

**THE GHOST OF RICHARD THE THIRD. A
POEM, PRINTED IN 1614, AND FOUNDED
UPON
SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORICAL PLAY.
REPRINTED FROM THE ONLY KNOWN
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WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

J. PAYNE COLLIER, ESQ.



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INTRODUCTION.

The ensuing poem, which is intimately connected in matter and manner with Shakespeare's "Richard the Third," and which would probably not have been written but for the extreme popularity of that historical tragedy, has been noticed and quoted, for the first time, in the "Life" of our great dramatist, prefixed to the recent impression of his works, published by Messrs. Whittaker and Co. Our reprint is made from the sole existing copy, preserved in the Bodleian Library, and unknown to the previous editors of Shakespeare, as well as to all bibliographical antiquaries.

The poem is divided into three parts—the "Character," the "Legend," and the "Tragedy" of Richard the Third; and the following obvious and highly laudatory allusion to Shakespeare commences the second portion of the work:—

"To him that impt my fame with Clio's quill
Whose magick rais'd me from oblivion's den,
That writ my storie on the Muses' hill,
And with my actions dignifi'd his pen;
He that from Helicon sends many a rill,
Whose nectared veines are drunke by thirstie men;
Crown'd be his stile with fame, his head with bayes,
And none detract, but gratulate his praise.

Yet if his scenes have not engrost all grace
 The much fam'd action could extend on stage;
 If time or memory have left a place
 For me to fill, t' enforme this ignorant age,
 To that intent I shew my horrid face,
 Imprest with feare, and characters of rage:
 Nor wits, nor chronicles, could ere containe
 The hell-deepe reaches of my soundlesse braine."

The author professes on his title-page to relate "more" regarding Richard the Third than was contained "in Chronicles, Plays, or Poems;" but it will be clear to those who read the following pages that to no previous writer has he been so much indebted as to Shakespeare. The incidents, or most of them, are of course matters of history; but in the treatment of them, and in much of the phraseology of his poem, the author has mainly copied our great dramatist, and a few of the more striking resemblances are pointed out in the notes. The writer has, in fact, done with respect to "Richard the Third," in verse, very much what was done with respect to "Pericles" in prose: a narrative is constructed out of a drama, the writer availing himself of the popularity of the subject in order to attract public attention and interest. It is the only specimen of the kind, and of that date, in our language with which we are acquainted; for, although poems derived from history are sufficiently numerous, we know of none confessedly founded, as it were, upon a play: in this instance it has the additional recommendation of being founded upon a play by Shakespeare.

The form chosen by the author is that in which the legends in "The Mirror for Magistrates" are written,

where the ghost of the person is supposed to relate his own history. Niccols published his "Winter Night's Vision," as a sequel to "The Mirror for Magistrates," in 1610; and there, as most persons are aware, is found "The lamentable Lives and Deaths of the two young Princes, Edward the Fifth and his brother Richard, Duke of York," as well as "The tragical Life and Death of King Richard the Third." It may be considered remarkable that, although Shakespeare's "Richard the Third," in 1610, had probably been on the stage for sixteen or seventeen years, and had gone through at least four editions, Niccols makes so little use of it, and has not the most remote allusion to it: only in one passage can we trace any direct likeness, and there it is by no means close, as may be seen by the subjoined quotation. Richard is speaking of the time after he had killed Henry VI. in the Tower:—

"He dead, the battels fought in field before
 Were turn'd to meetings of sweet amitie;
 The war-gods thundring cannons dreadful rore,
 And rattling drum-sounds warlike harmonie,
 To sweet tun'd noise of pleasing ministrallie;
 The haile-like shot to tennis balls were turn'd,
 And sweet perfumes in stead of smoakes were burn'd.

God Mars laid by his launce and tooke his lute,
 And turn'd his rugged frownes to smiling lookes;
 In stead of crimson fields, wars fatall fruit,
 He bath'd his limbes in Cypris warbling brookes,
 And set his thoughts upon her wanton lookes:
 All noise of war was husht upon our coast;
 Plentie each where in easefull pride did boast."—p. 753.

Steevens, referring to the preceding stanzas, says that "*more probably* Niccols was indebted to Shakespeare than Shakespeare to him:" it would have puzzled Steevens to show how it was *possible* for Shakespeare to have been indebted to an author who published his work thirteen years after "Richard the Third" came from the press. John Lyly has this passage in his play, "Alexander and Campaspe," 4to, 1584, but the resemblance is so trifling and distant, that we do not think Shakespeare had it even in his mind when he wrote Gloucester's soliloquy: it appeared, however, just as many years before "Richard the Third" was printed as Niccols's poem did after it:—"Is the warlike sound of drum and trump turned to the soft noise of lyre and lute? the neighing of barbed steeds, whose loudness filled the air with terror, and whose breaths dimmed the sun with smoke, converted to delicate tunes and amorous glances?"

It will be observed that our quotation from Niccols's "Winter Night's Vision" is in the ancient English form of stanza employed by Chaucer, Lydgate, and other early poets; while the author of "The Ghost of Richard the Third" employs the Italian *ottava rima*, which may, or may not, be considered an improvement. We do not discover any connexion between the two poems, excepting those inevitable coincidences which arise out of the fact, that both poets employed the same historical incidents. The author of "The Ghost of Richard the Third" seems almost purposely to have avoided some points upon which Niccols dwells, while he has de-