

master in a better mood for others as for me." Once when his friend Henry Windsor hinted to Worcester that he was extravagant in buying divers books from a Lombard, who was teaching him French, the secretary excused his prodigality by explaining that he had the same passionate regard for a good "boke of French or of poetre as my maistre Fastolf would have to purchase a fair manoir." After Fastolf died Worcester wrote a book of annals, which remains one of the most important histories of his times.

But this testy old soldier had his virtues if he had his faults; and we must "forbear to judge for we are sinners all." One is disposed to think kindly of him, too, for being the actual knight who suggested to Shakespeare his Falstaff, that unique combination of wit, impetuosity and folly, who has caused more laughter in the world than any of the numberless characters that sprang from the great poet's fertile imagination. If Falstaff be the lineal imaginative descendant of Fastolf, assuredly the poet transposed the character more than he did the name. One document alone in the Paston papers proves this. The real Fastolf on one occasion lent the Duke of York £137, taking diamonds and jewelry in pledge for payment, a transaction of which the Shakespearean knight would never have been guilty. But we know the motif in a work of art leaves the artist much liberty for details; and had not Charles Dickens reluctantly to confess that Leigh Hunt and his own father were respectively the prototypes of Horace Skimpool and Micawber?

Fastolf died Nov. 5, 1459. Towards the close of his life his dominant desire had been to establish in his castle at Caister a band of six monks and a prior, to pray for the souls of his relations and for his own soul; and to arrange an asylum for seven poor men. His will expressed this desire; and to give it effect, he appointed Parson Howes and John Paston executors, with power, if they choose, to confer with eight other executors, who had no authority unless they were asked to assist. Provided John Paston paid to the estate the sum of 4,000 marks, and founded the religious house and home for the poor in accordance with the will, the testator bequeathed to Paston his Caister property—four manors he had held—and the whole of the lands he had owned in Norfolk and Suffolk. Soon after Fastolf died, Paston became one of the representatives of the county of Norfolk in parliament. He was elected in the interest of the Duke of York. There is a letter to the newly elected member from Friar Brackley, which shows the latter to have been a zealous political supporter as well as a warm personal friend. He assures Paston, who is in London: "You have many good prayers, what of the religious houses, the city and country. May God save our good Lord Warwick and his brethren, and preserve them from treason and poison; for if aught comes to my Lord Warwick but good, farewell ye, farewell I, and all our friends! for by the worth of my soul this land were utterly undone, which God forbid."

Paston's increased importance soon brought its more than proportionate increase of trouble. His powerful neighbors, the Dukes of Norfolk

and Suffolk, like Ahab on Naboth's vineyard, soon cast longing looks toward his newly acquired possessions, and both persistently sought by law and force to despoil him of some portion of them, to their own advantage. Another danger also jeopardized his ownership of Caister castle. Edward IV. had married privately Elizabeth Woodville in 1464, three months after he was proclaimed king. That marriage estranged Warwick and others of the old nobility, and to make up the loss of their support, Edward sought to enrich and make powerful the relations of his wife, Lord Scaler, the queen's brother, had already thrown envious eyes on Caister castle, and somebody at court—Gairdner thinks Justice Yelverton, a non-acting executor with Paston for Fastolf—whispered in the ear of the king that Paston was of servile birth, virtually a bondman to the crown; that his claim to these rich manors in Norfolk and Suffolk was consequently invalid, and he might therefore be dispossessed of them without injustice.

After the accession of Edward IV. many estates were confiscated, and though the king turned a deaf ear to Yelverton's suggestion, Paston was by no means out of danger. For some reasons, he had more than once failed to obey summonses given under the privy seal, and a friend kindly warns him of ominous threats from the king that another instance of such disobedience might cost him his head. But the king was not unfriendly to John Paston, and sanctioned an agreement for the foundation of the college at Caister. It was likely at the king's instance the Duke of Norfolk temporarily withdrew from Caister. Paston, on his side, gave up to the king the jewels that the Duke of York had pledged to Fastolf.

But with all the good-will of the king, the times were big with trouble, and brought forth for Paston his full share. In Norfolk local riots, sometimes attended with loss of life, were of frequent occurrence. Once or twice he narrowly escaped grave personal injury, and his continuous litigation caused him temporary imprisonment three times. It was during that period that most of the remarkable letters of his wife, Margaret Paston, were written to him. In his absence she arranged everything pertaining to the estate: leases, rents, wages, tenants, workmen, crops; all that concerned these and much more she reported to her husband. It was almost impossible for Paston's enemies to take a step against him without her knowledge, and she added many a shrewd suggestion as to how their ends could be thwarted. Incidentally her letters give the then current prices of most commodities, and they are rightly prized as the best annals of English country life of that time. They must be read at leisure to be fully appreciated.

Paston made a brave fight, and held his own well against powerful odds; but at length his physical powers gave way, and he died in 1466, hardly six years and six months after Fastolf, and before he had established, beyond doubt, the rightfulness of his claim to the Fastolf estate. One wonders if John Paston, in those litigious years, did not often think of these