

HENRY VIII

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Henry VIII by William Shakespeare

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

HENRY VIII



HENRY VIII AND ANNE BOLEYN

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Famous History of the
Life of King Henry VIII.

Preface.

The First Edition. *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth* was printed for the first time in the First Folio. There was no Quarto edition of the play.

The text of the play is singularly free from corruptions; the Acts and Scenes are indicated throughout;* the stage directions are full and explicit.† Rowe first supplied, imperfectly, the Dramatis Personæ.

Date of Composition. *Henry the Eighth* was undoubtedly acted as 'a new play' on June 29th, 1613, and resulted in the destruction by fire of the Globe Theatre on that day. The evidence on this point seems absolutely conclusive:—

(i.) Thomas Lorkin, in a letter dated "this last of June," 1613, referring to the catastrophe of the previous day, says: "No longer since than yesterday, while Bour-

* Except in the case of Act V, Sc. iii., where no change of scene is marked in the folio. "Exeunt" is not added at the end of the previous scene, but it is quite clear that the audience was to imagine a change of scene from the outside to the inside of the Council-chamber. The stage-direction runs:—'A Council Table brought in with Chayres and Stooles, and placed under the state,' etc.

† The lengthy stage-direction at the beginning of Act V, Sc. v. was taken straight from Holinshed; similarly, the order of the Coronation in Act. IV, Sc. i.

bage his companie were acting at the Globe the play of *Henry VIII.*, and their shooting of certayne chambers in the way of triumph, the fire catch'd," etc.

(ii.) Sir Henry Wotton, writing to his nephew on July 2nd, 1613, tells how the Globe was burnt down during the performance "of a new play, called *All is True*,"*

* Cf. Prologue to *Henry VIII.*, ll. 9, 18, 21:—

'May here find truth.'

'To rank our chosen truth with such a show.'

'To make that only true we now intend.'

The second name of the play may very well have been a counterblast to the title of Rowley's Chronicle History of *Henry 8th*, "*When you see me, you know me*" and perhaps also of Heywood's plays on Queen Elizabeth, "*If you know not me, you know no body*." It is possible that both Prologue and Epilogue of *Henry VIII.* refer to Rowley's play, 'the merry bawdy play,' with its 'fool and fight,' and its 'abuse of the city.'

'*When you see Me*,' was certainly 'the Enterlude of K. Henry VIII.' entered in the Stationers' Books under the date of February 12, 1604 (-5), which has sometimes been identified with Shakespeare's play.

It is noteworthy that the play, first published in 1605, was re-issued in 1613. The same is true of the First Part of Heywood's play. This play of Heywood's called forth the well-known prologue, wherein the author protested

"That some by stenography drew

The plot: put it in print: scarce one word trew."

Similarly, the *Chronicle History of Thomas Lord Cromwell*, originally printed in 1602, was re-issued in 1613 with the mendacious or equivocal statement on the title-page, "*written by W. S.*"

We know from Henslowe's Diary that there were at least two plays on Wolsey which held the stage in 1601, 1602, "*The Rising of Cardinal Wolsey*," by Munday, Drayton & Chettle, and '*Cardinal Wolsey*,' by Chettle.

An edition of Rowley's play, by Karl Elze, with Introduction and Notes, was published in 1874 (Williams & Norgate).

representing some principal pieces of the reign of *Henry the 8th.* . . . 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, and other stuff, wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch," etc.

(iii.) John Chamberlain, in a letter to Sir Ralph Winwood (*vide* Winwood's *Memorials*), dated July 12th, 1613, alludes to the burning of the theatre, 'which fell out by a peale of chambers (that I know not upon what occasion were to be used in the play).'

(iv.) Howes, in his continuation of Stowe's *Chronicle* (1615) says that the fire took place when the house was 'filled with people, to behold the play, viz., of *Henry the 8.*'

(v.) Ben Jonson, in his *Execration upon Vulcan*, refers to 'that cruel stratagem against the Globe.'

'The fort of the whole parish,

I saw with two poor chambers taken in,

And razed; ere thought could urge this might have been!' †

Internal evidence seems to corroborate this external

**Vide* Act I. Sc. iv. 44-51, with stage direction:—'*Chambers discharged.*'

† There were also several 'lamentable ballads' on the event; one of them, if genuine, is of special interest, as it has for the burden at the end of each stanza:—

"O sorrow, pitiful sorrow!
And yet it all is true!"

The fifth stanza is significant:—

"Away ran Lady Catherine,
Nor waited out her trial."

(*Vide* Collier, *Annals of the Stage*.) The authenticity of the ballad is most doubtful.

Halliwell doubted the identity of *All is True* and Shakespeare's play, because he found a reference in a ballad to the fact that 'the reprobates . . . prayed for the Foole and Henrye Con-dye,' and there is no fool in the play, but the ballad does not imply that there was a fool's part.

evidence, and to point to *circa* 1612 as the date of *Henry VIII*. The panegyric on James I., with its probable reference (V. v. 51-3) to the first settlement of Virginia in 1607, and to subsequent settlements contemplated in 1612* (or to the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth to the Elector Palatine, which took place on 14th February, 1613), fixes the late date for the play in its present form.

Some scholars have, however, held that it was originally composed either (i.) towards the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign, or (ii.) at the beginning of the reign of her successor. Elze attempted, without success, to maintain the former supposition by eliminating (as later additions) not only the references to King James, but also the scene between Katharine and the Cardinals, and most of Katharine's death-scene, so as to make the play a sort of apology for Henry, a glorification of Anne Boleyn, and an apotheosis of Elizabeth.† Hunter held the latter view, discovering *inter alia* that the last scene was 'to exhibit the respect which rested on the memory of Elizabeth, and the hopeful anticipations which were entertained on the accession of King James.'‡

At all events, no critic has attempted to regard the great trial-scene as a later interpolation, and this scene may therefore be taken to be an integral part of Shakespeare's work; it is a companion picture to the trial in *The Winter's Tale*; Hermione and Katharine are twin-sisters, "queens of earthly queens" §; and indeed the general

* A state lottery was set up expressly for the establishment of English Colonies in Virginia in 1612.

† *Vide Essays on Shakespeare by Professor Karl Elze* (translated by L. Dora Schmitz); *cp. German Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 1874. Collier held a similar theory, which numbers many advocates among the old Shakespearians—e.g. Theobald, Johnson, Steevens, Malone, etc.

‡ *New Illustrations to Shakespeare*, II. 101.

§ *v.* Mrs. Jameson's comparative study of the two characters, and her enthusiastic appreciation of Katharine as "the triumph of Shakespeare's genius and his wisdom."

characteristics, metrical and otherwise, of this and other typically Shakespearian scenes, give a well-grounded impression that the two plays belong to the same late period, and that we probably have in *Henry VIII.* 'the last heir' of the poet's invention. "The opening of the play," wrote James Spedding, recording the effect produced by a careful reading of the whole, "seemed to have the full stamp of Shakespeare, in his latest manner; the same close-packed expression; the same life, and reality, and freshness; the same rapid and abrupt turnings of thought, so quick that language can hardly follow fast enough; the same impatient activity of intellect and fancy, which having once disclosed an idea cannot wait to work it orderly out; the same daring confidence in the resources of language, which plunges headlong into a sentence without knowing how it is to come forth; the same careless metre which disdains to produce its harmonious effects by the ordinary devices, yet is evidently subject to a master of harmony; the same entire freedom from book-language and commonplace; all the qualities, in short, which distinguish the magical hand which has never yet been successfully imitated."* But the magical touch is not found throughout the play.

Authorship of the Play. As early as 1758, in Edward's *Canons of Criticism* (sixth edition), Roderick called attention to the following peculiarities in the versification of *Henry VIII.*:—(i.) the frequent occurrence of a redundant syllable at the end of the line; (ii.) the remarkable character of the cæsure, or pauses of the verse; (iii.) the clashing of the emphasis with the cadence of the metre. The subject received no serious attention for well-nigh a century, until in 1850 Mr. Spedding published his striking study of the play, wherein he elaborated a suggestion casually thrown out 'by a man of first-rate judgment on such a point' (viz., the late Lord Tennyson),

*"Who wrote Shakespeare's *Henry VIII.*?" (*Gentleman's Magazine*, 1850); "New Shakespeare Society's Papers," 1874.