THE FIRST FOLIO

As a final tribute to their friend and fellow, Heminges and Condell employed Martin Droeshout to engrave a portrait of the author to accompany the volume. The choice of Droeshout cannot be called happy, and his effort is far from satisfactory. It is said that when Gainsborough accepted a commission to paint a portrait of Shakespeare he refused to bother with the engraving: "Damn the original picture," he exclaimed; "I think a stupider face I never beheld." His judgment, however, is too severe, and from other critics Droeshout has received a modicum of praise. On the page facing the portrait were set the following verses by Ben Jonson:

To the Reader

This figure that thou here see’st put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the graver had a strife
With nature to out do the life.
O, could he but have drawn his wit
As well in brass, as he hath hit
His face, the print would then surpass
All that was ever writ in brass
But since he cannot, reader, look
Not on his picture, but his book.

A volume so notable as this would naturally call for a dedication. For this honor Heminges and Condell chose two of Shakespeare’s Court friends, that “most noble and incomparable pair of brethren,” William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery. The choice, we are told, was made because both Earls had thought these plays “something heretofore,” and had “prosecuted both them and their author” with “much favour.” The favor with which the Earl of Pembroke held Shakespeare may be inferred from his deep affection for Burbage. More than two months after the death of the latter, the Earl wrote to the English Ambassador in Germany giving the news of
the Court: "My Lord of Lennox made a great supper to the French Ambassador this night here, and even now all the company are at a play; which I, being tender-hearted, could not endure to see so soon after the loss of my old acquaintance Burbage." And perhaps Pembroke, who died in 1630, is "that English Earl" referred to by Richard Brome in The Antipodes (1638), I, iii, in connection with Shakespeare's plays; Letoy, assuming the part of a nobleman fond of the drama, says:

I tell thee,
These lads can act the Emperor's lives all over,
And Shakespeare's chronicled histories to boot;
And were that Cæsar, or that English Earl
That loved a play and player so well, now living.

We may thus believe that Pembroke deserved the honor awarded him, and probably the same was true of the Earl of Montgomery. "There is a great difference," write Heminges and Condell, "whether any book choose his patrons, or find them. This hath done both. For so much were your Lordships' likings of the several parts when they were acted, as, before they were published, the volume ask'd to be yours.... In that name, therefore, we most humbly consecrate to your Highnesses these remains of your servant Shakespeare."

Apparently the volume was being rushed through the press in great haste, and no effort was made to solicit commendatory poems from the author's friends. A few such poems, however, came in, one after another, and were inserted, not without awkwardness to the volume. The first, and by far the most significant, eulogy was by Ben Jonson; others were by Hugh Holland, Leonard Digges, and a man who signs merely his initials "I. M." Jonson's tribute of affection can hardly be omitted here, though it is too long to be quoted in full.

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PHILIP HERBERT, EARL OF MONTGOMERY
THE FIRST FOLIO

To the Memory of My Beloved,
The Author,
Mr. William Shakespeare,
And
What He Hath Left Us.

To draw no envy, Shakespeare, on thy name,
Am I thus ample to thy book, and fame:
While I confess thy writings to be such
As neither Man nor Muse can praise too much.
'Tis true, and all men's suffrage. But these ways
Were not the paths I meant unto thy praise....
I therefore will begin. Soul of the age!
The applause! delight! the wonder of our stage!
My Shakespeare, rise! I will not lodge thee by
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie
A little further to make thee a room.
Thou art a monument without a tomb,
And art alive still while thy book doth live,
And we have wits to read, and praise to give. ....
And though thou hadst small Latin and less Greek,
From thence to honour thee I would not seek
For names, but call forth thund'ring Aeschylus,
Euripides, and Sophocles to us,
Pacuvius, Accius, him of Cordova dead,
To life again to hear thy buskin tread
And shake a stage: or, when thy socks were on,
Leave thee alone for the comparison
Of all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.
Triumph, my Britain! Thou hast one to show
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
He was not of an age, but for all time! ....
Sweet Swan of Avon, what a sight it were
To see thee in our waters yet appear
And make those flights upon the banks of Thames
That so did take Eliza and our James!
But stay! I see thee in the hemisphere
Advanced and made a constellation there!
Shine forth, thou Star of Poets!

The finished volume made a folio of portly size, consisting of 908 pages, and measuring, in the largest extant copy, 13½ inches in height by 8½ inches in breadth. The paper employed was of excellent quality, much to the dis-
A LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

gust of the Puritan William Prynne, who complained that it was "printed on the best crown paper, better than most Bibles." On November 8, 1623, it was registered at Stationers' Hall, and shortly after it was offered to the public at the goodly price of £1.1

With the appearance of this complete and authoritative volume from the hands of Shakespeare's actor-friends, the biography of the poet naturally closes.

1 The Burdett-Coutts copy sold in London in 1922 for £8,600. For a fuller discussion of the Folio and its editors see W. W. Greg, "The Bibliographical History of the First Folio," The Library, 1903, N. S., iv, 258; A. W. Pollard, Shakespeare Folios and Quartos, 1909; Sir Sidney Lee's Introduction to his facsimile of the First Folio; A. W. Pollard, Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates, 1920; and various recent articles in The Library.

THE END