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Shakspeare's Tragedy

OF

# KING LEAR.

PRINTED CHIEFLY FROM

NAHUM TATE'S EDITION,

WITH SOME RESTORATIONS FROM

THE ORIGINAL TEXT,

By R. W. ELLISTON.

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LONDON:

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1820.

[Price 1s. 4d.]

## ADVERTISEMENT.



It is scarcely requisite to inform the reader, that the Lear, which has so long held possession of the stage, differs much from the play of Shakspeare. The public taste long ago decided against the sublime, but terrible, catastrophe of the original, and even the critical Dr. Johnson has sanctioned that decision. He has left it on record, that he was so shocked by Cordelia's death that he did not venture to read the play a second time, till compelled to do so by his duty as an editor. Cordelia, therefore, is still allowed to retire "with victory and felicity," and Lear himself "crawls unburthen'd to his grave." This edition, however, does not entirely accord with that of Nahum Tate; yet much less liberty has been taken with him, than he has ventured to take with Shakspeare: the main fabric has not been touched; but some of his worthless weeds have been rooted up to make room for the strength and sweetness of the immortal bard.

In regard to the costume of the piece, it is much more easy to find fault with that which is done, than to point out what ought to be done. Shakspeare, by his mention of *Dukes and Earls*, makes the time of

action subsequent to the invasion of Caesar, whereas the chronicle makes Lear cotemporary with Joas, who reigned in Juda, in the year of the world 3105. In such a case, to talk of correctness or incorrectness would be something more than absurd; all that is left is to choose the costume of any period, not too recent, and adhere to it with fidelity, or if any additions are made, to let them be the products of fancy, and not the fashion of another time.

If this reasoning be true in regard to the dresses, it must be equally so when applied to the scenic decorations. The dwellings of such a period could only have been of the rudest construction; poor Tom's hovel as it is now represented, must be on a par with the real Lear's palace, if indeed such a personage ever did exist, a point, which at best is apocryphal; and how would such a style accord with the Dukes and Earls of Shakspeare?

In respect to the gold, pearls, and other ornaments adopted in this play, it may be right to observe, that the costume is borrowed from an early Saxon period, in which such decorations were profusely used, as may be seen by a reference to Strutt or any of our celebrated antiquarians. Most of such decorations, even to the fibula, are fac-similes of engravings from the best authorities.

That the reader may be satisfied as to the accuracy of my dates, the history of Lear is here subjoined, as related by Holinshed.

Lear the sonne of Baldud was admitted ruler over the Brittaines, in the yeare of the world 3105, at what time Ivas reigned in Iuda. This Lear was a prince of right noble demeanor, concerning his land and subjects in great wealth. He made the towne of Caerleir now called Leicester, which standeth ypon the river of Sore. It is written that he had by his wife three daughters without other issue, whose names were Gonorilla, Regan, and Cordella, which daughters he greatly loved, but specially Cordella the youngest farre above the two elder. When this Lear therefore was come to great yeres, & began to waxe unwelddie through age, he thought to vnderstand the affections of his daughters towards him, and preferre hir whome he best loved, to the succession over the kingdom. Wherupon he first asked Gonorilla the eldest, how well she loved him: who calling hir gods to record, protested that she loved "him more than hir owne life, which by right and reason should be most déere vnto hir. With which answer the father being well pleased, turned to the second, and demanded of hir how well she loved him: who answered (confirming hir saienngs with great othes) that she loved him more than tooong could expresse, and farre above all other creatures of the world."

Then called he his youngest daughter Cordella before him, and asked of hir what account she made of him, vnto whome she made this answer as followeth: "Knowing the great loue and fatherlike zeale that you haue alwaies borne towards me (for the which I maie not answers you otherwise than I thinke, and as my

conscience leadeth me) I protest vnto you, that I haue loved you euer, and will continuallie (while I liue) loue you as my naturall father. And if you would more vnderstand of the loue that I beare you, asser-taine your selfe, that so much as you haue, so much you are worth, and so much I loue you, and no more. The father being nothing content with this answer, married his two eldest daughters, the one vnto Hen-rius the duke of Cornewall, and the other vnto Maglanus the duke of Albania, betwixt whome he willed and ordeined that his land should be diuided after his death, and the one halfe thereof immediatlie should be assigned to them in hand : but for the third daughter Cordella he reserued nothing."

Neuertheless it fortun'd that one of the princesses of Gallia (which is now called France) whose name was Aganippus, hearing of the beautie, womanhood, and good conditions of the said Cordella, desired to haue hir in marriage, and sent ouer to hir father, requiring that he might haue hir to wife : to whome answer was made, that he might haue his daughter, but as for anie dower he could haue none, for all was promised and assured to hir other sisters alreadye. Aganippus notwithstanding this answer of deniall to receiue anie thing by way of dower with Cordella, tooke hir to wife, onlie moued thereto (I saie) for respect of hir person and amiable vertues. This Aganippus was one of the tweine kings that ruled Gallia in those daies, as in the British historie it is recorded. But to proceed.

After that Leir was fallen into age, the two dukes that had married his two eldest daughters, thinking it longer the gouernment of the land did come to their hands, arose against him in armour, and reft from him the gouernance of the land, vpon conditions to be continued for terme of life : by the which he was put to his portion, that is, to liue after a rate assigned to him for the maintenance of his estate, which in processe of time was diminished as well by Maglanus as by Henninus. But the greatest grieffe that Leir tooke, was to see the vnkindnesse of his daughters, which seemed to thinke that all was too much which their father had, the same being neuer so little : in so much that going from one to the other, he was brought to that miserie, that scarce he would allow him one seruant to wait vpon him.

In the end, such was the vnkindnesse, or (as I maie saie) the vnnaturalnesse which he found in his two daughters, notwithstanding their faire and pleasant words vttered in time past, that being constrained of necessity, he fled the land, & sailed into Gallia, there to seeke some comfort of his yongest daughter Cordella, whom before time he hated. The ladie Cordella hearing that he was arriv'd in poore estate, she first sent to him priuile a certaine summe of monie to apparel himselfe withall, and to retaine a certaine number of seruants that might attend vpon him in honorable wise, as appertained to the estate which he had borne : and then so accompanied, she appointed him to come to the court, which he did,

and was so iofullie, honorable, and louinglie received, both by his sonne in law Aganippus, and also by his daughter Cordella, that his hart was greatlie comforted: for he was no lesse honored, than if he had bene king of the whole countrie himselfe.

Now when he had informed his sonne in law and his daughter in what sort he had bene used by his other daughters, Aganippus caused a mightie armie to be put in a readinesse, and likewise a great naue of ships to be rigged, to passe ouer into Britaine with Leir his father in law, to see him againe restored to his kingdome. It was accorded, that Cordella should also go with him to take possession of the land, the which he promised to leane vnto hir, as the rightfull inheritor after his decease, notwithstanding any former grant made to hir sisters or to their husbands in anie maner of wise.

Herevpon, when this armie and naue of ships were readie, Leir and his daughter Cordella with hir husband tooke the sea, and arriuing in Britaine, fought with their cuinies, and discomfited them in battell, in the which Maglanus and Henninus were slaine: and then was Leir restored to his kingdome, which he ruled after this by the space of two yeeres, and then died, fortie yeeres after he first began to reigne. His bodie was buried at Leicester in a vault vnder the channell of the riuer of Soze beneath the towne.

Cordella the yoongest daughter of Leir was ad-

mitted Q. and supreme gouernesse of Britaine, in the yeere of the world 3155, before the bylding of Rome 54, Vzia then reigning in Iuda, and Ieroboam ouer Israell. This Cordella after hir fathers decease ruled the land of Britaine right worthilie during the space of fve yeeres, in which meane time hir husband died, and then about the end of those fve yeeres, hir two nephewes Margan and Cunedag, somes to hir aforesaid sisters, disdainig to be vnder the gouernment of a woman, leuied warre against hir, and destroyed a great part of the land, and finallie tooke hir prisoner, and laid her fast in ward, wherewith she tooke such grieffe, being a woman of a manlie courage, and despairing to recouer libertie, there she slue herselfe, when she had reigned (as before mentioned) the tearme of fve yeeres.

R. W. E.