

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

NOTES AND INTRODUCTION

BY

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## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

KING OF FRANCE.  
 DUKE OF FLORENCE.  
 BERTRAM, Count of Rousillon.  
 LAFEU<sup>1</sup>, an old Lord at the French court.  
 PAROLLES, a follower of Bertram.  
 First Lord,<sup>2</sup> } Two brothers } belonging to the French court, serving  
 Second Lord,<sup>2</sup> } } with Bertram in the Florentine war.  
 First Gentleman,<sup>2</sup> } } belonging to the French army.  
 Second Gentleman,<sup>2</sup> } }  
 A Gentleman, attached to the French army.  
 Steward, } servants to the Countess of Rousillon.  
 Clown, }  
 A Page.                      First Soldier.<sup>2</sup>                      Second Soldier.

COUNTESS OF ROUSILLON, mother to Bertram.  
 HELENA,<sup>3</sup> a gentlewoman protected by the Countess.  
 An old Widow of Florence.  
 DIANA, daughter to the Widow.  
 VIOLENTA,<sup>4</sup> } neighbours and friends to the Widow.  
 MARIANA, }

SCENE—Partly in France and partly in Tuscany.

HISTORICAL PERIOD: the 13th or 14th century.

TIME OF ACTION (according to Daniel).

ELEVEN DAYS distributed over about three months.

<p>Day 1: Act I. Scene 1.—Interval; Bertram's journey to Court.</p> <p>Day 2: Act I. Scenes 2, 3.—Interval; Helena's journey to Court.</p> <p>Day 3: Act II. Scenes 1, 2.—Interval two days; cure of the King's malady.</p> <p>Day 4: Act II. Sc. 3, 4, 5.—Interval; Helena's return to Rousillon; Bertram's journey to Florence.</p> <p>Day 5: Act III. Scenes 1, 2.</p>	<p>Day 6: Act III. Scenes 3, 4.—Interval "some two months" (iv. 3. 56).</p> <p>Day 7: Act III. Scene 5.</p> <p>Day 8: Act III. Scenes 6, 7; Act IV. Scenes 1, 2.</p> <p>Day 9: Act IV. Scenes 3, 4.—Interval; Bertram's return to Rousillon; Helena's return to Marseilles.</p> <p>Day 10: Act IV. Scene 5; Act V. Scene 1.</p> <p>Day 11: Act V. Scenes 2, 3.</p>
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<sup>1</sup> LAFEU: Spelt *Lafew* in the Folio.

<sup>2</sup> See note on Dramatis Personæ.

<sup>3</sup> HELENA: Sometimes spelt *Hellen* in the Folio.

<sup>4</sup> VIOLENTA: A mute personage. Perhaps her part was omitted for practical reasons in the copy from which the Folio was printed.

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### INTRODUCTION.

#### LITERARY HISTORY.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL was first printed in 1623 in the First Folio. In the entry of this volume in the Stationers' Register, November 8th of that year, it is enumerated among such plays as had not been previously entered to other men. This is the first time we hear of the play under its present name, and the period at which it was first produced is therefore purely a matter of conjecture. The theories here put forward are substantially those received by most modern critics, but every reader is at liberty to form his own opinion.

Francis Meres, in the list of Shakespeare's plays which he gives in the well-known passage of his *Palladis Tamia* (1598), mentions a comedy entitled *Love labours wonne*, and this immediately following *Love labors lost*. No other mention of this comedy has ever been found, and since Mere's testimony to its existence is unimpeachable, we are left to make the best conjecture we can as to its fate. Has it been lost, or is it one of the plays which we now know by another name? That Love's Labour's Won, an undoubted work of so popular a dramatist as Shakespeare, should have utterly disappeared, while Love's Labour's Lost has survived, is very unlikely; and there is every probability that, if it had so far escaped the printer, there would have been an acting copy in existence which the editors of the First Folio would have secured. But they have printed no play under this name, and we must, therefore, conclude that it is in some sense or other identical with one of the existing plays. Which play this was is a question which seems to have troubled nobody till Farmer in his *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* suggested that it was All's Well That Ends Well, and al-

though two or three others have been put forward,<sup>1</sup> no other has such strong claims.

There is, however, an insuperable difficulty in the way of the supposition that Love's Labour's Won and All's Well are absolutely identical. Considerations of style and metre forbid us to suppose that the latter in its present shape was written as early as 1598; if it was, we should have to put it earlier than such plays as *Much Ado*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*, none of which are mentioned by Meres, and which he could not fail to have pointed to, had he been acquainted with them, rather than to the "Gentlemen of Verona" and the "Errors" in order to prove Shakespeare's excellence "for the stage." But although the prevailing tone and style of All's Well unquestionably indicate a later date than these three plays, there are good reasons for believing that it is an earlier play remodelled, and that this earlier play was the Love's Labour's Won of Meres. Love's Labour's Won was evidently considered by Meres to be a companion play to Love's Labour's Lost, and in All's Well there are certain passages quite in the rhyming, balanced, somewhat artificial style of that play—passages which Mr. Fleay, who was the first to call attention to them, aptly terms "boulders from the old strata imbedded in the later deposits." The following is a list of them as picked out by Mr. Fleay, and among them, at the end of the play, may be noticed an expression of Helena suggestive of the old title:

This is done:  
 Will you be mine, now you are doubly won?  
 —Act v. 3. 314, 315.

Act i. 1. 231-244. Speech of Helena, preserved for its poetic worth; it is also very appropriate to

<sup>1</sup> *The Tempest*, Hunter (impossible!); *Much Ado*, Brae; *The Taming of the Shrew*, Hertzberg.

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the situation, emphasizing, as it does, Helena's self-reliance and strength of purpose.

Act i. 3. 134-142. Nine lines spoken by the Countess, the first four in alternate rhymes.

Act ii. 1. 132-213. Dialogue between the King and Helena in continuous rhyme, quite different in tone from the rest of the play, and quite in Shakespeare's early style. The gradual yielding of the sick king to Helena's persuasions is well depicted, and it probably struck the author as a bit worth preserving.

Act ii. 3. 78-111. Rhymed lines spoken by the King, Helena, and the two lords, with prose comments by Lafeu inserted on the revision. Helena's choice of a husband, naturally a telling bit in the original play.

Act ii. 3. 132-151. Speech of the King, of which the same may be said.

Act iii. 4. 4-17, and iv. 3. 252-260. Two letters in the form of sonnets. "This sort of composition," says Mr. Fleay, "does not quite die out till the end of Shakespeare's Second Period, but it is very rare in that period, and never appears in the Third." It is, however, conceivable that Shakespeare may have recurred to this form for a letter by a poetical character like Helena, or a fantastic character like Parolles, even in his Third Period.

Act v. 3. 60-72, 291-294, 301-304, 314-319, 325-340. Rhyming bits, chiefly from the speeches of the King and Helena, the last, which includes the epilogue, forming a suitable finish to the play.

The above passages will be seen to be quite in Shakespeare's early style, as we find it in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the title of which play probably suggested that of *Love's Labour's Won*, and we cannot be far wrong in surmising that both plays were written about the same time, *i.e.* in the period 1590-92.<sup>1</sup> The date at which the play was recast and appeared in its present shape of *All's Well That Ends Well* was probably the period 1601-1604. We should thus put it, with Professor Dowden and others, later than the romantic comedies *Much Ado*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*, and earlier than the three great tragedies, *Othello*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth*, while we should bring it near to *Measure for Measure*, to which the conjectural date 1603 has been assigned,—a play which, apart from certain resemblances of incident, it resembles

perhaps more closely than any other in "motif" and expression.

The source from which Shakespeare derived the story of *All's Well* is the story of Giletta of Narbona, which forms the Ninth Novel of the Third Day of the Decameron. He probably became acquainted with it through the translation in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, 1566-67, but all that he derived from it was the outline of the plot. The name Giletta he changed to Helena, Beltramo he anglicized into Bertram; the other names, with the exception of that of Helena's father, Gerard de Narbon, are his own. Lafeu, the Countess, the Steward, the Clown, and Parolles, are entirely his own creation, nor is there the slightest hint of the comic scenes in the original story, the extent of Shakespeare's obligation to which will be evident from the following analysis of it.

Giletta, the daughter of Gerado of Narbona, a physician, having been brought up in the family of the Count of Rossiglione with his only son Beltramo, fell in love with Beltramo "more than was meete for a maiden of her age." On his father's death, Beltramo, as the king's ward, was sent to Paris, "for whose departure the maiden was verie pensive." Accordingly she watched for an opportunity of going herself to Paris and joining Beltramo, and at last, hearing that the king "had a swellynge upon his breast, whiche by reason of ill cure, was growen to a Fistula," and had abandoned all hope of cure, she thought that "if the disease were suche (as she supposed,) easely to bryng to passe that she might have the Counte Beltramo to her husbande." So she "made a powder of certain herbes, which she thought meete for that disease, and rode to Paris" (act i. sc. 1 and 3). Here she obtained an interview with the king, and "putte hym in comforte, that she was able to heale hym, sayng: 'Sire, if it shall please your grace, I trust in God, without any paine or grieft unto your highnesse, within eighte daies I will make you whole of this disease.' The kyng hearyng her saie so, began to mocke her, sayng: 'How is it possible for thee, beyng a yong woman, to doe that, whiche the best renowned Phisicians in the worlde can not?'

<sup>1</sup> In common with *Love's Labour's Lost* may be noticed the name Dumain, *All's Well*, iv. 3. 209, &c.; and *perhaps* an allusion to the crazy Italian, Monarcho (see *Love's Labour's Lost*, Introduction), *All's Well*, i. 1. 118.

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He thanked her, for her goodwill, and made her a directe answer, that he was determined no more to followe the counsaile of any Phisicion. Whereunto the maiden answered: 'Sire, you dispise my knowledge, bicause I am yonge, and a woman, but I assure you, that I doe not minister Phisicke by profession, but by the aide and helpe of God: and with the cunningg of maister Gerardo of Narbona, who was my father, and a Phisicion of greate fame, so longe as he lived.' The kyng hearyng those wordes, saied to hymself: 'This woman peradventure is sent unto me of God, and therefore, why should I disdain to prove her cunningg? Sithens she promiseth to heale me within a litle space, without any offence or grief unto me.' And beyng determined to prove her, he said: 'Damosell, if thou doest not heale me, but make me to breake my determinacion, what wilt thou shall folowe thereof.' 'Sire,' saied the maiden: 'Let me be kept in what garde and keyng you list: and if I dooe not heale you within these eight daies, let me bee burnt: but if I do heale your grace, what recompence shall I have then?' To whom the kyng answered: 'Bicause thou art a maiden, and unmarried, if thou heale me, accordyng to thy promisse, I will bestowe thee upon some gentleman, that shalbe of right good worship and estimacion:' To whom she answered: 'Sire I am verie well content, that you bestowe me in mariage: But I will have suche a husbande, as I my self shall demaunde; without presumption to any of your children, or other of your bloudde'" (act ii. sc. 1). The king granted her request, and being cured by her even before the appointed time, told her to choose such a husband as she wished. Accordyngly she chose Beltramo. The king, however, "was very lothe to graunte him unto her: But bicause he had made a promis, whiche he was lothe to breake, he caused him to be called forthe, and saied unto hym: 'Sir Counte, bicause you are a gentleman of greate honor, our pleasure is, that you retourne home to your owne house, to order your estate according to your degree: and that you take with you a Damosell which I have appointed to be your wife.' To whom the Counte gave his humble thankes, and demaunded what she was? 'It

is she (quoth the kyng) that with her medecines, hath healed me.' The Counte knewe her well, and had alredie seen her, although she was faire, yet knowing her not to be of a stocke, convenable to his nobilitie, disdainfullie said unto the king, 'Will you then (sir) give me, a Phisicion to wife? It is not the pleasure of God, that ever I should in that wise bestowe my self.' To whom the kyng said: 'Wilt thou then, that we should breake our faithe, which we to recover healthe, have given to the damosell, who for a rewarde thereof, asked thee to husband?' 'Sire (quod Beltramo) you maie take from me al that I have, and give my persone to whom you please, bicause I am your subject: but I assure you, I shall never bee contented with that mariage.' 'Well you shall have her (saied the Kyng), for the maiden is faire and wise, and loveth you moste intirely: thinkyng verelie you shall leade a more joyfull life with her, then with a ladie of a greater house.'" So Beltramo had to give way and was married to Giletta, but immediately after the marriage he begged leave to return home (act ii. sc. 3). "And when he was on horsebacke, he went not thither, but took his journey into Thuscane, where understandyng that the Florentines, and Senois were at warres, he determined to take the Florentines parte, and was willinglie received, and honourable interteigned, and made capitaine of a certaine number of men, continuyng in their service a longe tyme" (act iii. sc. 3). As for Giletta, she returned to Rousillon, and governed the country very wisely for some time, hoping thereby to induce her husband to return to her. At last she sent to the count offering to leave the country, if that would satisfy him. His reply was, "Lette her doe what she list. For I doe purpose to dwell with her, when she shall have this ryng, (meaning a ryng which he wore) upon her finger, and a soonne in her armes, begotten by me" (act iii. sc. 2). Giletta, however, was not to be discouraged, and giving out that she intended to devote the rest of her days to a religious life, she left Rousillon, "tellyng no man whither shee went, and never rested, till she came to Florence (act iii. sc. 4): where by Fortune at a poore widowes house, she contented her self, with the state of a poore

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pilgrime, desirous to here newes of her lorde, whom by fortune she sawe the next daie, passing by the house (where she lay) on horsebacke with his companie. And although she knewe him well enough, yet she demaunded of the good wife of the house what he was: who answered that he was a straunge gentleman, called the Counte Beltramo of Rossiglione, a courteous knighte, and welbeloved in the citie, and that he was merveulously in love with a neighbor of her, that was a gentlewoman, verie poore and of small substaunce, neverthesse of right honest life and report, and by reason of her povertie, was yet unmarried, and dwelte with her mother, that was a wise and honest Ladie" (act iii. sc. 5). Giletta accordingly repaired to this lady, and with her laid the plot by which she was to fulfil the two conditions which her husband had laid down (act iii. sc. 7). The lady got the ring from Beltramo, "although it was with the Countes ill will," and having sent him word that her daughter was ready "to accomlishe his pleasure," she substituted Giletta in her place (act iv. sc. 2). By way of recompensing the service the lady had done her, Giletta gave her five hundred pounds and many costly jewels "to marie her daughter" (act iv. sc. 4), and Beltramo having returned to Rousillon, she remained at Florence till she was "brought a bedde of twoo soones, whiche were verie like unto their father," and "when she sawe tyme," she took her journey to Rousillon, and appeared in her husband's hall with her two sons in her arms just as he was about to sit down to table with a large company. She then produced the ring, and called upon Beltramo to recognize his children, and to receive her as his wife. This he could not refuse to do, but "abjected his obstinate rigour: causyng her to rise up, and imbraced and kissed her, acknowledging her againe for his lawfull wife (act v. sc. 3)."

## STAGE HISTORY.

No record of the performance of *All's Well That Ends Well* in Shakespeare's time remains, nor do we find any mention of it among the plays performed on the reopening of the theatres at the Restoration, nor can any record be found of such a play as *Love's Labour's*

Won having ever been acted. It was not till the middle of the eighteenth century that any manager thought it worth his while to bring this play forward on the stage, when it was produced for Mrs. Giffard's benefit at the theatre in Goodman's Fields (March 7, 1741), Mrs. Giffard taking the part of Helena, and her husband that of Bertram. The Parolles of this revival was Joseph Peterson, an actor of some note, who played Buckingham to Garrick's Richard III. on the occasion of the latter's first appearance at Goodman's Fields, October 26, 1741; Miss Hippley was the Diana; she, as well as Mrs. Giffard, were in the cast in Richard III. at Garrick's début, the former as Prince Edward, the latter as Queen Anne.

Davies, who does not seem to have known of the performance at Goodman's Fields, says that this play, "after having lain more than a hundred years undisturbed upon the prompter's shelf, was, in October, 1741, revived at the theatre in Drury Lane" (*Dramatic Miscellanies*, vol. ii. p. 7). It was really on the 22nd January, 1742, that this production took place; a production attended by so many calamities to the actors that the play was termed by them "the unfortunate comedy." On this first representation Mrs. Woffington, who played Helena, was taken so ill that she fainted on the stage during the first act (*Genest*, vol. iii. p. 645), and the part had to be read. The play was advertised for the following Friday, but had to be deferred till February 16th in consequence of Milward's illness. This illness was said to have been caused by his wearing too thin clothes in the part of the King which he played with great effect. He was seized with a shivering fit, and, when asked by one of his fellow-actors how he was, replied, "How is it possible for me to be sick, when I have such a physician as Mrs. Woffington?" (*Davies*, vol. ii. p. 7). This illness soon terminated fatally, for on February 9th we find that there was a performance of *All's Well* for the benefit of Milward's widow and children. Davies says that Mrs. Ridout, "a pretty woman and a pleasing actress," was taken ill and forbidden to act for a month, and that Mrs. Butler



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“was likewise seized with a distemper in the progress of this play” (*ut supra*, p. 9). Genest challenges the correctness of both these statements, on the ground that the names of these actresses appear in the bills for the remaining performances of this play; but, unless the habits of theatrical managers were different to what they are now, such a fact as the appearance of a name on the bills would not be a positive guarantee that the actor or actress so named did absolutely perform. Other troubles besides those occasioned by illness beset the production of this play. Fleetwood, the manager, had promised the part of Parolles to Macklin, but “Theophilus Cibber, by some sort of artifice, as common in theatres as in courts, snatched it from him to his great displeasure” (*ut supra*, p. 9). Macklin had to content himself with the part of the clown. In spite of these fatalities and these contrempts this revival certainly seems to have been successful; for the comedy was repeated nine times; Delane taking the place of Milward. Berry’s performance of Lafeu is much praised by Davies; nor does Cibber seem to have made the ridiculous failure in the part that might have been expected. When the piece was revived at Covent Garden, April 1st, 1746, Chapman succeeded Macklin as the clown; this actor was admitted to be the best representative of Shakespeare’s clowns and of some other comic characters, but was the victim of a delusion that he could play tragedy; and he indulged this delusion in the theatre at Richmond which belonged to him, playing such parts as Richard III. to the utter ruin of his own property. This revival at Covent Garden was notable for the fact that Woodward first played Parolles, a part in which he is said to have been unequalled. Mrs. Pritchard was the Helena. The piece was produced again, under Garrick’s management at Drury Lane, February 24, and March 2, 1756; probably owing to the instigation of Woodward, who was so fond of the part of Parolles that he revived this comedy on several occasions, not only in London but under his own management in Dublin. Mrs. Pritchard now exchanged the part of Helena for that of the Countess. On

October 23rd, 1762, Woodward having left Garrick’s company, King took the part of Parolles, Bertram being played by Palmer. On July 26, 1785, All’s Well was produced at the Haymarket in three acts for the benefit of Bannister, jun., who played Parolles; Mrs. Inchbald, the celebrated authoress, being the Countess, and Miss Farren, afterwards Countess of Derby, Helena. On December 12, 1794, All’s Well was produced, as arranged for the stage by John Kemble at Drury Lane. The cast included himself as Bertram, with King as Parolles and Mrs. Jordan as Helena. It was only played for one night. This play would seem to have been cast in 1793, as the first edition bears that date and contains Mrs. Siddons’ name as the representative of Helena. On May 24, 1811, this version was again played under Charles Kemble’s management; Fawcett playing Parolles and Munden Lafeu. The comedy seems, on the whole, to have been tolerably well received. It is said that Fawcett<sup>1</sup> was a comparative failure, and was even hissed on coming off the stage. So discouraged was he that he insisted on surrendering the part; but Kemble persuaded him not to do so, as if he did, he would “knock up the play.” The piece was only played once more, on June 22nd. Kemble’s alteration is a very good one. He has retained as much as possible of the original text, and has not introduced any embellishments of his own; but, by means of judicious excisions and a few ingenious transpositions, he has made a very good acting version of the play. We do not find any further record of its performance except at Bath, May 23, 1820, when, according to Genest, “it was acted in a respectable manner” (vol. ix. p. 132). The last time that it was produced at a London theatre was in 1852, September 1st, when Phelps revived it at Sadlers Wells, Phelps himself taking the part of Parolles; but the revival was not very successful.

Although All’s Well That Ends Well from the nature of its main story can never be a

<sup>1</sup> Fawcett’s copy of Kemble’s edition of this play dated 1811 is in my possession. It is marked, for stage purposes, as far as his own part is concerned; but the alterations and cuts are very few.—F. A. M.

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popular play, we may hope some day to see its revival, if only for a short period, when any actor can be found of sufficient vivacity and impudence—coupled with a thorough knowledge of his art—to play the part of Parolles. At any rate the experiment of its revival might be worth trying at some of those matinées, at which such dismal and depressing experiments are wont to be made on the patience of the audience, and on the long-suffering endurance of the critics.—F. A. M.

## CRITICAL REMARKS.

There is no doubt that at a first reading *All's Well That Ends Well* is one of the least attractive of Shakespeare's plays: it has neither the freshness and sprightliness of the earlier comedies, nor the thrilling interest of the great tragedies which succeeded it. But on re-reading it its beauties rise into relief before us; and although we should undoubtedly gain much from a careful representation of it upon the stage, we can more easily afford to dispense with the actor's aid than in most plays. There are no telling situations, no stirring incidents, the action moves calmly and soberly to its conclusion, but our interest in the heroine carries us through. It is to Shakespeare's conception of her character, perhaps, that his choice of what might seem an unpromising subject is due; but every character in the play is sketched with a master's hand, and if some scenes are dramatically irrelevant, as, for instance, those in which the clown is introduced, they fulfil their purpose in the fresh lights which they throw upon the principal personages, each of whom is a finished portrait. There is no waste of words in this play: the whole is instinct with thought, and it is perhaps from the irrepressible reflective energy of the writer's mind that the number of obscurities of language arises.

Nothing can give a clearer notion of the genius of Shakespeare than a comparison between the bald, wooden narrative in the *Palace of Pleasure* and the picture which he has painted from it. The characters which he has adopted from his original are so transformed that they may be considered almost as much new creations as those which are wholly

of his own invention. Compare Helena with the Giletta of the story. Of Giletta and her proceedings we have an unimpassioned straightforward narrative told in business-like fashion. We read of her love for Beltramo, and her desire to have him for a husband; of the conditions which he lays down, and of her fulfilment of them; we recognize in her a woman of a determined will, but we do not feel for her the love and admiration which we feel for Helena. Boccaccio retails the incidents, Shakespeare lets us into the secrets of the heart. Helena is his ideal of true womanhood, of true self-devotion, only equalled among all his heroines by Imogen and Hermione. The devotion of Helena is the key to the play, and as if to exalt it still higher, as if to emphasize the boundless capabilities of a woman's love, when once it has fastened itself upon an object, he has given it an object so unworthy as Bertram. Brought up with the young and handsome noble, we cannot wonder, though we may regret, that she has fallen in love with him; but regrettable as the passion of such a woman for such a man may be, when once she has given herself to him—

“I dare not say I take you; but I give  
Me and my service, ever whilst I live,  
Into your guiding power”—

she will shrink from nothing that may follow; she will save him even from himself.

It is but a superficial criticism that sees anything immodest in the conduct of Helena. She is not afraid to choose her husband, but her courage is equalled by her humility. She can meet adversity with resignation. When her hopes are dashed by the seeming refusal of the king to accept her offices she does not complain:

“My duty, then, shall pay me for my pains:  
I will no more enforce mine office on you;  
Humbly entreating from your royal thoughts  
A modest one, to bear me back again.”

And when she is scornfully rejected by Bertram, although her claims have all the advantage of the king's powerful advocacy, she accepts the situation with a sigh which only too plainly indicates the painfulness of the effort:



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“That you are well restor’d, my lord, I’m glad:  
 Let the rest go.”

The same spirit of self-sacrifice animates her subsequent conduct. For Bertram she is ready to suffer anything. In obedience to his commands she returns home, but she will not stay there when she finds that her presence keeps him away:

“My being here it is that holds thee hence:  
 Shall I stay here to do ’t? no, no, although  
 The air of paradise did fan the house,  
 And angels offic’d all.”

Yet she is not a woman who never tells her love, not one who sits like Patience on a monument smiling at grief. She is a woman, who, with all her gentleness and tenderness, combines an indomitable resolution. Although she has abandoned her home for her husband’s sake, so assured is she of her power to help and preserve him, that she goes straight to Florence in search of him, where she may at least watch over him in her disguise, and perchance find some occasion of securing him. The occasion offers, and with the decision which is one of her characteristics, she seizes it at once, saves her husband from sin, and in the end, if she has not yet won his affection, is at any rate acknowledged by him as his lawful wife.

The loveliness of Helena is felt by every personage in the drama except Bertram and Parolles. In this respect the latter is not worth consideration; but Bertram, the son of a noble father and a gentle mother, might have been expected at least to recognize her worth. Every allowance must be made for his aristocratic prejudices, and above all, for the constraint put upon him in a matter in which no man brooks constraint—the choice of a wife; but we cannot but feel that he is throughout unworthy of such a woman as Helena, and, like Johnson, we cannot reconcile our hearts to him. Had he had the courage to brave the king’s displeasure and refuse the wife proffered to him, we might have questioned his taste, but could not have condemned his conduct; but after once accepting her his action is inexcusable. If in the end he finds salvation it is through no merit of his own; the victim of a delusion for a worthless led-captain, he is

cured by the device of his friends; false to his promises to the girl whose seducer he believed himself to be, he is rescued from meshes of his own deceit and from his sovereign’s displeasure by the timely interposition of his wife. We are left to hope that under her guidance he will be led to better things.

Much of Bertram’s shortcoming is attributed to Parolles, a snipt-taffeta fellow with whose inducement the young nobleman corrupts a well-derived nature; and Parolles is indeed a pitiful rascal. An abject sneak and coward, he is the only thorough specimen of his class that Shakespeare has depicted. He has been compared with Falstaff, but the very idea is sacrilege; he has not a spark of the wit and the geniality which always gives us a kindly feeling for honest Jack. When he is exposed he feels no shame; he hugs himself in his disgrace:

“Captain I’ll be no more;  
 But I will eat and drink, and sleep as soft  
 As captain shall: simply the thing I am  
 Shall make me live.”

Yet, like old Lafeu, who was the first that “found” him, we are content to dismiss this miserable creature, not without compassion, “Though you are a fool and a knave, you shall eat; go to.”

A peculiar charm is lent to this play by the halo which it casts around old age. With this, as with all other phases of humanity, Shakespeare manifests his intense power of sympathy. The King, Lafeu, and the Countess are each delightful in their way. The King, who joins a benevolent regard for the rising generation to his eulogy of the past; Lafeu with his dry genial humour; and above all, the aged Countess, the most admirable character of her class that Shakespeare has drawn for us. The scene in which she elicits from Helena the confession of her love for Bertram sets before us at once her calm matronly dignity, her womanly insight, and her sympathy with the emotions of a girlish heart; unlike her son she could see that nobility does not depend upon birth alone, and in Helena she could recognize “a maid too virtuous for the contempt of empire.”

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