

The golden legend of Elizabeth's learning grew apace, but we need not record all the various stories. Nor were Ascham and Savile the only ones to capitalize on Elizabeth's vanity. About 1593 the Earl of Essex turned it to the advantage of one Francis Bacon, who was at the time in disfavor.

I told her, what I sought for you was not so much for your good, tho' it were a thing I would seek extremely, and please myself in obtaining, as for her own honour, that those excellent translations of hers might be known to them, who could best judge of them.⁶⁵

"This is no flattery!"

In 1597, Queen Elizabeth complimented herself upon being able to scour up her rusty Latin to put the Polonian ambassador in his place. History does not record that he understood her Latin, but he certainly got her meaning.

On August 4, 1601, not many months before her death, Queen Elizabeth was still displaying the pedantic delight of a child in demonstrating to the antiquarian William Lambarde that with his aid as a special vocabulary on the difficult technical terms she could still read Latin. She had insisted upon receiving Lambarde's *Pandecta* from his own hands, and

opening the book, said, "You shall see that I can read;" and so, with an audible voice, read over the epistle, and the title, so readily, and distinctly pointed, that it might perfectly appear, that she well understood, and conceived the same.⁶⁶

It is clear that till death Queen Elizabeth delighted to pose as a lady learned in the classics; but it is equally clear that with all her advantages, including double-translation directed by Ascham himself, she was yet never much, if any, more than a "learned grammarian." In fact, all this adulatory praise of royal learning reminds one of Dr. Samuel Johnson's dog; the wonder was not that the sovereign learned so well, but that being a sovereign, and a woman to boot, she should trouble to learn at all.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Birch, Thomas, *Memoirs of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, Vol. I, p. 121.

⁶⁶ Nichols, *Elizabeth*, Vol. III, p. 552.

⁶⁷ Mary Queen of Scots was also indiscreet enough to leave undestroyed her Latin themes, which have now put her halo of learning somewhat awry (Montaignon, Anatole de, *Latin Themes of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots*, pp. xvii ff).