

counsel her to take some potion, which she absolutely refusing to do, as still suspecting the worst; whereupon they sent a messenger on a day (unawares to her) for Dr. Bayly, and entreated him to persuade her to take some little potion by his direction, and they would fetch the same at Oxford; meaning to have added something of their own for her comfort, as the doctor upon just cause and consideration did suspect, seeing their great importunity, and the small need the lady had of physic, and therefore he peremptorily denied their request; misdoubting (as he afterwards reported), lest, if they had poisoned her under the name of his potion, he might after have been hanged for a colour of their sin, and the doctor remained still well assured that this way taking no effect, she would not long escape their violence, which afterwards happened thus. For Sir Richard Varney above said (the chief projector in this design), who, by the earl's order, remained that day of her death alone with her, with one man only and Forster, who had that day forcibly sent away all her servants from her to Abington market, about three miles distant from this place; they (I say, whether first stifling her, or else strangling her) afterwards flung her down a pair of stairs and broke her neck, using much violence upon her; but, however, though it was vulgarly reported that she by chance fell down-stairs (but yet without hurting her hood that was upon her head), yet the inhabitants will tell there, that she was conveyed from her usual chamber where she lay, to another where the bed's head of the chamber stood close to a privy postern door, where they in the night came and stifled her in her bed, bruised her head very much, broke her neck, and at length flung her down-stairs, thereby believing the world would have thought it a mischance, and so have blinded their villany. But behold the mercy and justice of God in revenging and discovering this lady's murder, for one of the persons that was a coadjutor in this murder was afterwards taken for a felony in the marches of Wales and, offering to publish the manner of the aforesaid murder, was privately made away in the prison by the earl's appointment; and Sir Richard Varney the other, dying about the same time in London, cried miserably and blasphemed God, and said to a person of note (who hath related the same to others since), not long before his death, that all the devils in hell did tear him in pieces. Forster, likewise, after this fact, being a man formerly addicted to hospitality, company, mirth, and music, was afterwards observed to forsake all this, and with much melancholy and pensiveness (some say with madness) pined and drooped away. The wife also of Bald Butler, kinsman to the earl, gave out the whole fact a little before her death. Neither are these following passages to be forgotten, that as soon as ever she was murdered they made great haste to bury her before the coroner had given in his inquest (which the earl himself condemned as not done advisedly), which her father, or Sir John Robertsett (as I suppose), hearing of, came with all speed hither, caused her corpse to be taken up, the coroner to sit upon her, and further inquiry to be made concerning this business to the full; but it was generally thought that the earl stopped his mouth, and made up the business betwixt them; and the good earl, to make plain to the world the

great love he bare to her while alive, and what a grief the loss of so virtuous a lady was to his tender heart, caused (though the thing, by these and other means, was beaten into the hearts of the principal men of the university of Oxford) her body to be re-buried in St. Mary's church in Oxford with great pomp and solemnity. It is remarkable, when Dr. Babington, the earl's chaplain, did preach the funeral sermon, he tript once or twice in his speech, by recommending to their memories that virtuous lady so pitifully murdered, instead of saying pitifully slain. This earl, after all his murders and poisonings, was himself poisoned by that which was prepared for others (some say by his wife at Cornbury Lodge before mentioned), though Baker in his *Chronicle* would have it at Killingworth, anno 1558.*

The same accusation has been adopted and circulated by the author of *Leicester's Commonwealth*, a satire written directly against the Earl of Leicester, which loaded him with the most horrid crimes, and, among the rest, with the murder of his first wife.† It was alluded to in the *Yorkshire Tragedy*,‡ a play erroneously ascribed to Shakespeare, where a rake, who determines to destroy all his family, throws his wife down-stairs, with this allusion to the supposed murder of Leicester's lady—

The surest way to charm a woman's tongue
Is, break her neck—a politician did it.

The reader will find I have borrowed several incidents as well as names from *Ashmole*, and the more early authorities; but my first acquaintance with the history was through the more pleasing medium of verse.§ There is a period in youth when the mere power of numbers has a more strong effect on ear and imagination than in more advanced life. At this season of immature taste the Author was greatly delighted with the poems of Mickle and Langhorne, poets who, though by no means deficient in the higher branches of their art, were eminent for their powers of verbal melody above most who have practised this department of poetry. One of those pieces of Mickle, which the Author was particularly pleased with, is a ballad, or rather a species of elegy, on the subject of *Cumnor Hall*, which, with others by the same author, were to be found in *Evans's Ancient Ballads* (volume iv. page 130), to which work Mickle made liberal contributions. The first stanza especially had a peculiar species of enchantment for the youthful ear of the Author, the force of which is not even now entirely spent; some others are sufficiently prosaic.

* *Ashmole's Antiquities of Berkshire*, London, 1719, vol. i. p. 149. The tradition as to Leicester's death was thus communicated by Ben Jonson to Drummond of Hawthornden;—'The Earl of Leicester gave a bottle of liquor to his lady, which he willed her to use in any faintness; which she, after his returne from court, not knowing it was poison, gave him, and so he died.'

† [This satire was written by the notorious Jesuit, Robert Parsons, and was largely copied by *Ashmole* in his *Antiquities*. These authorities were perhaps too much relied upon by the Author.]

‡ [This piece was acted at the Globe Theatre, together with three other short plays, under the name of *All's One*, as appears from one of the titles of the quarto 1608, which runs thus:—'All's One, or one of the four plays in one, called a Yorkshire tragedy—as it was played by the king's majestie's plaiers.' Shakespeare's name is affixed to this piece.—MALONE.]

§ Note A. Title of 'Kenilworth.'