

**THE SCHOOL OF ABUSE,
CONTAINING A PLEASANT
INVECTIVE AGAINST POETS,
PIPERS, PLAYERS, JESTERS, &C.**

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The School of Abuse, Containing a Pleasant Invective Against Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters, &c.
by Stephen Gosson

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STEPHEN GOSSON

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A PLEASANT INVECTIVE
AGAINST
POETS, PIPERS, PLAYERS, JESTERS, &c.

BY
STEPHEN GOSSON.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION REGARDING THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORKS.



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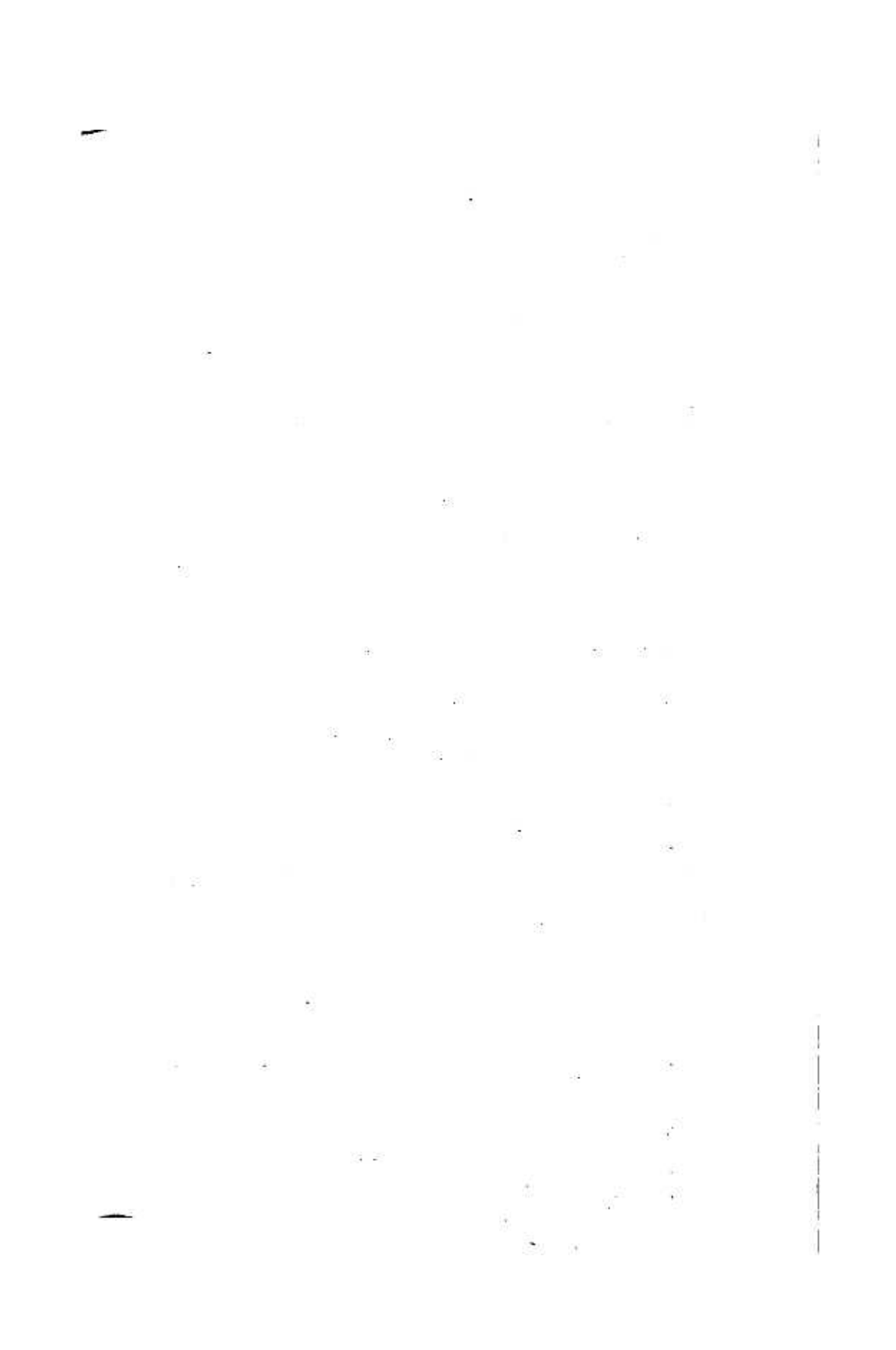
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INTRODUCTION.

STEPHEN GOSSON, the author of the tract reprinted on the following pages, was not the earliest literary enemy of theatrical performances in this country. That distinction belongs to John Northbrooke, whose "Treatise wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterluds &c. are reproved," was licensed for the press in 1577: it was printed by H. Bynneman, without date, but no doubt prior to 1579, when Gosson's "Schoole of Abuse, containing a plesaunt Inuective against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters" &c. made its appearance. Our author, therefore, is only entitled to the second place in the attack upon the stage, although he says nothing about any predecessor. Northbrooke's work well merits at least equal attention; and on an early occasion we shall offer a careful re-impression of it to the members of the Shakespeare Society. We were led, in the first instance, to Gosson's tract, by his connection with Edward Alleyn, late in life, when Gosson was vicar of the parish in which that great actor and most benevolent man was born.

We are told by Anthony Wood, (*Athenæ Oxon.* I. 675, edit. Bliss,) that Stephen Gosson was a Kentish

man by birth, and that he was admitted a scholar of Christ Church College, Oxford, on April 4th, 1572, "aged 16, or thereabouts." Gosson was, in fact, (as appears by the registration of his death, which will be introduced hereafter,) in his 18th year; and the Oxford antiquary adds, that "he took one degree in arts, four years after his admission, left the university without completing that degree by determination, and went to the great city, where he was noted for his admirable penning of pastorals." Of his pastorals we know nothing; and certainly whatever Gosson has left behind him savours more of a satirical than of a rustic character. He became tutor in a family, and soon afterwards wrote at least three plays, some of which were acted: on p. 30 of the present republication he mentions "Catalines Conspiracies, usually brought in at the Theatre," as "a pig of his own sow;" and he elsewhere admits himself to have been the author of a comedy called "Captain Mario," and of a moral play, which had for title "Praise at Parting." He asserts that he had been "drawn like a novice to these abuses," and he entirely abandoned them before he had completed his 25th year. The subsequent pages are full of self-reproaches for the offences he had in this respect committed.

"The School of Abuse" came out in 1579; and possibly Gosson had been led to see the error of his way by Northbrooke's "Treatise," which must then have been in the hands of the puritanical readers of such productions about a year. Gosson's tract was dedicated to "Master Philip Sidney Esquier;" and we have it on

no less evidence than that of Spenser (in one of his letters to Gabriel Harvey, dated in 1580,) that Gosson "was for his labour scorned; if, at least, it be in the goodness of that nature to scorn." Gosson was either not so scorned as to make him hesitate in the same year in dedicating to Sidney his "Ephemerides of Phialo," or the reproof he received on the occasion was not given until both those pieces had appeared.

In his "Ephemerides of Phialo" Gosson informs us that the players, having in vain applied to some members of the universities to answer his "School of Abuse," had at length found "one in London to write certain honest excuses, for so they term it, to their dishonest abuses, which I revealed." This sentence alludes to Thomas Lodge, the dramatist, who very soon afterwards published his reply to Stephen Gosson, only two copies of which are supposed to exist, both of them wanting the title-page: this mutilation was occasioned by the interference of some of the public authorities to suppress the work, and by the unwillingness of those who happened, by some chance, to obtain it to have it found in their possession in a perfect state. It consists of three divisions—the Defence of Poetry, the Defence of Music, and the Defence of Plays: in the last, Lodge speaks of Gosson not only as a writer, but as an actor of plays—a circumstance which Gosson kept in the back-ground.

No sooner had Lodge's "honest excuses" made their appearance, than Gosson set about his "Plays confuted in Five Actions," which he dedicated to Sir F. Walsingham; but, as it is without date, we can only presume that it was not delayed beyond the autumn of