

**TRAGEDY OF HAMLET. WITH
NOTES, EXTRACTS FROM THE
OLD "HISTORIE OF HAMBLET",
AND SELECTED CRITICISM ON
THE PLAY; PP. 1-155**

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & JOHN HUNTER

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The Tragedy of Hamlet

by

William Shakespeare

with notes, extracts from the Old
"Historie of Hamblet" and selected
criticism on the play by John Hunter

London : Spottiswoode, 1874

EXTRACTS

FROM THE OLD TRANSLATED

'HISTORIE OF HAMBLET.'

CHAPTER I.—You must understand that long time before the kingdom of Denmark received the faith of Jesus Christ, the common people were barbarous and uncivil, and their princes cruel. There was sometimes a good prince or king among them, who, being adorned with the most perfect gifts of nature, would addict himself to virtue, and use courtesy; but although the people had him in admiration, yet the envy of his neighbours was so great, that they never ceased until that virtuous man were despatched out of the world. King Roderick, as then reigning in Denmark, divided the kingdom into divers provinces, placing governors therein who bare the names of dukes, marquises, and earls, giving the government of Jutie (at this present called Ditmarse, lying upon the country of the Cimbrians, in the narrow part of land that showeth like a point or cape of ground upon the sea, which neathward bordereth upon the country of Norway) to two valiant and warlike lords—Horvendile¹ and Fengon.²

Now, the greatest honour that men of noble birth could at that time win and obtain, was exercising the art of piracy upon the seas, assailing their neighbours, &c.; wherein Horvendile obtained the highest place in his time, being the most renowned pirate that in those days scoured the seas and havens of the north parts, whose great fame so moved

¹ Comp. with Hamlet's father.

² Comp. with Claudius.

the heart of Collere,¹ king of Norway, that he was much grieved to hear that Horvendile surmounted him in feats of arms, thereby obscuring the glory by him already obtained upon the seas. This valiant and hardy king, having challenged Horvendile to fight with him body to body, the combat was by him accepted, with conditions that he which should be vanquished should lose all the riches he had in his ship, &c. And, to conclude, Collere, although a valiant prince, was in the end vanquished and slain by Horvendile, who, having then overrun all the coast of Norway and the northern islands, returned home laden with much treasure, sending the most part thereof to his sovereign king Roderick, thereby to procure his good-liking. The king, allured by those presents, and esteeming himself happy to have so valiant a subject, sought by a great favour and courtesy to make him become bounden unto him perpetually, giving him Geruth² his daughter to his wife, of whom he knew Horvendile to be already much enamoured. Of this marriage proceeded Hamblet.

Fengon, fretting in his heart at the great honour won by his brother, and provoked by a foolish jealousy to see him honoured with royal alliance, and fearing thereby to be deposed from his part of the government, or rather desiring to be only governor,³ thereby to obscure the memory of the victories of his brother Horvendile, determined to kill him; which he effected in such sort, that no man once so much as suspected him. Fengon, having secretly assembled certain men, Horvendile his brother being at a banquet with his friends, suddenly set upon him, where he slew him as traitorously, as cunningly he purged himself of so detestable a murder to his subjects; for that, before he committed parricide upon his brother, he had incestuously abused his wife. His sin found excuse among the common people, and of the nobility was esteemed for justice; for that, Geruth being as

¹ Comp. with old *Fortinbras*—'Thereto pricked on by a most emulous pride.' *Act i. sc. 1.*

² Comp. with Gertrude.

³ Both Fengon and Horvendile are afterwards called kings, and Geruth is called queen.

courteous a princess as any, this adulterer and infamous murderer slandered his dead brother that he would have slain his wife, and that he, by chance finding himself upon the point ready to do it, in defence of the lady had slain him; which was the cause that Fengon, boldened and encouraged by such impunity, durst venture to couple himself in marriage with Geruth. The unfortunate and wicked woman, that had received the honour to be the wife of one of the valiantest and wisest princes in the north, imbased herself in such vile sort, as to falsify her faith unto him, and, what is worse, to marry him that had been the tyrannous murderer of her lawful husband, which made divers men think that she had been the causer of the murder.¹

CHAPTER II.—Geruth having so much forgotten herself, Hamblet, perceiving himself to be in danger of his life, counterfeited the madman, with such craft and subtle practices, that he made show as if he had utterly lost his wits; and under that veil he covered his pretence, and defended his life from the treasons and practices of the tyrant his uncle. For every day he rent and tore his clothes, wallowing and lying in the dust and mire, his face all filthy and black, running through the streets like a man distraught, not speaking one word but such as seemed to proceed of madness and mere frenzy.

Hamblet, in this sort counterfeiting the madman, many times did divers actions of great and deep consideration; and often made such and so fit answers that a wise man would soon have judged from what spirit so fine an invention might proceed. For that standing by the fire, and sharpening sticks like poniards and pricks, one in smiling manner asked him wherefore he made those little staves so sharp at the points. 'I prepare,' said he, 'piercing darts and sharp arrows to revenge my father's death.' Fools esteemed those

¹ Whether *Shakespeare's Gertrude* was an accessory before the fact in the murder of her first husband, is still a controverted point. We have no hesitation in thinking she was not. In the quarto of 1603, she is made to say—

'But as I have a soul, I swear by heaven,
I never knew of this most horrid murder.'

his words as nothing; but men of quick spirits, and such as had a deeper reach, began to suspect somewhat, esteeming that under that kind of folly there lay hidden a great and rare subtlety, such as one day might be prejudicial to their prince, saying that under colour of such madness he shadowed a crafty policy, and by his devised simplicity concealed a sharp and pregnant spirit; for which cause they counselled the king to try and know if possible how to discover the intent and meaning of the young prince; and they could find no better nor more fit invention to entrap him than to set some fair and beautiful woman¹ in a secret place, that, with flattering speeches, and all the craftiest means she could use, should purposely seek to allure his mind. And surely the poor prince at this assault had been in great danger, if a gentleman,² that in Horvendile's time had been nourished with him, had not shown himself more affectioned to the bringing up he had received with Hamblet than desirous to please the tyrant. This gentleman more desired to give the prince instruction what he should do, than to entrap him. By the lady he was likewise informed of the treason, as being one that from her infancy loved and favoured him, and would have been exceeding sorrowful for his misfortune, so that as then Fengon's practice took no effect.

CHAPTER III.—Among the friends of Fengon there was one³ that among all the rest doubted of Hamblet's practices in counterfeiting the madman; who, for that cause, said that it was impossible that so crafty a gallant as Hamblet should be discovered with so common and unskilful practices, and that to find out his politic pretence, it were necessary to invent some subtle and crafty means more attractive, whereby the gallant might not have the leisure to use his accustomed dissimulation; which to effect, he said, he knew a fit way, and a most convenient mean to effect the king's desire, and thereby to entrap Hamblet in his subtleties, and cause him of his own accord to fall into the net prepared for him, and

¹ Comp. with Ophelia.

² Comp. with Horatio.

³ Comp. with Polonius.

thereby evidently show his secret meaning. His device was thus: that King Fengon should make as though he were to go some long voyage, and that in the meantime Hamblet should be shut up alone in a chamber with his mother, wherein some other should secretly be hidden behind the hangings, unknown either to him or his mother, there to stand and hear their speeches, and the complots by them to be taken concerning the accomplishment of the dissembling fool's pretence, assuring the king that, if there were any point of wisdom and perfect sense in the gallant's spirit, without all doubt he would easily discover it to his mother, as being devoid of all fear that she would utter or make known his secret intent; and withal offered himself to be the man that should stand to hearken and bear witness of Hamblet's speeches with his mother. This invention pleased the king exceeding well. The counsellor entered secretly into the queen's chamber, and there hid himself behind the arras, not long before the queen and Hamblet came thither; who being crafty and politic, as soon as he was within the chamber, doubting some treason, and fearing, if he should speak severely and wisely to his mother touching his secret practices, he should be understood, and by that means intercepted, used his ordinary manner of dissimulation, and began to crow like a cock, beating with his arms upon the hangings of the chamber, whereby, feeling something stirring under them, he cried, 'A rat, a rat!' and presently drawing his sword, thrust it into the hangings, which done, he pulled the counsellor, half dead, out by the heels, made an end of killing him, and, being slain, cut his body in pieces, which he caused to be boiled, and then cast into an open vault, that so it might serve for food to the hogs. By which means having discovered the ambush, and given the inventor thereof his just reward, he came again to his mother, who in the meantime wept and tormented herself, to see all her hopes frustrated; for that, what fault soever she had committed, yet was she sore grieved to see her only child made a mere mockery, every man reproaching her with his folly. Hamblet having once again searched every corner of the chamber,

distrusting his mother as well as the rest, and perceiving himself to be alone, began in sober and discreet manner to speak unto her, saying:—

‘What treason is this, O most infamous woman of all that ever prostituted themselves to the will of an abominable whoremonger; who, under the veil of a dissembling creature, covereth the most wicked and detestable crime that man could ever imagine or was committed? How may I be assured to trust you, that like a vile wanton adulteress, altogether impudent and given over to her pleasure, runs spreading forth her arms joyfully to embrace the traitorous villainous tyrant that murdered my father, and most incestuously receivest the villain into the lawful bed of your loyal spouse? Is this the part of a queen, and daughter to a king—to live like a brute beast, to follow the pleasure of an abominable king, that hath murdered a far honest and better man than himself in massacring Horvendile, the honour and glory of all the Danes? I, for my part, will never account him for my kinsman, nor once know him for mine uncle, nor you, my dear mother, for not having respect to the blood that ought to have united us so straitly together, and who neither with your honour, nor without suspicion of consent to the death of your husband, could ever have agreed to have married with his cruel enemy. O Queen Geruth, it is licentiousness only that hath made you deface out of your mind the memory of the valour and virtues of the good king your husband and my father. It was an unbridled desire that guided the daughter of Roderick to embrace the tyrant Fengon, and not to remember Horvendile, unworthy of so strange entertainment, neither that he killed his brother traitorously, and that she being his father’s wife betrayed him, although he so well favoured and loved her, that for her sake he utterly bereaved Norway of her riches and valiant soldiers to augment the treasures of Roderick, and made Geruth wife to the hardiest prince in Europe. It is not the part of a woman, much less of a princess, thus to leave her dear child to fortune in the bloody and murderous hands of a villain and traitor. Brute beasts do not so. Is not this as much as if you should