

CHAPTER XLI

UPPER GRAMMAR SCHOOL: SHAKSPERE'S EXERCISE OF VERSIFYING

IN CONSIDERING SHAKSPERE'S grammar school training in poetry it will be well to let Brinsley and Hoole explain the practice we have found indicated in the statutes. It can then be made apparent that Shakspeare has been explicit as to his knowledge both of the theory and of the practice of teaching poetry in the grammar schools.

As usual, Spoudeus is seeking information from Philoponus-Brinsley.

Phil. Though Poetry be rather for ornament then for any necessary vse; and the maine matter to be regarded in it, is the purity of phrase and of stile: yet because there is very commendable vse of it, sometimes in occasions of triumph and reioysing, more ordinarily at the funerals of some worthy personages, and sometimes for some other purposes; it is not amisse to traîne vp schollers even in this kinde also. and the rather because it serueth very much for the sharpening of the wit, and is a matter of high commendation, when a scholler is able to write a smooth and pure verse, and to comprehend a great deale of choise matter in very little roome.

Spoud. Surely (Sir) though it is, as you say, but an ornament, yet it is such a one, as doth highly grace those who haue attained it, in any such measure as you speake of; and two such Verses are worth two thousand, of such flash and bodge stufte as are ordinarily in some schooles. But this I haue found also to be full of difficulty, both in the entring, the progresse, and also in the end; that my schollers haue had more feare in this, then in all the former, and my selfe also driuen to more seuerity: which I haue been enforced vnto, or else I should haue done no good at all with the greatest part.

And yet when I haue done my vttermost, I haue not had any to come to such perfection as you mention, to write so pithily or purely: yea, let me tell you this, that I haue knowne some Masters, who haue thought themselues very profound Poets, who would vpon an occasion of a Funerall haue written you a sheete or two of Verses, as it were of a sudden; yet amongst all those, you should hardly haue found one such a Verse as you speake of, vnlesse it were stolne; and most of them such, as a iudicious Poet would be ready to laugh at, or loath to reade. Therefore I intreat you to guide me, how I may redresse this euill, and preuent these inconueniences.¹

We are inevitably reminded of the extemporal wit of Holofernes. Shakspeare and Brinsley here, as frequently, illustrate each other remarkably. It will be remembered that Master Holofernes was called

¹ Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius* (1627), p. 191.