

CHAPTER L

WHAT OF IT?

THE EVIDENCE APPEARS TO BE CONCLUSIVE that Shakspeare had such knowledge and techniques as grammar school was calculated to give. We have no direct evidence that he ever attended any grammar school a single day. Rowe was probably merely reporting an inference when in 1709 he said, "His Father . . . had bred him, 'tis true, for some time at a Free-School."¹ But the inference is an inevitable one, amounting almost to certainty. Those nearest the time either knew or assumed that Shakspeare had attended the grammar school at Stratford. It is reasonably certain that he did attend school there for some period of time. The internal evidence and such external evidence as survives conspire together to indicate that Shakspeare pretty certainly had at Stratford the benefits of the complete grammar school curriculum.

Nor do we know on direct evidence what the grammar school curriculum at Stratford was. But since there were certain standard requirements for schools of the type, we do know with sufficient accuracy for our purposes what was taught there and how it was taught, even though we do not know on direct evidence who taught Shakspeare there or by what pedagogical methods. And we do know that Shakspeare exhibits in his work such knowledge and techniques as he was supposed to acquire in a standard grammar school of his day, such as was that at Stratford.

Most important of all, if Shakspeare had this grammar school training, he had the only formal literary training provided by society in his day. University training was professional, with literary training only incidental and subsidiary. For instance, Ascham proposed in his program of studies for grammar school not to leave the boy

untill I haue brought him a perfite Scholer out of the Schole, and placed him in the Uniuersitie, to becum a fitte student, for Logicke and Rhetoricke: and so after to Phisicke, Law, or Diuinitie, as aptnes of nature, aduise of frendes, and Gods disposition shall lead him.²

He was, therefore, concerned because

Learning is, both hindred and iniured to, by the ill choice of them, that send

¹ Rowe, *Shakespear* (1709), Vol. I, p. II.

² Ascham, *Scholemaster* (1570), p. 30v.