

Cambridge University Press
0521092469 - The Fortunes of Falstaff
J. Dover Wilson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

THE
FORTUNES OF FALSTAFF

Cambridge University Press
0521092469 - The Fortunes of Falstaff
J. Dover Wilson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

To
his friend and colleague
JAMES RÖGNVALD LEARMONTH
an ever-grateful patient
dedicates this autopsy of a
'trunk of humours'

THE FORTUNES OF
FALSTAFF

BY
J. DOVER WILSON

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE
LONDON · NEW YORK · MELBOURNE

Cambridge University Press
0521092469 - The Fortunes of Falstaff
J. Dover Wilson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Published by the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
Bentley House, 200 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA
296 Beaconsfield Parade, Middle Park, Melbourne 3206, Australia

ISBN 0 521 06830 4 hard covers
ISBN 0 521 09246 9 paperback

First edition 1943
Reprinted 1944 1953 1961
First paperback edition 1964
Reprinted 1970
Paperback reissued 1979

Transferred to digital printing 2004

Cambridge University Press
 0521092469 - The Fortunes of Falstaff
 J. Dover Wilson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page vii</i>
<i>Chap. I.</i> Introduction: Back to Johnson	1
<i>Chap. II.</i> The Falstaff Myth Riot and the Prodigal Prince—Sweet Beef—Monsieur Remorse.	15
<i>Chap. III.</i> The Battle of Gad's Hill 'Enter the Prince of Wales and Sir John Falstaff'—The Bellowing Bull-calf—The Epic of Buckram—'I deny your major'.	36
<i>Chap. IV.</i> The Prince grows up The Truant's return to Chivalry—Honour: the Scutcheon and the Spirit—The Reconciliation between Father and Son.	60
<i>Chap. V.</i> Falstaff high on Fortune's Wheel The Classical Braggart and the Old Soldier—The 'day's service' at Shrewsbury, and its 'reward'—'If I do grow great, I'll grow less'—The Lord Chief Justice and Mistress Dorothy Tearsheet—Gaultree Forest and Gloucestershire.	82
<i>Chap. VI.</i> The Choice and the Balance Comic Counterpoint—Sir John at the Fleet—King Henry's Speech—The Heart 'fracted and corroborate'—Shakespeare's Balance.	114
<i>Notes</i>	129

Cambridge University Press
0521092469 - The Fortunes of Falstaff
J. Dover Wilson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE

Apart from the Introduction and passages omitted here and there from later chapters, in order to bring them within the compass of the one hour's traffic of the class-room, the contents of this book were delivered at Cambridge in May 1943 as five Clark Lectures. Lest my hearers should weary of the names of many authorities, I reserved most acknowledgements of indebtedness for the Notes, printed at the end of the volume. I cannot hope that these are complete; for, though I have striven to present a true account, in the study of Shakespeare as in life it is impossible for the individual to recognize all that he derives from others. But my chief creditor, without a doubt, is Andrew Bradley. His paper on Falstaff is perhaps the weakest of his writings, and my thesis has compelled me to criticize it at every turn; yet he remains, nearly half a century after the appearance of his *Shakespearean Tragedy*, the greatest of modern Shakespearian critics, and we are all his pupils.

When the Master and Fellows of Trinity College did me the honour of asking me to give these lectures, my first impulse was to speak of what Trinity has done, and is still doing, for Shakespearian scholarship. It is enough to mention (i) the Capell collection in the library, (ii) the *Cambridge Shakespeare*, originally produced by William G. Clark, generous founder of this lectureship, and by W. Aldis Wright, Vice-Master of the college and, after Samuel Johnson, wisest of Shakespeare's editors, and (iii) the names of R. B. McKerrow and W. W. Greg, joint-founders, with A. W. Pollard, of modern Shakespearian textual criticism, to show what wealth and promise the theme holds. But a treatment in any sense worthy would have asked time and quiet and the use of books, all at this moment of history out of reach; and I was therefore obliged to fall back upon a subject ready to hand and, as explained in the Introduction, for some years maturing

Cambridge University Press
0521092469 - The Fortunes of Falstaff
J. Dover Wilson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

viii

Preface

in my mind. Indeed, the views here set forth were already being advanced, in briefer and more tentative form, as three Ballard Matthews lectures, delivered in November 1940 at University College, Bangor, and their kindly reception on that occasion by Professor Herbert Wright, his colleagues and his students, did much to encourage me to develop them.

Forty-two years ago Alfred Ainger was Clark Lecturer, and his subject was *Shakespearian Comedy*. The lectures, given as I remember in a pleasant room off Neville's court, consisted in the main of readings from the plays, and were I think never printed. But a good reader may be worth a dozen critics, and for one tranced listener that 'merry-checked old man' with the silver hair opened a book that has never since been closed. If the Clark Lectures for 1942-3 succeed in kindling a single reader or auditor as those of 1900-1 kindled that undergraduate, the lecturer will feel he has cancelled a small portion of what he owes to Trinity College, not only in recent honour and hospitality, but in past instruction, and owes above all to its present Master, who as a young lecturer and 'Sunday tramp' taught a group of Cambridge juniors that Shakespeare was a true historian and Clio an English muse, before going on to prove the second to the world at large by his own writings.

I hope to publish an edition of *Henry IV*, parts I and II, shortly; and I quote from that text in the present volume.

J. D. W.

May 1943