

**'THE SUBJECT OF ALL  
VERSE', BEING AN INQUIRY  
INTO THE AUTHORSHIP OF  
A FAMOUS EPITAPH**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649278770

'The subject of all verse', being an inquiry into the authorship of a famous Epitaph by Philip Sidney

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Cover @ 2017

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**PHILIP SIDNEY**

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THE COUNTESS OF PEMBROKE

*(From a photograph by Emery Walker of the picture in the National Portrait Gallery)*

# 'The Subject of All Verse'

Being

An Inquiry into the Authorship  
of a Famous Epitaph

By

Philip Sidney

Author of 'A History of the Gunpowder Plot', &c.

Henry Frowde

Oxford University Press

London, New York, and Toronto

1907

'Underneath this sable hearse  
Lies the Subject of all Verse;  
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother,  
Death! ere thou hast slain another,  
Fair and learn'd and good as she,  
Time shall throw a dart at thee.'



## PREFACE

THIS little essay is intended to serve as a humble contribution towards the eventual settlement of the time-honoured controversy, which for so long has occupied the attention of students and lovers of Elizabethan literature, concerning the vexed question of the authorship of one of the most popular as well as one of the most frequently quoted epitaphs existing in the English language. So famous, indeed, has this panegyric become, that three of its lines have passed practically into household words. That I have been nearly, if not absolutely successful in demonstrating how this epitaph owes its origin, not, as has been generally conceived, to the facile pen of 'Rare' Ben Jonson, but to that of another contem-



porary poet, will, I venture to confide, admit of but little or no reasonable doubt.

In addition to penetrating into the curious mystery enveloping the authorship of these lines, I have also made myself responsible for a brief but concise memoir of the subject of their eulogy, to whose proud position, both as a writer and as a patron of letters and of science, adequate justice has not yet been rendered by her posterity.

P. S.

## 'THE SUBJECT OF ALL VERSE'

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### CHAPTER I

THERE is, probably, no single epitaph, extant in verse, in the English language, which has been more highly extolled, or more freely quoted as a model of literary grace, than that composed on Mary, Countess of Pembroke (sister to Sir Philip Sidney), the authorship of which is usually ascribed to Ben Jonson's Muse. At the same time, there is also, probably, no well-known epitaph in our language that is more often misquoted than this, and its actual authorship is still, as will be shown later, accredited generally to the wrong writer.

The illustrious lady, in whose honour were indited the famous lines—

'Underneath this sable hearse  
Lies the subject of all Verse;  
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother,' &c.,

was the fourth and youngest daughter of Sir Henry Sidney, K.G., by his wife, Lady Mary Dudley, eldest daughter of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, sister to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, to Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, to Catherine, Countess of Huntingdon, and sister-in-law to Lady Jane Grey, the 'ten-days Queen'. Her birth took place at Tickenhill Palace, Bewdley, Worcestershire, October 27, 1561. Tickenhill, now called Ticknell, was the Council-House of the Lords President of the Marches of Wales, Sir Henry Sidney being then Lord President. It was at Tickenhill that Arthur, Prince of Wales, espoused (by proxy) the Princess