THE MISFORTUNES OF ARTHUR

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MISFORTUNES OF ARTHUR.

It appears that eight persons, Members of the Society of Gray's Inn, were engaged in the production of *The Misfortunes of Arthur* for the entertainment of Queen Elizabeth, at Greenwich, on the 8th Feb. 1587: viz. Thomas Hughes, the author of the whole body of the tragedy; William Fulbecke who wrote two speeches substituted on the representation and appended to the old printed copy; Nicholas Trotte who furnished the Introduction; Francis Flower who penned Choruses for the first and second acts; Christopher Yelverton, Francis Bacon and John Lancaster who devised the dumb shews, then usually accompanying such performances; and a person of the name of Penroodocke, who, assisted by Flower and Lancaster, "directed the proceedings at Court."

Regarding Hughes and Trotte no information has survived. Fulbecke was born in 1566, became, as we are told, an eminent writer on the law, and in the year when this tragedy was brought-out, published a work called "Christian Ethics." The "Maister Francis Bacon," spoken of at the conclusion of the piece, was of course no other than Lord Bacon; and it is a new feature in his biography, though not perhaps very prominent nor important, that he was so nearly concerned in the preparation of a play at Court: in Feb. 1587, he had just commenced his 28th year. Christopher Yelverton, as early as 1566, had written the epilogue to Gascoyne's *Jocasta*, and on the present occasion was probably resorted to for his experience in such undertakings. Regarding Flower, Lancaster, and Penroodocke we have nothing to communicate.

The Misfortunes of Arthur is a dramatic composition only known to exist in the Garrick Collection. Judging from internal evidence, it seems to have been printed with unusual care under the superintendence of the principal Author: in the course of it some lines and words were cancelled, and those which were substituted were

pasted over the objectionable passages. In the notes we have given both versions, and the whole is reprinted as nearly as possible in its original shape. The mere rarity of this unique drama would not have recommended it to our notice; but it is not likely that such a man as Lord Bacon would have lent his aid to the production of a piece which was not intrinsically good, and unless we much mistake, there is a richer and a nobler vein of poetry running through it, than is to be found in any previous work of the kind. The blank verse is generally free and flowing, although now and then deformed by alliteration, and rendered somewhat monotonous by the want of that variety of rythm, which Marlowe may be said to have introduced, and which Shakespeare scarcely exceeded.

Most of the characters, and particularly those of Arthur and Mordred, are drawn with distinctness and vigour: the fiery and reckless ambition of the son is excellently contrasted with the cool determination and natural affection of the father. As an illustration of the former we may refer to many passages, but especially to several in the third scene of the second act; while the character and disposition of the latter are depicted in a masterly manner both before and after the final battle: this catastrophe, as far as relates to the death of Mordred, is mentioned by Dante in Canto XXXII. of his *Inferno:*

> Non quelli a cui fu rotto il petto e l'ombra
> Con esso un colpo per la man d'Arto.

The substance of the story is to be found in the *Morte Arthur*. The action is one, but the unities of time and place are disregarded; and although the tragedy in many respects is conducted upon the plan of the ancients, there are in it evident approaches to the irregularity of our romantic drama. It forms a sort of connecting link between such pieces of unimpassioned formality as *Ferrex and Porrex*, and rule-rejecting historical plays, as Shakespeare found them and left them.

THE INTRODUCTION.

An Introduction penned by Nicholas Trotte, Gentleman, one of the Society of Grayes-Inne: which was pronounced in manner following: viz. Three Muses came on the stage apparelled accordingly, bringing five Gentlemen Students with them attyred in their usuall garments, whom one of the Muses presented to her Majestie as Captives: the cause whereof she delivered by speach as followeth.

Of conquest (gracious Queene) the signs and fruits,
Atchiv'd 'gainst such as wrongfully witheld
The service by choice wits to Muses due,
In humbliest wise these Captives we present.
And least your highnes might suspect the gift,
As spoile of warre that justice might impeach,
Heare and discerne how just our quarrell was,
Avowed* (as you see) by good successe.
A dame there is, whom men Astrea terme,
Shee that pronounceth oracles of lawes,
Who to prepare fit servants for her traine,
As by commission, takes up flowring wits,
Whom first she schooleth to forget and scorne
The noble skils of language and of arts,
The wisedome which discourse of stories teach,
The ornaments which various knowledge yeelds:
But Poesie she hath in most disdaine
And marshals its next Follye's scorned place.
Then, when she hath these worthy prints defac'd
Out of the mindes that can endure her hand,
What doth she then supplie in steede of these?
Forsooth, some olde reports of altered lawes,
Clamors of Courts, and cavils upon words,
Grounds without ground, supported by conceit,

* *Avowed*] i. e. *avouched*, from the Fr. *avouer*.

And reasons of more subtiltie then sense.
What shall I say of moote points strange, and doubts
Still argued, but never yet agreed?
And shee that doth deride the poets lawe,
Because he must his words in order place,
Forgets her formes of pleading, more precise,
More bound to words then is the poets lore:
And for these fine conceits she fitly chose
A tongue that barbarisme it selfe doth use.
We, noting all these wrongs, did long expect
There hard condition would have made them wise,
To offer us their service, plac'd so ill;
But finding them addicted to their choyce,
And specially desirous to present
Your Majestie with fruits of province new,
Now did resolve to double force and skill,
And found and usde the vantage of the time,
Surprisde their fort and tooke them captives all.
So now submisse, as to their state belongs,
They gladly yeelde their homage long withdrawne,
And Poetry which they did most contemne,
They glory now her favours for to weare.
My sisters laught to see them take the penne,
And lose their wits all in unwoonted walkes:
But to your highnes that delight we leave
To see these poets new their stile advaunce.
Such as they are, or naught or litle worth,
Deigne to accept, and therewith we beseech,
That novelty give price to worthlesse things.

Unto this speach one of the Gentlemen answered as followeth:

Good Ladies, unacquaint with cunning reach,
And easly led to glory in your powre,
Heare now abasht our late dissembled mindes.
Not now the first time, as your selves best knowe,
Ye Muses sought our service to commaund:
Oft have ye wandred from Pernassus hill,
And shewed your selves with sweet and tempting grace,