

**SHAKSPEARE'S  
COMEDY OF AS  
YOU LIKE IT**

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Shakespeare's Comedy of as You like It by William Shakespeare & John Hunter

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**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & JOHN HUNTER**

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS  
ON  
SHAKSPEARE'S 'AS YOU LIKE IT.'

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IN the folio of 1623 is the earliest known copy of this pastoral comedy. It appears to have been composed in 1599 or 1600; for 1598 is the date of the publication of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, from which this play has a quotation; and we find *As you Like it*, *Henry the Fifth*, *Every Man in his Humour*, and *Much Ado about Nothing*, mentioned together in the Stationers' Registers, in an entry belonging to the year 1600. Against this entry, however, is the memorandum—'To be stayed;' but, whatever was the reason of the *stay*, the last three of the plays were soon afterwards published in the usual quarto form; and we may suppose, therefore, that *As you Like it* was issued in the same form about the same time.

It is founded on a novel by Thomas Lodge, the title of which is *Rosalind: Euphues Golden Legacie, Found after his death in his Cell at Silexetra. Fetched from the Canaries by T. L. Gent.* This book appeared in 1590, became very popular, and passed through several editions, that of 1598 being probably the one that prompted Shakspeare to dramatise the novel. The poet has followed very closely the outline of the story, changing in a few instances the names of the characters, as John of Burdeaux for Sir Roland, his three sons, Saladine, Ferdinand, and Rosader, for Oliver, Jaques, and Orlando, respectively, and Alinda for Celia. The melancholy Jaques, Touchstone, and Audrey are the poet's own creations.

The novel possesses little merit as regards either sentiment or diction; it is affected in style, and often tedious in narration. The student may compare the following extract from it with the first part of Shakspeare's opening scene:—

'*Saladine's Meditation with Himself.*—Thy brother is young; keep him now in awe; make him not check-mate with thyself. . . . Let him know little; so shall he not be able to execute much. Suppress his wits with a base estate; and though he be a gentleman by nature, yet form him anew, and make him a peasant by nurture: so shalt thou keep him a slave, and reign thyself sole lord over all thy father's possessions. As for Ferdinand, thy middle brother, he is a scholar, and hath no mind but on Aristotle; let him read on Galen, while thou revellest with gold, and pore on his book, whiles thou purchasest lands: wit is great wealth; if he have learning, it is enough; and so let all rest.'

'In this humour was Saladine making his brother Rosader his foot-boy, for the space of two or three years, keeping him in such servile subjection, as it had been the son of any country vassal. The young gentleman bare all with patience; till on a day walking in the garden by himself, he began to consider, how he was the son of John of Burdeaux, a knight renowned in many victories, and a gentleman famous for his virtues,—how, contrary to the testament of his father, he was not only kept from his land and entreated as a servant, but smothered in such secret slavery, as he might not attain to any honourable actions. Alas! said he to himself (nature working these effectual passions), why should I, that am a gentleman born, pass my time in such unnatural drudgery? . . . Those good parts that God hath bestowed upon me, the envy of my brother doth smother up in obscurity.—As thus he was ruminating, in came Saladine with his men, and seeing his brother in a brown study, and to forget his wonted reverence, thought to shake him out of his dumps.' &c.

It should be observed that Lodge founded his novel on *The Cook's Tale of Gamelyn*, inserted in some editions of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, though probably not Chaucer's composition: h Wright, in his edition of Chaucer, says: 'The tale of Gamelyn belongs to the Robin Hood cycle, and is

curious as a picture of the times. It will be at once recognised as the foundation of Shakspeare's *As you Like it*, though the dramatist appears to have taken it through the intermediance of Lodge's *Euphues Golden Legacie*, which is clearly built on the poem of Gamelyn, even the name of Adam Spencer being retained. In some MSS. Gamelyn's father is called *Johan of Burden*—an additional link with Lodge's novel.'

REMARKS OF VARIOUS AUTHORS  
ON  
SHAKSPEARE'S 'AS YOU LIKE IT.'

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'SELFISHNESS, envy, and ambition have been left behind in the city; of all the human passions, love alone has found an entrance into this wilderness, where it dictates the same language alike to the simple shepherd and the chivalrous youth who hangs his love-ditty to a tree. A prudish shepherdess falls at first sight in love with Rosalind disguised in man's apparel; the latter sharply reproaches her with her severity to her poor lover, and the pain of refusal, which she feels from experience in her own case, disposes her at length to compassion and requital. The fool carries his philosophical contempt of external show, and his raillery of the illusion of love so far, that he purposely seeks out the ugliest and simplest country wench for a mistress. Throughout the whole picture it seems to be the poet's design to show, that to call forth the poetry which has its indwelling in nature and the human mind, nothing is wanted but to throw off all artificial constraint, and restore both to mind and nature their original liberty. In the very progress of the piece, the dreamy carelessness of such an existence is sensibly expressed: it is even alluded to by Shakspeare in the title. Whoever affects to be displeased, if in this romantic forest the ceremonial of dramatic art is not duly observed, ought in justice to be delivered over to the wise fool, to be led gently out of it to some prosaical region.'

—SCHLEGEL.

In several of the historical plays, in *The Merchant of Venice*, and especially in *As you Like it*, the philosophic eye, turned inward on the mysteries of human nature, is more and more characteristic; and we might apply to the last comedy the bold figure that Coleridge has less appropriately employed as to the early poems, that "the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a war-embrace." In no other play, at least, do we find the bright imagination and fascinating grace of Shakspeare's youth so mingled with the thoughtfulness of his maturer age. This play is referred with reasonable probability to the year 1600. Few comedies of Shakspeare are more generally pleasing, and its manifold improbabilities do not much affect us in perusal. The brave injured Orlando, the sprightly but modest Rosalind, the faithful Adam, the reflecting Jaques, the serene and magnanimous Duke, interest us by turns, though the play is not so well managed as to condense our sympathy, and direct it to the conclusion.'—HALLAM.

'Though this play, with the exception of the disguise and self-discovery of Rosalind, may be said to be destitute of plot, it is yet one of the most delightful of the dramas of Shakspeare. . . . Nothing can blend more harmoniously with the romantic glades and magic windings of Arden, than the society which Shakspeare has placed beneath its shades. The effect of such scenery, on the lover of nature, is to take full possession of the soul, to absorb its very faculties, and, through the charmed imagination, to convert the workings of the mind into the sweetest sensations of the heart, into the joy of grief, into a thankful endurance of adversity, into the interchange of the tenderest affections: and find we not here, in the person of the Duke, the noblest philosophy of resignation; in Jaques, the humorous sadness of an amiable misanthropy; in Orlando, the mild dejection of self-accusing humility; in Rosalind and Celia, the purity of sisterly affection; whilst love in all its innocence and gaiety binds in delicious fetters, not only the younger exiles, but the pastoral natives of the forest?'—DRAKE.

