pp. 57–58).

Despite confinement in the Compter, Vennar had two further projects in hand for the good of his country. The first concerned the commission that he hoped King James would renew for the relief of debtors in prison. People in the Fleet and Kings Bench prisons, Vennar wrote, had petitioned the Lord Chancellor to make him registrar of such a commission and solicitor of the prisoners' causes, and the justices of Middlesex and Surrey had approved. Should this commission be appointed, Vennar promised "to leaue a memory behind mee of that integrity and zeale, shall set mee vpright againe in the world" (pp. 43–44). Vennar then launched into a passionate essay about English prisons and putting people in them for debt. The jails "of this Kingdome," are "the true paralell of hell, where the wretched onely feele misery, and those that" need "helpe, are most loaden with cruelty." He proposed that the country adopt the practice in the Low Countries, where "If any man arest his debtor, hee finds him competent allowance during that restraint" (pp. 46–48).

The other project was the building of a hospital in Bath in memory of the failure of the Gunpowder Plot "and in releife of such decaied persons, whose want of ability in purse, might be no hinderance to their ability in health." Vennar had promoted it, been encouraged "by many Honourable personages," and remained "yet hopefull of successe" (pp. 56–57).

He realized that his "disaster" at the Swan was better known than the others, hence was the one his readers wanted to read about, so he devoted more space to it: "this diuill must be cast out at leasure" (pp. 15–16, 23–27). He also thought it the one for which he should make amends, by which he meant showing that the play did exist. Before starting the *Apology,* or at least before he got to page 24, he secured the help of William Fennor, an educated pamphleteer.[38] Vennar inserted "a true history of my life . . . in place of Musicke, for [i.e., between?] the actes," and Fennor had copies made of the whole manuscript, including "all those intendments prepared for that daies entertainement" in 1602. Vennar may have paid, or lent, Fennor £2 for the copying (see below), and he promised his readers that the play would be presented in public next term—presumably by Fennor if Vennar was still in the Compter then.

Vennar also rattled off a series of witty arguments to prove that he had not cheated his spectators in 1602. If his play was bad, so are other plays, like the recently and anonymously printed (1613) *Knight of the Burning Pestle.* He, like its publisher, thought it the work of one man, though

38. The similarity of the their names may suggest that the two men were relatives, but if they were they were not fellow countrymen. Fennor was from Warwickshire (see below), where there was a family named Venner (PRO, STAC.8/287/4).

since 1635 it has usually been ascribed to Beaumont and Fletcher. It "rang so dismally in your eares," Vennar told his readers, "and yet the Writer in a state of Grace." Unlike that writer, Vennar had presented "a Dumbe Show, and the Players say, that is alwaies as good as a bad act." For their 12d., the spectators got a bargain, "mirth for a Twelue-month." Expectation is better than achievement—"the sweetnesse of hope is beyond the enioying." The public calls Vennar an "Impostor," but the law "presupposeth euery man good, till hee bee conuicted bad," and unlike all his other disasters, this one led neither to an indictment nor prison.

According to John Taylor, the Water Poet, in *A Cast Over the Water* (1615), Fennor posted bills and then in the spring of 1615 mounted Vennar's *England's Joy* in public somewhere other than at the Swan.[39] Taylor mocked Fennor's performance:

> Thou brag'st what fame thou got'st vpon the stage
> Indeed, thou set'st the people in a rage
> In playing *Englands Ioy,* that euery Man
> Did iudge it worse then that was done at Swan.
> I neuer saw poore fellow so behist,
> T'applaud thee, few or none lent halfe a fist. (sig. B5v)

Taylor said that Fennor had promised in his bills "In rare Extemporie to shew thy skill," but all he spoke he had studied "aboue a month and more" and had from "a better wit" (sig. B5v). Taylor went on:

> Upon S. *Georges* day last [April 23, 1615], Sir, you gaue
> To eight Knights of the Garter (like a Knave)
> Eight Manuscripts (or Books) all fairelie writ,
> Informing them, they were your Mother wit:
> And you compil'd them; then you were regarded,
> And for anothers wit was well rewarded.
> All this is true, and I this dare maintaine,
> The matter came from out a learned braine:
> And poore old *Vennor,* that plaine dealing man,
> Who acted *Englands Ioy* first at the Swan,
> Paid eight crowns [£2] for the writing of these things,

39. Taylor's tract is a reply to one by Fennor, *Fennors Defence* (1615). Fennor had agreed to join Taylor in a contest of wit at the Hope playhouse but did not appear. Taylor poured scorn on him, and Fennor replied with his *Defence:* he had not appeared because he had been summoned to his father's sickbed in Warwickshire. Moreover, when the same thing had happened to him at the Fortune playhouse (one Kendall had not appeared), he had achieved a triumph on his own: "Know, foole, when on the Stage I purchas'd worth, / I scorned to send for thee to helpe me forth" (sig. A7v), and it is to these lines that Taylor's first quoted line refers.

Besides the couers, and the silken strings:
Which money backe he neuer yet receiu'd,
So the deceiuer is by thee deceiu'd. (sig. C3)

Taylor accused Fennor again of putting his own name to Vennar's work and so of abusing noblemen who might have helped Vennar with "their bounty." He concluded:

And last, thou shew'st thy cheating good and euill,
Beguiling him, that could beguile the Deuill. (sig. C3v)

Vennar supposed in 1614 that he would get out of the Wood Street Compter with a whole skin: "I neuer held my selfe so fatally vnfortunate as to expire my last breath in a prison" (*Apology,* p. 22). But he was wrong. He died there, and he was buried at the parish church, St. Michael Wood Street, on October 13, 1615.[40] He was fifty-one years old.

A year later, Fennor wrote a pamphlet, *Compters Commonwealth,* published in 1617 but dated October 23, 1616 and licensed October 16, 1616. In it the persona becomes a prisoner in the Wood Street Compter and describes what happens to him there. In one passage he recalls "M^r^ *Venard* (that went by the name of *Englands Ioy*)." Prisoners were put into one of three sections: the "Masterside" for those who would pay many fees, the "Knights ward" for those who would pay fewer, and "the black hole" for the rest. Vennar was in the masterside, but he refused to pay some fees because he thought them improper. So the "cheefest officer" there, the chamberlain, confiscated his cloak. Vennar, who had "often . . . beene a prisoner" in such places, had a friend deliver a letter to "the next Iustice, demanding" that the chamberlain be arrested for theft. Vennar got his cloak back, but he was thrown into the black hole, where he was "plagued by the Keepers." And, "lying without a bedde, hee caught such an extreame cold in his legges, that it was not long before he departed this life" (pp. 62–64).

Vennar's achievements made his pretensions ridiculous, but his pretensions made the fiasco at the Swan a better story than it might have been, and, four hundred years later, him something more than a spendthrift or crook.

KINGSDON, SOMERSET

40. The parish register, GL, MS. 6530. Many entries read that people were buried "out" of the Compter, or Counter; this one reads "buryed Richard Venor Countre."