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OF KING HENRY THE FIFTH**

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & WILLIAM ALDIS WRIGHT

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HENRY THE FIFTH

W. A. WRIGHT

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SHAKESPEARE, *Wm.*

SELECT PLAYS ✓

THE LIFE OF

KING HENRY THE FIFTH

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PREFACE.

IN fulfilment of the promise made to his audience at the end of the Second Part of Henry the Fourth that 'the story with Sir John in it' should be continued, Shakespeare wrote the present play, which is called in the first folio 'The Life of Henry the Fifth.' The date of its composition may be fixed with certainty. It is not included in the list of plays attributed to Shakespeare by Meres in his *Palladis Tamia*, which was published in 1598; and the reference in the Prologue to Act V to Essex's expedition to Ireland shews that it must have been acted between March 27 and September 28, 1599. In all probability it was first represented in the summer of that year at the recently built Globe Theatre on Bankside. In the entries at Stationers' Hall we find on August [1600] 'Henry the Fifth / a booke,' with *As You Like It*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*, was for some reason or other 'to be staied.' But on 14 August, among the copies entered to Thomas Pavyer is 'The historye of Henry the Vth with the battell of Agencourt.' This is evidently the quarto of 1600, the title of which is: 'The Cronicle History of Henry the fifth, With his battell fought at *Agin Court* in France. Together with *Auntient Pistoll*. As it hath bene sundry times playd by the Right honorable the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants.'

The life of Henry had formed the subject of an earlier play, which had been performed before 1588, in which year Tarlton who acted in it died, and was entered at Stationers' Hall on the 14th of May 1594 to Thomas Creede. The

entry is as follows : 'Entred for his copie vnder thand of master Cawood warden / a booke intituled /. The famous victories of Henrye the Ffyft / conteyninge the honorable battell of Agincourt /.' It was printed in 1598 and again in 1617. As this play has nothing in common with Shakespeare's but the subject, it is for the present of no further interest to us.

For the historical facts Shakespeare consulted no other authority than the second edition of Holinshed's Chronicles, which was completed in 1587. The extracts which are here given, together with the quotations from the same work in the notes at the end of the play, will make this abundantly clear. It would be beside the purpose of this Preface to discuss the accuracy of Holinshed's narrative. Shakespeare took the facts as he found them and used them with a view to dramatic effect. That he had any political object in writing the play I find it hard to believe. But as this has been maintained by others whose opinion is entitled to respect, their views will be given subsequently. We will first deal with that about which there is no dispute, the narrative of Holinshed.

Act I, Scene 1. 'In the second yeare of his reigne, King Henrie called his high court of parlement, the last daie of Aprill in the towne of Leicester, in which parlement manie profitable lawes were concluded, and manie petitions moued, were for that time deferred. Amongst which, one was, that a bill exhibited in the parlement holden at Westminster in the eleuenth yeare of king Henrie the fourth (which by reason the king was then troubled with ciuill discord, came to none effect) might now with good deliberation be pondered, and brought to some good conclusion. The effect of which supplication was, that the temporall lands deuoutlie giuen, and disordinatlie spent by religious, and other spirituall persons, should be seized into the kings hands, sith the same might suffice to mainteine, to the honor of the king, and defense of the realme, fifteene earles, fifteene hundred knights, six

thousand and two hundred esquiers, and a hundred almshouses, for reliefe onelie of the poore, impotent, and needie persons, and the king to haue cleerelie to his coffers twentie thousand pounds, with manie other prouisions and values of religious houses, which I passe ouer.

'This bill was much noted, and more feared among the religious sort, whom suerlie it touched verie neere, and therefore to find remedie against it, they determined to assaie all waies to put by and ouerthrow this bill: wherein they thought best to trie if they might mooue the kings mood with some sharpe inuention, that he should not regard the importunate petitions of the commons.

Scene 2. 'Wherevpon, on a daie in the parlement, Henrie Chichelie archbishop of Canturburie made a pithie oration, wherein he declared, how not onelie the duchies of Normandie and Aquitaine, with the counties of Aniou and Maine, and the countrie of Gascoigne, were by vndoubted title appertaining to the king, as to the lawfull and onelie heire of the same; but also the whole realme of France, as heire to his great grandfather king Edward the third.

'Herein did he much inueie against the surmised and false fained law Salike, which the Frenchmen alledge euer against the kings of England in barre of their iust title to the crowne of France. The verie words of that supposed law are these, *In terram Salicam mulieres ne succedant*, that is to saie, Into the Salike land let not women succeed. Which the French glossers expound to be the realme of France, and that this law was made by king Pharamond; whereas yet their owne authors affirme, that the land Salike is in Germanie, betweene the riuers of Elbe and Sala; and that when Charles the great had ouercome the Saxons, he placed there certeine Frenchmen, which hauing in disdeine the dishonest maners of the Germane women, made a law, that the females should not succeed to any inheritance within that land, which at this daie is called Meisen, so that if this be true, this law was not made for the realme of

France, nor the Frenchmen possessed the land Salike, till foure hundred and one and twentie yeares after the death of Pharamond, the supposed maker of this Salike law, for this Pharamond deceased in the yeare 426, and Charles the great subdued the Saxons, and placed the Frenchmen in those parts beyond the riuer of Sala, in the yeare 805.

'Moreouer, it appeareth by their owne writers, that king Pepine, which deposed Childerike, claimed the crowne of France, as heire generall, for that he was descended of Blithild daughter to king Clothair the first: Hugh Capet also, who vsurped the crowne vpon Charles duke of Loraine, the sole heire male of the line and stocke of Charles the great, to make his title seeme true, and appeare good, though in deed it was starke naught, conueied himselfe as heire to the ladie Lingard, daughter to king Charlemaine, sonne to Lewes the emperour, that was son to Charles the great. King Lewes also the tenth otherwise called saint Lewes, being verie heire to the said vsurper Hugh Capet, could neuer be satisfied in his conscience how he might iustlie keepe and possesse the crowne of France, till he was persuaded and fullie instructed, that queene Isabell his grandmother was lineallie descended of the ladie Ermengard daughter and heire to the aboue named Charles duke of Loraine, by the which marriage, the bloud and line of Charles the great was againe vnited and restored to the crowne & scepter of France, so that more cleere than the sunne it openlie appeareth, that the title of king Pepin, the claime of Hugh Capet, the possession of Lewes, yea and the French kings to this daie, are deriued and conueied from the heire female, though they would vnder the colour of such a fained law, barre the kings and princes of this realme of England of their right and lawfull inheritance.

'The archbishop further alledged out of the booke of Numbers this saing: When a man dieth without a sonne, let the inheritance descend to his daughter. At length, hauing said sufficientlie for the prooffe of the kings iust and

lawfull title to the crowne of France, he exhorted him to aduance foorth his banner to fight for his right, to conquer his inheritance, to spare neither blood, sword, nor fire, sith his warre was iust, his cause good, and his claime true. And to the intent his louing chapleins and obedient subiects of the spirituallie might shew themselues willing and desirous to aid his maiestie, for the recouerie of his ancient right and true inheritance, the archbishop declared that in their spirituall conuocation, they had granted to his highnesse such a summe of monie, as neuer by no spirituall persons was to any prince before those daies giuen or advanced.

‘When the archbishop had ended his prepared tale, Rafe Neuill earle of Westmerland, and as then lord Warden of the marches against Scotland, vnderstanding that the king vpon a couragious desire to recouer his right in France, would suerlie take the wars in hand, thought good to moue the king to begin first with Scotland, and therevpon declared how easie it should be to make a conquest there, and how greatlie the same should further his wished purpose for the subduing of the Frenchmen, concluding the summe of his tale with this old saieng: that *Who so will France win, must with Scotland first begin.* Manie matters he touched, as well to shew how necessarie the conquest of Scotland should be, as also to prooue how iust a cause the king had to attempt it, trusting to persuade the king and all other to be of his opinion.

‘But after he had made an end, the duke of Excester, vnclē to the king, a man well learned and wise, who had beene sent into Italie by his father, intending that he should haue been a preest, replied against the erle of Westmerlands oration, affirming rather that he which would Scotland win, he with France must first begin. For if the king might once compasse the conquest of France, Scotland could not long resist; so that conquere France, and Scotland would soone obeie. For where should the Scots lerne