

## CHAPTER XXIII

### GRAMMAR SCHOOL TEXTS IN SHAKSPERE'S TIME

WE HAVE SEEN that the grammar schools of sixteenth century England were essentially uniform, and we have seen that Stratford school was of the standard type. We know, therefore, what subjects would be taught there. But subjects were taught from books. It will thus be well to glance at the current situation in textbooks when Shakspeare should have been in need of them, especially since these texts also furnish numerous indications of practice. For reasons which will later appear, this sketch must cover the latter half of the sixteenth century, not merely the actual period of from about 1571 to about 1577 or 1579 when Shakspeare should have been in grammar school.

The fundamental text was the *accidence*, rules, and grammar, which would, of course, have been the authorized form in some edition between 1545 and about 1571. Shakspeare's chance for a new book here and throughout would have been good, since apparently there is little likelihood that he would have inherited a set of texts—there were some advantages to being the son of an unschooled father. At this time, the monopoly on the authorized grammar belonged to Reginald Wolfe, as it had almost from the beginning. Though several thousand copies were doubtless printed each year,<sup>1</sup> yet only four copies printed by Wolfe are listed in S. T. C.; 1549, 1566-67, ?1570, 1572-73.<sup>2</sup> Copies of two continental editions, both of 1557, are also listed. From such statistics, the reader may at once see how infinitely small is the chance that any one of Shakspeare's own personal school texts has survived, or even for English prints that a single copy has survived of the particular edition from which any one of them was. Yet since there was a high degree of uniformity in content, barring misprints, one contemporary copy will serve all practical purposes about as well as another.

Since nearly all grammar school texts other than the first part of the grammar were wholly in Latin, they had before the 'seventies for the most part been imported from the continent. But in 1569 a

<sup>1</sup> Toward the end of the century, regular provision was made for four double impressions, or ten or twelve thousand copies a year (Arber, *Transcript*, Vol. II, p. 43).

<sup>2</sup> Wolfe was the printer of a fragment of 1548 now in the Lambeth Palace Library. There is record of an edition of 1559 by Wolfe (Herbert, W., *Typographical Antiquities*, p. 605), one of 1564 (*Ibid.*, p. 608), one of 1568 (*6 Notes and Queries*, Vol. II, p. 462), and one of 1569 (Herbert, *Typographical Antiquities*, p. 610). There were, of course, many other editions of which we have no record.