

**THE TRAGEDIE OF HAMLET,  
PRINCE OF DENMARKE:  
A STUDY WITH THE TEXT  
OF THE FOLIO OF 1623**

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The Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke: A Study with the Text of the Folio of 1623 by  
William Shakespeare & George MacDonald

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**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & GEORGE MACDONALD**

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HAMLET, PRINCE *of* DENMARKE

*A STUDY WITH THE TEXT*

OF

THE FOLIO OF 1623

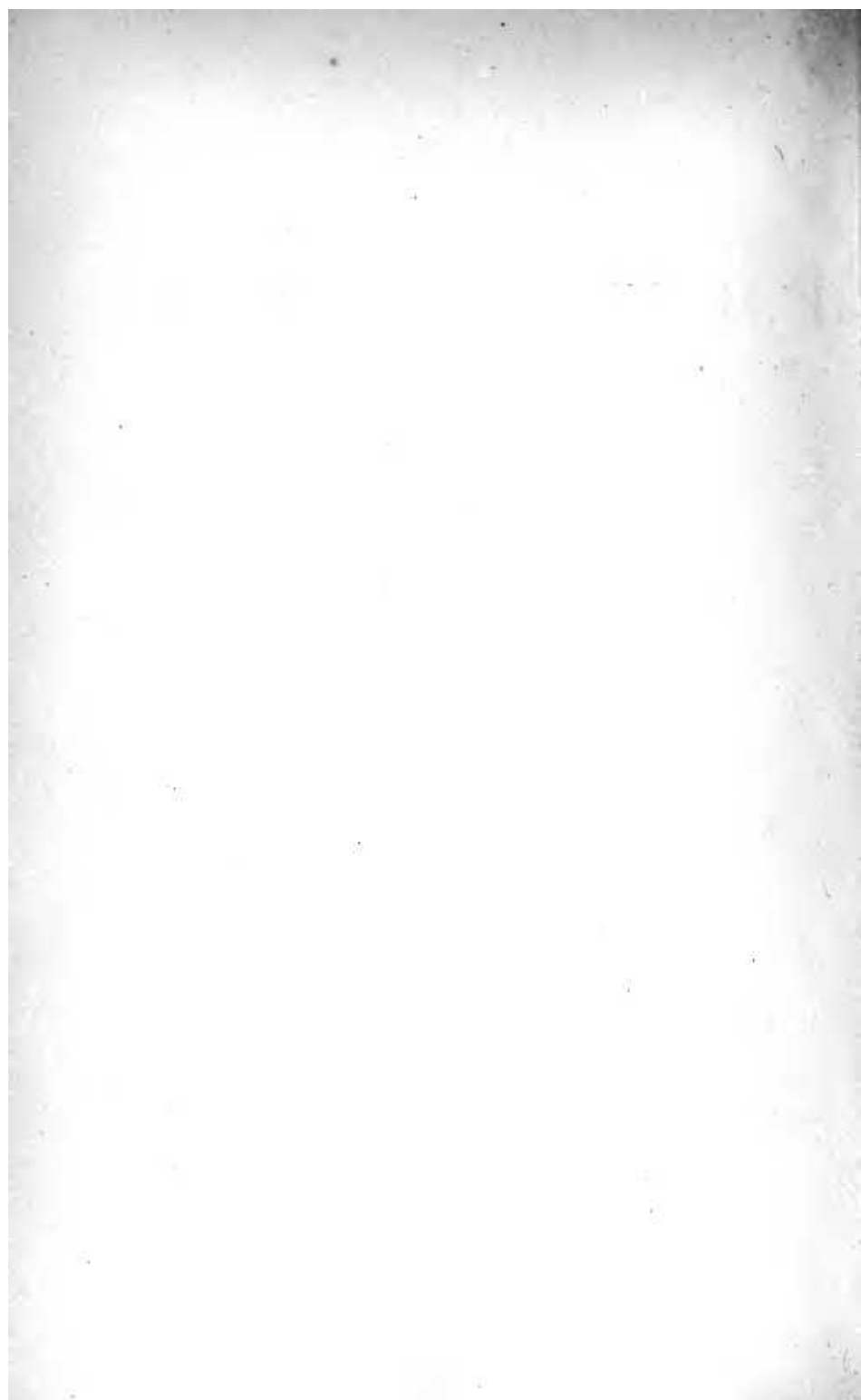
BY

GEORGE MAC DONALD

*What would you gracious figure?*

LONDON  
LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.  
1885

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TO  
MY HONOURED RELATIVE  
ALEXANDER STEWART MACCOLL

A LITTLE *LESS* THAN KIN, AND *MORE* THAN KIND

TO WHOM I OWE IN ESPECIAL THE TRUE UNDERSTANDING OF  
THE GREAT SOLILOQUY

I DEDICATE

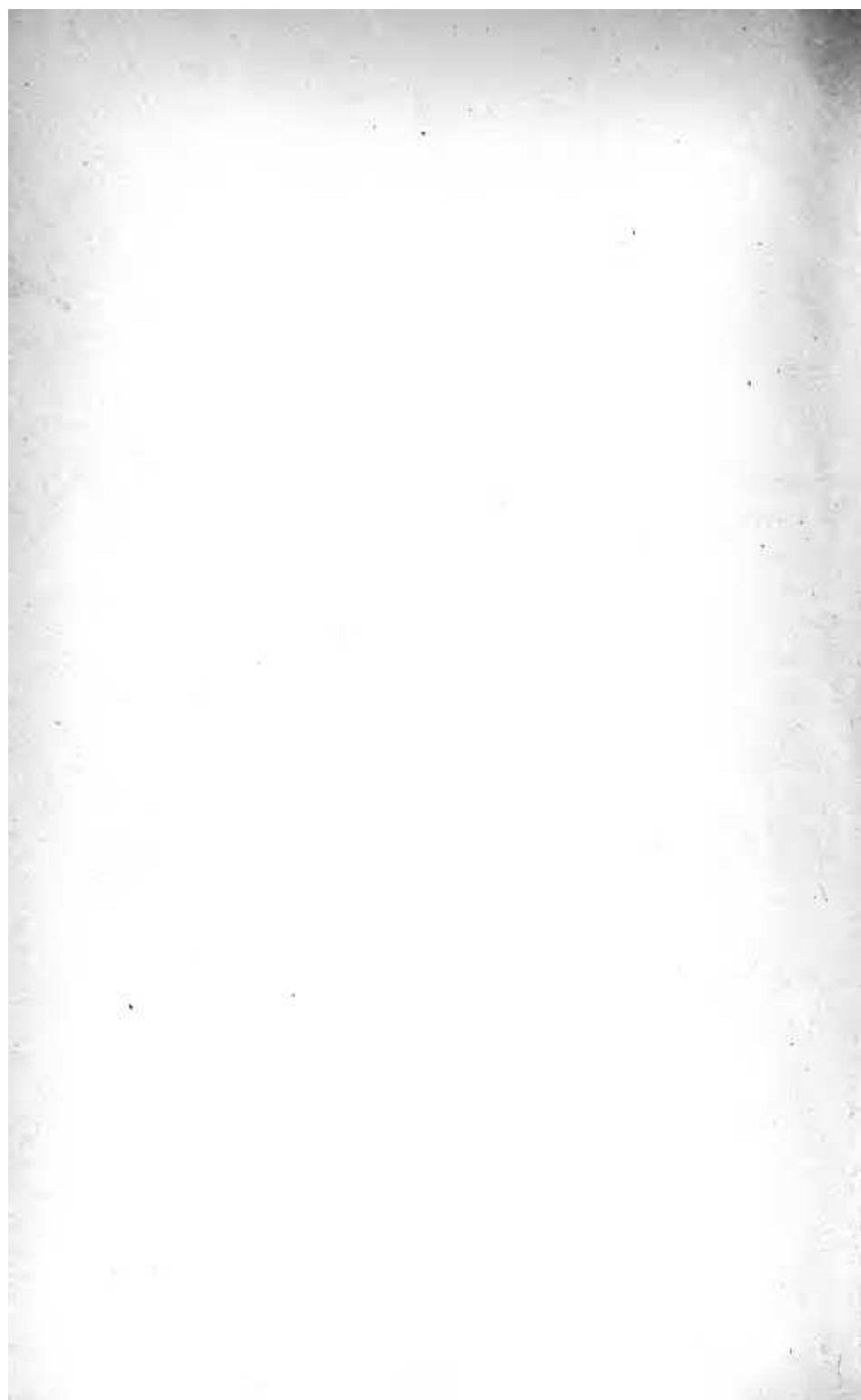
WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE

THIS EFFORT TO GIVE HAMLET AND SHAKSPERE THEIR DUE

*GEORGE MAC DONALD*

BORDIGNERA

*Christmas, 1884*





## PREFACE

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BY this edition of *HAMLET* I hope to help the student of Shakspeare to understand the play—and first of all Hamlet himself, whose spiritual and moral nature are the real material of the tragedy, to which every other interest of the play is subservient. But while mainly attempting, from the words and behaviour Shakspeare has given him, to explain the man, I have cast what light I could upon everything in the play, including the perplexities arising from extreme condensation of meaning, figure, and expression.

As it is more than desirable that the student should know when he is reading the most approximate presentation accessible of what Shakspeare uttered, and when that which modern editors have, with reason good or bad, often not without presumption, substituted for that which they received, I have given the text, letter for letter, point for point, of the First Folio, with the variations of the Second Quarto in the margin and at the foot of the page.

Of *HAMLET* there are but two editions of authority, those called the Second Quarto and the First Folio; but there is another which requires remark.

In the year 1603 came out the edition known as the First Quarto—clearly without the poet's permission, and doubtless as much to his displeasure: the following year he

sent out an edition very different, and larger in the proportion of one hundred pages to sixty-four. Concerning the former my theory is—though it is not my business to enter into the question here—that it was printed from Shakspeare's sketch for the play, written with matter crowding upon him too fast for expansion or development, and intended only for a continuous memorandum of things he would take up and work out afterwards. It seems almost at times as if he but marked certain bales of thought so as to find them again, and for the present threw them aside—knowing that by the marks he could recall the thoughts they stood for, but not intending thereby to convey them to any reader. I cannot, with evidence before me, incredible but through the eyes themselves, of the illimitable scope of printers' blundering, believe *all* the confusion, unintelligibility, neglect of grammar, construction, continuity, sense, attributable to them. In parts it is more like a series of notes printed with the interlineations horribly jumbled; while in other parts it looks as if it had been taken down from the stage by an ear without a brain, and then yet more incorrectly printed; parts, nevertheless, in which it most differs from the authorized editions, are yet indubitably from the hand of Shakspeare. I greatly doubt if any ready-writer would have dared publish some of its chaotic passages as taken down from the stage; nor do I believe the play was ever presented in anything like such an unfinished state. I rather think some fellow about the theatre, whether more rogue or fool we will pay him the thankful tribute not to enquire, chancing upon the crude embryonic mass in the poet's hand, traitorously pounced upon it, and betrayed it to the printers—therein serving the poet such an evil turn as if a sculptor's workman took a mould of the clay figure on which his master had been but a few days employed,

and published casts of it as the sculptor's work.<sup>1</sup> To us not the less is the *corpus delicti* precious—and that unspeakably—for it enables us to see something of the creational development of the drama, besides serving occasionally to cast light upon portions of it, yielding hints of the original intention where the after work has less plainly presented it.

The Second Quarto bears on its title-page, compelled to a recognition of the former,—‘Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie’; and it is in truth a harmonious world of which the former issue was but the chaos. It is the drama itself, the concluded work of the master's hand, though yet to be once more subjected to a little pruning, a little touching, a little rectifying. But the author would seem to have been as trusting over the work of the printers, as they were careless of his, and the result is sometimes pitiable. The blunders are appalling. Both in it and in the Folio the marginal note again and again suggests itself: ‘Here the compositor was drunk, the press-reader asleep, the devil only aware.’ But though the blunders elbow one another in tumultuous fashion, not therefore all words and phrases supposed to be such are blunders. The old superstition of plenary inspiration may, by its reverence for the very word, have saved many a meaning from the obliteration of a misunderstanding scribe: in all critical work it seems to me well to cling to the *word* until one sinks not merely baffled, but exhausted.

I come now to the relation between the Second Quarto and the Folio.

My theory is—that Shakspeare worked upon his own

<sup>1</sup> Shakspeare has in this matter fared even worse than Sir Thomas Browne, the first edition of whose *Religio Medici*, nowise intended for the public, was printed without his knowledge.