

**TARLTON'S JESTS, AND NEWS
OUT OF PURGATORY; WITH
NOTES, AND SOME ACCOUNT
OF THE LIFE OF TARLTON**

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Tarlton's Jestes, and News out of Purgatory; With Notes, and Some Account of the Life of Tarlton
by James Orchard Halliwell

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JAMES ORCHARD HALLIWELL

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PORTRAIT OF TARLTON,

Reduced by Mr. Shaw from an original drawing in the British Museum.

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73-4
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Richard
TARLTON'S JESTS,
AND
NEWS OUT OF PURGATORY:

WITH NOTES,

AND

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE OF TARLTON,

BY

JAMES ORCHARD HALLIWELL, ESQ., F.R.S.,

HON. M.R.I.A., HON. M.R.S.L., F.S.A., &c.

O honour far beyond a brazen shrine,
To sit with TARLTON on an ale-post's sign!

HALL'S Satires, vi., 1.



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INTRODUCTION.

The fleeting fame of men whose reputation has depended on arts that exclusively demand the exercise of the physical energies may be illustrated in the life of almost every actor, who was not likewise eminent as a dramatist. Burbage, the Kemble of Shakespeare's day, whose admirable personification of Richard the Third had so identified him with that character, that years afterwards the host at Leicester, as related by Bishop Corbet, confused the two—in how few does his memory remain! Tarlton, who is known to the bibliographer and collector by the two excessively rare tracts, now reprinted, neither of which, however, were written by him, may on that account have retained a greater degree of posthumous reputation; but that he deserves more may be concluded from the opinion of Gifford,¹ that “he was, perhaps, the most popular comic performer that ever trod the stage, and his memory was cherished with fond delight by the vulgar, to the period of the revolution.” Gifford is supported in this by nearly hundreds of contemporary witnesses, who agree in asserting that ✓

¹ Works of Ben Jonson, 1816, vol. iv., p. 364.

his comic powers were unrivalled, and in their estimation almost miraculous. He was the most celebrated clown of the school against which Shakespeare levelled his satire;¹ and he is also indirectly connected with our great dramatist, as having performed a part in the old play of the "Famous Victories." There are, moreover, few names in the whole circle of Elizabethan literature so frequently alluded to as that of Richard Tarlton: it will be familiar to all who have studied the progress of the drama during that period; and it is believed that a brief record of his merry sayings and doings will be generally acceptable to the members of the Shakespeare Society, highly illustrative as they are of the manners, or rather, perhaps, of the deficiency of them, at the court of Queen Bess.

Tarlton,² according to Fuller, was born at Conover,³ in Shropshire, "where," says he, "still some of his name and relations remain." If the "Jests" may be believed, his father was at one time resident at Ilford.⁴ See the present volume, p. 40. The period of his birth is not mentioned, but he was an author as early as 1570, as will be noticed hereafter. His mother's name was Kate,

¹ Hamlet, act iii., sc. 2.

² The name is not usual, but is found in the time of Henry VI. See Proceedings in Chancery, p. xxxv.

³ The registers do not begin till 1578, and none of those now preserved contain any notice of the family. Fuller erroneously gives Tarlton's Christian name *Thomas*. See also MS. Addit. 5749, f. 10.

⁴ The registers do not enable us to verify this circumstance. Some pedigrees of a family of the same name, resident in this part of England, kindly shown me by Sir Charles Young, do not commence early enough to clear up the point.