

CHAPTER II

THE RESTORATION FORMS THE TRADITION OF SHAKSPERE'S "LITTLE LATIN"

JONSON HAD GIVEN a striking official phraseology for the accepted contemporary opinion that Shakspeare was to be accounted for by Nature rather than by Art. Being now officially recognized, this opinion naturally continued to prevail, and with it continued the opposition between Shakspeare and Jonson as the respective exempla of Nature and Art. Unfortunately, too, this opposition between Art and Nature was a bone of contention between two schools of literary thought; and ideas were fast shaping themselves toward the time when even Nature was to be "Nature methodized." It was natural for the "Art" school to belittle Shakspeare's small Art as being his chief blemish; it was even more natural for the "Nature" school to emphasize the smallness of Shakspeare's Art as his chief glory.

This opposition shows itself strongly in the story concerning Hales of Eton, which, if all its composite details were true, as many of them certainly are not, should have occurred before 1633.

In a Conversation between Sir *John Suckling*, Sir *William D'Avenant*, *Endymion Porter*, Mr. *Hales of Eaton*, and *Ben Johnson*, Sir *John Suckling*, who was a profess'd admirer of *Shakespear*, had undertaken his Defence against *Ben. Johnson* with some warmth; Mr. *Hales*, who had sat still for some time, hearing *Ben* frequently reproaching him with the want of Learning, and Ignorance of the Antients, told him at last, "That if Mr. *Shakespear* had not read the Antients, he had likewise not stollen any thing from 'em; [a fault the other made no Conscience of] and that if he would produce any one Topick finely treated by any of them, he would undertake to shew something upon the same Subject at least as well written by *Shakespear*."¹

This is the version of the story which appears in Rowe, 1709; but, as it grows, we get fragments of it at various stages before Rowe. The traditional opposition between the methods of Shakspeare and Jonson was already existent by 1629. In that year, Thomas May wrote

To my worthy friend, John Ford.

'Tis said, from Shakspeare's mine your play you drew:
What need?—when Shakspeare still survives in you;
But grant it were from his vast treasury reft,
That plund'rer Ben ne'er made so rich a theft.²

¹ Munro, *Shak. All. Bk.*, Vol. I, pp. 373-374.

² Adams and Bradley, *Jonson All. Bk.*, p. 141.