

**HISTORY OF QUEEN ELIZABETH,
AMY ROBSART AND THE EARL OF
LEICESTER: BEING A REPRINT OF
"LEYCESTERS
COMMONWEALTH", 1641**

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History of Queen Elizabeth, Amy Robsart and the Earl of Leicester: Being a Reprint Of
"Leycesters Commonwealth", 1641 by Frank J. Burgoyne

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HISTORY
OF
QUEEN ELIZABETH, AMY ROBSART
AND
THE EARL OF LEICESTER
BEING A REPRINT
OF
“Leycesters Commonwealth”
1641

“No scandal about Queen Elizabeth I hope.”—*The Critic*.

EDITED BY
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INTRODUCTION.

THE historical work here reproduced throws considerable light upon the life of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and the political history of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The book was printed on the Continent in 1584. Where, is unknown, but probably at Antwerp. It was first published under the title "Copie of a Leter Wryten by a Master of Arte of Cambrige to his friend in London." The interest excited by its issue was considerable. In 1585, the year following its publication, it was translated into French under the title *Discours de la vie abominable, ruses, trahisons, . . . et autres tres iniques conversations desquelles a usé le my Lorde de Lecestre*; and a Latin version was also published at Naples in the same year, entitled *Flores Calvinistici decerpti ex vita Roberti Dudlei, comitis Leicestria*.

These editions, although printed on the Continent,

must have had a considerable circulation in England, for the Queen in Council on June 20th, 1585, found it necessary to repudiate the assertions contained in the work. In a letter addressed to the Magistrates of Cheshire, she writes :—

“Her Highness not only knoweth to assured certainty the books and libels against the said Earl to be most malicious, false and scandalous, and such as none but an incarnate devil himself could dream to be true.”

There is no doubt that careful watch was kept for the book at the various ports, and many copies were seized and destroyed. This led to extensive copying of the work in England and its circulation in manuscript; there being many more contemporary manuscript copies now in existence than copies of the printed book. Anthony Wood never saw a copy of the first issue, and writes respecting it, that he thought it was first printed in 1600; and the great collector Thomas Grenville wrote in a manuscript copy, now preserved in the British Museum,¹

¹ Additional MSS., 33,739.

"I never heard of more than one copy having been in print of this first edition, so carefully was it suppressed."

The book has been described¹ as

"one of the most inveterate and scurrilous libels which the religious dissensions of the times, prolific as they were, had produced. . . . In its pages everything was raked together which the tongue of scandal had uttered to the disparagement of the exalted statesman whom it strove to overwhelm with obloquy, and where that was silent the imagination of the writer was not slow in filling up the void, and in supplying materials which were characterized by all the venom and rancour that the most ruthless hatred could suggest."

In its pages Leicester is depicted as an inhuman monster. He is accused of attempting to gather in his hands the reins of government, by filling all offices of trust about the Queen with his friends. He is full of "dissimulation, hypocrisy, adultery, falsehood, treachery, rebellion, treason, cowardice, atheism, and what not." He is said to be unscrupulous in his methods, and to have practised the

¹ Miscellaneous Works of Sir Philip Sidney, 1893, p. 38.

Italian art of poisoning upon many who stood between him and his ambitions.

It is in this book that the tragic story of the death of his wife, Amy Robsart, was first related and the Earl charged with her murder—a crime that the generally accepted opinion of the time attributed to him. Ashmole in his "Antiquities of Berkshire" states that "when Dr. Babington, the Earl's chaplain, did preach the funeral sermon, he tript once or twice in his speech, by recommending to their memories that virtuous lady so pitifully *murdered*, instead of saying pitifully slain." The event is also alluded to in the play, "The Yorkshire Tragedy," 1608, where a husband kills his wife by throwing her downstairs, and says

"The surest way to charm a woman's tongue
Is, break her neck—a politician did it."

An indignant answer to the "Commonwealth" was penned by Leicester's nephew, Sir Philip Sidney. It is characteristic of the writer and his times that he does not attempt to answer any of the charges