

## CHAPTER XLII

### UPPER GRAMMAR SCHOOL: SHAKSPERE'S LATIN POETS; OVID

WHILE AND AFTER SHAKSPERE WAS LEARNING to versify by the methods we have examined in the preceding chapter, he should have been reading certain of the Latin poets as models upon which to ground his style. In the grammar school of Shakspeare's day, the chief of these was Ovid. We have already seen that Shakspeare through Holofernes has given us a sufficient hint that he himself was so grounded. Holofernes is thus quite in character as he sets Ovid upon his topmost pedestal. He is also given a peculiarly pedantic touch when he says,

Ovidius Naso was the man: and why, indeed, Naso, but for smelling out the odoriferous flowers of fancy, the jerks of invention?<sup>1</sup>

The meaning of the word Naso was regularly exhibited by the critics. For instance, Merula says, "Naso. Nasonum familiam à nasi magnitudine ita appellatam fuisse crediderim."<sup>2</sup> Dominicus also, "Nasonum autem familiam dictam inde crediderim, quòd qui primus in ea extiterit, grandiusculum nasum habuerit."<sup>3</sup> Holofernes is thus exhibiting common knowledge when he points out that Naso means nose.

Holofernes' "moralization" of the meaning of the word Naso was probably not much more original than his knowledge of it. A Mediæval introduction to *Heroides* gives a moral instead of a literary turn to the idea, "quia, sicut per nasum fetida ab oderiferis discernimus, ita vitia a virtutibus disgregavit."<sup>4</sup> For Holofernes, Ovid smells out flowers of literature instead of flowers of virtue. Holofernes was a schoolmaster of the Renaissance, not of the Middle Ages.

Some Holofernes had to some extent grounded Shakspeare in grammar school upon Ovid. We need now to get some idea of the quantity and quality of that grounding. We cannot take space here for any complete study of Shakspeare's indebtedness to Ovid, but can merely

<sup>1</sup> *Love's Labor's Lost*, IV, 2, 127-129.

<sup>2</sup> Ovid, *Fastorum Libri VI*. . . *De Ponto* (Basle, 1550, personal), p. 578.

<sup>3</sup> Ovid, *Opera Quæ Vocantur Amatoria* (Basle, 1549, personal), p. 217.

<sup>4</sup> Rick, L., "Shakespeare und Ovid," *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, Vol. LV, p. 38, referring to Sedlmayer, *Wiener Studien* (1884), Vol. VI, p. 143.