

**THE WORKS OF
SHAKESPEARE: THE
TRAGEDY OF HAMLET**

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The Works of Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Hamlet by William Shakespeare & Edward Dowden

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & EDWARD DOWDEN

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THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET

EDITED BY

EDWARD DOWDEN



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INTRODUCTION

THIS edition of *Hamlet* aims in the first place at giving a trustworthy text.

Secondly, it attempts to exhibit the variations from that text which are found in the primary sources—the Quarto of 1604 and the Folio of 1623—in so far as those variations are of importance towards the ascertainment of the text. Every variation is not recorded, but I have chosen to err on the side of excess rather than on that of defect. Readings from the Quarto of 1603 are occasionally given, and also from the later Quartos and Folios, but to record such readings is not a part of the design of this edition. The letter Q means Quarto 1604; F means Folio 1623.

The dates of the later Quartos are as follows:—Q 3, 1605; Q 4, 1611; Q 5, undated; Q 6, 1637. For my few references to these later Quartos I have trusted the *Cambridge Shakespeare* and Furness's edition of *Hamlet*.

Thirdly, it gives explanatory notes. Here it is inevitable that my task should in the main be that of selection and condensation. But, gleaning after the gleaners, I have perhaps brought together a slender sheaf. Thus, I am not aware that I have been antici-

pated in my explanation of Hamlet's question about Alexander's body, in the Churchyard scene (v. i. 218); of his swearing by St. Patrick (i. v. 136); of the name Lamord (iv. vii. 93). I hope I may have done something towards the solution of the "dram of eale" crux (i. iv. 36-38), and of "stand a comma 'tween their amities" (v. ii. 42). I have noted a curious parallel between Jonson and Shakespeare (ii. ii. 210-214). With the aid of the New English Dictionary I have perhaps removed any doubt as to the meaning of "mortal coil" (iii. i. 67), and given its correct sense (though this is doubtful) to "anchor's cheer" (iii. ii. 231). I have perhaps explained why Polonius classes "fencing" with drinking and drabbing (ii. i. 25). I have made what I suppose to be new—perhaps erroneous—suggestions as to "Take this from this" (ii. ii. 156) and "tender me a fool" (i. iii. 109). If ingenuities are anywhere pardonable, it is in conjecturing the meaning of Hamlet's riddling speeches; it was not his cue ever to talk sheer nonsense; accordingly I have ventured to throw out, doubtfully, suggestions—possibly darkening counsel with words—on "fishmonger" (ii. ii. 174), "mad . . . handsaw" (ii. ii. 401-403), "suit of sables" (iii. ii. 339), "soul of Nero" (iii. ii. 413), "the body is with the king" (iv. ii. 30), "drink up eisel, eat a crocodile" (v. i. 298). I, very doubtfully, suggest a new reading of "select and generous" (i. iii. 74), and a modification of Mr. Tovey's emendation of the "Yaughan" crux (v. i. 67). Occasionally, as in the "Nunnery" scene with Ophelia (iii. i.), I have tried to explain Hamlet's thoughts rather than verbal difficulties. When what is worthless has been sifted away, a little that is a

real addition to our knowledge of Shakespeare may remain.

For the earliest references to the legendary Hamlet the reader should consult Mr. Gollancz's interesting volume *Hamlet in Iceland* (1898). The first in date, he tells us, is found in the second section of Snorri Sturlason's *Prose Edda* (about 1230):—"The Nine Maids of the Island Mill" (daughters of Ægir, the Ocean-god) "in ages past ground Hamlet's meal." The words occur in a quotation of Snorri from Snæbjörn, who was probably an Arctic adventurer of the tenth century. The name Amhlaide is found yet earlier. In the *Annals of Ireland by the Four Masters*, under the year 917 (= 919), in a fragment of song (having reference to the battle of Ath-Cliath between the Northerners and the Irish) attributed to Queen Gormflaith, appear the words: "Niall Glundubh [was slain] by Amhlaide." Mr. Gollancz identifies this Amhlaide with Sitric, a Northerner, who first came to Dublin in 888, and hazards the conjecture that "Gaile," a cognomen applied to Sitric, may mean *mad*, and that Amhlaide may be a synonym of "Gaile." He believes that in the Scandinavian kingdom of Ireland was developed, in the eleventh century, the Northern tale of Hamlet as we know it from Saxo.¹

Probably about the opening of the thirteenth century the Danish writer Saxo Grammaticus told in Latin the

¹ The *Ambales Saga*, which Mr. Gollancz prints, is in its present form "a modern production belonging to the sixteenth, or perhaps early seventeenth century," preserving possibly some elements of the pre-Saxo Hamlet legend. The Icelandic folk-tale of Brjam (first written down from oral tradition in 1705) is "nothing but a levelling down of the story of Hamlet, cleverly blended with another folk-tale of the 'Clever Hans' type" (Gollancz, Introduction, lxiv and lxviii).