

**PIERCE PENNILESS'S
SUPPLICATION
TO THE DEVIL**

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Pierce Penniless's Supplication to the Devil by Thomas Nash

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THOMAS NASH

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BY

THOMAS NASH.

FROM THE FIRST EDITION OF ^(Aug) 1592,

COMPARED WITH LATER IMPRESSIONS.

WITH

AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES,

BY J. PAYNE COLLIER, ESQ., F.S.A.



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INTRODUCTION.

The ensuing tract is reprinted from the earliest impression, an edition of extreme rarity, and we have compared it with subsequent copies in 1592, 1593, and 1595, the two last of which are of more frequent occurrence, though all difficult to be procured. The author, in one of his subsequent works, ("Have with you to Saffron Walden,") informs us that his "Pierce Penniless" had been six times printed between 1592 and 1596, but we have not been able to meet with more than five impressions of those years. Its popularity was extraordinary.

Many years ago, Mr. Octavius Gilchrist, whose knowledge of such matters was great, and whose taste and judgment were good, issued a prospectus for a reprint of "Pierce Penniless his Supplication to the Devil;" but his proposal (never carried into effect) was to adopt the text of the second, and not of the first edition, which, probably, he could not obtain. The differences are trifling, in no case (the preliminary matter excepted) more than verbal, but, having the earliest impression in our hands, we have thought it expedient to

take that as our original, comparing it as we proceeded with later copies : to any subsequent to 1595, it was not necessary to resort.

This reprint, on several accounts, comes peculiarly within the province of the Shakespeare Society. It contains the earliest defence of theatres and theatrical performances and actors, (with the exception of Lodge's tract, in answer to Gosson's "School of Abuse") and in its pages are found those two very curious notices of historical plays, which Shakespeare is supposed to have seen, if not to have employed. "How would it have joyed brave Talbot," (exclaims Nash, p. 60 of our reprint) "the terror of the French, to think that after he had lain two hundred year in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least, (at several times) who, in the tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding." This passage is believed to refer to a lost play, of which Shakespeare made use in his "Henry VI." Part I.; and it establishes the great popularity of the subject, because, at the date referred to, it is probable that none of our public theatres would contain more than about four or five hundred persons: thus, the drama must have been represented at least twenty times before crowded audiences, in order to make up the number of "ten thousand spectators." Another passage, which will be read with interest, in relation to the works of our great dramatist, is the following: — "What a glorious thing it is to have Henry the Fifth represented on the stage, leading the French

king prisoner, and forcing both him and the dauphin to swear fealty!" We know of no existing play in which precisely such scenes are contained, and we may, therefore, conclude that our old stage was in possession of three dramas founded upon the events of the reign of Henry V., viz. that described by Nash; "The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth," first printed in 1598, and Shakespeare's historical play.

Another circumstance connected with the name of Shakespeare renders Nash's "Pierce Penniless" especially interesting. We find, in a poem near the commencement of it, two lines, which are also contained verbatim in a drama, printed in 1608, with "written by W. Shakspeare" on the title-page, and reprinted in 1619, subsequently included in the third folio impression of his works in 1664. The internal evidence that he had some concern in the production of it seems at least as strong as the external, for "The Yorkshire Tragedy" comprises lines which could scarcely have proceeded from any other pen. How the couplet

"Divines and dying men may talk of hell,
But in my heart her several torments dwell,"

came to be borrowed from Nash, and inserted in "The Yorkshire Tragedy," it is, perhaps, vain to speculate. It was a short drama, got up in a hurry on a melancholy incident, of then recent occurrence, and possibly the lines we have quoted were in the mind of the writer of "The Yorkshire Tragedy," and were transferred to the play, because they could be so conveniently and appositely introduced.

But, besides these peculiar and especial claims to the