

feather. I have of late, (but wherefore I know not) lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercise: and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'er-hanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me, than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me; nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

Ros. My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts.

Ham. Why did you laugh, when I said, *man delights not me?*

Ros. To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you: we accosted them on the way; and hither are they coming to offer you service.

Ham. He that plays the king shall be welcome; his majesty shall have tribute of me: the adventurous knight shall use his foil and target; the lover shall not sigh *gratis*; the humourous man shall end his part in peace; and the lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for't. What players are they?

Ros. Even those you were wont to take delight in, the tragedians of the city.

Ham. How chances it, they travel? their residence, both in reputation and profit was better, both ways.

Ros. I think, their inhibition^a comes by the means of the late innovation.

Ham. Do they hold the same estimation they did when I was in the city? are they so follow'd?

Ros. No, indeed, they are not.

Ham. How comes it? do they grow rusty?

Ros. Nay, their endeavour keeps in the wonted pace; but there

[^a In 1597 a statute was made against vagabonds, including players.]