

CHAPTER XXXVIII
UPPER GRAMMAR SCHOOL: SHAKSPERE'S
EPISTLES

NOW THAT WE HAVE DISTINGUISHED the compositional types and have examined Shakspeare upon the usual grammar school texts for theory, we may next examine the methods used in teaching each of these types in the upper grammar school, and attempt to see what knowledge Shakspeare shows of them. Fortunately, the Eton curriculum about 1530 shows clearly enough what was the practice in letter-writing at that time. There in the fifth form a text was employed, *Modus Conscribendi Epistolas*, the supplementary texts making it clear that this was the work of Erasmus under that title, not that of Vives. An examination of the methods employed in this text will explain certain further requirements in these curricula.

Erasmus begins with various definitions and instructions. Under "Exercitatio et Imitatio" Erasmus says,

But meanwhile that we may somewhat aid the moderately learned teachers with our industry, after he shall have taught his pupils the precepts of the rhetorical art in short form, he will strive to exercise them frequently in short and epistolary arguments. In these he will exercise choice and care that he especially propose those which allure that age with delightfulness as if baits. For in these the more willingly the boys are exercised, so the more effectively. That will happen if they are either novel, or humorous, or in any other way connected with the interests of boys. These must be sought either from the fables of poets or from the historians, unless as frequently happens, the life of mortals should suggest some new thing. For frequently even in our own times will happen things of which posterity should not be ignorant. And of the first class are the *amatoriae* of Naso, in which perhaps it would not be safe to exercise callow youth. But the *Heroides* are more chaste, nor does anything forbid that this kind of thing be treated chastely and modestly. As if a wooer should go about the wooing of his girl with caressing letters; if Helena should deter Paris from an unlawful love. For the epistle of Penelope to Ulysses is wholly chaste, as also that of Acontius to Cydippe. If a wife should write to her husband lingering abroad that he should hasten home. If Nestor, an aged and eloquent man, should exhort Achilles by letter, that he bear bravely the snatching away of Briseida by Agamemnon, showing that one must bear even with an evil ruler, and public good must be preferred to private grief; finally that it was very unworthy for Achilles, either because of a most famous family, or a noble mind, or outstanding deeds, just for the love of a barbarian maid-servant to be unmind-