

CHAPTER XXV

LOWER GRAMMAR SCHOOL: SHAKSPERE'S GRAMMAR

AS WE HAVE NOW SEEN, the statement of Jonson would imply a practically complete grammar school training for Shakspeare, and Beeston's would imply the same. Further, the King's Free Grammar School at Stratford was a competent one, competently taught, with competent results. There is thus both presumption and credible contemporary witness to imply that Shakspeare had received at least a competent grammar school education. There is not a shred of evidence nor any just ground for suspicion that Shakspeare received that grammar school training elsewhere than at Stratford. Yet because of the general uniformity of curricula and methods at the time, the particular school in which Shakspeare received his training is not for our present purpose of great importance. It was the conscious purpose of the authorities so to regiment schools and texts that transfers in teachers and schools would not retard the progress of the pupils. Because of this regimentation, the curricula had a certain common denominator of uniformity. In this way it becomes possible to infer with some accuracy how far Shakspeare had gone in this curriculum by observing the knowledge of it which he displays.

Stratford was not on the Eton system, since the boys were not required to have any grammar before entrance. Neither was Stratford on the cathedral system, which had been modified from the Eton. Since it had both a master and an usher, it probably had six forms, though it may have had five or seven, or even eight. But the organization of its curriculum into forms is relatively unimportant. As a standard grammar school, it would have presented the conventional subjects and processes in conventional sequences; and those subjects, processes, and sequences are now known. Our problem is thus to see to what extent Shakspeare had been subjected to the processes of this known curriculum.

Shakspeare should have learned in some form of petty school the elements of reading, writing, and perhaps casting accounts.¹ Then when he was about seven in 1571, he should have entered the grammar school under the usher, and should have completed the lower

¹ See Baldwin, *Petty School*, 1943.