Golden Lads

Daphne du Maurier

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Extract

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When Anthony Cooke became tutor to Prince Edward, the heir to the throne, in the closing years of King Henry VIII, he and his family of nine – five daughters and four sons – knew very well that life henceforward, for all of them, would no longer be the quiet, studious affair that it had been in the past, within the safe precincts of their home at Gidea Hall in Essex, the only rivalry permitted that of sister against sister, brother against brother, and who could translate the swiftest a page from Latin, Greek, Italian or Hebrew. It would be instead a process of manoeuvre, of political judgement, of precise timing, with the ability to hold the confidence of the Prince's uncle, Lord Edward Seymour, the surest step to winning the affection of the future King himself. 'Give me a child until he is seven, and he will be mine forever,' the Spanish founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius Loyola, is reputed to have said; and considering his new pupil, delicate, thoughtful, wise beyond his years but inclined to obstinacy, Anthony Cooke wondered which of his own five daughters was most fitted to aid him in the task of moulding the character of England's future sovereign.

His choice fell upon his second daughter, Ann, then in her seventeenth year. His eldest girl, Mildred, two years older, was equally brilliant at Greek and Latin; but, possibly better favoured in her personal appearance, was more likely to make an early and advantageous marriage. Instructed as she was to her finger-tips in the Protestant faith, with a healthy abhorrence of all things Catholic, Ann could hardly fail to impress

upon her royal charge the absolute necessity of holding firm to all the tenets and maxims of the reformed church.

Ann, fond though she was of her elder sister, felt a small sense of triumph that the choice had fallen upon herself. Devotion to her father was paramount; he was almost equal to God in her eyes, and the belief that she was his favourite daughter seemed to her now proven. Adhering firmly to the doctrine of predestination, she felt that the hand of the Almighty was upon her; she had been chosen from among her sisters to interpret the Holy Word to the King's son. Proud, plump and determined, Ann Cooke set forth for Court in the wake of her father, her envious younger brothers and sisters waving farewell.

King Henry, already a sick man, and harried by affairs of state, had no time to spare for yet another of his son's attendants, and Ann arrived at Court to find that, although her father commanded Prince Edward's attention for three or four hours a day, she herself was obliged to share her duties as governess with other equally scholastic ladies of her own age or even younger, amongst them the Prince's cousins, the Ladies Seymour, whose aptitude in writing Latin verse excelled that of either Ann herself or her sister Mildred. It was a chastening experience to find them fluttering around the Prince with Latin and Greek tags upon their tongues and a cousinly air of intimacy into the bargain.

She decided to concentrate her powers upon religious instruction, but here again there was apt to be distraction, for no sooner had she caught the young Prince's attention with a dissertation upon Calvin, a matter very close to her heart, than she would be interrupted by the arrival of his nurse with broth, or the physician would come to examine his chest, which was said to be weak, or worse still one of his Seymour uncles would arrive with a pet dog, and the Prince, with a wan smile but a stubborn air, would announce to his governess that he had had enough of learning for the day. Ann appealed

to her father for advice, but he could give her little comfort, for he was himself subordinate to the Prince's chief tutor, the famous scholar John Cheke, who had more important matters on his mind. Not only was he involved in endless controversy with his learned contemporaries about the pronunciation of the Greek language, but he was anxious to secure the future of his widowed son-in-law William Cecil, an extremely able young man of five-and-twenty. Cheke's daughter had died a few years previously, leaving an infant son named Thomas; and Cecil was now hovering on the fringe of Court society in the hope that his father-in-law might say a word for him in the right circles.

Cheke intimated to Anthony Cooke that young William Cecil would go far, and only needed to marry again – preferably a young woman who combined brains with beauty – to find himself in the forefront of those jostling for place in the corridors of power. Anthony Cooke found an early opportunity of falling in with young Cecil, who did indeed seem to be exceedingly able, far-sighted and agreeable, and on the first suitable occasion presented his daughter Ann. The meeting did not go well, William Cecil, whose outlook was political rather than religious, showing little interest in Ann's customary tirades against the odious practices of the Romanists. It was after this encounter that Anthony Cooke suggested to his daughter that her sister Mildred might care to relieve her for a few weeks in her capacity as governess at Court, while Ann herself would benefit from the fresh air of Essex. The exchange was made, and Mildred, slim, fair-haired, keen-eyed, and although sharply intelligent a better listener than her younger sister, made her debut at Court and was immediately liked by all, especially by William Cecil.

It came as a shock, and possibly not entirely a pleasant one, when Anthony Cooke arrived at Gidea Hall to tell his family that their sister Mildred was betrothed to William Cecil. He had given the happy pair his blessing, and the marriage would

take place in December. There was general rejoicing, in which of course Ann joined; nevertheless, she could not but be aware that in a certain sense Mildred had stolen a march on her. She had found herself a husband in a short space of time, which was naturally the ultimate hope of all young women, scholarly or otherwise, and not just any young man, as her father explained to them, but one of the most promising of his generation. He had no title and as yet little land, but these would come, and appointments too, and he could not have wished a better match for his eldest daughter.

The wedding on December 25th 1546 had hardly been solemnised, the celebrations ended, when King Henry VIII fell mortally sick, and died on January 28th. Prince Edward, nine years old, was crowned in Westminster Abbey, his uncle Edward Seymour, now Duke of Somerset, became Lord Protector, and those who had won his favour during the preceding months found promotion in their turn. Anthony Cooke was made a Knight of the Bath, and later in the year he was returned as Member of Parliament for Shoreham. John Cheke became Provost of Cambridge, but the education of the young King remained in his hands. William Cecil was elected Member of Parliament for his family borough of Stamford, and the following year the Lord Protector Somerset made him his Master of Requests. His wife Mildred was not so fortunate. Her first baby died, as did subsequent infants, and a number of years passed before she produced two daughters who lived, naming them Anne and Elizabeth after her sisters.

Once King Edward had been crowned the royal training intensified. He was deemed too adult to need women about him, and Ann Cooke, who had perhaps hoped to return to Court once Mildred was married, found herself remaining at home with ample time to continue the translation from Italian into English of twenty-five sermons upon the predestination and election of God, with which she had consoled herself

after her return to Gidea Hall. Her presence was often needed, however, at her sister Cecil's bedside, with the frequent stillborn babies and miscarriages, and the two became closer to one another as companions than they had ever been at home. And as William Cecil was constantly at the command of the Lord Protector Somerset, Mildred was glad to forget the anxiety of being wife to a politician, around whom storm clouds were gathering, if only by reading aloud to Ann the works of Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzen.

The next few years were crucial for Cecil's political future. The Lord Protector had enemies, the chief of whom was the Earl of Warwick, and in October 1549 Somerset fell from power and was committed to the Tower. William Cecil followed him, but was soon released. Fortunately his father-in-law, Anthony Cooke, did not become involved. There was a patched-up truce the following February between Somerset and his rival Warwick, and Cecil took advantage of this to make overtures to the latter, whose star seemed in the ascendant. Eight months later Warwick made himself Duke of Northumberland, and William Cecil was knighted, at the same time gaining the post of Secretary of State to the young King.

The truce between the rivals was short-lived, for in the latter part of 1551 the Duke of Northumberland brought a trumped-up charge of treason against the Duke of Somerset, and in January 1552 the boy-King was obliged to sign his uncle's death warrant. Sir William Cecil, now firmly established as one of Northumberland's henchmen, could do nothing to save his former patron.

It was some time during this year that Ann Cooke, once again called to minister to Mildred's household during her sister's pregnancy, was introduced to one of her brother-in-law's closest friends, the rising lawyer Nicholas Bacon. Son of a yeoman farmer in Suffolk, Nicholas Bacon had entered Corpus Christi, Cambridge, at the age of thirteen. He took his B.A. at seventeen, coming third out of the whole university. Some few years

later, deciding upon the law as a career, he was admitted to Gray's Inn. Called to the bar in 1533, when he was twenty-four, he rose rapidly in his profession and became solicitor of the Court of Augmentations in 1537, the particular work of his department being to administer the various manors, lands and estates that had been forfeit to the Crown at the dissolution of the monasteries.

He was not above dealing in property himself, and by the time he was forty owned estates in Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex and Middlesex, besides several tenements in London. He had married well. His wife, the daughter of a well-to-do London mercer, had borne him three sons and three daughters; and the mansion he had started building for her and for his family at Redgrave, Suffolk, on the site of a monastic hunting-lodge, was still in the process of completion when he met Ann Cooke at William Cecil's establishment at Burghley in Northamptonshire, an even more imposing edifice than Redgrave. There was no doubt about it, the two men thought alike, in politics and in other matters; they had risen from comparative obscurity to positions of authority by their own efforts and by keeping a prudent watch on the turn of events; and they both realised that in the rapidly changing world of the mid-sixteenth century one false step on the ladder of power which they were climbing might bring disgrace, or even death.

Ann Cooke took to her brother-in-law's friend immediately. He was only some six or seven years younger than her father, and this was a recommendation in itself. As a lawyer it amused him to argue with her, albeit he did it with courtesy and deference; and if he winked at William Cecil as he did so she was not aware of the fact. She liked older men, and Nicholas Bacon at forty-one was well set-up, even powerfully built, with a witty turn of phrase and a sense of humour; but what appealed to Ann most was his staunch defence of all things Protestant. When he asked her to visit Redgrave and

help his already ailing wife with her brood of boys and girls, in the still unfinished mansion, she needed no prompting from her sister Mildred to accept. The decision changed her life.

Redgrave Hall, with its spacious rooms set in a park surrounded by woodlands, reminded her of her mother's home Milton, also in Northamptonshire, which her grandfather Sir William Fitzwilliam had bought at the beginning of the century. Perhaps the association was unfortunate. Sir William had been Cardinal Wolsey's Treasurer, and after the Cardinal's disgrace in 1530 had had the temerity to entertain the fallen prelate for five days at Milton. Although Ann, his daughter, enjoyed relating the story on every possible occasion, as reflecting past glory, it was something her own daughter and namesake preferred to forget.

Jane Bacon was a frail creature, only too willing to hand over some of her responsibility to an able-bodied young woman of four-and-twenty, for six children, between the ages of thirteen and three, were more than she could manage. She did not realise that she was handing over to a successor who would take her place as wife and stepmother. In October of 1552 Jane Bacon was still living; in the spring of the following year her tomb was being erected; and shortly afterwards Ann Cooke became the second wife of Nicholas Bacon and mistress of Redgrave Hall. She had made as good a match as her sister Mildred.

She had only a few months to accustom herself to the pleasures and pains of her new status before clouds threatened to darken the serenity of married life, just as they had done for William Cecil and Mildred during their first years together. The young King Edward VI died on July 6th 1553, having only a few weeks before, at the instigation of the Duke of Northumberland, altered the succession from his Catholic sister Princess Mary to his Protestant cousin Lady Jane Grey, bride of Northumberland's own son Lord Guilford Dudley. Opinion in the country was instantly divided: some rallied to

Northumberland; the majority, even though non-Catholic, to the Princess Mary. William Cecil had been a witness to the document in favour of Lady Jane, though even at the time of signing he knew that Northumberland's move was a tactical error. Sir Anthony Cooke, ardent Protestant that he was, also declared himself for Lady Jane.

Nicholas Bacon, aware that the attempt to deprive the rightful heir, Princess Mary, of the succession would prove disastrous, withdrew prudently to Redgrave. His position as Treasurer to Gray's Inn and Attorney of the Court of Wards did not appear to be at stake, but he foresaw that Princess Mary and her supporters, should they march to London from her house in Norfolk – and this was their declared intention – must pass through Cambridge and Bury St Edmund's and halt at Framlingham Castle, a short distance from Redgrave. Therefore landowners and their ladies, Protestants as well as Catholics, should be prepared to show loyalty.

It was possibly the only time in their lives that Nicholas and Ann Bacon had a serious disagreement on political matters. The decision, either way, might cost them their heads. Ann, fiercely loyal to the Protestant faith and to her father, would have moved instantly to London. Nicholas Bacon, who knew Jane's and Northumberland's cause to be doomed to failure, told his wife firmly and gravely that she should go with him to Framlingham and offer their services to the Princess Mary. He did not tell her that in his pocket was a farewell letter from her brother-in-law William Cecil, with directions that it should be delivered to his wife Mildred should Cecil's life be forfeit. Ann had sworn to honour and obey her husband. They went to Framlingham.

Mary was proclaimed Queen on July 20th, exactly a fortnight after her brother Edward's death. The Duke of Northumberland, Lord Guilford Dudley and Lady Jane were committed to the Tower, as was Sir Anthony Cooke. William Cecil, who was still Secretary of State, had been sent to Ipswich

with papers for the new Queen to sign before she started out on her triumphant journey to the capital. Nicholas Bacon, already at Ipswich with his wife Ann, knew that the letter in his possession need never be delivered. William Cecil, glancing at the little group of ladies waiting upon Queen Mary, saw that Ann Bacon was of the company. If heads were to roll during the coming reign, neither William Cecil's nor Nicholas Bacon's would be amongst them.

The months that followed were probably the most agonising and humiliating of Ann Bacon's life, and were to leave a lasting impression upon her. Her husband was safe, but he had lost stature in her eyes; loyalty to a mortal princess had proved stronger than his belief in a Protestant God. The father she revered and loved was a prisoner, and her greatest fear was that the axe would fall upon him as it did later upon Northumberland, the Dudleys, and many of their friends. In the event, he was spared, and managed to leave the country and reach Strasbourg, where he remained for four years.

Nicholas Bacon was allowed to continue in his position as Attorney of the Court of Wards, but he was forbidden to leave the country, lest he should make common cause with Protestant exiles abroad. He divided his time between Bedfords, a house on the Gidea Hall estate, Redgrave in Suffolk, and his London house in Noble Street, Foster Lane. It was at one of these three that Ann gave birth to her first baby, a daughter, and, like her sister Mildred, she too knew the full sorrow of bringing a child into the world and losing it a few months later. She wondered, afterwards, whether the choice of the name Mary for the little girl, which her husband Nicholas had insisted would be wise and diplomatic, was the reason for the child's untimely death. Surely, she argued, the God she worshipped must have been displeased that an infant, dedicated by its mother to His service, should have been named for a Catholic queen.

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While the axe fell on Protestant heads, and the fires of Smithfield burnt their bodies, Nicholas Bacon, like his brother-in-law William Cecil, took care not to become too involved in public affairs. Both remained for the most part in the country, making additions to their estates at Redgrave and Burghley, dabbling with other properties, buying, selling, leasing, the modest incomes on which they had started out in life gradually doubling, trebling in size. Sheep-farming was another profitable concern – Bacon, the son of a yeoman farmer, could advise William Cecil on this – and through his position as Attorney of the Court of Wards he was able to purchase certain wardships himself. The custom was that every minor who was heir to land held by the old feudal knight service became, on the death of his father, a ward of the Crown. The Crown held the land and the rights of marriage, but through the Court of Wards was empowered to offer the wardship to the highest bidder. Although Nicholas Bacon later protested strongly against the abuses that frequently occurred in this marketing of minors, it was nevertheless a sound form of investment.

Meanwhile, he had three sons of his own to educate and put through Cambridge before entering them for Gray's Inn. The great school chamber at Redgrave was hardly large enough for Nicholas, Nathaniel and Edward, let alone a sprinkling of wards. The supervision of the hall, the great parlour, the little parlour, some twenty rooms for the use of the family and an equal number for the servants, with dry kitchens, wet kitchens, pantry and bakehouse – though not the out-buildings, the

fish-ponds and the deer-park – had taken a toll of his first wife's health, along with bearing six children, and Nicholas Bacon resolved that it must not do the same to his second wife Ann.

Nevertheless, she found the role of stepmother onerous. None of the boys was academically inclined or interested in book-learning, and as for sitting down and reading a page of Greek or Latin, or listening to a sermon, they turned sullen at once, and made every excuse to withdraw. Nicholas, already conscious of his position as eldest son and heir to Redgrave, turned most of his attention to farming, while Nathaniel had a good head for figures. Edward was amenable enough, but no intellectual. As to the girls, she saw to it that they were trained in the usual feminine accomplishments, and would know how to order their own households when the time arrived and a good match was arranged for them; meanwhile they made poor companions, the conversation between the sisters on a much lower level than it had been in the old days with her own sisters at Gidea Hall. If only her ill-named little daughter had lived, she would doubtless have lisped her way through the Greek alphabet before she had turned eighteen months.

Then Ann became pregnant again, and to her joy this baby also proved to be a girl, who would take the place of the poor dead Mary. William Cecil was godfather. The child was christened Susan, and surely there could be nothing unlucky in that. The Cecils and the Bacons exchanged visits, and while the brothers-in-law admired each other's properties of Burghley and Redgrave – which was now finally completed – resolving perhaps to add yet another wing on returning home and so astonish one another on a subsequent visit, the sisters were able to test the precocity of little Susan against Mildred's small daughter Anne – which was the better-grown, who was likely to walk first. When their husbands were well out of earshot, they exclaimed over the difficulty of disciplining stepsons,

young Thomas Cecil being as indifferent to his books as Nicholas and Nathaniel Bacon. It would be very different, they agreed, should the sisters themselves be blessed with sons at some future date.

In the summer of 1557 there was sickness in both families. The Cecils were at their house in Wimbledon and the Bacons apparently at Bedfords in Essex, close to Gidea Hall. The younger Cooke sisters, Elizabeth and Margaret, were also staying at Wimbledon under Mildred's wing. They were both of them to make good marriages the following year: Elizabeth to Thomas Hoby, a promising diplomat and a close friend of William Cecil's, who had inherited Bisham estate from his half-brother Philip, ambassador to the Imperial Court during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI; and Margaret to Sir Ralph Rowlett, a wealthy landowner in Hertfordshire. The middle sister, Katherine, may have gone abroad with her father, where she would have met another Protestant exile, Sir Henry Killigrew. In any event she was married to him a few years later. On August 18th 1557 a letter from Nicholas Bacon to William Cecil gives the family news.

> I and my wife thank you of your letter, and are glad that my sister Margaret hath for health's sake gotten liberty, and of my sister Elizabeth's recovery; your goddaughter, thanks be to God, is somewhat amended, her fits being more easy, but not delivered of any. It is a double tertian [ague] that holds her, and her nurse has a single, but it is gone clearly.
>
> Ann adds a postscript.
>
> We at Bedfords are no less glad of Wimbledon's welfare and especially of little Nan, trusting for all this shrewd fever to see her and mine playfellows many times. Thus wishing continuance of all good things to you at once

because your man hasteth away and my husband to dinner.

Your loving sister,
A. Bacon.

Alas, the cousins were never to be playfellows. Anne Cecil, the little Nan of the letter, survived, but Susan Bacon did not. The figures of the two small sisters, Mary and Susan Bacon, can be seen stamped on the family tree of Nicholas and Ann Bacon, wearing flounced dresses and small caps on their heads, Mary holding a feeding bottle, Susan carrying a doll in her right hand.

This second death was an even greater blow to their mother than the first. Susan had lived longer than Mary and had won her heart, showing such promise; how had Ann sinned, how had she offended God? She took no pleasure any longer in the great house at Redgrave, which seemed more and more to belong to her stepchildren, and found greater peace, if peace was possible in an age when Catholicism triumphed and the Queen had the Spanish King as consort, in her husband's London house. Her beloved father was still abroad, helped financially by his son-in-law Bacon, who arranged the sale of a manor on his behalf. Cooke's other son-in-law, Cecil, as surveyor to the lands of the Princess Elizabeth, was able to pay discreet visits to Hatfield, where the Princess had her establishment; far-sighted as ever, he knew that Queen Mary was a sick, possibly a dying woman, and that to win the trust and esteem of her successor was a necessary step not only in his own career and those of his relatives and friends, but for the future safety of the realm.

Ann Bacon was too sick at heart to look ahead to the time when her brother-in-law and her husband might rise to favour under yet another sovereign. More than three hundred Protestant martyrs had been burnt at the stake, and it was said that bystanders, from pity at their sufferings, sometimes attached bags of gunpowder to the necks of the victims so that they might die swiftly and not endure the fierce torture

of the flames. Great and humble, none had done wrong except to hold firm to the Reformed faith. How, she wondered, could she bear to bring yet another child into the world, very possibly to die in infancy like its sisters, or, if it survived, fated to be brought up in an England where Protestants were persecuted and burnt as heretics, where men like her father and John Cheke were forced to live abroad, bereft of status, penniless?

When their son was born in 1558, the month and birthplace alike unrecorded, and they named him Anthony, it was as though her father called to her from exile across the seas and bade her take courage. The child would live, must live. Delicate from birth like his sisters, still she would rear him, cosset him, guide him, nurture him in the faith that had so long sustained her, train him in infancy, discipline him in boyhood, so that when, God willing, he reached man's estate he would prove the embodiment of all the qualities she prized. Should he become a great Reforming preacher, possibly even another Calvin, it would be to his mother that he would owe his strength of character, his zeal.

If the boy's arrival gave renewed faith to Ann, the year of his birth brought a change of fortune to Nicholas Bacon, to the Cecil family, and to the great mass of the English people. Queen Mary died on November 17th, and joy was overwhelming throughout the kingdom. The dread of Spanish tyranny was at an end. The exiles could return from abroad.

William Cecil became Secretary of State, and on December 22nd, a month after Elizabeth's accession, the new Queen made Nicholas Bacon Lord Keeper of the Great Seal and a member of the Privy Council, and knighted him for good measure. Prudently, sagaciously, the brothers-in-law had climbed the political ladder side by side and had reached the top.

Her father safe home in England, her husband firmly installed in a position of great authority, with the duties of a Lord Chancellor combining also recommendations in Church matters – his close friend Matthew Parker was shortly afterwards

enthroned as Archbishop of Canterbury, achieving with almost Baconian discretion the alteration from the Roman Mass to an Anglican Holy Communion – Ann's rejoicing was subdued by yet another family tragedy. Her youngest sister Margaret, who had been married only a few months before, died very suddenly barely a fortnight before Nicholas was appointed Keeper of the Great Seal. Margaret, who had been Sir Ralph Rowlett's second wife, was buried beside her predecessor, and soon afterwards Nicholas Bacon was negotiating with the bereaved widower for his manor of Gorhambury. Now that he had become Lord Keeper, the dignity of his position necessitated a further elevation in his mode of living. He had sold the house in Noble Street and leased York House by Charing Cross, with a fine frontage down to the river, but he needed a country property as well, and one that was nearer to London than Redgrave in Suffolk. Ralph Rowlett's farmlands, close to St Albans in Hertfordshire, would suit him very well, and he could indulge his hobby of building by erecting a new house on the site of the existing one.

His eldest son Nicholas, now nineteen, was ripe for marriage, and negotiations were soon under way to procure for him an heiress who would bring him money and land as well. Young Nicholas and his bride could live at Redgrave, and his father would settle the entail upon him and any sons he might produce. His remaining children by his first wife should also be settled well as time went on, and make equally good marriages; but now, as Lord Keeper, living in York House with a large retinue of retainers, almost like a miniature Court, Sir Nicholas Bacon felt that he owed it to his second wife Ann, who had stood by him during the troublous reign of the late Queen, to build a house for her which, unlike Redgrave, she could feel would be her own, and the inheritance of their young son Anthony, if God was pleased to spare him – and that the delicate boy might not survive must sometimes have seemed agonizingly possible. When the boy was

about two years old Sir Nicholas Bacon wrote in a letter dated June 17th 1560 that his son 'was recovering from a dangerous fever'. Seven months later Ann gave birth to a second son, born at York House and baptised Francis on January 25th at St Martin-in-the-Fields. Anthony now had a blood-brother to compete for his mother's affection.

The building of the new mansion at Gorhambury did not start until 1563 and took some five years to complete, so the early years of the little boys were spent at York House. They cannot have seen much of their father, who was by now heavily engaged in affairs of State, and at times opposed to the advice given to Queen Elizabeth by his brother-in-law William Cecil. He was against aiding the Protestants in Scotland to rebel against their Catholic Queen Mary, a course urged by the Secretary of State, and suggested that delay would be more prudent until it was clearly seen what action France would take. Two years later Sir Nicholas was pressing for an alliance with the Protestant King Anthony of Navarre, who was in conflict with Catherine de Medici, the Catholic Regent of France.

Speaking on home affairs, at the opening of Parliament in 1563, Bacon professed himself disturbed by the laxity of religious observances in the country. Ann Bacon very naturally endorsed her husband's opinion: prayers in her own household opened and closed the day, the little boys no sooner up on their legs in the morning than they were down again upon their knees, and woe betide Anthony if he toppled over from sheer exhaustion, or was more likely pinched where it most hurt by his mischievous younger brother. Rows of servants, ranging from steward to scullion, attended with bowed heads, the major-domo being Sir Nicholas Bacon's own cousin, imported from Suffolk to act as treasurer and hold the purse-strings. Later, at Gorhambury, a chaplain became a regular member of the household, one of these being Robert Johnson, a Puritan who was later suspended from duty for being a Nonconformist. Nicholas Bacon, tolerant in so many ways, was not entirely unshaken by

the influence of his second wife. 'Nothing should be advised or done,' he said in one of his speeches, 'that might in any way breed or nourish any kind of idolatry or superstition, so heed must be taken lest, by licentious or loose handling, any occasion were given whereby contempt or irreverent behaviour towards God and godly things might creep in.'

This was the kind of sentiment, Ann Bacon felt, which must surely atone for her husband's years of silence when Queen Mary reigned. Fired by his friend John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, who had written in Latin a lengthy *Apologia for the Church of England* as a counter-blast to the many Catholic treatises published abroad, she undertook the task of translating the *Apologia* into English, so that the common people might read it. When she had finished she sent the results to Bishop Jewel and to the Archbishop of Canterbury, together with a letter in Greek to the former. Both prelates were astonished at the accuracy of the translation and the modesty of the sender. 'She had done pleasure,' wrote the Archbishop, 'to the author of the Latin book, in delivering him, by her clear translation, from the perils of ambiguous and doubtful constructions.' She had also 'raised up great comfort to her friends, and had furnished her own conscience joyfully with the fruit of her labour, in so occupying her time. Which must needs redound to the encouragement of noble youth in their good education, and to spend their time and knowledge in godly exercise, she having delivered them so singular a precedent.' The work was printed in 1564.

The little boys, Anthony and Francis, were now obliged to listen not only to their mother's translation of the Italian sermons, begun so many years ago, but to Bishop Jewel's *Apologia* as well. This in addition to other sermons, besides the compulsory lessons in Latin and Greek. What a relief to run down to the Thames and watch the gay life of the river instead! Fishermen spreading their nets, watermen ferrying folk from bank to bank, barges travelling downstream towards London

Bridge, the washerwomen thumping their linen on flat stones.

Or better still to journey by coach to Gorhambury with their father, when he could spare the time, and watch the progress of their new country home. Quarrymen, bricklayers, tile-makers, masons, and as the house took shape the carpenters and joiners appeared, glaziers, plasterers, a whole tribe of workmen with ladders and barrows, laughing, joking, singing, good-naturedly permitting the small brothers to climb up and down, to dirty their hands, to tear their stockings, while Sir Nicholas stood some way off, discussing his plan for the lay-out of the gardens, which he hoped would rival those of his brother-in-law William Cecil at Burghley.

He decided that Gorhambury should be built of flint and stone, the rooms compact, the main front facing south, about 115 feet long, flanked by octagonal towers. In the centre would be a porch and archway passing through a cloister into a court, and at the north end of the court the hall. East of the hall he would have buttery and kitchens, and to the west a chapel. East and west of the court would be the main rooms of the house. Above the main entry his family motto would be inscribed just as it was at Redgrave, *Mediocria firma* (Moderate things endure). And when the work was completed he would inscribe in stone

Haec cum perfecit Nicolaus tecta Baconus,
Elizabeth regni lustra fuerit duo,
Factus equis magni custos ipse sigilli,
Gloria sit soli tota tributa Deo.

A striking amenity was the system which involved bringing water through a leaden pipe 1¼ miles from its source up to the higher ground on which the mansion stood. The pumping engine must have had considerable force to do its work satisfactorily. Nicholas Bacon may well have borrowed this idea from his brother-in-law Sir Thomas Hoby, who had done the same thing at Bisham. Possibly Elizabeth Hoby, discussing

household matters with her sister Ann Bacon as a change from her own Latin and Greek verse – for she herself was no mean performer – may have suggested the innovation. In any event, the house was ready for the family to take up residence in 1568, in time for Anthony's tenth birthday.

The long cloister, with the great gallery above, was added nearly eight years later, in order to impress the Queen when she visited Gorhambury for the second time, since she had observed to her host, on an earlier visit, 'My Lord Keeper, what a little house you have gotten,' to which he made his famous reply, 'My house is well, Madam, but you have made me too great for my house.'

Tradition ascribes the fine terra-cotta busts of Sir Nicholas and his lady to the time of one of the Queen's two visits, and suggests that the bust of the small boy that was found alongside them in the gallery must be that of their younger son Francis. Yet the costume of all three busts would seem to be 1565 or thereabouts. If so, then the bust would be of Anthony. In 1565 he would have been seven years old, which the appearance of the boy in the bust suggests. Whether Anthony or Francis, the boy has a strong likeness to his mother about the nose and mouth, though the eyes are different, more slanted, like those of the Lord Keeper. Sir Nicholas would have been fifty-four in 1565 and Ann thirty-seven, and certainly these appear to be the ages of husband and wife as represented by the busts. The question of the boy's identity, whether Anthony or Francis, will probably never be solved.

The Lord Keeper had time to sit for an artist during that particular period, and to supervise the building of Gorhambury, for he had fallen temporarily under the Queen's displeasure and been banished from Court. A pamphlet on the succession had been published, passing over the claims of Mary Stuart of Scotland in favour of Lady Catherine Grey, sister of the unfortunate Lady Jane, and the Lord Keeper was said either to have published the pamphlet under a pseudonym or to be

compromised in some way in its issue. The Queen was furious, told him the succession was none of his affair, and warned him that if he meddled further he would be dismissed from her service. Sir Nicholas, discomfited, retired to the country, and when some months later he was restored to the royal favour he declared himself as upholding the claims of the House of Stuart, but not that of the Scottish Queen herself, who had forfeited her rights by her actions.

Meantime, with her stepsons thankfully adult and no longer any responsibility of hers – Nicholas at Redgrave married to his heiress, Nathaniel settled at the manor his father had bought for him at Stiffkey in Norfolk and married likewise to yet another Anne, the natural daughter of the Queen's financier Sir Thomas Gresham, and Edward mixing in doubtful company at Gray's Inn – Ann Bacon was able to concentrate on the education of her own two boys.

Sometimes at York House, sometimes at Gorhambury, occasionally perhaps with their grandfather Sir Anthony Cooke at Gidea Hall (where he entertained the Queen in 1568, having rebuilt his house, inspired possibly by the creative efforts of his sons-in-law Cecil, Bacon and Hoby), the boys do not appear to have received any formal education outside the home. Certainly, as sons of the Lord Keeper, they would have been well informed of current events, both in their own country and across the sea: the escape of Mary Queen of Scotland, imprisoned in Lochleven Castle, into England, for instance, and their father's anxiety lest her influence should harm the cause of Protestantism in England. Occasionally his speeches annoyed the Queen, and once she told him that his councils were like himself, rash and dangerous – a strange rebuke to such a prudent man.

The boys would hear discussions about confusion in France, with Catholics and Huguenots continually at each other's throats, and Queen Catherine de Medici still holding the reins of power and having total sway over her son, the

young Charles IX. It is less likely that Court gossip came to their ears, for their mother would have kept them out of the way of hearing it. Her two sons were never allowed to forget the little sisters who had gone before and now, robed in white, looked down from heaven upon their brothers. The image this conjured was not altogether consoling, disturbing privacy, as Anthony approached puberty. He was aware that his mother's eye was continually upon him, probing, accusing, insisting that he should set a better example to young Francis, who, slippery as Mercury, was able to efface himself when they heard her footstep outside their room. He was an avid reader, but there were certain books she frowned upon – the French poets Ronsard and du Bellay, and the Italian Petrarch, and Anthony was obliged to conceal from her the fact that he preferred his uncle Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, an account of the life and education of a gentleman at the ducal court of Urbino, to her own tracts. Nor did she approve of his habit of hanging about the stables, and laughing and chatting with stable-boys and grooms. Both boys were too free and easy in their manners, and this must be curbed.

No one could be more suited to do this than the Dutch schoolmaster at the St Albans grammar school, a Presbyterian, who would come across to Gorhambury when his duties permitted and instill some of his own piety into her wayward sons. Especially as her own household chaplain Robert Johnson had been admonished by the Archbishop of Canterbury for not subscribing to the Prayer Book, and in his excellent defence had said, 'Sir Nicholas Bacon needs Christian help regarding his youthful retinue, among whom all manner of vices do increase apace, and zeal, virtue, and the true fear of God decrease through lack of due admonition and instruction.'

Small wonder that Anthony, at fourteen, suffered some sort of psychological illness. He said in after years that he had nearly lost the sight of both eyes at this time, but gave no explanation of the cause.

There is no record of the elder boy being present when the Queen paid her first visit to Gorhambury in 1572 and remarked that the house was small, but young Francis was undoubtedly there, for it was upon this occasion that the Queen, asking his age, was told by the precocious eleven-year-old, 'Just three years younger than your Majesty's happy reign' – a remark that would have been repeated in triumph by his gratified mother to her sister Mildred, whose only surviving son Robert was now seven, and although very much under-sized, with one shoulder higher than the other, was reputedly as quick-witted as his cousin.

His father, William Cecil, had been created Baron Burghley of Burghley the preceding year, and in November 1572 was appointed to the post of Lord Treasurer to the Queen. The Cecils were riding high: Mildred, as Lady Burghley, would take precedence over Lady Bacon, and their great house of Theobalds, Cheshunt – William having purchased an estate there from a Hertfordshire landowner Robert Burbage, in 1564 – bid fair to rival Gorhambury. Sir Nicholas Bacon certainly had to build a cloister and a long gallery on to his own house if he was to keep in step with his brother-in-law.

In any event, the Lord Keeper decided that it was time Anthony entered university. It might be that his health would improve at Cambridge and, placed in the care of Bishop Whitgift, Master of Trinity, he would make better progress in his studies. Francis, although he would be barely twelve in April, should accompany his brother, if only to keep him out of mischief at home. The younger boy was too pert in many ways, too fond of airing his knowledge. So in April 1573 Anthony and Francis Bacon, along with Edward Tyrrell, one of the Lord Keeper's wards, entered Trinity College, Cambridge, lodging under the Master's roof.