

CHAPTER XXIX

LOWER GRAMMAR SCHOOL: SHAKSPERE'S LATINS

THE BOYS LEARNED THE PRECEPTS from Lily's grammar and studied examples of them in Cato, Aesop, and Terence practically always, with various other possible supplements. They also proceeded to the next stage, that of imitation, as Kempe demanded, by writing Latin upon these principles. In its first stages, this writing would be of the simplest form to illustrate each time the elements of the particular rule being studied. As the grammar rules mastered became sufficiently numerous, the written illustrations became correspondingly more complicated till the "rules" shifted from grammar to rhetoric. Ideas as to the best subject matter for the elementary process of turning English into Latin varied, but one method used on Shakspeare has left its mark.

As we have seen already,¹ Erasmus in his *Institutio Principis Christiani* had recommended that the Prince be drilled upon Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus, and the Book of Wisdom from the Old Testament, upon the Gospels from the New. In 1531, Sir Thomas Elyot had agreed with Erasmus that, "The prouerbes of Salomon with the bokes of Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiasticus be very good lessons" for the "Prince," with other elements of the program of Erasmus grudgingly allowed in later years.² So about May, 1552, Sir John Cheke had urgently recommended to Edward VI the continued reading of "the New Testament, *Sapientia, Ecclesiasticus*, and the Proverbs."³ Cheke had probably already had a hand in perfecting a device to impress these books upon learned grammarians everywhere in England. This device is recommended in the preface to the grammar in 1548. If it did not come from Cheke personally, at least it came from his group, and represents the sentiments of the educators surrounding the King. The preface to the edition of 1548 (Lambeth Palace) says,

A great heal[pe] to further this redynesse of makyng and speakyng shall be, [yf] the mayster geue hym an englishe booke, as the Psalter, or Salomons Prouerbes, or Ecclesiasticus, and to cause hym ordinarily to tourne euery daie a chapter into latin.

¹ See above, p. 208.

² Elyot, *The Governour* (1531), fol. 41v; Croft, Vol. I, p. 94.

³ Nichols, *Edward*, Vol. I, p. cix.