

CHAPTER XLIX

UPPER GRAMMAR SCHOOL: SHAKSPERE'S LESSE GREEKE

OUR ONLY EXTERNAL AUTHORITY for supposing that Shakspeare had any Greek at all is Ben Jonson. By his statement that Shakspeare had "small Latine, and lesse Greeke" he implies that Shakspeare had some Greek. If so, grammar school practice will enable us fairly well to locate his probable early acquisitions. We may again permit Brinsley to present his ideas on Greek, as a prelude to grammar school practice. Philoponus-Brinsley feels assured "that the Latine once obtained, the Greeke may be gotten with farre lesse labour, and euery thing as certainly."¹ The ideal was,

That schollers may be able as they proceed, to reade the Greeke of the New Testament, and the Hebrew of the old, first into Latine, or English exactly, out of the bare text, and after, out of a translation to reade them into the text, that is, into their owne words againe: and also to giue the reason of euery word, why it must be so . . . The continuall practice hereof, must needs make them worthy *Linguists* . . . and *notable text men*.²

Greek and Hebrew were for Biblical purposes primarily, if not solely. Greek was first Reformation, and only in its upper stages, if at all, Renaissance. A foreigner caught at least part of the truth when in 1551 Petrucio Ubaldini said,

The rich cause their sons and daughters to learn Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, for since this storm of heresy has invaded the land they hold it useful to read the Scriptures in the original tongue.³

This was the prime reason in grammar school for advancing from Latin to Greek to Hebrew.

Brinsley would begin, of course, with drill upon the grammar.

If your schollers who are to enter into it, be such as haue time enough before them; let them get the Grammar very perfectly, especially all the chiefe rules, by continuall saying and poasing, as in the Latine. Most exceptions or Anomalies may be learned after, or turned vnto presently, as they learne their Authors, Because *Rectum* is *Index sui*, & *obliqui*. And knowing the rule perfectly, they will soone know the reason of the change.

More specially, make them very perfect in declining Nouns and Verbs,

¹ Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius* (1627), p. 222.

² Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius* (1627), p. 223.

³ Stopes, *Shakespeare's Environment* (1918), p. 302.