

IX.

The Bedingfield Letter.

The following letter from Oxford also appeared in the same work, which was "published by commandment of the right honourable the Earl of Oxford." Dr. Grosart remarks: "This letter as in various ways extremely interesting and characteristic, graceful and gracious, is here reprinted for the first time."

"TO MY LOVING FRIEND THOMAS BEDINGFIELD ESQUIRE,
ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S GENTLEMEN PENSIONERS."

After I had perused your letters, good master Bedingfield, finding in them your request far differing from the desert of your labour, I could not choose but greatly doubt, whether it were better for me to yield to your desire, or execute mine own intention towards the publishing of your book. For I do confess the affections that I have always borne towards you could move me not a little. But when I had thoroughly considered in my mind, of sundry and diverse arguments, whether it were best to obey mine affections, or the merits of your studies: at the length I determined it were better to deny your unlawful request, than to grant or condescend to the concealment of so worthy a work. Whereby as you have been profitted in the translating, so many may reap knowledge by the reading of the

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same, that shall comfort the afflicted, confirm the doubtful, encourage the coward, and lift up the base-minded man to achieve to any true sum or grade of virtue, whereto ought only the noble thoughts of men to be inclined.

And because next to the sacred letters of divinity, nothing doth persuade the same more than philosophy, of which your book is plentifully stored : I thought myself to commit an unpardonable error to have murdered the same in the waste bottoms of my chests ; and better I thought it were to displease one than to displease many ; further considering so little a trifle cannot procure so great a breach of our amity, as may not with a little persuasion of reason be repaired again. And herein I am forced, like a good and politic captain, oftentimes to spoil and burn the corn of his own country, lest his enemies thereof do take advantage. For rather than so many of your countrymen should be deluded through my sinister means of your industry in studies (whereof you are bound in conscience to yield them an account) I am content to make spoil and havock of your request, and that, that might have wrought greatly in me in this former respect, utterly to be of no effect or operation. And when you examine yourself, what doth avail a mass of gold to be continually imprisoned in your bags, and never to be employed to your use ? I do not doubt even you so think of your studies and delightful Muses. What do they

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avail if you do not participate them to others? Wherefore we have this latin proverb: *Scire tu nihil est, nisi scire hoc sciat alter.* What doth avail the tree unless it yield fruit unto another? What doth avail the vine unless another delighteth in the grape? What doth avail the rose unless another took pleasure in the smell? Why should this tree be accounted better than that tree but for the goodness of his fruit? Why should this vine be better than that vine unless it brought forth a better grape than the other? Why should this rose be better esteemed than that rose, unless in pleasantness of smell it far surpassed the other rose?

And so it is in all other things as well as in man. Why should this man be more esteemed than that man but for his virtue, through which every man desireth to be accounted of? Then you amongst men, I do not doubt but will aspire to follow that virtuous path, to illuster yourself with the ornaments of virtue. And in mine opinion as it beautifyeth a fair woman to be decked with pearls and precious stones, so much more it ornifyeth a gentleman to be furnished in mind with glittering virtues.

Wherefore, considering the small harm I do to you, the great good I do to others, I prefer mine own intention to discover your volume, before your request to secret the same; wherein I may seem to you to play the part of the cunning and expert

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mediciner or physician, who although his patient in the extremity of his burning fever is desirous of cold liquor or drink to qualify his sore thirst, or rather kill his languishing body : yet for the danger he doth evidently know by his science to ensue, denyeth him the same. So you being sick of so much doubt in your own proceedings, through which infirmity you are desirous to bury and inseuill (sic) your works in the grave of oblivion : yet I knowing the discommodities that shall rebound to yourself thereby (and which is more unto your countrymen) as one that is willing to salve so great an inconvenience, am nothing dainty to deny your request.

Again we see, if our friends be dead we cannot show or declare our affection more than by erecting them of tombs : whereby when they be dead in deed, yet make we them live as it were again through their monument ; but with me behold it happeneth far better ; for in your lifetime I shall erect you such a monument, that as I say, in your lifetime you shall see how noble a shadow of your virtuous life, shall hereafter remain when you are dead and gone. And in your lifetime, again I say, I shall give you that monument and remembrance of your life, whereby I may declare my good will, though with your ill will, as yet that I do bear you in your life.

Thus earnestly desiring you in this one request of mine (as I would yield to you in a great many)

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not to repugn the setting forth of your own proper studies, I bid you farewell.

From my new country Muses of Wivenghole, wishing you as you have begun, to proceed in these virtuous actions. For when all things shall else forsake us, virtue will ever abide with us, and when our bodies fall into the bowels of the earth, yet that shall mount with our minds into the highest heavens.

From your loving and assured friend,

E. OXENFORD.

Note.—Compare p. 19 (middle par.) with :

“If a man do not erect in this age his own tomb ere he dies, he shall live no longer in monument than the bell rings and the widow weeps.”

“Much Ado” (V. 2.)