

SHAKESPEARIANA.

"HORSE" (10th S. i. 342).—The suggestion of "horse" for "horses" in 'Macbeth,' II. iv. 13, would slightly improve the scansion of the line, and is so far desirable; but in face of Shakespeare's free use of extra syllables in his verse, it is not cogent on that ground. Is it, then, cogent on any other? Are we to understand that any emendation restoring "Anglo-Saxon" or "Middle English" forms to Shakespeare is desirable? Perhaps not. We are asked to strike out the *s* in the l.c. "because it contradicts Shakespeare's usage in many other passages." Now what is Shakespeare's usage? PROF. SKEAT admits that the form "horses" is found in Shakespeare. It is. Schmidt's 'Lexicon' gives eleven references, "&c.," for it. For "horse" as plural it gives eleven only (including PROF. SKEAT's ten). Admitted these latter, the poet's usage seems to prefer the dissyllabic plural. But I propose to examine the eleven more closely.

Let me premise that while Schmidt's 'Lexicon' as a work of reference is of the highest utility, the lexicographer's dicta on English meanings and usage are not to be swallowed uncritically; and few that read his inept note on "organ-pipe" ('Temp.,' III. iii. 98) will defer to his taste.

In Sonnet 91 there seems to me not the slightest presumption that "horse" is plural. A man keeps more than one hawk, more than one hound, but often not more than one horse.

In 'Tam. Shr.,' Induct., 61, the same applies.

'1 Henry VI.,' V. v. 54, proves nothing: in a category of things they need not be all in the same number (e.g., "Verbera, carnifices, robur, pix, lammina, tædæ").

'2 Henry VI.,' V. i. 52 (if "horse" is the correct reading), proves nothing; to my mind one horse is here meant, as with the following word (one) armour. Cf. '2 Henry IV.,' IV. v. 30, and 'Two Noble Kinsmen,' III. vi. 3. N.B. Schmidt's second class of the word "armour" is a good sample of vacuous profundity.

'1 Henry VI.,' I. v. 31, though a strong instance, does not seem to me decisive. Categories may fluctuate between plural and singular, especially when "disjunctive."

'Ant.,' III. vii. 7, is enigmatical; but I see nothing in the context to show that horse is not singular. I suspect a play on words, with allusion to the fact that one horse may "serve" several mares.

In 'Macbeth,' IV. i. 140, "horse" is surely used in the "military" sense (implying the mounts), as in "The king to Oxford sent a troop of horse," "A cornet of horse," &c. Of this use Schmidt quotes sixteen instances from Shakespeare; I have not examined them.

This specialized use as a collective noun is natural enough (cf. ἡ ἵππος in Greek). It naturally, too, belongs to any collection of the animals that can be viewed as a unit—for example, "team of horse" in 'T. G. V.,' III. i. 265. In 'T. A.,' II. ii. 18, 'Ant.,' III. vi. 45, and '3 Henry VI.,' IV. v. 12, this "military" sense appears; the second, however, is rather bolder than the others.

To conclude, then, in only two instances at most, of the eleven, do I find even a *prima facie* case for considering "horse" as a plural.

If we are to purchase smoothness of scansion (by no means one of Shakespeare's fetiches) by reading "horse" in 'Macbeth,' II. iv. 13, I maintain that we should go further, and read "minion of his race.....his stall.....he would make.....he eat himself.....he did so." Or else we must take "horse" in the "military" sense, and retain the plurals. The omen will then be even more impressive. Of course I do not deny that a singular form (especially with numeral or quantitative adjective prefixed) is often used as a "collective," or that Shakespeare may have used it so in some of the passages; but I may not believe, short of an undoubted instance, that he ever consciously used "horse" as a plural form, to indicate several distinct units; still less can I assent to an emendation introducing such an instance. Rather would I hold it more reasonable to emend all the monosyllabic "plurals" into dissyllabic, where metre allowed.

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Shakespeare also uses the plural *horses*, as in the verse of Hotspur:—

Hath Butler brought these horses from the sheriff
And in the line,

And Duncan's horses (a thing most strange and certain),

the third foot is an anapaest. An additional syllable, making one of the feet an anapaest or a dactyl, is common in the blank verse of Shakespeare and of other great poets:—

These vi | slent | delights | have vi | slent ends.
'Romeo and Juliet.'

Ominous | cōnjūc | tūre ōn | the whole | success
A pill | ār ōf stāte | deēp ōn | his frōnt | engrāven.
'Paradise Lost.'

Nōw lies | the eārth | āll Dān | ās tō | the stārs.
Tennyson's 'Princess.'