

**THE WORKS OF
SHAKESPEARE; ALL'S
WELL THAT ENDS WELL**

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The Works of Shakespeare; All's Well that Ends Well by William Shakespeare & W. J. Craig & W. Osborne Brigstocke

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & W. J. CRAIG & W. OSBORNE BRIGSTOCKE

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EDITED BY
W. OSBORNE BRIGSTOCKE



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INTRODUCTION

All's Well that Ends Well, first published in the folio of 1623, is certainly one of the worst printed plays in the volume. It teems with obscure and corrupt passages, some of which, in spite of the erudition and ingenuity of generations of Shakespeare scholars, are still unexplained. There is almost unlimited scope for conjecture; consequently, one of the main difficulties is the sifting of endless emendations. I have throughout endeavoured to be as conservative of the original folio text as possible, relying rather on the reading of the first folio than on the versions of the other three, adopting subsequent emendations or conjectures only when supported by what seemed to me conclusive arguments. It seems preferable to leave doubtful readings as they are in the original; for conjectural corrections, unless quite indispensable, are best confined to the footnotes.

With regard to the carelessness of the printing, Hudson says that "it may be worth the while to observe . . . that in respect of plot and action the piece is of a somewhat forbidding, not to say repulsive, nature; and though it abounds in wisdom and is not wanting in poetry, and has withal much choice delineation of character, and contains scenes which stream down with the poet's raciest English, yet it is not among the plays which readers are often drawn

to by mere recollections of delight; . . . the poet may have left the manuscript in a more unfinished and illegible state, from a sense of something ungenial and unattractive in the subject-matter and action of the play."¹ Perhaps: but surely the fact that the play is supposed to have been remodelled after the lapse of several years is hardly in keeping with the idea that Shakespeare saw something ungenial in the subject-matter. On the contrary, all seems to lead us to suppose that Shakespeare liked the subject sufficiently well to revise the greater part of an old comedy he had written years before, and also to treat of the same subject in *Measure for Measure*. Be that as it may, the play certainly does, as Dr. Hudson says, abound in wisdom and contain scenes which stream down with the poet's raciest English.

The data we possess for determining the time of composition are lamentably scant. Of direct, certain evidence there is none; neither external nor internal. *All's Well that Ends Well* is mentioned neither by contemporary theatre-goers nor in the Registers. In the piece itself there is nothing to point conclusively to a definite period—or rather, there are many things which point to different periods. Certainly not much to go upon.

In Meres's *Palladis Tamia* there is the mention of a play called *Love's Labour's Wonne*. Though Halliwell is of the opinion that this play has been lost, most critics agree that, considering the commercial value of Shakespeare's name, it is hardly likely that such a thing can have happened. If we possess the play at all, it is evident that we must have it under a different title. There are three plays which may

¹ Hudson, *Shakespeare: His Life, Art, and Characters*, vol. i. p. 374.

not unreasonably be called tales of "love's labour's won," namely, *The Tempest*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *All's Well that Ends Well*. This is not the place to discuss the several claims of these three plays: the battle has been fought out, and critics are now almost unanimous in declaring that *All's Well that Ends Well* is, in all probability, the play that Meres calls *Love's Labour's Wonne*;—a conclusion first arrived at by Dr. Farmer in his *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* (1767).

This would not only prove that the play must already have been written by the year 1598; it would also lead one to suppose that it was written in connection with *Love's Labour's Lost*—either before or shortly after it, as a sequel—presumably the latter, as *Love's Labour's Lost* is one of the very earliest plays we possess. That being so, 1590 might be taken to be the date of the first composition. *Love's Labour's Lost* was published in 1598, "newly corrected and augmented"; and it is possible that the companion play, though not published, may have undergone a similar correction about that time.

In the play itself we cannot find much to help us. There are one or two passages which lead Stokes to believe that Shakespeare may possibly (and it is just within the bounds of possibility that he may) have made use of the following works:—Tom Drum's Vants (etc.) in *Gentle Craft* (ii. 8), 1598; Mendoza's *Theorique and Practice of Warre* (iv. iii. 160–165), translated by Holy 1597; Nash's novel, *The Unfortunate Traveller, or Life of Jack Wilton*, 1594. Another passage (v. iii. 83–87) seems to Elze to refer to the gift of a ring by Elizabeth to Essex when he departed for Cadiz in 1596. He writes: "The circumstance of the