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FOOLS AND JESTERS:

WITH A

REPRINT OF ROBERT ARMIN'S

NEST OF NINNIES.

1608.

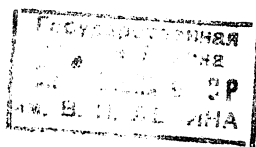
WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES.



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INTRODUCTION.

It would be singular that a man of so much, and of such peculiar, learning as the late Mr. Douce, in his "Dissertation upon Clowns and Fools," should not even refer to the ensuing tract, did we not know that only a single copy of it (as far as has been ascertained by the most diligent inquiries during the last thirty or forty years) exists in any public or private collection. Were it, therefore, of less value than it really possesses, as a curious picture of manners, towards the end of the reign of Elizabeth, and in the beginning of that of James I., we should be disposed to reprint it, in order to place it beyond the possibility of destruction. The original is preserved in the Bodleian Library, the statutes of which, we believe, forbid fire within the precincts of the edifice; and the unceasing and almost affectionate care of the Rev. Dr. Bandinel and his curators inspires every confidence as to the security of the matchless stores in their custody: still we are unwilling that any volume of this description, of which no other exemplar is known, should be exposed to the slightest risk of loss, however remote or improbable. We mention this as an addi-

tional inducement with us for the republication of a relic of much interest and merit, not only *unique* in itself, but unprecedented in its kind. The tract is the only one in our language that treats distinctly of such a subject, and of such persons, as the domestic fools and jesters of a period when they began to receive less encouragement than they had experienced in times of greater ignorance and barbarism.

The entertainment of this class of persons in private families seems to have originated mainly in two causes: one of these was, that the care and custody of idiots was of old assigned to individuals as a source of emolument, the latter having the control and management of the estates of the former: another cause was, perhaps, the natural weakness of our nature, which, when any species of learning was a rare acquisition, and when intellectual abilities were less prized and cultivated, sought to place itself in contrast with those who would show off to advantage even the smallest acquirements, and the most moderate talents. This consideration will account for the ancient familiarity of great men, even of kings and princes, with their fools or jesters, and for the introduction of them at their tables, on the most solemn, as well as on the most festive occasions. It has been ascertained, and requires no proof here, that such was the case of old, not merely in England, but in most other countries of Europe.

It is not our intention at present to pursue this inquiry farther, but merely to observe that the fools, to whose propensities and adventures the following pages chiefly relate, belonged to the class usually entertained