

**A TREATISE AGAINST
DICING, DANCING, PLAYS,
AND INTERLUDES. WITH
OTHER IDLE PASTIMES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649186235

A treatise against dicing, dancing, plays, and interludes. With other idle pastimes by John Northbrooke

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Cover @ 2017

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JOHN NORTHBROOKE

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A TREATISE
AGAINST
DICING, DANCING, PLAYS, AND
INTERLUDES.
WITH OTHER IDLE PASTIMES.

BY JOHN ✓ NORTHBROOKE,
MINISTER.

FROM THE EARLIEST EDITION, ABOUT A.D. 1577.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES.



LONDON:
REPRINTED FOR THE SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY.

1843.

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INTRODUCTION.

Although dramatic performances in England had been incidentally condemned in several anterior productions, the tract now reprinted is the earliest, separate, and systematic attack upon them. It therefore forms the first of the series of publications of the kind, which from time to time will be presented to the members of the Shakespeare Society, because such works are importantly illustrative of the condition and history of the stage, and of the nature and character of the pieces exhibited upon it, only a few years before our great dramatist joined a theatrical company in London.

It will be remarked that the title-page is without date; but it was entered at Stationers' Hall for publication in 1577, and there is little doubt that it came from the press either at the end of that year, or in the beginning of the next. A second edition of it, with the date of 1579, and with the name of Thomas Dawson as the printer,* is known: it differs in no respect from the earlier undated impression, an exact reprint of which

* The accurate Ritson appears to have supposed that there was but one edition of the tract—that printed in 1579, 4to. See *Bibliographia Poetica*, p. 288.

is comprised in the ensuing pages. Either edition is of extremely rare occurrence. Malone could never procure the tract: he conjectured that it first appeared "about the year 1579 or 1580," and the only copies of the first impression with which we are acquainted are the one in the British Museum, and that from which our transcript was made.

It may be necessary to touch briefly upon the state and prospects of theatrical affairs, especially in London, out of which may be said to have grown this specimen of puritanical hostility.

Dramatic performances seem to have received a strong impulse almost from the moment Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne; and although the earliest public acts of her reign bore a somewhat hostile appearance (such, for instance, as the proclamation of the 16th of May, 1559) there is no doubt that in her own person, and by means of many of her nobility, she gave them much private encouragement. A remarkable and early proof of this fact has been handed down to our day in a letter from the great favourite, the Earl of Leicester, when Sir Robert Dudley, who, in June following the proclamation to which we have alluded in May, wrote the following letter to the Earl of Shrewsbury, Lord President of the North, in favour of a company of actors, travelling round the country under the sanction of his name. The original is preserved in the Heralds' College, and we are indebted for a correct transcript of it to the kindness of Sir Charles G. Young, Garter. It has already been printed, but very defectively, in Lodge's "Illustrations of British History" (vol. i., p. 307); and

from thence in "The History of English Dramatic Poetry and the Stage," (vol. i., p. 170) and we are greatly obliged to Sir Charles G. Young for the means of giving so curious and interesting a document with the accuracy in such cases so desirable.

"My good Lorde,

"Where my servauntes, bringers hereof unto you, be suche as ar plaiers of interludes, and for the same haue the licence of diverse of my lordis here, under ther seales and handis, to plaie in diverse shieres within the realme under there auctorities, as maie ample appere unto your L. by the same licence. I haue thought, emong the rest, my lettre to besече your good L. conformitie to them likewise, that they maie haue your hand and seale to ther license, for the like libertye in Yorke shiere; being honest men, and suche as shall plaie none other matters (I trust) but tollerable and convenient, whereof some of them haue bene herde here alreadie before diverse of my Lordis: for whome I shall haue good cause to thank your L. and to remaine your L. to the best that shall lie in my litle power. And thus I take my leave of your good L. From Westm. the of June, 1559.

"Your good L. assured,

"R. DUDDLEY.

"To the right Honourable, and my verie good
Lord, the Erle of Shrewisburie."

Of what actors the company of Sir Robert Dudley's players consisted in 1559, we are without information; but at that date, and for many years afterwards, the different companies, who either performed in London or in the provinces, exhibited in the name, and under the real or supposed patronage and protection of some nobleman, or other person of distinction. Let who would be Sir R. Dudley's theatrical servants, we find

them playing for the amusement of Queen Elizabeth, when she was at Saffron Walden,* in 1571.

* Bristol (where Northbrooke resided) seems from an early date to have been much frequented by different companies of players. Upon this point we are much indebted to Mr. Tyson, of that city, for the following valuable information, shewing, not only that the Earl of Leicester's players were there in the year between Michaelmas, 1577, and Michaelmas, 1578, but that the theatrical retainers of Lord Berkley, Lord Charles Howard, and Lord Sheffield also presented dramatic performances in Bristol. The extracts are from the original records of the corporation, and they are the more curious because the very names of the pieces represented are given in the entries.

First Quarter :

Third weke. Item, paid to my L. of Leycestre's players at the end of their play, in the Yeld hall, before Mr. Mayer and the Aldermen, and for l yngks to geve light in the evening, the play was called *Myngs*, the sume of xxij^s.

Fourth Quarter :

Seconde weke. Item, paid to my Lord Berckley's players, at the end of their play, in the Yeld hall, before Mr. Mayer and the Aldermen, the matters was *what mischief workith in the mind of man*. I say paid theym x^s.

Tenthe weke. Item, paid to my Lord Charles Haward's players, at the end of their play, before Mr. Mayer and the Aldermen, in the Yeldhall, their mattier was *of the Q. of Ethiopia*, x^s.

The xijth weke. Item, paid to my Lord Sheffield's players, at the end of their play, in the Yeld hall, before Mr. Mayer and the Aldermen, the play was called *The Court of Comfort*, xiiij^s. iiij^d.

What may have been the subject of the performance called *Myngs*, by the Earl of Leicester's players, perhaps it would be vain to conjecture. Mr. Tyson very plausibly suggests that the drama called *What Mischief Worketh in the Mind of Man*, might be the MS. drama called "Mankind," an analysis of which will be found in "The Hist. of Engl. Dram. Poetry and the Stage," ii. 293. *The Court*