

**THE WILL OF WIT,
OTHERWISE
CALLED, WIT'S
WILL, OR WILL'S WIT**

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The Will of Wit, Otherwise Called, Wit's Will, or Will's Wit by Nicholas Breton & James O. Halliwell

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NICHOLAS BRETON & JAMES O. HALLIWELL

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*I hereby certify that the impression of Breton's W^h of
Wit, 1599, has been strictly limited to twenty-six copies,
no perfect copy being preserved in the waste, or even in
proof-sheets.*

Thomas Digges

The Will of Witt,

OTHERWISE CALLED,

WIT'S WILL, OR WILL'S WIT;

BY

NICHOLAS BRETON :

NOW FIRST

REPRINTED FROM THE RARE EDITION OF 1599.

EDITED BY

JAMES O. HALLIWELL, ESQ., F.R.S.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY THOMAS RICHARDS,

37, GREAT QUEEN STREET.

1860.

P R E F A C E.

ONE of the earliest notices of the following curious work, that have hitherto been discovered, occurs in the manuscript diary of the Rev. Richard Madox, a naval chaplain, who notes various curious matters respecting the inferior authors of the day. Mentioning a dinner, under the date of 1582, he says,—“ther was Mr. Brytten, onee of Oriel Colledge, which made *Wyts Wyl*; he speaketh the Ytalien well.” This entry, supposing it to be made at the time, would prove that the work named by Madox was written at least fifteen years before its first known publication; and there appears to be not only no reason for doubting that such was the fact, but a strong one for believing that it had been actually published before the notice of it made by Madox, who perhaps even at that early period had seen a printed copy of the work. It was in fact

entered on the books of the Stationers' Company on September 7th, 1580, in the following terms,—“William Wrighte,—tollerated unto him, but not under the wardens handes, a booke intituled William witte, wittes will, or wills will, chuse you whether.” The title has here a curious variation, but the book now reprinted is obviously the one referred to. The earliest edition mentioned by the bibliographers bears the date of 1597. This impression I have never seen, the most ancient I have met with being that of 1599, the copy here used. In this edition, Breton thus commences his address to the reader,—“A new booke, sayes one. True, it came forth but tother day.” This statement is really no good evidence as to the date of publication: it was formerly so much the fashion to reprint books without altering the prefatory matter. Some of the prefaces are written “from my chamber in the Blacke Fryers.”

Presuming that the first edition of the work appeared in the year 1580, we have now a notice of three impressions. There was probably at least one other, before 1606, of which no record has been discovered, for in

that year appeared,—“The Wil of Wit, Wits Will, or Wils Wit, chuse you whether, containing five discourses, the effects whereof follow. Read and judge. Newly corrected and amended, being the fift time imprinted, compiled by Nicholas Breton, Gentleman. London, Printed by Thomas Creede, 1606,” 4to. This edition differs from the previous one of 1599 in having separate titlepages to the various pieces, which I believe were sold singly as well as in a collective volume. In the impression of 1606, the initials at the end of the Praise of Vertuous Ladies, “Finis N. G. Gent.,” must be a misprint, as Breton signs the address to the reader with his name at length. A portion of this edition, intended no doubt for separate sale, is now before me. After the general title, above quoted, is a leaf containing on the first page the verses commencing, “What thing is Will, without good Wit?”, and on the reverse, the four stanzas, by W. S., which have been absurdly ascribed to Shakespeare. They are more likely by William Smyth, the author of *Cloris*, 1596. Then follows, in prose, “A pretje and wittie Discourse betwixt Wit and Will,” dated at the end, “from our

heart this 21. of February, 1606." The next piece is, "The Authors Dreame of strange effects," signed by N. Breton, which concludes the volume. There is no alteration made in the text of any importance.

The descent of Breton is a subject of doubt. A William Breton of London, who had considerable property, in his will, dated in 1557, names five children, one of them named Nicholas. William Breton died in January, 1559. Mr. Hunter is of opinion that this Nicholas was our author. According to others, the poet was the Captain Nicholas Breton, who died in 1624, and was buried at Norton, co. Northampton.

April, 1860.

THE
WIL OF WIT,
WITS WILL, OR WILS
Wit, chuse you whether.

Containing five discourses, the
effects whereof follow.

Beade and judge.

Compiled by NICHOLAS BRETON,
Gentleman.

Non hã, che non sã.

LONDON :
Printed by THOMAS CREEDE,
1599.