

**EIGHT NOVELS EMPLOYED BY
ENGLISH DRAMATIC POETS OF
THE REIGN OF QUEEN ELIZABETH;
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY
BARNABY RICHE IN THE YEAR 1581**

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BARNABE RICH

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P R E F A C E.

It will not be disputed that the present volume contains a very amusing assemblage of early novels, independently of their claims from intimate connection with Shakespeare and other old dramatists. The author, Barnaby Riche, in the "Conclusion" of his work, informs us that some of the stories had, even then, been applied to the purposes of the stage, and we shall presently more fully advert to this interesting point.

How far any of them are original it is not very easy to decide. In his address "to the Readers in general," Rich states that of the eight "histories" five were "but forged only for delight," while the other three were written in Italian, by an author whom he designates by the initials L. B. Hence we might infer that the five had been "forged only for delight" by himself, if we did not know that some of them were founded upon foreign authorities. One of the five, in a manner claimed by Riche, which stands second in his volume, (and, in our view, of peculiar importance, because it was employed by Shakespeare in his "Twelfth Night") is unquestionably, in all its main features, the same as in Bandello, who could not be the Italian writer pointed

out by Riche as L. B., because his Christian name was Matteo. The novel occurs in the second part of Bandello's collection, where it bears the following argumentative title: *Nicuola, innamorata di Lattantio, vada a servirlo vestita da paggio; e, dopo molti casi, seco si marita: e ciò che ad un suo fratello avvenne.* It is also transplanted into Belleforest's French Collection, where it is thus introduced: *Comme une fille Romaine, se vestant en page, servist long temps un sien amy sans estre cogneue, et depuis l'eust à mary; avec autres divers discours.*

It seems more likely that Riche resorted to Bandello, but it is possible that this novel was one of those which had been dramatised before Riche wrote; and if this were the case, it would establish the new and important fact, that a play on the same story as "Twelfth Night" had been produced before 1581.

Two Italian comedies upon very similar incidents, one called *Inganni* and the other *Ingannati*, were certainly then in existence, and may have formed the groundwork of a drama, anterior to Shakespeare, in our own language. The names given by Riche to the various personages are not those which occur in Bandello, Belleforest, or the Italian comedies; neither are they the same as any used by Shakespeare. Riche perhaps obtained them from the old English drama, the story of which he may have reduced to a narrative form, for the amusement of readers who were not in the habit of visiting theatres.

However, there can be little doubt that Riche's story-book, like Painter's "Palace of Pleasure," printed still

earlier, was known to Shakespeare, who without scruple availed himself of the literature of his time, whenever he could employ it to advantage for the purposes of the stage. On the very first page of Riche's "Farewell to Military Profession" we meet with a proof of it, for who can read the following without being instantly and forcibly reminded of a very notorious passage in the earliest scene of Shakespeare's "Richard III.":—"I see now," says Riche, "it is less painful to follow a fiddle in a gentlewoman's chamber, than to march after a drum in the field," &c. Other resemblances, not necessary here to be pointed out, will strike the reader as he proceeds; and on p. 112 of our reprint he will meet with a remarkable expression, applied in the same way as by our great dramatist in his "Romeo and Juliet."

"Twelfth Night" was acted very early in 1602, having probably been written in 1600 or 1601; and, as far as he derived assistance from Riche's novel, Shakespeare must have resorted to the edition we here reprint, that of 1581, which has only lately been brought to light in the Bodleian Library. There was a subsequent impression in 1606; and if Malone's conjecture, that "Twelfth Night" was composed in 1607, had not recently been entirely disproved,¹ that edition would have answered Shakespeare's purpose. The tale, containing some principal situations in "Twelfth Night," was given in Malone's Shakespeare by Boswell, 8vo., 1821, from the copy of Riche's "Farewell," in 1606, and more recently in vol. ii. of a work entitled "Shakespeare's Library;" but in neither instance was it complete, the whole of

¹ See Collier's Shakespeare, iii., 317.