

**KING HENRY THE EIGHTH; WITH
INTRODUCTION, AND NOTES
EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL.
FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND
FAMILIES**

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King Henry the Eighth; With Introduction, and Notes Explanatory and Critical. For Use in Schools and Families by William Shakespeare & Henry N. Hudson

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & HENRY N. HUDSON

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SHAKESPEARE'S
KING HENRY THE EIGHTH

WITH

INTRODUCTION, AND NOTES EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES.

BY THE

REV. HENRY N. HUDSON, LL.D.



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INTRODUCTION.

History of the Play.

KING HENRY THE EIGHTH was undoubtedly among the latest of the Poet's writing: Mr. Grant White thinks it was the very last; nor am I aware of any thing that can be soundly alleged against that opinion. The play was never printed till in the folio of 1623. It is first heard of in connection with the burning of the Globe theatre, on the 29th of June, 1613: at least I am fully satisfied that this is the piece which was on the stage at that time. Howes the chronicler, recording the event some time after it occurred, speaks of "the house being filled with people to behold the play of *Henry the Eighth*." And we have a letter from Thomas Lorkin to Sir Thomas Puckering, dated "London, this last of June," with the following: "No longer since than yesterday, while Burbage's company were acting at the Globe the play of *Henry the Eighth*, and there shooting off certain chambers in way of triumph, the fire caught, and fastened upon the thatch of the house, and there burned so furiously, as it consumed the whole house." But the most particular account is in a letter from Sir Henry Wotton to his nephew, dated July 2, 1613: "Now, to let matters of State sleep, I will entertain you at the present with what happened this week at the Bankside. The King's Players had a new play called *All is True*, representing some principal pieces in the reign of Henry the Eighth, which was set forth wi'

many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty. Now King Henry making a masque at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the paper or other stuff wherewith one of them was stopped did light on the thatch, where, being thought at first but an idle smoke, and their eyes being more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole house to the very ground. This was the fatal period of that virtuous fabric; wherein yet nothing did perish but wood and straw, and a few forsaken cloaks."

Some of the circumstances here specified clearly point to the play which has come down to us as Shakespeare's. Sir Henry, to be sure, speaks of the piece by the title "*All is True*"; but the other two authorities describe it as "the play of *Henry the Eighth*." And it is worth noting that Lorkin, in stating the cause of the fire, uses the very word, *chambers*, which is used in the original stage-direction of the play. So that the discrepancies in regard to the name infer no more than that the play then had a double title, as many other plays also had. And the name used by Sir Henry is unequivocally referred to in the Prologue, the whole argument of which turns upon the quality of the piece as being *true*. Then too the whole play, as regards the kind of interest sought to be awakened, is strictly correspondent with what the Prologue claims in that behalf: a scrupulous fidelity to Fact is manifestly the law of the piece; as if the author had here undertaken to set forth a drama made up emphatically of "chosen truth," insomuch that it might justly bear the significant title *All is True*.

The piece in performance at the burning of the Globe theatre is described by Wotton as *a new play*; and it will

hardly be questioned that he knew well what he was saying. The internal evidence of the piece itself all draws to the same conclusion as to the time of writing. In that part of Cranmer's prophecy which refers to King James, we have these lines :

Wherever the bright Sun of heaven shall shine,
The honour and the greatness of his name
Shall be, and make new nations : he shall flourish,
And, like a mountain cedar, reach his branches
To all the plains about him.

On a portrait of King James once owned by Lord Bacon, the King is styled *Imperii Atlantici Conditor*. And all agree that the first allusion in the lines just quoted is to the founding of the colony in Virginia, the charter of which was renewed in 1612, the chief settlement named Jamestown, and a lottery opened in aid of the colonists. The last part of the quotation probably refers to the marriage of the King's daughter Elizabeth with the Elector Palatine, which took place in February, 1613. The marriage was a theme of intense joy and high anticipations to the English people, as it seemed to knit them up with the Protestant interest of Germany ; anticipations destined indeed to a sad reverse in the calamities that fell upon the Elector's House. Concurrent with these notes of seeming allusion to passing events, are the style, language, and versification ; in which respects it is hardly distinguishable from *Coriolanus* and the other plays known to have been of the Poet's latest period.

All which considered, I am quite at a loss why so many editors and critics should have questioned whether Shakespeare's drama were the one in performance at the burning of the Globe theatre. They have done this partly under the assumption that Shakespeare's play could not have been ~~new~~

at that time. But I cannot find such assumption at all sustained by any arguments they have produced. It is true, a piece described as "The Interlude of King Henry the Eighth" was entered at the Stationers' in February, 1605. There is, however, no good reason for ascribing this piece to Shakespeare: on the contrary, there is ample reason for supposing it to have been a play by Samuel Rowley, entitled "When you see me you know me, or the famous chronicle history of King Henry the Eighth," and published in 1605.

Some, again, urge that Shakespeare's play must have been written before the death of Elizabeth, which was in March, 1603. This is done on the ground that the Poet would not have been likely to glorify her reign so largely after her death. And because it is still less likely that during her life he would have glorified so highly the reign of her successor, therefore resort is had to the theory, that in 1613 the play was revived under a new title, which led Wotton to think it a new play, and that the Prologue was then written, and the passage referring to James interpolated. But all this is sheer conjecture, and is directly refuted by the Prologue itself, which clearly supposes the forthcoming play to be then in performance for the first time, and the nature and plan of it to be wholly unknown to the audience: to tell the people they were not about to hear

A noise of targets, or to see a fellow
In a long molley coat guarded with yellow,

had been flat impertinence in case of a play that had been on the stage several years before. As to the passage touching James, I can perceive no such signs as have been alleged of its being an after-insertion: the awkwardness of connection,

which has been affirmed as betraying a second hand or a second time, is altogether imaginary: the lines knit in as smoothly and as logically with the context, before and after, as any other lines in the speech.

Nor can I discover any indications of the play's having been written with any special thought of pleasing Elizabeth. The design, so far as she is concerned, seems much rather to have been to please the people, by whom she was all-beloved during her life, and, if possible, still more so when, after the lapse of a few years, her prudence, her courage, and her magnanimity save where her female jealousies were touched, had been set off by the blunders and infirmities of her successor. For it is well known that the popular feeling ran back so strongly to her government, that James had no way but to fall in with the current, notwithstanding the strong causes which he had, both public and personal, to execrate her memory. The play has an evident making in with this feeling, unsolicitous, generally, of what would have been likely to make in, and sometimes boldly adventurous of what would have been sure to make out, with the object of it. Such an appreciative delineation of the meek and honourable sorrows of Catharine, so nobly proud, yet in that pride so gentle and true-hearted; her dignified submission, wherein her rights as a woman and a wife are firmly and sweetly asserted, yet the sharpest eye cannot detect the least swerving from duty; her brave and eloquent sympathy with the plundered people, pleading their cause in the face of royal and reverend rapacity, this too with an energetic simplicity which even the witchcraft of Wolsey's tongue cannot sophisticate; and all this set in open contrast with the worldly-minded levity, and the equivocal or at least qualified virtue, of her rival, and with the headstrong, high-handed,