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A GAME AT CHESSE

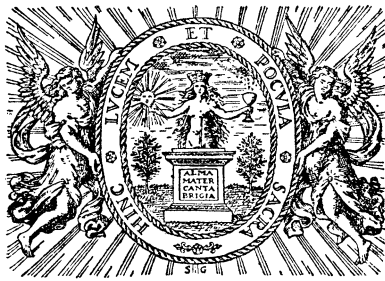
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BY
THOMAS MIDDLETON

EDITED
BY
R. C. BALD



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To

SIR ARCHIBALD STRONG

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[More information](#)

CONTENTS

PREFACE	<i>page</i> ix
INTRODUCTION	
Historical Background	i
Stage History	19
The Texts	26
A GAME AT CHESSE	45
TEXTUAL NOTES	121
NOTES	137
APPENDICES	
<i>A. Documents relating to <i>A Game at Chesse</i></i>	159
<i>B. Two scenes from MS. Malone 25</i>	167

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PREFACE

IT is no exaggeration to say that more is known about *A Game at Chesse* than about any other pre-Restoration play. In spite of the uncertainty that must attend any attempt to interpret all the details of the allegory, the general trend of its political satire is clear. It is the last expression of that great outburst of national feeling to which the Elizabethan age owed so much of its inspiration, although it is true that the spirit of independence and high adventure has narrowed down into a political and religious hatred of Spain. The poetry and rhetoric of Shakespeare's historical plays have given place to satire, for, as Swinburne says, this play is "the only work of English poetry which may properly be called Aristophanic."

However, it is in connection with the stage history of the play that our knowledge is most detailed; even the dates of its allowance by the Master of the Revels, and of the first and last performances, are all known. Its suppression by the authorities, and the consequent surreptitious circulation of copies, both manuscript and printed, have had the result that an editor is confronted with a series of texts unique in their interest. It is a matter of some importance that those who have been engaged on the study of Shakespearian texts are beginning to find that the method of inferring the nature of the original manuscripts from the printed quarto or folio has its limitations, and that valuable aid can be obtained from the study of the extant manuscripts of plays of the other writers of the period. The four manuscripts of *A Game at Chesse*, which provide transcripts in the hands of the author and two scribes working under his direction, offer exceptional material for the study of certain types of dramatic texts.

The two previous modern editions of the play are those contained in the collected works of Middleton by Dyce

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(1840) and Bullen (1886). Dyce did good service by showing which was the more reliable of the quartos, and indicated that the inferior quartos could often correct it when it was wrong; he also collated the Lansdowne and Bridgewater MSS., and did the pioneer work in identifying the characters of the play. Bullen half-heartedly collated the Trinity MS., indicated incompletely some of Middleton's sources, and attempted the identification of as many more of the characters as he could, but Dyce's editing was, none the less, the basis of his work. Perhaps if he had been successful in his search for MS. Malone 25 he would have realised the importance of the Trinity MS. and based his text on it. The important developments in the textual study of the early drama which have occurred in the last few years, as well as the extensive illustrations from contemporary pamphlets added here, will, it is hoped, justify the present edition.

I desire to acknowledge gratefully the freely-given advice and assistance of Dr W. W. Greg, who also lent me his copy of one of the quartos of the play; of Mr F. P. Wilson and Mr Percy Simpson of Oxford; and of Mr A. L. Attwater of Pembroke College, Cambridge. Clare College generously gave me a grant to defray the cost of certain necessary photostatic reproductions; the officials of the Trinity College Library have aided me in every way in their power; the Society of the Inner Temple has kindly given me permission to include two previously unpublished extracts from a MS. in its Library; and the Henry E. Huntington Library has allowed me to make full use of the MS. of the play in its possession.

R. C. B.

Cambridge
14 December 1926

ADDENDUM

Just as the final corrections are being made to the proofs of this book there comes the news that another manuscript of *A Game at Chesse* has been found, and was sold at auction at Sotheby's on April 4, 1928. Dr Greg informs me that it is in the hands of two scribes, neither of them either of the scribes concerned in the other manuscripts, but that, like the Bridgewater-Huntington ms., it has an autograph title-page.

R. C. B.

The University of Adelaide
South Australia
8 June 1928

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ILLUSTRATIONS

- The last page of Act III, from the ms. in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Gabriel, California
-facing page 27
 (By permission of the Librarian.)
- The dedication page of ms. Malone 25 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford *-facing page* 33
 (By permission of the Librarian.)
- The Epilogue, from the ms. in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge *-facing page* 34
 (By permission of the Master and Fellows.)
- A page from the ms. in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Gabriel, California *-facing page* 39
 (By permission of the Librarian.)
- Title-page of Quartos I and II (a) (c. 34. d. 38 in the British Museum) *-facing page* 47
- The Count Gondomar. From an engraving of a painting by Velasquez *-facing page* 60
- Marco Antonio de Dominis, Archbishop of Spalatro. From the engraved portrait in Vol. I of his *De Republica Ecclesiastica* (1617) *-facing page* 71
- Title-page of Quarto III from the copy (Mal. 247) in the Bodleian Library, Oxford *-facing page* 80
 (By permission of the Librarian.)
- A disguised Jesuit. From a broadside in the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge *-facing page* 94
 (By permission of the Master and Fellows.)
- Title-page of *The Second Part of Vox Populi*, by Thomas Scott *-facing page* 107