
ARTICLE III.—NOTE ON SOME EMENDATIONS (NOT
HITHERTO SUGGESTED) IN THE TEXT OF SHAKES-
PEARE, WITH A NEW EXPLANATION OF AN OLD
PASSAGE.—*by E. A. Meredith, LL.D., Vice Pre-
sident.*

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The corruptions of the text of our great poet have afforded an ample subject for the learning and ingenuity of commentators for upwards of two centuries. Nor is this strange. For, while our “myriad minded” Shakespeare is incomparably the first of all poets, it is equally true, that the text of his works rapidly became more vitiated and corrupted than that of any other poet whose writings have come down to posterity. Mr. Staunton, in the preface to his admirable edition of Shakespeare, quotes the following just remarks of Dr. Johnson on this subject. “It is not easy for invention to bring together so many causes concurring to vitiate a text, no other author ever gave up his works to fortune and time with so little care. No books could be left in hands so likely to injure them, as plays frequently acted yet continued in manuscript, no other transcribers were likely to be so little qualified for their task, as those who copied for the stage at a time when the lower ranks of the people were universally illiterate, no other editions were made from fragments so minutely broken and so fortuitously reunited, and in no age was the art of printing in such unskilful hands.”

These things considered we should perhaps rather wonder, not that we still find occasional passages in Shakespeare which are obscure or obviously corrupt, but that the writings of our great bard have not undergone more disastrous mutilation and corruption. Some alloy has doubtless been mixed up with the gold of Shakespeare, but the alloy forms but a small proportion to the genuine metal. In the pious task of restoring to its original purity the text of our author, all the great commentators from Rowe downwards have lent their aid, and in our own day especially, Dyce, Staunton and many lesser worthies, have laboured with no mean success in the same field.

To enter at all into a field of enquiry which has already been occupied by so many distinguished men is, I feel, somewhat presumptuous. I do so however, trusting to your indulgence and hoping, albeit a late and humble gleaner, here and there to light upon some scattered ears which have escaped the notice or been thought undeserving of the attention of the binders who have preceded me.

The first passage to which I shall refer occurs in "Twelfth night," Act I. Scene 3. The dialogue is between Sir Toby and Maria, the subject is the merits of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the boon companion of Sir Toby and the would-be lover of the lady.

Sir Toby blames his niece, the lady Olivia, for her coldness to Sir Andrew : Maria justifies her mistress, takes exception to Sir Toby's own proceedings and conduct, and points out very strongly the shortcomings of Sir Andrew, closing her remarks by saying

" He's a very fool and a prodigal."

Sir Toby—Fye that you'll say so ! he plays o' the Viol de Gambo, and speaks three or four languages without book, and hath all the good gifts of nature.

Maria—He hath indeed, almost natural; for besides that he's a fool he is a great quarreller, and but that he hath the gift of a coward to allay the gust he hath in quarrelling, 'tis thought among the prudent he would quickly have the gift of a grave."

The last passage is the one in which I would venture to propose a slight verbal emendation, the substitution namely of *gift* for *gust*. *Maria* takes up for comment Sir Toby's concluding words "he hath all the good gifts of nature." "He hath indeed, almost natural" or, filling up the ellipsis, he hath indeed all the good gifts of nature, so that he is in fact almost a natural. She then goes on to particularize Sir Andrew's gifts: "For besides that he is a fool he is a great quarreller." Quarrelling is plainly one of the gifts. But she goes on to say, the gift of quarrelling is happily qualified by another gift, cowardice. "And but he hath the *gift* of coward to allay the *gift* he hath in quarrelling, 'tis thought among the prudent he would quickly have the *gift* of a grave."

The frequent repetition of "gift" is perfectly Shakespearian. Whereas the introduction of "gust" comes in like a discord in a passage of music and weakens the point of *Maria's* rejoinder to the Knight.

Before leaving this passage I may remind you how very easy it was for a careless copyist or printer to confound *gift* and *gust*: especially in the early part of the last century when *f* and *s* were written and printed so much alike as to be almost indistinguishable.

Next let me call your attention to a passage in the play of King John—turn to Act V. Scene. 4.

The French Count Melun, who is brought in wounded during the battle between the English and French, warns the Earl of Salisbury and the other English traitors of the requital which the French King proposes to make them

for their treachery, he therefore counsels them to “unthread the rude eye of rebellion” “and welcome home again discarded faith.”

Salisbury replies :

“ We do believe thee, and beshrew my soul,
 “ But I do love the favour and the form
 “ Of this most fair occasion ; by the which
 “ We will untread the steps of damned flight ;
 “ And, like a bated and retired flood,
 “ Leaving our rankness and irregular course,
 “ Stoop low within those bounds we have o'erlooked,
 “ And camly run on in obedience,
 “ Even to our ocean, to our great King John.

I am strongly inclined to think that for “*o'erlooked*,” here we should read “*o'erleaped*.” I do not see how “*o'erlooked*” can bear the meaning which Staunton ascribes to it in this place, ‘*overborne*’ “*overcome*.” The word *o'erleaped*, on the other hand, appears to me exactly to suit the remainder of the passage, the flood must assuredly have “*o'erleaped* its bounds, before it could, “*like a bated and retired flood*,” “*Stoop low within those bounds*.”

I shall next submit for your consideration an explanation, novel so far as I know, of a passage in the second part of King Henry IV.—It occurs in Act II. scene 4.—The scene being a Room in the Boar’s Head Tavern in East Cheap.

ENTER TWO DRAWERS.

After some parley about the supper they are preparing for Falstaff and Doll Tear-Sheet,

2nd. *Drawer loquitur.*

Sirrah, here will be the Prince and master Poins, anon. And they will put on two of our jerkins and aprons, and Sir John must not know of it, Bardolph hath brought word.

1st. *Drawer.* By the mass, here will be old utis, it will be an excellent stratagem.

“ Old utis ” is the expression to which I desire to call your attention. All the commentators appear to me to have gone quite astray in their explanation of it. Let us hear the comment of one of the best and most recent of them, Staunton. I shall give his note on this passage at length. “ Old utis ” is, he says, “ rare fun. Old is nothing more than an augmentative. Utis, according to Skinner from the French *huit*, means a merry festival, properly the octave of a saint’s day.” I cannot discover any ground for giving utis this signification. The whole seems to me a purely gratuitous assumption. Our learned lexicographer, Richardson, indeed, explains *Utas* as the octave or eighth day of a festival. He spells the word, however, *utas* not *utis*. Then, referring to the passage in Shakespeare now under consideration, he observes somewhat guardedly : “ Shakespeare is supposed to mean festivity, jollity, according to old usage, without restraint.” It is plain from the context that the words “ old utis ” here must have some such meaning ; but what necessary connection is there between “ Jollity according to old usage ” and the octave of a saint’s day ? Whatever be the connection, Lexicographers have not attempted to explain it ; but they all appear to have taken for granted that “ utis ” here must be identical with “ utas ” and that the latter must, therefore, somehow or another, have the meaning which the context compels them to give “ utis ” in this passage.

Let us see whether we cannot help the commentators and lexicographers out of this difficulty by suggesting a more simple explanation of the words “ old utis.” First, be it remembered that the plays of Shakespeare, like the plays generally of that period, are replete with allusions to the Greek and Roman mythology, and to the classic heroes ; and in none of Shakespeare’s plays are those allusions

more frequent than in this very play of Henry IV. With Homer's worthies generally both Pistol and Doll Tear-Sheet appear to be on terms of perfect familiarity. In fact there is hardly one of the ranting bombastic speeches of this "fustian rascal," Pistol, which is not "horribly stuffed with" allusions to the Greek Deities or Heroes.

Take the following as illustrations.

"I'll see her damned first to Pluto's damned lake.

"With Erebus and tortures vile also."

And again

"Shall dung hill curs confront the Helicon?

"Then Pistol lay thy head in Furies' lap."

And Doll, (whose general tastes are certainly not refined or classical) thus declares her love for the burly knight.

"Ah rogue, i' faith I love thee, thou art as valorous as Hector of Troy. Worth five of Agamemnon and ten times better than the nine worthies."

We need not then be surprised if we have to turn to our Homers for the meaning of the words "old Utis". We shall find the clue to it (unless I am much mistaken), in the 9th Book of the Odyssey which relates the escape of Ulysses from the cave of the Cyclop under the name of Outis or Utis, *anglice*, Nobody! This adventure of the Ithacan Wanderer was a favorite subject with classical writers and is told very pleasantly by Lucian in one of his famous dialogues of the Dead*. The story of Ulysses as told in the Odyssey must have presented a perfect mine of wealth for the pre-shakespearean play-writers of the Pseudo-Classical school, and the adventure in the cave of Polyphemus would, doubtless, have offered peculiar attractions to the authors of that class. †

(*) See dialogue between Polypheme and Neptune.

† For the benefit of such as may not have the adventure fresh in their memories, a few words will suffice to give the heads of the story.

Of the plays of this family Shakespeare gives us a few samples. One in "Midsummer night's dream" where Bottom and the rest of the company perform the play entitled: "The most lamentable comedy and cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe", and another in Hamlet in the rhapsody which the player repeats at Hamlet's request giving an account of the death of Priam.

Coming to the Land of the Cyclops, Ulysses and his companions enter the Cave of the Monster Polypheme. Polyphemus returning home at evening finds them in his den, eats two of them for supper, and two more on the following morning. Ulysses, misliking the prospect before him, notwithstanding the comforting assurance of Polypheme that "he would eat him last," resolves upon a bold effort to escape. Accordingly he makes the monster drunk, telling him before hand that his own name was "Utiis," i: e, Nobody. Assisted by his companions he then puts out the Cyclops' eye. The Cyclop roars with pain and brings his brother savages round his cave. They ask who has hurt him, he replies, "Outis," "no man." They tell him, so they cannot help him, and leave him to his fate. Ulysses subsequently by another skilful device effects his escape from the cave. It is clear that the success of this adventure turns altogether upon the *alias* which Ulysses had assumed of "Utiis" or No man.

The latter part of the story is thus given by Pope. •

- "What hurts thee, Polypheme? what strange affright
 "Thus breaks our slumbers and disturbs the night?
 "Does any mortal in the unguarded hour
 "Of sleep, oppress thee, or by fraud or power?
 "Or thieves insidious the fair flock surprise?
 "Thus they, the Cyclop from his den replies,
 "Friends, *no man* kills me, *no man*, in the hour
 "Of sleep, oppresses me with fraudulent power."
 "If *no man* hurt thee, but the hand divine
 "Inflict disease, it fits thee to resign
 "To Jove, or to thy father Neptune pray."
 "The brethren cried and instant strode away."*

• Pope's translation of the *Odyssey*, Book IX. l 475.

I think therefore, we must suppose that, through the medium of this class of plays, the 1st Drawer had been made familiar with the adventure of Ulysses in the Cyclop's cave; and that the speech of the 2nd Drawer, "Sirrah, here will be the Prince and Master Poinson, and they will put on two of our jerkins, and aprons, and Sir John must not know of it," proposing a device to trick Sir John and the Prince, suggested to the classical mind of the 1st Drawer the "excellent stratagem" by which Ulysses' "Old Utis" humbugged Polyphemus!.

Let us then no longer claim for Pistol and Doll Tear-Sheet a monopoly in the matter of the Classics. Let us do tardy justice to the classic culture of the 1st Drawer and henceforth recognize in his reference to "old utis" an allusion to one of the many "artful dodges" of our old Homeric acquaintance Πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς.