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The honest mans fortune. A critical edition of MS Dyce 9 (1625)

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PROLEGOMENA

Among Elizabethan and Jacobean play-texts that of *The Honest mans Fortune* is almost in a class by itself. Two versions of it exist, both of which immediately derive from the same manuscript. That manuscript, it appears, consisted of the holographs of the play's several authors, worked over in the playhouse before the prompt book was prepared from them. Of the two extant versions one, the Dyce manuscript, was copied out by the prompter of the King's Company — now identified with certainty as Edward Knight — and then further prepared, and perhaps used, for prompting at Blackfriars in 1625. The other, the printed text in the Beaumont and Fletcher folio of 1647, seems to have been edited to some extent for the benefit of the reader.

Undoubted interest would thus attach to a comparison of the two texts, not least in that here we should have a better opportunity than usual to establish the authors' original text. Great intrinsic interest, however, also attaches to the Dyce manuscript as a record of the changes a play might undergo in the playhouse between composition and production. Where, as in the present case, these interests conflict when it comes to deciding upon the copy-text to be used for an edition, it is inevitable that one must suffer. On theoretical grounds the Folio, which is perhaps a shade more faithful in the matter of accidentals, would be the obvious choice, but the Folio is not a very rare volume, its substantive readings are fully represented by Dyce's edition, and Waller's reprint of the Second Folio preserves both these and a large proportion of the accidentals. The MS, on the other hand, has never been printed and even its substantive readings are only imperfectly recorded by Dyce. Under these circumstances, and where multiple authorship makes a study of accidentals largely unremunerative in any case, it has seemed preferable to take the Dyce manuscript as copy-text.

The present edition is, however, far from a mere reprint. The text as such is critical, but not to the point of obliterating all points of theatrical revision. The stage directions are those of the MS, except for a few obvious errors of omission and commission, but an occasional Folio direction has been admitted to emphasize a point of staging that the MS lacks. A scene wanting in the MS has been adopted from the Folio, and the two versions of the ending have been printed parallel.

The verse has been recast where necessary, but the original lineation has always been recorded, as have the variants between the texts and the alterations in the MS, in the apparatus at the foot of the page. In all other respects the features of the MS have been reproduced as faithfully as typography would allow. In addition, three selected portions of the MS have been reproduced in autotype at approximately original size.

Introduction and Commentary again try, to some extent, to reconcile two conflicting aims. *The Honest mans Fortune* is not expected to offer many attractions to the general reader, and it has thus been possible to ignore many points that should certainly be explained in an edition of wider scope. Familiarity with the idiom of the time is tacitly assumed, though a gloss or a modern spelling has been provided in the Commentary wherever the context seemed liable to misunderstanding. Full exegesis has been given in all cases of real difficulty, and a confession of ignorance has been preferred to the august silence so often affected by the earlier editors.

At the same time it has been realized that this book must also find its way in countries where the tools of research in its special field are not so near at hand, or where time has yet been too short to work off the amazingly large arrears of scholarly publications that had accumulated by the end of the war. This fact will account for several disquisitions on points that would otherwise have been more summarily dealt with. Where erring is inevitable it has been preferred to err on the side of fulness in these matters, and this the more since this book is sponsored by the School of St Martin: being already, like this saint, *carus in negotio*, it should certainly be *bonus in auxilio*.