

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE RHETORICAL TRAINING OF SHAKSPERE: QUINTILIAN, THE SUPREME AUTHORITY

AFTER *Ad Herennium*, as a whole or in parts, and *Topica*, together possibly with some detailed tabulation of tropes and schemes, the sixteenth century boy was supposed to turn to Quintilian. Kempe in 1588 gives Quintilian an honored place among the most revered grammar school authors. He has been praising Cicero,

Whose bookes, as also the histories of *Iulius Caesar*, *Terences Comedies*, together with the bookes of the three Poets *Virgil*, *Ouid* and *Horace*, and also of *Quintilian* the Rhetorician, are the only Latin schoolemaisters to all good students euen at this day.¹

Along with Cicero, Quintilian was *the Rhetorician*, at the pinnacle of grammar school. It was necessary, therefore, first to cover at least the minimum essentials of rhetoric in an elementary way, since Quintilian has written more a philosophy of rhetoric, and assumes a considerable amount of elementary knowledge. Assuming knowledge of fundamentals, he fixes his attention upon the finer points of procedure. If Shakspeare was subjected to Quintilian, he was subjected to the highest and best available in his day, though some of Shakspeare's own contemporaries were already certain that they could improve upon that antiquated gentleman.

There have been serious suspicions that Shakspeare knew Quintilian's work, but hardly conclusive proof.² It is abundantly clear, however, that considerable in Shakspeare derives from Quintilian, and that some of it was available in that particular form in Quintilian only. Holt White has noticed that Shakspeare uses in *Henry V* (chorus to the fourth act, ll. 41-5) a figure which Quintilian also uses in Book I.

every wretch, pining and pale before,
Beholding him, plucks comfort from his looks:
A largess universal like the sun
His liberal eye doth give to every one,
Thawing cold fear.

¹ Kempe, *Education*, p. Div.

² Anders, *Shakspeare's Books*, pp. 38-39.