

**THE PICTURE
OF INCEST, 1626**

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The picture of incest, 1626 by James Gresham

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JAMES GRESHAM

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OF INCEST, 1626**

VII.

THE
PICTURE OF INCEST

BY
JAMES GRESHAM

(1626.)

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ILLUSTRATIONS,
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INTRODUCTION.

THE *Picture of Incest* exists in the solitary copy in the British Museum. I have come on no notice of it whatever in the bibliographical authorities. In none of even Mr. J. P. Collier's many publications is either author or booklet so much as named; and the same holds of Mr. Dyce, Mr. Joseph Hunter, and other Shakesporean Workers. Neither have I met with the book in any of the great Sales.

The *Picture of Incest* has not the passion nor the picturesqueness of William Barksted's *Mirra the Mother of Adonis* or of his *Hiren, or the Faire Greeke*; it is inferior in imaginative touches to the anonymous *Scourge of Venus*. In sooth it is a bold and eke somewhat bald rendering of the unpleasant story (to use no stronger word than "unpleasant"), as told by Ovid. Yet its relation to the "Venus and Adonis" series, and especially to Shakespeare's marvellous poems,—not to speak of the hazards of a single known copy,—will justify to the student our limited reproduction. The creative splendors of Shakespeare are the more brought out when we turn from his "Venus and Adonis" and "Rape of Lucrece" to these homely and low-level versions, or when conversely we turn from them to the others.

In the *Picture of Incest* there are, "few and far between," certain dainty *bits*, e.g.:

—"from her rofie cheeke a dew let glide
Of pearly teares (like those in summer tide
Falling on the ripe Cherries which the sun
After exhales)"—

(p. 9.)

Then the alternation of feeling in the "lustful" *Mirra* is very well expressed :

—"pursued by her vnquiet thoughts
That night no sleepe vnto her eyes allots
But doth againe retract that lewd desire
Which blew the coles to this inceffious fire.
And one whiles timorously despatres to try
And yet againe resolues it by and by.
Shaming to aske the couets what the flames
And these vnwilling willing motions blames :
On every side is her attempt befet
With hope to forward and with feare to let
And in this conflict what her hart should doe
Cannot resolue or giue consent vnto."

(p. 11.)

So too this description is vivid :

"The pale-fac'd Moone therat asham'd doth shroud
Her filuer rayes in an obscuring cloud,
And those bright Starres which nightly v'l'd to blaze
Their glorious splendor, (to the worlds amaze)
Are with blacke Curtaines so close ouerspred,
That not the least can be discouered.
The night it selfe too wants that wonted light
Which vntually it had before that night
And each thing so prodigiously fecmes bent,
As if they iustly feared a sad euent."

(pp. 20-1.)

This has Fullerian quaintness :

—"inuolues
Her faire necke with her Zone, tied to that height
That falling thence she so might clime to death."

(p. 12.)

Now and again there are noticeable epithets and phrases, e.g. : "fleeting gaine" (p. 8) : "her azure-veyned necke" (p. 12) : "those heauens (her eyes) that weeping clouded were" (p. 13) : "clouding those faire skies wherein there shone at once two sun like eyes" (p. 16) : "whose bright

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eye reflected rayes of wonder" (p. 19): "the sense-delighting-rare-delitiousnesse" (*ibid*):

"The milke dipt rofe vermillon in her cheek,
Fled from its feate, some fafer place to feeke."

(p. 21.)

and "sun-shading litle boughes" (p. 28).

The original is a small duodecimo: and is now reproduced page for page, line for line, word for word, point for point, *literatim*. There is no Preface or Epistle of any kind. One should be glad to know something of James Gresham. He seems to have deemed his bare name on the title-page sufficient. Greater contemporaries needed more.

ALEXANDER B. GROSART.

From my study,

St. George's, 4th November, 1876.

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