

**RALPH ROISTER DOISTER,
A COMEDY, AND THE
TRAGEDIE OF GORBODUC**

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Ralph Roister Doister, a Comedy, and the Tragedie of Gorboduc by Nicholas Udall & Thomas Norton & Thomas Sackville

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NICHOLAS UDALL & THOMAS NORTON & THOMAS SACKVILLE

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BY NICHOLAS UDALL.

AND

THE TRAGEDIE

OF

G O R B O D U C,

BY

THOMAS NORTON AND THOMAS SACKVILLE.

WITH INTRODUCTORY MEMOIRS.

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P R E F A C E.

In reprinting for the Shakespeare Society the first known editions of the earliest Comedy and the earliest Tragedy in the English language, I have most scrupulously adhered to the text, adopting only such emendations in the punctuation as seemed to make out the sense more clearly. The members of the Society, therefore, have exact copies of the originals.

For the copy of Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*, carefully collated with the unique original deposited in the Library at Eton College, I am indebted to the kindness of my friend Mr. J. Payne Collier, to whom also my warmest acknowledgments are due for important suggestions and assistance, whilst the following pages were passing through the press. For the copy of the very rare impression of the first edition of *Gorboduc* our Society is under another obligation to its Vice-President, the Earl of Ellesmere.

It is well known that the existence of a copy of *Ralph Roister Doister*, as printed in 1566, was only discovered in 1818, and that the letter of Merygreeke (see pp. 47 and 54) was quoted by T. Wilson in "The Rule of Reason, conteinyng the arte of logique," printed in 1551, where he gives it as "An example of such doubtful writing, which by reason of pointing,

may have a double sense or contrary meaning, taken out of an Interlude made by Nicholas Udall." The authorship of Udall was first established by Mr. Collier, in his *Hist. Engl. Dram. Poetry*, vol. ii. p. 445. This Comedy must therefore have preceded by at least fifteen (and I believe by not less than thirty¹) years Still's comedy of "Gammer Gurton's Needle," acted in 1566. "The scene" of Ralph Roister Doister," says Mr. Collier,² "is laid in London, so that in no slight degree it is a representation of the manners of more polished society, exhibiting some of the peculiarities of thinking and acting in the metropolis, at the period when it was written. It is divided into acts and scenes, and is one of the earliest productions for the stage, which has reached us, in a printed shape, with these distinctions." The interest of the plot, the cleverness of the situations, and the wit and humour of the dialogue, all warrant the title of a true Comedy. It was reprinted, but without particular care, by James Compton, for the Rev. Mr. Briggs, in 1818; and also, with more attention, but still with several errors, by F. Marshall, in 1821; and again, in 1830, by Thomas White, in the first volume of his "Old English Drama." Of the notes to the edition of 1821 I have largely availed myself.

The Tragedy of Gorboduc was written for and exhibited at one of the famous Christmas festivities holden at the Inner Temple in the early part of Queen Elizabeth's reign, and was afterwards acted by the gentlemen of the Inner Temple "before the Quene's most excellent

¹ See Introductory Memoirs, p. xv.

² *Hist. of Engl. Dram. Poetry*, vol. ii., p. 450.

Majestie in her highnes court at Whitehall, the 18th January, 1561." It was not, however, printed till 1565 by William Griffith; from what MS. does not appear. This edition was supposed to have been reprinted in the edition of 1590, but the variations, which I have particularized in the notes, prove that this was not the case: nor was the edition of 1736 a copy of Griffith's edition: and, until this publication for our Society, I know of no reprint. In this original edition there are the following eight lines in Eubulus' speech (act v., sc. 1) which are not given in the subsequent edition of the same play printed by John Daye, under the title of "Ferrex and Porrex."

That no cause serves, whereby the subject may
 Call to account the doings of his prince;
 Much less in blood by sword to work revenge;
 No more than may the hand cut off the head.
 In act nor speech, no: not in secret thought
 The subject may rebel against his lord,
 Or judge of him that sits in Caesar's seat,
 With grudging mind to damn those he mislikes.

These circumstances are sufficient reasons for giving to the members of the Shakespeare Society this portion of our present publication. In the title-page it is expressly stated that the three first acts were written by Thomas Norton,¹ and the last two by Thomas Sackville: at that time the fact must have been well known; and, notwithstanding the opinions of Warton and Hallam to the contrary, I think that a minute examination of the Tragedy itself, and a comparison with other writings of

¹ In his reprint of the Tragedy (1736), Joseph Spence very quietly dispenses with all mention of Norton, and says only that it was "written by Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst," &c.