

I believe, then, that Shakespeare here, as frequently, took an old play, and, as Mr. Gollancz says, "alchemised" it. I think that *The Troublesome Reign* was not by Shakespeare, although the second and third editions were, like so many other old plays not by him, published in his name. I think that Meres's mention of *King John* probably had reference to the old play which had been wrongly ascribed to Shakespeare, Meres being in error in this case as he was in the case of *Titus Adronicus*; and I think it possible that nothing had been seen of Shakespeare's *King John* till the publication of the Folio of 1623. I think it was the same in the case of *Hamlet*. Here, too, Shakespeare took an old play, and transmuted all the inferior metal into gold. Shakespeare was, I take it, a busy man whose aim it was to use the stage as a means to convey instruction to the people, and to teach them a certain measure of philosophy through the medium of the theatre. "The purpose of playing," as he says in *Hamlet*, "is to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." It was not for him to consume his time in the invention of plots. He took what lay nearest to his hand—old novels, old chronicles, and old plays, and transformed them, making them all golden in the process of transformation. I do not for a moment believe that the Stratford player was, or could possibly have been, this "Shakespeare," but I think it is a mistake to endeavour to fortify the argument against him by ascribing to Shakespeare such old plays as the *King John* of 1591 or the primitive *Hamlet*.

It is not necessary to discuss the other plays mentioned by Mr. Reed, as evidencing "early authorship," at length. I cannot think, as does Mr. Reed, that the author of the old play of the *Taming of a Shrew* was also author of *The Taming of the Shrew*. The difficulty seems to be to say how much, if any, of the latter play is in truth by "Shake-

speare." Nor can I think that *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, which was acted before 1588, and apparently alluded to by Nash in *Pierce Pennilesse* (1592), was written by the author of the Shakespearean *Henry V*.<sup>1</sup> That the old play of *Leir* was Shakespeare's is an assumption that few will accept. As to *Titus Andronicus* and *King Henry VI*, Parts 1, 2, and 3, I have already dealt with them. *Pericles* is altogether too doubtful a composition to found an argument upon in support of the "early authorship" theory, and it is very unsafe to assume that *The History of Felix and Philomena*, which was acted before the Queen at Greenwich in 1584-5, "on the Sondae next after newe yeares daie at night," was the work of Shakespeare.

A word may be said as to the *Comedy of Errors*. In Act III, Scene 2, Dromio of Syracuse, speaking of the "countries" which he could "find out" in the fat kitchen-wench, when asked by Antipholus of Syracuse, "Where France"? replies: "In her forehead, armed and reverted, making war against her heir." Here is undoubtedly a play on the words "heir" and "hair," and an allusion to the civil war in France. "There is," writes Mr. Gollancz, "evidently an allusion to the civil war in France between Henry III and Henry of Navarre, which lasted from August 1589 to July 1593."<sup>2</sup> But this is obviously a mistake, for Henry III was assassinated in 1589! I think Mr. Reed is also mistaken when he says, "The war against him [Henry of Navarre], as 'heir,' began in April 1585, and terminated at the death of Henry III in August 1589." Rather, I think, Knight is right in referring the

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 355. I am very much inclined to agree with the critic quoted by Mr. Gollancz, "Never before did genius ever transmute so base a *caput mortuum* into ore so precious."

<sup>2</sup> Preface to the "Temple" edition, p. vi. Mr. J. M. Robertson (p. 27) says that this allusion "might be retrospective, since the time of a play may be any period prior to the production." But the dramatist would certainly not make a stale reference to a long gone event.

allusion to the contest between Henry of Navarre and the Leaguers, which commenced after the assassination of Henry III, and "was in effect concluded by Henry's renunciation of the Protestant faith in 1593." However, Mr. Gollancz seems to be not far wrong in putting the date of the play about 1589-91. As to *Love's Labour's Lost* all we can say is that it is an early play, in which again we find the allusions to the Civil War of France (1589-93), and if Mr. Lee is right in thinking that to this play "may reasonably be assigned priority in point of time of all Shakespeare's dramatic productions," then, assuming that Mr. Gollancz is also right as to the date of the *Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost* must have been written about 1590-91.

I think, then, that Mr. Reed's attempt to prove the very early authorship of Shakespearean drama, by assuming that the old plays alluded to were the work of Shakespeare, cannot be said to have succeeded. Nevertheless the dates, when fairly considered, are sufficiently remarkable. Francis Meres, writing in 1598, makes the following statement: "Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witness his Gentlemen of Verona, his Errors, his Love labors lost, his Love Labors Wonne, his Midsummer's night Dreame, and his Merchant of Venice: for Tragedy his Richard the Second, Richard the 3, Henry the 4, King John, Titus Andronicus, and his Romeo and Juliet." Here we have twelve,<sup>1</sup> or omitting Titus, as to which Meres was, I think, clearly in error, eleven dramas (one of them in two parts, so that we may still count twelve plays),<sup>2</sup> composed by Shakespeare before 1598, besides his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, and "his sugred Sonnets

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Reed says (p. 81): "In 1598 Francis Meres published a list of thirteen plays (seven tragedies and six comedies) as Shakespeare's." Mr. Reed doubtless counts the two parts of *Henry IV* as two "tragedies."

<sup>2</sup> Subject, however, to what I have already said as to *King John*.

among his private friends," if these are really Shakespearean. Moreover, Meres's artificially framed lists (six comedies and six tragedies) are obviously not meant to be exhaustive. We have seen that *Hamlet*, if we may trust Gabriel Harvey's note, was written before 1598, as were probably others of the plays, though not mentioned by Meres. I lay little stress on his omission of *Henry VI*, Parts 1, 2, and 3, for reasons already fully explained, but it is certainly a large order to suppose that the Stratford rustic, coming to town possibly in 1586, but probably in 1587 or 1588, had accomplished all this marvellous work before 1598. When we reflect upon all the culture, all the learning, all the experience, and all the philosophy which must have been acquired by the author of these wonderful plays and poems, surely we must admit that all other literary marvels fade into utter insignificance by the side of this! Mr. J. M. Robertson, too, roundly asserts that we must take Shakespeare strictly at his word, and believes, since *Venus and Adonis* was the first heir of his invention, that all the plays were written subsequently to that date.<sup>1</sup> If so, these eleven, twelve, or more dramas must have been composed by Shakespeare, and brought upon the stage (if not also published) between 1593 and 1598. If Mr. Robertson can believe this, he has, indeed, great faith, which seems to be reserved for the Stratfordian Gospel only. *Credat Judæus non ego!*

<sup>1</sup> With this alternative, however, viz. that "Shakespeare for the best of reasons would not regard as heirs of his invention plays in which he used other men's drafts or shared with others the task of composition" (p. 29). It is suggested, therefore, that he had collaborators for *The Two Gentlemen*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, the *Comedy of Errors*, the *Dream*, *Richard II*, and other early plays. I do not myself attach the same strict significance to the phrase "the first heir of my invention." *Venus and Adonis* was the first work published by "Shakespeare" under that name, and I think it is quite likely that he might style it the first heir of his invention, even although he had not actually composed it before the earlier plays, which had not been published in his name. We do not know, however, at what date the poem was composed, except that it must, apparently, have been after 1589. See p. 64.

But, if certain enthusiastic Stratfordians are to be believed, Shakespeare was writing poems and plays in very early days, long before the publication of the alleged first heir of his invention. Thus we have Spenser's allusion to "our pleasant Willy," in the *Tears of the Muses*, published in 1591:—

And he the man whom Nature's self had made  
To mock herself, and truth to imitate,  
With kindly counter under mimic shade  
Our pleasant Willy, oh! is dead of late;  
With whom all joy and jolly merriment  
Is also deaded, and in dolor drent.

Mr. Collier, in his *Life of Shaksper*, has no hesitation in saying that here is a reference to Shakespeare. In his opinion there was no other dramatist of the time to whom the lines were applicable. Modern Stratfordians, however, have perceived the danger of admitting that this is a testimony to "the admirable dramatic talents which he [Shakespeare] had already displayed, and which had enabled him even before 1591 to outstrip all living rivalry." This is too early fame for the young provincial who came from Stratford to London, "destitute of polite accomplishments," in 1587 or thereabouts. So the supposed allusion is scoffed at as absurd. How could "our pleasant Willy" be referred to as dead in 1591 if Shakspere were he, seeing that Shakspere lived some five-and-twenty years after this was published? They carefully suppress the lines which follow, showing that Spenser did not allude to physical death, but to the cessation of authorship:—

But that same gentle spirit from whose pen  
Large streams of honnie and sweete nectar flowe,  
Scorning the boldness of such base born men  
Which dare their follies forth so rashly throwe,  
Doth rather choose to sit in idle cell  
Than so himself to mockerie to sell.

Now if this is an allusion to Shakespeare, as Collier and others affirm, it furnishes an additional argument in sup-

Very curious

Note

port of the contention that Shakespeare and Shakspere are not identical, for it requires blind faith to believe that the young man from Stratford had before 1591 (and a considerable time, as we must suppose) outstripped all living rivalry. However, it is of course quite possible that Spenser was referring to some other author, though "honey and sweet nectar" are highly suggestive of "sweet" Mr. Shakespeare of the "sugred sonnets."

There is another supposed allusion to Shakespeare in Spenser's works, viz. the lines in *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*:

And there, though last not least, is Ætion ;  
A gentler Shepheard may no where be found,  
Whose muse, full of high thought's invention,  
Doth, like himselfe, heroically sound.

Now Fuller, in his *Worthies of Warwickshire* (1662), speaks of the poet as "martial in the warlike sound of his sur-name, whence some may conjecture him of military extraction, *hasti-vibrans* or Shake-speare." Spenser's poem, *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, was completed in 1594, and if Ætion stands for Shake-speare (as Mr. Lee and others assume), the poet must have won fame for his heroically sounding Muse some considerable time before that date. The description would not apply to such a poem as *Venus and Adonis*, so we must suppose that Shakespeare was writing heroic poems—dramas I presume—before 1593.<sup>1</sup> It is quite possible, indeed highly probable, that such was the fact; but I do not fancy it was the fact with Shakspere!

So, again, if Greene's famous allusion to "Shake-scene," in 1592, has reference to Shakespeare, and is to be taken, as some enthusiastic Stratfordians, Mr. Churton Collins for one, will have it, as implying that Shakespeare was at that early date known as a writer of plays, the allusion

<sup>1</sup> In the *Dictionary of National Biography* Mr. Lee gives 1591 as the date of Spenser's allusion.

really makes strongly in favour of those who believe that the dramatist was not the Stratford player. Mr. J. M. Robertson, with more caution, asserts that Greene's words import no more than that Shakespeare "had had a hand *in* plays before 1593; but certainly not that he had written one."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written, Professor Courthope has published the fourth volume of his *History of English Poetry*, containing the Appendix which I have already discussed in Note B to chap. v. The Professor, as I have pointed out, upholds the "early authorship" theory in the case of *Titus Andronicus*, the *Contention*, and *True Tragedy*, all three parts of *Henry VI*, the *Troublesome Raigne*, and the *Taming of A Shrew*. Mr. Reed has, therefore, found a powerful ally (although, of course, Professor Courthope would entirely repudiate his conclusions), and the case for those who disbelieve in the Stratfordian authorship of the plays is (for those who can accept the Professor's contention) immensely strengthened.

## APPENDIX

### THE "PHŒNIX AND TURTLE"

I HAD written a chapter on that very curious poem *The Phœnix and Turtle* which I had proposed to add by way of appendix to this work; but the book has, I fear, grown beyond the bounds of the reader's patience, and therefore I must content myself with a short note on these quaint lines, of which Mr. Sidney Lee says it is fortunate that Shakespeare wrote nothing else of like character (p. 147).

*The Phœnix and Turtle*, signed "William Shake-speare," first appeared in a collection published by Robert Chester in 1601 under the following title: "Love's Martyr; or Rosalin's Complaint. Allegorically shadowing the truth of Love in the constant Fate of the Phœnix and Turtle. A Poem enterlaced with much varietie and raritie; now first translated out of the venerable Italian Torquato Caeliano by Robert Chester. With the true legend of famous King Arthur, the last of the nine Worthies, being the first Essay of a new British poet; collected out of diverse authentical Records. To these are added some new compositions, of several modern writers whose names are subscribed to their several works, upon the first subject: viz., The Phœnix and Turtle." These "new compositions" are prefaced by the following title: "Here after follow divers Poetical Essaies on the former Subject, viz: the Turtle and Phœnix, done by the best and chiefest of our moderne writers, with their names subscribed to their particular works: never before extant. And (now first) consecrated by them all generally, to the love and merite of the true noble knight, Sir John Salisburie. *Dignum laude virum*



*Musa vetat mori, MDCI.* "Torquato Caeliano" is only a "mask" name, Chester having, as Dr. Grosart points out, combined the Christian name of Tasso, and the surname of one of the minor poets of Italy of the same period. Emerson in his Preface to *Parnassus* (1875), wrote, "I should like to have the Academy of Letters propose a prize for an essay on Shakespeare's poem, *Let the bird of loudest lay*, and the *Threnos* with which it closes, the aim of the essay being to explain, by a historical research into the poetic myths and tendencies of the age in which it was written, the frame and allusions of the poem." This explanation, however, has never been given, and although Dr. Grosart made, in 1878, an attempt to solve the problem, the riddle cannot yet be said to have been answered. The idea of the loves of the Phoenix and Turtle seems to have been formed on the analogy of the Ovidian fable ("Shake-speare," as we know, was saturated with Ovid) of the love between the Turtle and the Parrot (*Amores*, II, 6), where also the Phoenix is mentioned ("vivax phoenix, unica semper avis") as an inhabitant of that Avian Elysium whither the good birds go at death. It was constantly said of a high-placed lady, whom it was intended to eulogize as the ideal representative of her sex, that she was a "Phoenix." Thus in Camden's *Remains* (1614) we find (p. 371) "Queen Jane who died in child-birth of King Edward the sixth and used for her devise a Phoenix, being her paternal crest, had this thereunto alluding for her epitaph:—

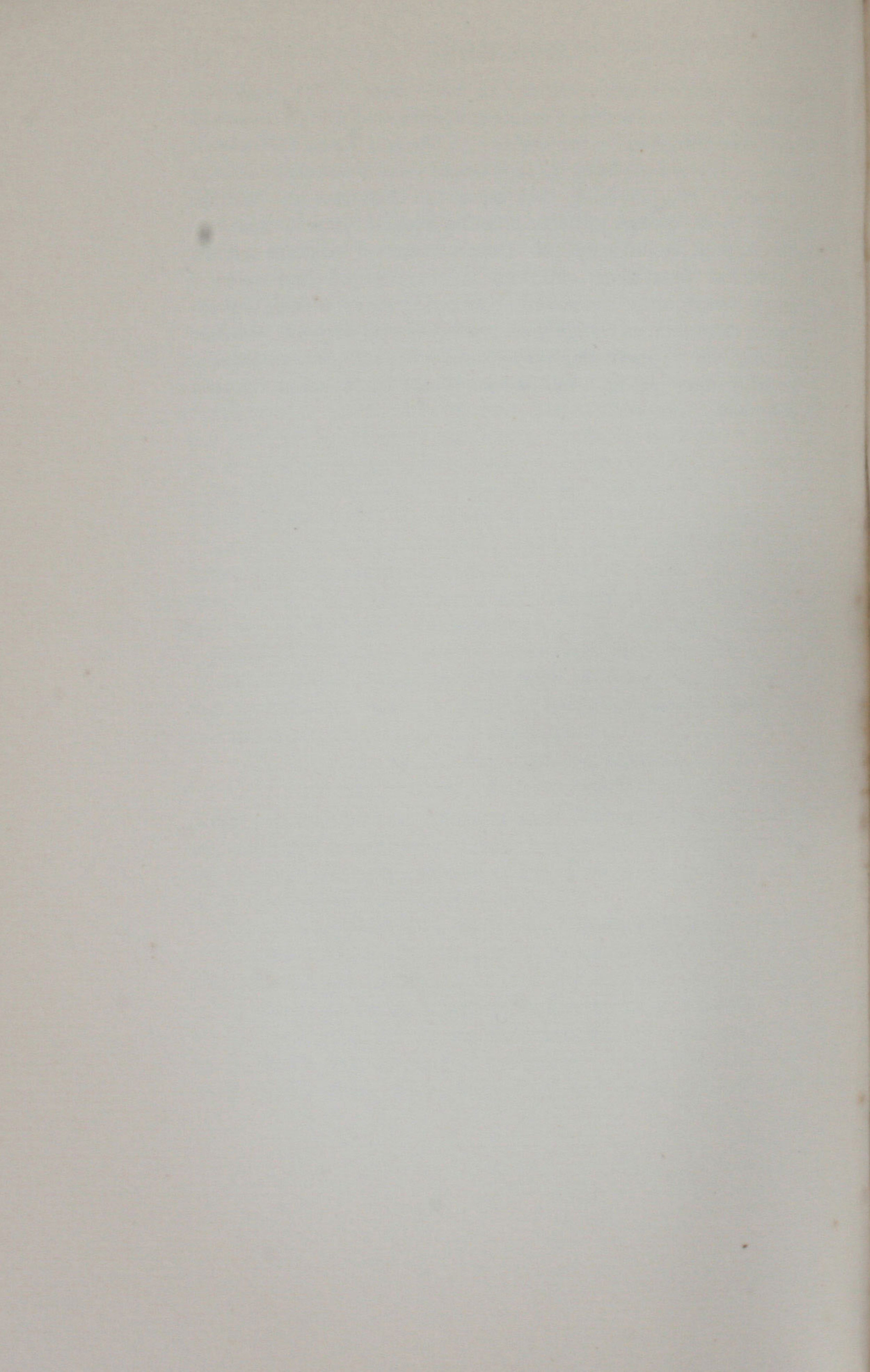
Phoenix Jana jacet nato Phœnice, dolendum  
Sæcula Phœnices nulla tulisse duos."

Some suppose that by Shake-speare's Phoenix Queen Elizabeth was intended, in support of which hypothesis they cite Cranmer's speech (now generally assigned to Fletcher) in *Henry VIII*, Act 5, sc. 5, alluding to "the maiden phoenix."

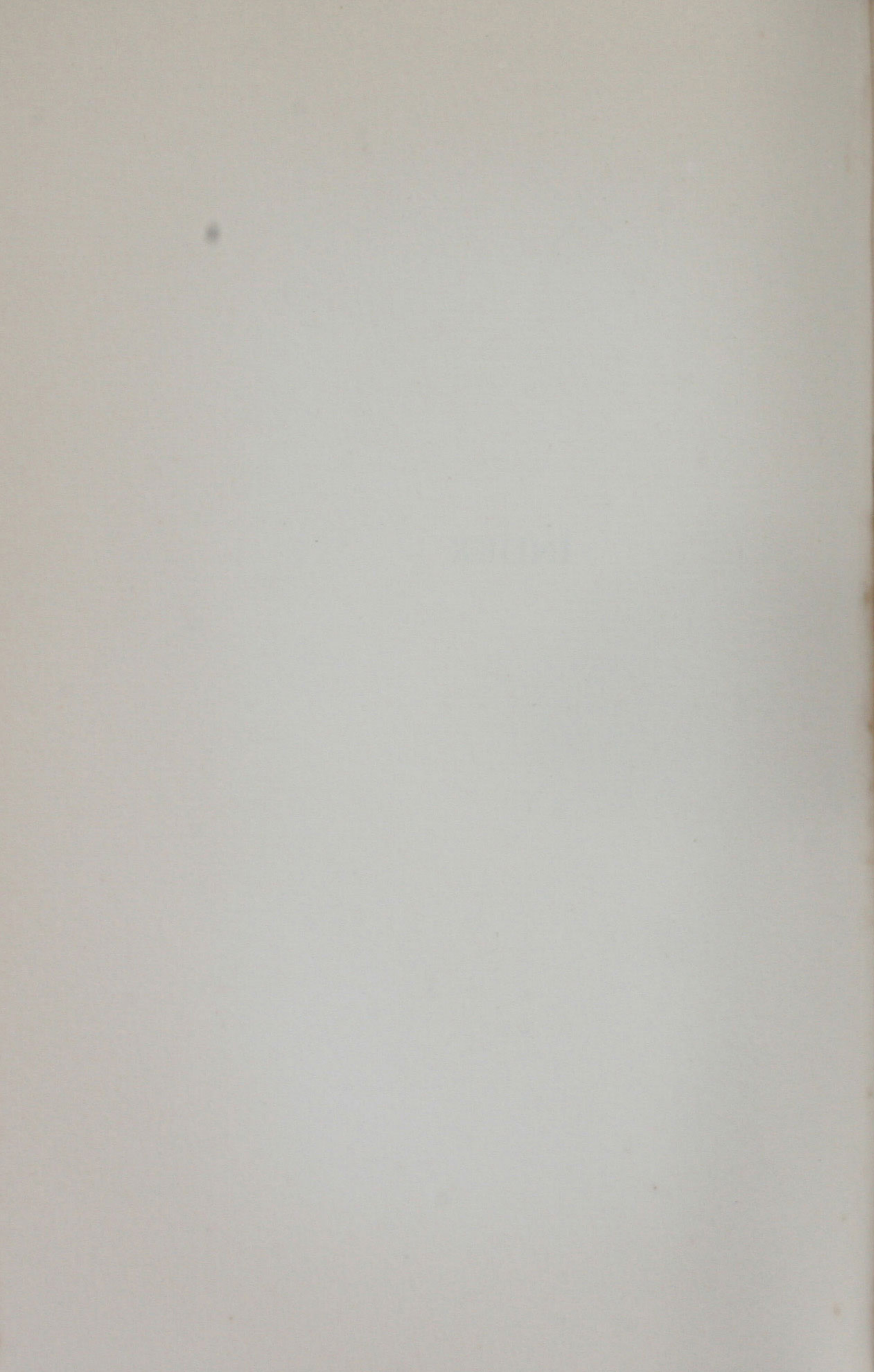
Of the poem published in Robert Chester's "Love's Martyr," and signed "William Shake-speare," Emerson writes: "I consider this piece a good example of the rule that there is a poetry for bards proper as well as a poetry for the world of readers. This poem if published for the first time and without a known author's name would find no general reception." This last criticism is undoubtedly true. Nay, even if it had been published in a

known author's name—say in his who wrote "The world's a bubble," etc.—can we for a moment believe that this poem would have been eulogized by the critics? I think I know the way in which Sir Theodore Martin (e.g.) would have written about it in that case! But anything that bears the signature of "Shakespeare" is, of course, perfection in the eyes of some of his worshippers, and, accordingly, Dr. Grosart writes: "I discern a sense of personal heart-ache and loss in these gifted and attuned stanzas, unutterably precious." Others, it may be said, discern in them the touch of a highly-cultured philosophic poet, who was assuredly *not* a provincial player, and who, also, wrote under a "mask" name, just as a fellow-contributor wrote under the *nom de plume* of "Ignoto."

Note.



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### ERRATA

- Page 9, note, *for* A. R. D. Anders, *read* H. R. D. Anders.  
,, 19, line 4, *instead of* "Aubrey, who at Shakspere's death was  
ten years old," *read* "Aubrey, who was born ten  
years after Shakspere's death."  
,, 33, line 18, *for* "Shakespeare," *read* "Shakspeare."  
,, 35, note 4, *for* Stratford, *read* Warwick.  
,, 37, ,, 1, ,, Mere's ,, Meres's.  
,, 58, line 22, *instead of* "Two years afterwards Sir Philip Sidney  
published," etc., *read* "Two years afterwards was  
published Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*,  
and inscribed upon the title page was," etc.  
,, 138, note 21, *for* Phillis, *read* Phyllis.  
,, 222, *instead of* "*E pur se muove*," *read* "*Eppur si muove*."  
,, 339, note 19, *for* Hemmings, *read* Hemings.  
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