

**SHAKESPEARE AND HIS
LOVE; A PLAY IN FOUR
ACTS AND AN EPILOGUE**

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Shakespeare and his love; a play in four acts and an epilogue by Frank Harris

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A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS
AND AN EPILOGUE

BY

FRANK HARRIS

(Author of "The Man Shakespeare,"
"The Women of Shakespeare," etc.).



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INTRODUCTION

THE National Shakespeare Memorial Committee, it is announced, is about to produce a new play by Mr. Bernard Shaw entitled "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets." Fourteen years ago, provoked by the nonsense Mr. Shaw was then writing about Shakespeare in *The Saturday Review*, I wrote some articles on Shakespeare in the same paper, in which I showed in especial that Hamlet was a good portrait of Shakespeare, for the master had unconsciously pictured Hamlet over again as Macbeth and Jaques, Angelo, Orsino, Lear, Posthumus, Prospero and other heroes. With admirable quickness Mr. Bernard Shaw proceeded to annex as much of this theory of mine as he thought important ; in preface after preface to his plays, notably in the preface to

"Man and Superman," he took my discovery and used it as if it were his. For instance, he wrote :—

"He (Shakespeare) must be judged by those characters into which he puts what he knows of himself, his Hamlets and Macbeths and Lears and Prosperos."

And again :—

"All Shakespeare's projections of the deepest humanity he knew have the same defect"—and so forth and so on.

In the preface to "Three Plays for Puritans" Mr. Shaw gave me a casual mention, just sufficient to afford him a fig-leaf, so to speak, of covering if the charge of plagiarism were brought against him: "His (Shakespeare's) genuine critics," he wrote, "from Ben Jonson to Mr. Frank Harris, have always kept as far on this side idolatry as I."

Six or seven years ago I wrote a play called

"Shakespeare and his Love," which was accepted by Mr. Beerbohm Tree. As Mr. Tree did not produce the play at the time agreed upon, I withdrew it. Some time afterwards, on the advice of a friend, I sent it to the Vedrenne-Barker management. They read it; but Mr. Barker, I was told, did not like the part of Shakespeare. I wrote, therefore, asking for the return of the play. Mr. Vedrenne, in reply, told me that he admired the play greatly, and still hoped to induce Mr. Barker to play it. He asked me, therefore, to leave it with him. A little while later I met Mr. Shaw in the street; he told me that he, too, had read my play which I had sent to the Court managers, and added, "you have represented Shakespeare as sadder than he was, I think; but you have shown his genius, which everyone else has omitted to do. . . ."

Last year I published a book entitled *The*

Man Shakespeare, which was in essence an amplification of my articles in *The Saturday Review*. A considerable portion of this book had been in print ten years. The work had a certain success in England and America. This year I have published in *The English Review* a series of articles on *The Women of Shakespeare*, which one of the first of living writers has declared marks an epoch in English criticism.

Now Mr. Shaw has written a play on the subject, which I have been working on for these fifteen years, and from what he has said thereon in *The Observer* it looks as if he had annexed my theory bodily so far as he can understand it, and the characters to boot. After talking about his play and Shakespeare's passion, and using words of mine again and again as if they were his own, he acknowledges his indebtedness to me in this high-minded and generous way :

"The only English writer who has really grasped this part of Shakespeare's story is Frank Harris; but Frank sympathises with Shakespeare. It is like seeing Semele reduced to ashes and sympathising with Jupiter."

This is equivalent to saying that all the other parts of Shakespeare's story have been grasped by someone else, presumably by Mr. Shaw himself, and not by me. It is as if Mr. Cook had said, "the only American who really knows anything about Polar exploration is Captain Peary, though he uses his knowledge quite stupidly." One can imagine that such testimony from such an authority would have been very grateful to Captain Peary.

This precious utterance of Mr. Shaw shows further that in his version of the story he is going to take the side of Mary Fitton against Shakespeare; he will therefore defend or at least explain her various marriages and her