

COURT AND COUNTY PALATINE IN THE REIGN OF HENRY VIII: THE CAREER OF WILLIAM BRERETON OF MALPAS

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IN sixteenth-century England new beliefs in religion, new structures in government, new approaches to production and new patterns of society progressively destroyed the old certainties of life. Inevitably the degree of change varied between area and area, but in few places did change bite so deeply and at so many points as in the county palatine of Chester. Like the rest of the country it lost its abbeys, but in 1541 Cheshire was further disturbed by becoming the centre of a new diocese which reached from the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District to within fifteen miles of Shrewsbury. Cheshire, too, was particularly affected by social change produced by the sale of church and crown lands, because an unusually high proportion of its land had been preserved as the estates of the earl and because church endowments were also unusually lavish. Even before this the county had the reputation of being a nursery of gentry families, but the Tudor land sales confirmed this reputation for the next four hundred years. Nor did the church suffer only in its lands. More than half the county's churches had been impropriated to monasteries so that the sale of its assets ensured a virtual surrender to lay patronage. In economic life the county felt more and more the pull of the metropolitan market in salt and in cheese while climate and geography guaranteed it a principal place in the droving trade. It was in the sixteenth century, too, that Cheshire lost its independence. In 1500, Prince Arthur kept court at Chester Castle; the palatinate had its own judicial machinery; it was financially distinct; it had no justices of the peace, no visits from the assizes; it sent no representatives to parliament; men spoke of crossing from Cheshire into England. By the reign of Elizabeth only the palatine courts were left. Cheshire accounted to the crown, had justices of the peace, was part of the assize system and elected M.P.s like any other

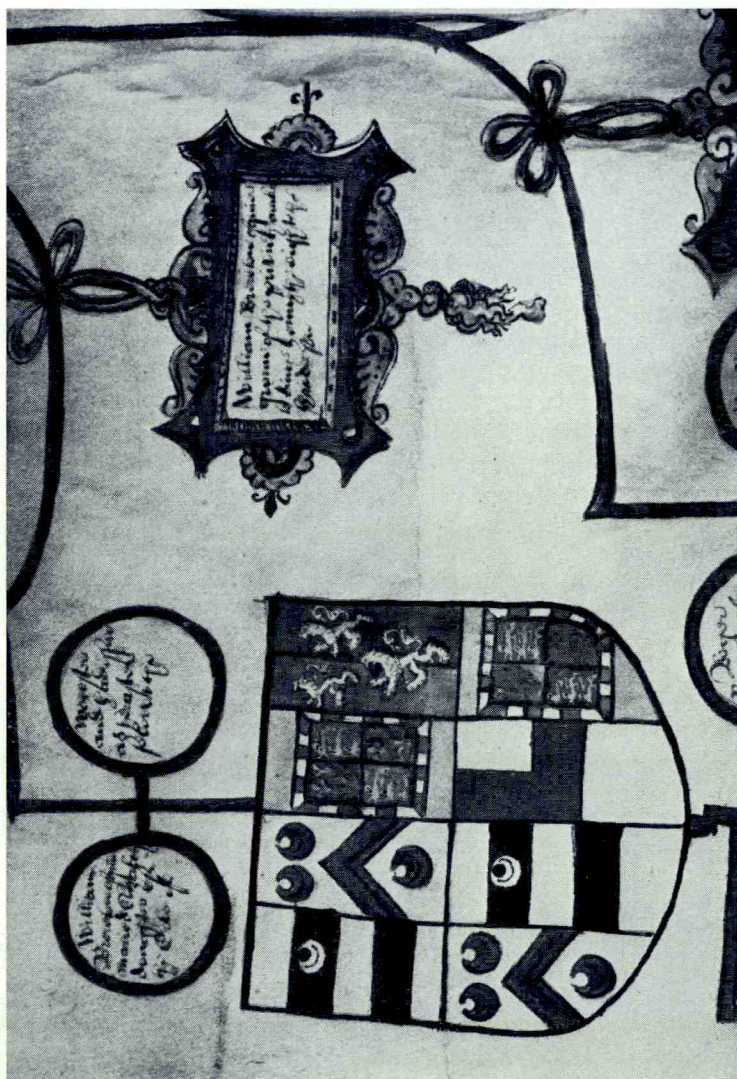


Figure 1
SECTION FROM THE PEDIGREE OF WILLIAM BRERETON
By courtesy of the Cheshire Record Office

county. The change had not been unheralded; ever since the crown annexed the earldom in 1237, the integration of the palatinate with the nation had been under way. But it was the sixteenth century which saw the decisive conclusion, after which the men of the county accepted that they were part of the English political nation.

Of this transition, which belongs to the story of national unification as much as to the history of Cheshire, all too little is known. The muniments of the palatinate lie neglected in the depths of the Chiltern Hills, while the rich documentation in family archives is largely untouched. However, what is probably the earliest substantial material on a Cheshire gentleman of the period has been preserved through the royal state papers and concerns William Brereton of Malpas, groom of the privy chamber to Henry VIII. The existence of a documentation more plentiful, it seems, than for any other gentleman of the county before the reign of Elizabeth, and certainly more than historians have any right to expect, has a grotesque explanation. In 1536, William died under the executioner's axe for the high treason of adultery with Anne Boleyn. His property, including his papers, thereby became forfeit to the crown. William's tragedy is the scholar's good fortune; augmented with a few items from other members of his family, this collection makes possible the detailed examination of a man who personified both the last years of palatine independence and the pressures which brought independence to an end.

I

William Brereton bore one of the great names in Tudor Cheshire. There were Breretons in the palatine administration, Breretons in monastic employment, a Brereton would be returned in the second-ever election of M.P.s for the county. Cheshire Breretons busied themselves at court, in military expeditions—there was a Brereton at Tournai, there would be a Brereton at Cadiz—they overflowed into North Wales, colonised in Ireland and would go to the New World, while in the Civil War, Sir William Brereton of Handforth would do more even than Oliver Cromwell to bring Charles I to defeat. The name was shared by two families at least, the Breretons of Brereton and the Breretons of Malpas. Initially related, by Tudor times they were effectively distinct, but a proliferation of cadet branches, to say nothing of frequent intermarriages and a common lack of originality in choosing baptismal names, produced a genealogical maze of the first order. In 1564, however, the splendid heraldic pedigree of the Breretons of Malpas was

produced for Richard Cholmondeley, tracing the descendants of his grandfather, Sir Randolph Brereton, the father of William Brereton of the privy chamber.¹ Prepared as a monument to family pride in the life-time of his children, it preserves an account of the Brereton pedigree far more reliable than the wish-fulfilment of a herald's visitation. Certainly pride in Sir Randolph's patriarchal achievement was warranted. Although the second of the nine sons born to him by his wife, Eleanor daughter of Piers Dutton of Halton, was mentally or physically defective, all the remaining eight did well.² The three who entered the church each acquired a number of preferments, and John the eighth son has been described as 'an arrant pluralist', combining a canonry at St Paul's with four Cheshire rectories and a Worcester deanery.³ The five laymen produced four knighthoods between them. Of the seven marriages they made, three were to heiresses, the fourth to the daughter of an earl and a wealthy widow as well, and three to daughters of knights, and from these marriages sprang the Breretons of Broughton, the Breretons of Tatton and the Breretons of Handforth. Two of Sir Randolph's daughters married knights and the other two, esquires of the standing of Richard Cholmondeley for whose son the pedigree was constructed.

William Brereton 'groom of the privy chamber to Henry VIII', as the pedigree identifies him, was the sixth son.⁴ It is not possible to be definite about his date of birth, but as his father settled an income on him in June 1508, he was probably then old enough to make his way in the world, and so would have been born about 1490.⁵ This would make him much of an age with Prince Henry whom he was later to serve. The annuity, settled on lands in and around Malpas, was not large (in the 1530s it was bringing in £3 4s. 1d. a year), but it did give William the quasi-independence to be able to seek a gentleman's career in service. And he needed a career, for as the sixth son his prospects of anything more from his family were remote. Yet Sir Randolph did have something more to give his younger sons, influence. He had entered the service of Henry VII and in 1493 was granted for his service in the king's wars and journeys the post of receiver in the lordship of Denbigh.⁶ In 1498, now a 'king's knight', he was granted part of Sir William Stanley's forfeited lands in Cheshire; by 1504 he was chamberlain of the county palatine.⁷ His posts were confirmed by Henry VIII and in 1513 he went with the royal army to France as marshal of the middle ward, with a company of 204 men; at the same time he appears to have been elevated to the rank of banneret.⁸ After the war, and despite his increasing age, Sir Randolph continued

to use the status of knight of the body to give himself the *entrée* at court. He served at the Greenwich banquet for the Imperial ambassadors in 1517, and although he was deprived of the receivership of Denbigh in 1519 for being in arrears with his account, he was sent in 1521 in charge of reinforcements to Calais and in 1522 attended Henry VIII at Canterbury at the welcome of the visiting Charles V.⁹ Oddly for a Cheshire man, Sir Randolph's patron was not the earl of Derby but Thomas Howard the third duke of Norfolk, and his will nominated as arbiter in any dispute among the beneficiaries, 'my singuler good lorde my lorde of Norfolkes grace which hath been good and gracious vnto me in my life'.¹⁰

It was, presumably, Sir Randolph who placed his son William at court. There were many Cheshiremen in the household of the early Tudors, several Breretons among them, but given his own record, Sir Randolph would have needed little help in putting a son of his to royal service. Indeed, no fewer than four of his sons obtained posts in the household, not only William, but the third son Peter, as a royal chaplain, the fourth son, Roger, as a sewer of the chamber and the youngest, Urian, who, like William, became a groom of the privy chamber.¹¹ Where William spent the years immediately before his appearance at court has yet to be established; perhaps he served in a Cheshire establishment such as the Abbey of St Werburgh whose abbot was later so attentive to him; perhaps he was in the entourage of his father's patron, the duke of Norfolk, who certainly knew him, Sir Antony Browne, the future master of the horse whose Cheshire estates William was to manage, or even Wolsey who was later to claim that he had advanced William; alternatively he may in fact have already been at court, his name buried among the lists of minor servants. What is clear is that by 1521 at the latest he was a groom of the chamber, and when in 1526 the Eltham Ordinances put on record the distinction within the chamber between an 'outer' and a 'private' section, Brereton appears as one of the four grooms of the privy chamber.¹²

II

A groom of the privy chamber held an envied position at court.¹³ This was not because of the salary of £5 a year with an allocation of stabling for two horses and two beds for his servants, nor was it because of the duties. In Tudor fashion the day started early, for the groom had to be at the privy chamber door by 7 a.m. to receive from the yeoman of the wardrobe the clothes the king was to wear that day, and to warm them at the

fire before handing them to the gentlemen of the privy chamber who helped the king to dress. At main meals the groom would, on instructions, attend the king or stay behind to staff the privy chamber, and at breakfast or when the king wanted food or drink during the day, it was a groom who retailed instructions from the gentleman of the privy chamber to the appropriate serving department. Last thing at night the grooms prepared a pallet for the two gentlemen of the privy chamber assigned to sleep there, made up the fires and attended to the lights before retiring to the lodgings provided for them. Apart from these 'statutory' duties, a groom was available generally, especially for delivering messages. Brereton on one occasion took jewellery from Cornelius Hales, the royal jeweller, to Anne Boleyn.¹⁴ And there was also boredom; the privy chamber rules specifically allowed dice, cards and backgammon when the king was absent.

For some individuals, service in the royal chamber may have been attractive as a road to prominence and a seat on the council. Of Brereton's colleagues, John Russell, Antony Browne and Thomas Cheney did achieve this and there was always the example of Charles Brandon who rose from nothing to a dukedom and the presidency of the council. But political ambition in the modern sense was not a major concern of the period and, in any case, relatively few of the king's attendants seem to have achieved a national position; a good deal more research needs to be done on this, but a list of the gentlemen of the privy chamber for 1533 (by then increased to fourteen) includes only two current and three future councillors.¹⁵ Intimate attendance on the king was, in any case, not enough by itself; successful service to the state was necessary as names like Russell suggest. A post at court could bring a man to the king's notice and earn the chance to prove himself; it was not an automatic passport to fame. On the other hand, counsellors and public figures could not ignore the contact privy chamber staff had with the king. It is this which explains the distress of the archbishop of York who discovered that Thomas Cromwell had been discussing him with William Brereton; a word in the wrong place from a royal attendant could cause much trouble.¹⁶ Wolsey found this in 1530 when he was fighting to regain favour; he used Brereton and two others to send messages to the king, hoping that his previous favours to them would stand him in good stead. But the king received quite the wrong impression, or so the duke of Norfolk said, and the correspondent who informed Wolsey of this was insistent that the cardinal should not disclose who had told him about Brereton and the others 'which might do me

great hurt'.¹⁷ This also explains the tone of Brereton's only letter to Cromwell, friendly but between equals; he joked about Cromwell's missing an appointment, reported on what had been done and apologised for having no wildfowl to send as a token—by no means the letter of a suppliant.¹⁸

The only occasion on which Brereton was given political employment was in the summer of 1530.¹⁹ In June the king summoned a gathering of notables to approve a petition to be sent to the pope in support of Henry's divorce suit. Although they had been ordered to bring their seals with them, difficulties in drafting prevented subscription at the time.²⁰ In the middle of the month, therefore, William Brereton was called on to lead Thomas Wriothesley and Edward Leighton in an expedition collecting signatures to what has been described as 'physically perhaps the most impressive piece uttered by Tudor England'.²¹ They certainly took care of 'the writings'; Brereton was paid £40 in advance from the privy purse and his first purchase was two wooden cases, covered with sheepskin, and wool packing 'to save the seales'.²² After leaving Windsor the first stop was St Albans, then Bedford, then Huntingdon, then Stamford where they sent for the abbot of Peterborough, and so through Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire into Yorkshire, sometimes calling men to meet them, sometimes making a detour, gathering signatures all the way; Brereton, for example, went on alone from Northallerton to Durham to meet the Earl of Cumberland. On their return to Westminster and Hampton Court they took in the rest of Lincolnshire, East Anglia and part of Essex. They then set 'furth agayn' for a circuit through Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire to the furthest point west of Hailes Abbey, after which they returned to Hampton Court via Oxford and High Wycombe. The rest of Essex was visited next, followed by Surrey, and Wriothesley made a special journey to Otford in Kent to collect Warham's signature. The operation was carefully organised with a servant riding ahead to arrange for horses, and everywhere speed was the order.²³ George Cavendish, Wolsey's usher, preserves a vivid picture of their visit to Wolsey's residence at Southwell on their way north.²⁴ The household had retired for the night when the porter woke Cavendish to say that two gentlemen from the king were at the lodge, demanding to see Wolsey. Cavendish, in turn, woke his master:

Sir, quoth I, ther be bynethe in the porters loge Master Breerton, gentelman of the kynges pryvye Chamber and Master Writhesley come frome the kyng to speke with you. They wyll not tary, therfore they beseche your grace to speke with you owt of hand.

The cardinal called them to the dining chamber and when they

insisted on privacy 'drew them a side in to a great wyndowe'. After a long conversation with Wolsey they brought out

a certyn Coffe couered with grean veluett and bound with barres of siluer & gylt with a looke of the same, hauyng a key whiche was gylt . . . owt of the whiche they toke a certyn Instrument or writyng conteynyng more then oon skyn of parchement, havyng many great Seales hangyng at yt where vnto they put more waxe for my lordes Seale, the whiche my lord Sealed with his owen seale & subscrybed his name to the same. And that don they wold nedes departe, And for as myche as it was after mydnyght, my lord desired them to tarye & take a bed. They thanked hym, And seyde they myght in no wyse tary for they wold with all spede to the Erle of Shrewsburys directly without lett by cause they wold be there or euer he stered in the mornyng.

Wolsey gave them first a cold meal and four gold sovereigns each, but even his courteous treatment could not protect him; they were dissatisfied with the gratuity and spread the news of his meanness. Even miles from the court, a gentleman of the household had to be reckoned with.

Yet the chance to exert on the great some influence of a negative and malicious kind was not enough to make gentlemen compete eagerly for a post where menial tasks such as warming the royal shirt were relieved by running errands and playing games. The real advantage for a groom or a gentleman of the privy chamber was the contact he enjoyed with the king and the consequent possibility of obtaining benefits, not simply for himself but for his friends and clients. So ingrained was this attitude that Household Ordinances did not attempt to prohibit it; members of the privy chamber staff were enjoined not to press suits with the king, except when commanded. The system was not, indeed, wholly to the king's disadvantage. How was he to recruit the army of servants he needed in every corner of the land unless particular individuals were recommended to him? How else would he know whom to honour or reward? Patronage was not improper, it was essential. It was a universal principle in Tudor England; as an Elizabethan remarked, 'advancement in all worlds be obtained by mediation and remembrance of noble friends'.²⁵ With the king at the centre of it all, what mattered above all was access to him and the welcome he gave. It was Henry VIII's availability to and confidence in Wolsey and Cromwell which allowed them to wield the patronage they did, just as in the much better studied court of Elizabeth I, the triumph of Burghley as a patron arose from his rarely shaken standing with the queen. But in many ways those closest to the sovereign were not the great men of the realm but the attendants and body servants in the royal apartments who alone had right of access to the privy chamber—in 1526 fifteen only, one of whom was William Brereton. Thus when Edward Smytting, an

easterling merchant with Chester connections, had fallen into grave financial difficulties it was Brereton he approached to secure help with the cardinal and also to sell to Henry himself a set of valuable tapestries.²⁶

A man like Brereton was willing to exploit his position with the king for two reasons. First, by securing grants and favours he built up his own prestige—it demonstrated his standing with the monarch, it guaranteed a steady stream of suppliants desirous 'to be protected under the shadow of his wings', and it enhanced his reputation and following in the country at large.²⁷ This is clearly to be seen in the struggle which William Brereton had with Sir Ralph Egerton of Ridley over the manor of Shotwick.²⁸ Brereton sought the reversion of this royal grant for himself and his brother Urian; Egerton, a courtier of great experience, wanted to transfer the office to his son. One of Brereton's servants reminded him of the implications in Cheshire.

Sir, I wolde gladly here howe ye do consernyng the parke of Shotwyke And your other fermes. Maister Eggertones ffriendes here do say that he wole opteyn to hise sonne all hise fermes and offices, which I trust he shall not, for if he shuld, I wolde ye hadde not medelt, and better it is, or he shuld so do, that ye spende therapon asmoche as ye may.²⁹

In the second place, satisfied clients meant profit. There were immediate gifts and gratuities in cash and in kind—as Edward Smyttyng wrote, 'what that I haue promyseid unto you afore thym by my letters, I schauill performe by the grace of God'.³⁰ And there was the long-term investment of a growing number of people obliged to him and ready to oblige him in return or anxious to sweeten him in hope of future favour. Robert Acurs made this relationship quite explicit in a letter to Brereton:

Sir, I doo not only perseyue yore kyndnes schewyd to me as yt apperyth by Master Knevettes letter, bot also by the reporte of dyuers of my ffriendes that you be my syngler and espessyall good master yn that behalfe, yn soo mych that you haue bondon my pore favur & goode wyll to be at yore como[n]dement the days of my lyffe, & yff that yt wolde pleyse you to comonde me to do som pleyisseur ar seruys to any of yore ffriendes, that wold be to me greyte comforth & then I myght be the more bolder to call vppon yore masterchyppe at my nede.³¹

What 'pleysseur' might mean is suggested by Brereton's own relations with John Tuchett, Lord Audley. When Audley's brother was faced with interference in the part of the New Forest where he was keeper, arising from a grant made to the bishop of Winchester's registrar, the peer wrote to Brereton, asking him to secure an exemption from the king, thanking Brereton 'fo the greate kyndenes that I haue found in yow at all tymes, the whiche I truste to deserve'.³² In 1529, Audley granted

William 'for goode and acceptable counsel' the stewardship of New Hall and Tattenhall with, it seems, a lease of the property as well; the stewardship brought in £6 13s. 4d., and the lease a clear £3 2s. 9½d.³³

The advantages of patronage for patron and client alike meant that the English court was a deeply competitive place. Patrons vied with each other to place candidates in the knowledge that continued failure would mean not merely the disappointment of the suitors but the eclipse of the patron. Examples of such conflict depend upon the survival of ephemeral notes between suitors and patrons, but a number of these exist for Thomas Cromwell which show that Brereton was no mean adversary. A priest, Richard Snede, offered Cromwell twenty marks a year in 1531 to defeat Brereton's claim to the advowson of Astbury, a living to which Brereton subsequently presented his brother; in 1533, Sir Richard Bulkeley asked Cromwell to anticipate Brereton over another presentation, offering £20 and a saddle outright with a promise of one third of the income of the benefice for life.³⁴ The inevitable consequence of such competition was the emergence of faction as a patron would seek to inspire the success of his suits by enlisting support from others with influence over the king. One of Brereton's letters is an excellent example of this. From Walter Walsh, another groom of the privy chamber, it concerned a benefice which rumour had it would soon be vacant.³⁵ Walsh wanted the living for a brother in holy orders, studying in Cambridge, so he arranged with Henry Norris, groom of the stole and the leading gentleman of the privy chamber, to press the appointment with the king and wrote to secure Brereton's voice as well. He was also anxious about rivals and asked Brereton to be on the watch and to inform him at once. Brereton's own campaign to secure Shotwick provides yet another example of faction. In competition with Egerton, Brereton was pressing his case with the king, with Princess Mary and her council, and with Cardinal Wolsey; he recruited Antony Knevitt, gentleman usher of the privy chamber, and others like Knevitt who had also an interest in despoiling Egerton, distributed *douceurs* to a considerable amount and, with his friends, maintained 'good attendaunce' on Henry and Wolsey to forestall his rival. In this he could count on his brother Urian and probably on Walsh as well, in which case three of the four grooms of the privy chamber were working together, and Norris was a likely ally too. This situation must have been repeated many times, and the court should be seen as comprising a number of these factions, probably some overlapping with each other, possibly with a certain fluidity of

membership, each dedicated to seeking royal favour and the rewards which went with it.

III

William Brereton's ability to manipulate the favour of the king is amply demonstrated by his remarkable success in securing offices of profit under the crown. In 1523 he was granted custody of the records of Cheshire and Flint, and for the next eight or ten years the flow of honours was continuous.³⁶ In 1525 the reversion of the stewardship of Longdendale, in 1526 the post of serjeant of the peace in Bromfield and Yale, and in 1527 the other offices of that lordship and control of the adjacent lordship of Chirk came to Brereton.³⁷ The same year brought the reversion of the posts of escheator of the county palatine and ranger of the Forest of Delamere.³⁸ The keepership of Merseley Park and the post of sheriff of Merioneth in fee were acquired in 1528.³⁹ At various unrecorded dates, probably in the late 1520s, William Brereton secured life appointment as sheriff of Flint, steward and controller of Halton and constable of Chester castle, while 1530 brought the pinnacle of his success in North Wales and the county palatine when, on the death of his father, he succeeded as chamberlain of Chester.⁴⁰ And as a decoration on that pinnacle came the appointment, after the king's breach with Queen Catherine, as receiver-general to the Dowager Princess of Wales in Cheshire and Flint.⁴¹

The years which saw William Brereton amass his formidable list of royal offices in and around his home territory, saw his collecting leases and annuities with equal success. His first taste of royal bounty in this form came in 1522 with the grant to him of the salt tolls of Nantwich, another of the Stanley interests then in royal hands by the minority of the earl of Derby.⁴² In March 1524, Brereton was awarded an annuity of £10 and in 1525 he was granted the reversion of the leases of Aldford, Etchells and Alderley.⁴³ About this time he was granted the lease of the lands of Sir John Savage, then in royal occupation, and another income he enjoyed was from the tolls of the North Wales ferries, although the date of this grant is not known.⁴⁴ An outright grant of land came in 1527, a royal gift of 200 acres near Malpas, and early in the next year William obtained a twenty-one year lease of the mills of Dyserth and 'Pentrich' in Flint.⁴⁵ Another interest which he secured in 1528 was the farm of the lordship of Shotwick, with its park and the valuable Dee fisheries, on the death of Sir Ralph Egerton. Certain of William's offices also brought him land; the stewardship of Longdendale,

granted in reversion at the same time as the Aldford lease, included the farm of the manor of Mottram, while his offices in Bromfield and Yale brought the possession of the demesnes of the lordship and the horsemill of Holt, plus the Dee water-meadows.

Not all of Brereton's leases came from the crown, nor all through the exploitation of his place. In 1529 he took a lease, presumably on the open market, of lodgings and stabling in Greenwich for thirty-one years at four marks a year; presumably this was for his own convenience when the court was at Greenwich.⁴⁶ In 1531 he bought the unexpired portion of a lease by the Knights of St John of a house and garden, with two cottages, outside the Smithfield Bars, somewhere of his own when the court was at Whitehall.⁴⁷ Brereton was also on the look-out for opportunities in Chester, and in 1532 he was able to lease from the monastery of St John's in Chester the church and tithes of Shocklach, a parish across the Dee from Bromfield, at £6 a year.⁴⁸

William Brereton's *annus mirabilis* was undoubtedly 1530. It saw his appointment as chamberlain of Chester and it also saw the first of Henry VIII's gifts outside Chester and North Wales where Brereton's own good fortune had made grants hard to come by. In February, Brereton was granted the manor of Finchley during the minority of Peter, son and heir of the king's old comrade, Sir William Compton.⁴⁹ In 1530, too, he received his only substantial outright grant from Henry VIII, the estate of the abbey of Lesnes in Kent, one of the houses which Wolsey had suppressed for his educational schemes; the patent for the grant was not issued until 1534, but Brereton was in possession from Michaelmas 1530.⁵⁰ Lesnes, granted in tail male, was something substantial which William Brereton could pass to his sons, a guarantee that the cadet branches of Malpas would include his line. But even the grant of Lesnes must have paled beside the greatest event of 1530 for William—his marriage to Elizabeth, Lady Savage. By any estimation this was a brilliant marriage for a sixth son, even of Sir Randolph Brereton. Elizabeth was the daughter of Charles Somerset, Henry VII's (albeit illegitimate) third cousin, the only male Beaufort to survive the wars of Lancaster and York. From 1508 lord chamberlain of the household and created earl of Worcester in 1514, Somerset was one of the key figures at court until his death in 1526. His son Henry, it is true, cut less of a figure at court, but in 1530 the memory of the first earl was still green and the alliance of a groom of the chamber with the daughter of the king's cousin and companion must have had Henry's approval.

Indeed, the grant to William first of Finchley and then Lesnes may have been connected with his match with a fringe-member of the royal family; the regrant of the stewardship of Longden-dale to Brereton and Elizabeth in survivorship obviously was.⁵¹

William Brereton was not Elizabeth Somerset's first husband; she had recently been widowed by the death in July 1528 of Sir John Savage of Clifton in Cheshire. Her marriage to Savage was arranged in 1504 between Sir John's father (also Sir John) and Charles Somerset when both the parties were children.⁵² Although no actual ages are given in the agreement, Elizabeth's first surviving son was born in the autumn of 1524 so in all likelihood she had been betrothed in her cradle.⁵³ The Savages were a rising family in the county palatine; the Sir John who arranged this marriage was the brother of Thomas Savage, archbishop of York and president of the king's council, and the son of the match (yet again Sir John) built the mansion at Rock Savage in 1568, and in the next century the family secured first a viscounty and then an earldom. Elizabeth Somerset's husband had been a turbulent character who had died aged thirty-five, heavily in debt to the crown, leaving her a widow with two infant sons. There was considerable difficulty over the royal rights and Elizabeth's own claims to dower, in all of which William Brereton was involved as escheator and as the sitting tenant of the Savage lands for the crown.⁵⁴ But in 1530, these official relations gave way to marriage.

Tudor marriage was measured, not only by the relative status of the parties, where William clearly gained, but also by their respective wealth, and here too it was Brereton who had the advantage. The circumstances of the Savage property were unusual and complicated.⁵⁵ The debt to the crown had arisen from the murder by Elizabeth's husband, then Sir John Savage junior, of a John Pauncefote. This was before her father's death, and it was clearly the earl of Worcester's influence which allowed Savage to settle with the crown for a fine of 4,600 marks, plus 1,000 marks for the benefit of Pauncefote's soul, a total of £3,733 6s. 8d. His estates were surrendered to Worcester, acting for the crown, and leased back to Sir John for £160 a year until the debt was paid. Sir John failed to maintain the payments and it was here that Brereton entered the story as the crown declared the lease forfeit and transferred it to him.⁵⁶ Shortly after this Sir John died, and for a time it seemed that the widow would claim her common law right to 'the seconde manor with the iij parte landes & woddess', but in July 1529 the king, who now had by wardship a second title to the estate, granted Elizabeth the lease

of all the Savage lands for eighteen and a half years at the same rent of £160, plus arrears of £80 for the half year since Sir John's death. Special favour to the daughter of the earl of Worcester must again be suspected, but if her marriage to Brereton had already been arranged, his influence too would be behind the grant. Instead of an annual tenancy of what remained after dower had been allowed, marriage brought Brereton a firm title until 1547 in the whole of the property of the Savage family, eight manors and lordships in Cheshire, principally in the Dane and Weaver valleys from Bostock and Minshull Vernon to Clifton, important estates and coal mines in Derbyshire and lesser holdings in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. For a little time there were conflicting grants to Philip Denys and to Sir Edward Neville of income from the lands but somehow these were extinguished and William also acquired the wardship of the young John Savage which Neville had been given originally, for the lease to Lady Elizabeth had substantially reduced Neville's chance of profit.⁵⁷ Now in his early forties, Brereton could reckon the wealth and prestige of the Savage family as his own for life.

IV

The survival of William Brereton's papers makes it possible to measure the financial consequences of this story of steadily increasing success. Some fifteen separate accounts and rentals have survived for the years 1529–30 to 1534–5 making a particularly comprehensive collection.⁵⁸ Brereton's annuity granted in 1508 had brought him £3 4s. 1d., but in the last full year of his life his gross income was £1,236. It is hard to make comparisons, but such an income was appropriate to a lesser member of the peerage.⁵⁹ For an intimate servant of the king to command such a figure was not unusual; Sir William Compton and Henry Norris enjoyed much the same gross amount, and although partial figures only are available for Sir Ralph Egerton, his income was of a similar sort.⁶⁰ The successful member of the royal household commanded very real rewards indeed. The foundation of Brereton's success had been his acquisition of royal office, and in 1530–1 his crown fees totalled £211 7s. 11d., and fees from other sources brought in £17 3s. 4d. Annuities from all sources raised £12, giving a grand total of £240 11s. 3d. In 1532–3 William Brereton capitalised part of his offices in Merioneth, but this loss was more than offset by new sources, principally three new monastic annuities which raised the total to £248 6s. 3d.⁶¹ The estates which he had on lease from the

crown were almost as important. These, in 1530-1, were worth in excess of £345 17s., and after the rent was paid showed a gross profit to Brereton of £163 11s. 3d.—nearly 50 *per cent*, unlike the estates he held from private persons which brought in 17 *per cent* on turnover, a matter of £9 6s. 9½d. Even more profitable than crown estates were the Savage lands. These were worth in 1530-1, £558 0s. 7½d., against dues to the crown, to creditors and to the widow of probably £327 11s. 6½d., and gave to Brereton (ignoring the fact that he had married the widow) a gross advantage of £230 9s. 1d.⁶²

Income on paper, of course, is never the same as cash in hand, and against these gross profits from leases and the Savage wardship has to be set the fixed charges of the estate (Savage family annuities totalled at a minimum £55 16s. 5d.), the costs of administration, farming expenses, repairs, charges for the young John Savage and his sister, and so on. The accounts, however, establish for 1530-1 and 1532-3 exactly what Brereton did receive in cash and kind. In 1530-1, for example, £71 15s. 10d. was spent on his orders and £439 2s. paid to Brereton himself in cash. Over and above this, he had income in kind to a value of £47 17s. 5d., making a net total received of £558 15s. 3d. These payments in kind varied from the employment of various pastures for his animals or the supply of winter feed to his stags, to liveries for his servants, the purchase of puffins to give as gifts, the maintenance of his horses, hawks and hounds, and the occupation of the Compton house at Finchley. Two years later, in the 1532-3 account, Brereton's cash receipts were swollen by the clearance of certain arrears to the even larger figure of £646 17s. 0½d., and in addition £140 was disbursed at his instructions. It is also important that these are minimum figures. In neither year are any accounts for Lesnes Abbey included, nor any mention of his privy chamber wages or of the king's regular New Year's gift of 40s., and no reference either to gratuities he received as he had the 'iiij^{or} old Souerayns of gold' from Wolsey in 1530. The days of £3 4s. 1d. were long past.

In recent years historians have been concerned to ask what was the net effect of success at court on the fortunes of such men as Brereton. On the one side it is argued that the court was a way to wealth, perhaps the most dramatic of all ways. Against this it is claimed that competition in 'conspicuous waste' largely cancelled out royal bounty. Quite clearly William Brereton had to spend a great deal simply on maintaining his 'port and charge'. He kept a pack of hounds at court, horses and, presumably, the hawks captured for him in Wales.⁶³ The expenses of the royal entourage may explain why he bought few lands and

leases, although this could reflect the sluggishness of the pre-dissolution land market. On the other hand, Brereton enjoyed a high standard of living with at least three houses of his own. It is incredible that he did not live better, dress better and have a fuller life than the younger sons of Cheshire gentlemen who stayed at home, even if this did cost money. But it did not take all his substantial income, for Brereton had surplus funds to invest. In the first place he lent money.⁶⁴ When he died at least £260 was outstanding, the most notable a loan of £200 to John Dudley, the future duke of Northumberland. Another borrower was Sir Antony Kingston and it seems probable that the £17 paid to Brereton in 1530-1 by Sir Antony Browne was to cancel another loan.⁶⁵ Brereton also lent money outside the court, and another debt outstanding in 1536 was owed by Henry Stafford, from whom he had bought the St John's Lane lease. Back in Cheshire and North Wales he lent money also, among others to his father and to the abbot of Bardsey.⁶⁶ He also borrowed, presumably because the flow of cash from his holdings was intermittent; his letters are often insistent on the importance of his servants and deputies keeping him in funds. Thus the 1530-1 accounts include the repayment of £46 1s. 1d. to the well-known London financier, Richard Gresham, and it must be this connection with Gresham which explains the loan by Richard and William Gresham to Sir William Brereton of Brereton against William Brereton's guarantee: the 1532-3 accounts even hint that Brereton may have been investing with Gresham.⁶⁷

Another outlet for Brereton's funds was in wholesale trading. In particular he may have been in business as a supplier to the court, and it is obvious that for an individual who had both a place in the royal household and the sources and finance to provide needed goods, the omens were inviting. There is no doubt that Brereton was trading substantially to the London area, for the cattle, sheep and horses which were regularly sent to Finchley were far more than necessary for the private supply of his own establishment. In 1530-1, horses were sent down from the Holt where Brereton had a stud, in both May and September; a consignment of sheep, cows and oxen went down in June, including six specially purchased Welsh oxen, and sixty sheep followed in September.⁶⁸ In 1532-3 animals were again sent to Finchley but, in addition, William Brereton gave the bailiff there £70 13s. 4d. to buy sheep and cattle, again clearly for resale.⁶⁹ That part or all this was meant for the court is suggested by another contract which Brereton made, this time for the supply of wood.⁷⁰ The grant to him of the manor of Finchley during the minority of Peter Compton was made on

18 February 1530. In less than a month he had agreed with Harry Lodysman, serjeant of the king's chandry, the lighting department at court, together with three local yeoman, to sell several woods on the estate. This may mean nothing more than that Lodysman, learning of Brereton's good fortune through court gossip, had approached him on behalf of friends in the wood trade, or even that the initiative had come from a group which had business connections with Lodysman and had long coveted the Finchley timber; alternatively, Brereton may have been the mover. But a plausible inference is that Lodysman, whose department at court had obvious links with the serjeant of the woodyard who purchased fuel for the household, and Brereton, who had acquired valuable timber conveniently near, had arranged to supply a guaranteed market at court.

It is unfortunate that Brereton's papers so far discovered only allow us these brief glimpses beyond the point where the ready cash entered his purse. Yet taking together this evidence of lending money and of involvement in wholesale trade, his standard of living and the two outright grants of land which Henry made him, there can be no doubt that for William Brereton at least, court office was immensely profitable. As he moved about the court, strangers would have seen a valet whose gentle birth, no less than his damask robe edged with budge and his jackets and doublets of velvet, proclaimed the majesty of the king he served.⁷¹ But if that was all they saw, they were mistaken—as we shall be. William was a man 'hely in the kynges favor', and in consequence a man of influence and wealth, a man to be reckoned with.⁷²

So far in this essay the emphasis has been upon William Brereton the courtier, a man who secured royal grants and offices in Cheshire because he served in the privy chamber. It has referred more to the court than the county palatine. But the fact that this is the natural emphasis is itself highly significant. By the early sixteenth century men in the palatinate looked to Greenwich, Whitehall or wherever the royal court was, not to Chester. It was there that Brereton secured his flood of grants; it was there he defeated Ralph Egerton over the succession to Shotwick. The palatinate still existed, the March still existed, but patronage there was now determined nationally. The pull of strong, centralising monarchy had eroded independence and the career of William Brereton is an epitome of the process.

V

There remains the question of the use to which Brereton put the offices and lands which service at court had won for him. Reference has already been made to his wholesaling interests, and it is obvious that he would set out to make the most economically of the estates he held, and the more so since the majority were his for a limited tenure only. Most of the holdings were farmed out to bailiffs, and Brereton was careful to have new and severe rentals drawn up.⁷³ Sometimes these proved to be too severe. In 1531-2, the bailiff of Stainsby, a Savage property in Derbyshire, was discharged of 20s. for excessive rent of the 'cole myne' there.⁷⁴ The tenants of Etchells, a royal manor, refused to commute their alnage dues for cash and insisted on paying 'in werkes', while at Alderley the crown tenants refused to pay 'for fynes & amercyamentes vppon them sett at the courte holden there . . . whyche they denye to pay because they haue not payd suche amercyamentes in tyme paste'.⁷⁵ Where direct farming was possible, Brereton appears as the archetypal capitalist producing for the market.⁷⁶ The centre of his operations was the Holt, but he also farmed the land which the king had given him in Chorlton. Animal husbandry was the principal interest and the accounts record costs for hedging and ditching of pastures, and for the mowing, making and carrying of hay in both places. Cattle were the chief product, disposed of either in direct sales to London and Coventry or to other drovers. In 1532-3, Hugh Keyth made five separate purchases from the Holt, a total of four oxen, two cows and eighteen sheep, while Thomas Calcote bought twenty-three steers and a bull. Brereton also traded with the local market. In 1530-1, Richard Bryne of Chester took eight calves and two rams, and a butcher from Whitchurch bought a cow.

Arable farming was confined to the demenses at the Holt, but Brereton also leased the corn tithes of Pickhill, making with Chorlton a relatively compact set of interests lying across the Dee valley in both Cheshire and the March. The crops were barley, oats, wheat, rye, peas and beans in that order of importance, and throughout the winter corn was threshed for sale at both places. By comparison with corn which brought in £25 in 1532-3 and cattle which brought in £41, sheep were unimportant. At shearing in 1533, Brereton had 152 sheep and 16 lambs. His wool crop was 79 pounds, of which he sold 34 and 18 sheep went for slaughter. The flock only brought in £3 8s. 4d.⁷⁷ That year, however, may have been a bad one, for in 1530-1, when almost no sheep were culled, the wool had raised £14 16s.

against an outlay of £2 4s. 1½d. for washing, shearing and tarring the sheep, together with the costs for herding and for the rent of 'the grounde in the mountaynes'. Some wool was used for village industry, the manufacture of coverlets and blankets which were disposed of at Chester. Malt was also made, but probably this was for domestic use.

William Brereton's economic activities were possibly typical of Cheshire landlords of his day, but the same cannot be said of the political and social authority which arose from the grants he received. While the first impression which these create is of the enormous success Brereton had at court, it is important to note that these grants form a coherent pattern. Taken together, the posts he secured gave him almost a monopoly of crown offices in counties and lordships stretching from Cardigan Bay to the Pennines, and from mid-Wales north to the Dee estuary. In Cheshire alone he combined the principal palatine office of chamberlain with the post of escheator for the county, constable of Chester castle and steward of the principal royal holdings with the additional right to appoint all the coroners. In Flint he was sheriff and escheator, his control of the marcher lordships which make up the southern part of Denbighshire was complete and he was sheriff in Merioneth, and perhaps escheator. When his father, Sir Randolph, had been chamberlain, he had exercised nothing approaching the authority of his son; Sir Ralph Egerton had held Longdendale, the sheriffdom of Flint and the rule in Chirk and in Bromfield and Yale. But by comparison with William Brereton who was also sheriff of Merioneth, chamberlain of Chester and steward of Halton, even Egerton's pluralism was eclipsed.⁷⁸ Ignoring such titular authority as that conferred on the Duke of Richmond or the Lady Mary, Brereton was by far the most powerful individual Cheshire and North Wales had seen for many years. The position was summed up after his death when he was described as 'a man wiche in the sayd countye of Chester hadd all the holle rewle and gouernaunce under owr souereigne lord the kynges grace'.⁷⁹

Royal authority on this scale attracted private clients, and the places they offered Brereton added not only to his wealth but to his status. Courtiers with interests in Cheshire were the first to use Brereton as agent. Andrew Windsor put him in charge of the marshes at Farndon which had been granted to him during the minority of the earl of Derby, and when the earl came of age he continued him in office.⁸⁰ Sir Antony Browne made him receiver of a knot of property around Nantwich.⁸¹ And if Brereton seemed to those at court a good man to trust, it is small

wonder that some Cheshire landowners decided that it was wise to have such a powerful royal servant on their side. Sir William Brereton made him steward of his lands in Malpas and he was steward for life for some of the lands of Lord Audley.⁸² Abbeys followed suit. William was steward of the Cistercian house at Valle Crucis and he was also deeply involved with St Werburgh's, Chester, the Augustinian canons of Norton, and the Cistercians of Vale Royal.⁸³ Over the border in Staffordshire he also had some connection with the house of Dieulacres, probably a reflection of his possession of the Savage estates in that area.⁸⁴

There is no doubt that Brereton had deliberately attempted to secure this authority. When challenged he answered that the exercise of the powers granted to him was in the hands of deputies; his involvement, or so he implied, was limited to occasional benign interventions at court.⁸⁵ But his aggression in seeking office in Cheshire and North Wales, and the coherence of his grants are enough to belie this; he set out to acquire not merely royal office, but office which would make him master in his home territory. In order to gain immediate possession of the first office the king granted him, the controllership of the records of Cheshire and Flint, he bought out the existing holder and then appointed him as deputy.⁸⁶ Brereton deliberately 'meddled' in the matter of Egerton's offices.⁸⁷ He purchased a Denbigh annuity from an existing grantee, John Dingley, sewer of the chamber.⁸⁸ In August 1528 Brereton co-operated with William Almer, a serjeant-at-arms in the royal household, to secure the grant, ostensibly in their joint names, of the keeping of Merseley Park in Bromfield.⁸⁹ As in the case of Shotwick, he prepared the campaign by securing copies of previous grants in order to make sure that his offer to the crown was attractive and that the grant was drawn in the terms he wished.⁹⁰ The application was successful. But judging from subsequent events, it seems clear that Almer and Brereton had originally been rivals for the office. Brereton, therefore, in order to avoid the risk of anyone intruding permanently into his preserves, agreed to a joint grant whose costs he would bear, and to the actual occupation of the office by Almer, on the condition that if he found Almer an equivalent office elsewhere, he should be left in sole possession of Merseley. In less than a year, Almer was granted the keepership of Grove Park in Warwickshire, and the patent for Merseley was redrawn to Brereton alone.⁹¹ A similar determination to defend his dominant position explains Brereton's concern about the post of baron of the exchequer at Chester. The existing holder, Randolph Brereton of Chester, gent., was very much William's man, but William did not own the reversion and there

was the chance, if Randolph were to die, that an unsympathetic appointment might be made. In 1532, therefore, he bargained with the reversioners for the presentation on Randolph's death, agreeing to pay £4 11s. a year from that event until he himself ceased to be chamberlain.⁹² Whatever Brereton claimed, there can be no question that he deliberately sought supremacy in his home territory. To succeed his father as chamberlain of the county palatine was not only the summit of this authority, it was the logical consequence of almost a decade of grants.

The political authority which William Brereton secured was augmented by the use which he made of royal lands and the Savage estates committed to him. These were not only of economic value, they could be exploited in other ways. At the simplest level, William Brereton the landless younger son was the effective landlord of the tenants of the crown and the Savage family. Thus he could assess an entry fine, allow a priest to turn his gelding into a meadow or a deputy his cattle into Shotwick Park, or restore at pleasure a heriot to a poor widow.⁹³ Similarly it was not only a financial but also a social dividend which was implied by the comment that the steward of Mottram 'hath the manrede there'.⁹⁴ At a more significant level, Brereton had to find a bailiff for each of his estates, a deputy for each of his offices and a number of additional appointments as well. All told he had, not counting domestic staff, thirteen men on an annual wage and over twenty bailiffs. This made Brereton an important employer for the professional administrators in the county, an influential group which provided managers for the crown, the corporations, the monasteries and the principal estates of the area.⁹⁵ Brereton's relationship with these men was strict. When he granted an office the terms were drawn up by a lawyer, and a bond for good behaviour was required: at least ten of these have survived, most in substantial sums, and from time to time the security was revised to bring it up to date.⁹⁶ Those letters from Brereton's subordinates which have survived vividly express their concern to keep in with their master. When he took over from Egerton, Brereton received this letter from Richard Leftwich the deputy escheator.

I haue shewed youre maistership whot I hade of my olde maister, whose soule god pardon. I hertely praye youre maistership to lette me knowe youre pleasure therin by my seruant whom shall resorte to you for the same . . . I hertely praye you that ye will be my good maister concernynge my baillywike of Shibbroke, the great substance of woddess be in the same. And that I may occupye vnder you therin. My singler truste is that ye will be my good maister . . . I shall serue you as truly as I can to my litle power as knoweth our lorde who euer preserue you.⁹⁷

Brereton's dominance over his employees may also be reflected

in a rapid turn-over in the occupants of certain posts. The receiver of Chirk was changed in September 1532, November 1533 and again in April 1535; death and illness may explain some of these movements, but Brereton certainly changed his auditor in 1533, dropping John Gostwick, the future treasurer of the court of first fruits and tenths, in favour of a Thomas Wrene.⁹⁸

VI

Thanks to the power he possessed as public officer, landlord and employer, coupled with the prestige of wealth, favour at court and a notable marriage, William Brereton became master in Cheshire and North Wales. His frequent absences with the king were no hindrance to this; quite the opposite. His battle with Egerton had not only been for local supremacy in the north-west, but to decide this by establishing who the principal Cheshire patron at court was to be. Thus when he was taking over from Egerton, William Pole, a gentleman usher but resident at Poole near Nantwich, wrote to assure William of his support and to seek employment for a kinsman; Hugh Starky of Darley, also a gentleman usher, solicited favour in an arbitration.⁹⁹ John Puleston, serjeant-at-arms and constable of Caernarvon, wrote about a feud with the deputy of Sir Hugh Vaughan sheriff of Caernarvon; he suggested that if William could not buy out Sir Hugh, then he should attempt to secure the reversion of the shrievalty, either for himself or else for Puleston. He also sought Brereton's advice on whether to come to court 'to waytte thus quarter' or to push his suit in person.¹⁰⁰ That all these men had minor household office may suggest that a 'Cheshire gang' operated at court, led by the Breretons, but other Cheshire men approached him too: Randolph Brereton the baron of the palatine exchequer was importunate for help in a local dispute.¹⁰¹ William Brereton was also able to act as a small patron in his own right when the full extent of his crown grants had been reached. His immediate family were the first to benefit. His brother Urian was bailiff of two large manors and shared some grants, another brother, Roger, acted as steward of the Holt, and sheriff of Flint; of his brothers in holy orders, Peter, the parson of Heswall, was installed as incumbent at Oswestry, and John was appointed to Astbury.¹⁰² Brereton paid out more than twenty annuities although it is not certain how many of these were of his grant and how many were charged on the properties before he obtained possession.¹⁰³ Prominent men in his circle were Randolph Brereton of the exchequer, John Brereton esquire, Hugh Calverley esquire, the Pulestons and

Morgan Broughton (perhaps with the Hanmers and Richard Leftwich of a slightly lower status).

The way in which William Brereton exploited his position in Cheshire and the March is nowhere more clearly seen than in his relationships with the monasteries of the area. The annuities which he enjoyed from St Werburgh's, the abbey of Norton and the abbey of Vale Royal speak of his importance as a patron at court; his stewardship of the abbey of Valle Crucis arose directly from his royal offices in the March. But in all cases the connection was more than a formality. At Valle Crucis in the early 1530s, the abbot Robert Salusbury, a member of a rising Denbigh family, was in serious trouble. It was not his involvement in the local feuds between Robert ap Rhys and the Salusburies which mattered, but a rebellion in the abbey, apparently headed by the prior. This led to the intervention of the patron of Valle Crucis, the duke of Richmond, acting through William Brereton and Leyson Thomas, abbot of Neath and 'reformer' of the Cistercian order. Abbot Thomas, with the abbots of Conway, Cwm-hir and Cymer, made a visitation to Valle Crucis in February 1534, but Robert Salusbury appealed from his fellow Cistercians to the archbishop of Canterbury.¹⁰⁴ Nothing came of this, perhaps because parliament was at that moment passing a statute providing for the appeal from exempt houses to go to the king instead, and in the summer of 1534 William Brereton intervened in person to support Leyson Thomas.¹⁰⁵ On 4 August the quarrel was resolved by Salusbury's effective surrender of his position to the prior and three monks, one probably a relative of Brereton.¹⁰⁶ Robert agreed to move to Oxford and 'there to inhabit at his school and learning' with a pension of £20 a year. He was not to leave without Brereton's permission and the length of his 'rustication' was also at William's discretion. The commission which took over the abbey was to account before Brereton and Fulk Salusbury, dean of St Asaph. As it turned out, Oxford had no reforming effect on Abbot Robert. Obligated to be in residence by Michaelmas, he immediately recruited a gang of highwaymen until betrayed in May 1535.¹⁰⁷

In a characteristic way, Brereton's part in this affair brought him profit. The abbot of Cymer, one of the co-adjutors with Abbot Thomas, ruled one of the poorest Welsh houses in the Cistercian order. After the February visitation he began to negotiate with Brereton, apparently to secure Valle Crucis for himself, offering £40 'so that he may obtayne his suite'. Whether Brereton was tempted by this offer is not known but he did not lose by the suspension rather than the removal of the Abbot

Salisbury. On the day of the suspension, Salisbury granted him the abbey's interest in the church of Ruabon.¹⁰⁸ The abbot of Cymer did not give up hope. As soon as Salisbury was arrested, he appealed to Thomas Cromwell for the succession, offering a gratuity of £20. He was not appointed, but it is hardly surprising that the successful candidate was left 'destitute by the costs of the election'.¹⁰⁹

The dominance of William Brereton at Valle Crucis had parallels elsewhere. About 1540, John Smyth and John Cowper (possibly the future mayors of Chester of these names) appealed to the court of chancery for an injunction against Brereton's widow who was suing them for 200 marks.¹¹⁰ Smyth and Cowper claimed that when John Butler, abbot of Vale Royal, had died some years previously, William Brereton 'dyd instauntely sake and labur to haue oon Randall Golson', otherwise Goldsmythe, elected. But the king granted a free election, and it was another of the monks, John Harware, who was chosen. The new abbot knew of Brereton's power in the palatinate and 'fering greatlye the dyspleasure of the sayd William' sent the defendants to pacify him. Brereton, however, 'dyd pleyntley saye he wold do hym suche dyspleasure that yt shuld be verey hevy and harde for hym to abyde in Chester', and they felt it advisable to offer an emollient of £100 on behalf of the abbot. William insisted that they should be bound in 200 marks until the abbot himself accepted an equivalent obligation, which he did, but before the first bond could be delivered to Cowper and Smyth, Brereton was executed, his papers confiscated and then returned to Lady Savage who, unaware of this 'simple and special consideration' went to law for the money. The story suggests a certain simplicity about Smyth and Cowper—what they describe as their 'grett treste and confidence' in Brereton—and, in fact, Brereton had forced a harder settlement than they knew. Among his papers is a bond from Abbot Harware dated 2 December 1529, but it is not the bond in 200 marks for the payment of a 'reward' of £100. It is in £1,000 to be 'at all times ready' to resign his office to a nominee of Brereton in return for a pension of 100 marks and not to resign without Brereton's consent.¹¹¹ This surrender, if anything, put Vale Royal more into Brereton's power than the election of Goldsmythe in the first place. Brereton brooked no challenge in his own back yard.

William Brereton's accounts also tell of his relations with the monasteries of Cheshire and North Wales. They could be a major market for his produce; in 1532–3, Valle Crucis took £7 6s. of 'corn', perhaps two tons or more.¹¹² They were con-

venient places to conduct business. In 1531, for example, Brereton held his annual audit in the abbey at Chester.¹¹³ John Gostwick, the auditor, was installed there with his three servants for a total of nine days; he was well entertained—two does were provided—and his four horses kept the abbey stable busy. John Norbury, Brereton's receiver-general, was in residence also for the whole period and other servants for shorter times, and the bailiffs and officials came from their various and widely dispersed holdings to present their accounts. Norbury quite properly recognised the hospitality of the abbey by entering in his 'particulars' 6s. 8d. in gratuities to the domestic staff. At Vale Royal in the same year, Morgan Broughton distributed at least £1 12s. 6d. to the prior and his colleagues, although no explanation is given in the accounts, any more than for a special gift of puffins to the abbot of Bardsey.¹¹⁴ But whether these were payments for services, or 'sweeteners' is immaterial. They tell of a monastic community absorbed into secular society, a society led by Brereton.

Perhaps the most interesting evidence from a monastery concerning William Brereton comes from a letter written to him between 1531 and 1535 by Gilbert Godbehere, a servant in the household of the abbot of St Werburgh.¹¹⁵ It is an enormously long plea for Brereton's aid against victimisation:

I besече yow for the love of God to provyde sum lytull cotage for my pore wyfe to dwell in, owt of hys davnger, and then yf yt shall please yow I shall be content to be at youre puttyng to lyue in the kynges warrs, other at Hams, Gynys, Barwyke, Kallys or else where, where shall be youre plesure to put me, for I know yt well, on les ye be my good and specyall master and by youre assystavnse and support, I am not able to abyde in Cheschyre.

But it is not Godbehere's personal revelations which matter so much as his information on the situation inside the third largest religious house in the north of England and particularly on the links between feuds inside the abbey and faction and politics in the lay world outside. The letter assumes a deal of knowledge which we no longer have, but the general outline is clear. Within the monastery Brereton had a group of friends, 'the most part of the convent whych byn sure and substancyall men', including Thomas Clarke who was to be the last abbot and first dean of Chester Cathedral. Their connection with Brereton earned the hostility of the recorder or high steward, a Dan Richard Huntington, the marshal, one of the lay abbot's officers who is never identified by name, and the cellarer, who together had the ear of the ageing and overbearing abbot, John Birkenshaw. Birkenshaw could not break with Clarke because Huntington and the others 'be as chylderne in comparyson of hym in the premysses and stonde more lykyn shadoys then men

of gravyte', and because he was also anxious to stand well with Brereton he was attempting to censor communication between the abbey and London. Nevertheless the marshal 'bothe rulyth my lorde and the monasterii as hym lyst for of trewth who so euyre he favorythe hath fauor and plesure of my lorde abbott'. The actual issue in dispute seems to have been the appointment of a new prior, with Clarke and Huntington as the candidates, but Godbehere links this struggle in what is known to have been a restless community with a confrontation in the world outside. On one side were William and his friends, including his brother Roger and Randolph Brereton, the baron of the exchequer, and on the other his elder brother Randolph Brereton of Malpas, the 'marshal' and 'hys alyavntys whych be the Snedys, with all there adsherentes'. If the marshal and the Snede family 'may haue a prior made after there myndys as they say and thynke to bryng the same to pas, yt shall be bottles for yow, youre frendys, seruantes or any louer that yow haue to cum with in the monastery'.

Godbehere's letter must be treated with caution, but some other evidence exists to support his story. Randolph Brereton, Sir Randolph's heir, was at loggerheads with his younger brothers; William was very close to his brother Roger and to Randolph Brereton the baron of the palatine exchequer.¹¹⁶ There was friction between William Brereton and the Snedes; Ralph Snede, LL.D., the rector of Woodchurch and Tattonhall, accused Brereton in 1531 of meddling with the advowson of Astbury simply to spite him, and in 1537 Richard Snede claimed that William Brereton had engineered his dismissal from the post of attorney to the Lady Mary in the Marches of Wales by 'moving' Anne Boleyn's father, the earl of Wiltshire, against him.¹¹⁷ In Tudor England there was always the danger that local authority bestowed by the crown might be exploited to private ends. The troubles which the Egertons of Ridley experienced concurrently with their quarrel with Brereton in the 1520s look suspicious. After Sir Ralph's death, when Brereton was finally extinguishing the young heir's right to Shotwick, the deer park at Ridley was raided twice, by Hugh Calverley and by Richard Jerard, and a serious affray resulted on each occasion.¹¹⁸ Hugh Calverley was one of William Brereton's servants and Jerard was possibly a client of Sir William Brereton of Brereton whose steward William was.¹¹⁹ Before Ralph Egerton died he clashed with a Robert More who had 'by sinister labours' persuaded Sir John Dudley to break a promise that one of Sir Ralph's servants should retain a tenancy in Peckforton, and Dudley had borrowed, or was soon to borrow money from William Brereton.

More's complaints produced royal letters to the bailiff of Peckforton to evict Sir Ralph's nominee, and the bailiff, despite Sir Ralph's objections, insisted on carrying out the eviction; it is no surprise that the bailiff in question was Morgan Broughton, William Brereton's confidential servant.¹²⁰

If Brereton was behind these attacks on the Egertons, he was only following the example of his father who was more than once accused of abusing his office of chamberlain of Chester. Example, indeed, may be too weak a word, for father and son may have seen their roles as complementary, together guaranteeing the fortune of the Breretons and their supporters. That the two were close is indicated by a letter from William Pole, recommending a client to William on the argument that 'his fader and he beryth master chamberleyn all theyre gud wile and seruice that may be in theyre pore power'.¹²¹ Similarly, when William Knight, archdeacon of Chester, was in difficulties with his bishop over their respective jurisdictions, he asked William to send a letter soliciting his father's special favour.¹²² William's accumulation of offices in the county palatine buttressed his father's position as chamberlain and, at the same time, helped to ensure his succession to Sir Randolph's honours. It is also possible that this Brereton monopoly is related to an enduring faction struggle in Tudor Cheshire between the various Brereton clans and the Dutton family. In 1538, Bishop Roland Lee complained to Cromwell that the Brereton-Dutton feud was destroying all order in the county.¹²³ The protagonists were then Sir William Brereton of Brereton, the deputy-chamberlain, and Sir Piers Dutton of Halton, but thirty years earlier Dutton had been quarrelling with Sir Randolph Brereton, a quarrel which had ranged behind the chamberlain the Savage family, Sir William Pole, Richard and William Done and the abbot of St Werburgh's.¹²⁴ Too little is as yet known of the factions and alignments of the palatine gentry to be certain that the Brereton-Dutton dispute of 1538 was a continuation of the earlier antagonism, still less to see how the Brereton-Egerton struggle fits in, but the hypothesis is not unsupported. William Brereton complained that Sir Piers Dutton was, in 1531, impeding his duties as steward of Halton.¹²⁵ The notorious riot at the suppression of the abbey of Norton, a few months after William Brereton's execution, points in the same direction: Randolph Brereton of the palatine exchequer, William's deputy and relative, was deeply involved in an attempt to rescue the convent from the king and Sir Piers Dutton, and Sir William Brereton intervened to protect the resistance from the penalties of rebellion.¹²⁶

VII

William Brereton's role in Cheshire politics has to be inferred, but there is more direct evidence of his use or abuse of the powers he enjoyed in the marcher lordships of North Wales. Two of the letters he received from John Puleston, his agent in Merioneth, tell the usual story of pre-Act of Union Wales—barely disguised brigandage being kept down by a liberal, but perhaps partisan use of the gallows.¹²⁷ They also suggest that absentee placemen like Brereton might lack administrative vigour, and so be tempted to welcome a local man, such as Puleston, who had obliging friends.

Item, as concernyng your office of exchetourship of Meryoneth shire, I haue put oon to occupie it, by reason ther was no body for you at the said tyme. Therfor, yf yt wold please you from hense forthe that a frynde of myn may haue hyt, I will answeare as well of hyt as of that oder office.

But Merioneth was a long way away and Brereton was eventually to surrender effective control to Puleston. With the Dee valley lordships it was a different matter. He was appointed to the office of serjeant of the peace, or *pencais*, in the lordship of Chirk in November 1526 and it can be only shortly afterwards that he received a petition from two of the commotes of Chirkland, complaining about the extent of robbery and cattle rustling allowed because the duties of the *pencais* had not been performed for two years.¹²⁸ By September 1527 Hugh Porter was appointed as deputy on the spot, and for as long as the Brereton accounts continue, he appears each year on the wage strength.¹²⁹

The principal evidence for believing that Brereton was very deeply concerned with what went on in Chirk and in Bromfield and Yale is a star chamber suit brought against him by his deputy John Eyton, or as he appears in the accounts, John ap Gryffith Eyton.¹³⁰ Eyton alleged 'diuerse articles of mayntenance of murderers, theves and misruled persons and bering of ill factes and dedes', starting with the removal of the Oswestry tithes by William's clerical brother, Peter, under an armed escort of the men of Chirk, but going on to stories of robbery and murder which would grace any Western. According to Eyton, Brereton influence made Chirk a safe haven for cattle thieves; the animals were put into Black Park where William Hanmer, one of Brereton's servants, was the keeper, and John Gatyn who trailed them ended in Chirk castle 'for that he shulde not folowe the tracke of his catell'. Hanmer, and another Brereton servant, Robert ap Morys, were outlawed for murder, but they still went 'where they would', even to the Brereton

house at Malpas, and when legal action against them was begun at Westminster, William Brereton who 'wold not that the kinges highnes and his moost honorable counsaill shuld knowe of his misdemeanure and of his seruantes' bought off the accusers. Brereton also protected his men back in the Marches. Morys and Hanmer organised a raid in force upon the lordship of Oswestry, held by the earl of Arundel. They

ranne to the said Erl of Arundelles tenauntes and toke many of theym and robbed and spoiled them of all that they had abowt them, and many of the said tenauntes toke the Churche of Oswestre vpon thaim for savegarde of thair lyves. The said mysdoers assaulted the said churche and shotte many arrowes to the churche and the towne dwellers were fayne to shet vp their dores and windowes and thay that lefte thair dores and windowes open, thay shot in many arrowes and so the said misdoers went through the towne to the high crosse. And at the high crosse, the forsaid William Hanmer shot a pore man, oon Richard Capper, with a brode arrowe, by cause the pore man saied, 'This is an evill rule in a good towne'. And from thens thay went through the high strete till thay came before the castell gate, and there thay stode and their wepons in thair handes after the most riotouse fasshion, and then called for drynk and so dronke in the market place. And when they had taried there as long as it pleasid thaim, the said misdoers went to Chirk land again.

Despite this, when the offenders were indicted by Sir Richard Herbert, the steward of Oswestry and a member of the council in the Marches, Brereton secured their pardon from the earl of Arundel.

The complaint by John Eyton alleged complicity in several more offences, including a murder by another of Brereton's servants and his release of a monk of Valle Crucis arrested for treason, but the real ground of Eyton's attack on Brereton (which might be thought to reflect as much or more on Eyton's role as William's lieutenant) appears in the account of two other killings, the one of Eyton's uncle William Edwardes, an ex-soldier and for thirty-four years constable of Chirk, and the other of Henry Eyton, 'a true harmeless man' related also to the plaintiff. Henry's murderers 'walk at pleasure in harness after the manner and facion of warre', and when the murdered man's aged father complained, William Brereton's deputy at the Holt Randolph Lloyd incarcerated him for six months. The final straw came with the murder of William Hanmer at Bromfield, when Lloyd and John Puleston conspired to put the blame on John Eyton, imprisoning a first jury which refused to co-operate and then empanelling a jury, half of Brereton's servants and half of bondmen.

William Brereton's answer to these charges has survived but it is not very informative. He denied any connection with most of those accused, depicted his negotiations with Sir Richard Herbert and the earl of Arundel as those of an honest broker

anxious to bring peace and made great play with the responsibility of Eyton for day-to-day matters in the lordships. Nevertheless, the seriousness of the quarrel is clear. Cromwell's remembrances include a note of the 'displeasures' between William Brereton and John Eton.¹³¹ Brereton's own accounts for 1532-3 include a sum of £28 5s. 10½d. for the 'costes & expences for the deth of Wylliam Hanmer' covering

dyuers persones & horses frome the Holt to London & frome London to the Holt at dyuers tymes for bryngnge vp of certen persones tayken at the Holt for suspicions of morder for the deth of Wylliam Hanmer, seruant to Wylliam Brereton esquier . . . with xxij^s payd for xxiiij^d Walshe bylles.¹³²

This was not Brereton's first or his only involvement in the disturbances of the March. In 1529 another of his servants had been murdered, and in 1530 or 1531 Brereton paid the costs of another of his men, Matthew Hanmer, summoned to appear before the star chamber.¹³³ There seems little doubt, therefore, that Brereton knew what was going on, or that he was as ready to use what enemies described as 'his extortionate power and mighte' in Holt and Chirk as in the county palatine.¹³⁴ Eyton was probably also correct in suggesting that William Brereton was sensitive about the impression his 'bearing' made at court. When, in 1533, he granted the post of deputy under-steward of the Holt to Randolph Lloyd, a special clause was added as a postscript to the indenture, binding Lloyd not to pardon felonies or murders without William's special licence.¹³⁵ This suggests that he was well aware of the active government concern with the disorders in the Marches, a concern which was soon to be manifest in the appointment of Bishop Roland Lee to the council for the March and in the start of a programme of statutory reform.

William Brereton was an 'over-mighty' subject. It is true that he did not possess the inherited status of a fifteenth-century magnate, that he distributed no badges to his tenants, that he was in a most complete sense the king's man. But the reality of independent local power was there as William wanted it to be. How he reacted to the appointment of Roland Lee is not known, although Lee chose as receiver-general a cleric who certainly had no love for Brereton's palatine independence.¹³⁶ In any case, time was running out for men like William. The only solution to the dangerous isolation they embodied was the radical one actually under consideration in the last months of his life—the extinction of the politically separate palatinate and marcher lordships and their assimilation into the country at large. It is somehow appropriate that a man who so personified

the final years of Cheshire's independence and marcher privileges should have gone to the block a month after the royal assent which ended that separation for all time.

VIII

For historians the principal importance of William Brereton may be the documents which he left behind and the light which his career throws on the interaction of court and county palatine in the final years before national unity was imposed. Yet it would be high-minded to a degree to ignore the personal tragedy of May 1536 as Brereton was dragged down in the disgrace of Henry VIII's second queen.¹³⁷ A commission to investigate treason began work on 24 April 1536, and Mark Smeaton, a musician on the staff of the privy chamber, was arrested on Sunday April 30, but secrecy was absolute and there was complete surprise when Henry broke up the May Day jousts at Greenwich, accused Henry Norris of adultery with Anne and sent him to the Tower. Anne never saw her husband again, she went to the Tower the next day, and so too her brother, Lord Rochford. On Thursday 4 May, Brereton was arrested with Sir Francis Weston of the privy chamber, the king's former page. All were indicted on Wednesday 10 May for adultery; it was alleged that Anne solicited Brereton on 16 November 1533 and that the liaison began at Greenwich on 27 November. When the commoners were tried in Westminster Hall on Friday 12 May, William pleaded not guilty, but like the rest he was condemned. Three days later Anne and her brother were also found guilty.

Whatever the legal decision, there is no reason now to doubt that Brereton was innocent. The timing of his arrest shows that the investigating commission had nothing against him before the panic of May week began. The queen showed 'very gud countenans' when she learned of his arrest and obviously felt she had nothing to fear from him. George Constantine, Henry Norris' servant at the time, but also a former schoolfellow of Brereton, made a determined effort to get the truth out of William, and got a firm denial. It is clear that prisoners of state were under strict compulsion not to embarrass the government by their scaffold speeches, but Brereton made his innocence plain. The others were more guarded so, as Constantine said, 'if he were gyltie, I saye therfore that he dyed worst of them all'. His widow continued to remember him with affection and at her death in 1545 she bequeathed to her youngest son, Thomas Brereton who could scarcely have known his father,

my dooble wire of golde set with rubyes and perles and my cheyne of golde, the which I were dayely and the tablett thereunto annexed, and one bracellet of golde with a Jasyndte stone in the same, the whiche was the laste token his father sent me.¹³⁸

Anne, too, denied guilt with Brereton and each of the others on the damnation of her immortal soul, and the only admission was that secured from Smeaton by torture or psychological pressure. Against this, the evidence which the crown produced appears flimsy in the extreme. The Tudor court engaged in a conventional charade of courtly love with the queen as its focus. In May 1536 the crown wrenched out of context a few items of banter, gave them a false and dishonourable interpretation and bolstered the lies with general imputations of lechery; as one of the judges present said of Anne, 'there was never such a whore in the realm'.

The explanation of the judicial murder of six innocent people by the king with the co-operation of the peers of the realm and false verdicts from several juries, is mundane. The destruction of Anne Boleyn and her *concubinos* was the culmination of a bitter faction struggle in the spring of 1536. The sort of faction which we have seen Brereton operating was of a modest and limited sort, but when a major issue arose at court, such as the supplanting of Anne Boleyn by Jane Seymour, then these petty factions were forced to take sides. Anne had strong support; there was no reason to believe that she would not triumph as she had done before—only hindsight makes Jane's victory appear inevitable. Not only Rochford, Norris, Weston and Brereton rallied behind her, but Sir Francis Bryan, the king's confidant (who was interrogated by Cromwell), and Sir Richard Page (who was arrested)—altogether half of the privy chamber staff—backed up by Sir Thomas Wyatt (also arrested), Archbishop Cranmer (banned from court until it was too late to save Anne) and others. When, at last, Henry surrendered to the faction promoting Jane, not only Anne but the faction which had calculated on her success lay exposed to reprisals.

Brereton and the other commoners returned, condemned, to the Tower on Friday 12 May. They had five days to wait, and on Wednesday 17 May they were taken with Rochford to the scaffold on Tower Hill. Henry had shown some mercy by remitting the full bestiality of drawing, hanging and quartering, and they all died by the axe. Rochford suffered first after making a notable moral exhortation to the crowd, then Norris 'who sayed allmost nothings at all', then Weston who lamented his careless life, and then, with Smeaton left to follow, William Brereton. Constantine, his boyhood companion, recorded his

words. 'I haue deserved to dye if it were a thousande deethes, but the cause wherefore I dye, judge not: but yf ye judge, judge the best'.¹³⁹ He was buried in the Tower.

The shock of May 1536 rippled on at court throughout the summer. Within a matter of weeks Henry rounded on the successful faction and there was a further bout of arrests and interrogations, although, this time, no executions. With the king shaking off his mentors, the allies of those executed in May raised their voice for the first time.¹⁴⁰

I mornynge wyse syns daylye I increas,
Thus shuld I cloke the cause of all my greffe;
So pensyve mynd with tong to hold his pease,
My reasons sayethe ther can be no relyeffe:
Wherefore geve ere, I vmblye you requyre,
The affectes to know that this dothe mak me mone.
The cause ys great of all my dolfull chere,
Ffor those that were, and now be dead and gonne.

* * * * *

Brewton, ffarwell, as one that lest I knewe.
Great was thy love with dyuers as I here;
But common voyce dothe not so sore the Rewe,
As other twayne that dothe beffore appere.¹⁴¹
But yet no dobt but thy frendes lament,
And other her ther petus crye and mone,
So dothe eche hart ffor the lykwyse Relent,
That thou gevyst cause thus to be ded and gonne.

But the repeated refrain is 'dead and gone', and with both Anne and her 'paramours' destroyed and the grand alliance against her cut down to size, the court began to adjust to a new queen and a change of faces; and there were spoils to share. Cromwell had immediately collected details of grants made void by the executions, and the first of Brereton's offices was granted away on 28 May, a fortnight after his death.¹⁴² His prize possession, the abbey of Lesnes, went the next day to Ralph Sadler, one of Cromwell's underlings.¹⁴³ Everyone, from peers like Viscount Lisle, captain of Calais, to grooms of the chamber like Henry Annesley, besieged the secretary with applications.¹⁴⁴ It was no time to hang back to lament those that 'be dead and gone'.

The new government thinking about Cheshire and the Marches informed the redistribution of all Brereton's offices. When William Smith of the council learned had been disgraced in 1509 in company with Empson and Dudley, his 'corner' in the palatinate had passed to Ralph Egerton; William Brereton enjoyed it next.¹⁴⁵ But this time there was to be no one successor, either in Cheshire or at court. Sir Piers Dutton, Sir Rees Mauncell, Hugh Starky and Urian Brereton all shared.¹⁴⁶ Many of the more important posts went to strangers; the stewardship of Longdendale and the important leases of Aldford, Etchells

and Alderley were granted to Edmund Peckham, cofferer of the household, the stewardship of Halton to Sir Edward Neville.¹⁴⁷ Holt and Chirk went to George Cotton and the new queen's brother, Thomas Seymour, gentleman of the privy chamber, and the wardship of John Savage eventually passed to Sir Antony Browne with an annuity of £40.¹⁴⁸

Against those who gained from William's death must be set his creditors and his family. Four people were still claiming money in 1545, most especially Sir Clement West, the knight of Malta who had relied on William as a patron.¹⁴⁹ When Brereton was arrested, the goods and money he held on trust were seized too, and West bombarded Cromwell for the next two years with requests to recover them: as he had not succeeded by 1545 it is doubtful whether he ever did.¹⁵⁰ As for Brereton's family, the law of forfeiture was less hard on dependants in practice than in theory; this was usual, although Lady Elizabeth Savage's connections obviously helped as well. On 30 June she was granted all William's goods and chattels with all the payments and arrears due to him, together with the continuation of her jointure.¹⁵¹ But to get a royal grant enforced in these circumstances was not easy, and for a number of years Lady Savage kept up her suits with the help of Urian Brereton and the co-operation of Thomas Cromwell. She was not unsuccessful. In March, 1537, she recovered the Savage lands, although in May she had to write to Cromwell for help in recovering debts from the Lesnes estate.¹⁵² The dissolution of the monasteries brought in some of the arrears of William's annuities, and until at least 1539 Elizabeth seems to have held on to Finchley.¹⁵³ But she did not recover everything. The £200 which Brereton had lent to John Dudley proved particularly obstinate. Urian Brereton was badgering Cromwell, and Lady Elizabeth sending him papers about it in 1539 but, perhaps because of Cromwell's fall, the amount was still outstanding when she died in 1545.¹⁵⁴ And it was not the only amount unrecovered. Attached to her will are two schedules of debts due to William totalling, even in a mutilated condition, in excess of £670.¹⁵⁵

The death of Lady Elizabeth was the final misfortune for William Brereton's children, already deprived of a prominent and wealthy start in life. His two sons, Henry and Thomas, were still adolescents as were his stepsons John and Henry Savage, but unlike John Savage who was a valuable ward and his brother who at least had a reversionary interest in the Savage lands, the Brereton brothers had a bleak future. Their mother bequeathed them what years remained in her leasehold property and an annuity of £20 each from John Savage, in

return for surrendering to him their claims over her chattels.¹⁵⁶ But in the event, Henry Brereton could only agree with John Savage in 1558, and that for an annual sum of 20 marks, £13 6s. 8d.¹⁵⁷ He and his brother drop out of the family tree and, unlike the descendants of Norris and Weston, they were not reinstated in public life by Elizabeth I. The glory of the younger sons of Sir Randolph Brereton of Malpas lay with Urian Brereton and the Breretons of Handforth, a family that in Urian's great-grandson, Sir William, produced one of the foremost parliamentary generals of the Civil War. George Ormerod wrote of this Sir William, 'the best and greatest of his kinsmen, Sir [*sic*] William Brereton of the Shocklach branch, had been sacrificed on the block but a few generations before, to the fury of Henry VIII, which would still rankle in the breasts of his relatives'.¹⁵⁸ It is far more likely that the family had forgotten all about him, and his children too.

NOTES

- 1 Cheshire Record Office [CRO] DDX/95.
- 2 Judging by the settlements in the Cholmondeley MSS., C.R.O.
- 3 D. Jones, *The Church in Cheshire* (Chetham Soc., 3 ser. vii, 1957), pp. 34, 176.
- 4 The pedigree gives William and Peter (parson of Heswall) both as 3rd sons and omits the 6th; 'Recognizance Rolls of Cheshire, Henry VIII', *Reports of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* [DKR], 39 (1878), 29 names William 6th.
- 5 E. 326 B11351 [references cited without location are from the Public Record Office].
- 6 *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1485-1494*, p. 411.
- 7 *Ibid.* 1494-1509, p. 131; 'Recognizance Rolls of Cheshire, Henry IV to Henry VII', DKR 37 (1876), 87.
- 8 *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII*, [L. and P.], I, 54(40), 132(108), 2392, App. 26. The second (1920) edition of this volume has been used.
- 9 L. and P., III, 3446; III, 1474, 2288(2).
- 10 C.R.O. DCH/H82.
- 11 Jones, *Church in Cheshire*, p. 166; DKR 39.29; L. and P., IV, p. 863.
- 12 E 326 B12346; L. and P., IV, p. 863.
- 13 For the following see the Eltham Ordinances, *ibid.* IV, p. 865.
- 14 *Ibid.* IV, 276.
- 15 G. R. Elton, *Tudor Revolution in Government* (1953), p. 379.
- 16 L. and P., VII, 1104.
- 17 SP1/58/135-6 [L. and P., IV, 6688].
- 18 SP1/72/149 [L. and P., V, 1631].
- 19 He headed the Cheshire commission on church revenue in 1535, but took no active part. L. and P., VIII, 149(70); *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, V, 201 *sqq.*
- 20 But see below n. 23.
- 21 J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (1968), p. 259.
- 22 *Privy Purse Expenses of Henry VIII* (ed. N. H. Nicolas, 1827), p. 51; SP1/57/212^v-224 [L. and P., IV, 6489].
- 23 The meeting of the magnates at court was on 12 June; Brereton received his advance on 13 June and reached Southwell on 15th. This must throw doubt on the extent of the changes in the text demanded on the 12th.

- 24 George Cavendish, *Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey* (ed. R. S. Sylvester, Early English Text Society, 1959), pp. 139–40.
- 25 W. T. MacCaffery, 'Place and Patronage in Elizabethan Politics', *Elizabethan Government and Society* (ed. S. T. Bindoff etc., 1961), p. 108.
- 26 SP1/236/88, 89 [*L. and P.*, Add. I, 647]; British Museum, Stowe MS. 141 ff. 29–31 [hereafter Stowe].
- 27 J. E. Neale, *Essays in Elizabethan History* (1958), p. 71.
- 28 E. W. Ives, 'Patronage at the Court of Henry VIII: the case of Sir Ralph Egerton of Ridley', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 52 (1970), 366–8 [hereafter Ives, *Egerton*].
- 29 *Ibid.* p. 373.
- 30 Stowe 141 f. 29.
- 31 *Ibid.* f. 18.
- 32 *Ibid.* f. 19.
- 33 E326 B11480; E315/276 f. 13^v.
- 34 *L. and P.*, V, 426; IX, 504(13); X, 392(50); VI, 179.
- 35 Stowe 141 f. 33.
- 36 *DKR* 39.29.
- 37 *Ibid.* 39.29; *L. and P.*, IV, 2673(12), 3622(15).
- 38 *DKR* 39.29.
- 39 *L. and P.*, IV, 5906(20); 'List of Sheriffs for England and Wales', *Lists and Indexes* 9 (1963), 260.
- 40 Flint: 30 Sep. 1532, *ibid.* 9.254, but in post by 1530, E315/275 f. 12; Halton and Chester Castle by 1530, *ibid.* f. 10^v; Chamberlain: *L. and P.*, IV, 6490(11).
- 41 SC6 Henry VIII, 400, 401.
- 42 E326 B12506.
- 43 *L. and P.*, IV, 213(23); *DKR* 39.29.
- 44 Stowe 141 f. 56; E315/275 f. 9.
- 45 *L. and P.*, IV, 3087(26); *DKR* 39.29; soon after he was also granted the wardship of Godfrey Fuljambe, *L. and P.*, X, 879(5).
- 46 E326 B6894.
- 47 E326 B6928.
- 48 E326 B10076.
- 49 E326 B9202.
- 50 *L. and P.*, VII, 419(6); SC6 Henry VIII, 404 f. 13.
- 51 *L. and P.*, IV, 6600(2).
- 52 C.R.O. DCH/H293.
- 53 *Lancashire and Cheshire Records* (ed. W. D. Selby, Record Soc. of Lancashire and Cheshire, VII, 1882), p. 161.
- 54 Stowe 141 ff. 22, 56.
- 55 *L. and P.*, XII(1), 795(38).
- 56 Stowe 141 f. 56.
- 57 *L. and P.*, IV, 5906(20), 6301(12); VI, 179.
- 58 The accounts, letters and other documents concerning William Brereton are to be published by the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire. The principal accounts used in the following are E315/275, Receiver-General's Accounts 1530–1, 1532–3; E315/276, 277, Bailiffs' Accounts 1530–1, 1533–4 and 1531–2, 1532–3; SC6 Henry VIII, 404, Receiver-General's 'Particulars' 1530–1.
- 59 *L. and P.*, IV, 2527.
- 60 *Ibid.* IV, 4442–3; X, 878; Ives, *Egerton*, pp. 364–5.
- 61 *Lists and Indexes* 9.260; E315/275 f. 30.
- 62 Assuming the jointure as agreed in 1504, see above n. 52.
- 63 SC6 Henry VIII, 404 ff. 9, 11, 11^v.
- 64 C.R.O. DCH/E294, schedule of debts.
- 65 E315/275 f. 9^v.
- 66 *Ibid.* f. 30.
- 67 *Ibid.* ff. 18, 35; E326 B7175; E315/275 f. 35.
- 68 SC6 Henry VIII, 404 ff. 9–10; E315/275 f. 16^v.
- 69 *Ibid.* ff. 34^v, 35.
- 70 E326 B9202.

- 71 E101/419/20 f. 9 [*L. and P.*, IV, 3469], uniforms for the grooms and barber of the privy chamber, individually made at £20 3s. 8d. each.
- 72 C1/902/18.
- 73 E315/410 ff. 24–32.
- 74 E315/277 f. 23.
- 75 E315/275 f. 21.
- 76 The following is based on the accounts listed above n. 58.
- 77 In addition 1s. 6d. for sheep skins that died 'of the rott'.
- 78 Ives, *Egerton*, pp. 350–1, 355–8.
- 79 C1/902/16.
- 80 E326 B 12346; E315/276 f. 15.
- 81 E315/275 f. 11.
- 82 *L. and P.*, X, 878(iii); see above n. 33.
- 83 *Valor Ecclesiasticus* IV, 447; E315/276 f. 31^v; see below pp. 23–6.
- 84 *Ibid.* f. 32.
- 85 See below p. 29.
- 86 E326 B11499.
- 87 See above pp. 9, 10.
- 88 E326 B12512.
- 89 E326 B11478.
- 90 Ives, *Egerton*, p. 371; Stowe 141 f. 8.
- 91 *L. and P.*, IV, 5906 (2, 20).
- 92 E326 B11448.
- 93 E315/277 ff. 7^v, 17; 276 ff. 44^v, 33^v.
- 94 [*L. and P.*, X, 879]. SP1/103/294 [*L. and P.*, X, 879(3)].
- 95 'Also he maketh the coroners', *ibid.*
- 96 E326 B10684, 11286, 11287, 10557, 10558; SC6 Henry VIII, 404 ff. 9^v, 13.
- 97 Stowe 141 f. 22.
- 98 E326 B10660, 10670, 12426; E315/275 ff. 17, 33.
- 99 Stowe 141 f. 25.
- 100 *Ibid.* f. 26.
- 101 SP1/39/96–7; 59/141–2; 234/77 [*L. and P.*, IV, 2431, App. 235(1); Add. I, 426].
- 102 E315/275 f. 27; *DKR* 39.30; E315/275 f. 20; *Lists and Indexes* 9.254; STA CHA 2/14/194; *L. and P.*, IX, 504(13); X, 392(50).
- 103 Cf. E315/277 f. 2^v.
- 104 G. Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (1962), pp. 388–9; Stowe 141 f. 23.
- 105 *Ibid.* f. 24.
- 106 E326 B10136, 10140. These documents show that the date of Stowe 141 ff. 23, 24 is 1534, cf. Williams, *Welsh Church*, p. 388n. The transcriptions in E. Owen, *Mss relating to Wales in the British Museum* (Cymmrodorion Record Soc. 4), IV (1922), 818–19 are faulty.
- 107 Williams, *Welsh Church*, p. 401.
- 108 E326 B10141.
- 109 Williams, *Welsh Church*, p. 407.
- 110 C1/902/16–18.
- 111 E326 B10693.
- 112 E315/275 f. 36.
- 113 SC6 Henry VIII, 404 ff. 15, 15^v.
- 114 *Ibid.* f. 16^v.
- 115 Stowe 141 ff. 20–1.
- 116 C.R.O. DCH/H84; Stowe 141 f. 45.
- 117 *L. and P.*, V, 426; XII (1), 1110.
- 118 E326 B10688; *Cases in the Court of Star Chamber* (ed. R. Stewart-Brown, Record Soc. Lancs. and Ches., LXXI, 1916), pp. 95–6.
- 119 E315/275 f. 14^v; Henry Gerard certainly was Sir William Brereton's man, *Cases in Star Chamber*, p. 23.
- 120 *Ibid.* pp. 118–20.
- 121 Stowe 141 f. 25.
- 122 SP1/42/123 [*L. and P.*, IV, 3205].
- 123 *L. and P.*, XIII(1), 519.

- 124 *Cases in Star Chamber*, pp. 63-4, 87-92.
- 125 British Museum, Harleian Ms. 2115 f. 87b.
- 126 Most recently discussed in G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police* (1972), pp. 321-5.
- 127 Stowe 141 ff. 27, 28.
- 128 *Ibid.* f. 34.
- 129 E326 B11278.
- 130 STA CHA 2/14/194, 195.
- 131 *L. and P.*, VII, 923 (xxxvi).
- 132 E315/275 f. 34.
- 133 *L. and P.*, IV, 5190; SC6 Henry VIII, 404 f. 13.
- 134 STA CHA 2/15/49.
- 135 E326 B11684.
- 136 *L. and P.*, VI, 389, 586.
- 137 For the following see E. W. Ives, 'Faction at the court of Henry VIII: the fall of Anne Boleyn', *History* 57 (1972).
- 138 C.R.O. DCH/E294.
- 139 T. Amyot, 'Memorial from George Constantyne to Thomas, Lord Cromwell', *Archaeologia* 23 (1831), 65.
- 140 K. Muir, *Life and Letters of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (1963), pp. 33-4. The poem is anonymous.
- 141 *I.e.* Norris and Weston.
- 142 *L. and P.*, X, 870, 871, 879, 1256.
- 143 *Ibid.* X, 1015(37).
- 144 *Ibid.* X, 879(6), 943.
- 145 Ives, *Egerton*, pp. 350, 366.
- 146 *L. and P.*, 1256(7, 8, 17, 43); XI, 1217(7).
- 147 *Ibid.* 1256(14); XIII(1), 1114.
- 148 *Ibid.* XI, 943(1); XV, 436(5).
- 149 C.R.O. DCH/E294.
- 150 *L. and P.*, XI, 489, 917; XII(1), 347, 1358, 1398.
- 151 *Ibid.* X, 1256(52).
- 152 *Ibid.* XII(1), 795(38), 1170.
- 153 *Ibid.* XIII(2), 457; XIV(1), 952.
- 154 *Ibid.* XIV(1), 952.
- 155 C.R.O. DCH/E294.
- 156 *Ibid.*
- 157 C.R.O. DCH/H298.
- 158 G. Ormerod, *History of the County Palatine and City of Chester* (ed. T. Helsby, 1875-82), III, 642.