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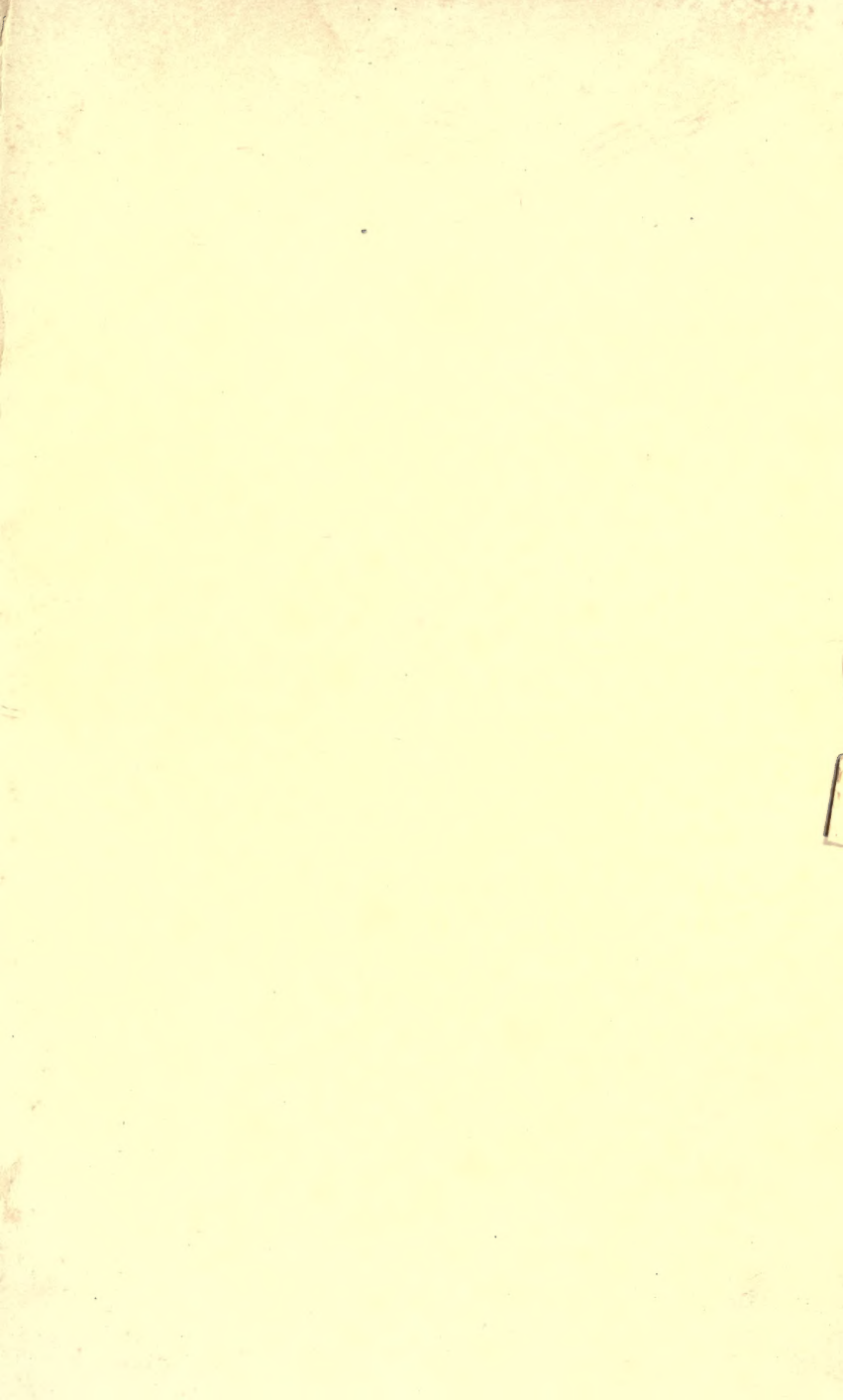
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FAMOUS INTRODUCTIONS
TO
SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS







NICHOLAS ROWE

Page

**FAMOUS INTRODUCTIONS
TO
SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS**

BY THE
NOTABLE EDITORS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

EDITED WITH A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION,
BIOGRAPHICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

BY
Ellison
BEVERLEY WARNER, D.D.

MEMBER OF THE NEW YORK SHAKESPEARE
SOCIETY. AUTHOR OF "ENGLISH HISTORY
IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS," ETC., ETC.



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To
ROBERT SHARP, Ph.D.

STUDENT AND SCHOLAR

Professor of English in Tulane University

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED



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P R E F A C E

THE editor hopes that he has performed a real service for students in thus bringing together, in one volume, the most notable utterances of Shakespearean criticism during the eighteenth century.

The young reader is forever happening upon allusions to the opinions of Johnson, of Pope, of Theobald, etc., without being able to locate the references. The originals of these elusive comments are scattered through many editions of the poet's works, and have never been available for the average reader, save in the form of prolegomena to expensive publications, usually either beyond the purse, or otherwise inaccessible to the great majority of readers.

That this body of criticism and interpretation should be within reach of students both young and old, I have long been convinced, and it has been a labour of love to collect and illustrate the contents of this volume. The biographical and explanatory notes have been made as brief as is consistent with clearness and accuracy. The portraits are reproductions of old engravings gathered from many sources. Search has been made in vain for prints of Heminge and Condell, as well as of Sir Thomas North, the translator, whose work was used by Shakespeare in the construction of the Roman plays.

The introductory essay is an attempt to estimate the critical value of these famous prefaces and to indicate the special contribution of their several authors to Shakespearean interpretation.



INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

THE eternal charm of Shakespeare to the English-speaking peoples is not that of an exotic forced into bloom by the nourishing of the commentators. There were other playwrights and poets in the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries, whose puppets passed across the stage of the Globe and Blackfriars theatres, as popular in their day perhaps as the great dramatist. The play-going world of the twentieth century knows them not at all, and even to students of literature they are hardly more than lists of names. A few stray bits of flotsam and jetsam from the vessels of Marlowe, Jonson and others of that day, have floated down the stream of time. But stately and fair swept on the precious bark of Shakespeare's lading, breasting the rude waves of the Puritan tempest, and riding the shallows of the French reaction, reaching safely the ports of a new world, its bulk undiminished and its value unharmed.

There was no criticism properly so called in the seventeenth century. So far from any attempt to purify the text of Shakespeare, every actor on the stage felt himself authorised to corrupt it by his own additions or emendations. In printing the Folio of 1623, the first complete edition of the dramatist's works, John Heminge and Henry Condell rendered the most precious service to English literature.

The originals, from which more than one-half of the plays were printed in that volume, have never seen the

light. Perhaps they were destroyed as useless after the Folio went to press, or were worn out in service in the greenroom.

How much or how little revision was performed by the joint editors no one can say. The text of this Folio has become the foundation for all succeeding texts, and I am inclined to think that the actor-managers performed their task with fidelity, however imperfectly, and that they were really editors, not merely reprinters of blotted manuscripts.

The Folio of 1623 is prefaced, among other tributes in prose and verse to the poet's honour, by the first of these famous Introductions by which the spirit of Shakespeare's dramatic work has been interpreted to readers and students.

From this brief foreword "To the Great Variety of Readers," we extract some valuable information as to the condition of the dramatic stage during the Elizabethan cycle, as well as concerning the plays of Shakespeare himself. The semi-humorous opening paragraphs show no shyness on the editor's part at standing in the market place with wares to sell.

"Read, and censure. Doe so, but buy it first. That doth best commend a Book, the Stationer saies."

From this preface we learn that Shakespeare had not edited the plays for a collected edition. "A thing worthy to have been wished." Nevertheless there is abundant evidence that they were edited after a fashion, as many of them that had appeared in single quartos before and after Shakespeare's death up to the year 1623, show changes and alterations in the Folio which presuppose an editor's hand. We argue, therefore, that the other plays received the same attention. Indeed the players

declare as much. They speak of former publications as "maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors" "now offered to your view cured and perfect of their limbs."

To speak thus confidently the players must have had in their possession the manuscripts in original or authenticated copies. "His mind and hand went together," continues the preface, "and what he thought he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers."

The judgment of his fellow-players that "His wit can no more be hid than it can be lost," registered a few years after his death, has since been adopted in the high court of letters.

With this word of prophecy the thirty-six plays were committed to posterity. Three times in the seventeenth century they were reprinted, 1632, 1664, 1685, with the addition of seven doubtful plays, only one of which ("Pericles," and that not without dispute) holds place in the modern Shakespearean canon.

The Puritan reaction and the Royalist restoration alike acted against the frequent production of the Shakespearean drama; the one by closing the theatres, the other by debauching them. A revival of hybrid adaptations by poets who sought to improve or revamp the dramas to suit the public taste characterised the early part of the eighteenth century. In the first decade of that century, however, arose the beginnings of that school of Shakespearean criticism to which modern students and readers are so deeply indebted.

To Nicholas Rowe, under-Secretary of State and poet laureate, belongs the honour of introducing Shakespeare to the world, by means of a formal biography and handy

volume edition of the plays. Rowe's "Life," which prefaces the seven octavo volumes (1709), I esteem as the most important of all contributions to Shakespearean literature, next to the plays printed from the lost manuscripts which Heminge and Condell included in their Folio. He took great pains to gather all available material for a story of the poet's life, most of which would surely have been lost to posterity had it not been for his research. Later editors refer in scornful or complaining tones to the "meagre account" given by Rowe. As a matter of fact, however, pretty much all we know of Shakespeare even to this day is contained in that same meagre account. Very few additional facts have been discovered by later students. Documents have been unearthed, leases, wills, and stationers' registers have been exploited, but within those few octavo pages of Rowe are included all of the essential story that will ever be known of the career of William Shakespeare.

The textual value of Rowe's edition is not great. He merely reprinted the fourth Folio, which was itself a reprint that had gathered errors through the careless typographical work of the seventeenth century. But his dramatic instinct and experience led him to perform a great service for the host of editors and readers who were to follow him, in dividing all of the plays into acts and scenes, prefixing lists of *dramatis personæ*, and so preparing them for intelligent study.

Not until the last great edition of the eighteenth century appeared, that of Edmond Malone with his chronological order of the composition of the plays, and a history of the English stage, was there a contribution to Shakespeare study as notable for its intrinsic value, as this of Rowe.

How little the first commentator presaged what was to come on the Rialto of criticism, we learn from his deprecatory statement—"And though the works of Mr. Shakespeare may seem to many not to want a commentary, yet I fancy some little account of the man himself may not be thought improper to go along with them."

It is not within the scope of this essay to meddle with questions of textual criticism, but with the contents and value of those introductions, prefaces, and advertisements of the eighteenth century editors which occupy themselves partly with estimates of their predecessors, and partly with setting forth and defending the canons of criticism by which the editors' own contentions are to be judged.

No one editor seems ever to have been satisfied with any other's practice of editorial discrimination. The eighteenth century welkin rang in the most approved fashion with cries of the contestants in the arena of criticism. It must be admitted that a great mass of comment was directed towards the critics rather than fixed upon the Shakespeare text.

Alexander Pope led the way in this battle of the thumb-biters. With his edition (1725) we open the pages of that enormous library of emendations, omissions, notes, comments, and new readings which has gained in bulk, if not always in value, ever since.

His introduction is one of the best, as it was the first, of the all-round critical reviews of Shakespeare's work. He neither worshipped with bespattering praise, nor defiled with superficial censure. His mental attitude is much like that of Richard Grant White among modern editors. Grant White is cantankerous but honest, and

not afraid to express his convictions. Shakespeare has become so idealised, that like some characters in history, many students think he can do no wrong. When an evident wrong, therefore, appears, the attempt is made to throw the responsibility of weak or unworthy lines upon some other pen. Beyond a doubt Shakespeare collaborated. The acute critic can trace (with no fear of contradiction save at the hand of other acute critics) exactly where the Stratford poet ends and Fletcher or Heywood begins. But to attribute all of the gold to the titular author, and all of the alloy to those who worked with him, or whose works he redacted, is folly. Pope struck the key in which Shakespearean study should be carried on, when he says: "It must be owned that with all these great excellencies he has almost as great defects, and that as he has certainly written better, he has as certainly written worse than any other."

Pope defended, moreover, that lack of an observance of those unities of time, place, and action which became the battleground of later critics, and which has been so admirably discussed by a recent writer.¹ But Pope's defence was of what he himself considered a fault. He argues that Shakespeare's mission was to write to the people, and that he did what the people wanted, understood and rejoiced in. Dr. Johnson, in his famous introduction, strikes a truer note, by defending Shakespeare's art. The evolution of the drama since the sixteenth century, undoubtedly influenced by the example of the Master, has been away from the classical models, for which Ben Jonson was so sedulous, and of which Shakespeare was contemptuously and deliberately careless.

¹ Prof. Thos. R. Lounsbury (Yale University) in "Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist."

Pope also lifted his voice, not very wisely in my judgment, in defence of Shakespeare's "learning," which has also been a famous battleground. The advocates of the encyclopædic knowledge of our poet leave out of account the sources from which he drew most, if not all of his plays. He is no more responsible for the knowledge of "natural philosophy, mechanics, ancient and modern history, poetical learning and mythology," the "customs, rites, and manners of antiquity," the law and medicine and geography treated in the works, than he is for the false historical movements in "King John," or the addition of a sea coast to Bohemia in "A Winter's Tale." He took them from the same sources whence he drew his plots.

The knowledge of Shakespeare was transferred from his foundation plays and other sources. He was an omnivorous reader, but even this seems to have been limited to the novels, plays, poems, etc., out of which he was quarrying the immortal dramas which bear his name.

The previous editors, Heminge and Condell, and Rowe, are dealt with by Pope in a manner which becomes amusingly familiar with each succeeding edition; while he (from lack of that patient collation of copies which is the dullest but most necessary part of a commentator's work) fell into many grievous errors which later critics, especially Malone, gleefully held up to public scorn.

A delicious bit of the approved mode of handling others who dared to walk in the same paths is the following preface to the eighth volume of his second edition, apropos of Theobald's critical attempts:²

² Isaac Reed notes this, crediting Mr. Chalmer's "Supplemental Apology" as his authority.

“Since the publication of *our* first edition, there having been some attempts upon Shakespeare, published by Lewis Theobald (which he would not communicate during the time wherein that edition was preparing for the press, when *we* by public advertisement did request the assistance of all lovers of this author), *we* have inserted in this impression, as many of 'em as are judged of any the least advantage to the poet; the whole amounting to about twenty-five words. . . . And we purpose for the future to do the same with respect to any other persons, who either through candour or vanity shall communicate or publish, the least things tending to the illustration of our author.”

Lewis Theobald followed Pope (1733) and laid himself open to that irritable poet's caustic reference, by remarking that he, Pope, seldom corrected the text but to its injury, and “he frequently inflicted a wound where he intended a cure.” Pope's first version of the “Dunciad” appearing about this time, in which Theobald was made the official hero of dulness, may be thought to justify the latter's remark that “His libels have been thrown out with so much inveteracy that, not to dispute whether they should come from a Christian, they leave it a question whether they *could* come from a *man*.”

Theobald's preface is turgid and high sounding and gives evidence that he is overcome by the attempt to estimate the poet's genius. He gives liberal space to biographical details, and adds a few unimportant facts to the Account of Rowe. One of these is the visit of Queen Henrietta to Stratford during the Civil War, and her occupancy of New Place.

Theobald felt called upon to apologise for Shakespeare's offences against chronology, etc., attributing

them not to ignorance "but to the too powerful blaze of his imagination." I have already noted that they are properly to be attributed to the sources from whence he drew them. There are still worshippers, however, who seek to explain and account for them on other grounds. His summing up is an arraignment of Pope's method, or lack of method, and although Theobald's work was bitterly attacked both by Pope and his ally Warburton, the sifting of the centuries accords him a higher place in textual criticism than either of his great detractors, although Pope's preface is by far the more valuable. Running through Theobald's sentences we cannot but see that his grief was more over his own wounded vanity than that the great poet was mishandled.

Sir Thomas Hanmer, who followed the hero of Pope's vitriolic verse, was a gentleman of elegant leisure and abundant means, who devoted himself in his latter years to the production of an edition of the poet's works which would be representative of the poet's place in English letters. He was an exception to the run of backbiting critics, praised everything that had been achieved before him, and prefaced a very beautiful set of the works in six quarto volumes published by the University of Oxford (1744), with a short but stately preface, chiefly notable rather than valuable for his contention that a great deal of what he called "low stuff," ribaldry, coarse jests, etc., were interpolated by the players to please the vulgar audiences before which they played. There is much truth in this, but surely not enough to warrant the cutting out of a whole scene in "Henry V." because the editor considered it "improper in French and unintelligible in English."

Hanmer's own delicacy of mind and elegance of style

induced him to leave out many such passages which were purely Shakespearean. This contribution to the increasing number of editions of Shakespeare's works deserves to be remembered as the first official recognition by the great Oxford University of the poet who achieved the highest eminence in English letters without passing through her preparatory halls.

Bishop Warburton, who followed closely upon Hammer (1747), was the first of the long line of clergymen who made Shakespeare the companion of the Old and New Testaments. And he devoted a portion of his lively preface to a defence of his secular studies. He assumes St. Chrysostom as a godfather in poetic studies, who is known to have slept with Aristophanes under his pillow. In this connection he writes something that gives chief value in my opinion to his Preface, and I would that it might be laid to heart by the teachers of all English youth.

"But they will say," he continues, "St. Chrysostom contracted a fondness for the comick poet *for the sake of his Greek*. To this indeed I have nothing to reply. Far be it from me to insinuate so unscholarlike a thing as if we had the same use for good English, that a Greek has for his Attick elegance."

Warburton was a friend and admirer of Pope, and after some preliminary misunderstandings, they entered and maintained a close alliance in literary matters, offensive more than defensive. It was said that the poet made the clergyman a Bishop, and the Bishop made the poet a Christian.

Warburton took up Pope's quarrel with Theobald, sneered at Rowe's account as "meagre," although subsequent generations have added little to it, and fell upon

the amiable and elegant Hammer with tooth and claw. His extravagance in the use of words led him often into unfairness and inaccuracy. He amused while he repelled. He carried the personalities of criticism to the extreme. For example, when in speaking of Theobald he said, "What he read he could transcribe, but, as what he thought, if ever he did think, he could but ill express, so he read on." Posterity judging between the two forgot Warburton and Pope as critics and bought several editions of Theobald. It is amusing to find such a writer saying that an "odd humour of finding fault hath long prevailed among critics, as if nothing were worth remarking that did not at the same time deserve to be reprov'd."

The chief value of Warburton's Preface is his statement of the principles upon which textual criticism should proceed, which we may endorse to the student as sound and wholesome, although their author did not always act upon them with consistency.

Dr. Samuel Johnson's Introduction to his edition of the plays in 1765, while ponderous in style, and occasionally whimsical in sentiment, is, in my judgment, the most valuable critical estimate of Shakespeare's genius which the eighteenth century produced. From some of his literary judgments we are bound to dissent. His assertion, for instance, that Shakespeare's natural bent was in the line of comedy, so that "In tragedy he often writes with great appearance of toil and study what is written at last with little felicity."

Shakespeare's genius illuminated human life. In the broadest sense he wrote neither comedy nor tragedy, but interpreted men and women whose dealings with earth and time resulted in one or other or both. But the poet

seems to me to be equally at home in both phases of life. *Desdemona* does not seem to be less naturally studied than *Rosalind*. "King Lear" and "Macbeth" are as spontaneous as "Twelfth Night," and far more so than the "Midsummer Night's Dream." But Johnson declares that "His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct." It is true that tragedy involves a more arduous toil, as it is a superior form of composition, but Shakespeare is surely as spontaneous in one as the other, and I do not think that the judgment of the ages acquiesces in the dictum that "In his tragic scenes there is always something wanting, his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire."

The most whimsical of Dr. Johnson's utterances concerns the part played by love in Shakespearean drama. "Love," he says, "is only one of many passions, *and as it has no great influence upon the sum of life* it has little operation in the dramas of a poet who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him." The italics are mine. The widow Porter was twenty years older than himself when Johnson took her to wife, but he is reported to have lived very happily with her, so this remarkable sentence must be taken as the result of general observation rather than a personal experience. I confess it is to me the most astounding adjudication in English letters. Love with one or more of its "spontaneous variations" is the theme of almost every comedy, of one third of the tragedies, and even plays no small part in many of the historical plays. As to the passion of love having no great influence upon the sum of life, if it were possible to withdraw that influence, there would be little but rags and tatters left.

Another judgment in which we cannot concur is

that Shakespeare's "declamation or set speeches are commonly cold and weak . . . in which he seldom escapes without the pity or resentment of the reader." We at once recall the grandeur of monologue which characterises "Richard II.," the whirling passion of "Julius Cæsar" and "Antony and Cleopatra"; the biting cynicism of "Richard III.," and wonder if Dr. Johnson did more than glance through the plays in order to see how the plot came to its dénouement.

In his other unfavourable comments upon, for instance, the quibbles with words, grossness of the comic parts, and lack of delicacy in his ladies and gentlemen, the critic half admitted that he was really criticising the manners and customs of the Elizabethan age from which Shakespeare drew his working models.

Every critic, however, feels bound to censure here and there in order to justify his existence, and Dr. Johnson redeems the most extraordinary and whimsical of his utterances by certain excellencies of interpretation and shrewd common sense judgments.

His defence of Shakespearean violation of the unities of the classic drama is not an apology in the vein of Pope, but a reconstruction of the theory of the drama. He strikes at the root of the claim that an observance of the unities is necessary to make the drama credible, in the sentence: "Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation; if the spectator can be once persuaded that his old acquaintance are Alexander and Cæsar, or that a room illuminated with candles, is the plain of Pharsalia, or the bank of the Granicus, he is in a state of elevation above the reach of reason, or of truth, and from the heights of empyrean poetry, may despise the circumscriptions of terrestrial nature. There

is no reason why a mind thus wandering in ecstasy should count the clock, or why an hour should not be a century in that calenture of the brain's that can make the stage a field."

Shakespearean dramas offer a proof in themselves, and the developments of the later drama buttress this proof, "that the unities of time and place are not necessary to a great drama," and Dr. Johnson led the way to a juster estimate of the works of the great poet, by relieving them on sound, critical grounds from the incubus of irregularity which seventeenth and eighteenth century critics insisted upon saddling upon them.

The shrewd mind of the great man perceived a truth to which so many before and after him seemed curiously blind, that the learning and knowledge of Shakespeare, as already noted, were to be attributed to the sources of his plays; "I am inclined to believe," he says, "that he read little more than English, and chose for his fables only such tales as he found translated."

Modern research has caused no material alteration of this judgment. We have access to Shakespeare's library in more than one exhaustive collection, and the student of these sources has no difficulty in accounting for the knowledge and learning displayed throughout the plays. This is not to say that the poet was unlearned, but that he need not have been learned in either the languages or sciences to have written the works attributed to him.

Dr. Johnson added to his own comments a brief but judicious review of the editorial work which preceded his own, bestowing praise and blame with impartial pen, save as it seems to me in his criticism of Theobald. The literary atmosphere which he breathed was charged with

a malignant spirit towards that unfortunate editor. It will be noticed, however, that those who criticised Theobald's vanity, his petulance and his learning, availed themselves of the results of his labour with no niggardly hand, and Johnson proved no exception.

Dr. Johnson's observations form, on the whole, the best and finest critical estimate of Shakespeare's works which the eighteenth century produced, and whether we agree with him or not in every judgment, we cannot fail to be enlightened by his many-syllabled sentences.

His advice to the average reader is sound and helpful. It is summed up in a conclusion which I am proud to remember was the result of my own judgment long before I saw it so happily expressed by so great an authority: "Let him that is yet unacquainted with the powers of Shakespeare, and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that the drama can give, read every play from the first scene to the last with utter negligence of all his commentators."

It was thus that the audience who first saw these plays presented received their impressions. It is only so that modern readers can have original opinions. The herd-mind is not desirable. Every reader should be his own commentator, which is merely another way for saying that everyone should be able to form an independent judgment as to characters and events. Great names should not stand in the way. A very average-minded man has made within a few years one of the most luminous comments on a line in Shakespeare which has been uttered in a generation:

"Parts are not to be examined till the whole has been surveyed." Get the story in hand. Have a grasp of the plot. Then pay a closer attention to details, and

then having his own opinion, let the student graft upon this original stock such shoots as shall seem worth while.

George Steevens followed Dr. Johnson, in a new departure, deserting the Folios and paying attention to the Quartos. His Advertisement to the Reader prefixed to the edition of twenty of the old Quarto copies (1766) is given in the following collection rather than the later Advertisement to the Steevens and Johnson edition, because it calls attention to these earlier and rarer imprints of Shakespeare's plays.

These Quartos were nearly all published during Shakespeare's life-time, and while some of them are doubtless the "stolen and surreptitious copies" referred to by Heminge and Condell in their "Address to the Great Variety of Readers," some of them bear evidence of enlargement and redaction, perhaps by Shakespeare himself. They offered the only standard of comparison for collation with the Folios, however, and Steevens's work in gathering and reprinting them in four volumes was of the greatest value to all succeeding students.

Steevens opened another new avenue in the enlarging field of criticism by his suggestion, trite enough in these days, but new in the eighteenth century, that the meaning of many blind expressions in the plays might be retrieved by comparison with the works of contemporary authors.

In treating of the publication of scraps and bits of composition, "detached and broken sentences" of authors who never intended them for publication, Steevens rebukes that spirit which is much more prevalent in the twentieth than in the eighteenth century, as is evidenced in shoals of volumes of posthumously printed letters and diaries.

“A man conscious of literary reputation will grow in time afraid to write with tenderness to his sister, or with fondness to his child. . . . That esteem which preserves his letters will at last produce his disgrace; when that which he wrote to his friend or his daughter shall be laid open to the public.”

We recall a comparatively recent instance in which the most beautiful and tender love story of modern times was laid open to profane eyes by the son of two great poets.

Edward Capell's Introduction confines itself mainly to the Quartos, and defends the purity of their text from the slur of the players' Preface. His arguments are ingenious and may be said to be convincing, although like every man with a brief, he exaggerates facts which of themselves are sufficient if barely stated.

He reviews briefly the editions preceding his own, discovering their errors and mistakes and failing to note their excellencies. His own work, he states, is based not upon the text of preceding editions (which is the crying sin he declares of his predecessors from Rowe down), but upon the oldest editions, the Quartos when they are available, and the First Folio rather than later reprints. In this course he is entirely justified, but he was not the first or only commentator who did so. Mr. Capell was, until Malone, the most patient, conscientious and praiseworthy of annotators, although Dr. Johnson said of him, “he doth quibble monstrously.” His learning was considerable and his genius for plodding beyond words. His chief contribution to Shakespeare lore, in this Introduction, is in a few lines of explanation why the great poet seemed to lie *perdu* for two generations; the change of the Court taste which ran to the Masques, in

the construction of which Ben Johnson was past master, the civil war, the lascivious taste of the Restoration, and the alterations of Shakespeare's own text to please a debased public taste. He notes in this connection, however, that the current of tendency towards Shakespeare never dried up even while "the stream of the public favour ran the other way." Capell also makes a very ingenious and I think judicious examination of the earlier plays of Shakespeare, upon which doubts of his authorship had been cast, because of their blunders and extravagance of language. His searching comments on "Love's Labour's Lost," and "Titus Andronicus," are fine pieces of critical acumen.

When Rowe revived the poet in a convenient and handy form in 1709, and enlivened public interest in his works by the first account of his life that had been published, there was no small circle of his admirers remaining as a nucleus, and from that day there has never been a question as to William Shakespeare's right of eminent domain in English letters.

Capell's Introduction acquired substantial value for his day in the appendix entitled "Origin of Shakespeare's Fables," being a brief description of the known works upon which nearly all the plays were founded. (This is omitted from the reprint in this volume, as cumbersome, and it was by no means complete.) But it was a long step forward and collected material out of which scholars were thereafter to construct the true and complete fabric.³

Mr. Isaac Reed in 1785 re-edited the Steevens text

³The student is here referred to the six volumes called "Shakespeare's Library," edited first by Payne Collier (1843), revised and enlarged by W. Carew Hazlett (1875).

and is the only known instance in the eighteenth century of a modest editor, as will appear from the following paragraph of his Advertisement:

“The present editor thinks it unnecessary to say anything of his own share in the work except that he undertook it in consequence of an application which was too flattering and honourable to him to decline. He mentions this only to have it known that he did not intrude himself into the situation.”

Mr. Reed's Advertisement is here printed and his revision noted because the Steevens text to which he gave his labours was for a long period the standard, and until the beginning of the latter half of the nineteenth century most Shakespearean readers used it.

Mr. Reed deserves to be remembered also as the editor of the first variorum edition of Shakespeare, based on Steevens's text in twenty-one volumes, published in 1803, and practically reprinted in 1813. The next variorum was the work of James Boswell, son of Johnson's "Bozzy," in 1821. The next and most stupendous, by our fellow countryman, Horace Howard Furness, was begun in 1871 and is now undergoing revision by his son.

With Edmond Malone we reach the last of the great editors of the eighteenth century. His patience equalled and his special learning exceeded that of Capell, while his contribution to Elizabethan dramatic history and literature out-ranked all who preceded him, and serves as a mine for all who follow him. He quoted more generally than is customary from Dr. Johnson's Introduction, and took exception to some of his conclusions.

We must admit that Malone spoke with an authority

no preceding editor could assume, (with the possible exception of Capell) in matters pertaining to the traditions of the English stage, and the customs of the Elizabethan players in handling their parts. He had an extensive first-hand knowledge of the earliest printed copies both of Shakespeare's plays and those of his contemporaries. He displays this knowledge in tracing the gradual process of corruption in a text as it passes through the hands of editors and printers, in several pages of examples (which are omitted from the following reprint of his introduction as concerned only with matters of textual criticism).

Malone's contention that the First Folio has a value which is lacking in the three succeeding ones is based upon the "numerous misrepresentations and interpolations" with which he was familiar from close personal examination. I have long been of his opinion that the first edition of each play is alone of any authority, and that they are properly the basis of annotation and emendation.

He proves by comparison of the First and Second Folios that the editor of the latter was "entirely ignorant of our poet's phraseology"; supporting his argument by quotations to a wearisome extent.

The Introduction is enriched by the wide reading of its author in Elizabethan literature and he makes a stout defence of the editor's work against the complaints, of which we still have echoes, that the plays themselves are buried under the notes of the commentators. Malone believed the works of Shakespeare to be such a treasure house for the reader and student that he was bold enough to say "When our poet's entire library shall have been discovered, and the fables of all his plays

traced to their original source, when every contemporary allusion shall have been pointed out, and every obscurity elucidated, then, and not till then, let the accumulation of notes be complained of."

I consider that Malone's chief contribution to Shakespearean literature in this introduction is his estimate of the value of first editions.

As one reads these famous introductions, covering a century of time, and reflects upon the immense industry and arduous toil which the editions and prefaces represent, one is inclined to smile again at the *naïve* remark of Rowe, "the works of Mr. Shakespeare may seem to many not to want a commentary."

The smile broadens as we read Dr. Johnson's announcement that he would deal with the faults and excellencies of the poet "without envious malignity or superstitious veneration. Since no question can be more innocently discussed than a dead poet's pretensions to renown."

The reader has but to follow the raging clamour of the famous editors of the eighteenth century as set forth in these pages, the scorns and sarcasms, the accusations of ignorance and malevolence, to realise how little the great "Cham" of literature could prophesy what was to be, or judiciously reflect upon what was going on within sound of his ears. For the echoes of Pope, Theobald, and Warburton's "innocent discussions" still fill the air.

It is because of my belief in the value of these discussions that I offer the contribution of this volume to the student of Shakespeare. Every critic or editor whose preface, advertisement, or introduction is included in these pages improves our knowledge both of

the text and the spirit of Shakespeare. To each one the empire of letters owes a distinct debt.

Modern research has added many minor details to our knowledge of the poet and his works; modern editions have placed the results of the ripest scholarship within reach of the poorest student; modern machinery has produced in the perfection of form, fitting and graceful caskets for these jewels of English letters. But all—without exception—are and must remain debtors to the pioneer players who saved the bulk of the poet's work from the slag heap of annihilation; to the pioneer biographer who gleaned those otherwise neglected facts, which, meagre as they are, are still almost all we know of the poet's life; to Pope with his bitter tongue, Theobald with his petulant genius, Warburton with his sarcastic raillery, Steevens with his saturnine pugnacity, as well as Johnson with his far-reaching powers of analysis, Capell with his patient plodding, and Malone with his well-digested learning in things pertaining to the Elizabethan stage.

The study of Shakespeare will continue to be the most noble pursuit in the large realm of English letters as long as the language lasts to which he gave both form and stability.

And the student of Shakespeare cannot fail to be aided in his quest of the fascinating spirit of the plays, under the illumination cast upon their pages by the famous Introductions of the eighteenth century.

JOHN HEMINGE HENRIE CONDELL

JOHAN HEMINGE, as he signs his name in the First Folio, or Hemmings as it appears in other places, was an actor, manager, and shareholder in both the Globe and Blackfriars theatres. There is no record extant of the time of his birth, but perhaps he was a native of Shottery, the home of Anne Hathaway, as a man of his name had a child baptised in Stratford Parish Church in 1567.

His original trade was that of a grocer, as we learn from his will, where he describes himself as a "citizen and grocer" of London.

His name is traced through various documents as actor in a number of plays, and Malone hands down a tradition which he found in a forgotten pamphlet that Heminge was the creator of the character of Falstaff.

He increased in wealth and importance, as is noted from two lists of players in the King's Company (the players were usually sharers in the profits), when in 1603 his name stands sixth, and in 1619, it is at the head of the list. He was a warm personal friend of Shakespeare, who left him by will the sum of twenty-six shillings and sixpence wherewith to purchase a ring.

His literary work was confined, so far as we know, to the publication (and editing after a fashion) of the celebrated First Folio edition of the plays of Shakespeare, in association with Henrie Condell. This was in 1623, seven years after the poet's death.

In a "Sonnet upon the pitiful burning of the Globe Playhouse in London" (1613) occur the following lines:

"There with swol'n eyes like druncken Flemmings
Distressed stood old stuttering Hemmings."¹

He died in October, 1630, at Aldermanbury.

HENRIE CONDELL

HENRIE CONDELL, or CUNDELL as it was sometimes spelled (Elizabethan spelling was a matter of individual taste and preference) was the associate of John Heminge in the production of the First Folio. He was an actor of moderate reputation and a fellow manager in theatrical ventures with Heminge. From actors' lists we learn that he played in the productions of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher. His relations with the former were confidential and friendly, and in the great poet's will he was also remembered by a bequest of money to buy a ring.

He is mentioned in the "Sonnet" quoted above as follows:

"Out runne the knightes, out runne the lordes, and there was
great adoe,
Some lost their hattes and some their swords, then out run
Burbidge too.
The reprobates thoughe drunck on Munday
Pray'd for the Foole and Henry Condye."

There is no record of his birth, but he died in December, 1627.

No portraits are extant of either of the first two editors of Shakespeare's plays.

¹ "Outlines," by Halliwell Phillips. Vol. I, p. 310. Ed. 1887.

HEMINGE AND CONDELL'S INTRODUCTION

[First Folio Edition, 1623.]

To the Great Variety of Readers:

From the most able, to him that can but spell: There you are number'd. We had rather you were weigh'd. Especially, when the fate of all Bookes depends upon your capacities: and not of your heads alone, but of your purses. Well! It is now publique, & you wil stand for your priviledges wee know: to read, and censure. Doe so, but buy it first. That doth best commend a Booke, the Stationer saies. Then, how odde soever your braines be, or your wisdomes, make your licence the same, and spare not. Judge your sixe-pen'orth, your shillings worth, your five shillings worth at a time, or higher, so you rise to the just rates, and welcome. But, what ever you do, Buy. Censure will not drive a Trade, or make the Jacke go. And though you be a Magistrate of wit, and sit on the Stage at Black-Friers, or the Cock-pit, to arraigne Playes dailie, know, these Playes have had their triall alreadie, and stood out all Appeales; and do now come forth quitted rather by a Decree of Court, then any purchas'd Letters of commendation.

It had been a thing, we confesse, worthie to have bene wished, that the Author himselfe had liv'd to have set forth, and overseen his owne writings; But since it hath bin ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envie his Friends, the office of their care, and paine, to have collected & publish'd them; and so to have publish'd them, as where (before) you were abus'd with diverse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds

and stealths of injurious imposters, that expos'd them: even those, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them. Who, as he was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: and what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarce received from him a blot in his papers. But it is not our province, who only gather his works, and give them you, to praise him. It is yours that reade him. And there we hope, to your divers capacities, you will find enough, both to draw, and hold you: for his wit can no more lie hid, than it could be lost. Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe: And then if you do not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to understand him. And so we leave you to other of his Friends, who if you need, can bee your guides: if you neede them not, you can leade your selves, and others and such Readers we wish him.

JOHN HEMINGE.

HENRIE CONDELL.

NICHOLAS ROWE

1677-1718

THE high honour of being the first biographer of William Shakespeare belongs to Nicholas Rowe, born in Bedfordshire in 1677, died in London December 6, 1718. He was a pupil at Westminster School under the famous Dr. Busby, became a student of the Inner Temple, was called to the bar, but forsook the law for politics and finally for literature. He was an under-Secretary of State, and Secretary of State for Scotland, but in the reign of George I. reached the object of his ambition and became poet laureate.

He became a dramatic writer of repute. His chief works were, "The Ambitious Stepmother," "Tamerlane," "The Famous Penitent" (famous as having among its *dramatis personæ* the original "gallant gay Lothario"), "Ulysses," "The Royal Convert," "Jane Shore," and "Lady Jane Grey." Of these I believe only "Jane Shore" has been acted on the modern stage. Two volumes of miscellaneous poetry were also accredited to him. Rowe was a popular member of that literary coterie at the beginning of the eighteenth century which included Pope and Addison, whom he counted among his friends.

His Shakespeare work was his most notable achievement. In 1709 he published an edition of the plays "with an account of his life and writings" in seven volumes octavo. This was followed in 1714 by a

second edition in nine volumes. It was the first attempt to give any details of the great poet's life; and Rowe's experience as a playwright led him to prefix to each play its list of *dramatis personæ*, to divide the plays into numbered acts and scenes, and to mark exits and entrances.

Rowe was buried in Westminster Abbey and Pope wrote the following epitaph for his tomb:

“Thy relics, Rowe, to this sad shrine we trust,
 And near thy Shakespeare place thy honoured bust.
 Oh, next him, skilled to draw the tender tear,
 For never heartfelt passion more sincere;
 To nobler sentiment to fire the brave,
 For never Briton more disdained a slave;
 Peace to thy gentle shade and endless rest!
 Blest in thy genius, in thy love, too, blest!
 And blest, that timely from our scene removed,
 Thy soul enjoy the liberty it loved.”

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

WRITTEN BY NICHOLAS ROWE

This account is taken from the second edition (1714), slightly altered by the author from the first edition of 1709.

It seems to be a kind of respect due to the memory of excellent men, especially of those whom their wit and learning have made famous, to deliver some account of themselves, as well as their works, to posterity. For this reason, how fond do we see some people of discovering any little personal story of the great men of antiquity: their families, the common accidents of their lives, and even their shape, make, and features, have been the subject of critical inquiries. How trifling

soever this curiosity may seem to be, it is certainly very natural; and we are hardly satisfied with an account of any remarkable person, till we have heard him described even to the very clothes he wears. As for what relates to men of letters, the knowledge of an author may sometimes conduce to the better understanding his book; and though the works of Mr. Shakespeare may seem to many not to want a comment, yet I fancy some little account of the man himself may not be thought improper to go along with them.

He was the son of Mr. John Shakespeare, and was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in Warwickshire, in April, 1564. His family, as appears by the register and public writings relating to that town, were of good figure and fashion there, and are mentioned as gentlemen. His father, who was a considerable dealer in wool, had so large a family, ten children in all, that though he was his eldest son, he could give him no better education than his own employment. He had bred him, it is true, for some time at a free school,¹ where, it is probable, he acquired what Latin he was master of: but the narrowness of his circumstances, and the want of his assistance at home, forced his father to withdraw him from thence, and unhappily prevented his further proficiency in that language. It is without controversy, that in his works we scarce find any traces of any thing that looks like an imitation of the ancients. The delicacy of his taste, and the natural bent of his own great genius (equal, if not superior, to some of the best of theirs), would certainly have led him to read and study them with so much pleasure, that some of their fine images would naturally

¹ One of the grammar schools founded or reconstructed on older foundations by Edward VI. in 1547.

have insinuated themselves into, and been mixed with his own writings; so that his not copying at least something from them, may be an argument of his never having read them. Whether his ignorance of the ancients were a disadvantage to him or no, may admit of a dispute: for though the knowledge of them might have made him more correct, yet it is not improbable but that the regularity and deference for them, which would have attended that correctness, might have restrained some of that fire, impetuosity, and even beautiful extravagance, which we admire in Shakespeare: and I believe we are better pleased with those thoughts, altogether new and uncommon, which his own imagination supplied him so abundantly with, than if he had given us the most beautiful passages out of the Greek and Latin poets, and that in the most agreeable manner that it was possible for a master of the English language to deliver them.

Upon his leaving school, he seems to have given entirely into that way of living which his father proposed to him; and in order to settle in the world after a family manner, he thought fit to marry while he was yet very young.² His wife was the daughter of one Hathaway, said to have been a substantial yeoman in the neighbour-

² Anne, daughter of Richard Hathaway of Shottery, a hamlet near Stratford. There is no record in the parish register or elsewhere so far as is known of the marriage. The only light upon it is a record in the Diocesan Registry (of Worcester) of a bond for £40 to free the Bishop from liability in the event of any impediment appearing upon the marriage of William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway. The date of this (Nov. 28, 1582) affords reasonable inference that the marriage took place immediately after. As the oldest child, Susanna, was baptised May 26, 1583, Shakespeare must have been under nineteen when he married.

hood of Stratford. In this kind of settlement he continued for some time, till an extravagance that he was guilty of forced him both out of his country, and that way of living which he had taken up; and though it seemed at first to be a blemish upon his good manners, and a misfortune to him, yet it afterwards happily proved the occasion of exerting one of the greatest geniuses that ever was known in dramatick poetry. He had by a misfortune common enough to young fellows, fallen into ill company, and amongst them, some that made a frequent practice of deer-stealing engaged him more than once in robbing a park that belonged to Sir Thomas Lucy, of Charlecote, near Stratford. For this he was prosecuted by that gentleman, as he thought, somewhat too severely; and in order to revenge that ill usage, he made a ballad upon him.³ And though this, probably the first essay of his poetry, he lost, yet it is said to have been so very bitter, that it redoubled the prosecution against him to that degree, that he was obliged to leave his business and family in Warwickshire for some time, and shelter himself in London.⁴

It is at this time, and upon this accident, that he is said to have made his first acquaintance in the play-house. He was received into the company then in being, at first in a very mean rank, but his admirable wit, and the natural turn of it to the stage, soon distinguished him, if not as an extraordinary actor, yet as an excellent writer. His name is printed, as the custom was in those times, amongst those of the other players, before some

³ This alleged ballad is very doubtful. But an allusion to Sir Thos. Lucy is evident in the coat of arms assigned to *Justice Shallow* in the opening scene of "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

⁴ Probably about 1586.

old plays, but without any particular account of what sort of parts he used to play; and though I have inquired, I could never meet with any further account of him this way, than that the top of his performance was the *Ghost* in his own "Hamlet."⁵ I should have been much more pleased, to have learned from certain authority, which was the first play he wrote; it would be without doubt a pleasure to any man, curious in things of this kind, to see and know what was the first essay of a fancy like Shakespeare's. Perhaps we are not to look for his beginnings, like those of other authors, among their least perfect writings; art had so little, and nature so large a share in what he did, that, for aught I know, the performances of his youth, as they were the most vigorous, and had the most fire and strength of imagination in them, were the best. I would not be thought by this to mean, that his fancy was so loose and extravagant, as to be independent on the rule and government of judgment; but that what he thought was commonly so great, so justly and rightly conceived in itself, that it wanted little or no correction, and was immediately approved by an impartial judgment at the first sight. But though the order of time in which the several pieces were written be generally uncertain, yet there are passages in some few of them which seem to fix their dates. So the *Chorus* at the end of the fourth act of "Henry the Fifth," by a compliment very handsomely turned to the Earl of Essex, shows the play to have been written when that lord was general for the Queen in Ireland; and his eulogy upon Queen Elizabeth, and

⁵ According to Oldys, Shakespeare's younger brother Gilbert remembered his performance of the character of *Adam* in "As You Like It."

her successor King James, in the latter end of his "Henry the Eighth," is a proof of that play's being written after the accession of the latter of these two princes to the crown of England.⁶ Whatever the particular times of his writing were, the people of his age, who began to grow wonderfully fond of diversions of this kind, could not but be highly pleased to see a genius arise amongst them of so pleasurable, so rich a vein, and so plentifully capable of furnishing their favourite entertainments. Besides the advantages of his wit, he was in himself a good-natured man, of great sweetness in his manners, and a most agreeable companion; so that it is no wonder, if, with so many good qualities, he made himself acquainted with the best conversations of those times. Queen Elizabeth had several of his plays acted before her, and without doubt gave him many gracious marks of her favour: it is that maiden princess plainly, whom he intends by

"... a fair vestal, throned by the west."

—"A Midsummer-Night's Dream."

and that whole passage is a compliment very properly brought in, and very handsomely applied to her. She was so well pleased with that admirable character of *Falstaff*, in the two parts of "Henry the Fourth," that she commended him to continue it for one play more, and to show him in love. This is said to be the occasion of his writing "The Merry Wives of Windsor."⁷ How well she was obeyed, the play itself is an admirable proof. Upon this occasion it may not be improper to

⁶ It is generally admitted that Thos. Fletcher had a large share in the authorship of "Henry VIII."

⁷ Anecdote dates from 1702 but is not considered authentic.

observe, that this part of *Falstaff* is said to have been written originally under the name of *Oldcastle*: some of that family being then remaining, the Queen was pleased to command him to alter it; upon which he made use of *Falstaff*. The present offence was indeed avoided; but I do not know whether the author may not have been somewhat to blame in his second choice, since it is certain that Sir John Falstaff,⁸ who was a knight of the garter, and a lieutenant-general, was a name of distinguished merit in the wars in France in Henry the Fifth's and Henry the Sixth's times. What grace soever the Queen conferred upon him, it was not to her only he owed the fortune which the reputation of his wit made. He had the honour to meet with many great and uncommon marks of favour and friendship from the Earl of Southampton, famous in the histories of that time for his friendship to the unfortunate Earl of Essex. It was to that noble lord that he dedicated his poem of "Venus and Adonis." There is one instance so singular in the magnificence of this patron of Shakespeare's, that if I had not been assured that the story was handed down by Sir William D'Avenant, who was probably very well acquainted with his affairs, I should not have ventured to have inserted; that my Lord Southampton at one time gave him a thousand pounds, to enable him to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to. A bounty very great, and very rare at any time, and almost equal to that profuse generosity the present age has shown to French dancers and Italian singers.

What particular habitude or friendship he contracted with private men, I have not been able to learn, more than that every one, who had a true taste of merit, and

⁸ Sir John Fastolf.

could distinguish men, had generally a just value and esteem for him. His exceeding candour and good-nature must certainly have inclined all the gentler part of the world to love him, as the power of his wit obliged the men of the most delicate knowledge and polite learning to admire him.

His acquaintance with Ben Jonson began with a remarkable piece of humanity and good-nature; Mr. Jonson, who was at that time altogether unknown to the world, had offered one of his plays to the players, in order to have it acted; and the persons into whose hands it was put, after having turned it carelessly and superciliously over, were just upon returning it to him with an ill-natured answer, that it would be of no service to their company; when Shakespeare luckily cast his eye upon it, and found something so well in it, as to engage him first to read it through, and afterwards to recommend Mr. Jonson and his writings to the publick.

Jonson was certainly a very good scholar, and in that had the advantage of Shakespeare; though at the same time I believe it must be allowed, that what nature gave the latter, was more than a balance for what books had given to the former; and the judgment of a great man upon this occasion was, I think, very just and proper. In a conversation between Sir John Suckling, Sir William D'Avenant, Endymion Porter, Mr. Hales of Eton, and Ben Jonson, Sir John Suckling, who was a professed admirer of Shakespeare, had undertaken his defence against Ben Jonson with some warmth; Mr. Hales, who had sat still for some time, told them, that if Mr. Shakespeare had not read the ancients, he had likewise not stolen anything

from them; and that if he would produce any one topick finely treated by any one of them, he would undertake to show something upon the same subject at least as well written by Shakespeare.

The latter part of his life was spent, as all men of good sense will wish theirs may be, in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends. He had the good fortune to gather an estate equal to his occasion, and, in that, to his wish; and is said to have spent some years before his death at his native Stratford.⁹ His pleasurable wit and good-nature engaged him in the acquaintance, and entitled him to the friendship, of the gentlemen of the neighborhood. Amongst them, it is a story almost still remembered in that country that he had a particular intimacy with Mr. Combe, an old gentleman noted thereabouts for his wealth and usury: it happened, that in a pleasant conversation amongst their common friends, Mr. Combe told Shakespeare in a laughing manner, that he fancied he intended to write his epitaph, if he happened to out-live him; and since he could not know what might be said of him when he was dead, he desired it might be done immediately; upon which Shakespeare gave him these four verses:

“Ten in the hundred lies here engrav’d,
 ’Tis a hundred to ten his soul is not sav’d!
 If any man ask, Who lies in this tomb?
 Oh! Oh! quoth the devil, ’tis my John-a Combe.”

But the sharpness of the satire is said to have stung the man so severely, that he never forgave it.¹⁰

⁹ His permanent retirement is placed about 1613.

¹⁰ The story is doubtful. Combe left £5 to Shakespeare in his will, and made liberal donations both to his creditors and to the poor.

He died in the fifty-third year of his age,¹¹ and was buried on the north side of the chancel, in the great church at Stratford, where a monument is placed in the wall. On his grave-stone underneath is,—

“Good friend, for Jesus’ sake forbear
To dig the dust inclosed here.
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones.”¹²

He had three daughters, of which two lived to be married; Judith, the elder,¹³ to one Mr. Thomas Quiney, by whom she had three sons, who all died without children; and Susanna, who was his favourite, to Dr. John Hall, a physician of good reputation in that country. She left one child only, a daughter, who was married first to Thomas Nashe, Esq., and afterwards to Sir John Barnard of Abington, but died likewise without issue. This is what I could learn of any note, either relating to himself or family; the character of the man is best seen in his writings. But since Ben Jonson has made a sort of an essay towards it in his Discoveries,¹⁴ I will give it in his words:

“I remember the players have often mentioned it is an honour to Shakespeare that in writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, Would he had blotted a thousand! which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance, who chose that

¹¹ The parish register records his burial April 25, 1616.

¹² Not the work of the poet. Author unknown.

¹³ A mistake. Susanna was the oldest. *Vide* Note 3, page 8.

¹⁴ “Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matters,” a farrago of miscellaneous notes and comments unpublished until after Jonson’s death.

circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted: and to justify mine own candour, for I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature, had an excellent fancy, brave notions, and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped: *Sufflaminandus erat*, as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too. Many times he fell into those things which could not escape laughter; as when he said in the person of Cæsar, one speaking to him,

“‘Cæsar, thou dost me wrong.’”

He replied:

“‘Cæsar did never wrong, but with just cause.’”

and such like, which were ridiculous. But he redeemed his vices with his virtues; there was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned.”

As for the passage which he mentions out of Shakespeare, there is somewhat like it in “Julius Cæsar,” but without the absurdity; nor did I ever meet with it in any edition that I have seen as quoted by Mr. Jonson.

Besides his plays in this edition, there are two or three ascribed to him by Mr. Langbaine, which I have never seen, and know nothing of. He writ likewise “Venus and Adonis,” and “Tarquin and Lucrece,” in stanzas, which have been printed in a late collection of poems. As to the character given of him by Ben Jonson, there is a good deal true in it; but I

²⁵ Know Cæsar doth no wrong; nor without cause will he be satisfied.—“Julius Cæsar,” III. 1.

believe it may be as well expressed by what Horace says of the first Romans, who wrote tragedy upon the Greek models, (or indeed translated them), in his epistle to Augustus:

“ . . . *naturâ sublimis & acer:*
Nam spirat tragicum satis, et feliciter audet,
Sed turpem putat in chartis metuitque lituram.”

As I have not proposed to myself to enter into a large and complete criticism upon Shakespeare's works, so I will only take the liberty with all due submission to the judgment of others, to observe some of those things I have been pleased with in looking him over.

His plays are properly to be distinguished only into comedies and tragedies. Those which are called histories, and even some of his comedies, are really tragedies, with a run or mixture of comedy amongst them. That way of tragi-comedy was the common mistake of that age, and is indeed become so agreeable to the English taste, that though the severer criticks among us cannot bear it, yet the generality of our audiences seem to be better pleased with it than with an exact tragedy. “The Merry Wives of Windsor,” “The Comedy of Errors,” and “The Taming of a Shrew,” are all pure comedy; the rest, however they are called, have something of both kinds. It is not very easy to determine which way of writing he was most excellent in. There is certainly a great deal of entertainment in his comical humours; and though they did not then strike at all ranks of people, as the satire of the present age has taken the liberty to do, yet there is a pleasing and a well-distinguished variety in those

characters which he thought fit to meddle with. *Falstaff* is allowed by every body to be a master-piece; the character is always well sustained, though drawn out into the length of three plays; and even the account of his death given by his old landlady *Mrs. Quickly*, in the first Act of "Henry the Fifth," though it be extremely natural, is yet as diverting as any part of his life. If there be any fault in the draught he has made of this lewd old fellow, it is, that though he has made him a thief, lying, cowardly, vain-glorious, and in short every way vicious, yet he has given him so much wit as to make him almost too agreeable; and I do not know whether some people have not, in remembrance of the diversion he had formerly afforded them, been sorry to see his friend *Hal* use him so scurvily, when he comes to the crown in the end of The Second Part of "Henry the Fourth." Amongst other extravagancies, in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," he made him a deer-stealer, that he might at the same time remember his Warwickshire prosecutor, under the name of *Justice Shallow*; he has given him very near the same coat of arms which Dugdale, in his "Antiquities" of that county, describes for a family there, and makes the Welsh parson descant very pleasantly upon them. That whole play is admirable; the humours are various and well opposed; the main design, which is to cure *Ford* of his unreasonable jealousy, is extremely well conducted. In "Twelfth-Night" there is something singularly ridiculous and pleasant in the fantastical steward *Malvolio*. The parasite and the vain-glorious in *Parolles*, in "All's Well That Ends Well," is as good as any thing of that kind of Plautus or Terence, *Petruccio* in "The

Taming of the Shrew," is an uncommon piece of humour. The conversation of *Benedick* and *Beatrice*, in "Much Ado About Nothing," and of *Rosalind*, in "As You Like It," have much wit and sprightliness all along. His clowns, without which character there was hardly any play writ in that time, are all very entertaining; and, I believe, *Thersites* in "Troilus and Cressida," and *Apemantus* in "Timon," will be allowed to be master-pieces of ill-nature and satirical snarling. To these I might add, that incomparable character of *Shylock the Jew*, in the "Merchant of Venice"; but though we have seen that play received and acted as a comedy, and the part of the Jew performed by an excellent comedian, yet I cannot but think it was designed tragically by the author.¹⁶ There appears in it such a deadly spirit of revenge, such a savage fierceness and fellness, and such a bloody designation of cruelty and mischief, as cannot agree either with the style or characters of comedy. The play itself, take it altogether, seems to me to be one of the most finished of any of Shakespeare's. The tale, indeed, in that part relating to the caskets, and the extravagant and unusual kind of bond given by *Antonio*, is too much removed from the rules of probability; but taking the fact for granted, we must allow it to be very beautifully written. There is something in the friendship of *Antonio* to *Bassanio* very great, generous, and tender. The whole fourth act (supposing, as I said, the fact to be probable), is extremely fine. But there are two passages that deserve a particular notice. The first

¹⁶ In 1701 George Granville, Lord Lansdowne, produced a version of the "Merchant of Venice" called the "Jew of Venice," in which the character of *Shylock* was exhibited as a buffoon. This version held the stage for more than a generation.

is, what *Portia* says in praise of mercy, and the other on the power of musick. The melancholy of *Jaques*, in "As You Like It," is as singular and odd as it is diverting. And if, what Horace says,

"Difficile est proprie communia dicere,"

it will be a hard task for any one to go beyond him in the description of the several degrees and ages of man's life, though the thought be old, and common enough.

" . . . All the world's a stage,
 And all the men and women merely players;
 They have their exits and their entrances,
 And one man in his time plays many parts,
 His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
 Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms:
 And then the whining school-boy with his satchel,
 And shining morning face, creeping like snail
 Unwillingly to school. And then, the lover
 Sighing like furnace, with a woful ballad
 Made to his mistress's eye-brow. Then, a soldier;
 Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
 Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
 Seeking the bubble reputation
 Ev'n in the cannon's mouth. And then, the justice;
 In fair round belly, with good capon lin'd,
 With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
 Full of wise saws and modern instances;
 And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
 Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon;
 With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side;
 His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide
 For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
 Turning again tow'rd childish treble, pipes
 And whistles in his sound: Last scene of all,
 That ends this strange eventful history,
 In second childishness, and mere oblivion;
 Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."¹⁷

¹⁷ "As You Like It." Act II. 7.

His images are indeed every where so lively, that the thing he would represent stands full before you, and you possess every part of it. I will venture to point out one more, which is, I think, as strong and as uncommon as any thing I ever saw; it is an image of Patience. Speaking of a maid in love, he says:

“ . . . She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' th' bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pin'd in thought,
And sate like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.”¹⁸

What an image is here given! and what a task would it have been for the greatest masters of Greece and Rome to have expressed the passions designed by this sketch of Statuary! The style of his comedy is, in general natural to the characters, and easy in itself; and the wit most commonly sprightly and pleasing, except in those places where he runs into doggerel rhymes, as in “The Comedy of Errors,” and some other plays. As for his jingling sometimes, and playing upon words, it was the common vice of the age he lived in: and if we find it in the pulpits, made use of as an ornament to the sermons of some of the gravest divines of those times, perhaps it may not be thought too light for the stage.

But certainly the greatness of this author's genius does no where so much appear, as where he gives his imagination an entire loose rein, and raises his fancy to a flight above mankind, and the limits of the visible world. Such are his attempts in “The Tempest,” “A Midsummer-Night's Dream,” “Macbeth,” and “Hamlet.” Of these, “The Tempest,” however it

¹⁸ “Twelfth Night.” Act II. 4.

comes to be placed the first by the publishers of his works, can never have been the first written by him: it seems to me as perfect in its kind, as almost any thing we have of his. One may observe, that the unities are kept here, with an exactness uncommon to the liberties of his writing; though that was what, I suppose, he valued himself least upon, since his excellencies were all of another kind. I am very sensible that he does, in this play, depart too much from that likeness to truth which ought to be observed in these sort of writings; yet he does it so very finely, that one is easily drawn in to have more faith for his sake, than reason does well allow of. His magick has something in it very solemn and very poetical: and that extravagant character of *Caliban* is mighty well sustained, shows a wonderful invention in the author, who could strike out such a particular wild image, and is certainly one of the finest and most uncommon grotesques that ever was seen. The observation, which I have been informed, three very great men concurred in making upon this part,¹⁹ was extremely just; that Shakespeare had not only found out a new character in his *Caliban*, but had also devised and adopted a new manner of language for that character.

It is the same magick that raises the *Fairies* in "A Midsummer-Night's Dream," the *Witches* in "Macbeth," and the *Ghost* in "Hamlet," with thoughts and language so proper to the parts they sustain, and so peculiar to the talent of this writer. But of the two last of these plays I shall have occasion to take notice, among the tragedies of Mr. Shakespeare.

¹⁹ Lord Falkland, Lord C. J. Vaughan and Mr. Selden.—*Rowe's note.*

If one undertook to examine the greatest part of these by those rules which are established by Aristotle, and taken from the model of the Grecian stage,²⁰ it would be no very hard task to find a great many faults; but as Shakespeare lived under a kind of mere light of nature, and had never been made acquainted with the regularity of those written precepts, so it would be hard to judge him by a law he knew nothing of. We are to consider him as a man that lived in a state of almost universal licence and ignorance: there was no established judge, but every one took the liberty to write according to the dictates of his own fancy. When one considers, that there is not one play before him of a reputation good enough to entitle it to an appearance on the present stage, it cannot but be a matter of great wonder that he should advance dramattick poetry so far as he did. The fable is what is generally placed the first, among those that are reckoned the constituent parts of a tragick or heroick poem; not, perhaps, as it is the most difficult or beautiful, but as it is the first properly to be thought of in the contrivance and course of the whole; and with the fable ought to be considered the fit disposition, order, and conduct of its several parts. As it is not in this province of the drama that the strength and mastery of Shakespeare lay, so I shall not undertake the tedious and ill-natured trouble to point out the several faults he was guilty of in it. His tales were seldom invented, but rather taken either from true history, or novels and romances: and he commonly made use of them in that order, with those incidents, and that extent of time in which he found them in the authors from whence he borrowed them. So the

²⁰ The so-called "unities" of time, place and action.

“Winter’s Tale” which is taken from an old book, called “The Delectable History of Dorastus and Fawnia,” contains the space of sixteen or seventeen years, and the scene is sometimes laid in Bohemia, and sometimes in Sicily, according to the original order of the story. Almost all his historical plays comprehend a great length of time, and very different and distinct places: and in his “Antony and Cleopatra,” the scene travels over the greatest part of the Roman empire. But in recompence for his carelessness in this point, when he comes to another part of the drama, the manners of his characters, in acting or speaking what is proper for them, and fit to be shown by the poet, he may be generally justified, and in very many places greatly commended. For those plays which he has taken from the English or Roman history, let any man compare them, and he will find the character as exact in the poet as the historian. He seems indeed so far from proposing to himself any one action for a subject, that the title very often tells you, it is The Life of King John, King Richard, &c. What can be more agreeable to the idea our historians give of “Henry the Sixth,” than the picture Shakespeare has drawn of him? His manners are everywhere exactly the same with the story; one finds him still described with simplicity, passive sanctity, want of courage, weakness of mind, and easy submission to the governance of an imperious wife, or prevailing faction: though at the same time the poet does justice to his good qualities, and moves the pity of his audience for him, by showing him pious, disinterested, a contemner of the things of this world, and wholly resigned to the severest dispensations of God’s providence. There is a short scene in The

Second Part of "Henry the Sixth,"²¹ which I cannot but think admirable in its kind. *Cardinal Beaufort*, who had murdered the *Duke of Gloucester*, is shown in the last agonies on his death-bed, with the good king praying over him. There is so much terror in one, so much tenderness and moving piety in the other, as must touch any one who is capable either of fear or pity. In his "Henry the Eighth," that prince is drawn with that greatness of mind and all those good qualities which are attributed to him in any account of his reign. If his faults are not shown in an equal degree, and the shades in this picture do not bear a just proportion to the lights, it is not that the artist wanted either colours or skill in the disposition of them; but the truth, I believe, might be, that he forbore doing it out of regard to Queen Elizabeth, since it could have been no very great respect to the memory of his mistress, to have exposed some certain parts of her father's life upon the stage. He has dealt much more freely with the minister of that great king; and certainly nothing was ever more justly written, than the character of *Cardinal Wolsey*. He has shown him insolent in his prosperity; and yet, by a wonderful address, he makes his fall and ruin the subject of general compassion. The whole man, with his vices and virtues, is finely and exactly described in the second scene of the fourth act. The distresses likewise of *Queen Katharine*, in this play, are very movingly touched; and though the art of the poet has screened *King Henry* from any gross imputation of injustice, yet one is inclined to wish, the *Queen* had met with a fortune more worthy of her birth and virtue. Nor are

²¹ Act III. 3.

the manners proper to the persons represented less justly observed, in those characters taken from the Roman history; and of this, the fierceness and impatience of *Coriolanus*, his courage and disdain of the common people, the virtue and philosophical temper of *Brutus*, and the irregular greatness of mind in *M. Antony*, are beautiful proofs. For the two last especially, you find them exactly as they are described by Plutarch, from whom certainly Shakespeare copied them. He has indeed followed his original pretty close, and taken in several little incidents that might have been spared in a play. But, as I hinted before, his design seems most commonly rather to describe those great men in the several fortunes and accidents of their lives, than to take any single great action, and form his work simply upon that. However, there are some of his pieces, where the fable is founded upon one action only. Such are more especially, "Romeo and Juliet," "Hamlet," and "Othello." The design in "Romeo and Juliet" is plainly the punishment of their two families, for the unreasonable feuds and animosities that had been so long kept up between them, and occasioned the effusion of so much blood. In the management of this story, he has shown something wonderfully tender and passionate in the love-part, and very pitiful in the distress. "Hamlet" is founded on much the same tale with the "Electra" of Sophocles. In each of them a young prince is engaged to revenge the death of his father, their mothers are equally guilty, are both concerned in the murder of their husbands, and are afterwards married to the murderers. There is in the first part of the Greek tragedy something very moving in the grief of *Electra*; but,

as Mr. Dacier has observed, there is something very unnatural and shocking in the manners he has given that princess and *Orestes* in the latter part. *Orestes* imbrues his hands in the blood of his own mother; and that barbarous action is performed, though not immediately upon the stage, yet so near, that the audiences hear *Clytemnestra* crying out to *Ægysthus* for help, and to her son for mercy: while *Electra*, her daughter, and a princess, (both of them characters that ought to have appeared with more decency), stands upon the stage, and encourages her brother in the parricide. What horror does this not raise! *Clytemnestra* was a wicked woman, and had deserved to die; nay, in the truth of the story, she was killed by her own son; put to represent an action of this kind on the stage, is certainly an offence against those rules of manners proper to the persons, that ought to be observed there. On the contrary, let us only look a little on the conduct of Shakespeare. *Hamlet* is represented with the same piety towards his father, and resolution to revenge his death, as *Orestes*; he has the same abhorrence for his mother's guilt, which, to provoke him the more, is heightened by incest: but it is with wonderful art and justness of judgment, that the poet restrains him from doing violence to his mother. To prevent anything of that kind, he makes his father's *Ghost* forbid that part of his vengeance:

“But howsoever thou pursu’st this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught; leave her to heaven,
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
To prick and sting her.”

This is to distinguish rightly between horror and

terror. The latter is a proper passion of tragedy, but the former ought always to be carefully avoided. And certainly no dramatick writer ever succeeded better in raising terror in the minds of an audience than Shakespeare has done. The whole tragedy of "Macbeth," but more especially the scene where the *King* is murdered in the second Act, as well as this play, is a noble proof of that manly spirit with which he writ; and both show how powerful he was, in giving the strongest motions to our souls that they are capable of. I cannot leave *Hamlet*, without taking notice of the advantage with which we have seen this masterpiece of Shakespeare distinguish itself upon the stage, by Mr. Betterton's fine performance of that part.²² A man, who, though he had no other good qualities, as he has a great many, must have made his way into the esteem of all men of letters, by this only excellency. No man is better acquainted with Shakespeare's manner of expression, and indeed he has studied him so well, and is so much a master of him, that whatever part of his he performs, he does it as if it had been written on purpose for him, and that the author had exactly conceived it as he plays it. I must own a particular obligation to him, for the most considerable part of the passages relating to this life, which I have here transmitted to the publick; his veneration for the memory of Shakespeare having engaged him to make a journey to Warwickshire on purpose to gather up what remains he could, of a name for which he had so great a veneration.

²² Thomas Betterton (1634-1710), a great actor of Shakespearean parts. He was given a royal funeral in Westminster Abbey.

ALEXANDER POPE

1688-1744

THE second editor was Alexander Pope, born May 22, 1688, died May 30, 1744.

Pope was a self-made man in the realm of letters. He had but little schooling and was self-taught in the languages, having as a basis for his Latin and Greek some lessons from a Roman Catholic priest.

In his sixteenth year he began to frequent the London coffee houses, where wits and writers of the day most did congregate. From the moment of making friends he made quarrels. His satire was bitter and cruel.

We omit mention of his other literary work, which is sufficiently well known, to note that in 1725, eleven years after Rowe's second edition, appeared Pope's in six volumes quarto. His critical work in the notes by no means takes rank with his other literary achievements. He set the pace for future critics, however. His malignant genius fastened upon Lewis Theobald, whom he made a hero of the "Dunciad," because of certain comments on Pope's methods of using Shakespeare's text. In 1728 he issued a second edition, and his text was reprinted after his death at Glasgow in 1766, and in Birmingham in 1768. He died at Twickenham.

ALEXANDER POPE'S PREFACE

[To quarto edition of the works, in six volumes, 1728.]

It is not my design to enter into a criticism upon this author: though to do it effectually, and not superficially, would be the best occasion that any just writer could take, to form the judgment and taste of our nation. For of all English poets Shakespeare must be confessed to be the fairest and fullest subject for criticism, and to afford the most numerous, as well as most conspicuous instances, both of beauties and faults of all sorts. But this far exceeds the bounds of a preface, the business of which is only to give an account of the fate of his works, and the disadvantages under which they have been transmitted to us. We shall hereby extenuate many faults which are his, and clear him from the imputation of many which are not: a design, which, though it can be no guide to future criticks to do him justice in one way, will at least be sufficient to prevent their doing him an injustice in the other.

I cannot however but mention some of his principal and characteristick excellencies, for which (notwithstanding his defects) he is justly and universally elevated above all other dramattick writers. Not that this is the proper place of praising him, but because I would not omit any occasion of doing it.

If ever any author deserved the name of an original, it was Shakespeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature; it proceeded through Ægyptian strainers and channels, and came to him not without some tincture of the learning,



A Pope

or some cast of the models, of those before him. The poetry of Shakespeare was inspiration indeed: he is not so much an imitator, as an instrument, of nature; and it is not so just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks through him.

His characters are so much nature herself, that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her. Those of other poets have a constant resemblance, which shows that they received them from one another, and were but multipliers of the same image: each picture, like a mock-rainbow, is but the reflection of a reflection. But every single character in Shakespeare is as much an individual, as those in life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike; and such, as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be twins, will, upon comparison, be found remarkably distinct. To this life and variety of characters, we must add the wonderful preservation of it; which is such throughout his plays, that had all the speeches been printed without the very names of the persons, I believe one might have applied them with certainty to every speaker.

The power over our passions was never possessed in a more eminent degree, or displayed in so different instances. Yet all along there is seen no labour, no pains to raise them; no preparation to guide or guess to the effect, or be perceived to lead towards it: but the heart swells, and the tears burst out, just at the proper places: we are surprised the moment we weep; and yet upon reflection find the passion so just, that we should be surprised if we had not wept, and wept at that very moment.

How astonishing is it again, that the passions

directly opposite to these, laughter and spleen, are no less at his command; that he is not more a master of the great than of the ridiculous in human nature; of our noblest tendernesses than of our vainest foibles; of our strongest emotions, than of our idlest sensations!

Nor does he only excel in the passions; in the coolness of reflection and reasoning he is full as admirable. His sentiments are not only in general the most pertinent and judicious upon every subject; but, by a talent very peculiar, something between penetration and felicity, he hits upon that particular point on which the bent of each argument turns, or the force of each motive depends. This is perfectly amazing from a man of no education or experience in those great and publick scenes of life which are usually the subject of his thoughts: so that he seems to have known the world by intuition, to have looked through human nature at one glance, and to be the only author that gives ground for a very new opinion, that the philosopher, and even the man of the world may be born as well as the poet.

It must be owned, that with all these great excellencies, he has almost as great defects; and that as he has certainly written better, so he has perhaps written worse than any other. But I think I can in some measure account for these defects, from several causes and accidents; without which it is hard to imagine that so large and so enlightened a mind could ever have been susceptible of them. That all these contingencies should unite to his disadvantage seems to me almost as singularly unlucky, as that so many various (nay contrary) talents should meet in one man, was happy and extraordinary.

It must be allowed that stage-poetry, of all other, is more particularly levelled to please the populace, and its success more immediately depending upon the common suffrage. One cannot therefore wonder, if Shakespeare, having at his first appearance no other aim in his writings than to procure a subsistence, directed his endeavors solely to hit the taste and humour that then prevailed. The audience was generally composed of the meaner sort of people; and therefore the images of life were to be drawn from those of their own rank: accordingly we find, that not our author's only, but almost all the old comedies have their scene among tradesmen and mechanicks: and even their historical plays strictly follow the common old stories or vulgar traditions of that kind of people. In tragedy, nothing was so sure to surprise and cause admiration, as the most strange, unexpected, and consequently most unnatural, events and incidents; the most exaggerated thoughts; the most verbose and bombast expression; the most pompous rhymes, and thundering versification. In comedy, nothing was so sure to please, as mean buffoonry, vile ribaldry and unmannerly jest of fools and clowns. Yet even in these our author's wit buoys up, and is borne above his subject: his genius in those low parts is like some prince of a romance in the disguise of a shepherd or peasant; a certain greatness and spirit now and then break out, which manifest his higher extraction and qualities.

It may be added, that not only the common audience had no notion of the rules of writing, but few even of the better sort piqued themselves upon any great degree of knowledge or nicety that way; till Ben

Jonson getting possession of the stage, brought critical learning into vogue. And that this was not done without difficulty, may appear from those frequent lessons (and indeed almost declamations) which he was forced to prefix to his first plays, and put into the mouth of his actors, the *grex, chorus, &c.* to remove the prejudices, and inform the judgment of his hearers. 'Till then, our authors had no thoughts of writing on the model of the ancients: their tragedies were only histories in dialogue; and their comedies followed the thread of any novel as they found it, no less implicitly than if it had been true history.

To judge therefore of Shakespeare by Aristotle's rules, is like trying a man by the laws of one country, who acted under those of another. He writ to the people; and writ at first without patronage from the better sort, and therefore without aims of pleasing them; without assistance or advice from the learned, as without the advantage of education or acquaintance among them; without that knowledge of the best models, the ancients, to inspire him with an emulation of them; in a word, without any views of reputation, and of what poets are pleased to call immortality; some or all of which have encouraged the vanity, or animated the ambition of other writers.

Yet it must be observed, that when his performances had merited the protection of his prince, and when the encouragement of the court had succeeded to that of the town, the works of his riper years are manifestly raised above those of his former. The dates of his plays sufficiently evidence that his productions improved in proportion to the respect he had for his auditors. And I make no doubt this observation would

be found true in every instance, were but editions extant from which we might learn the exact time when every piece was composed, and whether writ for the town, or the court.

Another cause (and no less strong than the former) may be deduced from our poet's being a player, and forming himself first upon the judgment of that body of men whereof he was a member. They have ever had a standard to themselves, upon other principles than those of Aristotle. As they live by the majority, they know no rule but that of pleasing the present humour, and complying with the wit in fashion; a consideration which brings all their judgment to a short point. Players are just such judges of what is right, as tailors are of what is graceful. And in this view it will be but fair to allow, that most of our author's faults are less to be ascribed to his wrong judgment as a poet, than to his right judgment as a player.

By these men it would be thought a praise to Shakespeare, that he scarce ever blotted a line. This they industriously propagated, as appears from what we are told by Ben Jonson in his "Discoveries," and from the preface of Heminge and Condell to the First Folio Edition. But in reality (however it has prevailed) there never was a more groundless report, or to the contrary of which there are more undeniable evidences: as, the comedy of "The Merry Wives of Windsor," which he entirely new writ; The History of "Henry the Sixth," which was first published under the title of "The Contention of York and Lancaster;" and that of "Henry the Fifth," extremely improved; that of "Hamlet," enlarged to almost as much again as at first; and many others. I believe the common

opinion of his want of learning proceeded from no better ground. This too might be thought a praise by some; and to this his errors have as injudiciously been ascribed by others. For it is certain, were it true, it could concern but a small part of them; the most are such as are not proper defects, but superfluities, and arise not from want of learning or reading, but from want of thinking or judging: or rather (to be more just to our author) from a compliance to those wants in others. As to a wrong choice of the subject, a wrong conduct of the incidents, false thoughts, forced expressions, &c. if these are not to be ascribed to the aforesaid accidental reasons, they must be charged upon the poet himself, and there is no help for it. But I think the two disadvantages which I have mentioned (to be obliged to please the lowest of the people, and to keep the worst of company), if the consideration be extended as far as it reasonably may, will appear sufficient to mislead and depress the greatest genius upon earth. Nay, the more modesty with which such a one is endued, the more he is in danger of submitting and conforming to others, against his own better judgment.

But as to his want of learning, it may be necessary to say something more: there is certainly a vast difference between learning and languages. How far he was ignorant of the latter, I cannot determine; but it is plain he had much reading at least, if they will not call it learning. Nor is it any great matter, if a man has knowledge, whether he has it from one language or from another. Nothing is more evident than that he had a taste of natural philosophy, mechanicks, ancient and modern history, poetical learning, and mythology: we

find him very knowing in the customs, rites, and manners of antiquity. In "Coriolanus," and "Julius Cæsar," not only the spirit, but manners of the Romans are exactly drawn and still a nicer distinction is shown between the manner of the Romans in the time of the former, and of the latter. His reading in the ancient historians is no less conspicuous, in many references to particular passages: and the speeches copied from Plutarch in "Coriolanus"¹ may, I think, as well be made an instance of his learning, as those copied from Cicero in "Cataline," of Ben Jonson's. The manners of other nations in general, the Egyptians, Venetians, French, &c. are drawn with equal propriety. Whatever object of nature, or branch of science, he either speaks of or describes, it is always with competent, if not extensive knowledge: his descriptions are still exact: all his metaphors appropriate, and remarkably drawn from the true nature and inherent qualities of each subject.

When he treats of ethick or politick, we may constantly observe a wonderful justness of distinction, as well as extent of comprehension. No one is more a master of the political story, or has more frequent allusions to the various parts of it: Mr. Waller (who has been celebrated for this last particular) has not shown more learning this way than Shakespeare. We have translations from Ovid published in his name, among those poems which pass for his, and for some of which we have

¹Shakespeare used the translation of Sir Thomas North published in 1579, which was itself a translation not from the original but from a French version by Jacques Amyot, Bishop of Auxene.

undoubted authority (being published by himself, and dedicated to his noble patron the Earl of Southampton): he appears also to have been conversant in Plautus, from which he has taken the plot of one of his plays:² he follows the Greek authors, and particularly Dares Phrygius,³ in another (although I will not pretend to say in what language he read them). The modern Italian writers of novels he was manifestly acquainted with; and we may conclude him to be no less conversant with the ancients of his own country, for the use he has made of Chaucer in "Troilus and Cressida," and in "The Two Noble Kinsmen," if that play be his, as there goes a tradition it was (and indeed it has little resemblance of Fletcher, and more of our author than some of those which have been received as genuine).

I am inclined to think this opinion proceeded originally from the zeal of the partizans of our author and Ben Jonson: as they endeavoured to exalt the one at the expense of the other. It is ever the nature of parties to be in extremes; and nothing is so probable, as that, because Ben Jonson had much the more learning, it was said, on the one hand that Shakespeare had none at all; and because Shakespeare had much the most wit and fancy, it was retorted on the other, that Jonson wanted both. Because Shakespeare borrowed nothing, it was said that Ben Jonson borrowed everything. Because Jonson did not write extempore, he was reproached with being a year about every piece; and because Shakespeare wrote with ease and rapidity,

² "The Comedy of Errors," for which the "Menæchmi" and the "Amphitruo" of Plautus are considered as foundation plays.

³ "Troilus and Cressida."

they cried, he never once made a blot. Nay, the spirit of opposition ran so high, that whatsoever those of the one side objected to the other, was taken at the rebound, and turned into praises; as injudiciously, as their antagonists before had made them objections.

Poets are always afraid of envy; but sure they have as much reason to be afraid of admiration. They are the Scylla and Charybdis of authors; those who escape one, often fall by the other. *Pessimum genus inimicorum laudantes*, says Tacitus: and Virgil desires to wear a charm against those who praise a poet without rule or reason:

“ . . . *Si ultra placitum laudarit baccare frontem.*
Cingite, ne vati noceat. . . .”

But however this contention might be carried on by the partizans on either side, I cannot help thinking these two great poets were good friends, and lived on amicable terms, and in offices of society with each other. It is an acknowledged fact that Ben Jonson was introduced upon the stage, and his first work encouraged, by Shakespeare; and after his death, that author writes, To the memory of his beloved William Shakespeare which shews as if the relationship had continued through life. I cannot, for my own part, find anything invidious or sparing in those verses, but wonder Mr. Dryden was of that opinion. He exalts him not only above all his contemporaries, but above Chaucer and Spenser, whom he will not allow to be great enough to be ranked with him, and challenges the names of Sophocles, Euripides, and Æschylus, nay all Greece and Rome at once, to equal him; and (which is very particular) expressly vindicates him from the imputation

of wanting art, not enduring that all his excellences should be attributed to nature. It is remarkable, too, that the praise he gives him in his "Discoveries" seems to proceed from a personal kindness; he tells us, that he loved the man, as well as honoured his memory; celebrates the honesty, openness, and frankness of his temper; and only distinguishes, as he reasonably ought, between the real merit of the author, and the silly and derogatory applauses of the players. Ben Jonson might indeed be sparing in his commendations (though certainly he is not so in this instance), partly from his own nature, and partly from judgment. For men of judgment think they do any man more service in praising him justly, than lavishly. I say, I would fain believe they were friends though the violence and ill-breeding of their followers and flatterers, were enough to give rise to the contrary report. I hope that it may be with parties both in wit and state, as with those monsters described by the poets; and that their heads at least may have something human, though their bodies and tails are wild beasts and serpents.

As I believe that what I have mentioned gave rise to the opinion of Shakespeare's want of learning; so what has continued it down to us may have been the many blunders and illiteracies of the first publishers of his works. In these editions their ignorance shines almost in every page; nothing is more common than *actus tertia. Exit omnes. Enter three Witches solus.*⁴

Their French is as bad as their Latin, both in con-

⁴This blunder appears to be of Mr. Pope's own invention. It is not to be found in any one of the four Folio copies of "Macbeth"; and there is no Quarto edition of it extant.—*Note by Geo. Steevens.*

struction and spelling: their very Welsh is false. Nothing is more likely than that those palpable blunders of *Hector's* quoting Aristotle, with others of that gross kind, sprung from the same root: it not being at all credible that these could be the errors of any man who had the least tincture of a school, or the least conversation with such as had. Ben Jonson (whom they will not think partial to him) allows him at least to have had some Latin; which is utterly inconsistent with mistakes like these. Nay, the constant blunders in proper names of persons and places are such as must have proceeded from a man, who had not so much as read any history in any language: so could not be Shakespeare's.

I shall now lay before the reader some of those almost innumerable errors, which have arisen from one source, the ignorance of the players, both as his actors, and as his editors.

When the nature and kinds of these are enumerated and considered, I dare to say that not Shakespeare only, but Aristotle or Cicero, had their works undergone the same fate, might have appeared to want sense as well a learning.

It is not certain that any one of his plays was published by himself. During the time of his employment in the theatres, several of his pieces were printed separately in Quarto. What makes me think that most of these were not published by him, is the excessive carelessness of the press: every page is so scandalously false spelled, and almost all the learned or unusual words so intolerably mangled, that it is plain there either was no corrector to the press at all, or one totally illiterate. If any were supervised by himself, I should

fancy the two parts of "Henry the Fourth," and "Midsummer-Night's Dream," might have been so, because I find no other printed with any exactness; and (contrary to the rest) there is very little variation in all the subsequent editions of them. There are extant two prefaces to the first Quarto edition of "Troilus and Cressida," in 1609, and to that of "Othello"; by which it appears, that the first was published without his knowledge or consent, and even before it was acted, so late as seven or eight years before he died: and that the latter was not printed till after his death. The whole number of genuine plays, which we have been able to find printed in his life time, amounts but to eleven. And of some of these we meet with two or more editions by different printers, each of which has whole heaps of trash different from the other: which I should fancy was occasioned by their being taken from different copies belonging to different play-houses.

The Folio edition (in which all the plays we now receive as his, were first collected) was published by two players, Heminge and Condell, in 1623, seven years after his decease. They declare, that all the other editions were stolen and surreptitious, and affirm theirs to be purged from the errors of the former. This is true as to the literal errors, and no other; for in all respect else it is far worse than the Quartos.

First, because the additions of trifling and bombast passages are in this edition far more numerous. For whatever had been added, since those Quartos, by the actors, or had stolen from their mouths into the written parts, were from thence conveyed into the printed text, and all stand charged upon the author. He himself complained of this usage in "Hamlet," where he wishes

that those who play the clowns would speak no more than is set down for them.⁵ But as a proof that he could not escape it, in the old editions of "Romeo and Juliet," there is no hint of a great number of the mean conceits and ribaldries now to be found there. In others, the low scenes of mobs, plebeians, and clowns, are vastly shorter than at present: and I have seen one in particular (which seems to have belonged to the play-house, by having the parts divided with lines, and the actors' names in the margin) where several of those very passages were added in a written hand, which are since to be found in the Folio.

In the next place, a number of beautiful passages, which are extant in the first single editions, are omitted in this; as it seems, without any other reason, than their willingness to shorten some scenes: these men (as it was said of Procrustes) either lopping, or stretching an author, to make him just fit for their stage.

This edition is said to be printed from the original copies; I believe they meant those which had lain ever since the author's days in the play-house, and had from time to time, been cut, or added to, arbitrarily. It appears that this edition, as well as the Quartos, was printed (at least partly) from no better copies than the prompter's book, or piece-meal parts written out for the use of the actors: for in some places their very names are, through carelessness, set down instead of the *personæ dramatis*;⁶ and in others the notes of direction to the property-men for their movables, and to the

⁵ Act. III. 4.

⁶ "Much Ado About Nothing." Act II. 3, *Jacke Wilson for Balthazar*. Act IV., *Andrew Cowley and Kempe for Dogberry and Verges*. "III. Henry VI.," Act III., "Enter *Siliklo* and *Humphrey* with cross bowes in their hands," etc.

players for their entries, are inserted into the text through the ignorance of the transcribers.

The plays not having been before so much as distinguished by Acts and Scenes, they are in this edition divided according as they played them; often when there is no pause in the action, or where they thought fit to make a breach in it, for the sake of musick, masques, or monsters.

Sometimes the scenes are transposed and shuffled backward and forward; a thing which could not otherwise happen, but by their being taken from separate and piece-meal written parts.

Many verses are omitted entirely, and others transposed: from whence invincible obscurities have arisen, past the guess of any commentator to clear up, but just where the accidental glimpse of an old edition enlightens us.

Some characters were confounded and mixed, or two put into one, for want of a competent number of actors. Thus in the Quarto edition of "Midsummer-Night's Dream," Act V., Shakespeare introduces a kind of master of the revels called *Philostrate*; all whose part is given to another character (that of *Egeus*) in the subsequent editions: so also in "Hamlet" and "King Lear." This too, makes it probable that the prompter's books were what they called the original copies.

From liberties of this kind, many speeches also were put into the mouths of wrong persons, where the author now seems chargeable with making them speak out of character: or, sometimes, perhaps, for no better reason than that a governing player, to have the mouthing of some favourite speech himself, would snatch it from the unworthy lips of an underling.

Prose from verse they did not know, and they accordingly printed one for the other throughout the volume.

Having been forced to say so much of the players, I think I ought in justice to remark, that the judgment, as well as condition, of that class of people, was then far inferior to what it is in our days. As then the best play-houses were inns and taverns (the Globe, the Hope, the Red-Bull, the Fortune, &c.), so the top of the profession were then mere players, not gentlemen of the stage: they were led into the buttery⁷ by the steward, not placed at the lord's table, or lady's toilette; and consequently were entirely deprived of those advantages they now enjoy in the familiar conversation of our nobility, and an intimacy (not to say dearness) with people of the first condition.

From what has been said, there can be no question but had Shakespeare published his works himself (especially in his latter time, and after his retreat from the stage), we should not only be certain which are genuine, but should find, in those that are, the errors lessened by some thousands. If I may judge from all the distinguishing marks of his style, and his manner of thinking and writing, I make no doubt to declare that those wretched plays, "Pericles," "Lochrine," "Sir John Oldcastle," "Yorkshire Tragedy," "Lord Cromwell," "The Puritan," and "London Prodigal," and a thing called "The Double Falsehood," cannot be admitted as his.⁸ And I should conjecture of some of the others (particularly 'Love's Labour's Lost,' "The

⁷ "Taming of the Shrew."—*Induction, sc. 1.*

⁸ All of these plays except "The Double Falsehood" are published in the Third Folio (1664) as Shakespeare's. "Pericles" is the only one included in modern editions.

Winter's Tale," "Comedy of Errors," and "Titus Andronicus") that only some characters, single scenes, or perhaps a few particular passages, were of his hand. It is very probable what occasioned some plays to be supposed Shakespeare's was only this; that they were pieces produced by unknown authors, or fitted up for the theatre while it was under his administration; and no owner claiming them, they were adjudged to him, as they give strays to the lord of the manor: a mistake which (one may also observe) it was not for the interest of the house to remove. Yet the players themselves, Heminge and Condell, afterwards did Shakespeare the justice to reject these eight plays in their edition; though they were then printed in his name, in everybody's hands and acted with some applause (as we learn from what Ben Jonson says of "Pericles" in his ode on the New-Inn). That "Titus Andronicus" is one of this class, I am the rather induced to believe, by finding the same author openly express his contempt of it in the induction to "Bartholomew-Fair," in the year 1614, when Shakespeare was yet living. And there is no better authority for these latter sort, than for the former, which were equally published in his lifetime.

If we give in to this opinion, how many low and vicious parts and passages might no longer reflect upon this great genius, but appear unworthily charged upon him? And even in those which are really his, how many faults may have been unjustly laid to his account from arbitrary additions, expunctions, transpositions of scenes and lines, confusion of characters and persons, wrong application of speeches, corruptions of innumerable passages by the ignorance and wrong corrections of them again by the impertinence of his

first editors? From one or other of these considerations, I am verily persuaded that the greatest and the grossest part of what are thought his errors would vanish, and leave his character in a light very different from that disadvantageous one in which it now appears to us.

This is the state in which Shakespeare's writings lie at present; for, since the above-mentioned Folio edition, all the rest have implicitly followed it, without having recourse to any of the former, or ever making the comparison between them. It is impossible to repair the injuries already done him; too much time has elapsed, and the materials are too few. In what I have done, I have rather given a proof of my willingness and desire, than of my ability, to do him justice. I have discharged the dull duty of an editor, to my best judgment, with more labour than I expect thanks, with a religious abhorrence of all innovation, and without any indulgence to my private sense or conjecture. The method taken in this edition will shew itself. The various readings are fairly put in the margin, so that every one may compare them; and those I have preferred into the text are constantly *ex fide codicum*, upon authority. The alterations or additions which Shakespeare himself made are taken notice of as they occur. Some suspected passages, which are excessively bad (and which seem interpolations, by being so inserted that one can entirely omit them without any chasm or deficiency in the context), are degraded to the bottom of the page, with an asterisk referring to the places of their insertion. The scenes are marked so distinctly that every removal of place is specified; which is more necessary in this author than any other, since he shifts

them more frequently; and sometimes, without attending to this particular, the reader would have met with obscurities. The more obsolete or unusual words are explained. Some of the most shining passages are distinguished by commas in the margin; and where the beauty lay not in particulars but in the whole, a star is prefixed to the scene. This seems to me a shorter and less ostentatious method of performing the better half of criticism (namely the pointing out an author's excellencies) than to fill a whole paper with citations of fine passages, with general applauses, or empty exclamations at the tail of them. There is also subjoined a catalogue of those first editions, by which the greater part of the various readings and of the corrected passages are authorised (most of which are such as carry their own evidences along with them). These editions⁹ now hold the place of originals, and are the only materials left to repair the deficiencies, or restore the corrupted sense of the author. I can only wish that a greater number of them (if a greater were ever published) may yet be found, by a search more successful than mine, for the better accomplishment of this end.

I will conclude by saying of Shakespeare, that with all his faults, and with all the irregularity of his drama, one may look upon his works, in comparison with those that are more finished and regular, as upon an ancient majestic piece of Gothic architecture compared with a neat modern building: the latter is more elegant and glaring, but the former is more strong and more solemn. It must be allowed that in one of these there are materials enough to make many of the other. It has much

⁹ The reference is to the Quarto copies of single plays.

the greater variety, and much the nobler apartments, though we are often conducted to them by dark, odd, and uncouth passages. Nor does the whole fail to strike us with greater reverence, though many of the parts are childish, ill-placed, and unequal to its grandeur.

LEWIS THEOBALD

1688-1744

LEWIS THEOBALD was born April, 1688, and died September, 1744, exactly contemporary with Pope. He was educated in an attorney's office, but chose literature as a profession. His first literary work was the translation of various Greek plays. He became a dramatist of very ordinary ability. His name holds its place in English literature because of his critical work in Shakespeare's plays. He reviewed Pope's edition (in 1726) under the title of "Shakespeare restored, or Specimens of the many errors as well Committed as Unamended by Mr. Pope in his edition of this Poet, designed not only to correct the same edition, but to restore the true reading of Shakespeare in all the editions ever yet published."

Pope bitterly denounced Theobald for this "impertinence," and pilloried him in the "Dunciad." Theobald, with many faults, was a real critic, and his edition of the plays in seven volumes (1733) took the place of Pope's among students, as the latter had superseded Rowe's.

Theobald was unfortunate both in his financial affairs and his intellectual ambitions. He just failed of the Poet Laureateship in 1732, and passed most of his life in poverty. At the time of his death he was engaged in editing the collected works of Beaumont and Fletcher.

In Hogarth's plate of "The Distressed Poet," the artist is supposed to have been inspired by the wretched fortunes of poor Theobald. George Steevens suggested that the picture was a satire upon the poet's reward.

The poet in the caricature is the only suggestion of a portrait of Theobald extant.

LEWIS THEOBALD'S PREFACE

[To his second edition of Shakespeare's Works published 1740, abridged from the first edition of 1733.]

THE attempt to write upon Shakespeare is like going into a large, a spacious, and a splendid dome, through the conveyance of a narrow and obscure entry. A glare of light suddenly breaks upon you, beyond what the avenue at first promised, and a thousand beauties of genius and character, like so many gaudy apartments pouring at once upon the eye, diffuse and throw themselves out to the mind. The prospect is too wide to come within the compass of a single view; it is a gay confusion of pleasing objects, too various to be enjoyed but in a general admiration, and they must be separated and eyed distinctly in order to give the proper entertainment.

And as, in great piles of building, some parts are often furnished up to hit the taste of the connoisseur; others more negligently put together, to strike the fancy of a common and unlearned beholder; some parts are made stupendously magnificent and grand, to surprise with the vast design and execution of the architect; others are contracted, to amuse you with his neatness and elegance in little; so, in Shakespeare, we may

find traits that will stand the test of the severest judgment; and strokes as carelessly hit off, to the level of the more ordinary capacities; some descriptions raised to that pitch of grandeur, as to astonish you with the compass and elevation of his thought; and others copying nature within so narrow, so confined a circle, as if the author's talent lay only at drawing in miniature.

In how many points of light must we be obliged to gaze at this great poet! In how many branches of excellence to consider and admire him! Whether we view him on the side of art or nature, he ought equally to engage our attention: whether we respect the force and greatness of his genius, the extent of his knowledge and reading, the power and address with which he throws out and applies either nature or learning, there is ample scope both for our wonder and pleasure. If his diction, and the clothing of his thoughts attract us, how much more must we be charmed with the richness and variety of his images and ideas! If his images and ideas steal into our souls, and strike upon our fancy, how much are they improved in price when we come to reflect with what propriety and justness they are applied to character! If we look into his characters, and how they are furnished and proportioned to the employment he cuts out for them, how are we taken up with the mastery of his portraits! What draughts of nature! What variety of originals, and how different each from the other! How are they dressed from the stores of his own luxurious imagination, without being the apes of mode, or borrowing from any foreign wardrobe! Each of them are the standards of fashion for themselves: like gentlemen that are above the direction of their tailors, and can adorn themselves without the aid of imita-



“THE DISTREST POET”

By Hogarth

“It was suggested by George Steevens (q.v.) that Hogarth's plate, ‘The Distressed Poet,’ as first published on 3 March, 1736, was intended as a satire on the much abused Theobald. The composition was doubtless inspired by Pope's vivid picture of the dunce-laureate-elect brooding over his sunken fortunes.”—*Dictionary of National Biography.*

tion. If other poets draw more than one fool or coxcomb, there is the same resemblance in them as in that painter's draughts who was happy only at forming a rose; you find them all younger brothers of the same family, and all of them have a pretence to give the same crest: but Shakespeare's clowns and fops come all of a different house; they are no farther allied to one another than as man to man, members of the same species, but as different in features and lineaments of character as we are from one another in face or complexion. But I am unawares launching into his character as a writer, before I have said what I intended of him as a private member of the republic.

Mr. Rowe has very justly observed, that people are fond of discovering any little personal story of the great men of antiquity, and that the common accidents of their lives naturally become the subject of our critical enquiries: that however trifling such a curiosity at the first view may appear, yet, as for what relates to men and letters, the knowledge of an author may, perhaps, sometimes conduce to the better understanding his works; and, indeed, this author's works, from the bad treatment he has met with from copyists and editors, have so long wanted a comment, that one would zealously embrace every method of information that could contribute to recover them from the injuries with which they have so long lain overwhelmed.

'Tis certain that if we have first admired the man in his writings, his case is so circumstanced that we must naturally admire the writings in the man: that if we go back to take a view of his education, and the employment in life which fortune had cut out for him, we shall retain the strongest ideas of his extensive genius.

His father, we are told, was a considerable dealer in wool; but having no fewer than ten children, of whom our Shakespeare was the eldest, the best education he could afford him was no better than to qualify him for his own business and employment. I cannot affirm with any certainty how long his father lived, but I take him to be the same Mr. John Shakespeare who was living in the year 1599, and who then, in honour of his son, took out an extract of his family arms from the herald's office, by which it appears that he had been officer and bailiff of Stratford-upon-Avon, in Warwickshire, and that he enjoyed some hereditary lands and tenements, the reward of his great-grandfather's faithful and approved service to King Henry VII.

Be this as it will, our Shakespeare, it seems, was bred for some time at a free-school—the very free-school, I presume, founded at Stratford—where, we are told, he acquired what Latin he was master of; but that his father being obliged, through narrowness of circumstances, to withdraw him too soon from thence, he was thereby unhappily prevented from making any proficiency in the dead languages: a point that will deserve some little discussion in the sequel of this dissertation.

How long he continued in his father's way of business, either as an assistant to him, or on his own proper account, no notices are left to inform us, nor have I been able to learn precisely at what period of life he quitted his native Stratford, and began his acquaintance with London and the stage.

In order to settle in the world after a family manner, he thought fit, Mr. Rowe acquaints us, to marry while he was yet very young. It is certain he did so, for by

the monument in Stratford church, erected to the memory of his daughter Susanna, the wife of John Hall, gentleman, it appears that she died on the 2d of July, in the year 1649, aged 66. So that she was born in 1583, when her father could not be full 19 years old; who was himself born in the year 1564. Nor was she his eldest child,¹ for he had another daughter, Judith, who was born before her, and who was married to one Mr. Thomas Quiney. So that Shakespeare must have entered into wedlock by that time he was turned of seventeen years.

Whether the force of inclination merely, or some concurring circumstances of convenience in the match, prompted him to marry so early, is not easy to be determined at this distance; but it is probable a view of interest might sway his conduct in this point, for he married the daughter of one Hathaway, a substantial yeoman in his neighbourhood, and she had the start of him in age no less than eight years. She survived him notwithstanding seven seasons, and died that very year the players published the first edition of his works in Folio, anno Dom., 1623, at the age of 67 years, as we likewise learn from her monument in Stratford church.

How long he continued in this kind of settlement, upon his own native spot, is not more easily to be determined. But if the tradition be true, of that extravagance which forced him both to quit his country and way of living, to wit, his being engaged with a knot of young deer-stealers, to rob the park of Sir Thomas Lucy, of Cherlecot, near Stratford, the enterprise savours so much of youth and levity, we may reasonably suppose it

¹ A mistake. According to the parish register Susannah was the oldest, having been baptised May 26, 1583; Judith, Feb. 2, 1585.

was before he could write full man. Besides, considering he has left us six-and-thirty plays at least, avowed to be genuine; and considering too that he had retired from the stage to spend the latter part of his days at his own native Stratford, the interval of time necessarily required for the finishing so many dramattick pieces obliges us to suppose he threw himself very early upon the play-house. And as he could, probably, contract no acquaintance with the drama while he was driving on the affair of wool at home, some time must be lost, even after he had commenced player, before he could attain knowledge enough of the science to qualify himself for turning author.

It has been observed by Mr. Rowe that amongst other extravagancies which our author has given to his *Sir John Falstaff* in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," he has made him a deer-stealer; and, that he might at the same time remember his Warwickshire prosecutor, under the name of *Justice Shallow*, he has given him very near the same coat of arms which Dugdale, in his "Antiquities" of that county, describes for a family there. There are two coats, I observe, in Dugdale, where three silver fishes are borne in the name of Lucy; and another coat, to the monument of Thomas Lucy, son of Sir William Lucy, in which are quartered, in four several divisions, twelve little fishes, three in each division, probably Luces. This very coat, indeed, seems alluded to in *Shallow's* giving the dozen white Luces, and in *Slender* saying he may quarter. When I consider the exceeding candour and good nature of our author (which inclined all the gentler part of the world to love him, as the power of his wit obliged the men of the most delicate knowledge and polite learning to admire him), and

that he should throw this humorous piece of satire at his prosecutor at least twenty years after the provocation given, I am confidently persuaded it must be owing to an unforgiving rancour on the prosecutor's side; and if this was the case, it were pity but the disgrace of such an inveteracy should remain as a lasting reproach, and *Shallow* stand as a mark of ridicule to stigmatise his malice.

It is said our author spent some years before his death in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends, at his native Stratford. I could never pick up any certain intelligence when he relinquished the stage. I know it has been mistakenly thought by some that Spenser's *Thalia*, in his "Tears of the Muses," where she laments the loss of her *Willy*, in the comic scene, has been applied to our author's quitting the stage. But Spenser himself, it is well known, quitted the stage of life in the year 1598, and five years after this we find Shakespeare's name among the actors in Ben Jonson's "Sejanus," which first made its appearance in the year 1603. Nor, surely, could he then have any thoughts of retiring, since that very year a licence under the privy-seal was granted by King James I. to him and Fletcher, Burbage, Phillipps, Hemings, Condell, etc., authorising them to exercise the art of playing comedies, tragedies, etc., as well at their usual house called *The Globe* on the other side of the water, as in any other parts of the kingdom, during his Majesty's pleasure (a copy of which licence is preserved in Rymer's *Fœdera*). Again, it is certain that Shakespeare did not exhibit his "Macbeth" till after the Union was brought about, and till after King James I. had begun to touch for the evil; for it is plain he has inserted compliments on both

those accounts upon his royal master, in that tragedy. Nor, indeed, could the number of the dramattick pieces he produced admit of his retiring near so early as that period. So that what Spenser there says, if it relate at all to Shakespeare, must hint at some occasional recess he made for a time upon a disgust taken; or the *Willy* there mentioned must relate to some other favourite poet. I believe we may safely determine that he had not quitted in the year 1610. For, in his "Tempest"² our author makes mention of the Bermuda islands, which were unknown to the English till, in 1609, Sir John Summers made a voyage to North America and discovered them, and afterwards invited some of his countrymen to settle a plantation there. That he became a private gentleman at least three years before his decease is pretty obvious from another circumstance; I mean, from that remarkable and well-known story which Mr. Rowe has given us of our author's intimacy with Mr. John Combe, an old gentleman noted thereabouts for his wealth and usury, and upon whom Shakespeare made the following facetious epitaph:

"Ten in the hundred lies here ingrav'd,
 'Tis a hundred to ten his soul is not sav'd;
 If any man ask, who lies in this tomb,
 Oh! oh! quoth the devil, 'tis my John-a-Combe."

This sarcastical piece of wit was, at the gentleman's own request, thrown out extemporally in his company. And this Mr. John Combe I take to be the same who, by Dugdale in his "Antiquities of Warwickshire" is said to have died in the year 1614, and for whom, at the

²" . . . to fetch dew

From the still-vex'd Bermoothes."

—"Tempest." Act I. 2.

upper end of the quire of the Guild of the Holy Cross at Stratford a fair monument is erected, having a statue thereon cut in alabaster, and in a gown, with this epitaph: "Here lieth interred the body of John Combe, esq., who died the 10th of July, 1614, who bequeathed several annual charities to the parish of Stratford, and £100 to be lent to fifteen poor tradesmen from three years to three years, changing the parties every third year, at the rate of fifty shillings per annum, the increase to be distributed to the almes-poor there." The donation has all the air of a rich and sagacious usurer.

Shakespeare himself did not survive Mr. Combe long, for he died in the year 1616, the 53d of his age. He lies buried on the north side of the chancel in the great church at Stratford, where a monument, decent enough for the time, is erected to him, and placed against the wall. He is represented under an arch in a sitting posture, a cushion spread before him, with a pen in his right hand, and his left rested on a scroll of paper. The Latin distich which is placed under the cushion has been given us by Mr. Pope, or his graver, in this manner:

*"INGENIO Pylium, genio Socratem, arte Maronem,
Terra tegit, populus moeret, Olympus habet."*

I confess I do not perceive the difference between *ingenio* and *genio* in the first verse. They seem to me intirely synonymous terms; nor was the Pylian sage Nestor celebrated for his ingenuity, but for an experience and judgment owing to his long age. Dugdale, in his "Antiquities of Warwickshire," has copied this distich with a distinction which Mr. Rowe has followed,

and which certainly restores us the true meaning of the epitaph:

*"JUDICIO Pylium, genio Socratem," etc.*³

In 1614 the greater part of the town of Stratford was consumed by fire, but our Shakespeare's house, among some others, escaped the flames. This house was first built by Sir Hugh Clopton, a younger brother of an ancient family in that neighbourhood, who took their name from the manor of Clopton. Sir Hugh was Sheriff of London in the reign of Richard III., and Lord Mayor in the reign of King Henry VII. To this gentleman the town of Stratford is indebted for the fine stone bridge, consisting of fourteen arches, which, at an extraordinary expense, he built over the Avon, together with a causeway running at the west end thereof; as also for rebuilding the chapel adjoining his house, and the cross-aisle in the church there. It is remarkable of him that though he lived and died a bachelor, among the other extensive charities which he left both to the city of London and town of Stratford, he bequeathed considerable legacies for the marriage of poor maidens of good name and fame both in London and at Stratford. Notwithstanding which large donations in his life, and bequests at his death, as he had purchased the manor of Clopton, and all the estates of the family, so he left the same again to his elder brother's son with a very great addition (a proof of how well beneficence and economy may walk hand in hand in wise families), good part of which estate is yet in the possession of Edward Clopton, Esq., and Sir Hugh Clopton, Knt., lineally descended from the elder brother of the first Sir Hugh,

³ *Judicio Pylium* is the correct transcription.

who particularly bequeathed to his nephew, by his will, his house, by the name of his Great House in Stratford.

The estate had now been sold out of the Clopton family for above a century at the time when Shakespeare became the purchaser; who, having repaired and remodelled it to his own mind, changed the name to New-Place, which the mansion-house, since erected upon the same spot, at this day retains. The house, and lands which attended it, continued in Shakespeare's descendants to the time of the Restoration, when they were re-purchased by the Clopton family, and the mansion now belongs to Sir Hugh Clopton, Knt.⁴ To the favour of this worthy gentleman I owe the knowledge of one particular, in honour of our poet's once dwelling-house, of which I presume Mr. Rowe never was apprised. When the civil war raged in England, and King Charles the First's Queen was driven by the necessities of affairs to make a recess in Warwickshire, she kept her court for three weeks⁵ in New-Place. We may reasonably suppose it then the best private house in the town; and her Majesty preferred it to the college, which was in the possession of the Combe family, who did not so strongly favour the King's party.

How much our author employed himself in poetry after his retirement from the stage does not so evidently appear; very few posthumous sketches of his pen have been recovered to ascertain that point. We have

⁴The house (rebuilt after Shakespeare's time) was pulled down by its owner Francis Gastrell in 1759.

⁵"Halliwell [in his 'History of New Place'] reduced these three weeks to three days, July 11-13, 1643, and points out that on the 14th the Queen made her entry into Oxford accompanied by the King."—*Karl Elze*, "William Shakespeare," p. 524.

been told, indeed, in print, but not till very lately, that two large chests full of this great man's loose papers and manuscripts, in the hands of an ignorant baker of Warwick (who married one of the descendants from our Shakespeare) were carelessly scattered and thrown about as garret lumber and litter, to the particular knowledge of the late Sir William Bishop, till they were all consumed in the general fire and destruction of that town. I cannot help being a little apt to distrust the authority of this tradition, because his wife survived him seven years, and, as his favourite daughter Susanna survived her twenty-six years, it is very improbable they should suffer such a treasure to be removed and translated into a remoter branch of the family without a scrutiny first made into the value of it. This, I say, inclines me to distrust the authority of the relation; but notwithstanding such an apparent improbability, if we really lost such a treasure, by whatever fatality or caprice of fortune they came into such ignorant and neglected hands, I agree with the relater, the misfortune is wholly irreparable.

To these particulars, which regard his person and private life, some few more are to be gleaned from Mr. Rowe's Account of his Life and Writings. Let us now take a short view of him in his public capacity as a writer, and from thence the transition will be easy to the state in which his writings have been handed down to us.

No age, perhaps, can produce an author more various from himself than Shakespeare has been universally acknowledged to be. The diversity in style and other parts of composition, so obvious in him, is as variously to be accounted for. His education, we find, was at

best but begun; and he started early into a science from the force of genius, unequally assisted by acquired improvements. His fire, spirit, and exuberance of imagination, gave an impetuosity to his pen; his ideas flowed from him in a stream rapid, but not turbulent; copious, but not ever overbearing its shores. The ease and sweetness of his temper might not a little contribute to his facility in writing, as his employment as a player gave him an advantage and habit of fancying himself the very character he meant to delineate. He used the helps of his function in forming himself to create and express that sublime, which other actors can only copy and throw out in action and graceful attitude. But, *Nullum sine venia placuit ingenium*, says Seneca. The genius, that gives us the greatest pleasure, sometimes stands in need of our indulgence. Whenever this happens with regard to Shakespeare, I would willingly impute it to a vice of his times. We see complaisance enough in our days paid to a bad taste. So that his clinches, false wit, and descending beneath himself, may have proceeded from a deference paid to the then reigning barbarism.

I have not thought it out of my province, whenever occasion offered, to take notice of some of our poet's grand touches of nature, some, that do not appear sufficiently such, but in which he seems the most deeply instructed; and to which, no doubt, he has so much owed that happy preservation of his characters, for which he is justly celebrated. Great geniuses, like his, naturally unambitious, are satisfied to conceal their arts in these points. It is the foible of your worsser poets to make a parade and ostentation of that little science they have; and to throw it out in the most

ambitious colours. And whenever a writer of this class shall attempt to copy these artful concealments of our author, and shall either think them easy, or practised by a writer for his ease, he will soon be convinced of his mistake by the difficulty of reaching the imitation of them.

*“Speret idem, sudet multum, frustra que laboret,
Ausus idem: . . .”*

Indeed to point out and exclaim upon all the beauties of Shakespeare, as they come singly in review, would be as insipid, as endless; as tedious, as unnecessary: but the explanations of those beauties that are less obvious to common readers, and whose illustration depends on the rules of just criticism, and on exact knowledge of human life, should deservedly have a share in a general critique upon the author. But to pass over at once to another subject:—

It has been allowed on all hands, how far our author was indebted to nature; it is not so well agreed, how much he owed to languages and acquired learning. The decisions on this subject were certainly set on foot by the hint from Ben Jonson, that he had small Latin, and less Greek: and from this tradition, as it were, Mr. Rowe has thought fit peremptorily to declare that, “It is without controversy, he had no knowledge of the writings of the ancient poets, for that in his works we find no traces of anything which looks like an imitation of the ancients. For the delicacy of his taste (continues he) and the natural bent of his own great genius (equal, if not superior, to some of the best of theirs), would certainly have led him to read and study them with so much pleasure, that some of their fine images

would naturally have insinuated themselves into, and been mixed with, his own writings: and so his not copying, at least something from them, may be an argument of his never having read them." I shall leave it to the determination of my learned readers, from the numerous passages which I have occasionally quoted in my notes, in which our poet seems closely to have imitated the classicks, whether Mr. Rowe's assertion be so absolutely to be depended on. The result of the controversy must certainly, either way, terminate to our author's honour: how happily he could imitate them, if that point be allowed; or how gloriously he could think like them, without owing anything to imitation.

Though I should be very unwilling to allow Shakespeare so poor a scholar, as many have laboured to represent him, yet I shall be very cautious of declaring too positively on the other side of the question; that is, with regard to my opinion of his knowledge in the dead languages. And therefore the passages, that I occasionally quote from the classicks, shall not be urged as proofs that he knowingly imitated those originals; but brought to show how happily he has expressed himself upon the same topicks. A very learned critick of our own nation has declared that a sameness of thought and sameness of expression too, in two writers of a different age, can hardly happen, without a violent suspicion of the latter copying from his predecessor. I shall not therefore run any great risque of a censure, therefore I should venture to hint, that the resemblances in thought and expression of our author and an ancient (which we should allow to be imitation in the one whose learning was not questioned) may sometimes take its rise from strength of memory, and those impressions

which he owed to the school. And if we may allow a possibility of this, considering that, when he quitted the school, he gave in to his father's profession and way of living, and had, it is likely, but a slender library of classical learning; and considering what a number of translations, romances, and legends, started about his time, and a little before (most of which, it is very evident, he read), I think it may easily be reconciled why he rather schemed his plots and characters from these more latter informations, than went back to those fountains, for which he might entertain a sincere veneration, but to which he could not have so ready a recourse.

In touching upon another part of his learning, as it related to the knowledge of history and books, I shall advance something that, at first sight, will very much wear the appearance of a paradox. For I shall find it no hard matter to prove, that, from the grossest blunders in history, we are not to infer his real ignorance of it; nor from a greater use of Latin words, than ever any other English author used, must we infer his intimate acquaintance with that language.

A reader of taste may easily observe, that though Shakespeare, almost in every scene of his historical plays, commits the grossest offences against chronology, history, and ancient politicks; yet this was not through ignorance, as is generally supposed, but through the too powerful blaze of his imagination, which, once raised, made all acquired knowledge vanish and disappear before it. But this licence in him, as I have said, must not be imputed to ignorance, since as often we may find him, when occasion serves, reasoning up to the truth of history; and throwing out sentiments

as justly adapted to the circumstances, of his subject, as to the dignity of his characters, or dictates of nature in general.

Then to come to his knowledge of the Latin tongue, it is certain there is a surprising effusion of Latin words made English, far more than in any one English author I have seen; but we must be cautious to imagine this was of his own doing. For the English tongue, in this age, began extremely to suffer by an inundation of Latin: and this to be sure, was occasioned by the pedantry of those two monarchs, Elizabeth and James, both great Latinists. For it is not to be wondered at, if both the court and schools, equal flatterers of power, should adapt themselves to the royal taste.

But now I am touching on the question (which has been so frequently agitated, yet so entirely undecided) of his learning and acquaintance with the languages: an additional word or two naturally falls in here upon the genius of our author, as compared with that of Jonson, his contemporary. They are confessedly the greatest writers our nation could ever boast of in the drama. The first, we say, owed all to his prodigious natural genius; and the other a great deal to his art and learning. This, if attended to, will explain a very remarkable appearance in their writings. Besides, those wonderful master-pieces of art and genius, which each has given us; they are the authors of other works very unworthy of them: but with this difference, that in Jonson's bad pieces we do not discover one single trace of the author of "The Fox" and "Alchemist"; but in the wild extravagant notes of Shakespeare, you every now and then encounter strains that recognise the divine composer. This difference may be thus accounted for.

Jonson, as we said before, owing all his excellence to his art, by which he sometimes strained himself to an uncommon pitch, when at other times, he unbent and played with his subject, having nothing then to support him, it is no wonder that he wrote so far beneath himself. But Shakespeare, indebted more largely to nature than the other to acquired talents, in his most negligent hours, could never so totally divest himself of his genius, but that it would frequently break out with astonishing force and splendor.

As I have never proposed to dilate farther on the character of my author than was necessary to explain the nature and use of this edition, I shall proceed to consider him as a genius in possession of an everlasting name. And how great that merit must be, which could gain it against all the disadvantages of the horrid condition in which he had hitherto appeared! Had Homer, or any other admired author, first started into publick so maimed and deformed, we cannot determine whether they had not sunk for ever under the ignominy of such an ill appearance. The mangled condition of Shakespeare has been acknowledged by Mr. Rowe, who published him indeed, but neither corrected his text, nor collated the old copies. This gentleman has abilities, and sufficient knowledge of his author, had but his industry been equal to his talents. The same mangled condition has been acknowledged, too, by Mr. Pope, who published him likewise, pretended to have collated the old copies, and yet seldom has corrected the text but to his injury. I congratulate with the manes of our poet, that this gentleman has been sparing in indulging his private sense, as he phrases it; for he who tampers with an author, whom he does not under-

stand, must do it at the expence of his subject. I have made it evident throughout my remarks, that he has frequently inflicted a wound where he intended a cure. He has acted with regard to our author, as an editor, whom Lipsius mentions, did with regard to Martial; *Inventus est nescio quis Popa, qui non vitia ejus, sed ipsum excidit.* He has attacked him like an unhandy slaughterman; and not lopped off the errors, but the poet.

While this is found to be fact, how absurd must appear the praises of such an editor! It seems a moot point, whether Mr. Pope has done most injury to Shakespeare, as an editor and encomiast; or Mr. Rymer has done him service, as his rival and censor. They have both shown themselves in an equal impuissance of suspecting or amending the corrupted passages: and though it be neither prudent to censure or commend what one does not understand; yet if a man must do one when he plays the critick, the latter is the more ridiculous office; and by that Shakespeare suffers most. For the natural veneration which we have for him makes us apt to swallow whatever is given us as his, and set off with encomiums; and hence we quit all suspicions of depravity: on the contrary, the censure of so divine an author sets us upon his defence; and this produces an exact scrutiny and examination, which ends in finding out and discriminating the true from the spurious.

It is not with any secret pleasure that I so frequently animadvert on Mr. Pope as a critick, but there are provocations, which a man can never quite forget. His libels have been thrown out with so much inveteracy, that, not to dispute whether they should come from a Christian, they leave it a question whether they could

come from a man. I should be loth to doubt, as Quintus Serenus did in a like case :

*“Sive homo, seu similis turpissima bestia nobis
Vulnera dente dedit. . . .”*

The indignation, perhaps, for being represented a blockhead,⁶ may be as strong in us, as it is in the ladies for a reflection on their beauties. It is certain, I am indebted to him for some flagrant civilities; and I shall willingly devote a part of my life to the honest endeavour of quitting scores: with this exception, however, that I will not return those civilities in his peculiar strain, but confine myself, at least, to the limits of common decency. I shall ever think it better to want wit, than to want humanity: and impartial posterity may, perhaps, be of my opinion.

But to return to my subject, which now calls upon me to enquire into those causes, to which the depravations of my author originally may be assigned. We are to consider him as a writer, of whom no authentick manuscript was left extant; as a writer, whose pieces were dispersedly performed on the several stages then in being. And it was the custom of those days for the poets to take a price of the players for the pieces they, from time to time, furnished; and thereupon, it was supposed they had no farther right to print them without the consent of the players. As it was the interest of the companies to keep their plays unpublished, when any one succeeded, there was a contest betwixt the curiosity of the town, who demanded to see it printed, and the policy of the stagers, who wished to secrete it

⁶“High on a gorgeous seat that far outshone Henley’s gilt tub,
or Flecknoe’s Irish throne, Great Tibbald nods.”—*Pope’s*
“Dunciad.”

within their own walls. Hence many pieces were taken down in short-hand, and imperfectly copied by ear from a representation; others were printed from piece-meal parts surreptitiously obtained from the theatres, uncorrect, and without the poet's knowledge. To some of these causes we owe the train of blemishes that deform those pieces which stole singly into the world in our author's life-time.⁷

There are still other reasons, which may be supposed to have affected the whole set. When the players took upon them to publish his works entire, every theatre was ransacked to supply the copy; and parts collected, which had gone through as many changes as performers, either from mutilations or additions made to them. Hence we derive many chasms and incoherences in the sense and matter. Scenes were frequently transposed, and shuffled out of their true place, to humour the caprice, or supposed convenience, of some particular actor. Hence much confusion and impropriety has attended and embarrassed the business and fable. To these obvious causes of corruption it must be added, that our author has lain under the disadvantage of having his errors propagated and multiplied by time: because, for near a century, his works were published from the faulty copies, without the assistance of any intelligent editor: which has been the case likewise of many a classick writer.

The nature of any distemper once found has generally been the immediate step to a cure. Shakespeare's case has in a great measure resembled that of a corrupt classick; and, consequently, the method of cure was likewise to bear a resemblance. By what means, and

⁷ *Vide* Heminge and Condell's Introduction, p 3.

with what success, this cure has been effected on ancient writers, is too well known, and needs no formal illustration. The reputation, consequent on tasks of that nature, invite me to attempt the method here; with this view, the hopes of restoring to the publick their greatest poet in his original purity, after having so long lain in a condition that was a disgrace to common sense. To this end I have ventured on a labour, that is the first essay of the kind on any modern author whatsoever. For the late edition of Milton, by the learned Dr. Bentley, is, in the main, a performance of another species. It is plain, it was the intention of that great man rather to correct and pare off the excrescencies of the "Paradise Lost," in the manner that Tucca and Varius were employed to criticise the *Æneid* of Virgil, than to restore corrupted passages. Hence, therefore, may be seen either the iniquity or ignorance of his censurers, who, from some expressions would make us believe the doctor every where gives us his corrections as the original text of the author; whereas the chief turn of his criticism is plainly to show the world, that, if Milton did not write as he would have him, he ought to have wrote so.

I thought proper to premise this observation to the readers, as it will show that the critick on Shakespeare is of a quite different kind. His genuine text is for the most part, religiously adhered to, and the numerous faults and blemishes, purely his own, are left as they were found. Nothing is altered but what by the clearest reasoning can be proved a corruption of the true text; and the alteration, a real restoration of the genuine reading. Nay, so strictly have I strove to give the true reading, though sometimes not to the advantage of my

author, that I have been ridiculously ridiculed for it by those, who either were iniquitously for turning every thing to my disadvantage; or else were totally ignorant of the true duty of an editor.

The science of criticism, as far as it affects an editor, seems to be reduced to these three classes; the emendation of corrupt passages; the explanation of obscure and difficult ones; and an enquiry into the beauties and defects of composition. This work is principally confined to the two former parts: though there are some specimens interspersed of the latter kind, as several of the emendations were best supported, and several of the difficulties best explained, by taking notice of the beauties and defects of the composition peculiar to this immortal poet. But this was but occasional, and for the sake only of perfecting the two other parts, which were the proper objects of the editor's labour. The third lies open for every willing undertaker: and I shall be pleased to see it the employment of a masterly pen.

It must necessarily happen, as I have formerly observed, that where the assistance of manuscripts is wanting to set an author's meaning right, and rescue him from those errors which have been transmitted down through a series of incorrect editions, and a long intervention of time, many passages must be desperate, and past a cure; and their true sense irretrievable either to care or the sagacity of conjecture. But is there any reason therefore to say, that because all cannot be retrieved, all ought to be left desperate? We should show very little honesty, or wisdom, to play the tyrants with an author's text; to raze, alter, innovate, and overturn, at all adventures, and to the utter detriment of his sense and meaning: but to be so very

reserved and cautious, as to interpose no relief or conjecture, where it manifestly labours and cries out for assistance, seems, on the other hand, an indolent absurdity.

As there are very few pages in Shakespeare, upon which some suspicions of depravity do not reasonably arise; I have thought it my duty in the first place, by a diligent and laborious collation, to take in the assistance of all the older copies.

In his historical plays, whenever our English chronicles, and in his tragedies, when Greek or Roman story could give any light, no pains have been omitted to set passages right, by comparing my author with his originals; for, as I have frequently observed, he was a close and accurate copier wherever his fable was founded on history.

Wherever the author's sense is clear and discoverable, (though, perchance, low and trivial), I have not by any innovation tampered with his text, out of an ostentation of endeavouring to make him speak better than the old copies have done.

Where, through all the former editions, a passage has laboured under flat nonsense and invincible darkness, if, by the addition or alteration of a letter or two, or a transposition in the pointing, I have restored to him both sense and sentiment; such corrections, I am persuaded, will need no indulgence.

And whenever I have taken a greater latitude and liberty in amending, I have constantly endeavoured to support my corrections and conjectures by parallel passages and authorities from himself, the surest means of expounding any author whatsoever. "*Cette voie d'interpreter un auteur par lui-meme est plus sure que*

tous les commentaires,” says a very learned French critick.

As to my notes, (from which the common and learned readers of our author, I hope, will derive some satisfaction), I have endeavoured to give them a variety in some proportion to their number. Wherever I have ventured at an emendation, a note is constantly subjoined to justify and assert the reason of it. Where I only offer a conjecture, and do not disturb the text, I fairly set forth my grounds for such conjecture, and submit it to judgment. Some remarks are spent in explaining passages, where the wit or satire depends on an obscure point of history: others, where allusions are to divinity, philosophy, or other branches of science. Some are added to show where there is a suspicion of our author having borrowed from the ancients: others, to show where he is rallying his contemporaries; or where he himself is rallied by them. And some are necessarily thrown in, to explain an obscure and obsolete term, phrase, or idea. I once intended to have added a complete and copious glossary; but as I have been importuned, and am prepared to give a correct edition of our author's poems, (in which many terms occur which are not to be met with in his plays), I thought a glossary to all Shakespeare's works more proper to attend that volume.

In reforming an infinite number of passages in the pointing, where the sense was before quite lost, I have frequently subjoined notes to show the depraved, and to prove the reformed, pointing: a part of labour in this work which I could very willingly have spared myself. May it not be objected, why then have you burdened us with these notes? The answer is obvious,

and if I mistake not, very material. Without such notes, these passages in subsequent editions would be liable, through the ignorance of printers and correctors, to fall into the old confusion: whereas, a note on every one hinders all possible return to depravity: and forever secures them in a state of purity and integrity not to be lost or forfeited.

Again, as some notes have been necessary to point out the detection of the corrupted text, and establish the restoration of the genuine reading; some others have been as necessary for the explanation of passages obscure and difficult. To understand the necessity and use of this part of my task, some particulars of my author's character are previously to be explained. There are obscurities in him, which are common to him with all poets of the same species; there are others, the issue of the times he lived in; and there are others, again, peculiar to himself. The nature of comick poetry being entirely satirical, it busies itself more in exposing what we call caprice and humour, than vices cognizable to the laws. The English, from the happiness of a free constitution, and a turn of mind peculiarly speculative and inquisitive, are observed to produce more humourists, and a greater variety of original characters, than any other people whatsoever: and these owing their immediate birth to the peculiar genius of each age, an infinite number of things alluded to, glanced at, and exposed, must needs become obscure, as the characters themselves are antiquated and disused. An editor, therefore, should be well versed in the history and manners of his author's age, if he aims at doing him a service in this respect.

Besides, wit lying mostly in the assemblage of ideas,

and in putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance, or congruity, to make up pleasant pictures, and agreeable visions in the fancy; the writer, who aims at wit, must of course, range far and wide for materials. Now the age in which Shakespeare lived, having, above all others, a wonderful affection to appear learned, they declined vulgar images, such as are immediately fetched from nature, and ranged through the circle of the sciences, to fetch their ideas from thence. But as the resemblances of such ideas to the subject must necessarily lie very much out of the common way, and every piece of wit appear a riddle to the vulgar; this, that should have taught them the forced, quaint, unnatural tract they were in, (and induce them to follow a more natural one), was the very thing that kept them attached to it. The ostentatious affectation of abstruse learning, peculiar to that time, the love that men naturally have to everything that looks like mystery, fixed them down to the habit of obscurity. Thus became the poetry of Donne (though the wittiest man of that age), nothing but a continued heap of riddles. And our Shakespeare, with all his easy nature about him, for want of the knowledge of the true rules of art, falls frequently into this vicious manner.

The third species of obscurities which deform our author, as the effects of his own genius and character, are those that proceed from his peculiar manner of thinking, and as peculiar a manner of clothing those thoughts. With regard to this thinking, it is certain that he had a general knowledge of all the sciences: but his acquaintance was rather that of a traveller than a native. Nothing in philosophy was unknown to him;

but every thing in it had the grace and force of novelty. And as novelty is one main source of admiration, we are not to wonder that he has perpetual allusions to the most recondite parts of the sciences: and this was done not so much out of affectation, as the effect of admiration begot by novelty. Then, as to his style and diction, we may much more justly apply to Shakespeare, what a celebrated writer said of Milton: Our language sunk under him, and was unequal to that greatness of soul which furnished him with such glorious conceptions. He therefore frequently uses old words, to give his diction an air of solemnity; as he coins others, to express the novelty and variety of his ideas.

Upon every distinct species of these obscurities, I have thought it my province to employ a note for the service of my author, and the entertainment of my readers. A few transient remarks too I have not scrupled to intermix, upon the poet's negligence and omissions in point of art; but I have done it always in such a manner, as will testify my deference and veneration for the immortal author. Some censurers of Shakespeare, and particularly Mr. Rymer,⁸ have taught me to distinguish betwixt the railer and critick. The outrage of his quotations is so remarkably violent, so pushed beyond all bounds of decency and sober reasoning, that it quite carries over the mark at which it was levelled. Extravagant abuse throws off the edge of the intended disparagement, and turns the madman's weapon into his own bosom. In short, as to Rymer, this is my opinion of him from his criticisms on the trage-

⁸ "A Short View of Tragedy," etc., "with some reflections on Shakespeare and other practitioners for the stage," by Thomas Rymer, 1693.

dies of the last age. He writes with great vivacity, and appears to have been a scholar: but as for his knowledge of the art of poetry, I cannot perceive it was any deeper than his acquaintance with Bossu and Dacier, from whom he has transcribed many of his best reflections. The late Mr. Gildon^o was one attached to Rymer by a similar way of thinking and studies. They were both of that species of criticks who are desirous of displaying their powers rather in finding faults, than in consulting the improvement of the world; the hypercritical part of the science of criticism.

I had not mentioned the modest liberty I have here and there taken of animadverting on my author, but that I was willing to obviate in time the splenetick exaggerations of my adversaries on this head. From past experiments I have reason to be conscious, in what light this attempt may be placed: and that what I call a modest liberty will, by a little of their dexterity, be inverted into downright impudence. From a hundred mean and dishonest artifices employed to discredit this edition, and to cry down its editor, I have all the grounds in nature to beware of attacks. But though the malice of wit, joined to the smoothness of versification, may furnish some ridicule; fact, I hope, will be able to stand its ground against banter and gaiety.

It has been my fate, it seems, as I thought it my duty, to discover some anachronisms in our author; which might have slept in obscurity but for this Restorer as Mr. Pope is pleased affectionately to style me: as for instance, where Aristotle is mentioned by *Hector* in

^o Charles Gildon, who published many "Remarks" and "Reflections" on Shakespeare, including a vindication against Rymer's "Short View."

“Troilus and Cressida”; and Galen, Cato, and Alexander the Great, in “Coriolanus.” These, in Mr. Pope’s opinion, are blunders, which the illiteracy of the first publishers of his works has fathered upon the poet’s memory: it not being at all credible, that these could be the errors of any man who had the least tincture of a school, or the least conversation with such as had. But I have sufficiently proved, in the course of my notes, that such anachronisms were the effect of poetick licence, rather than of ignorance in our poet. And if I may be permitted to ask a modest question by the way, why may not I restore an anachronism really made by our author, as well as Mr. Pope take the privilege to fix others upon him, which he never had it in his head to make; as I may venture to affirm he had not, in the instance of Sir Francis Drake, to which I have spoken in the proper place?

But who shall dare make any words about this freedom of Mr. Pope’s toward Shakespeare, if it can be proved, that, in his fits of criticism, he makes no more ceremony with good Homer himself? To try, then, a criticism of his own advancing: in the eighth book of the Odyssey, where Demodocus sings the episode of the loves of Mars and Venus; and that, upon their being taken in the net by Vulcan,

“ . . . *The god of arms*
Must pay the penalty for lawless charms;”

Mr. Pope is so kind gravely to inform us, “That Homer in this, as in many other places, seems to allude to the laws of Athens, where death was the punishment of adultery.” But how is this significant observation made out? Why, who can possibly object any thing to the

contrary?—Does not Pausanias relate that Draco, the lawgiver to the Athenians, granted impunity to any person that took revenge upon an adulterer? And was it not also the institution of Solon, that if any one took an adulterer in the fact, he might use him as he pleased? These things are very true: and to see what a good memory, and sound judgment in conjunction, can achieve though Homer's date is not determined down to a single year, yet it is pretty generally agreed that he lived above three hundred years before Draco and Solon: and that, it seems, has made him seem to allude to the very laws, which these two legislators propounded above three hundred years after. If this inference be not something like an anachronism or prolepsis, I will look once more into my lexicons for the true meaning of the words. It appears to me, that somebody besides Mars and Venus has been caught in a net by this episode: and I could call in other instances, to confirm what treacherous tackle this net-work is, if not cautiously handled.

How just, notwithstanding, I have been in detecting the anachronisms of my author, and in defending him for the use of them, our late editor seems to think, they should rather have slept in obscurity: and the having discovered them is sneered at, as a sort of wrong-headed sagacity.

The numerous corrections which I have made of the poet's text in my *Shakespeare Restored*, and which the publick have been so kind to think well of, are in the appendix of Mr. Pope's last edition, slightly called various readings, guesses, &c. He confesses to have inserted as many of them as he judged of any the least advantage to the poet; but says, that the whole

amounted to about twenty-five words: and pretends to have annexed a complete list of the rest, which were not worth his embracing. Whoever has read my book will, at one glance, see how in both these points veracity is strained, so an injury might be done. *Malus, etsi obesse non pote, tamen cogitat.*

Another expedient to make my work appear of a trifling nature, has been an attempt to depreciate literal criticism. To this end, and to pay a servile compliment to Mr. Pope, an anonymous writer has, like a Scotch pedlar in wit, unbraced his pack on the subject. But, that his virulence might not seem to be levelled singly at me, he has done me the honour to join Dr. Bentley in the libel. I was in hopes we should have been both abused with smartness of satire at least, though not with solidity of argument; that it might have been worth some reply in defence of the science attacked. But I may fairly say of this author, as *Falstaff* does of *Poins*:—"Hang him, baboon! his wit is as thick as Tewksbury mustard; there is no more conceit in him, than is in a Mallet."¹⁰ If it be not a profanation to set the opinion of the divine Longinus against such a scribbler, he tells us expressly, "That to make a judgment upon words (and writings) is the most consummate fruit of much experience."

ἡ γὰρ τῶν λόγων χριστὶς πολλῆς εἰς πειρασὸς τελευταῖον ἐπιγενήμα.

Whenever words are depraved, the sense of course must be corrupted; and thence the reader is betrayed into a false meaning.

If the Latin and Greek languages have received the

¹⁰ David Mallet was the name of the "anonymous writer."

greatest advantages imaginable from the labours of the editors and critics of the last two ages, by whose aid and assistance the grammarians have been enabled to write infinitely better in that art than even the preceding grammarians, who wrote when those tongues flourished as living languages; I should account it a peculiar happiness that, by the faint essay I have made in this work, a path might be chalked out for abler hands, by which to derive the same advantages to our own tongue; a tongue which, though it wants none of the fundamental qualities of an universal language, yet, as a noble writer says, lisps and stammers as in its cradle, and has produced little more towards its polishing than complaints of its barbarity.

Having now run through all these points, which I intended should make any part of this dissertation, and having in my former edition made public acknowledgments of the assistances lent me, I shall conclude with a brief account of the methods taken in this.

It was thought proper, in order to reduce the bulk and price of the impression, that the notes, wherever they would admit of it, might be abridged; for which reason I have curtailed a great quantity of such, in which explanations were too prolix, or authorities in support of an emendation too numerous; and many I have entirely expunged, which were judged rather verbose and declamatory (and so notes merely of ostentation) than necessary or instructive.

The few literal errors which had escaped notice for want of revisals, in the former edition, are here reformed, and the pointing of innumerable passages is regulated with all the accuracy I am capable of.

I shall decline making any further declaration of the

pains I have taken upon my author, because it was my duty, as his editor, to publish him with my best care and judgment; and because I am sensible all such declarations are construed to be laying a sort of debt on the public. As the former edition has been received with much indulgence, I ought to make my acknowledgments to the town for their favourable opinion of it, and I shall always be proud to think that encouragement the best payment I can hope to receive for my poor studies.

SIR THOMAS HANMER

1677-1746

SIR THOMAS HANMER, of a distinguished county family, was born at the family seat in Hanmer, Suffolk, September 24, 1677, and died May 7, 1746.

He was a student of Christ Church, Oxford, and occupied himself during the entire years of his life with politics of the High-Church tory stamp. In spite of his aristocratic convictions, however, he was one of the keenest advocates for the Protestant Succession. He was a member of Parliament for various constituencies from 1701 to 1727. In 1714 he was elected Speaker of the House of Commons and was in that high office at the death of Queen Anne. Retiring from public life in 1727, he devoted the balance of his days to gardening and literature.

Under the auspices of Oxford University he brought out a superbly printed edition of Shakespeare's works in six volumes, quarto, in 1744. His critical powers were not conspicuous, although some of his readings were of value enough to be adopted by later editors. The Oxford edition was an elegant and ornamental piece of book-making, containing many engravings, a worthy shrine for the great poet's literary remains.

The "Dunciad" has this reference to Hanmer:

"There moved Montalto with superior air,
His stretched out arms displayed a volume fair,
Courtiers and patriots in two ranks divide
Through both he passed and bowed from side to side."

SIR THOMAS HANMER'S PREFACE

[Prefixed to quarto edition in six volumes, 1744.]

WHAT the public is here to expect is a true and correct edition of Shakespeare's works, cleared from the corruption with which they have hitherto abounded. One of the great admirers of this incomparable author hath made it the amusement of his leisure hours for many years past to look over his writings with a careful eye to note the obscurities and absurdities introduced into the text, and according to the best of his judgment to restore the genuine sense and purity of it. In this he proposed nothing to himself but his private satisfaction in making his own copy as perfect as he could; but as the emendations multiplied upon his hands other gentlemen, equally fond of the author, desired to see them, and some were so kind as to give their assistance, by communicating their observations and conjectures upon difficult passages which had occurred to them. Thus by degrees the work growing more considerable than was at first expected, they who had the opportunity of looking into it, too partial perhaps in their judgment, thought it worth being made public; and he who hath with difficulty yielded to their persuasions is far from desiring to reflect upon the late editors for the omissions and defects which they left to be supplied by others who should follow them in the same province. On the contrary, he thinks the world much obliged to them for the progress they made in weeding out so great a number of blunders and mistakes as they have done; and probably he who hath carried on the work might never have thought of such an undertaking if he had not found a considerable part so done to his hands.



ST. THOMAS HANMER.

From what causes it proceeded that the works of this author, in the first publication of them, were more injured and abused than perhaps any that ever passed the press, hath been sufficiently explained in the preface to Mr. Pope's edition, which is here subjoined, and there needs no more to be said upon that subject. This only the reader is desired to bear in mind, that as the corruptions are more numerous and of a grosser kind than can be well conceived but by those who have looked nearly into them, so in the correcting them this rule hath been most strictly observed, not to give a loose to fancy or indulge a licentious spirit of criticism, as if it were fit for any one to presume to judge what Shakespeare ought to have written, instead of endeavouring to discover truly and retrieve what he did write; and so great caution hath been used in this respect that no alterations have been made but what the sense necessarily required, what the measure of the verse often helped to point out, and what the similitude of words in the false reading and in the true, generally speaking, appeared very well to justify.

Most of these passages are here thrown to the bottom of the page and rejected as spurious, which were stigmatised as such in Mr. Pope's edition, and it were to be wished that more had then undergone the same sentence. The promoter of the present edition hath ventured to discard but few more upon his own judgment, the most considerable of which is that wretched piece of ribaldry in "King Henry the Fifth,"¹ put into the mouths of the French princess and an old gentlewoman, improper enough as it is all in French, and not intelligible to an English audience; and yet that perhaps is

¹ Act III. 4.

the best thing that can be said of it. There can be no doubt but a great deal more of that low stuff, which disgraces the works of this great author, was foisted in by the players after his death to please the vulgar audiences by which they subsisted; and though some of the poor witticisms and conceits must be supposed to have fallen from his pen, yet as he hath put them generally into the mouths of low and ignorant people, so it is to be remembered that he wrote for the stage, rude and unpolished as it then was, and the vicious taste of the age must stand condemned for them, since he hath left upon record a signal proof how much he despised them. In his play of "The Merchant of Venice,"² a clown is introduced quibbling in a miserable manner; upon which one, who bears the character of a man of sense, makes the following reflection: "How every fool can play upon a word! I think the best grace of wit will shortly turn into silence, and discourse grow commendable in none but parrots." He could hardly have found stronger words to express his indignation at those false pretences to wit then in vogue, and therefore, though such trash is frequently interspersed in his writings, it would be unjust to cast it as an imputation upon his taste and judgment and character as a writer.

There being many words in Shakespeare which are grown out of use and obsolete, and many borrowed from other languages which are not enough naturalised or known among us, a glossary is added at the end of the work, for the explanation of all those terms which have hitherto been so many stumbling blocks to the generality of readers; and where there is any obscurity in the

² Act III. 5.

text, not arising from the words, but from a reference to some antiquated customs now forgotten, or other causes of that kind, a note is put at the bottom of the page, to clear up the difficulty.

With these several helps, if that rich vein of sense which runs through the works of this author can be retrieved in every part, and brought to appear in its true light, and if it may be hoped, without presumption, that this is here effected, they who love and admire him will receive a new pleasure, and all probably will be more ready to join in doing him justice, who does great honour to his country as a rare and perhaps a singular genius; one who hath attained a high degree of perfection in those two great branches of poetry, tragedy and comedy, different as they are in their natures from each other, and who may be said without partiality to have equalled, if not excelled, in both kinds, the best writers of any age or country, who have thought it glory enough to distinguish themselves in either.

Since therefore other nations have taken care to dignify the work of their most celebrated poets with the fairest impressions beautified with the ornaments of sculpture, well may our Shakespeare be thought to deserve no less consideration; and as a fresh acknowledgement hath lately been paid to his merit, and a high regard to his name and memory by erecting his statue at a public expense,³ so it is desired that this new edition of his works, which hath cost some attention and care, may be looked upon as another small monument designed and dedicated to his honour.

³The monument set up in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey, 1741.

WILLIAM WARBURTON

1698-1779

WILLIAM WARBURTON was born, the son of a Newark attorney, December 4, 1698, and died Bishop of Gloucester, June 7, 1779. He was educated at various small schools, and in 1714 articled in an attorney's office. Always a great reader, he included theology in his list of subjects, and was led to take orders in the English Church (1723). Awarded the M.A. degree by Cambridge in 1728, he was successively curate, vicar, King's Chaplain, Lincoln's Inn Preacher, Prebendary, Dean, and finally Bishop of Gloucester.

He was a voluminous and vigorous writer mainly in apologetics. His chief work, the "Divine Legation of Moses," was severely handled by Gibbon, the historian. It was a brilliant, scholarly, but paradoxical and futile mass of learning.

He and Pope formed a friendly alliance, although the parson had at one time roundly abused the poet.

In 1747 he brought out a new edition of Shakespeare's works, founded upon, although not bound by, Pope's text. He was a critic of the slashing order, and added little of value to the fast accumulating commentaries. He quarrelled fiercely with Theobald, accusing him of both ignorance and lack of critical ability. Time, however, did not justify the criticism. Warburton's Introduction is interesting reading.

WILLIAM WARBURTON'S PREFACE

[Prefixed to an octavo edition in eight volumes, 1747.]

It hath been no unusual thing for writers, when dissatisfied with the patronage or judgment of their own times, to appeal to posterity for a fair hearing. Some have even thought fit to apply to it in the first instance, and to decline acquaintance with the public till envy and prejudice had quite subsided. But, of all the trusters to futurity, commend me to the author of the following poems, who not only left it to time to do him justice as it would, but to find him out as it could. For what between too great attention to his profit as a player, and too little to his reputation as a poet, his works, left to the care of door-keepers and prompters, hardly escaped the common fate of those writings, how good soever, which are abandoned to their own fortune, and unprotected by party or cabal. At length, indeed, they struggled into light, but so disguised and travestied that no classic author, after having run ten secular stages through the blind cloisters of monks and canons, ever came out in half so maimed and mangled a condition. But for a full account of his disorders, I refer the reader to the excellent discourse which follows,¹ and turn myself to consider the remedies that have been applied to them.

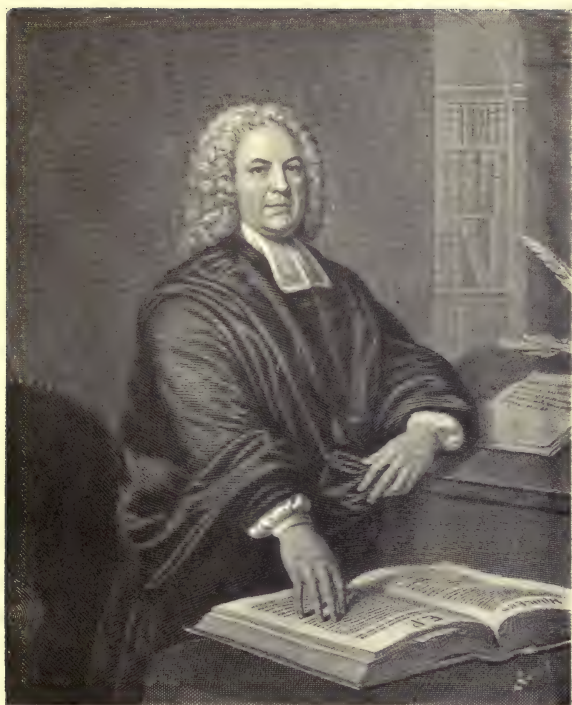
Shakespeare's works, when they escaped the players, did not fall into much better hands when they came amongst printers and booksellers; who, to say the truth, had at first but small encouragement for putting them into a better condition. The stubborn nonsense with which he was incrustated occasioned his lying long neg-

¹ Pope's Preface.

lected amongst the common lumber of the stage. And when that resistless splendour which now shoots all around him had, by degrees, broke through the shell of those impurities, his dazzled admirers became as suddenly insensible to the extraneous scurf that still stuck upon him as they had been before to the native beauties that lay under it. So that, as then he was thought not to deserve a cure, he was now supposed not to need any.

His growing eminence, however, required that he should be used with ceremony, and he soon had his appointment of an editor in form. But the bookseller, whose dealing was with wits, having learned of them I know not what silly maxim, that none but a poet should presume to meddle with a poet, engaged the ingenious Mr. Rowe to undertake this employment. A wit indeed he was, but so utterly unacquainted with the whole business of criticism that he did not even collate or consult the first editions of the work he undertook to publish, but contented himself with giving us a meagre account of the author's life, interlarded with some commonplace scraps from his writings. The truth is, Shakespeare's condition was yet but ill understood. The nonsense, now, by consent, conceived for his own, was held in a kind of reverence for its age and author, and thus it continued till another great poet broke the charm by showing us that the higher we went, the less of it was still to be found.

For the proprietors, not discouraged by their first unsuccessful effort, in due time made a second; and, though they still stuck to their poets, with infinitely more success in their choice of Mr. Pope, who, by the mere force of an uncommon genius, without any par-



your most affectionate and
faithfull humble Servt
W. Gloucester

ticular study or profession of this art, discharged the great parts of it so well as to make his edition the best foundation for all further improvements. He separated the genuine from the spurious plays; and with equal judgment, though not always with the same success, attempted to clear the genuine plays from the interpolated scenes. He then consulted the old editions, and, by a careful collation of them, rectified the faulty, and supplied the imperfect reading in a great number of places. And lastly, in an admirable preface, hath drawn a general, but very lively sketch of Shakespeare's poetic character, and, in the corrected text, marked out those peculiar strokes of genius which were most proper to support and illustrate that character. Thus far Mr. Pope. And although much more was to be done before Shakespeare could be restored to himself (such as amending the corrupted text where the printed books afford no assistance, explaining his licentious phraseology and obscure allusions, and illustrating the beauties of his poetry), yet, with great modesty and prudence, our illustrious author left this to the critick by profession.

But nothing will give the common reader a better idea of the value of Mr. Pope's edition than the two attempts which have been since made by Mr. Theobald and Sir Thomas Hanmer in opposition to it; who, although they concerned themselves only in the first of these three parts of criticism, the restoring the text (without any conception of the second, or venturing even to touch upon the third), yet succeeded so very ill in it that they left their author in ten times a worse condition than they found him. But, as it was my ill fortune to have some accidental connections with these two gentlemen, it

will be incumbent on me to be a little more particular concerning them.

The one was recommended to me as a poor man, the other as a poor critic, and to each of them, at different times, I communicated a great number of observations which they managed, as they saw fit, to the relief of their several distresses. As to Mr. Theobald, who wanted money, I allowed him to print what I gave him for his own advantage, and he allowed himself in the liberty of taking one part for his own, and sequestering another for the benefit, as I supposed, of some future edition. But, as to the Oxford editor, who wanted nothing but what he might very well be without, the reputation of a critick, I could not so easily forgive him for trafficking with my papers without my knowledge; and when that project failed, for employing a number of my conjectures in his edition against my express desire not to have that honour done unto me.

Mr. Theobald was naturally turned to industry and labour. What he read he could transcribe; but as to what he thought, if ever he did think, he could but ill express, so he read on, and by that means got a character of learning, without risking to every observer the imputation of wanting a better talent. By a punctilious collation of the old books he corrected what was manifestly wrong in the latter editions by what was manifestly right in the earlier. And this is his real merit, and the whole of it. For where the phrase was very obsolete or licentious in the common books, or only slightly corrupted in the other, he wanted sufficient knowledge of the progress and various stages of the English tongue, as well as acquaintance with the peculiarity of Shakespeare's language, to understand what

was right; nor had he either common judgment to see, or critical sagacity to amend, what was manifestly faulty. Hence he generally exerts his conjectural talent in the wrong place; he tampers with what is found in the common books, and, in the old ones, omits all notice of variations, the sense of which he did not understand.

How the Oxford editor came to think himself qualified for this office, from which his whole course of life had been so remote, is still more difficult to conceive. For whatever parts he might have either of genius or erudition, he was absolutely ignorant of the art of criticism, as well as of the poetry of that time, and the language of his author. And so far from the thought of examining the first editions, that he even neglected to compare Mr. Pope's, from which he printed his own, with Mr. Theobald's; whereby he lost the advantage of many fine lines, which the other had recovered from the old quartos. Where he trusts to his own sagacity, in what affects the sense, his conjectures are generally absurd and extravagant, and violating every rule of criticism. Though, in this rage of correcting, he was not absolutely destitute of all art. For, having a number of my conjectures before him, he took as many of them as he saw fit to work upon, and by changing them to something he thought synonymous or similar he made them his own and so became a critick at a cheap expense. But how well he hath succeeded in this, as likewise in his conjectures which are properly his own, will be seen in the course of my remarks; though, as he hath declined to give the reasons for his interpolations he hath not afforded me so fair a hold of him as Mr. Theobald hath done, who was less cautious. But his principal object

was to reform his author's numbers, and this, which he hath done on every occasion, by the insertion or omission of a set of harmless unconcerning expletives, makes up the gross body of his innocent corrections. And so, in spite of that extreme negligence in numbers which distinguishes the first dramattick writers, he hath tricked up the old bard, from head to foot, in all the finical exactness of a modern measurer of syllables.

For the rest, all the corrections which these two editors have made on any reasonable foundation are here admitted into the text and carefully assigned to their respective authors, a piece of justice which the Oxford editor never did, and which the other was not always scrupulous in observing towards me. To conclude with them in a word, they separately possessed those two qualities which, more than any other, have contributed to bring the art of criticism into disrepute—dulness of apprehension, and extravagance of conjecture.

I am now to give some account of the present undertaking. For as to all those things which have been published under the title of Essays, Remarks, Observations, etc., on Shakespeare (if you except some critical notes on "Macbeth," given as a specimen of a projected edition, and written, as appears, by a man of parts and genius), the rest are absolutely below a serious notice.²

The whole a critick can do for an author who deserves his service is to correct the faulty text, to remark the peculiarities of language, to illustrate the obscure allusions, and to explain the beauties and defects of sentiment or composition. And surely, if ever author had a claim to this service, it was our Shakespeare; who,

² Dr. Johnson.

widely excelling in the knowledge of human nature, hath given to his infinitely varied pictures of it, such truth of design, such force of drawing, such beauty of colouring, as was hardly ever equalled by any writer, whether his aim was the use, or only the entertainment of mankind. The notes in this edition, therefore, take in the whole compass of criticism.

I. The first sort is employed in restoring the poet's genuine text, but in those places only where it labours with inextricable nonsense; in which, how much soever I may have given scope to critical conjecture, where the old copies failed me, I have indulged nothing to fancy or imagination, but have religiously observed the severe canons of literal criticism, as may be seen from the reasons accompanying every alteration from the common text. Nor would a different conduct have become a critic whose greatest attention, in this part, was to vindicate the established reading from interpolations occasioned by the fanciful extravagances of others. I once intended to have given the reader a body of canons for literal criticism, drawn out in form, as well such as concern the art in general, as those that arise from the nature and circumstances of our author's works in particular. And this for two reasons. First, to give the unlearned reader a just idea, and consequently a better opinion of the art of criticism, now sunk very low in the popular esteem, by the attempts of some who would needs exercise it without either natural or acquired talents, and by the ill success of others who seemed to have lost both when they come to try them upon English authors. Secondly, to deter the unlearned writer from wantonly trifling with an art he is a stranger to, at the expence of his own reputation and the integrity of the

text of established authors. But these uses may be well supplied by what is occasionally said upon the subject in the course of the following remarks.

II. The second sort of notes consists in an explanation of the author's meaning when by one or more of these causes it becomes obscure: either from a licentious use of terms, or a hard or ungrammatical construction, or lastly, from far-fetched or quaint allusions.

1. This licentious use of words is almost peculiar to the language of Shakespeare. To common terms he hath affixed meanings of his own, unauthorised by use, and not to be justified by analogy. And this liberty he hath taken with the noblest parts of speech, such as mixed modes, which, as they are most susceptible of abuse, so that abuse much hurts the clearness of the discourse. The criticks (to whom Shakespeare's licence was still as much a secret as his meaning which that licence had obscured) fell into two contrary mistakes, but equally injurious to his reputation and his writings. For some of them, observing a darkness that pervades his whole expression, have censured him for confusion of ideas and inaccuracy of reasoning. "In the neighing of a horse (says Rymer) or in the growling of a mastiff, there is a meaning, there is a lively expression, and, I may say, more humanity than many times in the tragical flights of Shakespeare." The ignorance of which censure is of a piece with its brutality. The truth is, no one thought clearer, or argued more closely, than this immortal bard. But his superiority of genius less needing the intervention of words in the act of thinking, when he came to draw out his contemplations into discourse, he took up (as he was hurried on by the torrent of his matter) with the first words that lay in

his way; and if, amongst these, there were two mixed modes that had but a principal idea in common, it was enough for him. He regarded them as synonymous, and would use the one for the other without fear or scruple. Again, there have been others, such as the two last editors, who have fallen into a contrary extreme, and regarded Shakespeare's anomalies (as we may call them) amongst the corruptions of his text; which, therefore, they have cashiered in great numbers to make room for a jargon of their own. This hath put me to additional trouble, for I had not only their interpolations to throw out again, but the genuine text to replace and establish in its stead, which, in many cases could not be done without showing the peculiar sense of the terms and explaining the causes which led the poet to so perverse a use of them. I had it once, indeed, in my design, to give a general alphabetic glossary of those terms; but as each of them is explained in its proper place, there seems the less occasion for such an index.

2. The poet's hard and unnatural construction had a different original. This was the effect of mistaken art and design. The publick taste was in its infancy, and delighted (as it always does during this state) in the high and turgid; which leads the writer to disguise a vulgar expression with hard and forced construction, whereby the sentence frequently becomes cloudy and dark. Here his criticks show their modesty, and leave him to himself. For the arbitrary change of a word doth little towards dispelling an obscurity that ariseth, not from the licentious use of a single term, but from the unnatural arrangement of a whole sentence. And they risqued nothing by their silence. For Shakespeare

was too clear in fame to be suspected of a want of meaning, and too high in fashion for anyone to own he needed a critick to find it out. Not but, in his best works, we must allow, he is often so natural and flowing, so pure and correct, that he is even a model for style and language.

3. As to his far-fetched and quaint allusions, these are often a cover to common thoughts; just as his hard construction is to common expression. When they are not so, the explanation of them has this further advantage that, in clearing the obscurity, you frequently discover some latent conceit not unworthy of his genius.

III. The third and last sort of notes is concerned in a critical explanation of the author's beauties and defects; but chiefly of his beauties, whether in style, thought, sentiment, character, or composition. An odd humour of finding fault hath long prevailed amongst the criticks, as if nothing were worth remarking that did not at the same time deserve to be reprov'd. Whereas the publick judgment hath less need to be assisted in what it shall reject than in what it ought to prize, men being generally more ready at spying faults than in discovering beauties. Nor is the value they set upon a work a certain proof that they understand it. For it is ever seen that half a dozen voices of credit give the lead, and if the publick chance to be in good humour, or the author much in their favour, the people are sure to follow. Hence it is that the true critick hath so frequently attached himself to works of established reputation: not to teach the world to admire, which, in those circumstances, to say the truth, they are apt enough to do of themselves, but to teach them how

with reason to admire; no easy matter, I will assure you, on the subject in question, for though it be very true, as Mr. Pope hath observed, that Shakespeare is the fairest and fullest subject for criticism, yet it is not such a sort of criticism as may be raised mechanically on the rules which Dacier, Rapin, and Bossu have collected from antiquity, and of which such kind of writers as Rymer, Gildon, Dennis, and Oldmixon have only gathered and chewed the husks. Nor, on the other hand, is it to be formed on the plan of those crude and superficial judgments on books and things with which a certain celebrated paper so much abounds;³ too good, indeed, to be named with the writers last mentioned, but being unluckily mistaken for a model, because it was an original, it hath given rise to a deluge of the worst sort of critical jargon—I mean that which looks most like sense. But the kind of criticism here required is such as judgeth our author by those only laws and principles on which he wrote, nature and common-sense.

Our observations, therefore, being thus extensive, will, I presume, enable the reader to form a right judgment of this favourite poet without drawing out his character, as was once intended, in a continued discourse.

These, such as they are, were among my younger amusements when, many years ago, I used to turn over these sort of writers to unbend myself from more serious applications; and what certainly the publick at this time of day had never been troubled with, but for the conduct of the two last editors, and the persuasion of dear Mr. Pope, whose memory and name,

“ . . . semper acerbum,
Semper honoratum (sic Di voluistis) habebo.”

³ *The Spectator.*

He was desirous I should give a new edition of this poet, as he thought it might contribute to put a stop to a prevailing folly of altering the text of celebrated authors without talents or judgment. And he was willing that his edition should be melted down into mine, as it would, he said, afford him (so great is the modesty of an ingenuous temper) a fit opportunity of confessing his mistakes. In memory of our friendship, I have therefore made it our joint edition. His admirable preface is here added; all his notes are given, with his name annexed; the scenes are divided according to his regulation; and the most beautiful passages distinguished, as in his book, with inverted commas. In imitation of him, I have done the same by as many others as I thought most deserving of the reader's attention, and have marked them with double commas.

If, from all this, Shakespeare or good letters have received any advantage, and the publick any benefit or entertainment, the thanks are due to the proprietors, who have been at the expence of procuring this edition. And I should be unjust to several deserving men of a reputable and useful profession if I did not, on this occasion, acknowledge the fair dealing I have always found amongst them, and profess my sense of the unjust prejudice which lies against them; whereby they have been hitherto unable to procure that security for their property which they see the rest of their fellow-citizens enjoy; a prejudice in part arising from the frequent piracies (as they are called) committed by members of their own body. But such kind of members no body is without. And it would be hard that this should be turned to the discredit of the honest part of the pro-

fession, who suffer more from such injuries than any other men. It hath in part, too, arisen from the clamours of profligate scribblers, ever ready for a piece of money, to prostitute their bad sense for or against any cause, profane or sacred, or in any scandal, publick or private; these meeting with little encouragement from men of account in the trade (who, even in this enlightened age, are not the very worst judges or rewarders of merit), apply themselves to people of condition, and support their importunities by false complaints against booksellers.

But I should now, perhaps, rather think of my own apology than busy myself in the defence of others. I shall have some *Tartuffe* ready on the first appearance of this edition to call out again and tell me that I suffer myself to be wholly diverted from my purpose by these matters less suitable to my clerical profession. "Well, but (says a friend) why not take so candid an intimation in good part? Withdraw yourself again, as you are bid, into the clerical pale; examine the records of sacred and profane antiquity, and on them erect a work to the confusion of infidelity." Why, I have done all this, and more; and hear now what the same men have said to it. They tell me, I have wrote to the wrong and injury of religion, and furnished out more handles for unbelievers. "Oh! now the secret is out; and you may have your pardon, I find, upon easier terms. It is only to write no more." Good gentlemen! and shall I not oblige them? They would gladly obstruct my way to those things which every man who endeavours well in his profession, must needs think he has some claim to when he sees them given to those who never did endeavour, at the same time that they would deter

me from taking those advantages which letters enable me to procure for myself. If then I am to write no more (though as much out of my profession as they may please to represent this work, I suspect their modesty would not insist on a scrutiny of our several applications of this profane profit and their purer gains), if, I say, I am to write no more, let me at least give the publick, who have a better pretence to demand it of me, some reason for my presenting them with these amusements; which, if I am not much mistaken, may be excused by the best and fairest examples; and, what is more, may be justified on the surer reason of things.

The great Saint Chrysostom, a name consecrated to immortality by his virtue and eloquence, is known to have been so fond of Aristophanes as to wake with him at his studies, and to sleep with him under his pillow; and I never heard that this was objected either to his piety or his preaching, not even in those times of pure zeal and primitive religion. Yet, in respect of Shakespeare's great sense, Aristophanes' best wit is but buffoonery; and in comparison of Aristophanes' freedoms, Shakespeare writes with the purity of a vestal. But they will say, St. Chrysostom contracted a fondness for the comick poet for the sake of his Greek. To this, indeed, I have nothing to reply. Far be it from me to insinuate so unscholar-like a thing, as if we had the same use for good English that a Greek had for his Attick elegance. Critick Kuster, in a taste and language peculiar to grammarians of a certain order, hath decreed that the history and chronology of Greek words is the most solid entertainment of a man of letters.

I fly then to a higher example, much nearer home, and still more in point, the famous university of Oxford.

This illustrious body, which hath long so justly held, and with such equity dispensed the chief honours of the learned world, thought good letters so much interested in correct editions of the best English writers, that they very lately in their publick capacity undertook one of this very author by subscription. And if the editor⁴ hath not discharged his task with suitable abilities for one so much honoured by them, this was not their fault, but his, who thrust himself into the employment. After such an example, it would be weakening any defence to seek further for authorities. All that can be now decently urged is the reason of the thing; and this I shall do, more for the sake of that truly venerable body than my own.

Of all the literary exercitations of speculative men, whether designed for the use or entertainment of the world, there are none of so much importance or what are more our immediate concern than those which let us into the knowledge of our nature. Others may exercise the reason, or amuse the imagination, but these only can improve the heart and form the human mind to wisdom. Now, in this science, our Shakespeare is confessed to occupy the foremost place, whether we consider the amazing sagacity with which he investigates every hidden spring and wheel of human action, or his happy manner of communicating this knowledge, in the just and living paintings which he has given us of all our passions, appetites and pursuits. These afford a lesson which can never be too often repeated, or too constantly inculcated, and to engage the reader's due attention to it hath been one of the principal objects of this edition.

⁴ Hanmer's edition was issued by the Oxford University Press.

As this science (whatever profound philosophers may think) is, to the rest, in things; so, in words (whatever supercilious pedants may talk), every one's mother tongue is to all other languages. This hath still been the sentiment of nature and true wisdom. Hence, the greatest men of antiquity never thought themselves better employed than in cultivating their own country idiom. So, Lycurgus did honour to Sparta in giving the first complete edition of Homer; and Cicero to Rome, in correcting the works of Lucretius. Nor do we want examples of the same good sense in modern times, even amidst the cruel inroads that art and fashion have made upon nature and the simplicity of wisdom. Menage, the greatest name in France for all kinds of philologick learning, prided himself in writing critical notes on their best lyric poet, Malherbe; and our greater Selden, when he thought it might reflect credit on his country, did not disdain even to comment a very ordinary poet, one Michael Drayton. But the English tongue, at this juncture, deserves and demands our particular regard. It hath, by means of the many excellent works of different kinds composed in it, engaged the notice and became the study of almost every curious and learned foreigner, so as to be thought even a part of literary accomplishment. This must needs make it deserving of a critical attention; and its being yet destitute of a test or standard to apply to in cases of doubt or difficulty, shows how much it wants that attention. For we have neither Grammar nor Dictionary, neither chart nor compass, to guide us through this wide sea of words. And indeed, how should we? since both are to be composed and finished on the authority of our best established writers. But their authority can be of little use till the

text hath been correctly settled, and the phraseology critically examined. As, then, by these aids, a Grammar and Dictionary planned upon the best rules of logick and philosophy (and none but such will deserve the name) are to be procured, the forwarding of this will be a general concern; for, as Quintillian observes, "*Verborum proprietates ac differentia omnibus, qui sermonem curam habent, debet esse communis.*" By this way, the Italians have brought their tongue to a degree of purity and stability which no living language ever attained unto before. It is with pleasure I observe that these things now begin to be understood among ourselves, and that I can acquaint the publick we may soon expect very elegant editions of Fletcher and Milton's "Paradise Lost," from gentlemen of distinguished abilities and learning. But this interval of good sense, as it may be short, is indeed but new. For I remember to have heard of a very learned man who, not long since, formed a design of giving a more correct edition of Spenser, and, without doubt, would have performed it well; but he was dissuaded from his purpose by his friends, as beneath the dignity of a professor of the occult sciences. Yet these very friends, I suppose, would have thought it added lustre to his high station to have new-furnished out some dull northern chronicle, or dark Sibylline ænigma. But let it not be thought that what is here said insinuates anything to the discredit of Greek and Latin criticism. If the follies of particular men were sufficient to bring any branch of learning into disrepute, I do not know any that would stand in a worse situation than that for which I now apologise. For I hardly think there ever appeared, in any learned language, so execrable a heap of nonsense, under the

name of commentaries, as hath been lately given us on a certain satyrick poet, of the past age, by his editor and coadjutor.⁵

I am sensible how unjustly the very best classical criticks have been treated. It is said that our great philosopher⁶ spoke with much contempt of the two finest scholars of this age, Dr. Bentley and Bishop Hare, for squabbling, as he expressed it, about an old play-book; meaning, I suppose, Terence's comedies. But this story is unworthy of him, though well enough suiting the fanatick turn of the wild writer that relates it. Such censures are amongst the follies of men immoderately given over to one science, and ignorantly undervaluing all the rest. Those learned criticks might, and perhaps did, laugh in their turn (though still, sure, with the same indecency and indiscretion) at that incomparable man, for wearing out a long life in poring through a telescope. Indeed, the weaknesses of such are to be mentioned with reverence. But who can bear, without indignation, the fashionable cant of every trifling writer, whose insipidity passes, with himself, for politeness, for pretending to be shocked, forsooth, with the rude and savage air of vulgar criticks; meaning such as Muretus, Scaliger, Casaubon, Salmasius, Spanheim, Bentley! When, had it not been for the deathless labours of such as these, the western world, at the revival of letters, had soon fallen back again into a state of ignorance and barbarity as deplorable as that from which Providence had just redeemed it.

To conclude with an observation of a fine writer and

⁵ Reed notes this reference as belonging to Dr. Grey's edition of *Hudibras*, 1744.

⁶ Sir Isaac Newton.

great philosopher of our own, which I would gladly bind, though with all honour, as a phylactery, on the brow of every awful grammarian, to teach him at once the use and limits of his art: *Words are the money of fools, and the counters of wise men.*⁷

⁷ "For words are wise men's counters,—they do but reckon by them; but they are the money of fools."—*Thos. Hobbes*, "The Leviathan." Part I., chap. iv.

SAMUEL JOHNSON

1709-1784

JOHNSON, the great leviathan of English letters in the eighteenth century, lexicographer and author of "Rasselas," was born September 18, 1709, the son of a bookseller of moderate means, in Lichfield, and died full of honours in London, December 13, 1784.

Prepared at various small schools, he entered Pembroke College at Oxford, and left after a stay of nearly three years without a degree. Married to a woman twenty years older than himself, a widow, Mrs. Porter, he tried school-keeping and failed. In 1737 he emigrated from the provinces to London, and beginning as a contributor to the "Gentleman's Magazine," embarked upon his half century career as the "great Cham" of English literature.

Passing over the works which have given him his fame, we note that his first contribution to the elucidation of Shakespeare was a pamphlet, "Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth" (1745). It was not until twenty years later (1765), that his edition of the Plays, in association with George Steevens, was published. The most valuable part of this work was the Introduction, which is, perhaps, the most famous of all contributions of a like character. His textual criticism did not add much to his reputation. His Shakespearean work was but a by-product of his most fruitful genius.

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON'S PREFACE.

[Prefixed to octavo edition in eight volumes, 1765.]

THAT praises are without reason lavished on the dead, and that the honours due only to excellence are paid to antiquity, is a complaint likely to be always continued by those, who, being able to add nothing to truth, hope for eminence from the heresies of paradox; or those, who, being forced by disappointment upon consolatory expedients, are willing to hope from posterity what the present age refuses, and flatter themselves that the regard which is yet denied by envy, will be at last bestowed by time.

Antiquity, like every other quality that attracts the notice of mankind, has undoubtedly votaries that reverence it, not from reason, but from prejudice. Some seem to admire indiscriminately whatever has been long preserved, without considering that time has sometimes cooperated with chance; all perhaps are more willing to honour past than present excellence; and the mind contemplates genius through the shades of age, as the eye surveys the sun through artificial opacity. The great contention of criticism is to find the faults of the moderns, and the beauties of the ancients. While an author is yet living, we estimate his powers by his worst performance; and when he is dead, we rate them by his best.

To works, however, of which the excellence is not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative; to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientifick, but appealing wholly to observation and experience, no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem. What mankind

have long possessed they have often examined and compared, and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favour. As among the works of nature no man can properly call a river deep, or a mountain high, without the knowledge of many mountains, and many rivers; so in the production of genius, nothing can be styled excellent till it has been compared with other works of the same kind. Demonstration immediately displays its power, and has nothing to hope or fear from the flux of years; but works tentative and experimental must be estimated by their proportion to the general and collective ability of man, as it is discovered in a long succession of endeavours. Of the first building that was raised, it might be with certainty determined that it was round or square; but whether it was spacious or lofty must have been referred to time. The Pythagorean scale of numbers was at once discovered to be perfect; but the poems of Homer we yet know not to transcend the common limits of human intelligence, but by remarking, that nation after nation, and century after century, has been able to do little more than transpose his incidents, new name his characters, and paraphrase his sentiments.

The reverence due to writings that have long subsisted, arises therefore, not from any credulous confidence in the superior wisdom of past pages, or gloomy persuasions of the degeneracy of mankind, but is the consequence of acknowledged and indubitable positions, that what has been longest known has been most considered, and what is most considered is best understood.

The poet, of whose works I have undertaken the



SAMUEL JOHNSON



revision, may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient, and claim the privilege of an established fame and prescriptive veneration. He has long outlived his century, the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit. Whatever advantages he might once derive from personal allusions, local customs, or temporary opinions, have for many years been lost; and every topick of merriment or motive of sorrow, which the modes of artificial life afforded him, now only obscure the scenes which they once illuminated. The effects of favour and competition are at an end; the tradition of his friendships and his enmities has perished; his works support no opinion with arguments, nor supply any faction with invectives; they can neither indulge vanity, nor gratify malignity; but are read without any other reason than the desire of pleasure, and are therefore praised only as pleasure is obtained; yet, thus unassisted by interest or passion, they have past through variations of taste and changes of manners, and, as they devolved from one generation to another, have received new honours at every transmission.

But because human judgment, though it be gradually gaining upon certainty, never becomes infallible; and approbation, though long continued, may yet be only the approbation of prejudice or fashion; it is proper to inquire, by what peculiarities of excellence Shakespeare has gained and kept the favour of his countrymen.

Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature. Particular manners can be known to few, and therefore few only can judge how nearly they are copied. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight awhile, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest;

the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.

Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world, by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can operate but upon small numbers; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions: they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find. His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species.

It is from this wide extension of design that so much instruction is derived. It is this which fills the plays of Shakespeare with practical axioms and domestick wisdom. It was said of Euripides, that every verse was a precept; and it may be said of Shakespeare, that from his works may be collected a system of civil and economical prudence. Yet his real power is not shown in the splendour of particular passages, but by the progress of his fable, and the tenor of his dialogue; and he that tries to recommend him by select quotations, will succeed like the pedant in Hierocles, who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen.

It will not easily be imagined how much Shakespeare excels in accommodating his sentiments to real life, but

by comparing him with other authors. It was observed of the ancient schools of declamation, that the more diligently they were frequented, the more was the student disqualified for the world, because he found nothing there which he should ever meet in any other place. The same remark may be applied to every stage but that of Shakespeare. The theatre, when it is under any other direction, is peopled by such characters as were never seen, conversing in a language which was never heard, upon topics which will never arise in the commerce of mankind. But the dialogue of this author is often so evidently determined by the incident which produces it, and is pursued with so much ease and simplicity, that it seems scarcely to claim the merit of fiction, but to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation, and common occurrences.

Upon every other stage the universal agent is love, by whose power all good and evil is distributed, and every action quickened or retarded. To bring a lover, a lady, and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest, and harass them with violence of desires inconsistent with each other; to make them meet in rapture, and part in agony; to fill their mouths with hyperbolical joy and outrageous sorrow; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered, is the business of a modern dramatist. For this, probability is violated, life is misrepresented, and language is depraved. But love is only one of many passions, and as it has no great influence upon the sum of life, it has little operation in the dramas of a poet, who caught his ideas from the

living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him. He knew, that any other passion, as it was regular or exorbitant, was a cause of happiness or calamity.

Characters thus ample and general were not easily discriminated and preserved, yet perhaps no poet ever kept his personages more distinct from each other. I will not say with Pope, that every speech may be assigned to the proper speaker, because many speeches there were which have nothing characteristical; but, perhaps, though some may be equally adapted to every person, it will be difficult to find any that can be properly transferred from the present possessor to another claimant. The choice is right, when there is reason for choice.

Other dramatists can only gain attention by hyperbolic or aggravated characters, by fabulous and unexampled excellence or depravity as the writers of barbarous romances invigorated the reader by a giant and a dwarf; and he that should form his expectation of human affairs from the play, or from the tale, would be equally deceived. Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken and acted on the same occasion: even where the agency is super-natural, the dialogue is level with life. Other writers disguise the most natural passions and most frequent incidents; so that he who contemplates them in the book will not know them in the world: Shakespeare approximates the remote, and familiarizes the wonderful; the event which he represents will not happen, but if it were possible, its effects would probably be such as he has assigned; and it may be said, that he has not only shown human nature as it acts in real exigencies,

but as it would be found in trials, to which it cannot be exposed.

This, therefore, is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life; that he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human sentiments in human language, by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions.

His adherence to general nature has exposed him to the censure of criticks, who form their judgments upon narrow principles. Dennis and Rymer think his Romans not sufficiently Roman; and Voltaire censures his kings as not completely royal. Dennis is offended, that Menenius, a senator of Rome, should play the buffoon; and Voltaire perhaps thinks decency violated when the Danish usurper is represented as a drunkard. But Shakespeare always makes nature predominate over accidents; and if he preserves the essential character, is not very careful of distinctions superinduced and adventitious. His story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men. He knew that Rome, like every other city, had men of all dispositions; and wanting a buffoon, he went into the senate-house for that which the senate-house would certainly have afforded him.

He was inclined to show an usurper and a murderer not only odious, but despicable; he therefore added drunkenness to his other qualities, knowing that kings love wine like other men, and that wine exerts its natural power upon kings. These are the petty cavils of petty minds; a poet overlooks the casual distinction of country

and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery.

The censure which he has incurred by mixing comick and tragick scenes, as it extends to all his works, deserves more consideration. Let the fact be first stated, and then examined.

Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hastening to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolick of another; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design.

Out of this chaos of mingled purposes and casualties the ancient poets, according to the laws which custom had prescribed, selected some the crimes of men, and some their absurdities: some the momentous vicissitudes of life, and some the lighter occurrences; some the terrors of distress, and some the gayeties of prosperity. Thus rose the two modes of imitation, known by the names of tragedy and comedy, compositions intended to promote different ends by contrary means, and considered as so little allied, that I do not recollect among the Greeks or Romans, a single writer who attempted both.

Shakespeare has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind, but in one composition.

Almost all his plays are divided between serious and ludicrous characters, and in the successive evolutions of the design, sometimes produce seriousness and sorrow, and sometimes levity and laughter.

That this is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism will be readily allowed; but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature. The end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing. That the mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied, because it included both in its alternations of exhibition, and approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life, by showing how great machinations and slender designs may promote or obviate one another, and the high and the low co-operate in the general system of unavoidable concatenation.

It is objected, that by this change of scenes the passions are interrupted in their progression, and that the principal event, being not advanced by a due gradation of preparatory incidents, wants at last the power to move, which constitutes the perfection of dramatick poetry. This reasoning is so specious, that it is received as true, even by those who in daily experience feel it to be false. The interchanges of mingled scenes seldom fail to produce the intended vicissitudes of passion. Fiction cannot move so much, but that the attention may be easily transferred; and though it must be allowed that pleasing melancholy be sometimes interrupted by unwelcome levity, yet let it be considered likewise, that melancholy is often not pleasing, and that the disturbance of one man may be the relief of another; that different auditors have different habitudes; and that, upon the whole, all pleasure consists in variety.

The players, who in their edition divided our author's works into comedies, histories, and tragedies, seem not to have distinguished the three kinds, by any very exact or definite ideas.

An action which ended happily to the principal persons, however serious or distressful through its intermediate incidents, in their opinion constituted a comedy. This idea of a comedy continued long amongst us, and plays were written, which, by changing the catastrophe, were tragedies to-day, and comedies to-morrow.

Tragedy was not in those times a poem of more general dignity or elevation than comedy; it required only a calamitous conclusion, with which the common criticism of that age was satisfied, whatever lighter pleasure it afforded in its progress.

History was a series of actions, with no other than chronological succession, dependent on each other, and without any tendency to introduce and regulate the conclusion. It is not always very nicely distinguished from tragedy. There is not much nearer approach to unity of action in the tragedy of "Antony and Cleopatra," than in the history of "Richard the Second." But a history might be continued through many plays; as it had no plan, it had no limits.

Through all these denominations of the drama, Shakespeare's mode of composition is the same; an interchange of seriousness and merriment, by which the mind is softened at one time, and exhilarated at another. But whatever be his purpose, whether to gladden or depress, or to conduct the story, without vehemence or emotion, through tracts of easy and familiar dialogue, he never fails to attain his purpose; as he commands

us, we laugh or mourn, or sit silent with quiet expectation, in tranquillity without indifference. When Shakespeare's plan is understood, most of the criticisms of Rymer and Voltaire vanish away. The play of "Hamlet" is opened, without impropriety, by two centinels; *Iago* bellows at *Brabantio's* window, without injury to the scheme of the play, though in terms which a modern audience would not easily endure; the character of *Polonius* is seasonable and useful; and the *Gravediggers* themselves may be heard with applause.

Shakespeare engaged in dramattick poetry with the world open before him; the rules of the ancients were yet known to few; the publick judgment was unformed; he had no example of such fame as might force him upon imitation, nor criticks of such authority as might restrain his extravagance: he therefore indulged his natural disposition, and his disposition, as Rymer has remarked, led him to comedy. In tragedy he often writes with great appearance of toil and study, what is written at last with little felicity; but in his comick scenes, he seems to produce without labour, what no labour can improve. In tragedy he is always struggling after some occasion to be comick, but in comedy he seems to repose, or to luxuriate, as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature. In his tragick scenes there is always something wanting, but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire. His comedy pleases by the thoughts and the language, and his tragedy for the greater part by incident and action. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct.

The force of his comick scenes has suffered little diminution from the changes made by a century and a half, in manners or in words. As his personages act upon

principles arising from genuine passion, very little modified by particular forms, their pleasures and vexations are communicable to all times and to all places; they are natural, and therefore durable; the adventitious peculiarities of personal habits, are only superficial dyes, bright and pleasing for a little while, yet soon faded to a dim tint, without any remains of former lustre; and the discrimination of true passion are the colours of nature; they pervade the whole mass, and can only perish with the body that exhibits them. The accidental compositions of heterogeneous modes are dissolved by the chance that combined them; but the uniform simplicity of primitive qualities neither admits increase, nor suffers decay. The sand heaped by one flood is scattered by another, but the rock always continues in its place. The stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabrics of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakespeare.

If there be, what I believe there is, in every nation, a style which never becomes obsolete, a certain mode of phraseology so consonant and congenial to the analogy and principles of its respective language, as to remain settled and unaltered: this style is probably to be sought in the common intercourse of life, among those who speak only to be understood, without ambition of elegance. The polite are always catching modish innovations, and the learned depart from established forms of speech, in hope of finding or making better; those who wish for distinction forsake the vulgar, when the vulgar is right; but there is a conversation above grossness and below refinement, where propriety resides, and where this poet seems to have gathered his comic dialogue. He is therefore, more agreeable to the ears

of the present age, than any other author equally remote, and among his other excellencies deserves to be studied as one of the original masters of our language.

These observations are to be considered not as unexceptionably constant, but as containing general and predominant truth. Shakespeare's familiar dialogue is affirmed to be smooth and clear, yet not wholly without ruggedness or difficulty; as a country may be eminently fruitful, though it has spots unfit for cultivation: his characters are praised as natural, though their sentiments are sometimes forced, and their actions improbable; as the earth upon the whole is spherical, though its surface is varied with protuberances and cavities.

Shakespeare, with his excellencies, has likewise faults, and faults sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit. I shall show them in the proportion in which they appear to me, without envious malignity or superstitious veneration. No question can be more innocently discussed than a dead poet's pretensions to renown; and little regard is due to that bigotry which sets candour higher than truth.

His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally; but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his

persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place.

The plots are often so loosely formed that a very slight consideration may improve them, and so carelessly pursued, that he seems not always fully to comprehend his own design. He omits opportunities of instructing or delighting, which the train of his story seems to force upon him, and apparently rejects those exhibitions which would be more affecting, for the sake of those which are more easy.

It may be observed, that in many of his plays, the latter part is evidently neglected. When he found himself near the end of his work, and in view of his reward, he shortened the labour to snatch the profit. He therefore remits his efforts where he should most vigorously exert them, and his catastrophe is improbably produced or imperfectly represented.

He had no regard to distinction of time or place, but gives to one age or nation, without scruple, the customs, institutions, and opinions of another, at the expence not only of likelihood, but of possibility. These faults Pope has endeavoured, with more zeal than judgment, to transfer to his imagined interpolators. We need not wonder to find *Hector* quoting Aristotle, when we see the loves of Theseus and Hippolyta combined with the Gothick mythology of fairies. Shakespeare, indeed, was not the only violator of chronology, for in the same age Sidney, who wanted not the advantages of learning, has, in his "Arcadia," confounded the pastoral with the

feudal times, the days of innocence, quiet, and security, with those of turbulence, violence, and adventure.

In his comick scenes, he is seldom very successful, when he engages his characters in reciprocations of smartness and contests of sarcasm; their jests are commonly gross, and their pleasantry licentious; neither his gentlemen nor his ladies have much delicacy, nor are sufficiently distinguished from his clowns by any appearance of refined manners. Whether he represented the real conversation of his time is not easy to determine; the reign of Elizabeth is commonly supposed to have been a time of stateliness, formality, and reserve, yet perhaps, the relaxations of that severity were not very elegant. There must, however, have been always some modes of gaiety preferable to others, and a writer ought to choose the best.

In tragedy his performance seems constantly to be worse, as his labour is more. The effusions of passion, which exigence forces out, are for the most part striking and energetick; but whenever he solicits his invention, or strains his faculties, the offspring of his throes is tumour, meanness, tediousness, and obscurity.

In narration he affects a disproportionate pomp of diction, and a wearisome train of circumlocution, and tells the incident imperfectly in many words, which might have been more plainly delivered in few. Narration in dramattick poetry is naturally tedious, as it is unanimated and inactive, and obstructs the progress of the action; it should, therefore, always be rapid, and enlivened by frequent interruption. Shakespeare found it an incumbrance, and instead of lightening it by brevity, endeavoured to recommend it by dignity and splendour.

His declamations or set speeches are commonly cold and weak, for his power was the power of nature; when he endeavoured, like other tragic writers, to catch opportunities of amplification, and instead of inquiring what the occasion demanded, to show how much his stores of knowledge could supply, he seldom escapes without the pity or resentment of his reader.

It is incident to him to be now and then entangled with an unwieldy sentiment, which he cannot well express, and will not reject; he struggles with it a while, and if it continues stubborn, comprises it in words such as occur, and leaves it to be disentangled and evolved by those who have more leisure to bestow upon it.

Not that always where the language is intricate, the thought is subtle, or the image always great where the line is bulky; the equality of words to things is very often neglected, and trivial sentiments and vulgar ideas disappoint the attention, to which they are recommended by sonorous epithets and swelling figures.

But the admirers of this great poet have most reason to complain when he approaches nearest to his highest excellence, and seems fully resolved to sink them in dejection, and mollify them with tender emotions by the fall of greatness, the danger of innocence, or the crosses of love. What he does best, he soon ceases to do. He is not long soft and pathetick without some idle conceit, or contemptible equivocation. He no sooner begins to move, than he counteracts himself; and terror and pity, as they are rising in the mind, are checked and blasted by sudden frigidity.

A quibble is to Shakespeare, what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf

him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disquisitions, whether he be enlarging knowledge, or exalting affection, whether he be amusing attention with incidents, or enchaining it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it by the sacrifice of reason, propriety and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.

It will be thought strange, that, in enumerating the defects of this writer, I have not yet mentioned his neglect of the unities; his violation of those laws which have been instituted and established by the joint authority of poets and criticks.

For his other deviations from the art of writing, I resign him to critical justice, without making any other demand in his favour than that which must be indulged to all human excellence; that his virtues be rated with his failings: but, from the censure which this irregularity may bring upon him, I shall, with due reverence to that learning which I must oppose, adventure to try how I can defend him.¹

His histories, being neither tragedies nor comedies, are not subject to any of their laws; nothing is more necessary to all the praise which they expect, than that

¹ For the best discussion of this much vexed question see Prof. Thos. R. Lounsbury's "Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist," Chapters I-III.

the changes of action be so prepared as to be understood, that the incidents be various and affecting, and the characters consistent, natural, and distinct. No other unity is intended, and therefore none is to be sought.

In his other works he has well enough preserved the unity of action. He has not, indeed, an intrigue regularly perplexed and regularly unravelled; he does not endeavour to hide his design only to discover it, for this is seldom the order of real events, and Shakespeare is the poet of nature: but his plan has commonly what Aristotle requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end; one event concatenated with another, and the conclusion follows by easy consequence. There are, perhaps, some incidents that might be spared, as in other poets there is much talk that only fills up time upon the stage; but the general system makes gradual advances, and the end of the play is the end of expectation.

To the unities of time and place, he has shown no regard; and perhaps a nearer view of the principles on which they stand will diminish their value, and withdraw from the veneration which, from the time of Corneille, they have very generally received, by discovering that they have given more trouble to the poet, than pleasure to the auditor.

The necessity of observing the unities of time and place arises from the supposed necessity of making the drama credible. The criticks hold it impossible that an action of months or years can be possibly believed to pass in three hours; or that the spectator can suppose himself to sit in the theatre, while ambassadors go and return between distant kings, while armies are levied and towns besieged, while an exile wanders and returns, or till he whom they saw courting his mistress, shall

lament the untimely fall of his son. The mind revolts from evident falsehood, and fiction loses its force when it departs from the resemblance of reality.

From the narrow limitation of time necessarily arises the contraction of place. The spectator, who knows that he saw the first act at Alexandria, cannot suppose that he sees the next at Rome, at a distance to which not the dragons of Medea could, in so short a time, have transported him; he knows with certainty that he has not changed his place; and he knows that place cannot change itself; that what was a house cannot become a plain; that what was Thebes can never be Persepolis.

Such is the triumphant language with which a critick exults over the misery of an irregular poet, and exults commonly without resistance or reply. It is time, therefore, to tell him, by the authority of Shakespeare, that he assumes, as an unquestionable principle, a position, which, while his breath is forming it into words, his understanding pronounces to be false. It is false, that any representation is mistaken for reality; that any dramattick fable in its materiality was ever credible, or, for a single moment, was ever credited.

The objection arising from the impossibility of passing the first hour at Alexandria, and the next at Rome, supposes, that when the play opens, the spectator really imagines himself at Alexandria, and believes that his walk to the theatre has been a voyage to Egypt, and that he lives in the days of Antony and Cleopatra. Surely he that imagines this may imagine more. He that can take the stage at one time for the palace of the Ptolemies, may take it in half an hour for the promontory of Actium. Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation; if the spectator can be once

persuaded, that his old acquaintance are Alexander and Cæsar, that a room illuminated with candles is the plain of Pharsalia, or the bank of Granicus, he is in a state of elevation above the reach of reason, or of truth, and from the heights of empyrean poetry, may despise the circumscriptions of terrestrial nature. There is no reason why a mind thus wandering in ecstasy should count the clock, or why an hour should not be a century in that calenture of the brains that can make the stage a field.

The truth is, that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players. They come to hear a certain number of lines recited with just gesture and elegant modulation. The lines relate to some action, and an action must be in some place; but the different actions that complete a story may be in places very remote from each other; and where is the absurdity of allowing that space to represent first Athens, and then Sicily, which was always known to be neither Sicily nor Athens, but a modern theatre?

By supposition, as place is introduced, time may be extended; the time required by the fable elapses, for the most part, between the acts; for, of so much of the action as is represented, the real and poetical duration is the same. If, in the first act, preparations for war against Mithridates are represented to be made in Rome, the event of the war may, without absurdity, be represented, in the catastrophe, as happening in Pontus; we know that there is neither war, nor preparation for war; we know that we are neither in Rome nor Pontus; that neither Mithridates nor Lucullus are before us.

The drama exhibits successive imitations of successive actions, and why may not the second imitation represent an action that happened years after the first; if it be so connected with it, that nothing but time can be supposed to intervene? Time is, of all modes of existence, most obsequious to the imagination; a lapse of years is as easily conceived as a passage of hours. In contemplation we easily contract the time of real actions, and therefore, willingly permit it to be contracted when we only see their imitation.

It will be asked, how the drama moves, if it is not credited. It is credited with all the credit due to a drama. It is credited, whenever it moves, as a just picture of a real original; as representing to the auditor what he would himself feel, if he were to do or suffer what is there feigned to be suffered or to be done. The reflection that strikes the heart is not, that the evils before us are real evils, but that they are evils to which we ourselves may be exposed. If there be any fallacy, it is not that we fancy the players, but that we fancy ourselves unhappy for a moment; but we rather lament the possibility than suppose the presence of misery, as a mother weeps over her babe, when she remembers that death may take it from her. The delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no more.

Imitations produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind. When the imagination is recreated by a painted landscape, the trees are not supposed capable to give us shade, or the fountains coolness; but we consider, how we should be pleased with such

fountains playing beside us, and such woods waving over us. We are agitated in reading the History of "Henry the Fifth," yet no man takes his book for the field of Agincourt. A dramattick exhibition is a book recited with concomitants that increase or diminish its effect. Familiar comedy is often more powerful on the theatre than in the page; imperial tragedy is always less. The humour of *Petruchio* may be heightened by grimace; but what voice or what gesture can hope to add dignity or force to the soliloquy of *Cato*?

A play read, affects the mind like a play acted. It is therefore evident that the action is not supposed to be real; and it follows, that between the acts a longer or shorter time may be allowed to pass, and that no more account of space or duration is to be taken by the auditor of a drama, than by the reader of a narrative, before whom may pass in an hour the life of a hero, or the revolutions of an empire.

Whether Shakespeare knew the unities, and rejected them by design, or deviated from them by happy ignorance, it is, I think, impossible to decide, and useless to enquire. We may reasonably suppose, that, when he rose to notice, he did not want the counsels and admonitions of scholars and criticks, and that he at last deliberately persisted in a practice, which he might have begun by chance.

As nothing is essential to the fable, but unity of action, and as the unities of time and place arise evidently from false assumptions, and, by circumscribing the extent of the drama, lessen its variety, I cannot think it much to be lamented that they were not known by him, or not observed: nor, if such another poet could arise, should I very vehemently reproach him, that

his first act passed at Venice, and his next in Cyprus. Such violations of rules merely positive, became the comprehensive genius of Shakespeare, and such censures are suitable to the minute and slender criticism of Voltaire:

*“Non usque adeo permiscuit imis
Longus summa dies, ut non, si voce Metelli
Serventure leges, malint a Cæsare tolli.”*

Yet when I speak thus slightly of dramattick rules, I cannot but recollect how much wit and learning may be produced against me; before such authorities I am afraid to stand, not that I think the present question one of those that are to be decided by mere authority, but because it is to be suspected that these precepts have not been so easily received, but for better reasons than I have yet been able to find. The result of my inquiries, in which it would be ludicrous to boast of impartiality, is that the unities of time and place are not essential to a just drama, that though they may sometimes conduce to pleasure, they are always to be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction; and that a play, written with nice observation of critical rules, is to be contemplated as an elaborate curiosity, as the product of superfluous and ostentatious art, by which is shown, rather what is possible, than what is necessary.

He that, without diminution of any other excellence, shall preserve all the unities unbroken, deserves the like applause with the architect, who shall display all the orders of architecture in a citadel, without any deduction from its strength; but the principal beauty of a citadel is to exclude the enemy; and the greatest graces of a play are to copy nature and instruct life.

Perhaps, what I have here not dogmatically but deliberately written, may recall the principles of the drama to a new examination. I am almost frightened at my own temerity; and when I estimate the fame and the strength of those that maintain the contrary opinion, am ready to sink down in reverential silence; as Æneas withdrew from the defence of Troy, when he saw Neptune shaking the wall, and Juno heading the besiegers.

Those whom my arguments cannot persuade to give their approbation to the judgment of Shakespeare, will easily, if they consider the condition of his life, make some allowance for his ignorance.

Every man's performances, to be rightly estimated, must be compared to the state of the age in which he lived, and with his own particular opportunities; and though to a reader a book be not worse or better for the circumstances of the author, yet as there is always a silent reference of human works to human abilities, and as the enquiry, how far man may extend his designs, or how high he may rate his native force, is of far greater dignity than in what rank we shall place any particular performance, curiosity is always busy to discover the instruments, as well as to survey the workmanship, to know how much is to be ascribed to original powers, and how much to casual and adventitious help. The palaces of Peru or Mexico were certainly mean and incommo-
dious habitations, if compared to the houses of European monarchs; yet who could forbear to view them with astonishment, who remembered that they were built without the use of iron?

The English nation, in the time of Shakespeare, was yet struggling to emerge from barbarity. The phi-

lology of Italy had been translated hither in the reign of Henry the Eighth; and the learned languages had been successfully cultivated by Lilly, Linacre, and More; by Pole, Cheke, and Gardiner; and afterwards by Smith, Clerk, Haddon, and Ascham. Greek was now taught to boys in the principal schools; and those who united elegance with learning, read, with great diligence, the Italian and Spanish poets. But literature was yet confined to professed scholars, or to men and women of high rank. The publick was gross and dark; and to be able to read and write was an accomplishment still valued for its rarity.

Nations, like individuals, have their infancy. A people newly awakened to literary curiosity, being yet unacquainted with the true state of things, knows not how to judge of that which is proposed as its resemblance. Whatever is remote from common appearances is always welcome to vulgar, as to childish credulity; and of a country unenlightened by learning, the whole people is the vulgar. The study of those who then aspired to plebeian learning was laid out upon adventures, giants, dragons, and enchantments. The "Death of Arthur" was the favourite volume.

The mind, which has feasted on the luxurious wonders of fiction, has no taste for the insipidity of truth. A play, which imitated only the common occurrences of the world, would, upon the admirers of *Palmerin* and *Guy of Warwick*, have made little impression; he that wrote for such an audience was under the necessity of looking round for strange events and fabulous transactions, and that incredibility, by which maturer knowledge is offended, was the chief recommendation of writings to unskilful curiosity.

Our author's plots are generally borrowed from novels; and it is reasonable to suppose that he chose the most popular, such as were read by many, and related by more; for his audience could not have followed him through the intricacies of the drama, had they not held the thread of the story in their hands.

The stories, which we now find only in remoter authors, were in his time accessible and familiar. The fable of "As You Like It," which is supposed to be copied from Chaucer's "Gamelyne,"² was a little pamphlet of those times; and old Mr. Cibber remembered the tale of "Hamlet" in plain English prose, which the criticks have now to seek in Saxo Grammaticus.

His English histories he took from English chronicles and English ballads;³ and as the ancient writers were made known to his countrymen by versions, they supplied him with new subjects; he dilated some of Plutarch's lives into plays, when they had been translated by North.

His plots, whether historical or fabulous, are always crowded with incidents, by which the attention of a rude people was more easily caught than by sentiment or argumentation; and such is the power of the marvellous, even over those who despise it, that every man finds his mind more strongly seized by the tragedies of Shakespeare than of any other writer; others please us by particular speeches, but he always makes us anxious for the event, and has perhaps excelled all but Homer in securing the first purpose of a writer, by exciting

²The foundation of "As You Like It" was Thos. Lodge's novel "Rosalynde or Euphues Legacy."

³Except "King John" which was based upon an old play by John Bale entitled "The Troublesome Raigne of King John," a bitter tractate against the papacy.

restless and unquenchable curiosity, and compelling him that reads his work to read it through.

The shows and bustle with which his plays abound have the same original. As knowledge advances, pleasure passes from the eye to the ear but returns, as it declines, from the ear to the eye. Those to whom our author's labours were exhibited had more skill in pomps or processions than in poetical language, and perhaps wanted some visible and discriminated events, as comments on the dialogue. He knew how he should most please; and whether his practice is more agreeable to nature, or whether his example has prejudiced the nation, we still find that on our stage something must be done as well as said, and inactive declamation is very coldly heard, however musical or elegant, passionate or sublime.

Voltaire expresses his wonder, that our author's extravagances are endured by a nation which has seen the tragedy of "Cato." Let him be answered, that Addison speaks the language of poets, and Shakespeare of men. We find in "Cato" innumerable beauties which enamour us of its author, but we see nothing that acquaints us with human sentiments or human actions; we place it with the fairest and the noblest progeny which judgment propagates by conjunction with learning; but "Othello" is the vigorous and vivacious offspring of observation impregnated by genius. "Cato" affords a splendid exhibition of artificial and fictitious manners, and delivers just and noble sentiments, in diction easy and harmonious, but its hopes and fears communicate no vibration to the heart; the composition refers us only to the writer; we pronounce the name of "Cato," but we think on Addison.

The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers: the composition of Shakespeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with the weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses; filling the eye with awful pomp and gratifying the mind with endless diversity. Other poets display cabinets of precious rarities, minutely finished, wrought into shape, and polished into brightness. Shakespeare opens a mine which contains gold and diamonds in unexhaustible plenty, though clouded by incrustations, debased by impurities, and mingled with a mass of meaner minerals.

It has been much disputed, whether Shakespeare owed his excellence to his own native force, or whether he had the common helps of scholastic education, the precepts of critical science, and the examples of ancient authors.

There has always prevailed a tradition, that Shakespeare wanted learning, that he had no regular education nor much skill in the dead languages. Jonson, his friend, affirms that he had small Latin, and less Greek; who, besides that he had no imaginable temptation to falsehood, wrote at a time when the character and acquisitions of Shakespeare were known to multitudes. His evidence ought, therefore, to decide the controversy, unless some testimony of equal force could be opposed.

Some have imagined that they have discovered deep learning in imitation of old writers; but the examples which I have known urged, were drawn from books translated in his time; or were such easy coincidences of thought, as will happen to all who consider the same subjects; or such remarks on life or axioms of mortality

as float in conversation, and are transmitted through the world in proverbial sentences.

I have found it remarked, that, in this important sentence, "Go before, I'll follow," we read a translation of, *I prae sequar*. I have been told, that when *Caliban*, after a pleasing dream, says, "I cried to sleep again," the author imitates Anacreon, who had, like every other man the same wish on the same occasion.

There are a few passages which may pass for imitation, but so few, that the exception only confirms the rule; he obtained them from accidental quotations, or by oral communication, and as he used what he had, would have used more if he had obtained it.

"The Comedy of Errors" is confessedly taken from the "Menaechmi" of Plautus; from the only play of Plautus which was then in English. What can be more probable, than that he who copied that, would have copied more; but that those which were not translated were inaccessible?

Whether he knew the modern languages is uncertain. That his plays have some French scenes proves but little; he might easily procure them to be written, and probably, even though he had known the language in the common degree, he could not have written it without assistance. In the story of "Romeo and Juliet" he is observed to have followed the English translation, where it deviates from the Italian; but this on the other part proves nothing against his knowledge of the original. He was to copy, not what he knew himself, but what was known to his audience.

It is most likely that he had learned Latin sufficiently to make him acquainted with construction, but that he never advanced to an easy perusal of the Roman

authors. Concerning his skill in modern languages, I can find no sufficient ground of determination; but as no imitations of French or Italian authors have been discovered, though the Italian poetry was then in high esteem, I am inclined to believe, that he read little more than English, and chose for his fables only such tales as he found translated.

That much knowledge is scattered over his works is very justly observed by Pope, but it is often such knowledge as books did not supply. He that will understand Shakespeare, must not be content to study him in the closet, he must look for his meaning sometimes among the sports of the field, and sometimes among the manufactures of the shop.

There is, however, proof enough that he was a very diligent reader, nor was our language then so indigent of books, but that he might very liberally indulge his curiosity without excursions into foreign literature. Many of the Roman authors were translated, and some of the Greek; the Reformation had filled the kingdom with theological learning; most of the topicks of human disquisition had found English writers; and poetry had been cultivated, not only with diligence, but success. This was a stock of knowledge sufficient for a mind so capable of appropriating and improving it.

But the greater part of his excellence was the product of his own genius. He found the English stage in a state of the utmost rudeness; no essays either in tragedy or comedy had appeared, from which it could be discovered to what degree of delight either one or the other might be carried. Neither character nor dialogue were yet understood. Shakespeare may be truly said to have introduced them both amongst us,

and in some of his happier scenes to have carried them both to the utmost height.

By what gradations of improvement he proceeded, is not easily known; for the chronology of his works is yet unsettled. Rowe is of opinion that perhaps we are not to look for his beginning, like those of other writers, in his least perfect works; art had so little, and nature so large a share in what he did, that for aught I know, says he, the performances of his youth, as they were the most vigorous, were the best. But the power of nature is only the power of using to any certain purpose the materials which diligence procures or opportunity supplies. Nature gives no man knowledge, and when images are collected by study and experience, can only assist in combining or applying them. Shakespeare, however, favoured by nature, could impart only what he had learned; and as he must increase his ideas, like other mortals, by gradual acquisition he, like them, grew wiser as he grew older, could display life better, as he knew it more, and instruct with more efficacy, as he was himself more amply instructed.

There is a vigilance of observation and accuracy of distinction which books and precepts cannot confer; from this almost all original and native excellence proceeds. Shakespeare must have looked upon mankind with perspicacity, in the highest degree curious and attentive. Other writers borrow their characters from preceding writers, and diversify them only by the accidental appendages of present manners; the dress is a little varied, but the body is the same. Our author had both matter and form to provide; for, except the characters of Chaucer, to whom I think he is not much indebted, there were no writers in English, and perhaps

not many in other modern languages, which showed life in its native colours.

The contest about the original benevolence or malignity of man, had not yet commenced. Speculation had not yet attempted to analyse the mind, to trace the passions to their sources, to unfold the seminal principles of vice and virtue, or sound the depths of the heart for the motives of action. All those enquiries, which from that time that human nature became the fashionable study, have been made sometimes with nice discernment, but often with idle subtilty, were yet unattempted. The tales, with which the infancy of learning was satisfied, exhibited only the superficial appearances of action, related the events, but omitted the causes, and were formed for such as delighted in wonders rather than in truth. Mankind was not then to be studied in the closet; he that would know the world, was under the necessity of gleaning his own remarks by mingling as he could in its business and amusements.

Boyle congratulated himself upon his high birth, because it favoured his curiosity, by facilitating his access. Shakespeare had no such advantage; he came to London a needy adventurer, and lived for a time by very mean employments. Many works of genius and learning have been performed in states of life that appear very little favourable to thought or to enquiry; so many, that he who considers them is inclined to think that he sees enterprise and perseverance predominating over all external agency, and bidding help and hindrance vanish before them. The genius of Shakespeare was not to be depressed by the weight of poverty nor limited by the narrow conversation to which men in

want are inevitably condemned; the incumbrances of his fortune were shaken from his mind, as dew-drops from a lion's mane.

Though he had so many difficulties to encounter, and so little assistance to surmount them, he has been able to obtain an exact knowledge of many modes of life, and many casts of native dispositions; to vary them with great multiplicity; to mark them by nice distinctions; and to show them in full view by proper combinations. In this part of his performances he had none to imitate, but has himself been imitated by all succeeding writers; and it may be doubted whether from all his successors more maxims of theoretical knowledge, or more rules of practical prudence, can be collected, than he alone has given to his country.

Nor was his attention confined to the actions of men; he was an exact surveyor of the inanimate world; his descriptions have always some peculiarities, gathered by contemplating things as they really exist. It may be observed that the earliest poets of many nations preserve their reputation, and that the following generations of wit, after a short celebrity, sink into oblivion. The first, whoever they be, must take their sentiments and descriptions immediately from knowledge; the resemblance is therefore just, their descriptions are verified by every eye, and their sentiments acknowledged by every breast. Those whom their fame invites to the same studies, copy partly them, and partly nature, till the books of one age gain such authority, as to stand in the place of nature to another, and imitation, always deviating a little, becomes at last capricious and casual. Shakespeare, whether life or nature be his subject, shows plainly that he has seen with his own

eyes; he gives the image which he receives, not weakened or distorted by the intervention of any other mind; the ignorant feel his representations to be just, and the learned see that they are complete.

Perhaps it would not be easy to find any author, except Homer, who invented so much as Shakespeare, who so much advanced the studies which he cultivated, or effused so much novelty upon his age or country. The form, the character, the language, and the shows of the English drama are his. "He seems," says Dennis, "to have been the very original of our English tragical harmony, that is, the harmony of blank verse, diversified often by dissyllable and trissyllable terminations. For the diversity distinguishes it from heroick harmony, and by bringing it nearer to common use makes it more proper to gain attention, and more fit for action and dialogue. Such verse we make when we are writing prose; we make such verse in common conversation."

I know not whether this praise is rigorously just. The dissyllable termination, which the critick rightly appropriates to the drama, is to be found, though I think not in *Gorboduc*,⁴ which is confessedly before our author; yet in *Hieronymo*,⁵ of which the date is not certain, but which there is reason to believe at least as old as his earliest plays. This, however, is certain, that he is the first who taught either tragedy or comedy to please, there being no theatrical piece of any older writer, of which the name is known, except to antiquaries and col-

⁴ "Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Pollex," the first tragedy written in the English tongue; by Thos. Norton and Thos. Sackville. The latter became Earl of Dorset and Lord High Treasurer of England. The tragedy was performed as early as 1561 and published in 1565.

⁵ By Thos. Kyd.

lectors of books, which are sought because they are scarce, and would not have been scarce, had they been much esteemed.

To him we must ascribe the praise, unless Spenser may divide it with him, of having first discovered to how much smoothness and harmony the English language could be softened. He has speeches, perhaps sometimes scenes, which have all the delicacy of Rowe, without his effeminacy. He endeavours indeed commonly to strike by the force and vigour of his dialogue, but he never executes his purpose better than when he tries to sooth by softness.

Yet it must be at last confessed, that as we owe everything to him, he owes something to us; that, if much of his praise is paid by perception and judgment, much is likewise given by custom and veneration. We fix our eyes upon his graces, and turn them from his deformities, and endure in him what we should in another loath or despise. If we endure without praising, respect for the father of our drama might excuse us; but I have seen, in the book of some modern critick, a collection of anomalies, which show that he has corrupted language by every mode of depravation, but which his admirer has accumulated as a monument of honour.

He has scenes of undoubted and perpetual excellence, but perhaps not one play, which, if it were now exhibited as the work of a contemporary writer, would be heard to the conclusion. I am indeed far from thinking that his works were wrought to his own ideas of perfection; when they were such as would satisfy the audience, they satisfied the writer. It is seldom that authors, though more studious of fame than Shakespeare, rise much above the standard of their own age;

to add a little to what is best will always be sufficient for present praise, and those who find themselves exalted into fame, are willing to credit their encomiasts, and to spare the labour of contending with themselves.

It does not appear that Shakespeare thought his works worthy of their posterity, that he levied any ideal tribute upon future times, or had any further prospects than of present popularity and present profit. When his plays had been acted his hope was at an end; he solicited no addition of honour from the reader. He therefore made no scruple to repeat the same jests in many dialogues, or to entangle different plots by the same knot of perplexity, which may be at least forgiven him, by those who recollect, that of Congreve's four comedies, two are concluded by a marriage in a mask; by a deception, which perhaps never happened, and which, whether likely or not, he did not invent.

So careless was this great poet of future fame, that, though he retired to ease and plenty, while he was yet little declined into the vale of years, before he could be disgusted with fatigue, or disabled by infirmity, he made no collection of his works, nor desired to rescue those that had been already published from the depravations that obscured them, or secure to the rest a better destiny, by giving them to the world in their genuine state.

Of the plays which bear the name of Shakespeare in the late editions, the greater part were not published till about seven years after his death, and the few which appeared in his life, are apparently thrust into the world without the care of the author, and therefore probably without his knowledge.

Of all the publishers, clandestine or professed, the

negligence and unskilfulness has by the late revisers, been sufficiently shown. The faults of all are indeed numerous and gross, and have not only corrupted many passages perhaps beyond recovery, but have brought others into suspicion, which are only obscured by obsolete phraseology, or by the writer's unskilfulness and affectation. To alter is more easy than to explain, and temerity is a more common quality than diligence. Those who saw that they must employ conjecture to a certain degree, were willing to indulge it a little further. Had the author published his own works, we should have sat quietly down to disentangle his intricacies, and clear his obscurities; but now we tear what we cannot loose, and eject what we happen not to understand.

The faults are more than could have happened without the concurrence of many causes. The style of Shakespeare was in itself ungrammatical, perplexed, and obscure; his works were transcribed for the players by those who may be supposed to have seldom understood them; they were transmitted by copiers equally unskilful, who still multiplied errors; they were, perhaps, sometimes mutilated by the actors, for the sake of shortening the speeches; and were at last printed without correction of the press.

In this state they remained, not as Dr. Warburton supposed, because they were unregarded, but because the editor's art was not yet applied to modern languages, and our ancestors were accustomed to so much negligence of English printers, that they could very patiently endure it. At last an edition was undertaken by Rowe; not because a poet was to be published by a poet, for Rowe seems to have thought very little on

correction or explanation, but that our author's works might appear like those of his fraternity, with the appendages of a life and recommendatory preface. Rowe has been clamorously blamed for not performing what he did not undertake, and it is time that justice be done him, by confessing, that though he seems to have had no thought of corruption beyond the printer's errors, yet he has made many emendations, if they were not made before, which his successors have received without acknowledgment, and which, if they had produced them, would have filled pages and pages with censures of the stupidity by which the faults were committed, with displays of the absurdities which they involved, with ostentatious expositions of the new reading, and self-congratulations on the happiness of discovering it.

As of the other editors I have preserved the prefaces, I have likewise borrowed the author's life from Rowe, though not written with much elegance or spirit; it relates, however, what is now to be known, and therefore deserves to pass through all succeeding publications.

The nation had been, for many years, content enough with Mr. Rowe's performance, when Mr. Pope made them acquainted with the true state of Shakespeare's text, showed that it was extremely corrupt, and gave reason to hope that there was means of reforming it. He collated the old copies, which none had thought to examine before, and restored many lines to their integrity; but, by a very compendious criticism, he rejected whatever he disliked, and thought more of amputation than of cure.

I know not why he is commended by Dr. Warburton for distinguishing the genuine from the spurious plays.

In this choice he exerted no judgment of his own; the plays which he received, were given to Hemings and Condell, the first editors; and those which he rejected; though, according to the licentiousness of the press in those times, they were printed during Shakespeare's life, with his name, had been omitted by his friends, and were never added to his works before the edition of 1664, from which they were copied by the latter printers.

This was a work which Pope seems to have thought unworthy of his abilities, being not able to suppress his contempt of the dull duty of an editor. He understood but half his undertaking. The duty of a collator is indeed dull, yet like other tedious tasks is very necessary; but an emendatory critick would ill discharge his duty, without qualities very different from dullness. In perusing a corrupted piece, he must have before him all possibilities of meaning, with all possibilities of expression. Such must be his comprehension of thought, and such his copiousness of language. Out of many readings possible, he must be able to select that which best suits with the state, opinions, and modes of language prevailing in every age, and with his author's particular cast of thought and turn of expression. Such must be his knowledge, and such his taste. Conjectural criticism demands more than humanity possesses, and he that exercises it with most praise, has very frequent need of indulgence. Let us now be told no more of the dull duty of an editor. Confidence is the common consequence of success. They whose excellence of any kind has been loudly celebrated, are ready to conclude that their powers are universal. Pope's edition fell below his own expectations, and he was so much

offended, when he was found to have left any thing for others to do, that he passed the latter part of his life in a state of hostility with verbal criticism.

I have retained all his notes, that no fragment of so great a writer may be lost; his preface, valuable alike for elegance of composition and justness of remark, and containing a general criticism on his author, so extensive that little can be added, and so exact that little can be disputed, every editor has an interest to suppress, but that every reader would demand its insertion.

Pope was succeeded by Theobald, a man of narrow comprehension, and small acquisitions, with no native and intrinsic splendour of genius, with little of the artificial light of learning, but zealous for minute accuracy, and not negligent in pursuing it. He collated the ancient copies, and rectified many errors. A man so anxiously scrupulous might have been expected to do more, but what little he did was commonly right.

In his report of copies and editions he is not to be trusted without examination. He speaks sometimes indefinitely of copies, when he has only one. In his enumeration of editions, he mentions the first two folios as of high, and the third folio as of middle authority; but the truth is, that the first is equivalent to all others, and that the rest only deviate from it by the printer's negligence. Whoever has any of the folios, has all, excepting those diversities which mere reiteration of editions will produce. I collated them all at the beginning, but afterwards used only the first.

Of his notes I have generally retained those which he retained himself in his second edition, except when they

were confuted by subsequent annotators, or were too minute to merit preservation. I have sometimes adopted his restoration of a comma, without inserting the panegyrick in which he celebrated himself for his achievement.

The exuberant excrescence of his diction I have often lopped, his triumphant exultations over Pope and Rowe I have sometimes suppressed, and his contemptible ostentation I have frequently concealed; but I have in some places shown him, as he would have shown himself, for the reader's diversion, that the inflated emptiness of some notes may justify or excuse the contraction of the rest.

Theobald, thus weak and ignorant, thus mean and faithless, thus petulant and ostentatious, by the good luck of having Pope for his enemy, has escaped, and escaped alone, with reputation, from this undertaking. So willingly does the world support those who solicit favour, against those who command reverence; and so easily is he praised, whom no man can envy.

Our author fell then into the hands of Sir Thomas Hanmer, the Oxford editor, a man, in my opinion, eminently qualified by nature for such studies. He had, what is the first requisite to emendatory criticism, that intuition by which the poet's intention is immediately discovered, and that dexterity of intellect which despatches its work by the easiest means. He had undoubtedly read much; his acquaintance with customs, opinions, and traditions, seems to have been large; and he is often learned without show. He seldom passes what he does not understand, without an attempt to find or to make a meaning, and some times hastily makes what a little more attention would have found. He is solicitous to

reduce to grammar, what he could not be sure that his author intended to be grammatical. Shakespeare regarded more the series of ideas, than of words; and his language, not being designed for the reader's desk, was all that he desired it to be, if it conveyed his meaning to the audience.

Hanmer's care of the metre has been too violently censured. He found the measure reformed in so many passages, by the silent labours of some editors, with the silent acquiescence of the rest, that he thought himself allowed to extend a little further the licence, which had already been carried so far without reprehension; and of his corrections in general, it must be confessed, that they are often just, and made commonly with the least possible violation of the text.

But, by inserting his emendations, whether invented or borrowed, into the page, without any notice of varying copies, he has appropriated the labour of his predecessors, and made his own edition of little authority. His confidence, indeed, both in himself and others, was too great; he supposed all to be right that was done by Pope and Theobald; he seems not to suspect a critick of fallibility, and it was but reasonable that he should claim what he so liberally granted.

As he never writes without careful enquiry and diligent consideration, I have received all his notes, and believe that every reader will wish for more.

Of the last editor it is more difficult to speak. Respect is due to high place, tenderness to living reputation, and veneration to genius and learning; but he cannot be justly offended at the liberty of which he has himself so frequently given an example, nor very solicitous what is thought of notes, which he ought never to have con-

sidered as part of his serious employment, and which, I suppose, since the ardour of composition is remitted, he no longer numbers among his happy effusions.

The original and predominant error of his commentary is acquiescence in his first thoughts; that precipitation which is produced by consciousness of quick discernment; and that confidence which presumes to do, by surveying the surface, what labour only can perform, by penetrating the bottom. His notes exhibit sometimes perverse interpretations, and sometimes improbable conjectures; he at one time gives the author more profundity of meaning than the sentence admits, and at another discovers absurdities, where the sense is plain to every other reader. But his emendations are likewise often happy and just; and his interpretation of obscure passages learned and sagacious.

Of his notes, I have commonly rejected those, against which the general voice of the publick has exclaimed, or which their own incongruity immediately condemns, and which, I suppose the author himself would desire to be forgotten. Of the rest, to part I have given the highest approbation, by inserting the offered reading in the text; part I have left to the judgment of the reader, as doubtful, though specious; and part I have censured without reserve, but I am sure without bitterness of malice, and, I hope, without wantonness of insult.

It is no pleasure to me, in revising my volumes, to observe how much paper is wasted in confutation. Whoever considers the revolutions of learning, and the various questions of greater or less importance, upon which wit and reason have exercised their powers, must lament the unsuccessfulness of enquiry, and the slow advances of truth, when he reflects, that great part of

the labour of every writer is only the destruction of those that went before him. The first care of the builder of a new system is to demolish the fabricks which are standing. The chief desire of him that comments an author, is to show how much other commentators have corrupted and obscured him. The opinions prevalent in one age, as truths above the reach of controversy, are confuted and rejected in another, and rise again to reception in remoter times. Thus the human mind is kept in motion without progress. Thus sometimes truth and error, and sometimes contrarieties of error, take each other's place by reciprocal invasion. The tide of seeming knowledge which is poured over one generation, retires and leaves another naked and barren; the sudden meteors of intelligence, which for a while appear to shoot their beams into the regions of obscurity, on a sudden withdraw their lustre, and leave mortals again to grope their way.

These elevations and depressions of renown, and the contradictions to which all improvers of knowledge must for ever be exposed, since they are not escaped by the highest and brightest of mankind, may surely be endured with patience by criticks and annotators, who can rank themselves but as the satellites of their authors. How canst thou beg for life, says Homer's hero to his captive, when thou knowest that thou art now to suffer only what must another day be suffered by Achilles?

Dr. Warburton had a name sufficient to confer celebrity on those who could exalt themselves into antagonists, and his notes have raised a clamour too loud to be distinct. His chief assailants are the authors of "The Canons of Criticism," and of "The Revisal of

Shakespeare's Text"; of whom one ridicules his errors with airy petulance, suitable enough to the levity of the controversy; the other attacks them with gloomy malignity, as if he were dragging to justice an assassin or incendiary. The one stings like a fly, sucks a little blood, takes a gay flutter, and returns for more; the other bites like a viper, and would be glad to leave inflammations and gangrene behind him. When I think on one, with his confederates, I remember the danger of Coriolanus, who was afraid that girls with spits, and boys with stones, should slay him in puny battle; when the other crosses my imagination, I remember the prodigy in "Macbeth":

"A falcon tow'ring in his pride of place,
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd."

Let me, however, do them justice. One is a wit, and one a scholar. They have both shown acuteness sufficient in the discovery of faults, and have both advanced some probable interpretations of obscure passages; but when they aspire to conjecture and emendation, it appears how falsely we all estimate our own abilities, and the little which they have been able to perform might have taught them more candour to the endeavours of others.

Before Dr. Warburton's edition, "Critical Observation on Shakespeare," had been published by Mr. Upton, a man skilled in languages, and acquainted with books, but who seems to have had no great vigour of genius or nicety of taste. Many of his explanations are curious and useful, but he likewise, though he professed to oppose the licentious confidence of editors, and adhere to the old copies, is unable to restrain the rage of

emendation, though his ardour is ill seconded by his skill. Every cold empirick, when his heart expanded by a successful experiment, swells into a theorist, and the laborious collator at some unlucky moment frolicks in conjecture.

Critical, historical, and explanatory notes have been likewise published upon Shakespeare by Dr. Grey, whose diligent perusal of the old English writers has enabled him to make some useful observations. What he undertook he has well enough performed, but as he neither attempts judicial nor emendatory criticisms, he employs rather his memory than his sagacity. It were to be wished that all would endeavour to imitate his modesty, who have not been able to surpass his knowledge.

I can say with great sincerity of all my predecessors, what I hope will hereafter be said of me, that not one has left Shakespeare without improvement, nor is there one to whom I have not been indebted for assistance and information. Whatever I have taken from them, it was my intention to refer to its original author, and it is certain, that what I have not given to another, I believe when I wrote it to be my own. In some, perhaps, I have been anticipated; but if I am ever found to encroach upon the remarks of any other commentator, I am willing that the honour, be it more or less, should be transferred to the first claimant, for his right, and his alone, stands above dispute; the second can prove his pretensions only to himself, nor can himself always distinguish invention, with sufficient certainty, from recollection.

They have all been treated by me with candour, which they have not been careful of observing to one another.

It is not easy to discover from what cause the acrimony of a scholiast can naturally proceed. The subjects to be discussed by him are of very small importance; they involve neither property nor liberty; nor favour the interest of sect or party. The various readings of copies, and different interpretations of a passage, seem to be questions that might exercise the wit, without engaging the passions. But whether it be, that small things make mean men proud, and vanity catches small occasions; or that all contrariety of opinion, even in those that can defend it no longer, makes proud men angry; there is often found in commentaries a spontaneous strain of invective and contempt, more eager and venomous than is vented by the most furious controvertist in politicks against those whom he is hired to defame.

Perhaps the lightness of the matter may conduce to the vehemence of the agency; when the truth to be investigated is so near to inexistence as to escape attention, its bulk is to be enlarged by rage and exclamation: that to which all would be indifferent in its original state may attract notice when the fate of a name is appended to it. A commentator has indeed great temptations to supply by turbulence what he wants of dignity, to beat his little gold to a spacious surface, to work that to foam which no art or diligence can exalt to spirit.

The notes which I have borrowed or written, are either illustrative, by which difficulties are explained; or judicial, by which faults and beauties are remarked; or emendatory, by which depravations are corrected.

The explanations transcribed from others, if I do not subjoin any other interpretation, I suppose commonly

to be right, at least I intend by acquiescence to confess that I have nothing better to propose.

After the labours of all the editors, I found many passages, which appeared to me likely to obstruct the greater number of readers, and thought it my duty to facilitate their passage. It is impossible for the expositor not to write too little for some, and too much for others. He can only judge what is necessary by his own experience; and how long soever he may deliberate, will at last explain many lines which the learned will think impossible to be mistaken, and omit many for which the ignorant will want his help. These are censures merely relative, and must be quietly endured. I have endeavoured to be neither superfluously copious, nor scrupulously reserved, and hope that I have made my author's meaning accessible to many, who before were frightened from perusing him, and contributed something to the publick, by diffusing innocent and rational pleasure.

The complete explanation of an author not systematick and consequential, but desultory and vagrant, abounding in casual allusions and light hints, is not to be expected from any single scholiast. All personal reflections, when names are suppressed, must be in a few years irrecoverably obliterated; and customs, too minute to attract the notice of law, yet such as modes of dress, formalities of conversation, rules of visits, disposition of furniture, and practices of ceremony, which naturally find places in familiar dialogue, are so fugitive and unsubstantial that they are not easily retained or recovered. What can be known will be collected by chance, from the recesses of obscure and obsolete papers, pursued commonly with some other view. Of

this knowledge every man has some, and none has much ; but when an author has engaged the publick attention, those who can add any thing to his illustration, communicate their discoveries, and time produces what had eluded diligence.

To time I have been obliged to resign many passages, which, though I did not understand them, will perhaps hereafter be explained, having, I hope, illustrated some, which others have neglected or mistaken, sometimes by short remarks, or marginal directions, such as every editor has added at his will, and often by comments more laborious than the matter will seem to deserve ; but that which is most difficult is not always most important, and to an editor nothing is a trifle by which his author is obscured.

The poetical beauties or defects I have not been very diligent to observe. Some plays have more, and some fewer judicial observations, not in proportion to their difference of merit, but because I gave this part of my design to chance, and to caprice. The reader, I believe, is seldom pleased to find his opinion anticipated ; it is natural to delight more in what we find or make, than in what we receive. Judgment, like other faculties, is improved by practice, and its advancement is hindered by submission to dictatorial decisions, as the memory grows torpid by the use of a table-book. Some initiation is however necessary ; of all skill, part is infused by precept, and part is obtained by habit ; I have, therefore, shown so much as may enable the candidate of criticism to discover the rest.

To the end of most plays I have added short strictures, containing a general censure of faults, or praise of excellence ; in which I know not how much I have con-

curred with the current opinion ; but I have not, by any affectation or singularity, deviated from it. Nothing is minutely and particularly examined, and therefore, it is to be supposed that in the plays which are condemned there is much to be praised, and in these which are praised much to be condemned.

The part of criticism in which the whole succession of editors has laboured with the greatest diligence, which has occasioned the most arrogant ostentation, and excited the keenest acrimony, is the emendation of corrupted passages, to which the publick attention having been first drawn by the violence of the contention between Pope and Theobald, has been continued by the persecution, which, with a kind of conspiracy, has been since raised against all the publishers of Shakespeare.

That many passages have passed in a state of depravation through all the editions is indubitably certain ; of these, the restoration is only to be attempted by collation of copies, or sagacity of conjecture. The collator's province is safe and easy, the conjecturer's perilous and difficult. Yet as the greater part of the plays are extant only in one copy, the peril must not be avoided, nor the difficulty refused.

Of the readings which this emulation of amendment has hitherto produced, some from the labours of every publisher I have advanced into the text ; those are to be considered as in my opinion sufficiently supported ; some I have rejected without mention, as evidently erroneous ; some I have left in the notes without censure or approbation, as resting in equipoise between objection and defence ; and some, which seemed specious but not right, I have inserted with a subsequent animadversion.

Having classed the observations of others, I was at last to try what I could substitute for their mistakes, and how could I supply their omissions. I collated such copies as I could procure, and wished for more, but have not found the collectors of these rarities very communicative. Of the editions which chance or kindness put into my hands I have given an enumeration, that I may not be blamed for neglecting what I had not the power to do.

By examining the old copies, I soon found that the later publishers, with all their boasts of diligence, suffered many passages to stand unauthorized, and contented themselves with Rowe's regulation of the text, even where they knew it to be arbitrary, and with a little consideration might have found it to be wrong. Some of these alterations are only the ejection of a word for one that appeared to him more elegant or more intelligible.

These corruptions I have often silently rectified; for the history of our language, and the true force of our words, can only be preserved by keeping the text of authors free from adulteration. Others, and those very frequent, smoothed the cadence, or regulated the measure; on these I have not exercised the same rigour; if only a word was transposed, or a particle inserted or omitted, I have sometimes suffered the line to stand; for the inconstancy of the copies is such, as that some liberties may be easily permitted. But this practice I have not suffered to proceed far, having restored the primitive diction wherever it could for any reason be preferred.

The emendations, which comparison of copies supplied, I have inserted in the text; sometimes, where the

improvement was slight, without notice, and sometimes with an account of the reasons of the change.

Conjecture, though it be sometimes unavoidable, I have not wantonly nor licentiously indulged. It has been my settled principle, that the reading of the ancient books is probably true, and therefore is not to be disturbed for the sake of elegance, perspicuity, or mere improvement of the sense. For though much credit is not due to the fidelity, nor any to the judgment of the first publishers, yet they who had the copy before their eyes were more likely to read it right, than we who read it only by imagination. But it is evident that they have often made strange mistakes by ignorance or negligence, and that, therefore, something may be properly attempted by criticism, keeping the middle way between presumption and timidity.

Such criticism I have attempted to practice, and where any passage appeared inextricably perplexed, have endeavored to discover how it may be recalled to sense, with least violence. But my first labour is, always to turn the old text on every side, and try if there be any interstice, through which light can find its way; nor would Huetius himself condemn me, as refusing the trouble of research, for the ambition of alteration. In this modest industry, I have not been unsuccessful. I have rescued many lines from the violations of temerity, and secured many scenes from the inroads of correction. I have adopted the Roman sentiment that it is more honourable to save a citizen than to kill an enemy, and have been more careful to protect than to attack.

I have preserved the common distribution of the plays into acts, though I believe it to be in almost all the plays void of authority. Some of those which are divided in

the later editions have no division in the first folio, and some that are divided in the folio have no division in the preceding copies. The settled mode of the theatre requires four intervals in the play, but few, if any, of our author's compositions can be properly distributed in that manner. An act is so much of the drama as passes without intervention of time, or change of place. A pause makes a new act. In every real, and therefore in every imitative action, the intervals may be more or fewer, the restriction of five acts being accidental and arbitrary. This Shakespeare knew, and this he practised; his plays were written, and at first printed in one unbroken continuity, and ought now to be exhibited with short pauses, interposed as often as the scene is changed, or any considerable time is required to pass. This method would at once quell a thousand absurdities.

In restoring the author's works to their integrity, I have considered the punctuation as wholly in my power; for what could be their care of colons and commas, who corrupted words and sentences? Whatever could be done by adjusting points, is therefore silently performed, in some plays, with much diligence, in others with less; it is hard to keep a busy eye steadily fixed upon evanescent atoms, or a discursive mind upon evanescent truth.

The same liberty has been taken with a few particles, or other words of slight effect. I have sometimes inserted or omitted them without notice. I have done that sometimes, which the other editors have done always, and which, indeed, the state of the text may sufficiently justify.

The greater part of readers, instead of blaming us for passing trifles, will wonder that on mere trifles so much

labour is expended, with such importance of debate, and such solemnity of diction. To these I answer with confidence, that they are judging of an art which they do not understand; yet cannot much reproach them with their ignorance, nor promise that they would become in general, by learning criticism, more useful, happier, or wiser.

As I practised conjecture more, I learned to trust it less; and after I had printed a few plays, resolved to insert none of my own readings in the text. Upon this caution I now congratulate myself, for every day increases my doubt of my emendations.

Since I have confined my imagination to the margin, it must not be considered as very reprehensible, if I have suffered it to play some freaks in its own dominion. There is no danger in conjecture, if it be proposed as conjecture; and while the text remains uninjured, those changes may be safely offered, which are not considered even by him that offers them as necessary or safe.

If my readings are of little value, they have not been ostentatiously displayed or importunately obtruded. I could have written longer notes, for the art of writing notes is not of difficult attainment. The work is performed first by railing at the stupidity, negligence, ignorance, and asinine tastelessness of the former editors, showing, from all that goes before and all that follows, the inelegance and absurdity of the old reading; then by proposing something, which to superficial readers would seem specious, but which the editor rejects with indignation; then by producing the true reading, with a long paraphrase, and concluding with loud acclamations on the discovery, and a sober wish for the advancement and prosperity of genuine criticism.

All this may be done, and perhaps done sometimes without impropriety. But I have always suspected that the reading is right, which requires many words to prove it wrong; and the emendation wrong, that cannot without so much labour appear to be right. The justness of a happy restoration strikes at once, and the moral precept may be well applied to criticism, *quod dubitas ne feceris*.

To dread the shore which he sees spread with wrecks, is natural to the sailor. I had before my eye, so many critical adventures ended in miscarriage, that caution was forced upon me. I encountered in every page wit struggling with its own sophistry, and learning confused by the multiplicity of its views. I was forced to censure those whom I admired, and could not but reflect, while I was dispossessing their emendations, how soon the same fate might happen to my own, and how many of the readings which I have corrected may be by some other editor defended and established.

“ Criticks I saw, that others, names efface,
And fix their own, with labour, in the place;
Their own, like others, soon their place resign’d,
Or disappear’d, and left the first behind.”—*Pope*.

That a conjectural critick should often be mistaken, cannot be wonderful, either to others, or himself, if it be considered, that in his art there is no system, no principal and axiomatical truth that regulates subordinate positions. His chance of error is renewed at every attempt; an oblique view of the passage, a slight misapprehension of a phrase, a casual inattention to the parts connected, is sufficient to make him not only fail, but fail ridiculously; and when he succeeds best he produces

perhaps but one reading of many probable, and he that suggests another will always be able to dispute his claims.

It is an unhappy state, in which danger is hid under pleasure. The allurements of emendation are scarcely resistible. Conjecture has all the joy and all the pride of invention, and he that has once started a happy change, is too much delighted to consider what objections may rise against it.

Yet conjectural criticism has been of great use in the learned world; nor is it my intention to depreciate a study, that has exercised so many mighty minds, from the revival of learning to our own age, from the Bishop of Aleria⁶ to English Bentley. The criticks on ancient authors have, in the exercise of their sagacity, many assistances, which the editor of Shakespeare is condemned to want. They are employed upon grammatical and settled languages, whose construction contributes so much to perspicuity, that Homer has fewer passages unintelligible than Chaucer. The words have not only a known regimen, but invariable quantities, which direct and confine the choice. There are commonly more manuscripts than one; and they do not often conspire in the same mistakes. Yet Scaliger could confess to Salmasius how little satisfaction his emendations gave him. *Illudunt nobis conjecturæ, quarum nos pudet, posteaquam in meliores codices incidimus.* And Lipsius could complain, that criticks were making faults, by trying to remove them, *Ut olim vitiis, ita nunc remediis laboratur.* And indeed, when mere conjecture is to be

⁶ John Andreas, Bishop of Aleria, a province of Corsica. He edited and published several classic authors under the patronage of Pope Paul II.—*Note by Stevens.*

used, the emendations of Scaliger and Lipsius, notwithstanding their wonderful sagacity and erudition, are often vague and disputable, like mine or Theobald's.

Perhaps I may not be more censured for doing wrong than for doing little; for raising in the publick expectations which at last I have not answered. The expectation of ignorance is indefinite, and that of knowledge is often tyrannical. It is hard to satisfy those who know not what to demand, or those who demand by design what they think impossible to be done. I have indeed disappointed no opinion more than my own; yet I have endeavoured to perform my task with no slight solicitude. Not a single passage in the whole work has appeared to me corrupt, which I have not attempted to restore; or obscure, which I have not endeavoured to illustrate. In many I have failed like others; and from many, after all my efforts, I have retreated, and confessed the repulse. I have not passed over, with affected superiority, what is equally difficult to the reader and to myself, but where I could not instruct him, have owned my ignorance. I might easily have accumulated a mass of seeming learning upon easy scenes; but it ought not to be imputed to negligence, that, where nothing was necessary, nothing has been done, or that, where others have said enough, I have said no more.

Notes are often necessary, but they are necessary evils. Let him, that is yet unacquainted with the powers of Shakespeare, and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that the drama can give, read every play, from the first scene to the last, with utter negligence of all his commentators. When his fancy is once on the wing, let it not stoop at correction or explanation. When his attention

is strongly engaged, let it disdain alike to turn aside to the name of Theobald and of Pope. Let him read on through brightness and obscurity, through integrity and corruption; let him preserve his comprehension of the dialogue and his interest in the fable. And when the pleasures of novelty have ceased, let him attempt exactness, and read the commentators.

Particular passages are cleared by notes, but the general effect of the work is weakened. The mind is refrigerated by interruption; the thoughts are diverted from the principal subject; the reader is weary, he suspects not why; and at last throws away the book which he has too diligently studied.

Parts are not to be examined till the whole has been surveyed; there is a kind of intellectual remoteness necessary for the comprehension of any great work in its full design and in its true proportions; a close approach shows the smaller niceties, but the beauty of the whole is discerned no longer.

It is not very grateful to consider how little the succession of editors has added to this author's power of pleasing. He was read, admired, studied, and imitated, while he was yet deformed with all the improprieties which ignorance and neglect could accumulate upon him; while the reading was yet not rectified, nor his allusions understood; yet then did Dryden pronounce, "that Shakespeare was the man who, of all modern and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it, too. Those, who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation; he was naturally learned;

he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat and insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him: no man can say, he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets.

“Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.”

It is to be lamented, that such a writer should want a commentary; that his language should become obsolete, or his sentiments obscure. But it is vain to carry wishes beyond the condition of human things; that which must happen to all, has happened to Shakespeare, by accident and time; and more than has been suffered by any other writer since the use of types, has been suffered by him through his own negligence of fame, or perhaps, by that superiority of mind, which despised its own performances, when it compared them with its powers, and judged those works unworthy to be preserved, which the criticks of following ages were to contend for the fame of restoring and explaining.

Among these candidates of inferior fame, I am now to stand the judgment of the publick; and wish that I could confidently produce my commentary as equal to the encouragement which I have had the honour of receiving. Every work of this kind is by its nature deficient, and I should feel little solicitude about the sentence, were it to be pronounced only by the skillful and the learned.

Of what has been performed in this revisal, an account is given in the following pages by Mr. Steevens,⁷ who might have spoken both of his own diligence and sagacity, in terms of greater self approbation, without deviating from modesty or truth.

⁷The final paragraph refers to the second edition with added notes by George Steevens, published in 1773.

GEORGE STEEVENS

1736-1800

GEORGE STEEVENS was born in Stepney, May 10, 1736, and died in his hermit retreat at Hampstead, January 22, 1800. He was educated at Eton and Cambridge, although he received from the latter no degree. Unlike his great associate, Dr. Johnson, Shakespearean criticism was his vocation; to it he devoted his life, and to such good account, that the text he left behind him remained the standard for quite half a century, and is the basis of many modern editions.

He first made a departure from the beaten track of Shakespearean criticism, in that he devoted his virgin pen to the Quartos instead of the Folio copies. These he published in 1766, under the title "Twenty of the Plays of Shakespeare, being the whole number printed in quarto during his life-time, or before the Restoration."

In collaboration with Dr. Johnson, and assisted in a very moderate degree by Edmund Malone, he issued a ten volume edition in 1773; revised in 1778; which became the basis for Isaac Reed's edition of 1793. In 1779 he published Six Old Plays upon which Shakespeare founded the plays of "Measure for Measure," "Comedy of Errors," "Taming of the Shrew," "King John," "King Lear," "Henry IV.," and "Henry V."

Steevens was a man of most uncertain temper, which manifested itself in his literary as well as his domestic

life. He was led by a saturnine humour to play mischievous practical jokes of a literary turn, and used both the forged letter and the anonymous libel to further his ends.

His vitriolic jesting led him even to make obscene notes to coarse passages in the plays, and by some peculiar diabolism to attribute these comments to two amiable clergymen, whose names he mentioned.

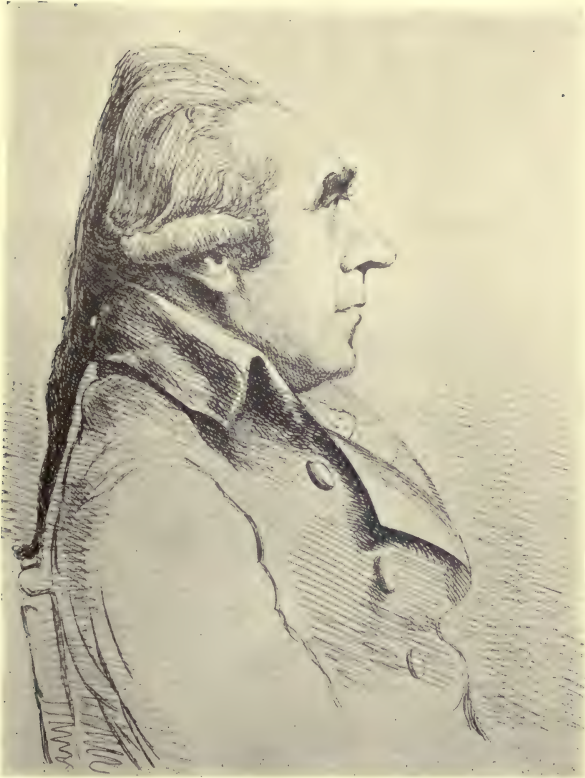
No wonder that when he died Samuel Rogers wrote of him, "the outlaw is at last dead in his den."

The student of Shakespeare owes him an enormous debt.

GEORGE STEEVENS'S ADVERTISEMENT TO THE READER

[Prefixed to Mr. Steevens's edition of twenty of the old quarto copies of Shakespeare, etc., in 4 volumes, 8vo. 1766.]

THE plays of Shakespeare have been so often republished, with every seeming advantage which the joint labours of men of the first abilities could procure for them, that one would hardly imagine they could stand in need of anything beyond the illustration of some few dark passages. Modes of expression must remain in obscurity, or be retrieved from time to time, as chance may throw the books of that age into the hands of critics who shall make a proper use of them. Many have been of opinion that his language will continue difficult to all those who are unacquainted with the provincial expressions which they suppose him to have used; yet for my own part, I cannot believe but that those which are now local may once have been universal, and must have been the language of those persons before whom his plays were represented. However, it is certain, that



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the instances of obscurity from this source are very few. Some have been of opinion that even a particular syntax prevailed in the time of Shakespeare; but, as I do not recollect that any proofs were ever brought in support of that sentiment, I own I am of the contrary opinion.

In this time indeed a different arrangement of syllables had been introduced in imitation of the Latin, as we find in Ascham; and the verb was frequently kept back in the sentence; but in Shakespeare no marks of it are discernible; and though the rules of syntax were more strictly observed by the writers of that age than they have been since, he of all the number is perhaps, the most ungrammatical. To make his meaning intelligible to his audience seems to have been his only care, and with the ease of conversation he has adopted its incorrectness.

The past editors, eminently qualified as they were by genius and learning for this undertaking, wanted industry; to cover which they published catalogues, transcribed at random, of a greater number of old copies than ever they can be supposed to have had in their possession; when, at the same time, they never examined the few which we know they had, with any degree of accuracy. The last editor alone has dealt fairly with the world in this particular; he professes to have made use of no more than he had really seen, and has annexed a list of such to every play, together with a complete one of those supposed to be in being, at the conclusion of his work, whether he had been able to procure them for the service of it or not.

For these reasons I thought it would not be unacceptable to the lovers of Shakespeare to collate all the

quartos I could find, comparing one copy with the rest, where there were more than one of the same play; and to multiply the chances of their being preserved, by collecting them into volumes, instead of leaving the few that have escaped, to share the fate of the rest, which was probably hastened by their remaining in the form of pamphlets, their use and value being equally unknown to those into whose hands they fell.

Of some I have printed more than one copy; as there are many persons, who, not contented with the possession of a finished picture of some great master, are desirous to procure the first sketch that was made for it, that they may have the pleasure of tracing the progress of the artist from the first light colouring to the finishing stroke. To such the earlier editions of "King John," "Henry the Fifth," "Henry the Sixth," "The Merry Wives of Windsor," and "Romeo and Juliet," will, I apprehend, not be unwelcome; since in these we may discern as much as will be found in the hasty outlines of the pencil, with a fair prospect of that perfection to which he brought every performance he took the pains to retouch.

The general character of the quarto editions may more advantageously be taken from the words of Mr. Pope, than from any recommendation of my own.

"The folio edition (says he), in which all the plays we now receive as his were first collected, was published by two players, Hemings and Condell, in 1623, seven years after his decease. They declare that all the other editions were stolen and surreptitious, and affirm theirs to be purged from the errors of the former. This is true as to the literal errors, and no other; for in all respects else it is far worse than the quartos.

“First, because the additions of trifling and bombast passages are in this edition far more numerous. For whatever had been added since those quartos, by the actors, or had stolen from their mouths into the written parts, were from thence conveyed into the printed text, and all stand charged upon the author. He himself complained of this usage in ‘Hamlet,’ where he wishes those who play the clowns would speak no more than is set down for them, (Act III. sc. iv). But as a proof that he could not escape it, in the old editions of ‘Romeo and Juliet,’ there is no hint of the mean conceits and ribaldries now to be found there. In others, the scenes of the mobs, plebeians, and clowns are vastly shorter than at present; and I have seen one in particular (which seems to have belonged to the play-house, by having the parts divided by lines, and the actors’ names in the margin), where several of those very passages were added in a written hand, which since are to be found in the folio.

“In the next place, a number of beautiful passages were omitted, which were extant in the first single editions; as it seems without any other reason than their willingness to shorten some scenes.”¹

To this I must add, that I cannot help looking on the folio as having suffered other injuries from the licentious alteration of the players; as we frequently find in it an unusual word changed into one more popular; sometimes to the weakening of the sense, which rather seems to have been their work, who knew that plainness was necessary for the audience of an illiterate age, than that it was done by the consent of the author: for he would hardly have unnerved a line in his written copy,

¹ Pope’s Preface, p. 42.

which they pretend to have transcribed, however he might have permitted many to have been familiarised in the representation. Were I to indulge my own private conjecture, I should suppose that his blotted manuscripts were read over by one to another among those who were appointed to transcribe them; and hence it would easily happen, that words of similiar sound, though of sense directly opposite, might be confounded with each other. They themselves declare that Shakespeare's time of blotting was past, and yet half the errors we find in their edition could not be merely typographical. Many of the quartos (as our own printers assume), were far from being skilfully executed, and some of them were much more correctly printed than the Folio, which was published at the charge of the same proprietors, whose names we find prefixed to the older copies; and I cannot join with Mr. Pope in acquitting that edition of more literal errors than those which went before it. The particles in it seem to be as fortuitously disposed, and proper names as frequently undistinguished by Italick or capital letters from the rest of the text. The punctuation is equally accidental; nor do I see, on the whole, any greater marks of a skilful revisal, or the advantage of being printed from unblotted originals in the one, than in the other. One reformation indeed there seems to have been made, and that very laudable; I mean the substitution of more general terms for a name too often unnecessarily invoked on the stage; but no jot of obscenity is omitted: and their caution against profaneness is, in my opinion, the only thing for which we are indebted to the judgment of the editors of the folio.

How much may be done by the assistance of the old

copies will now be easily known ; but a more difficult task remains behind, which calls for other abilities than are requisite in the laborious collator.

From a diligent perusal of the comedies of contemporary authors, I am persuaded that the meaning of many expressions in Shakespeare might be retrieved ; for the language of conversation can only be expected to be preserved in works which in their time assume the merit of being pictures of men and manners. The style of conversation we may suppose to be as much altered as that of books ; and, in consequence of the change, we have no other authorities to recur to in either case.

Should our language ever be recalled to a strict examination, and the fashion become general of striving to maintain our old acquisitions, instead of gaining new ones, which we shall be at last obliged to give up, or be incumbered with their weight ; it will then be lamented that no regular collection was ever formed of the old English books ; from which, as from ancient repositories, we might recover words and phrases as often as caprice or wantonness should call for variety ; instead of thinking it necessary to adopt new ones, or barter solid strength for feeble splendour, which no language has long admitted and retained its purity.

We wonder that, before the time of Shakespeare, we find the stage in a state so barren of productions, but forget that we have hardly any acquaintance with the authors of that period, though some few of their dramattick pieces may remain. The same might be almost said of the interval between that age and the age of Dryden, the performances of which, not being preserved in sets, or diffused as now, by the greater

number printed, must lapse apace into the same obscurity.

*“Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona
Multi . . .”*

And yet we are contented from a few specimens only, to form our opinions of the genius of ages gone before us. Even while we are blaming the taste of that audience which received with applause the worst plays in the reign of Charles the Second, we should consider that the few in possession of our theatre, which would never have been heard a second time had they been written now, were probably the best of hundreds which had been dismissed with general censure. The collection of plays, interludes, &c. made by Mr. Garrick, with an intent to deposit them hereafter in some publick library,² will be considered as a valuable acquisition; for pamphlets have never yet been examined with a proper regard to posterity. Most of the obsolete pieces will be found on enquiry to have been introduced into libraries but some few years since; and yet those of the present age, which may one time or other prove as useful, are still entirely neglected. I should be remiss, I am sure, were I to forget my acknowledgments to the gentleman I have just mentioned, to whose benevolence I owe the use of several of the scarcest quartos, which I could not otherwise have obtained; though I advertised for them, with sufficient offers, as I thought, either to tempt the casual owner to sell, or the curious to communicate them; but Mr. Garrick's zeal would not permit him to withhold any thing that might ever so remotely tend to show the perfections of that author who could only have enabled him to display his own.

² Now in the British Museum.

It is not merely to obtain justice to Shakespeare, that I have made this collection, and advise others to be made. The general interest of English literature, and the attention due to our own language and history, require that our ancient writings should be diligently reviewed. There is no age which has not produced some works that deserve to be remembered; and as words and phrases are only understood by comparing them in different places, the lower writers must be read for the explanation of the highest. No language can be ascertained and settled, but by deducing its words from their original sources, and tracing them through their successive varieties of signification; and this deduction can only be performed by consulting the earliest and intermediate authors.

Enough has already been done to encourage us to do more. Dr. Hicke^s,³ by reviving the study of the Saxon language, seems to have excited a stronger curiosity after old English writers, than ever had appeared before. Many volumes which were mouldering in dust have been collected; many authors which were forgotten have been revived; many laborious catalogues have been formed; and many judicious glossaries compiled; the literary transactions of the darker ages are now open to discovery; and the language in its intermediate gradations, from the Conquest to the Restoration, is better understood than in any former time.

To incite the continuance, and encourage the extension of this domestick curiosity, is one of the purposes of

³ George Hicke^s, 1642-1715. An English clergyman who, in addition to some theological works, published *Institutiones Grammaticæ Anglo Saxonicæ* (1689), and *Antiquæ Literaturæ Septentrionalis Thesaurus* (1703-5).

the present publication. In the plays it contains, the poet's first thoughts, as well as words, are preserved; the additions made in subsequent impressions, distinguished in Italicks, and the performances themselves make their appearance with every typographical error, such as they were before they fell into the hands of the player-editors. The various readings, which can only be attributed to chance, are set down among the rest, as I did not choose arbitrarily to determine for others which were useless, or which were valuable. And many words differing only by the spelling, or serving merely to show the difficulties which they to whose lot it first fell to disentangle their perplexities must have encountered, are exhibited with the rest. I must acknowledge that some few readings have slipped in by mistake, which can pretend to serve no purpose of illustration, but were introduced by confining myself to note the minutest variations of the copies, which soon convinced me that the oldest were in general the most correct. Though no proof can be given that the poet superintended the publication of any one of these himself, yet we have little reason to suppose that he who wrote at the command of Elizabeth, and under the patronage of Southampton, was so very negligent of his fame, as to permit the most incompetent judges, such as the players were, to vary at their pleasure what he had set down for the first single editions; and we have better grounds for suspicion that his works did materially suffer from their presumptuous corrections after death.

It is very well known, that before the time of Shakespeare, the art of making title pages was practised with as much, or perhaps more, success than it has been

since. Accordingly, to all his plays we find long and descriptive ones, which, when they were first published, were of great service to the venders of them. Pamphlets of every kind were hawked about the streets by a set of people resembling his own *Autolycus*, who proclaimed aloud the qualities of what they offered to sale, and might draw in many a purchaser by the mirth he was taught to expect from the humours of *Corporal Nym*, or the swaggering vaine of *Auncient Pistoll*, who was not to be tempted by the representation of a fact merely historical. The players, however, laid aside the whole of this garniture, not finding it so necessary to procure success to a bulky volume, when the author's reputation was established, as it had been to bespeak attention to a few struggling pamphlets while it was yet uncertain.

The sixteen plays which are not in these volumes, remained unpublished till the Folio in the year 1623, though the compiler of a work called "Theatrical Records," mentions different single editions of them all before that time. But as no one of the editors could ever meet with such, nor has any one else pretended to have seen them, I think myself at liberty to suppose the compiler supplied the defects of the list out of his own imagination; since he must have had singular good fortune to have been possessed of two or three different copies of all, when neither editors nor collectors, in the course of nearly fifty years, have been able so much as to obtain the sight of one of the number.

At the end of the last volume I have added a tragedy of "King Leir," published before that of Shakespeare, which it was not improbable he might have seen, as the

father kneeling to the daughter, when she kneels to ask his blessing, is found in it; a circumstance two poets were not very likely to have hit on separately; and which seems borrowed by the latter with his usual judgment, it being the most natural passage in the whole play; and is introduced in such a manner, as to make it fairly his own. The ingenious editor of the "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry" having never met with this play, and as it is not preserved in Mr. Garrick's collection, I thought it a curiosity worthy the notice of the publick.

I have likewise reprinted "Shakespeare's Sonnets," from a copy published in 1609, by G. Eld, one of the printers of his plays; which, added to the consideration that they made their appearance with his name, and in his life-time, seems to be no slender proof of their authenticity. The same evidence might operate in favour of several more plays which are omitted here, out of respect to the judgment of those who had omitted them before.

It is to be wished that some method of publication most favourable to the character of an author were once established; whether we are to send into the world all his works without distinction, or arbitrarily to leave out what may be thought a disgrace to him. The first editors, who rejected "Pericles," retained "Titus Andronicus"; and Mr. Pope, without any reason, named "The Winter's Tale," a play that bears the strongest marks of the hand of Shakespeare, among those which he supposed to be spurious. Dr. Warburton has fixed a stigma on the three parts of "Henry the Sixth," and some others:

"Inde Dolabella, est, atque hinc Antonius;"

and all have been willing to plunder Shakespeare, or mix up a breed of barren metal with his purest ore.

Joshua Barnes, the editor of "Euripides," thought every scrap of his author so sacred, that he has preserved with the name of one of his plays, the only remaining word of it. The same reason indeed might be given in his favour, which caused the preservation of that valuable trisyllable; which is, that it cannot be found in any other place in the Greek language. But this does not seem to have been his only motive, as we find he has to the full as carefully published several detached and broken sentences, the gleanings from scholiasts, which have no claim to merit of that kind; and yet the author's works, might be reckoned by some to be incomplete without them. If then this duty is expected from every editor of a Greek or Roman poet, why is the same not insisted on in respect of an English classick? But if the custom of preserving all whether worthy of it or not, be more honoured in the breach, than the observance, the suppression at least should not be considered as a fault. The publication of such things as Swift had written merely to raise a laugh among his friends, has added something to the bulk of his works, but very little to his character as a writer. The four volumes that came out since Dr. Hawkesworth's edition, not to look on them as a tax levied on the publick, (which I think one might, without injustice), contain not more than sufficient to have made one of real value; and there is a kind of disin-genuity, not to give it a harsher title, in exhibiting what the author never meant should see the light; for no motive but a sordid one, can betray the survivors to make that publick, which they themselves must be

of opinion will be unfavourable to the memory of the dead.

Life does not often receive good unmixed with evil. The benefits of the art of printing are depraved by the facility with which scandal may be diffused, and secrets revealed; and by the temptation which traffick solicits avarice to betray the weaknesses of passion, or the confidence of friendship.

I cannot forbear to think these posthumous publications injurious to society. A man conscious of literary reputation will grow in time afraid to write with tenderness to his sister, or with fondness to his child; or to remit on the slightest occasion, or most pressing exigence, the rigour of critical choice, and grammatical severity. That esteem which preserves his letters, will at last produce his disgrace, when that which he wrote to his friend or his daughter shall be laid open to the publick.

There is, perhaps, sufficient evidence, that most of the plays in question, unequal as they may be to the rest, were written by Shakespeare; but the reason generally given for publishing the less correct pieces of an author, that it affords a more impartial view of a man's talents or way of thinking, than when we only see him in form, and prepared for our reception, is not enough to condemn an editor who thinks and practises otherwise. For what is all this to show, but that every man is more dull at one time than at another? A fact which the world would easily have admitted, without asking any proofs in its support that might be destructive to an author's reputation.

To conclude; if the work, which this publication was meant to facilitate, has been already performed, the

satisfaction of knowing it to be so may be obtained from hence; if otherwise, let those who raised expectations of correctness, and through negligence defeated them, be justly exposed by future editors, who will now be in possession of by far the greatest part of what they might have enquired after for years to no purpose; for in respect of such a number of the old Quartos as are here exhibited, the first Folio is a common book. This advantage will at least arise, that future editors having equally recourse to the same copies, can challenge distinction and preference only by genius, capacity, industry, and learning.

As I have only collected materials for future artists, I consider what I have been doing as no more than an apparatus for their use. If the publick is inclined to receive it as such, I am amply rewarded for my trouble; if otherwise, I shall submit with cheerfulness to the censure which should equitably fall on an injudicious attempt; having this consolation however, that my design amounted to no more than a wish to encourage others to think of preserving the oldest editions of the English writers, which are growing scarcer every day; and to afford the world all the assistance or pleasure it can receive from the most authentick copies extant of its noblest poet.

EDWARD CAPELL

1713-1781

EDWARD CAPELL was born in Throston, Suffolk, June 11, 1713, and died at Brill Court Temple, London, February 24, 1781. He was educated at Cambridge, and in 1737 received the appointment of Deputy Inspector of Plays with the functions of a censor. This both gave him time and whetted his taste for the study of Elizabethan dramatic literature. His first essay in letters was "Prolusions, or Select Pieces of Ancient Poetry," in which appeared the anonymous play of "Edward III.," which the editor tentatively attributed to Shakespeare.

In 1768 appeared his edition of Shakespeare's works, in ten volumes. His "Notes and Various Readings to Shakespeare" were published in advance of the text in 1759, but were withdrawn, and the first two volumes, revised, appeared in 1779. The third volume, called the "School of Shakespeare," appeared in 1783, after his death. The "School" consisted of poems, plays, etc., extant in Shakespeare's time and supposed to have formed a part of his literary capital. Two other works, long since forgotten, are credited to Capell, "Two tables elucidating the sound of letters" (1749), "Reflections in originality of Authors" (1766). He also collaborated with David Garrick in a special edition of "Antony and Cleopatra."

EDWARD CAPELL'S INTRODUCTION

[Prepared to octavo edition in ten volumes, 1768.]

It is said of the ostrich, that she drops her egg at random, to be dispos'd of as chance pleases; either brought to maturity by the sun's kindly warmth, or else crushed by beasts and the feet of passers-by: such at least, is the account which naturalists have given us of this extraordinary bird; and admitting it for a truth, she is in this a fit emblem of almost every great genius: they conceive and produce with ease those noble issues of human understanding; but incubation, the dull work of putting them correctly upon paper and afterwards publishing, is a task they can not away with. If the original state of all such author's writings, even from Homer downward, could be enquir'd into and known, they would yield proof in abundance of the justness of what is here asserted: but the author now before us shall suffice for them all; being at once the greatest instance of genius in producing noble things, and of negligence in providing for them afterwards. This negligence indeed was so great, and the condition in which his works are come down to us so very deformed, that it has, of late years, induc'd several gentlemen to make a revision of them: but the publick seems not to be satisfied with any of their endeavours; and the reason of its discontent will be manifest, when the state of his old editions, and the methods that they have taken to amend them, are fully lay'd open, which is the first business of this Introduction.

Of thirty-six plays which Shakespeare has left us, and which compose the collection that was afterwards set out in folio, thirteen only were published in his life-

time, that have much resemblance to those in the folio; these thirteen are—"Hamlet," First and Second "Henry IV.," "King Lear," "Love's Labour's Lost," "Merchant of Venice," "Midsummer-Night's Dream," "Much Ado About Nothing," "Richard II.," "Richard III.," "Romeo and Juliet," "Titus Andronicus," and "Troilus and Cressida." Some others, that came out in the same period, bear indeed the titles of—"Henry V.," "King John," "Merry Wives of Windsor," and "Taming of the Shrew," but are no other than either first draughts, or mutilated and perhaps surreptitious impressions of those plays, but whether of the two is not easy to determine: "King John" is certainly a first draught, and in two parts; and so much another play that only one line of it is retain'd in the second: there is also a first draught of the Second and Third parts of "Henry VI.," published in his life time under the following title,—"The whole Contention between the two famous Houses, Lancaster and Yorke": and to these plays, six in number, may be added the first impression of "Romeo and Juliet," being a play of the same stamp: The date of all these quartos, and that of their several re-impressions, may be seen in a table that follows the Introduction. "Othello" came out only one year before the folio; and is, in the main, the same play that we have there: and this too, is the case of the first-mentioned thirteen; notwithstanding there are in many of them great variations, and particularly in "Hamlet," "King Lear," "Richard III.," and "Romeo and Juliet."

As for the plays which, we say, are either the poet's first draughts, or else imperfect and stolen copies, it will be thought, perhaps, they might as well have been left out of the account: but they are not wholly useless;



EDWARD CAPELL

some lacunæ, that are in all the other editions, have been judiciously fill'd up in modern impressions by the authority of these copies; and in some particular passages of them, where there happens to be a greater conformity than usual between them and the more perfect editions, there is here and there a various reading that does honour to the poet's judgment, and should upon that account, be presum'd the true one; in other respects, they have neither use nor merit, but are merely curiosities.

Proceed we then to a description of the other fourteen. They all abound in faults, though not in equal degree; and those faults are so numerous, and of so many different natures, that nothing but a perusal of the pieces themselves can give an adequate conception of them; but amongst them are these that follow. Divisions of acts and scenes, they have none, "Othello" only excepted, which is divided into acts: entries of persons are extremely imperfect in them, (sometimes more, sometimes fewer, than the scene requires), and their exits are very often omitted; or when mark'd, not always in the right place; and few scenical directions are to be met with throughout the whole: speeches are frequently confounded, and given to wrong persons, either whole, or in part; and sometimes, instead of the person speaking, you have the actor who presented him: and in two of the plays, ("Love's Labour's Lost," and "Troilus and Cressida"), the same matter, and in nearly the same words, is set down twice in some passages; which who sees not to be only a negligence of the poet, and that but one of them ought to have been printed? But the reigning fault of all is in the measure: prose is very often printed as verse, and verse as prose; or, where rightly printed verse, that verse is not always right

divided: and in all these pieces, the songs are in every particular still more corrupt than the other parts of them. These are the general and principal defects: to which if you add—transposition of words, sentences, lines, and even speeches; words omitted, and others added without reason; and a punctuation so deficient, and so often wrong, that it hardly deserves regard; you have, upon the whole, a true but melancholy picture of the condition of these first printed plays: which bad as it is is yet better than that of those which came after; or than that of the subsequent folio impression of some of these which we are now speaking of.

This folio impression was sent into the world seven years after the author's death, by two of his fellow-players; and contains, besides the last mention'd fourteen, the true and genuine copies of the other six plays, and sixteen that were never publish'd before: the editors make great professions of fidelity, and some complaint of injury done to them and the author by stolen and maim'd copies, giving withal an advantageous, if just, idea of the copies which they have follow'd; but see the terms they make use of: "It had been a thing, we confesse, worthie to have bene wished, that the author himselfe had liv'd to have set forth, and overseen his owne writings; but since it hath bin ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envy his friends, the office of their care, and paine, to have collected & published them; and so to have publish'd them, as where (before) you were abus'd with diverse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injurious imposters, that expos'd them; even those, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes;

and all the rest absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them. Who, as he was a happie imitator of nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His minde and hand went together: and what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers." Who now does not feel himself inclin'd to expect an accurate and good performance in the edition of these prefacers? But alas, it is nothing less: for (if we except the six spurious ones, whose places were then suppli'd by true and genuine copies) the editions of plays preceding the folio, are the very basis of those we have there; which are either printed from those editions, or from the copies which they made use of; and this is principally evident in—First and Second "Henry IV.," "Love's Labour's Lost," "Merchant of Venice," "Midsummer-Night's Dream," "Much Ado About Nothing," "Richard II.," "Titus Andronicus," and "Troilus and Cressida"; for in the others we see somewhat a greater latitude as was observ'd a little above: but in these plays, there is an almost strict conformity between the two impressions: some additions are in the second, and some omissions; but the faults and errors of the quartos are all preserv'd in the folio, and others added to them; and what difference there is, is generally for the worse on the side of the folio editors; which should give us but faint hopes of meeting with greater accuracy in the plays which they first publish'd; and, accordingly, we find them subject to all the imperfections that have been noted in the former: nor is their edition in general distinguish'd by any mark of preference above the earliest quartos, but that some of their plays are divided into acts, and some others into acts and scenes; and that with

due precision, and agreeable to the author's idea of the nature of such divisions. The order of printing these plays, the way in which they are class'd, and the titles given them, being matters of some curiosity, the Table that is before the first folio is here reprinted: and to it are added marks, put between crotchets, shewing the plays that are divided; *a* signifying—acts, *a & s*—acts and scenes.

TABLE OF PLAYS IN THE FOLIO.

<i>Comedies.</i>	
The Tempest. (a & s.)	The First Part of King Henry the Sixth.
The Two Gentlemen of Verona.* (a & s.)	The Second part of King Henry the Sixth.
The Merry Wives of Windsor. (a & s.)	The Third part of King Henry the Sixth.
Midsommer Nights Dreame.* (a.)	The Life & Death of Richard the Third.* (a & s.)
The Merchant of Venice.* (a.)	The Life of King Henry the Eighth. (a & s.)
As You Like It. (a & s.)	
The Taming of the Shrew.	<i>Tragedies.</i>
All Is Well That Ends Well. (a.)	
Twelve-Night, or What You Will. (a & s.)	Othello, the Moore of Venice. (a & s.)
The Winter's Tale. (a & s.)	Antony and Cleopater.
Measure for Measure. (a & s.)	(Troylus and Cressida) from the second folio; omitted in the first.
The Comedy of Errors.* (a.)	The Tragedy of Coriolanus. (a.)
Much Adoo About Nothing. (a.)	Titus Andronicus.* (a.)
Loves Labour lost.*	Romeo and Juliet.*
<i>Histories.</i>	Timon of Athens.
The Life and Death of King John.* (a & s.)	The Life and Death of Julius Cæsar. (a.)
The Life and Death of Richard the second.* (a & s.)	The Tragedy of Macbeth. (a & s.)
The First part of King Henry the fourth. (a & s.)	The Tragedy of Hamlet.
The Second part of King Henry the fourth.* (a & s.)	King Lear. (a & s.)
The Life of King Henry the Fift.	Cymbeline King of Britaine. (a & s.)

The plays, mark'd with asterisks, are spoken of by name, in a book, call'd—"Wit's Treasury," being the "Second Part of Wit's Commonwealth," written by Francis Meres, who in the same paragraph mentions another play as being Shakespeare's under the title of "Love's Labours Wonne"; a title that seems well adapted to "All's Well that Ends Well," and under which it might first be acted. In the paragraph immediately preceding, he speaks of his "Venus and Adonis," his "Lucrece," and his "Sonnets"; this book was printed in 1598, by P. Short, for Cuthbert Burbie; octavo, small. The same author mentions, too, a "Richard the Third," written by Doctor Leg, author of another play, called "The Destruction of Jerusalem." And there is in the Museum a manuscript Latin play upon the same subject, written by one Henry Lacy in 1586: which Latin play is but a weak performance; and yet seemeth to be the play spoken of by Sir John Harrington, (for the author was a Cambridge man, and of St. John's) in this passage of his "Apologie of Poetrie," prefixed to his translation of Ariosto's "Orlando," edit. 1591, fol: ". . . and for tragedies, to omit other famous tragedies; that, that was played at S. John's in Cambridge of 'Richard the 3,' would move (I think) Palaris the tyraunt and terrifie all tyrantous minded men, fro following their foolish ambitious humors, seeing how his ambition made him kill his brother, his nephews, his wife, beside infinit others; and last of all after a short and troublesome raigne, to end his miserable life, and to have his body harried after his death."—*Capell, in loco.*

Having premis'd thus much about the state and condition of these first copies, it may not be improper, nor will it be absolutely a digression, to add something concerning their authenticity: in doing which it will be greatly for the reader's ease,—and our own, to confine ourselves to the quartos: which, it is hop'd, he will allow of; especially as our intended vindications of them will also include in it (to the eye of a good observer) that of the plays that appear'd first in the folio: which therefore omitting, we now turn ourselves to the quartos.

We have seen the slur that is endeavour'd to be thrown upon them indiscriminately by the player-editors, and

we see it too wip'd off by their having themselves follow'd the copies that they condemn. A modern editor, who is not without his followers, is pleased to assert confidently in his preface, that they are printed from "piece-meal parts, and copies of prompters": but his arguments for it are, some of them, without foundation, and the others not conclusive; and it is to be doubted, that the opinion is only thrown out to countenance an abuse that has been carry'd to much too great lengths by himself and another editor,—that of putting out of the text passages that they did not like. These censures then, and this opinion being set aside, is it criminal to try another conjecture, and see what can be made of it? It is known, that Shakespeare liv'd to no great age, being taken off in his fifty-third year; and yet his works are so numerous, that, when we take a survey of them, they seem the productions of a life of twice that length: for to the thirty-six plays in this collection, we must add seven, (one of which is in two parts), perhaps written over again; seven others that were publish'd, some of them in his life-time, and all with his name; and another seven, that are upon good grounds imputed to him; making in all, fifty-eight plays; besides the part that he may reasonably be thought to have had in other men's labours, being himself a player and a manager of theatres: what his prose productions were, we know not: but it can hardly be suppos'd, that he, who had so considerable a share in the confidence of the Earls of Essex and Southampton, could be a mute spectator only of controversies in which they were so much interested; and his other poetical works, that are known, will fill a volume the size of these that we have here. When the number and bulk of these pieces, the shortness of his

life, and the other busy employments of it are reflected upon duly, can it be wondered that he should be so loose a transcriber of them? or why should we refuse to give credit to what his companions tell us, of the state of those transcriptions, and of the facility with which they were pen'd? Let it then be granted, that these quartos are the poet's own copies, however they were come by; hastily written at first, and issuing from presses most of them as corrupt and licentious as can any where be produc'd, and not overseen by himself, nor by any of his friends: and there can be no stronger reason for subscribing to any opinion, than may be drawn in favour of this from the condition of all the other plays that were first printed in the folio; for, in method of publication, they have the greatest likeness possible to those which preceded them, and carry all the same marks of haste and negligence; yet the genuineness of the latter is attested by those who publish'd them, and no proof brought to invalidate their testimony. If it be still asked what then becomes of the accusation brought against the quartos by the player-editors, the answer is not so far off as may perhaps be expected: it may be true that they were "stoln"; but stoln from the author's copies by transcribers who found means to get at them: and "maim'd" they must needs be, in respect of their many alterations after the first performance: and who knows, if the difference that is between them, in some of the plays that are common to them both, has not been studiously heighten'd by the player-editors,—who had the means in their power, being masters of all the alterations,—to give at once a greater currency to their own lame edition, and support the charge which they bring

against the quartos? This, at least, is a probable opinion, and no bad way of accounting for those differences.

It were easy to add abundance of other argument in favour of these quartos;—Such as, their exact affinity to almost all the publications of this sort that came out about that time; of which it will hardly be asserted by any reasoning man, that they are all clandestine copies, and publish'd without their author's consent: next, the high improbability of supposing that none of these plays were of the poet's own setting-out: whose case is render'd singular by such a supposition; it being certain, that every other author of the time, without exception, who wrote any thing largely, publish'd some of his plays himself, and Ben Jonson all of them: nay, the very errors and faults of these quartos—of some of them at least, and those such as are brought against them by other arguers,—are with the editor, proofs of their genuineness; for from what hand, but that of the author himself, could come those seemingly strange repetitions which are spoken of,¹ those imperfect exits, and entries of persons who have no concern in the play at all, neither in the scene where they are made to enter, nor in any other part of it? yet such there are in several of these quartos; and such might well be expected in the hasty draughts of so negligent an author, who neither saw at once all he might want, nor, in some instances, have himself sufficient time to consider the fitness of what he was then penning. These and other like arguments might, as is said before, be collected, and urg'd for the plays that were first publish'd in the quartos; that is, for fourteen of them, for the other six are out of the question: but what has been enlarg'd

¹ *Vide* pp. 43-44.

upon above, of their being follow'd by the folio, and their apparent general likeness to all the other plays that are in that collection, is so very forcible as to be sufficient of itself to satisfy the unprejudic'd, that the plays of both impressions spring all from the same stock, and owe their numerous imperfections to one common origin and cause,—the too great negligence and haste of their over-careless producer.

But to return to the things immediately treated,—the state of the old editions. The quartos went through many impressions, as may be seen in the Table: and, in each play, the last is generally taken from the impression next before it, and so onward to the first; the few that come not within this rule, are taken notice of in the Table: and this further is to be observed of them: that, generally speaking, the more distant they are from the original, the more they abound in faults; 'till in the end, the corruptions of the last copies become so excessive, as to make them of hardly any worth. The folio too, had its re-impressions, the dates and notices of which are likewise in the Table, and they tread the same round as did the quartos: only that the third of them has seven plays more (see their titles below),² in which it is followed by the last; and that again by the first of the modern impressions, which come now to be spoken of.

If the stage be a mirror of the times, as undoubtedly it is, and we judge of the age's temper by what we see prevailing there, what must we think of the times that

²“Locrine;” “The London Prodigal;” “Pericles, Prince of Tyre;” “The Puritan, or, the Widow of Watling Street;” “Sir John Oldcastle;” “Thomas Lord Cromwell;” and “The Yorkshire Tragedy.”

succeeded Shakespeare? Jonson, favour'd by a court that delighted only in masques, had been gaining ground upon him even in his life-time; and his death put him in full possession of a post he had long aspir'd to, the empire of the drama: the props of this new king's throne, were—Fletcher, Shirley, Middleton, Massinger, Broome, and others; and how unequal they all were, the monarch and his subjects too, to the poet they came after, let their works testify: yet they had the vogue on their side, during all those blessed times that preceded the civil war, and Shakespeare was held in disesteem. The war, and the medley government that follow'd, swept all these things away: but they were restor'd with the king; and another stage took place, in which Shakespeare had little share. Dryden had then the lead, and maintain'd it for half a century: though his government was sometimes disputed by Lee, Tate, Shadwell, Wytcherly, and others; weakened much by "The Rehearsal"; and quite overthrown in the end by Otway, and Rowe: what the cast of their plays was, is known to every one: but that Shakespeare, the true and genuine Shakespeare, was not much relish'd, is plain from the many alterations of him, that were brought upon the stage by some of those gentlemen, and by others within that period.

But, from what has been said, we are not to conclude—that the poet had no admirers: for the contrary is true; and he had in all this interval no inconsiderable party amongst men of the greatest understanding who both saw his merit, in despite of the darkness it was then wrapt up in, and spoke loudly in praise; but the stream of the publick favour ran the other way. But this, too, coming about at the time we are speaking of, there was

a demand for his works, and in a form that was more convenient than the folios; in consequence of which, the gentleman last mentioned was set to work by the booksellers; and, in 1709, he put out an edition in six³ volumes octavo, which, unhappily, is the basis of all the other moderns: for this editor went no further than to the edition nearest to him in time, which was the folio of 1685, the last and worst of those impressions: this he republished with great exactness; correcting here and there some of its grossest mistakes, and dividing into acts and scenes the plays that were not divided before.

But no sooner was this edition in the hands of the publick, than they saw in part its deficiencies, and one of another sort began to be required of them; which accordingly was set about some years after by two gentlemen at once, Mr. Pope and Mr. Theobald. The labours of the first came out in 1725, in six volumes quarto: and he has the merit of having first improved his author, by the insertion of many large passages, speeches, and single lines, taken from the quartos; and of amending him in other places, by readings fetch'd from the same: but his materials were few, and his collation of them not the most careful; which, join'd to other faults, and to that main one—of making his predecessor's the copy himself follow'd, brought his labours in disrepute, and has finally sunk them in neglect.

His publication retarded the other gentleman, and he did not appear 'till the year 1733, when his work, too, came out in seven volumes octavo. The opposition that was between them seems to have inflam'd him,

³ Seven.

which was heighten'd by other motives, and he declaims vehemently against the work of his antagonist: which yet serv'd him for a model; and his own is made only a little better, by his having a few more materials; of which he was not a better collator than the other, nor did he excel him in use of them; for, in this article, both their judgments may be equally call'd in question; in what he has done that is conjectural, he is rather more happy; but in this he had large assistances.

But the gentleman that came next, is a critick of another stamp; and pursues a trick, in which it is greatly to be hop'd he will never be follow'd in the publication of any authors whatsoever: for this were, in effect, to annihilate them, if carry'd a little further; by destroying all marks of peculiarity and notes of time, all easiness of expression and numbers, all justness of thought, and the nobility of not a few of their conceptions: The manner in which his author is treated, excites an indignation that will be thought by some to vent itself too strongly; but terms weaker would do injustice to my feelings, and the censure shall be hazarded. Mr. Pope's edition was the ground-work of this overbold one; splendidly printed at Oxford in six quarto volumes, and publish'd in the year 1744: the publisher disdains all collation of folio, or quarto; and fetches all from his great self, and the moderns his predecessors: wantoning in very license of conjecture; and sweeping all before him (without notice, or reason given), that not suits his tastes, or lies level to his conceptions. But this justice should be done him:—as his conjectures are numerous, they are oftentimes not unhappy; and some of them are of that excellence, that one is struck with amazement to see a person of so much judgment as he

shows himself in them, adopt a method of publishing that runs counter to all the ideas that wise men have hitherto entertain'd of an editor's province and duty.

The year 1747 produc'd a fifth edition in eight octavo volumes published by Mr. Warburton; which, though it is said in the title page to be the joint work of himself and the second editor, the third ought rather to have been mention'd, for it is printed from his text. The merits of this performance have been so thoroughly discuss'd in two very ingenious books, "The Canons of Criticism," and "Revisal of Shakespeare's Text," that it is needless to say any more of it: this only shall be added to what may be there met with,—that the edition is not much benefited by fresh acquisitions from the old ones, which this gentleman seems to have neglected.

Other charges there are, that might be brought against these modern impressions, without infringing the laws of truth or candour either; but what is said, will be sufficient; and may satisfy their greatest favourers,—that the superstructure cannot be a sound one, which is built upon so bad a foundation as that work of Mr. Rowe's; which all of them, as we see, in succession, have yet made their corner-stone: The truth is it was impossible that such a beginning should end better than it has done: the fault was in the setting-out; and all the diligence that could be used, join'd to the discernment of a Pearce, or a Bentley, could never purge their author of all his defects by their method of proceeding.

The editor now before you was apriz'd in time of this truth; saw the wretched condition his author was reduc'd to by these late tamperings, and thought seriously of a cure for it, and that so long ago as the year 1745; for the attempt was first suggested by that gentleman's

performance, which came out at Oxford the year before: which when he had perus'd with no little astonishment, and consider'd the fatal consequences that must inevitably follow the imitation of so much license, he resolv'd himself to be champion; and to exert to the uttermost such abilities as he was master of, to save from further ruin an edifice of this dignity, which England must forever glory in. Hereupon he possess'd himself of the other modern editions, the folios, and as many quartos as could be presently be procur'd; and, within a few years, after, fortune and industry help'd him to all the rest, six only excepted; adding to them withal twelve more, which the compilers of former tables had no knowledge of. Thus furnish'd, he fell immediately to collation,—which is the first step in works of this nature; and, without it, nothing is done to purpose,—first of moderns with moderns, then of moderns with ancients, and afterwards of ancients with others more ancient: 'till, at the last, a ray of light broke forth upon him, by which he hop'd to find his way through the wilderness of these editions into that fair country, the poet's real habitation. He had not proceeded far in his collation, before he saw cause to come to this resolution;—to stick invariably to the old editions (that is, the best of them), which hold now the place of manuscripts, no scrap of the author's writing having the luck to come down to us; and never to depart from them, but in cases where reason, and the uniform practice of men of the greatest note in this art, tell him—they may be quitted; nor yet in those, without notice. But it will be necessary, that the general method of this edition should now be lay'd open; that the publick may be put in a capacity not only of comparing it with those they

already have, but of judging whether anything remains to be done towards the fixing this author's text in the manner himself gave it.

It is said a little before,—that we have nothing of his in writing; that the printed copies are all that is left to guide us; and that those copies are subject to numberless imperfections, but not all in like degree: our first business then, was—to examine their merit, and see on which side the scale of goodness preponderated; which we have generally found to be on that of the most ancient: it may be seen in the Table, what editions are judg'd to have the preference among those plays that were printed singly in quarto; and for those plays, the text of those editions is chiefly adher'd to: in all the rest, the first folio is follow'd; the text of which is by far the most faultless of the editions in that form; and has also the advantage in three quarto plays, in “2 Henry IV.,” “Othello,” and “Richard III.” Had the editions thus follow'd been printed with carefulness, from correct copies, and copies not added to or otherwise alter'd after those impressions, there had been no occasion for going any further: but this was not at all the case, even in the best of them; and it therefore became proper and necessary to look into the other old editions, and to select from thence whatever improves the author, or contributes to his advancement in perfectness, the point in view throughout all this performance: that they do improve him, was with the editor an argument in their favour; and a presumption of genuineness for what is thus selected, whether additions, or differences of any other nature; and the causes of their appearing in some copies, and being wanting in others, cannot now be discover'd, by reason of the time's distance, and

defect of fit materials for making the discovery. Did the limits of his Introduction allow of it, the editor would gladly have dilated and treated more at large this article of his plan; as that which is of greatest importance, and most likely to be contested of any thing in it: but this doubt, or this dissent (if any be), must come from those persons only who are not yet possess'd of the idea they ought to entertain of these ancient impressions; for of those who are, he fully persuades himself he shall have both the approof and the applause. But without entering further in this place into the reasonableness, or even necessity, of so doing, he does for the present acknowledge—that he has everywhere made use of such materials as he met with in other old copies, which he thought improv'd the editions that are made the ground-work of the present text: and whether they do so or no, the judicious part of the world may certainly know, by turning to a collection that will be publish'd; where all discarded readings are enter'd, all additions noted, and variations of every kind; and the editions specify'd, to which they severally belong.

But, when these helps were administered, there was yet behind a very great number of passages, labouring under various defects and those of various degree, that had their cure to seek from some other sources, that of copies affording it no more. For these he had recourse in the first place to the assistance of modern copies: and, where that was incompetent, or else absolutely deficient, which was very often the case, there he sought the remedy in himself, using judgment and conjecture; which, he is bold to say, he will not be found to have exercis'd wantonly, but to follow the establish'd rules of critique with soberness and temperance. These

emendations (whether of his own, or other gentlemen), carrying in themselves a face of certainty, and coming in aid of places that were apparently corrupt, are admitted into the text, and the rejected reading is always put below; some others,—that are neither of that certainty, nor are of that necessity, but are specious and plausible, and may be thought by some to mend the passage they belong to,—will have a place in the collection that is spoken of above. But where it is said, that the rejected reading is always put below, this must be taken with some restriction: for some of the emendations, and of course the ancient readings upon which they are grounded, being of a complicated nature, the general method was there inconvenient; and, for these few, you are referr'd to a note which will be found among the rest: and another sort there are, that are simply insertions; these are effectually pointed out by being printed in the gothick or black character.

Hitherto, the defects and errors of these old editions have been of such a nature, that we could lay them before the reader, and submit to his judgment the remedies that are apply'd to them; which is accordingly done, either in the page itself where they occur, or in some note that is to follow: but there are some behind that would not be so manag'd either by reason of their frequency, or difficulty of subjecting them to the rules under which the others are brought; they have been spoken of before (at p. 189), where the corruptions are all enumerated, and are as follows:—a want of proper exits and entrances, and of many scenical directions, throughout the work in general, and, in some of the plays, a want of division; and the errors are those of measure, and punctuation: all these are mended, and

supply'd, without notice and silently; but the reason for so doing, and the method observed in doing it, shall be a little enlarg'd upon, that the fidelity of the editor, and that which is chiefly to distinguish him from those who have gone before, may stand sacred and unimpeachable; and, first, of the division.

The thing chiefly intended in reprinting the list of titles that may be seen (at p. 192), to show which plays were divided into acts, which into acts and scenes, and which of them were not divided at all; and the number of the first class is—eight; of the third—eleven: for though in “Henry V.,” “1 Henry VI.,” “Love’s Labour’s Lost,” and “The Taming of the Shrew,” there is some division aim’d at; yet it is so lame and erroneous that it was thought best to consider them as totally undivided, and to rank them accordingly: now when these plays were to be divided, as well those of the first class as those of the third, the plays of the second class were studiously attended to; and a rule was pick’d out from them, by which to regulate this division: which rule might easily have been discover’d before, had but any the least pains have been bestow’d upon it; and certainly it was very well worth it, since neither can the representation be manag’d, nor the order and thread of the fable be properly conceiv’d by the reader, ’till this article is adjusted. The plays that are come down to us divided, must be look’d upon as of the author’s own settling; and in them, with regard to acts, we find him following establish’d precepts, or, rather, conforming himself to the practice of some other dramattick writers of his time; for they, it is likely, and nature, were the books he was best acquainted with: his scene divisions he certainly did not fetch from writers upon

the drama; for, in them, he observed a method in which perhaps he is singular, and he is invariable in the use of it; with him, a change of scene implies generally a change of place, though not always; but always an entire evacuation of it, and a succession of new persons: that liaison of the scenes, which Jonson seems to have attempted and upon which the French stage prides itself, he does not appear to have had any idea of; of the other unities he was perfectly well apprized; and has follow'd them, in one of his plays, with as great strictness and greater happiness than can perhaps be met with in any other writer: the play meant is "The Comedy of Errors"; in which the action is one, the place one, and the time such as even Aristotle himself would allow of—the revolution of half a day: but even in this play, the change of scene arises from change of persons, and by that it is regulated; as are also all the other plays that are not divided in the folio: for whoever will take the trouble to examine those that are divided (and they are pointed out for him in the list), will see them conform exactly to the rule above mentioned; and can then have but little doubt, that it should be apply'd to all the rest. To have distinguish'd these divisions,—made (indeed), without the authority, but following the example of the folio,—had been useless and troublesome; and the editor fully persuades himself that what he has said will be sufficient, and that he shall be excus'd by the ingenious and candid for overpassing them without further notice: whose pardon he hopes also to have for some other unnotic'd matters that are related to this in hand, such as—marking the place of action, both general and particular; supplying scenical directions; and due regulating of exits, and entrances:

for the first, there is no title in the old editions; and in both the latter, they are so deficient and faulty throughout, that it would not be much amiss if we look'd upon them as wanting too; and then all these several articles might be consider'd as additions, that needed no other pointing out than a declaration that they are so: the light that they throw upon the plays in general, and particularly upon some parts of them,—such as, the battle scenes throughout; *Cæsar's* passage to the senate-house, and subsequent assassination; *Antony's* death, the surprisal and death of *Cleopatra*; that of *Titus Andronicus*; and a multitude of others, which are all directed new in this edition,—will justify these insertions; and may, possibly, merit the reader's thanks, for the great aids which they afford to his conception.

It remains now to speak of errors of the old copies which are here amended without notice, to wit—the pointing, and wrong division of much of them respecting the numbers. And as to the first, it is so extremely erroneous, throughout all the plays, and in every old copy, that small regard is due to it; and it becomes an editor's duty (instead of being influenc'd by such a punctuation, or even casting his eyes upon it), to attend closely to the meaning of what is before him, and to new-point it accordingly: was it the business of this edition—to make parade of discoveries, this article alone would have afforded ample field for it, for a very great number of passages are now first set to rights by this only, which, before, had either no sense at all, or one unsuited the context, and unworthy the noble penner of it; but all the emendations of this sort, though inferior in merit to no others whatsoever, are consign'd to silence; some few only excepted, of passages that

have been much contested, and whose present adjustment might possibly be call'd in question again; these will be spoken of in some note, and a reason given for embracing them; all the other parts of the works have been examin'd with equal diligence, and equal attention; and the editor flatters himself, that the punctuation he has follow'd (into which he has admitted some novelties), will be found of so much benefit to his author, that those who run may read, and that with profit and understanding. The other great mistake in these old editions, and which is very insufficiently rectify'd in any of the new ones, relates to the poet's numbers; his verse being often wrong divided, or printed wholly as prose, and his prose as often printed like verse: this, though not so universal as their wrong pointing, is yet so extensive an error in the old copies, and so impossible to be pointed out otherwise than by a note, that an editor's silent amendment of it is surely pardonable at least; for who would not be disgusted with that perpetual sameness which must necessarily have been in all the notes of this sort? Neither are they, in truth, emendations that require proving; every good ear does immediately adopt them, and every lover of the poet will be pleas'd with that accession of beauty which results to him from them: it is perhaps to be lamented, that there is yet standing in his works much displeasing mixture of prosaick and material dialogue, and sometimes in places seemingly improper, as—in "Othello," and some others which men of judgment will be able to pick out for themselves: but these blemishes are not now to be wip'd away, at least not by an editor, whose province it far exceeds to make a change of this nature; but must remain as marks of the poet's negligence, and of the haste with which his

pieces were compos'd: what he manifestly intended prose (and we can judge of his intentions only from what appears in the editions that are come down to us), should be printed as prose, what verse as verse; which, it is hop'd, is now done, with an accuracy that leaves no great room for any further considerable improvement in this way.

Thus have we run through, in as brief a manner as possible, all the several heads, of which it was thought proper and even necessary that the publick should be appriz'd; as well those that concern preceding editions, both old and new; as the other which we have just quitted,—the method observ'd in the edition that is now before them: which though not so entertaining, it is confess'd, nor affording so much room to display the parts and talents of a writer, as some other topicks that have generally supply'd the place of them; such as—criticisms or panegyricks upon the author, historical anecdotes, essays, and *florilegia*; yet there will be found some odd people, who may be apt to pronounce of them—that they are suitable to the place they stand in, and convey all the instruction that should be look'd for in a preface. Here, therefore, we might take our leave of the reader, bidding him welcome to the banquet that is set before him; were it not apprehended, and reasonably, that he will expect some account why it is not serv'd up to him at present with its accustom'd and laudable garniture, of “Notes, Glossaries,” etc. Now though it might be reply'd, as a reason for what is done,—that a very great part of the world, amongst whom is the editor himself, profess much dislike to this paginary intermixture of text and comment; in works merely of entertainment, and written in the language

of the country; as also—that he, the editor, does not possess the secret of dealing out notes by measure, and distributing them amongst his volumes so nicely that the equality of their bulk shall not be broke in upon the thickness of a sheet of paper; yet, having other matter at hand which he thinks may excuse him better, he will not have recourse to these above mention'd! which matter is no other, than his very strong desire of approving himself to the publick a man of integrity; and of making his future present more perfect, and as worthy of their acceptance as his abilities will let him. For the explaining of what is said, which is a little wrap'd up in mystery at present, we must inform that publick—that another work, is prepar'd, and in great forwardness, having been wrought upon many years; nearly indeed as long as the work which is now before them, for they have gone hand in hand almost from the first; this work, to which we have given for title “The School of Shakespeare,⁴ consists wholly of extracts, (with observations upon some of them, interspers'd occasionally,) from books that may properly be called—his school; as they are indeed the sources from which he drew the greater part of his knowledge in mythology and classical matters, his fable, his history, and even the seeming peculiarities of his language: to furnish out of these materials, all the plays have been perus'd, within a very small number, that were in print in his time or some short time after; the chroniclers his contemporaries, or that a little preceded him; many original poets of that age, and many translators; with essayists, novelists, and story-mongers in great abundance:

⁴ Published in three volumes, 1783, two years after Capell's death.

every book, in short, has been consulted that it was possible to procure, with which it could be thought he was acquainted, or that seem'd likely to contribute anything towards his illustrations. To what degree they illustrate him, and in how new a light they set the character of this great poet himself can never be conceiv'd as it should be, 'till these extracts came forth to the publick view, in their just magnitude, and properly digested: for besides the various passages that he has either made use of or alluded to, many other matters have been selected and will be found in this work, tending all to the same end,—our better knowledge of him and his writings; and one class of them there is, for which we shall perhaps be censur'd as being too profuse in them, namely—the almost innumerable examples, drawn from those ancient writers, of words and modes of expression which many have thought peculiar to Shakespeare, and have been too apt to impute to him as a blemish: but the quotations of this class do effectually purge him from such a charge, which is one reason of their profusion; though another main inducement to it has been, a desire of shewing the true force and meaning of the aforesaid unusual words and expressions; which can no way be better ascertain'd, than by a proper variety of well-chosen examples. Now,—to bring this matter home to the subject for which it has been alledg'd, and upon whose account this affair is now lay'd before the publick somewhat before its time,—who is so short-sighted as not to perceive, upon first reflection, that, without manifest injustice, the notes upon this author could not precede the publication of the work we have been describing; whose choicest materials would unavoidably

and certainly have found a place in those notes, and so been twice retailed upon the world; a practice which the editor has often condemn'd in others, and could therefore not resolve to be guilty of in himself? By postponing these notes a while, things will be as they ought: they will then be confin'd to that which is their proper subject, explanation alone, intermix'd with some little criticism; and instead of long quotations, which would otherwise have appear'd in them, "The School of Shakespeare" will be referr'd to occasionally; and one of the many indexes with which this same "School" will be provided, will afford an ampler and truer Glossary than can be made out of any other matter. In the mean while, and 'till such time as the whole can be got ready, and their way clear'd for them by publication of the book above mention'd, the reader will please to take in good part some few of these notes with which he will be presented by and by: they were written at least four years ago, with intention of placing them at the head of the several notes that are design'd for each play; but are now detach'd from their fellows, and made parcel of the Introduction, in compliance with some friends' opinion; who having given them a perusal, will needs have it, that 'tis expedient the world should be made acquainted forthwith—in what sort of reading the poor poet himself, and his editor after him, have been unfortunately immers'd.

This discourse is run out, we know not how, into greater heaps of leaves than was anyways thought of, and has perhaps fatigu'd the reader equally with the penner of it; yet can we not dismiss him, nor lay down our pen, 'till one article more has been enquir'd into, which seems no less proper for the discussion of this

place, than one which we have inserted before, beginning at p. 191; as we have ventur'd to stand up in the behalf of some of the quartos and maintain their authenticity, so mean we to have the hardiness here to defend some certain plays in this collection from the attacks of a number of writers who have thought fit to call in question their genuineness: the plays contested are—The Three Parts of “Henry VI.”; “Love’s Labour’s Lost”; “The Taming of the Shrew”; and “Titus Andronicus”; and the sum of what is brought against them, so far at least as is hitherto come to the knowledge, may be all ultimately resolv’d into the sole opinion of their unworthiness, exclusive of some weak surmises which do not deserve a notice: it is therefore fair and allowable, by all laws of duelling, to oppose opinion to opinion; which if we can strengthen with reason, and something like proofs, which are totally wanting on the other side, the last opinion may chance to carry the day.

To begin then with the first of them, the “Henry VI.” in three parts. We are quite in the dark as to when the first part was written; but should be apt to conjecture, that it was some considerable time after the other two; and, perhaps, when those two were retouch’d, and made a little fitter than they are in their first draught to rank with the author’s other plays which he has fetch’d from our English history: and those two parts, even with all their retouchings, being still much inferior to the other plays of that class, he may reasonably be suppos’d to have underwrit himself on purpose in the first, that it might the better match with those it belong’d to: now that these two plays (the first draughts of them, at least), are among his early performances, we know

certainly from their date; which is further confirm'd by the two concluding lines of his "Henry V." spoken by the Chorus; and (possibly) it were not going too far, to imagine—that they are his second attempt in history, and near in time to his original "King John" which is also in two parts; and, if this be so, we may safely pronounce them his, and even highly worthy of him; it being certain, that there was no English play upon the stage, at that time, which can come at all in competition with them; and this probably it was, which procur'd them the good reception that is mention'd too in the Chorus. The plays we are now speaking of have been inconceivably mangl'd either in the copy or the press, or perhaps both: yet this may be discovered in them—that the alterations made afterwards by the author are nothing near so considerable as those in some other plays; the incidents, the characters, every principal outline in short being the same in both draughts; so that what we shall have occasion to say of the second, may, in some degree, and without much violence, be apply'd also to the first: and this we presume to say of it;—that, low as it must be set in comparison with his other plays, it has beauties in it, and grandeurs, of which no other author was capable but Shakespeare only; that extremely-affecting scene of the death of young *Rutland*, that of his father which comes next it, and of *Clifford*, the murthurer of them both; *Beaufort's* dreadful exit, the exit of *King Henry*, and a scene of wondrous simplicity and wondrous tenderness united, in which that *Henry* is made a speaker, while his last decisive battle is fighting,—are as so many stamps upon these plays; by which his property is mark'd, and himself declar'd the owner of them, beyond controversy as we

think: and though we have selected these passages only, and recommended them to observation, it had been easy to name abundance of others which bear his mark as strongly: and one circumstance there is that runs through all the three plays, by which he is as surely to be known as by any other that can be thought of; and that is,—the preservation of character: all the personages in them are distinctly and truly delineated, and the character given them sustain'd uniformly throughout; the enormous *Richard's* particularly, which in the third of these plays is seen rising towards its zenith: and who sees not the future monster, and acknowledges at the same time the pen that drew it, in those two lines only, spoken over a king who lies stab'd before him,—

“What, will the aspiring blood of Lancaster
Sink in the ground? I thought it would have mounted.”*

let him never pretend discernment hereafter in any case of this nature.

It is hard to persuade one's self, that the objectors to the play which comes next, are indeed serious in their opinion; for if he is not visible in “*Love's Labour's Lost*,” we know not in which of his comedies he can be said to be so; the ease and sprightliness of the dialogue in very many parts of it; it's quick turns of wit, and the humour it abounds in; and (chiefly) in those truly comick characters, the pedant and his companion, the page, the constable, *Costard*, and *Armado*,—seem more than sufficient to prove Shakespeare the author of it: and for the blemishes of this play, we must seek the true cause in it's antiquity; which we may venture to carry higher than 1598, the date of it's first impression:

* “Henry VI.” part III., V., 6.

rime, when this play appear'd, was thought a beauty of the drama, and heard with singular pleasure by an audience, who but a few years before, had been accustom'd to all rime; and the measure we call dogrel, and are so much offended with, had no such effect upon the ears of that time: but whether blemishes or no, however this matter be which we have brought to exculpate him, neither of these articles can with any face of justice be alleg'd against "Love's Labour's Lost," seeing they are both to be met with in several other plays, the genuineness of which has not been question'd by any one. And one thing more shall be observ'd in the behalf of this play;—that the author himself was so little displeas'd at least with some part of it, that he has brought them a second time upon the stage; for who may not perceive that his famous *Benedict* and *Beatrice* are but little more than the counter-parts of *Biron* and *Rosaline*? All which circumstances consider'd, and that especially of the writer's childhood (as it may be term'd) when this comedy was produc'd, we may confidently pronounce it his true offspring, and replace it amongst its brethren.

That the "Taming of the Shrew" should ever have been put into this class of plays, and adjudg'd a spurious one, may justly be reckon'd wonderful, when we consider it's merit, and the reception it has generally met with in the world: its success at first, and the esteem it was then held in, induc'd Fletcher to enter the lists with it in another play, in which *Petruchio* is humb'd and *Catharine* triumphant; and we have it in his works, under the title of "The Woman's Prize, or, the Tamer tam'd": but, by an unhappy mistake of buffoonery for humour and obscenity for wit, which was

not uncommon with that author, his production came lamely off, and was soon consign'd to the oblivion in which it is now bury'd; whereas this of his antagonist flourishes still, and has maintained its place upon the stage (in some shape or other) from its very first appearance down to the present hour: and this success it has merited, by true wit and true humour; a fable of very artful construction, much business, and highly interesting; and by natural and well-sustained characters, which no pen but Shakespeare's was capable of drawing: what defects it has, are chiefly in the diction; the same (indeed) with those of the play that was last-mention'd, and to be accounted for the same way: for we are strongly inclin'd to believe it a neighbour in time to "Love's Labour's Lost," though we want the proofs of it which we have luckily for that.

But the plays which we have already spoken of are but slightly attack'd, and by few writers, in comparison of this which we are now come to of "Titus Andronicus"; commentators, editors, every one (in short) who has had to do with Shakespeare, unite all in condemning it,—as a very bundle of horrors, totally unfit for the stage, and unlike the poet's manner, and even the style of his other pieces; all which allegations are extremely true, and we readily admit of them, but can not admit the conclusion—that therefore it is not his; and shall now proceed to give the reasons of our dissent, but (first) the play's age must be enquir'd into. In the Induction to Jonson's "Bartholomew Fair," which was written in the year 1614, the audience is thus accosted;—"Hee that will sweare, 'Jeronimo,' or 'Andronicus' are the best playes, yet, shall passe unexcepted at, heere, as a man whose judgement shews it is constant, and hath

stood still, these five and twentie, or thirty yeeres. Though it be an ignorance, it is a vertuous and stay'd ignorance; and next to truth, a confirm'd errour does well; such a one the author knowes where to finde him." We have here the great Ben himself, joining this play with "Jeronimo, or The Spanish Tragedy," and bearing express testimony to the credit they were both in with the publick at the time they were written; but this by the by; to ascertain that time, was the chief reason for inserting the quotation, and there we see it fix'd to twenty-five or thirty years prior to this Induction: now it is not necessary to suppose that Jonson speaks in this place with exact precision; but allowing that he does, the first of these periods carries us back to 1589, a date not very repugnant to what is afterwards advanc'd: Langbaine, in his "Account of the English Dramatick Poets," under the article "Shakespeare," does expressly tell us,—that "'Andronicus' was first printed in 1594, quarto, and acted by the Earls of Derby, Pembroke, and Essex, their servants"; and though the edition is not now to be met with, and he who mentions it be no exact writer, nor greatly to be rely'd on in many of his articles, yet in this which we have quoted he is so very particular that one can hardly withhold assent to it; especially, as this account of its printing coincides well enough with Jonson's æra of writing this play; to which therefore we subscribe, and go on upon that ground. The books of that time afford strange examples of the barbarism of the publick taste both upon the stage and elsewhere: a conceited one of John Lilly's set the whole nation a-madding; and, for a while, every pretender to politeness "parl'd Euphuism," as it was phras'd, and no writings would go

down with them but such as were pen'd in that fantastical manner: the setter-up of this fashion try'd it also in comedy; but seems to have miscarry'd in that, and for this plain reason; the people who govern theatres are, the middle and lower order of the world; and these expected laughter in comedies, which this stuff of Lilly's was incapable of exciting: but some other writers, who rose exactly at that time, succeeded better in certain tragical performances, though as outrageous to the full in their way, and as remote from nature, as these comick ones of Lilly; for falling in with that innate love of blood which has been often objected to British audiences, and choosing fables of horror which they made horrider still by their manner of handling them, they produc'd a set of monsters that are not to be parallel'd in all the annals of play-writing; yet they were received with applause, and were the favourites of the publick for almost ten years together, ending at 1595; many plays of this stamp, it is probable, have perish'd; but those that are come down to us, are as follows; —“The Wars of Cyrus,” “Tamburlaine the Great,” in two parts; “The Spanish Tragedy,” likewise in two parts; “Soliman and Perseda,” and “Selimus, a tragedy”; which whoever has means of coming at, and can have patience to examine, will see evident tokens of a fashion then prevailing, which occasion'd all these plays to be cast in the same mold. Now, Shakespeare, whatever motives he might have in some other parts of it, at this period of his life wrote certainly for profit; and seeing it was to be had in this way, (and this way only, perhaps), he fell in with the current, and gave his sorry auditors a piece to their tooth in this contested play of “Titus Andronicus”; which as it came out at the same

time with the plays above-mention'd, is most exactly like them in almost every particular; their very numbers, consisting all of ten syllables with hardly any redundant, are copied by this Proteus, who could put on any shape that either serv'd his interest or suited his inclination: and this, we hope, is a fair and unforc'd way of accounting for "Andronicus"; and may convince the most prejudic'd—that Shakespeare might be the writer of it; as he might also of "Lochrine" which is ascribed to him, a ninth tragedy, in form and time agreeing perfectly with the others. But to conclude this article,—However he may be censur'd as rash or ill-judging, the editor ventures to declare—that he himself wanted not the conviction of the foregoing argument to be satisfy'd who the play belongs to; for though a work of imitation, and conforming itself to models truly execrable throughout, yet the genius of its author breaks forth in some places, and, to the editor's eye, Shakespeare stands confess'd: the third act in particular may be read with admiration even by the most delicate; who, if they are not without feelings, may chance to find themselves touch'd by it with such passions as tragedy should excite, that is—terror, and pity. The reader will please to observe—that all these contested plays are in the folio, which is dedicated to the poet's patrons and friends, the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, by editors who are seemingly honest men, and profess themselves dependant upon those noblemen, to whom therefore they would hardly have had the confidence to present forgeries, and pieces supposititious; in which too they were liable to be detected by those identical noble persons themselves, as well as by a very great part of their other readers and auditors: which argument, though of no little

strength in itself, we omitted to bring before, as having better (as we thought) and more forcible to offer; but it had behov'd those gentlemen who have question'd the plays to have got rid of it in the first instance as it lies full in their way in the very entrance upon this dispute.

We shall close this part of the introduction with some observations, that were reserv'd for this place, upon that paragraph of the player-editor's preface which is quoted at p. 190; and then taking this further liberty with the reader,—to call back his attention to some particulars that concern the present edition, dismiss him to be entertain'd (as we hope) by a sort of appendix, consisting of those notes that have been mention'd, in which the true and undoubted originals of almost all the poet's fables are clearly pointed out. But first of the preface. Besides the authenticity of all the several pieces that make up this collection, and their care in publishing them, both solemnly affirm'd in the paragraph refer'd to, we there find these honest editors acknowledging in terms equally solemn the author's right in his copies, and lamenting that he had not exercis'd that right by a publication of them during his life-time; and from the manner in which they express themselves, we are strongly inclin'd to think—that he had really form'd such a design, but towards his last days, and too late to put it in execution: a collection of Jonson's was at that instant in the press, and upon the point of coming forth; which might probably inspire such a thought into him and his companions, and produce conferences between them—about a similar publication from him, and the pieces that should compose it, which the poet might make a list of. It is true, this is only a supposition; but a supposition arising naturally, as we think, from the incident

that has been mention'd, and the expressions of his fellow-players and editors: and, if suffer'd to pass for truth, here is a good and sound reason for the exclusion of all those other plays that have been attributed to him upon some grounds or other;—he himself has proscrib'd them; and we cannot forbear hoping, that they will in no future time rise up against him, and be thrust into his works; a disavowal of weak and idle pieces, the productions of green years, wantonness, or inattention, is a right that all authors are vested with; and should be exerted by all, if their reputation is dear to them; had Jonson us'd it, his character had stood higher than it does. But, after all, they who have pay'd attention to this truth are not always secure; the indiscreet zeal of an admirer, or avarice of a publisher, has frequently added things that dishonour them; and where realities have been wanting, forgeries supply the place; thus has Homer his Hymns, and the poor Mantuan his Ciris and his Culex. Noble and great authors demand all our veneration: where their wills can be discover'd, they ought sacredly to be comply'd with; and that editor ill discharges his duty, who presumes to load them with things they have renounc'd: it happens but too often, that we have other ways to shew our regard to them; their own great want of care in their copies, and the still greater want of it that is commonly in their impressions, will find sufficient exercise for any one's friendship, who may wish to see their works set forth in that perfection which was intended by the author. And this friendship we have endeavour'd to shew to Shakespeare in the present edition; the plan of it has been lay'd before the reader; upon whom it rests to judge finally of its goodness, as well as how it is executed: but as several matters

have interven'd that may have driven it from his memory ; and we are desirous above all things to leave a strong impression upon him of one merit which it may certainly pretend to, that is—it's fidelity ; we shall take leave to remind him, at parting, that—Throughout all this work, what is added without the authority of some ancient edition, is printed in a black letter : what alter'd, and what thrown out, constantly taken notice of ; some few times in a note, where the matter was long, or of a complex nature ; but, more generally, at the bottom of the page ; where what is put out of the text, how minute and insignificant soever, is always to be met with ; what alter'd, as constantly set down, and in the proper words of that edition upon which the alteration is form'd : and, even in authoriz'd readings, whoever is desirous of knowing further, what edition is follow'd preferably to the others, may be gratify'd too in that, by consulting the " Various Readings " ; which are now finish'd ; and will be publish'd, together with the " Notes," in some other volumes, with all the speed that is convenient.⁶

⁶ Here follows a summary, filling several pages, of the original sources of Shakespeare's plays. As it has no critical value it is here omitted.

ISAAC REED

1742-1807

ISAAC REED, the son of a baker, was born in London, January, 1742, and died January, 1807. He received such slender education as the narrow means of his parents allowed, but was wisely directed in his reading by his father. Beginning life as clerk in a solicitor's office, he became a conveyancer, and finally adopted literature. He was the friend of Horace Walpole, Bishop Percy, Dr. Farmer, and even George Steevens, with whom he was associated in Shakespearean criticism. He was a modest man, the editor of a number of memoirs and collected works, to which he rarely attached his name, and of which little note is taken at this day, save his edition of "Doddsley's Old Plays," and his additions and augmentations to the Johnson and Steevens edition of Shakespeare, published in 1785, again in 1793, and a fifth edition in twenty-one volumes, after his death in 1813.

Reed's Advertisement, which follows, gives us the quality of the man, modest, sincere, and honest.

REED'S ADVERTISEMENT

[The third edition, prefixed to a revision of Johnson and Steevens's text, 1785.]

THE works of Shakespeare, during the last twenty years, have been the objects of publick attention more than at any former period. In that time the various

editions of his performances have been examined, his obscurities illuminated, his defects pointed out, and his beauties displayed, so fully, so accurately, and in so satisfactory a manner, that it might reasonably be presumed little would remain to be done by either new editors or new commentators: yet, though the diligence and sagacity of those gentlemen who contributed towards the last edition of this author may seem to have almost exhausted the subject, the same train of enquiry has brought to light new discoveries, and accident will probably continue to produce further illustrations, which may render some alterations necessary in every succeeding republication.

Since the last edition of this work in 1778, the zeal for elucidating Shakespeare, which appeared in most of the gentlemen whose names are affixed to the notes, has suffered little abatement. The same persevering spirit of enquiry has continued to exert itself, and the same laborious search into the literature, the manners, and the customs of the times, which was formerly so successfully employed, has remained undiminished.

By these aids some new information has been obtained, and some new materials collected. From the assistance of such writers, even Shakespeare will receive no discredit.

When the very great and various talents of the last editor, particularly for this work, are considered, it will occasion much regret to find, that having superintended two editions of his favourite author through the press, he has at length declined the laborious office, and committed the care of the present edition to one who laments with the rest of the world the secession of his predecessor; being conscious, as well of his own inferiority,



ISAAC REED

as of the injury the publication will sustain by the change.

As some alterations have been made in the present edition, it may be thought necessary to point them out. These are of two kinds, additions and omissions. The additions are such as have been supplied by the last editor, and the principal of the living commentators. To mention these assistances, is sufficient to excite expectation; but to speak of anything in their praise will be superfluous to those who are acquainted with their former labours. Some remarks are also added from new commentators, and some notices extracted from books which have been published in the course of a few years past.

Of the omissions, the most important are some notes which have been demonstrated to be ill founded, and some which were supposed to add to the size of the volumes without increasing their value. It may probably have happened that a few are rejected which ought to have been retained; and in that case the present editor, who has been the occasion of their removal, will feel some concern from the injustice of his proceeding. He is, however, inclined to believe, that what he has omitted will be pardoned by the reader; and that the liberty which he has taken will not be thought to have been licentiously indulged. At all events, that the censure may fall where it ought, he desires it to be understood that no person is answerable for any of these innovations but himself.

It has been observed by the last editor, that the multitude of instances which have been produced to exemplify particular words, and explain obsolete customs, may, when the point is once known to be estab-

lished, be diminished by any future editor, and, in conformity of this opinion, several quotations, which were heretofore properly introduced, are now curtailed. Were an apology required on this occasion, the present editor might shelter himself under the authority of Prior, who long ago has said,

“That when one’s proofs are aptly chosen,
Four are as valid as four dozen.”

The present editor thinks it unnecessary to say any thing of his own share in the work, except that he undertook it in consequence of an application which was too flattering and too honourable to him to decline. He mentions this only to have it known that he did not intrude himself into the situation. He is not insensible, that the task would have been better executed by many other gentlemen, and particularly, by some whose names appear to the notes. He has added but little to the bulk of the volumes from his own observations, having, upon every occasion, rather chosen to avoid a note, than to court the opportunity of inserting one. The liberty he has taken of omitting some remarks, he is confident, has been exercised without prejudice and without partiality; and therefore, trusting to the candour and indulgence of the publick, will forbear to detain them any longer from the entertainment they may receive from the greatest poet of this or any other nation.

EDMUND MALONE

1741-1812

EDMUND MALONE was born in Dublin, October 4, 1741, and died in London, May 25, 1812.

He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, and became a member of the Irish bar. He turned his back, however, both upon the land of his birth and the profession of his adoption, and settling in London in the year 1777, devoted himself to literature, and mainly to Shakespearean criticism. His first essay in this field was "An Attempt to Ascertain the Order in Which the Plays of Shakespeare Were Written" (1778); followed two years later by two volumes supplementary to the Steevens and Johnson edition of the works.

These volumes opened a new era in Shakespearean interpretation. They contained the "Supplemental Observations," as he called them, which were afterwards made the basis of his history of the English stage; a reprint of Arthur Brooke's translation from the Italian of the old poem, "Romeus and Juliet," the "Venus and Adonis," "Rape of Lucrece," "Sonnets," "Passionate Pilgrim," and "A Lover's Complaint of Shakespeare"; and the seven doubtful plays, "Pericles," "Lochrine," "Sir John Oldcastle," "Lord Cromwell," "London Prodigal," "The Puritans," and "The Yorkshire Tragedy."

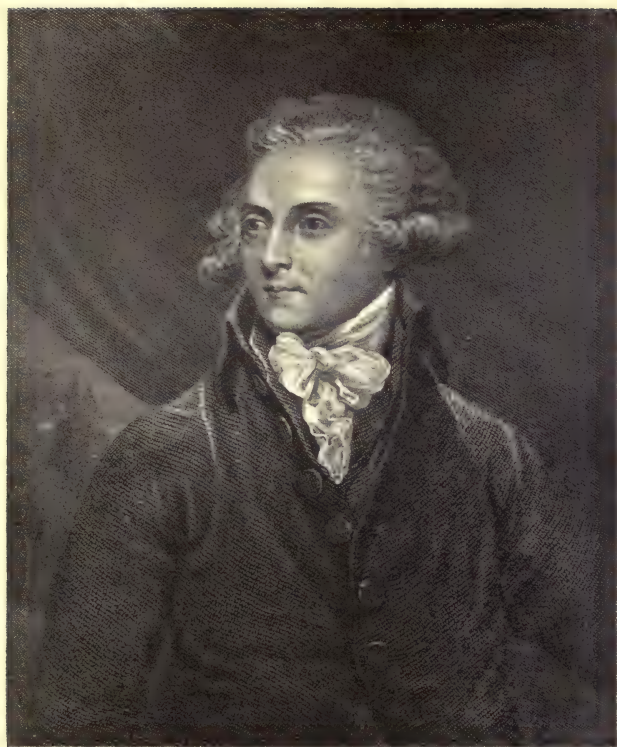
A first and second appendix followed these volumes, containing additional notes and emendations.

His own complete edition of the "Plays and Poems," in ten volumes, appeared in 1790, and gave evidence of a patient and plodding industry, accompanied by critical powers of great ability. This was the most monumental of all editions up to that date; containing not only "the corrections and illustrations of various commentators," but to which were added, "an essay on the chronological order of his plays (previously published); an essay relating to Shakespeare and Johnson; a dissertation on the three parts of 'King Henry VI.' and an historical account of the 'English Stage.'"

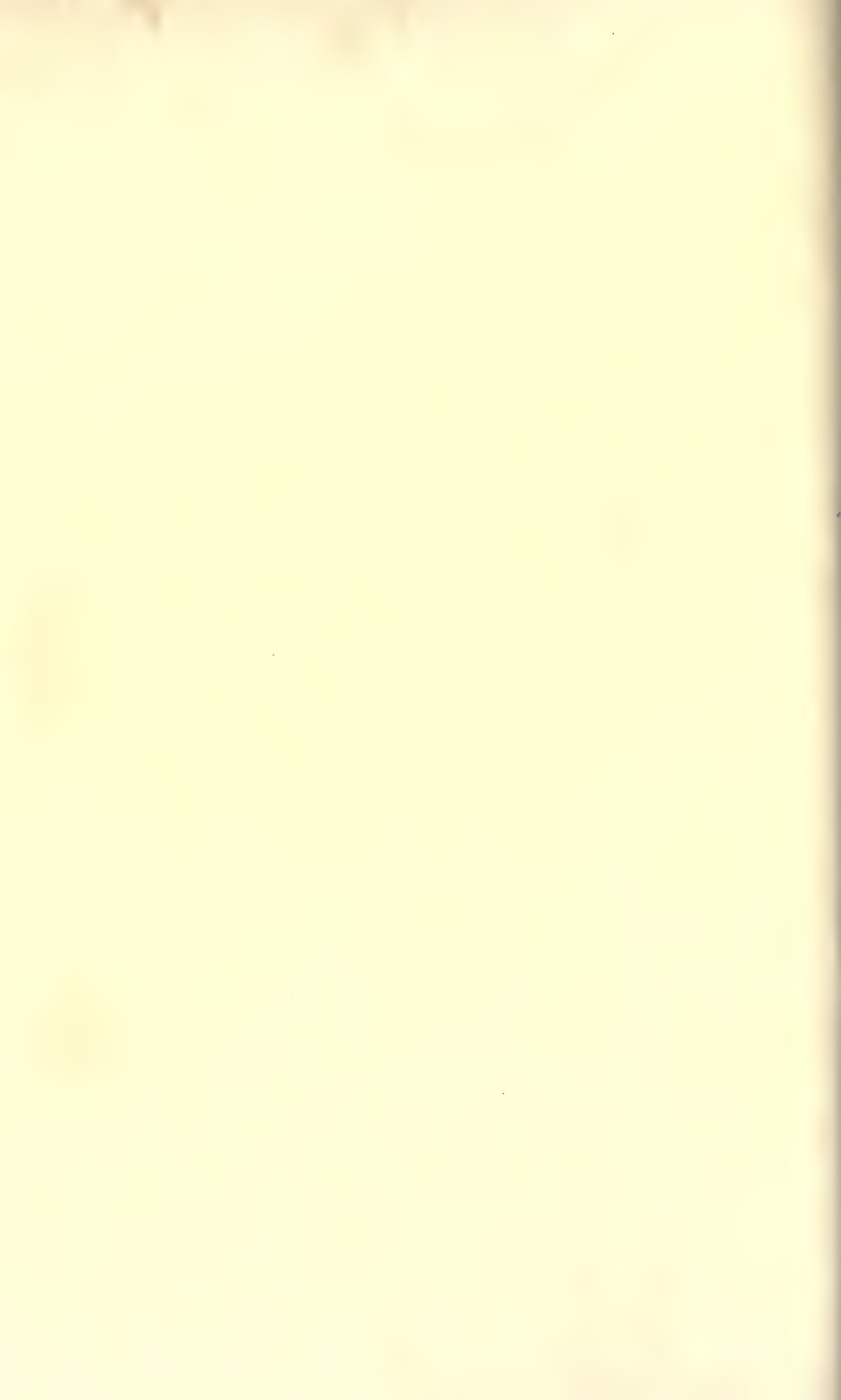
In 1796 Malone published "An Inquiry Into the Authenticity of Certain Miscellaneous Papers and Legal Instruments," etc., known as the "Ireland Forgeries," which sufficiently exposed the duplicity of young William Henry Ireland, who claimed to have discovered a number of autographs of Shakespeare, Queen Elizabeth, and of the Earl of Southampton, with one whole play of the former's and fragments of others.

Malone edited the works of Dryden, William Gerard Hamilton and Sir Joshua Reynolds. Visiting Stratford and the tomb of the poet, he convinced the vicar that the monument of Shakespeare should not be in colors as originally designed, and was allowed to cover it with white paint. It was restored as nearly as possible to its former state more than half a century later; but gave rise to the following bitter screed published in the "Gentleman's Magazine," 1815:

"Stranger, to whom this monument is shown,
Invoke the poet's curse upon Malone;
Whose meddling zeal his barbarous taste displays,
And daubs his tombstone as he mars his plays."



Edmond Malouet.



MALONE'S PREFACE

[Prefixed to octavo edition in 10 volumes, 1790.]

IN the following work, the labour of eight years, I have endeavoured, with unceasing solicitude, to give a faithful and correct edition of the plays and poems of Shakespeare. Whatever imperfection or errors therefore, may be found in it, (and what work of so great a length and difficulty was ever free from error or imperfection?) will, I trust, be imputed to any other cause than want of zeal for the due execution of the task which I venture to undertake.

The difficulties to be encountered by an editor of the works of Shakespeare, have been so frequently stated, and are so generally acknowledged, that it may seem unnecessary to conciliate the publick favour by this plea: but as these in my opinion have in some particulars, been over-rated, and in others, not sufficiently insisted on, and as the true state of the ancient copies of this poet's writings has never been laid before the publick, I shall consider the subject as if it had not been already discussed by preceding editors.

In the year 1756 Dr. Johnson published the following excellent scheme of a new edition of Shakespeare's dramattick pieces, which he completed in 1765:

“When the works of Shakespeare are, after so many editions, again offered to the publick, it will doubtless be enquired, why Shakespeare stands in more need of critical assistance than any other of the English writers, and what are the deficiencies of the late attempts, which another editor may hope to supply.

“The business of him that republishes an ancient book is, to correct what is corrupt, and to explain what is

obscure. To have a text corrupt in many places, and in many doubtful, is, among the authors that have written since the use of types, almost peculiar to Shakespeare. Most writers, by publishing their own works, prevent all various readings and preclude all conjectural criticism. Books indeed are sometimes published after the death of him who produced them, but they are better secured from corruption than these unfortunate compositions. They subsist in a single copy, written or revised by the author; and the faults of the printed volume can be only faults of one descent.

“But of the works of Shakespeare the condition has been far different: he sold them, not to be printed, but to be played. They were immediately copied for the actors, and multiplied by transcript after transcript, vitiated by the blunders of the penman, or changed by the affectation of the player; perhaps enlarged to introduce a jest, or mutilated to shorten the representation; and printed at last without the concurrence of the author, without the consent of the proprietor, from compilations made by chance or by stealth out of the separate parts written for the theatre: and thus thrust into the world surreptitiously and hastily, they suffered another depravation from the ignorance and negligence of the printers, as every man who knows the state of the press in that age will readily conceive.

“It is not easy for invention to bring together so many causes concurring to vitiate a text. No other author ever gave up his works to fortune and time with so little care; no books could be left in hands so likely to injure them, as plays frequently acted, yet continued in manuscript: no other transcribers were likely to be so little qualified for their task, as those who copied for the stage,

at a time when the lower ranks of the people were universally illiterate: no other editions were made from fragments so minutely broken, and so fortuitously reunited; and in no other age was the art of printing in such unskilful hands.

“With the causes of corruption that make the revival of Shakespeare’s dramattick pieces necessary, may be enumerated the causes of obscurity, which may be partly imputed to his age, and partly to himself.

“When a writer outlives his contemporaries, and remains almost the only unforgotten name of a distant time, he is necessarily obscure. Every age has its modes of speech, and its cast of thought; which, though easily explained when there are many books to be compared with each other, become sometimes unintelligible, and always difficult, when there are no parallel passages that may conduce to their illustration. Shakespeare is the first considerable author of sublime or familiar dialogue in our language. Of the books which he read, and from which he formed his style some perhaps have perished, and the rest are neglected. His imitations are therefore unnoted, his allusions are undiscovered, and many beauties both of pleasantry and greatness, are lost with the objects to which they were united, as the figures vanish when the canvas has decayed.

“It is the great excellence of Shakespeare, that he drew his scenes from nature, and from life. He copied the manners of the world then passing before him, and has more allusions than other poets to the traditions and superstitions of the vulgar; which must therefore be traced before we can understand.

“He wrote at a time when our poetical language was yet unformed, when the meaning of our phrases was yet

in fluctuation, when words were adopted at pleasure from the neighbouring languages, and while the Saxon was still visibly mingled in our diction. The reader is therefore embarrassed at once with dead and with foreign languages, with obsolescence and innovation. In that age, as in all others, fashion produced phraseology, which succeeding fashion swept away before its meaning was generally known, or sufficiently authorized; and in that age, above all others, experiments were made upon our language, which distorted its combinations, and disturbed its uniformity.

“ If Shakespeare has difficulties above other writers, it is to be imputed to the nature of his work, which required the use of the common colloquial language, and consequently admitted many phrases allusive, elliptical, and proverbial, such as we speak and hear every hour without observing them; and of which, being now familiar, we do not suspect that they can ever grow uncouth, or that, being now obvious, they can ever seem remote.

“ These are the principal causes of the obscurity of Shakespeare; to which may be added that fullness of idea, which might sometimes load his words with more sentiment than they could conveniently convey, and that rapidity of imagination which might hurry him to a second thought before he had fully explained the first. But my opinion is, that very few of his lines were difficult to his audience, and that he used such expressions as were then common, though the paucity of contemporary writers makes them now seem peculiar.

“ Authors are often praised for improvement, or blamed for innovation, with very little justice, by those who read few other books of the same age. Addison himself

has been so unsuccessful in enumerating the words with which Milton has enriched our language, as perhaps not to have named one of which Milton was the author; and Bentley has yet more unhappily praised him as the introducer of those elisions into English poetry, which had been used from the first essays of versification among us, and which Milton was indeed the last that practised.

“Another impediment, not the least vexatious to the commentator, is the exactness with which Shakespeare followed his author. Instead of dilating his thoughts into generalities, and expressing incidents with poetical latitude, he often combines circumstances unnecessary to his main design, only because he happened to find them together. Such passages can be illustrated only by him who has read the same story in the very book which Shakespeare consulted.

“He that undertakes an edition of Shakespeare, has all these difficulties to encounter, and all these obstructions to remove.

“The corruptions of the text will be corrected by a careful collation of the oldest copies, by which it is hoped that many restorations may yet be made; at least it will be necessary to collect and note the variations as materials for future criticks, for it very often happens that a wrong reading has affinity to the right.

“In this part all the present editions are apparently and intentionally defective. The criticks did not so much as wish to facilitate the labour of those that followed them. The same books are still to be compared; the work that has been done, is to be done again, and no single edition will supply the reader with a text on which he can rely as the best copy of the works of Shakespeare.

“The edition now proposed will at least have this advantage over others. It will exhibit all the observable varieties of all the copies that can be found; that, if the reader is not satisfied with the editor’s determination, he may have the means of choosing better for himself.

“Where all the books are evidently vitiated and collation can give no assistance, then begins the task of critical sagacity; and some changes may well be admitted in a text never settled by the author, and so long exposed to caprice and ignorance. But nothing shall be imposed, as in the Oxford edition, without notice of the alteration; nor shall conjecture be wantonly or unnecessarily indulged.

“It has been long found, that very spacious emendations do not equally strike all minds with conviction, nor even the same mind at different times; and, therefore, though perhaps many alterations may be proposed as eligible, very few will be obtruded as certain. In a language so ungrammatical as the English, and so licentious as that of Shakespeare, emendatory criticism is always hazardous; nor can it be allowed to any man who is not particularly versed in the writings of that age, and particularly studious of his author’s diction. There is danger lest peculiarities should be mistaken for corruptions, and passages rejected as unintelligible, which a narrow mind happens not to understand.

“All the former criticks have been so much employed on the correction of the text, that they have not sufficiently attended to the elucidation of passages obscured by accident or time. The editor will endeavour to read the books which the author read, to trace his knowledge to its source, and compare his copies with the originals. If in this part of his design he hopes to attain any de-

gree of superiority to his predecessors, it must be considered, that he has the advantage of their labours; that part of the work being already done, more care is naturally bestowed on the other part; and that, to declare the truth, Mr. Rowe and Mr. Pope were very ignorant of the ancient English literature; Dr. Warburton was detained by more important studies; and Mr. Theobald, if fame be just to his memory, considered learning only as an instrument of gain, and made no further inquiry after his author's meaning, when once he had notes sufficient to embellish his page with the expected decorations.

“With regard to obsolete or peculiar diction, the editor may perhaps claim some degree of confidence, having had more motives to consider the whole extent of our language than any other man from its first formation. He hopes, that, by comparing the works of Shakespeare with those of writers who lived at the same time, immediately preceded, or immediately followed him, he shall be able to ascertain his ambiguities, disentangle his intricacies, and recover the meaning of words now lost in the darkness of antiquity.

“When, therefore, any obscurity arises from an allusion to some other book, the passage will be quoted. When the diction is entangled, it will be cleared by a paraphrase or interpretation. When the sense is broken by the suppression of part of the sentiment in pleasantry or passion, the connection will be supplied. When any forgotten custom is hinted, care will be taken to retrieve and explain it. The meaning assigned to doubtful words will be supported by the authorities of other writers, or by parallel passages of Shakespeare himself.

“The observation of faults and beauties is one of the duties of an annotator, which some of Shakespeare's

editors have attempted, and some have neglected. For this part of his task, and for this only, was Mr. Pope eminently and indisputably qualified: nor has Dr. Warburton followed him with less diligence or less success. But I never observed that mankind was much delighted or improved by their asterisks, commas, or double commas; of which the only effect is, that they preclude the pleasure of judging for ourselves; teach the young and ignorant to decide without principles; defeat curiosity and discernment by leaving them less to discover; and, at last, show the opinion of the critick, without the reasons on which it was founded, and without affording any light by which it may be examined.

“The editor, though he may less delight his own vanity, will probably please his reader more, by supposing him equally able with himself to judge of beauties and faults, which require no previous acquisition of remote knowledge. A description of the obvious scenes of nature, a representation of general life, a sentiment of reflection or experience, a deduction of conclusive argument, a forcible eruption of effervescent passion, are to be considered as proportionate to common apprehensions, unassisted by critical officiousness; since to conceive them, nothing more is requisite than acquaintance with the general state of the world, and those faculties which he must always bring with him who would read Shakespeare.

“But when the beauty arises from some adaptation of the sentiment to customs worn out of use, to opinions not universally prevalent, or to any accidental or minute particularity, which cannot be supplied by common understanding, or common observation, it is the duty of a commentator to lend his assistance.

“The notice of beauties and faults thus limited will make no distinct part of the design, being reducible to the explanation of obscure passages.

“The editor does not, however, intend to preclude himself from the comparison of Shakespeare’s sentiments or expressions with those of ancient or modern authors, or from the display of any beauty not obvious to the students of poetry, for, as he hopes to leave his author better understood, he wishes likewise to procure him more rational approbation.

“The former editors have affected to slight their predecessors: but in this edition all that is valuable will be adopted from every commentator, that posterity may consider it as including all the rest and exhibit whatever is hitherto known of the great father of the English drama.”

Though Dr. Johnson has here pointed out with his usual perspicuity and vigour, the true course to be taken by an editor of Shakespeare, some of the positions which he has laid down may be controverted, and some are indubitably not true. It is not true that the plays of this author were more incorrectly printed than those of any of his contemporaries: for in the plays of Marlowe, Marston, Fletcher, Massinger, and others, as many errors may be found. It is not true that the art of printing was in no other age in so unskilful hands. Nor is it true, in the latitude in which it is stated, that “these plays were printed from compilations made by chance or by stealth out of the separate parts written for the theatre”; two only of all his dramas, “The Merry Wives of Windsor,” and “King Henry V.,” appear to have been thus thrust into the world, and of the former it is yet a doubt whether it is a first sketch

or an imperfect copy. I do not believe that words were then adopted at pleasure from the neighbouring languages, or that an antiquated diction was then employed by any poet but Spenser. That the obscurities of our author, to whatever cause they may be referred, do not arise from the paucity of contemporary writers, the present edition may furnish indisputable evidence. And lastly, if it be true, that "very few of Shakespeare's lines were difficult to his audience, and that he used such expressions as were then common," (a position of which I have not the smallest doubt), it cannot be true, that "his reader is embarrassed at once with dead and with foreign languages, with obsolescence and innovation."

When Mr. Pope first undertook the task of revising these plays, every anomaly of language, and every expression that was not understood at that time, were considered as errors or corruptions, and the text was altered, or amended, as it was called, at pleasure. The principal writers of the early part of this century seem never to have looked behind them, and to have considered their own era and their own phraseology as the standard of perfection: hence, from the time of Pope's edition, for above twenty years, to alter Shakespeare's text and to restore it, were considered as synonymous terms. During the last thirty years our principal employment has been to restore, in the true sense of the word; to eject the arbitrary and capricious innovations made by our predecessors from ignorance of the phraseology and customs of the age in which Shakespeare lived.

As on the one hand our poet's text has been described as more corrupt than it really is, so on the other, the

labour required to investigate fugitive allusions, to explain and justify obsolete phraseology by parallel passages from contemporary authors, and to form a genuine text by a faithful collation of the original copies, has not perhaps had that notice to which it is entitled; for undoubtedly it is a laborious and a difficult task: and the due execution of this it is, which can alone entitle an editor of Shakespeare to the favour of the publick.

I have said that the comparative value of the various ancient copies of Shakespeare's plays has never been precisely ascertained. To prove this, it will be necessary to go into a long and minute discussion for which, however, no apology is necessary; for though to explain and illustrate the writings of our poet is a principal duty of his editor, to ascertain his genuine text, to fix what is to be explained, is his first and immediate object: and till it be established which of the ancient copies is entitled to preference, we have no criterion by which the text can be ascertained.

Fifteen of Shakespeare's plays were printed in quarto antecedent to the first complete collection of his works, which was published by his fellow-comedians in 1623. These plays are, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Love's Labour's Lost," "Romeo and Juliet," "Hamlet," The Two Parts of "King Henry IV.," "King Richard II.," "King Richard III.," "The Merchant of Venice," "King Henry V.," "Much Ado About Nothing," "The Merry Wives of Windsor," "Troilus and Cressida," "King Lear," and "Othello."

The players, when they mention these copies, represent them all as mutilated and imperfect; but this was merely thrown out to give an additional value to their own edition, and is not strictly true of any but two of the

whole number; "The Merry Wives of Windsor," and "King Henry V."—With respect to the other thirteen copies, though undoubtedly they were all surreptitious, that is, stolen from the playhouse, and printed without the consent of the author or the proprietors, they in general are preferable to the exhibition of the same plays in the folio; for this plain reason, because instead of printing these plays from a manuscript, the editors of the folio, to save labour, or from some other motive, printed the greater part of them from the very copies which they represented as maimed and imperfect, and frequently from a late, instead of the earliest edition; in some instances with additions and alteration of their own. Thus, therefore, the first folio, as far as respects the plays above enumerated, labours under the disadvantage of being at least a second, and in some cases a third, edition of these quartos. I do not, however, mean to say, that many valuable corrections of passages undoubtedly corrupt in the quartos are not found in the folio copy; or that a single line of these plays should be printed by a careful editor without a minute examination, and collation of both copies; but those quartos were in general the basis on which the folio editors built, and are entitled to our particular attention and examination as first editions.

It is well known to those who are conversant with the business of the press, that (unless when the author corrects and revises his own works) as editions of books are multiplied, their errors are multiplied also; and that consequently every such edition is more or less correct, as it approaches nearer to or is more distant from the first. A few instances of the gradual progress of corruption will fully evince the truth of this assertion.

[Here follow, in the original, several pages of examples of what Malone considered as corruptions of the text, which are omitted as having no special interest to the general reader.]

So little known indeed was the value of the early impressions of books (not revised or corrected by their authors), that King Charles the First, though a great admirer of our poet, was contented with the second folio edition of his plays, unconscious of the numerous misrepresentations and interpolations by which every page of that copy is disfigured; and in a volume of the quarto plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, which formerly belonged to that king, and is now in my collection, I did not find a single first impression. In like manner, Sir William D'Avenant, when he made his alteration of the play of "Macbeth," appears to have used the third folio printed in 1664.

The various readings found in the different impressions of the quarto copies are frequently mentioned by the late editors: it is obvious from what has been already stated, that the first edition of each play is alone of any authority, and accordingly to no other have I paid any attention. All the variations in the subsequent quartos were made by accident or caprice. When, however, there are two editions printed in the same year, or an undated copy, it is necessary to examine each of them, because which of them was first, cannot be ascertained; and being each printed from a manuscript, they carry with them a degree of authority to which a re-impression cannot be entitled. Of the tragedy of "King Lear," there are no less than three copies, varying from each other, printed for the same bookseller, and in the same year.

Of all the plays of which there are no quarto copies extant, the first folio, printed in 1623, is the only authentick edition.

An opinion has been entertained by some that the second impression of that book, published in 1632, has a similar claim to authenticity. "Whoever has any of the folios (says Dr. Johnson), has all, excepting those diversities which mere reiteration of editions will produce. I collated them all at the beginning, but afterwards used only the first, from which (he afterwards adds), the subsequent folios never differ but by accident or negligence." Mr. Steevens, however, does not subscribe to this opinion. "The edition of 1632 (says that gentleman), is not without value; for though it be in some places more incorrectly printed than the preceding one, it has likewise the advantage of various readings, which are not merely such as reiteration of copies will naturally produce."

What Dr. Johnson has stated, is not quite accurate. The second folio does indeed very frequently differ from the first by negligence or chance; but much more frequently by the editor's profound ignorance of our poet's phraseology and metre, in consequence of which there is scarce a page of the book which is not disfigured by the capricious alterations introduced by the person to whom the care of that impression was entrusted. This person in fact, whoever he was, and Mr. Pope, were the two great corrupters of our poet's text; and I have no doubt that if the arbitrary alterations introduced by these two editors were numbered, in the plays of which no quarto copies are extant, they would greatly exceed all the corruptions and errors of the press in the original and only authentick copy of those plays. Though

my judgment on this subject has been formed after a very careful examination, I cannot expect that it should be received on my mere assertion: and therefore it is necessary to substantiate it by proof. This cannot be effected but by a long, minute, and what I am afraid will appear to many, an uninteresting disquisition: but let it still be remembered that to ascertain the genuine text of these plays is an object of great importance.

On a revision of the second folio printed in 1632, it will be found, that the editor of that book was entirely ignorant of our poet's phraseology and metre, and that various alterations were made by him, in consequence of that ignorance, which render his edition of no value whatsoever.

[Several pages of quotations follow which, having to do with textual criticism only, are here omitted.]

Various other instances of the same kind might be produced; but that I may not weary my readers, I will only add, that no person who wishes to peruse the plays of Shakespeare should ever open the Second Folio, or either of the subsequent copies, in which all these capricious alterations were adopted, with many additional errors and innovations.

It may seem strange, that the person to whom the care of supervising the second folio was consigned, should have been thus ignorant of our poet's language; but it should be remembered, that in the beginning of the reign of Charles the First many words, and modes of speech began to be disused, which had been common in the age of Queen Elizabeth. The editor of the second folio was probably a young man, perhaps born in the

year 1600. That Sir William D'Avenant, who was born in 1605, did not always perfectly understand our author's language, is manifest from various alterations which he has made in some of his pieces. The successive "Chronicles of English History," which were compiled between the years 1540 and 1630, afford indubitable proofs of the gradual change in our phraseology during that period. Thus a narrative which Hall exhibits in what now appears to us as very uncouth and ancient diction, is again exhibited by Holinshed, about forty years afterwards, in somewhat a less rude form; and in the chronicles of Speed and Baker in 1611 and 1630, assumes a somewhat more polished air. In the second edition of "Gascoigne's Poems," printed in 1587, the editor thought it necessary to explain many of the words by placing more familiar terms in the margin, though not much more than twenty years had elapsed from the time of their composition: so rapid were at that time the changes in our language.

My late friend, Mr. Tyrwhitt, a man of such candour, accuracy, and profound learning that his death must be considered as an irreparable loss to literature, was of opinion, that in printing these plays the original spelling should be adhered to, and that we never could be sure of a perfectly faithful edition, unless the first folio copy was made the standard, and actually sent to the press, with such corrections as the editor might think proper. By others it was suggested, that the notes should not be subjoined to the text, but placed at the end of each volume, and that they should be accompanied by a complete Glossary. The former scheme (that of sending the first folio to the press), appeared to me liable to many objections; and I am confident that if

the notes were detached from the text, many readers would remain uninformed, rather than undergo the trouble occasioned by perpetual references from one part of a volume to another.

In the present edition I have endeavoured to obtain all the advantages which would have resulted from Mr. Tyrwhitt's plan, without any of its inconveniences. Having often experienced the fallaciousness of collation by the eye, I determined, after I had adjusted the text in the best manner in my power, to have every proof-sheet of my work read aloud to me, while I perused the first folio, for those plays which first appear in that edition; and for all those which had been previously printed, the first quarto copy, excepting only in the instances of "The Merry Wives of Windsor," and "King Henry V.," which, being either sketches or imperfect copies, could not be wholly relied on; and "King Richard III." of the earliest edition of which tragedy I was not possessed. I had at the same time before me a table which I had formed of the variations between the quartos and the folio. By this laborious process not a single innovation, made either by the editor of the second folio, or any of the modern editors, could escape me. From the index to all the words and phrases explained or illustrated in the notes, which I have subjoined to this work, every use may be derived which the most copious Glossary could afford; while the readers who are less intent on philological inquiries, by the notes being appended to the text, are relieved from the irksome task of seeking information in a different volume from that immediately before them.

If it be asked, what has been the fruit of all this labour, I answer, that many innovations, transposi-

tions, &c. have been detected by this means; many hundred emendations have been made, and, I trust, a genuine text has been formed. Wherever any deviation is made from the authentick copies, except in the case of mere obvious errors of the press, the reader is apprized by a note; and every emendation that has been adopted, is ascribed to its proper author. When it is considered that there are one hundred thousand lines in these plays, and that it often was necessary to consult six or seven volumes, in order to ascertain by which of the preceding editors, from the time of the publication of the second folio, each emendation was made, it will easily be believed that this was not effected without much trouble.

Whenever I mention the old copy in my notes, if the play be one originally printed in quarto, I mean the first quarto copy; if the play appeared originally in folio, I mean the first folio; and when I mention the old copies, I mean the first quarto and first folio, which, when that expression is used, it may be concluded, concur in the same reading. In like manner, the folio always means the first folio, and the quarto, the earliest quarto, with the exceptions already mentioned. In general, however, the date of each quarto is given, when it is cited. Where there are two quarto copies printed in the same year, they are particularly distinguished, and the variations noticed.

The two great duties of an editor are: to exhibit the genuine text of his author, and to explain his obscurities. Both of these objects have been so constantly before my eyes, that, I am confident, one of them will not be found to have been neglected for the other. I can, with perfect truth say, with Dr. Johnson, that "Not a single

passage in the whole work has appeared to me obscure, which I have not endeavoured to illustrate." I have examined the notes of all the editors, and my own former remarks, with equal rigour; and have endeavoured as much as possible to avoid all controversy, having constantly had in view a philanthropick observation made by the editor above mentioned: "I know not (says that excellent writer), why our editors should, with such implacable anger, persecute their predecessors. *Οἱ νεκροὶ μὴ λαχεσίν*, the dead, it is true, can make no resistance, they may be attacked with great security; but since they can neither feel nor mend, the safety of mauling them seems greater than the pleasure: nor, perhaps, would it be much misbesem us to remember, amidst our triumphs over the nonsensical and the senseless, that we likewise are men; that *debemur morti*, and, as Swift observed to Burnet, shall soon be among the dead ourselves."

I have, in general, given the true explication of a passage, by whomsoever made, without loading the page with the preceding unsuccessful attempts at elucidation, and by this means, have obtained room for much additional illustration: for, as on the one hand, I trust very few superfluous or unnecessary annotations have been admitted, so on the other, I believe, that not a single valuable explication of any obscure passage in these plays has ever appeared, which will not be found in the following volumes.

The admirers of this poet will, I trust, not merely pardon the great accession of new notes in the present edition, but examine them with some degree of pleasure. An idle notion has been propagated, that Shakespeare has been buried under his commentators;

and it has again and again been repeated by the tasteless and the dull, "that notes, though often necessary, are necessary evils." There is no person, I believe, who has a higher respect for the authority of Dr. Johnson than I have; but he has been misunderstood, or misrepresented, as if these words contained a general caution to all the readers of this poet. Dr. Johnson, in the part of his preface here alluded to, is addressing the young reader, to whom Shakespeare is new; and him he very judiciously counsels to "read every play from the first scene to the last, with utter negligence of all his commentators. Let him read on, through brightness and obscurity, through integrity and corruption; let him preserve his comprehension of the dialogue, and his interest in the fable." But to much the greater and more enlightened part of his readers, (for how few are there comparatively to whom Shakespeare is new?) he gives a very different advice: Let them to whom the pleasures of novelty have ceased, "attempt exactness, and read the commentators."

During the era of conjectural criticism and capricious innovation, notes were indeed evils; while one page was covered with ingenious sophistry in support of some idle conjecture, and another was wasted in its overthrow, or in erecting a new fabrick equally unsubstantial as the former. But this era is now happily past away; and conjecture and emendation have given place to rational explanation. We shall never, I hope, again be told, that "as the best guesser was the best diviner, so he may be said in some measure to be the best editor of Shakespeare."¹ Let me not, however, be supposed an enemy to all conjectural emendation; sometimes un-

¹Newton's Preface to his edition of Milton.

doubtedly, we must have recourse to it; but, like the machinery of the ancient drama, let it not be resorted to except in cases of difficulty; *nisi dignus vindici nodus*. "I wish (says Dr. Johnson) we all conjectured less, and explained more." When our poet's entire library shall have been discovered, and the fables of all his plays traced to their original source, when every temporary allusion shall have been pointed out, and every obscurity elucidated, then, and not till then, let the accumulation of notes be complained of. I scarcely remember ever to have looked into a book of the age of Queen Elizabeth, in which I did not find somewhat that tended to throw a light on these plays. While our object is, to support and establish what the poet wrote, to illustrate his phraseology by comparing it with that of his contemporaries, and to explain his fugitive allusions to customs long since disused and forgotten, while this object is kept steadily in view, if even every line of his plays were accompanied with a comment, every intelligent reader would be indebted to the industry of him who produced it. Such uniformly has been the object of the notes now presented to the publick. Let us, then hear no more of this barbarous jargon concerning Shakespeare's having been elucidated into obscurity, and buried under the load of his commentators. Dryden is said to have regretted the success of his own instructions, and to have lamented that at length, in consequence of his critical prefaces, the town had become too skilful to be easily satisfied. The same observation may be made with respect to many of these objectors, to whom the meaning of some of our poet's most difficult passages is now become so familiar, that they fancy they originally understood them "Without a prompter,"

and with great gravity exclaim against the unnecessary illustrations furnished by his Editors: nor ought we much to wonder at this; for our poet himself has told us,

“ . . . 'tis a common proof,
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Whereto the climber upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the upmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back;
Looks in the clouds . . . ”

I have constantly made it a rule in revising the notes of former editors, to compare such passages as they have cited from any author, with the book from which the extract was taken, if I could procure it; by which some inaccuracies have been rectified. The incorrect extract made by Dr. Warburton from Saviola's treatise on “Honour and Honourable Quarrels,” to illustrate a passage in “As You Like It,” fully proves the propriety of such a collation.

At the end of the tenth volume I have added an Appendix, containing corrections, and supplementary observations, made too late to be annexed to the plays to which they belong. Some object to an Appendix; but in my opinion, with very little reason. No book can be the worse for such a supplement; since the reader, if such be his caprice, need not examine it. If the objector means that he wishes that all the information contained in an appendix, were properly disposed in the preceding volumes, it must be acknowledged that such an arrangement would be extremely desirable: but as well might be required from the elephant the sprightliness and agility of the squirrel, or from the squirrel the wisdom and strength of the elephant, as expect that

an editor's latest thoughts suggested by discursive reading while the sheets that compose his volumes were passing through the press, should form a part of his original work; that information acquired too late to be employed in its proper place, should yet be found there.

That the very few stage-directions which the old copies exhibit, were not taken from our author's manuscripts, but furnished by the players, is proved by one in "Macbeth," Act IV., sc. 1, where "A show of eight kings" is directed, "and *Banquo* last, with a glass in his hand"; though from the very words which the poet has written for *Macbeth*, it is manifest that the glass ought to be borne by the eighth king, and not by *Banquo*. All the stage directions, therefore, throughout this work, I have considered as wholly in my power, and have regulated them in the best manner I could. The reader will also, I think, be pleased to find the place in which every scene is supposed to pass, precisely ascertained; a species of information, for which, though it often throws light on the dialogue, we look in vain in the ancient copies, and which has been too much neglected by the modern editors.

The play of "Pericles, Prince of Tyre," which is now once more restored to our author, I originally intended to have subjoined, with "Titus Andronicus," to the tenth volume; but, to preserve an equality of size in my volumes, have been obliged to give it a different place. The hand of Shakespeare being indubitably found in that piece, it will, I doubt not, be considered as a valuable accession; and it is of little consequence where it appears.

It has long been thought, that "Titus Andronicus"

was not written originally by Shakespeare; about seventy years after his death, Ravenscroft having mentioned that he had been "told by some anciently conversant with the stage, that our poet only gave some master-touches to one or two of the principal parts or characters." The very curious papers lately discovered in Dulwich College, from which large extracts are given at the end of the "History of the Stage," prove, what I long since suspected, that this play, and the First Part of "King Henry VI." were in possession of the scene when Shakespeare began to write for the stage; and the same manuscripts show, that it was then very common for a dramattick poet to alter and amend the work of a preceding writer. The question, therefore, is now decisively settled; and undoubtedly some additions were made to both these pieces by Shakespeare. It is observable that the second scene of the third act of "Titus Andronicus," is not found in the quarto copy printed in 1611. It is, therefore, highly probable, that this scene was added by our author; and his hand may be traced in the preceding act, as well as in a few other places. The additions which he made to "Pericles" are much more numerous, and therefore more strongly entitled it to a place among the dramattick pieces which he has adorned by his pen.

With respect to the other contested plays, "Sir John Oldcastle," "The London Prodigal," &c., which have now for near two centuries been falsely ascribed to our author, the manuscripts above-mentioned completely clear him from that imputation; and prove that while his great modesty made him set but little value on his own inimitable productions, he could patiently endure to have the miserable trash of other writers publicly

imputed to him, without taking any measure to vindicate his fame. "Sir John Oldcastle," we find from indubitable evidence, though ascribed in the title-page to "William Shakspeare," and printed in the year 1600, when his fame was in its meridian, was the joint-production of four other poets; Michael Drayton, Anthony Mundy, Richard Hathwaye, and Robert Wilson.

In the Dissertation annexed to the three parts of "King Henry the Sixth," I have discussed at large the question concerning their authenticity; and have assigned my reasons for thinking that the second and third of those plays were formed by Shakespeare, on two elder dramas now extant. Any disquisition, therefore, concerning these controverted pieces is here unnecessary.

Some years ago I published a short essay on the economy and usages of our old theatres. The "Historical Account of the English Stage," which has been formed on that essay, has swelled to such a size, in consequence of various researches since made, and a great accession of very valuable materials, that it is become almost a new work. Of these, the most important are the curious papers which have been discovered at Dulwich, and the very valuable "Office-book of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels to King James and King Charles the First," which have contributed to throw much light on our dramattick history, and furnished some singular anecdotes of the poets of those times.

Twelve years have elapsed since the essay on the order of time in which the plays of Shakespeare were written, first appeared. A re-examination of these plays since that time has furnished me with several particulars in

confirmation of which I had formerly suggested on this subject. On a careful revisal of that essay, which, I hope, is improved as well as considerably enlarged, I had the satisfaction of observing that I had found reason to attribute but two plays to an era widely distant from that to which they had been originally ascribed; and to make only a minute change in the arrangement of a few others. Some information, however, which has been obtained since that essay was printed in its present form, inclines me to think, that one of the two plays which I allude to, "The Winter's Tale," was a still later production than I have supposed; for I now have good reason to believe, that it was first exhibited in the year 1613; and that consequently it must have been one of our poet's latest works.

Though above a century and a half has elapsed since the death of Shakespeare, it is somewhat extraordinary, (as I observed on a former occasion), that none of his various editors should have attempted to separate his genuine poetical compositions from the spurious performances with which they have been long intermixed; or have taken the trouble to compare them with the earliest and most authentick copies. Shortly after his death,² a very incorrect impression of his poems was issued out, which in every subsequent edition, previous to the year 1780, was implicitly followed. They have been carefully revised, and with many additional illustrations, are now a second time faithfully printed from the original copies, excepting only "Venus and Adonis," of which I have not been able to procure the first impression. The second edition, printed in 1596, was obligingly transmitted to me by the late Reverend

² 1640.

Thomas Warton, of whose friendly and valuable correspondence I was deprived by death, when these volumes were almost ready to be issued from the press. It is painful to recollect how many of (I had almost said) my coadjutors have died since the present work was begun: the elegant scholar, and ingenious writer, whom I have just mentioned; Dr. Johnson, and Mr. Tyrwhitt: men, from whose approbation of my labours I had promised myself much pleasure, and whose stamp could give a value and currency to any work.

With the materials which I have been so fortunate as to obtain, relative to our poet, his kindred, and friends, it would not have been difficult to have formed a new Life of Shakespeare, less meagre and imperfect than that left us by Mr. Rowe: but the information which I have procured having been obtained at very different times, it is necessarily dispersed, partly in the copious notes subjoined to "Rowe's Life," and partly in the "Historical Account of Our Old Actors." At some future time I hope to weave the whole into one uniform and connected narrative.

My inquiries having been carried on almost to the very moment of publication, some circumstances relative to our poet were obtained too late to be introduced into any part of the present work. Of these due use will be made hereafter.

The prefaces of Theobald, Hanmer, and Warburton, I have not retained, because they appeared to me to throw no light on our author or his works: the room which they would have taken up, will, I trust be found occupied by more valuable matter.

As some of the preceding editors have justly been condemned for innovation, so perhaps, (for of objec-

tions there is no end), I may be censured for too strict an adherence to the ancient copies. I have constantly had in view the Roman sentiment adopted by Dr. Johnson, that "it is more honourable to save a citizen than to destroy an enemy," and, like him, "have been more careful to protect than to attack." "I do not wish the reader to forget, (says the same writer), that the most commodious (and he might have added, the most forcible and elegant), is not always the true reading." On this principle I have uniformly proceeded, having resolved never to deviate from the authentick copies, merely because the phraseology was harsh or uncommon. Many passages, which have heretofore been considered as corrupt, and are now supported by the usage of contemporary writers, fully prove the propriety of this caution.

The rage for innovation till within these last thirty years was so great, that many words were dismissed from our poet's text, which in his time were current in every mouth. In all the editions since that of Mr. Rowe, in the Second Part of "King Henry IV." the word channel has been rejected, and kennel substituted in its room, though the former term was commonly employed in the same sense in the time of our author; and the learned Bishop of Worcester has strenuously endeavoured to prove that in "Cymbeline" the poet wrote—not shakes, but shuts or checks, "all our buds from growing"; though the authenticity of the original reading is established beyond all controversy by two other passages of Shakespeare. Very soon, indeed, after his death, this rage for innovation seems to have seized his editors; for in the year 1616 an edition of his "Rape of Lucrece" was published, which was said to

be newly revised and corrected; but in which, in fact, several arbitrary changes were made, and the ancient diction rejected for one somewhat more modern. Even in the first complete collection of his plays published in 1623, some changes were undoubtedly made from ignorance of his meaning and phraseology. They had, I suppose, been made in the playhouse copies after his retirement from the theatre. Thus in "Othello," *Brabantio* is made to call to his domesticks to raise "some special officers of might," instead of "officers of night"; and the phrase "of all loves," in the same play, not being understood, "for loves sake," was substituted in its room. So, in "Hamlet," we have ere ever for or ever, and rites instead of the more ancient word, crants. In "King Lear," Act I., sc. 1, the substitution of—"Goes thy heart with this?" instead of—"Goes this with thy heart?" without doubt arose from the same cause. In the plays of which we have no quarto copies, we may be sure that similar innovations were made, though we have now no certain means of detecting them.

After what has been proved concerning the sophistications and corruptions of the Second Folio, we cannot be surprized that when these plays were republished by Mr. Rowe in the beginning of this century from a later folio, in which the interpolations of the former were all preserved, and many new errors added, almost every page of his work was disfigured by accumulated corruptions. In Mr. Pope's edition our author was not less misrepresented; for though by examining the oldest copies he detected some errors, by his numerous fanciful alterations the poet was so completely modernized, that I am confident, that had he "re-visited the glimpses of

the moon," he would not have understood his own works. From the quartos indeed a few valuable restorations were made; but all the advantage that was thus obtained, was outweighed by arbitrary changes, transpositions, and interpolations.

The readers of Shakespeare being disgusted with the liberties taken by Mr. Pope, the subsequent edition of Theobald was justly preferred; because he professed to adhere to the ancient copies more strictly than his competitor, and illustrated a few passages by extracts from the writers of our poet's age. That his work should at this day be considered of any value, only shows how long impressions will remain, when they are once made; for Theobald, though not so great an innovator as Pope, was yet a considerable innovator; and his edition being printed from that of his immediate predecessor, while a few arbitrary changes made by Pope were detected, innumerable sophistications were silently adopted. His knowledge of the contemporary authors was so scanty, that all the illustration of that kind dispersed throughout his volumes, has been exceeded by the researches which have since been made for the purpose of elucidating a single play.

Of Sir Thomas Hanmer it is only necessary to say, that he adopted almost all the innovations of Pope, adding to them whatever caprice dictated.

To him succeeded Dr. Warburton, a critick, who (as hath been said of Salmasius) seems to have erected his throne on a heap of stones, that he might have them at hand to throw at the heads of all those who passed by. His unbounded licence in substituting his own chimerical conceits in the place of the author's genuine text, has been so fully shown by his revisers, that I suppose

no critical reader will ever again open his volumes. An hundred strappadoes, according to an Italian comick writer, would not have induced Petrarch, were he living, to subscribe to the meaning which certain commentators after his death had by their glosses extorted from his works. It is a curious speculation to consider how many thousand would have been requisite for this editor to have inflicted on our great dramattick poet for the same purpose. The defence which has been made for Dr. Warburton on this subject, by some of his friends, is singular. "He well knew," it has been said, "that much the greater part of his notes do not throw any light on the poet of whose works he undertook the revision, and that he frequently imputed to Shakespeare a meaning of which he never thought; but the editor's great object was to display his own learning, not to illustrate his author, and this end he obtained; for in spite of all the clamour against him, his work added to his reputation as a scholar." Be it so then; but let none of his admirers ever dare to unite his name with that of Shakespeare; and let us at least be allowed to wonder, that the learned editor should have had so little respect for the greatest poet that has appeared since the days of Homer, as to use a commentary on his works merely as "a stalking-horse, under the presentation of which he might shoot his wit."

At length the task of revising these plays was undertaken by one, whose extraordinary powers of mind, as they rendered him the admiration of his contemporaries, will transmit his name to posterity as the brightest ornament of the eighteenth century; and will transmit it without competition, if we except a great orator, philosopher, and statesman, now living,³ whose

³ Edmund Burke.

talents and virtues are an honour to human nature. In 1765, Dr. Johnson's edition, which had long been impatiently expected, was given to the publick. His admirable preface, (perhaps the finest composition in our language), his happy, and in general just, characters of these plays, his refutation of the false glosses of Theobald and Warburton, and his numerous explanations of involved and difficult passages, are too well known to be here enlarged upon; and therefore, I shall only add, that his vigorous and comprehensive understanding threw more light on his author than all his predecessors had done.

In one observation, however, concerning our poet, I do not entirely concur with him. "It is not (he remarks) very grateful to consider how little the succession of editors has added to this author's power of pleasing. He was read, admired, studied and imitated, while he was yet deformed with all the improprieties which ignorance and neglect could accumulate upon him."

He certainly was read, admired, studied, and imitated, at the period mentioned; but surely not in the same degree as at present. The succession of editors has effected this; it has made him understood; it has made him popular; it has shown every one who is capable of reading, how much superior he is not only to Jonson and Fletcher, whom the bad taste of the last age from the time of the Restoration to the end of the century set above him, but to all the dramattick poets of antiquity:

" . . . *jam monte potitus,*
Ridet anhelantem dura ad vestigia turbam."

Every author who pleases must surely please more as he is more understood, and there can be no doubt that

Shakespeare is now infinitely better understood than he was in the last century. To say nothing of the people at large, it is clear that Dryden himself, though a great admirer of our poet, and D'Avenant, though he wrote for the stage in the year 1627, did not always understand him. The very books which are necessary to our author's illustration, were of so little account in their time, that what now we can scarce procure at any price, was then the furniture of the nursery or stall. In fifty years after our poet's death Dryden mentions that he was then become "a little obsolete." In the beginning of the present century Lord Shaftesbury complains of his "rude unpolished stile, and his ANTIQUATED phrase and wit"; and not long afterwards Gildon informs us that he had been rejected from some modern collections of poetry on account of his obsolete language. Whence could these representations have proceeded, but because our poet, not being diligently studied, not being compared with the contemporary writers was not understood? If he had been "read, admired, studied, and imitated," in the same degree as he is now, the enthusiasm of some one or other of his admirers in the last age would have induced him to make some enquiries concerning the history of his theatrical career, and the anecdotes of his private life.

But no such person was found; no anxiety in the publick sought out any particulars concerning him after the Restoration (if we except the few which were collected by Mr. Aubrey), though at that time the history of his life must have been known to many; for his sister, Joan Hart, who must have known much of his early years, did not die till 1646: his favourite daughter,

Mrs. Hall, lived till 1649; and his second daughter, Judith, was living at Stratford-upon-Avon, in the beginning of the year 1662. His grand-daughter, Lady Barnard, did not die till 1670. Mr. Thomas Combe, to whom Shakespeare bequeathed his sword, survived our poet above forty years, having died at Stratford in 1657. His elder brother, William Combe, lived till 1667. Sir Richard Bishop, who was born in 1585, lived at Bridgetown near Stratford till 1672: and his son, Sir William Bishop, who was born in 1626, died there in 1700. From all these persons without doubt many circumstances relative to Shakespeare might have been obtained; but that was an age as deficient in literary curiosity as in taste.

It was remarkable that in a century after our poet's death, five editions only of his plays were published; which probably consisted of not more than three thousand copies. During the same period three editions of the plays of Fletcher, and four of those of Jonson had appeared. On the other hand, from the year 1716 to the present time, that is, in seventy-four years, but two editions of the former writer, and one of the latter, have been issued from the press; while about thirty thousand copies of Shakespeare have been dispersed through England. That nearly as many editions of the works of Jonson as of Shakespeare should have been demanded in the last century, will not appear surprising, when we recollect what Dryden has related soon after the Restoration: that "others were then generally preferred before him." By others Jonson and Fletcher were meant. To attempt to show to the readers of the present day the absurdity of such a preference, would be an insult to their understandings.

When we endeavour to trace any thing like a ground for this preposterous taste, we are told of Fletcher's ease, and Jonson's learning. Of how little use his learning was to him, an ingenious writer of our own time has shown with that vigour and animation for which he was distinguished. "Jonson, in the serious drama, is as much an imitator as Shakespeare is an original. He was very learned, as Sampson was very strong, to his own hurt. Blind to the nature of tragedy, he pulled down all antiquity on his head, and buried himself under it. We see nothing of Jonson, nor indeed of his admired (but also murdered), ancients; for what shone in the historian is a cloud on the poet, and 'Catiline' might have been a good play, if Sallust had never written.

"Who knows whether Shakespeare might not have thought less, if he had read more? Who knows if he might not have laboured under the load of Jonson's learning, as Enceladus under *Ætna*? His mighty genius, indeed, through the most mountainous oppression would have breathed out some of his inextinguishable fire; yet possibly he might not have risen up into that giant, that much more than common man, at which we now gaze with amazement and delight. Perhaps he was as learned as his dramattick province required; for whatever other learning he wanted, he was master of two books unknown to many of the profoundly read, though books which the last conflagration alone can destroy; the book of nature, and that of man."⁴

To this and the other encomiums on our great poet which will be found in the following pages, I shall not

⁴ "Conjectures on Original Composition," by Dr. Edward Young.

attempt to make any addition. He has justly observed, that

“To guard a title that was rich before,
 To gild refined gold, or paint the lily,
 To throw a perfume on the violet,
 To smooth the ice, or add another hue
 Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
 To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish,
 Is wasteful and ridiculous excess.”

Let me, however, be permitted to remark, that beside all his other transcendent merits, he was the great refiner and polisher of our language. His compound epithets, his bold metaphors, the energy of his expressions, the harmony of his numbers, all these render the language of Shakespeare one of his principal beauties. Unfortunately none of his letters, or other prose compositions, not in a dramattick form, have reached posterity; but if any of them ever shall be discovered, they will, I am confident, exhibit the same perspicuity, the same cadence, the same elegance and vigour, which we find in his plays. “Words and phrases,” says Dryden, “must of necessity receive a change in succeeding ages; but it is almost a miracle, that much of his language remains so pure; and that he who began dramattick poetry amongst us, untaught by any, and, as Ben Jonson tells us, without learning, should by the force of his own genius perform so much, that in a manner he has left no praise for any who come after him.”

In these prefatory observations my principal object was, to ascertain the true state and respective value of the ancient copies, and to mark out the course which has been pursued in the editions now offered to the

publick. It only remains, that I should return my very sincere acknowledgments to those gentlemen, to whose good offices I have been indebted in the progress of my work. My thanks are particularly due to Francis Ingram, of Ribbisford in Worcestershire, Esq., for the very valuable "Office-book of Sir Henry Herbert," and several other curious papers, which formerly belonged to that gentleman; to Penn Asheton Curzon, Esq., for the use of the very rare copy of "King Richard III.," printed in 1597; to the Master, and the Rev. Mr. Smith, librarian, of Dulwich College, for the Manuscripts relative to one of our ancient theatres, which they obligingly transmitted to me; to John Kipling, Esq., keeper of the rolls in Chancery, who in the most liberal manner directed every search to be made in the Chapel of the Rolls that I should require, with a view to illustrate the history of our poet's life; and to Mr. Richard Clark, registrar of the diocese of Worcester, who with equal liberality, at my request, made many searches in his office for the wills of various persons. I am also in a particular manner indebted to the kindness and attention of the Rev. Mr. Davenport, vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon, who most obligingly made every inquiry in that town and the neighbourhood, which I suggested as likely to throw any light on the Life of Shakespeare.

I deliver my book to the world not without anxiety; conscious, however, that I have strenuously endeavoured to render it not unworthy the attention of the publick. If the researches which have been made for the illustration of our poet's works, and for the dissertations which accompany the present edition, shall afford as much entertainment to others, as I have derived from them,

I shall consider the time expended on it as well employed. Of the dangerous ground on which I tread, I am fully sensible. "*Multa sunt in his studiis* (to use the words of a venerable fellow-labourer in the mines of Antiquity) *cineri supposita, doloso. Errata possint esse multa á memoria. Quis enim in memoriæ thesauro omnia simul sic complectatur, ut pro arbitrato suo possit expromere? Errata possint esse plura ab imperitia. Quis enim tam peritus, ut in cæco hoc antiquitatis mari, cum tempore colluctatus, scopulis non allidatur? Haec tamen á te, humanissime lector, tua humanitas, mea industria, patriæ charitas, et SHAKSPEARI dignitas, mihi exorent, ut quid mei sit judicium, sine aliorum præjudicio libere proferam; ut eadem via qua alii in his studiis solent, insistam; et ut erratis, si ego agnoscam, tu ignoscas.*" Those who are the warmest admirers of our great poet, and most conversant with his writings, best know the difficulty of such a work, and will be most ready to pardon its defects; remembering that in all arduous undertakings, it is easier to conceive than to accomplish; that "the will is infinite, and the execution confined; that the desire is boundless, and the act a slave to limit."





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