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# The Henry Irving Shakespeare

VOLUME 8

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE  
EDITED BY HENRY IRVING  
AND FRANK A. MARSHALL



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THE WORKS  
OF  
SHAKESPEARE.



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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

FROM THE CHANDOS PORTRAIT

IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON.

RAMUS. Sc

*THE HENRY IRVING SHAKESPEARE.*

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THE WORKS  
OF  
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

EDITED BY  
HENRY IRVING AND FRANK A. MARSHALL.

WITH  
NOTES AND INTRODUCTIONS TO EACH PLAY BY F. A. MARSHALL  
AND OTHER SHAKESPEARIAN SCHOLARS,

AND  
NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS BY GORDON BROWNE.

—  
VOLUME VIII.  
—



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1890.

## PREFATORY NOTE.

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My task in writing this short prefatory note to the last volume of this edition of Shakespeare is an easy one, for I have only to commend to the notice of the public the work of my friends. The writer of the Introduction and the Life—my old and valued friend, Dr. Dowden—made, many years ago, a remark which, when it came to my ears, impressed me much—“An Actor’s commentary is his acting.” Dr. Dowden criticises keenly, and from a very high stand-point; and in the face of such a truly critical apothegm what can I say but commend its truth, and humbly trust that the form of commentary to which I have devoted my life may have arrested the attention of some that might otherwise not have paused to grasp the lessons which the great English master of thought has spread with such free and beneficent fulness. In the years which have elapsed since we, each in his own way, took this work in hand, I have learned much, and I have to be grateful for many happy hours spent in congenial toil and in friendly communion with both the living and the dead. I am proud that my name should be associated with such a work, and with so many names illustrious in the scholarship of my time.

To those who remain of the staff who undertook and carried on the work, there is one deep, sad note in all their pleasure. The voice that cheered them on their way—the hand most resolute, most untiring in the task—the brain that sought out truth and mastered difficulties and comprehended all the vast ramifications of such a work, are now but memories; the eyes that scanned so lovingly and so jealously the growing work shall never look on its completion. From the first, Frank Marshall set himself down to the editorship of this edition of Shakespeare, as to the *magnum opus* of his life. The amount of solid, hard work which he did was almost incredible, and could only have been accomplished by an unswerving sense of duty, and an iron resolution



to keep abreast of his task. In the later days, when failing health made such stress of work impossible for him, he found loyal and loving helpers in those other men whose names are given in connection with various portions of the work. One of them, Mr. Arthur Symons, to whose ability and care the completion of the last volume is mainly due, writes of his friend and mine as follows:—

“The death of Mr. Frank Marshall, to whom this edition of Shakespeare owes its existence, and under whose harassed but unwearied care it had all but reached completion, leaves to others than himself the duty, now a painful one, of writing ‘Finis’ at the end of a long labour. Had he lived, Mr. Marshall would, no doubt, have had much to say in that General Introduction promised in the first volume, which can now never be said; there were certain corrections, I know, that he had hoped to make, certain acknowledgments of kind help received that he would gratefully and fully have expressed. He might, also, casting a glance over the finished work, have summed up his own feeling of contentment or discouragement before the result of so much toil—of so many hopes. Probably he would have done himself less than justice. A great Shakespeare scholar, at the end of a monumental edition, told a friend that he felt as if his work were but now beginning, and himself but now fully prepared for it. The feeling is inevitable in a world where finality means only the limit of one’s own sight. And, in the case of Frank Marshall, there would have been the regret that health and circumstance had not permitted him to finish, single-handed, a work which he had once hoped to carry through without assistance. As it is, the edition remains his achievement—his in spirit, even when other hands have worked under the direction of the kindest and most considerate of editors.”

Every kind thought and just comment thus given on a man of great literary ability, I endorse most heartily. Frank Marshall was a friend of my life. We were brought together and linked by the golden bond of a common love for the Great Englishman whose work he endeavoured to worthily set forth; and from the hour we first met our friendship ripened, till in all the world I had no warmer friend.

## PREFATORY NOTE.

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At the beginning of this work, I had occasion to speak of Shakespeare as a playwright—as a practical dramatist—as the actor, as well as the poet who constructed plays—playwright first and man of letters afterwards; and here at the close of the work this idea must be the Omega as it was the Alpha of my theme. There is even now in existence a school of criticism, the exponents of which hold that Shakespeare's writing is not for the stage at all. I need not say more of this class here, but pass them by and leave their utterances to the calmer judgment of history. That Shakespeare found his vogue in the form which his genius took for its manifestation we cannot doubt; for it must never be forgotten that he was actor and playwright as well as poet—that even with a knowledge of the strength of the narrative and epic methods, he adhered to the dramatic form which was in great part his contribution to the standards of English poetry. There was, therefore, a peculiar fitness in Mr. Marshall's editing of his work. Until he undertook the task there never was a Shakespearean editor who was himself a playwright; and it was through his knowledge of the practical working of the stage that he was able so to realize every situation. He had a singular skill in clearing up many a difficult passage by his keen sight of the actual appearance to be presented by these characters or those, upon the stage.

Lest there should be any who may say that, in suggesting the deletion of any line of Shakespeare, I myself endeavour to improve his work, let me here say that I do so in loving reverence for his own work, which was to bring home to men by dramatic method the realities of life. Up to Shakespeare's time there was no English drama or stage in the noble form in which we understand it, and we must ever bear in mind that the conditions of life were, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, different to our own. Nay, more, we may well imagine how even the greater leisure of the Elizabethan age was prolonged to the utmost to multiply the hours of intellectual and emotional delight thus newly given to men. But the times are changed; and the hours for work and rest and recreation have to be so exactly apportioned in our less restful age, that all our duties and pleasures must conform to

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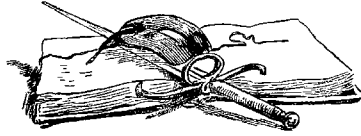
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them. I have, therefore, only tried to mark, for the use of students, those lines, passages, and scenes which could best be dispensed with—if such limitation were desired—without doing unnecessary injury to the thoughts and work of the poet, or to the dramatic bearings of the story of the play.

HENRY IRVING.

LONDON, *May, 1890.*



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LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE  
 AND  
 GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

BY EDWARD DOWDEN, LL.D.

THE life of Shakespeare has been threefold: first, the external life of good and evil fortune which he lived as a youth in Stratford, as a player and playwright in London, and again as an honoured inhabitant of his native town; secondly, the inner life of his spirit, the wide-orbing movement of his intellect and imagination of which we can read something in his marvellous series of poetical creations, and can conjecture more; and last, the life which he has lived during three hundred years in the history of the national mind of England, or rather we should say the mind of humanity, the life of posthumous influence which he has exercised, and exercises at the present day, on the generations of mankind. Of each of these it will be our endeavour to speak.

I.

“All that is known with any degree of certainty concerning Shakespeare is—that he was born at Stratford-upon-Avon—married and had children there—went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote poems and plays—returned to Stratford, made his will, died and was buried.” So wrote Steevens a century ago, and De Quincey at a much more recent date is even briefer in his summing-up of the facts: “That he lived, and that he died, and that he was ‘a little lower than the angels’—these make up pretty nearly the amount of our undisputed report.” Having spoken of the perplexity which we are likely to feel on finding the materials for the biography of a transcendent writer so meagre and so few, De Quincey goes on to solve the difficulty by an elaborate argument intended to prove that the parliamentary war and the local feuds engendered by it extinguished those traditions and memorials of Shakespeare which, he says, must have been abundant up to that era. In truth there is no great cause for wonder or perplexity. More is known of Shakespeare’s life than Steevens and De Quincey allege. More is known of Shakespeare’s life than of the lives of many of his dramatic contemporaries. Far less has been ascertained respecting the life of Marlowe, whose fame stood so high in Elizabethan days, and whose personality was undoubtedly a striking one. Far less has been ascertained respecting the life of Webster or the life of Ford, although these dramatists flourished at a later time, and one of them was a gentleman of posi-



tion. The materials for John Fletcher's biography are of the scantiest kind; it is not certain whether he went to Cambridge; it is not certain whether he lived and died unmarried; from 1593 to 1607 his history is a complete blank. Yet Fletcher was highly honoured by his contemporaries; he survived till the opening of the reign of Charles I.; his father was the Bishop of London. The Elizabethan age was not an age of literary biography; a playwright, unless, like Ben Jonson, he were distinguished for his scholarship and classical learning, was hardly thought of as a man of letters. Our wonder as regards Shakespeare should be, not that we know so little, but that we know so much. Our acquaintance with the facts of his outward history—partly founded on tradition, partly on documents—is due to the zeal of lovers of the great dramatist, from the actor Betterton to the latest and most indefatigable of investigators, Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps. We cannot hope that much additional light will ever be gained. The facts which we possess are enough to assure us that the greatest of poets conducted his material life, after, perhaps, some errors of his ardent youth, wisely and well to a prosperous issue. They are enough to prove his good sense and discreet dealing in worldly affairs.

Richard Shakespeare, the poet's grandfather, was a Warwickshire farmer, renting land at Snitterfield, a village some three or four miles from Stratford-on-Avon. His son John, evidently a man of some enterprise and energy, settled at Stratford about 1551, and did business in Henley Street as a fellmonger and glover. According to Aubrey he was a butcher, and it may be that he slaughtered the beasts whose skins he converted into gauntlets and leggings; according to Rowe he was a considerable dealer in wool, and it is certain that he had transactions in corn and in timber. In 1557 he greatly improved his position by his marriage with Mary, the youngest and the favourite daughter of Robert Arden, a wealthy farmer, lately deceased, of the neighbouring hamlet of Wilmecote. That these Ardens were connected with an ancient family of gentlesfolk of that name has been asserted, and may be true, but the statement cannot be proved. Mary Arden inherited from her father an estate of some sixty acres, known as Asbies, at Wilmecote, together with the reversion to part of a larger property at Snitterfield, on which Snitterfield property her father-in-law, Richard Shakespeare, held land as a tenant. From this date John Shakespeare became a person of some importance at Stratford, and he rose year by year in the esteem of his fellow-townsmen. Appointed at first by the corporation one of the officers whose duty it was to supervise malt liquors and bread, he became in 1561 a chamberlain of the borough, in 1565 an alderman, and in 1568 he was elected to the most important official position in the town, that of high bailiff. It is true that he could not write even his name, but the accomplishment of penmanship was rare among the members of the corporation. He was certainly a successful man of business and a skilful accountant.

In the house in Henley Street towards the close of April, 1564, was born

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

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William Shakespeare, the eldest son of his parents. Two daughters, who died in infancy, had been born before him. On April the 26th the child was baptized; a tradition of the last century, that Shakespeare died upon his birthday, would favour the popular opinion that he was born on April 23rd; but his monument states that he died in his fifty-third year. Attention was called by De Quincey to the fact that Shakespeare's only grandchild, Elizabeth Hall, was married to Thomas Nash on April 22nd, and he suggested that the day may have been chosen as the anniversary of her grandfather's birthday. The matter remains doubtful. April the 23rd, Old Style, corresponds with our present May 5th.

Stratford-on-Avon, in which Shakespeare spent his youth and to which he gladly returned in his elder years, was a town of gable-roofed, timber or timber-and-plaster houses, containing some fourteen or fifteen hundred inhabitants. Its chief buildings were the noble church hard by the river, and the Guildhall where on occasions travelling companies of actors would present their plays. Around it in Warwickshire, "the heart of England," lay the perfection of rural landscape: in the Feldon division such pasture-lands, with a wealth of wild flowers, as Shakespeare has described in *A Winter's Tale*; and in the Arden division the perfection of forest scenery, such woodland glades and streams as he has imagined in the *French Arden* of *As You Like It*. During the Wars of the Roses the county was divided against itself; Coventry was Lancastrian, Warwick, for a time, Yorkist. The battle of Bosworth Field was fought near its north-eastern border. Traditions of the stirring events of those times must have lived on to Shakespeare's day, and created in his imagination a sympathy with the great historical figures of that period which he has represented with such life and force in his historical dramas.

That Shakespeare was sent to the Free School at Stratford is stated by his first biographer, Rowe, and we may reasonably assume that such was the fact. Some knowledge of reading and writing was required at entrance; the usual age of pupils when admitted was seven. When duly drilled in the Latin accidence (of which we have an amusing Shakespearian reminiscence in Sir Hugh Evans' examination of William Page in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*), the boy began to construe from the *Sententiæ Pueriles*, and, if he remained long enough at school, advanced as far as Ovid, Virgil, Cicero, and the *Eclogues* of Mantuanus. Much has been written on the subject of Shakespeare's learning. From Ben Jonson's scholarly point of view he may be said to have had "small Latin and less Greek." Perhaps the Greek was nothing or next to nothing; but Aubrey was probably not wrong when he stated on the authority of a Mr. Beeston that Shakespeare "understode Latine pretty well." In later years he seems to have acquired a little knowledge of French, and possibly a little knowledge of Italian.

At what age Shakespeare was withdrawn from school we cannot tell. But we know that when he was thirteen years old his father was no longer a prosperous man, and that the fortunes of his house continued for a considerable time to

decline. While John Shakespeare's means were first waxing and then rapidly waning, his family had increased in numbers. His son Gilbert, who afterwards became a haberdasher in London and who lived certainly to 1609, was born in 1566; Joan, who was married to William Hart, and whose name appears in the great dramatist's will, was born 1569; Anne, born in 1571, died in her eighth year; Richard, born in March 1573-74, lived to manhood, dying at Stratford in 1613; John Shakespeare's last child, Edmund, born in 1580, became an actor, died in September 1607, and on the morning of his burial at St. Saviour's, Southwark, a knell of the "great bell" of the church was rung, a mark of respect secured only by the payment of a considerable fee. Thus with younger brothers and a sister requiring sustenance and education, and with narrowing means in the household, William Shakespeare, at the age of thirteen may, as the tradition asserts, have been set to help his father in business. An old parish clerk of Stratford towards the close of the seventeenth century declared that Shakespeare was bound apprentice to a butcher; and according to Aubrey he performed the sacrificial rites with dramatic accompaniments, for "when he killed a calf, he would do it in a high style and make a speech." According to another report he was a country schoolmaster, and Malone has argued from Shakespeare's frequent and exact use of law-terms that most probably he was for two or three years in the office of a Stratford attorney. We may indulge our imagination by picturing the future poet rather as a wool-stapler than as a butcher's lad.

What cannot be doubted is that his father had passed from wealth to comparative poverty. In 1578 he effected a large mortgage on the estate of Asbies; when he tendered payment in the following year it was refused until other sums due had been repaid; the money designed for the redemption of Asbies had been obtained by the sale of his wife's reversionary interest in the Snitterfield property. His taxes were lightened, nor was he always able to pay those which were still claimed. He dropped off from attendance at the town-council, and in consequence was ultimately deprived of his alderman's gown (1586). He fell into debt, and was tormented with legal proceedings. A commission appointed to inquire respecting Jesuits, priests, and recusants reported his name in 1592 among those of persons who "come not to church for fear of process for debt." It does not appear, however, that he was obliged to part with his house in Henley Street, and, as we shall see, his eldest son was careful, when prosperity came to him in his dramatic career, to restore the fallen fortunes of his father.

Before he was nineteen years old Shakespeare had a new and a powerful motive for trying to better himself in the world; he had taken to himself a wife. A bond given before the marriage, for the security of the bishop in licensing the marriage after once asking of the banns, is preserved in the registry at Worcester. It is dated November 28, 1582. The bride, Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a substantial yeoman, lately deceased, of Shottery hamlet in the parish of Strat-

ford, was between seven and eight years older than her husband. The sureties of the bond were friends of the Hathaway family, and the seal of Anne's father was used on the occasion, whence it has been inferred that the Shottery folk rather than those of Henley Street were desirous of the match. Whether the consent of Shakespeare's parents was or was not given we have no means of ascertaining. Shakespeare's eldest child—Susanna—was baptized on May 26, 1583, just six months after the bond, preliminary to marriage, had been signed. The ceremony of wedlock may have been preceded by precontract, which according to the custom of the time and place would have been looked on as having the validity of marriage, though as yet unsanctified by ecclesiastical rites. Halliwell-Phillipps has aptly pointed out that when Shakespeare's maternal grandfather, Robert Arden, "settled part of an estate on his daughter Agnes, on July the seventeenth, 1550, he introduces her as *nunc uxor Thome Stringer, ac nuper uxor Johannis Hewyns*, and yet the marriage was not solemnized until three months afterwards." It may be added that the words "wedded wife" were at this time in no way tautological; a woman duly espoused might be a wife though the priestly benediction of wedlock had not yet been bestowed.

The marriage of a boy of eighteen with a woman eight years his senior, of humbler rank than his own and probably uneducated, cannot be called prudent; but we have no evidence to prove that the union was unhappy. Shakespeare remained in Stratford with his wife until he went to seek his fortune in London. Although he did not bring her and her children to the capital, he certainly from time to time visited his home. He looked forward to returning to his native town, and living henceforth by her side, and he actually carried that long-contemplated purpose into effect. It may be, as Shakespeare's Sonnets seem to indicate, that for a season his heart was led astray by the intellectual fascination of a woman who possessed all those qualities of brilliance and cultured grace which perhaps were lacking in his wife; but if so, Shakespeare perceived his error, and in due time returned to the companion of his youth. In his will he leaves her only his "second best bed with the furniture," and this as an afterthought, for the words occur as an interlineation; but without special bequest she was sufficiently provided for by free-bench and dower; the best bed, as Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps suggests, was probably that reserved for strangers, the second best may have been that of the master and mistress of the house. We cannot suppose that the wife of his early choice, the daughter of a husbandman, could have followed Shakespeare in his poetical mountings of mind or in his profound dramatic studies of character, but there is a wide field for mutual sympathy and help in the common joys and sorrows and daily tasks of household life, and the greatest of men are sometimes they who can best value the qualities of homely goodness. We cannot think of Shakespeare's marriage as a rare union of perfect accord, but we are not justified in speaking of it as unfortunate. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Lysander has a reference to love "misgraffed in respect

of years;" in *Twelfth Night* the Duke warns Viola, when disguised in the garb of a youth, against the danger of an unequal marriage:—

Let still the woman take  
 An elder than herself; so wears she to him,  
 So sways she level in her husband's heart.—(ii. 4. 30–32.)

Even if the lines were non-dramatic, they would prove no more than that the writer with good sense admitted as a rule that to which his own experience may have been the exception. One other passage from the plays has been cited as bearing on Shakespeare's marriage, that passage in *The Tempest* where Prospero, after he has given his daughter to Ferdinand as his future bride, cautions the Prince against "breaking her virgin-knot" before

All sanctimonious ceremonies may  
 With full and holy rite be minister'd.—(iv. 1. 16, 17.)

*The Tempest* was probably written to grace some noble wedding, and Shakespeare's mature wisdom of life, uttering itself through Prospero, recognized the fact that the sanctity of marriage can hardly be guarded with too great jealousy. Having closed the series of his dramatic works, perhaps with the very play in which this passage occurs, he returned to his home to find the happiness of his elder years in company with her whom he had loved in boyhood.

For three or four years after his marriage Shakespeare continued to reside at Stratford, and in 1585 his wife gave birth to twins, a boy and girl, baptized (Feb. 2) Hamnet and Judith, doubtless after Hamnet Sadler, a baker of Stratford, and Judith his wife. For this Hamnet Sadler, presumably sponsor for the boy, who, to the grief of his father, died before he had reached the age of twelve (buried August 11, 1596), Shakespeare retained a regard to the close of his life. He is remembered in the great dramatist's will, where the name appears in the form "Hamlett" Sadler, receiving a bequest of one pound six and eightpence "to buy him a ringe."

In what employments and with what recreations these years at Stratford, growing years of early manhood, went by we can but conjecture. How they came to a close we are told by Shakespeare's first biographer, Rowe: "He had by a misfortune, common enough to young fellows, fallen into ill company, and amongst them, some that made a frequent practice of deer-stealing, engaged him more than once in robbing a park that belonged to Sir Thomas Lucy, of Charl-cote, near Stratford. For this he was prosecuted by that gentleman, as he thought, somewhat too severely; and in order to revenge that ill usage, he made a ballad upon him. And though this, probably the first essay of his poetry, be lost, yet it is said to have been so very bitter, that it redoubled the prosecution against him to that degree, that he was obliged to leave his business and family in Warwickshire, for some time, and shelter himself in London." According to Archdeacon Davies, vicar of Sapperton in the county of Gloucester, who died in

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1708, Sir Thomas Lucy had the young poacher “oft whipped and sometimes imprisoned,” in revenge for which Shakespeare afterwards made him “his Justice Clodpate [Justice Shallow: *clodpate* meaning foolish] and calls him a great man, and that in allusion to his name bore three louses rampant for his arms.” The first stanza of the ballad which Rowe speaks of as lost is given by Oldys on the authority of “a very aged gentleman living in the neighbourhood of Stratford,” and it contains the same offensive play on the name Lucy—“O lowsie Lucy”—as that in the passage to which Davies refers.

We can hardly doubt that there is a kernel of truth in these traditions. Malone endeavoured to disprove the deer-stealing story by showing that Sir Thomas Lucy had no park at Charlote; but he may have had deer there; or the scene of the adventure, instead of Charlote, may have been the adjoining sequestered estate of Fulbroke, over which Sir Thomas, as a local magnate devoted to the crown, may have kept watch and ward. It has been suggested that he may have felt some animosity against the Shakespeare family as possibly having sympathy with the old religion, for Sir Thomas was not only a game preserver but a zealous Protestant. The offence of poaching was commonly regarded at the time by those who did not suffer from it as a venial frolic of youth; “the students of Oxford, the centre of the kingdom’s learning and intelligence,” says Halliwell-Phillipps, “had been for many generations the most notorious poachers in all England.” There can be no doubt that Shakespeare retained some ill-will against the Lucy family. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Justice Shallow fumes with violent indignation against Sir John Falstaff, whom he charges with having beaten his men, killed his deer, and broken open his lodge. We are informed by Slender that in the Shallow coat of arms are a “dozen white luses,” translated by Evans, the Welsh parson, with unconscious humour, into “a dozen white louses” which “do become an old coat well.” Sir Thomas was a member of that strong Protestant commission which reported that Shakespeare’s father did not attend church in 1592 for fear of process for debt, a circumstance which might have kept the early soreness of feeling from subsiding. If it is any satisfaction to us we have some reason to believe that the barb prepared for Sir Thomas Lucy struck home, and that the family did not forget the mockery of their old coat. A copy of the 1619 Quarto edition of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was discovered not very long since among the family records, the only copy of any one of Shakespeare’s plays in the early editions found at Charlote.

In what year Shakespeare quitted Stratford we cannot tell; it can hardly have been earlier than 1585, and may have been a year or two later. Nor can we say with certainty how he came to join himself to a company of players. From early childhood he had opportunities of seeing dramatic performances. Perhaps he inherited from his father a taste for the drama; theatrical entertainments, as has been noticed by Halliwell-Phillipps, are first heard of at Stratford-on-Avon during the year of John Shakespeare’s bailiffship. While the players

declaimed in the Guildhall the boy may have looked on, standing between his father's legs, as his contemporary Willis tells us he did when he saw the "Cradle of Security" acted before the aldermen and common council of the city of Gloucester. He may have witnessed the performance of the mysteries at Coventry on the Corpus Christi festival; his phrase "out-herods Herod" is a reminiscence of the ramping and raging king by whose command the innocents of Bethlehem were slaughtered; his comparison of the flea on Bardolph's fiery nose to "a black soul burning in hell-fire" was the grotesque fancy of one who had probably watched the exhibition of the damned with their sooty faces and black and yellow garb in the pageant at Coventry. Various companies of players visited Stratford from time to time and performed under the patronage of the corporation; before Shakespeare forsook his home, says Dyce, "he had doubtless seen the best dramatic productions, such as they were, represented by the best actors then alive." He may have made acquaintance with some of the London players, but the assertion that the famous Burbage was from Warwickshire, and that Thomas Greene, an actor of James I.'s time, was a Stratford man, have been made without sufficient evidence. Leicester's players visited Stratford in 1587; it is supposed by Mr. Fleay that Shakespeare joined them during or immediately after their arrival, and during their travels received his earliest instruction in comic acting from Kempe and Pope, who soon after became noted performers.<sup>1</sup> But this is mere conjecture, and the early traditions do not favour the notion that Shakespeare left his native town with the design of taking to the stage. They rather lead us to believe that after his arrival in London he gradually found his way towards his future profession.

According to a tradition, which is alleged to have come down to us through Sir William D'Avenant, the first employment of Shakespeare in connection with the theatre was that of holding the horses of gentlemen who had ridden to the playhouse. The first building erected (1576) for the exhibition of dramatic performances in England was that known as "The Theatre," situated in the parish of Shoreditch. It was the property of James Burbage, father of Shakespeare's fellow-actor, the great tragedian, Richard Burbage. James Burbage kept livery-stables close by Smithfield, and it is an ingenious suggestion of Halliwell-Phillipps that, on arriving in London, Shakespeare may have sold at Smithfield the horse on which he rode up to town, may then and there have made the acquaintance of James Burbage, and may have been employed by him to take care of the horses of Burbage's Smithfield customers who visited the theatre. The tradition adds that Shakespeare made himself popular, and soon had to hire lads to assist him, who, "when Will Shakespeare was summoned were immediately to present themselves, 'I am Shakespeare's boy, sir;'" whence the young lackeys, after their master's fortune had raised him to higher employment, continued to be known as "Shakespeare's Boys." An old

<sup>1</sup> A Chronicle History of the Life and Work of William Shakespeare, by F. G. Fleay, p. 8.

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parish-clerk of Stratford, towards the close of the seventeenth century, informed visitors that the dramatist was first received into the playhouse as “a servitude,” that is, as an attendant on the players. The stage-tradition of a hundred years ago was that he acted as the prompter’s assistant, giving the performers notice to be ready when their presence was required on the stage.

It is not surprising that Shakespeare’s early years in connection with the theatre should have left no record behind them. We know that he did not cut himself adrift from Stratford and his own family, for in 1587 he joined his father in an effort to assign the title of the Asbies property to John Lambert in consideration of the cancelling of the previous mortgage and the payment of £20. But beyond this fact we know nothing for certain until 1592, when he was an author and an actor, and of importance in both capacities to his dramatic company. A year before this, in 1591, was published Spenser’s poem, the “Tears of the Muses,” in which Thalia, the Muse of Comedy, laments the cessation from authorship of some creator of general mirth whom he names “our pleasant Willy:”

And he, the man whom Nature selfe had made  
 To mock her selfe, and Truth to imitate,  
 With kindly counter under mimic shade,  
 Our pleasant Willy, ah! is dead of late.

It would be pleasant to suppose that the author of the *Faerie Queene* here spoke of his great contemporary; but it is much more probable that Spenser’s friend, the dramatist John Lyly, is meant.<sup>1</sup> If Spenser ever refers to Shakespeare, it is in his *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, in lines which describe some high poet under the name of “Aetion,” the eaglet (from *ἄετός*, an eagle). *Colin Clouts* was not published until 1594, but probably was written in whole or in part in 1591. The true name of “Aetion” had, says Spenser, a heroic sound, which agrees well with the name Shakespeare; the epithet “gentle” seems to be one to which our poet had almost a peculiar right:

And there, though last not least, is Aetion,  
 A gentler shepheard may no where be found:  
 Whose Muse, full of high thoughts invention,  
 Doth like himselfe heroically sound.

These lines, if written as early as 1591, were hardly meant for Shakespeare; they may, however, be a later insertion. But it seems not unlikely that Drayton was intended, who had written under the poetical name of “Rowland,” and whose *Idea*, as some have thought, may be pointed to (though to myself the notion appears far-fetched) by the choice of the name Aetion (*ἰδέα* = *αἴτιον*).

There can be no mistake that Shakespeare is the object of Greene’s attack in the pamphlet *Greenes Groatsworth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance*,

<sup>1</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps identifies “our pleasant Willy” with the comic actor Richard Tarlton (died 1588); Professor Minto supposes him to be Sir Philip Sidney.



written by the unhappy poet as he lay dying in a mean house in Dowgate, attended by a shoemaker's wife, his kind hostess and nurse. The pamphlet must have been written in August, 1592. Having warned his friends Marlowe, Peele, and "young Juvenal" (probably Lodge) against the inconstancy of the players, he proceeds: "Yes trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide*, supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Iohannes fac totum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrie." The travestied line

Oh tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide,

is found in Richard, Duke of York, and also in the Third Part of Henry VI., which is founded on Richard, Duke of York. In the old play Marlowe and Greene had probably been collaborateurs, and it would seem that Greene bitterly resented Shakespeare's rehandling of his work, and felt indignant at the success of one whom he looked on as an unlettered rival. Greene's pamphlet was seen through the press by Henry Chettle, and in December of the same year he entered on the Stationers' Books his own prose tract *Kind-Hart's Dreame*, in the preface to which he apologizes to Shakespeare for Greene's unworthy attack. He expresses his regret for not having used his discretion in moderating the writer's warmth; he is as sorry, he says, as if the original fault were his own, "because my selfe have seene his [Shakespeare's] demeanour no less civil than he exelent in the qualitie he professes: Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightnes of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious [*i.e.* felicitous] grace in writing, that approves his Art." The word "quality" in this passage of Chettle's "Address to the Gentlemen Readers" of his pamphlet has a special reference to the profession of an actor, as it has in Hamlet's inquiry respecting the boy-performers: "Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing?" We may infer from Chettle's words that Shakespeare was at least a respectable actor. According to Rowe, "the top of his performance was the Ghost in his own *Hamlet*," a part requiring an actor of good delivery though not a great artist. There is some ground for thinking that he played the part of Old Knowell in Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, in the representation of which comedy he certainly appeared. And there is a confused tradition handed down by Oldys which makes it probable that he was the Adam of his own *As You Like It*. Whether he excelled or not in his practice as an actor, Shakespeare certainly had a cultivated knowledge of the principles of the histrionic art; the instructions given to the players by Hamlet could have come from no one who had not carefully studied the merits and the defects of the actor on the boards; the writer of the words assigned to Hamlet assuredly knew the grace of moderation and reserve in the rendering of passion, and at the same time knew the error of languor or inertness. The latest express mention of Shakespeare as having

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taken a part in the performance of a play is in connection with Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*, which was performed at the Globe Theatre in 1603 or 1604. But in a document of 1610 the Burbages speak of placing Shakespeare as an actor among others at Blackfriars Theatre. His name, however, does not appear in a list of the actors of *The Alchemist* (1610), where, if he were performing, he might naturally have taken a part among his fellows.

No doubt it was perceived at an early date in Shakespeare's dramatic company that he could aid them more by his pen than by his voice. As we learn from the charges and insinuations of Greene, part of Shakespeare's early work as a writer for the stage was that of revising and adapting the work of his predecessors or early contemporaries. It was an excellent way of apprenticeship to his dramatic craft. He learned to distinguish between what is effective and ineffective on the stage; he acquired the art of carrying on the action of a piece without falling into tedious speech-making, he studied the links and transitions of the dramatic events, he came to see how these should be manipulated, he learned how to develop a dramatic character, how to regulate imagery and diction so that they should never pass into the epical; and while amending the pieces of others his own genius would have enough of play to gain in strength, and enough of restraint to save it from the waste of exuberant power.

But the poet in Shakespeare could not be content with what may be justly described as in a certain degree hackwork. The poet in Shakespeare aspired to an independent existence, and apparently he did not yet perceive that through the drama alone could his genius explore the heights and depths of passion and of song. In the passage quoted from Kind-Hart's *Dreame* the author informs his readers that "divers of worship" have reported to him Shakespeare's "facetious grace in writing." Possibly Shakespeare had already earned the good opinion and good-will of the Earl of Southampton. Early in 1593 Richard Field, the son of a Stratford tanner, himself a London printer, was carrying through the press Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, which was published in that year with a dedication to Southampton, in which the author, speaking of his young patron with graceful homage and of his poem with becoming modesty, describes it as "the first heire of my invention." Doubtless several plays of merit by Shakespeare had already appeared upon the stage; but they had not been published by the press; they formed in the eyes of Shakespeare's contemporaries hardly a part of literature proper; they could not compete in dignity with such a miniature epic as this which now appeared, and in which Shakespeare first claimed his rank as poet. *Venus and Adonis* at once became popular, and edition followed edition during a series of years. In the dedication Shakespeare promises that if his poem should please the earl, he would take advantage of all idle hours to prepare some "graver labour" for his patron's honour. This graver labour, the *Lucrece*, followed in 1594; graver because of its tragic theme, and its celebration of the wronged, yet triumphant,

purity of woman. It is dedicated to Southampton in words of loyal affection: "What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being part in all I have, devoted yours;" and a reference to favours received proves that the regard and esteem were not on Shakespeare's side alone. "There is," says Rowe, "one instance so singular in the magnificence of this patron of Shakespeare's, that, if I had not been assured that the story was handed down by Sir William D'Avenant, who was probably very well acquainted with his affairs, I should not have ventured to have inserted; that my Lord Southampton at one time gave him a thousand pounds to enable him to go through with a purchase which he heard he had a mind to." It is supposed that the purchase was that of the large house named New Place in the centre of the town of Stratford-on-Avon, which Shakespeare bought for £60 in the spring of 1597, a gabled house of brick, resting on stone foundations, with a bay-window on the garden side. Report exaggerated the amount of Southampton's gift, but even sixty pounds in the days of Elizabeth was a very considerable sum of money.

In December, 1594, Shakespeare appeared in two comedies before Queen Elizabeth at Greenwich Palace. Two eminent actors of his company, that known as the Lord Chamberlain's servants, Richard Burbage, the tragedian, and Kemp, a popular comedian, were associated with him on this occasion.<sup>1</sup> The queen, who had a keen eye for merit, honoured Shakespeare and his art. Ben Jonson in his memorial lines prefixed to the First Folio speaks of those "flights" of the "Swan of Avon."

upon the bankes of Thames,  
 That so did take Eliza, and our Iames.

Shakespeare's company repeatedly performed before the queen at Richmond Palace, at Greenwich Palace, at Whitehall. In the Christmas holidays of 1597 her Majesty witnessed a performance of *Love's Labour's Lost* in its revised form, "newly corrected and augmented." Next Christmas three plays were given at Whitehall, among them probably *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, by Elizabeth's express desire. It is a well-known tradition that the queen was so highly entertained by Falstaff, as seen in the two parts of *King Henry IV.*, that she commanded the dramatist to continue the character for one play more, and show the fat knight in love. That bright comedy of English rural life, *The Merry Wives*, is said to have been the work of a fortnight. At times, by special arrangement, Shakespeare's plays were performed for the grave lawyers of the Inns of Court in their mirth-loving hours of leisure. On Innocents' Day, 1594, the day after Shakespeare's performance before the queen at Greenwich, The

<sup>1</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps's statement as to the companies to which Shakespeare belonged previously to his joining the Lord Chamberlain's servants deserves to be quoted: "It would appear not altogether unlikely that the poet was one of Lord Strange's actors in March, 1592; one of Lord Pembroke's a few months later; and that he joined the company of the Earl of Sussex in or before January, 1594." But on this subject see especially Mr. Fleay's "A Chronicle History of the Life and Work of William Shakespeare."

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Comedy of Errors was presented before a distinguished company in the hall of Gray's Inn; there had been some confusion and disturbance in the earlier part of the evening, which ceased while the spectators watched the entanglements of the twins of Syracuse and Ephesus; ever afterwards that night of Dec. 28, 1594, was remembered as the Night of Errors. Early in February, 1601-2, the benchers of the Middle Temple witnessed in their hall (which still exists) a performance of that delightful comedy Twelfth Night; the law student John Manningham records the fact in his diary, and tells us of his diversion at the odd figure of the deceived Malvolio. But of these occasional performances by Shakespeare's company the most remarkable were two which took place in the preceding year. On February 8th, 1601, the Earl of Essex, accompanied by Shakespeare's patron, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, and Roger Manners, Earl of Rutland, made their rash revolt in the streets of London. On the preceding afternoon, by special arrangement between the conspirators and the Lord Chamberlain's servants, "a play of the deposing and killing of King Richard" [*i.e.* possibly Shakespeare's King Richard II.] was represented at the Globe Theatre.<sup>1</sup> It was not a new play, and the actors, to provide against loss if the attendance should be small, required that the sum of forty shillings should be added by their employers to whatever might be taken at the door. Less than two years previously, in this same Globe Theatre, Shakespeare's lines in honour of Essex, then her Majesty's representative in Ireland, had been delivered as part of the prologue to the last act of King Henry V. The unfortunate earl was executed on February 25. Perhaps to make an outward show of equanimity, Elizabeth spent the evening before his execution in witnessing at Richmond Palace a dramatic performance by the same company of actors who, a few days before, had been employed to prepare the minds of the Londoners for the treasonable outbreak of the doomed favourite. When the queen died, in 1603, it was noticed in print by Henry Chettle, the former editor of Greene's pamphlet, that Shakespeare did not join in the poetical lamentations of the time.

James I. had not been many days in London before he granted a license to the members of Shakespeare's company to enact plays both in town and in the provinces. In December, 1603, while the king was a visitor at Wilton, the seat of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, they received a call to perform before the royal party. The editors of the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays (1623), in the dedication of that volume, addressing William Herbert and his brother Philip, Earl of Montgomery, refer to the great favour which these patrons of art had shown both to the author of the plays and the plays themselves. When his Majesty's long-delayed state entry into London took place, Shakespeare and his fellows appeared in the king's train: "each of them was presented with four yards and a half of scarlet cloth, the usual dress allowance to players

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare's play was already in print, but the earlier quartos—those published in Elizabeth's reign—do not contain the deposition scene, lines 154-318 of act iv. sc. 1. See vol. ii. p. 393.

belonging to the household. The poet and his colleagues were termed the king's servants, and took rank at court amongst the Grooms of the Chamber."<sup>1</sup> We have records (copied for Malone) of the performance by the king's servants at Whitehall of *Othello* (Nov. 1, 1604), of *Measure for Measure* (Dec. 26, 1604), and of *King Lear* (Dec. 26, 1606). The lines in *Measure for Measure* (ii. 4. 24–30) which describe the troubles of a king occasioned by the over-demonstrative loyalty of his admiring subjects, and those in *Macbeth* which tell of the cure of the king's-evil by the royal touch, are supposed to have been meant as compliments to King James.

During the summer and early autumn months the players often itinerated. Thus in the summer of 1597 Shakespeare's company travelled through Sussex and Kent; on Sept. 3rd they acted at Dover, where, as Halliwell-Phillipps has observed, the author of *Lear* might have seen the samphire gatherers on the cliff, which may have served as model for Edgar's imaginary precipice. They turned westward in that year, reached Bristol, and performed at Marlborough and Bath. In the autumn of 1605 they travelled to Barnstaple, and before returning to town acted before the mayor and corporation of Oxford. In that city of spires and colleges Shakespeare probably lodged at John D'Avenant's tavern, and knew the tavern-keeper's handsome wife. Her boy, the future dramatist, Sir William D'Avenant, born in March, 1606, was reputed to be Shakespeare's godson. The gossip which named our poet as father of the boy has no real evidence to lend it support.

The playhouse in which Shakespeare first acted, if not "The Theatre" which belonged to James Burbage, must have been that named "The Curtain," which stood not far off in a division of the parish of Shoreditch known as the Liberty of Halliwell (holy well). Here, on the edge of the great city, the country had actually begun; we read of a prentice in the year 1584 sleeping on the grass "very nere the Theatre or Curten." In 1598 The Theatre had ceased to be suitable for the requirements of the time, and in the winter of that year (Dec.–Jan. 1598–99) the timber of which it was built was removed to Southwark with a view to its forming part of a new and better structure. This building, known as The Globe, from its sign of Hercules or Atlas carrying his load, stood not far from London Bridge, a little westward, and close to the river on the Southwark side. Upon a circular substructure rose two wooden stories, which included the galleries and boxes. These, and the stage, were roofed with thatch; the pit or yard was open to the weather. In the profits of this theatre Shakespeare was a sharer. Blackfriars Theatre, with which also Shakespeare's name is associated, was converted into a building for dramatic performances from a large house purchased by the elder Burbage in 1596. The inhabitants of Blackfriars petitioned the privy-council without success against the establishment of the theatre, setting forth in their memorial the various dangers and annoyances to which they would

<sup>1</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps: *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*, vol. i. p. 212.

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be subjected by its presence in the neighbourhood. For a time it was leased by the Burbages to one Evans for the performances of the boy-actors, Her Majesty's Children of the Chapel. When they quitted it Shakespeare's company took their place, and in the later days of his dramatic career the great poet himself may have appeared on the boards of Blackfriars. Dryden informs us that *The Tempest* was represented at this theatre and was well received.

The theatrical company which produced a play in Elizabethan days had no wish to see the work in print, its publication necessarily detracting from the novelty of the piece. But from the year 1597 onwards several of Shakespeare's dramas were placed in the hands of the booksellers, and were printed, each singly, in quarto form. The first to appear was *King Richard II.* (1597), from which the deposition scene was omitted. It was speedily followed by *King Richard III.* A pirated copy of *Romeo and Juliet*, made up from fragments of manuscript, eked out by notes taken during the performance, and by recollected lines and speeches, appeared in the same year (1597). In 1598 *King Henry IV.* and the revised version of *Love's Labour's Lost* were published. Hardly a year, indeed, passed from this date until that of Shakespeare's death without the appearance in quarto of some new tragedy, history, or comedy, or the republication of one which had already issued from the press. The popularity of Shakespeare's two chief non-dramatic poems was of remarkable continuance, as is attested by the number of successive editions. Occasionally plays or poems by other writers were foisted on the public by unscrupulous publishers with the attractive name or initials of William Shakespeare on the title-page. A list of his works, most valuable from the light it throws on their chronology, appears in a "Comparative Discourse of our English Poets with the Greeke, Latine, and Italian Poets," which is printed near the end of a little volume named *Palladis Tamia* by Francis Meres, a Master of Arts of both universities. The chapter was written in the summer of 1598, and it bears remarkable testimony to the high rank held by Shakespeare both as a narrative and a dramatic poet. "As the soule of Euphorbus," says Meres, "was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweete wittie soule of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare; witnes his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends, &c.—As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latines, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witnes his Gentlemen of Verona, his Errors, his Love labors lost, his Love labours wonne, his Midsummers night dreame, and his Merchant of Venice; for tragedy, his Richard the 2, Richard the 3, Henry the 4, King John, Titus Andronicus and his Romeo and Juliet.—As Epius Stolo said that the Muses would speake with Plautus tongue, if they would speake Latin; so I say that the Muses would speake with Shakespeares fine filed phrase, if they would speake English." The *Love's Labour's Won* which Meres names may be a lost play of Shakespeare,