

**THE COMPLETE WORKS OF  
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: WITH A  
LIFE OF THE POET, EXPLANATORY  
FOOT-NOTES, CRITICAL NOTES,  
AND A GLOSSARIAL INDEX**

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The complete works of William Shakespeare: with a life of the poet, explanatory foot-notes, critical notes, and a glossarial index by William Shakespeare & Henry Norman Hudson

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Puc. "O Lay, whilst I waite on my tender lambs,  
... God's mother deign'd to appear to me,"

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**Harvard Edition.**

BY THE  
REV. HENRY N. HUDSON, LL.D.

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*IN TWENTY VOLUMES.*

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## KING HENRY VI. PART FIRST.

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NEVER printed that we know of till in the folio of 1623; but evidently referred to by Thomas Nash in his *Pierce Penniless*, 1592: "How would it have joyed brave Talbot, the terror of the French, to think that, after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage; and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least, (at several times,) who, in the tragedian that represents his person, behold him fresh bleeding." The special matter of this allusion is in the fifth, sixth, and seventh scenes of the fourth Act, where the veteran Earl of Shrewsbury and his son John fight it out together to the death.

During those years, one of the London theatres, called "The Rose," was under the management of Philip Henslowe, who had numerous and varied dealings with playwrights and actors, and from whose records much of our information about the dramatic doings of the time is derived. From this source we learn that a play called *Henry the Sixth* was acted at his theatre by "Lord Strange's men" on the 3d of March, 1592, and was repeated twelve times in the course of that season. Whether this play were the same as that referred to by Nash, we have no means of ascertaining. Shakespeare is not known to have had any connection with the theatrical company designated as "Lord Strange's men"; and most of his plays, if not all, were undoubtedly written for another company. But it is well known that at that time the same play was often performed by several different companies in succession; for in such matters what we call copyright was then unsecured by law, and little regarded by custom; so it is nowise unlikely that Shakespeare's *King Henry the Sixth*,



after running a course with the company to which he belonged, may have been permitted to the use of another company, or may have been used by another without permission.

At all events, the forecited passage from Nash would fairly infer the play in question to have been on the stage as early as 1589 or 1590. As, in 1589, Shakespeare was but twenty-five years old, this would needs conclude the play in hand to have been among the first, if not the very first, of his essays in dramatic composition. And it stands clear in evidence that the public taste or preference was at that time running strongly in favour of plays founded on English history: in these the intense national feeling of the people and the old English passion for dramatic entertainments could meet and feast together: hence, no doubt, the early and rapid growth in England of the Historical Drama, as a species quite distinct from the old forms of Comedy and Tragedy. To be sure, the play in hand is vastly inferior in every respect to what the Poet afterwards achieved in the same kind; yet hardly, if at all, more inferior to these than it is superior to the best plays on English history that had been seen on the London stage at the supposed date of its production. Shakespeare's own workmanship apart, the earliest historical play that can bear any comparison with it is Marlowe's *Edward the Second*, which is first heard of by an entry in the Stationers' Books dated July 6, 1593; and it is beyond question, as we shall see hereafter, that both the Second and the Third Parts of Shakespeare's *King Henry the Sixth*, probably in their present form, but certainly in some form, were on the stage some two years before that date.

Nevertheless the authorship of the play in hand has been a theme of argument and controversy from the days of Theobald to the present time: some boldly maintaining that Shakespeare could have had no hand in it whatever; others supposing that he merely revised and improved it, and perhaps contributed a few scenes; while yet others hold the main body of it to be his, though an inferior hand may have had some share in the composition. The reasoning of the two former classes proceeds, I believe, entirely upon internal evidence, and seems to me radically at fault in allowing far too little for the probable difference

between the boyhood and the manhood of Shakespeare's genius. The argument, branching out, as it does, into numerous details, and involving many nice points of critical inquiry, is much too long for rehearsal in this place; and, even if it were not so, a statement of it would hardly pay, as it is not of a nature to interest any but those who make a special study in matters of that kind. I have endeavored to understand the question thoroughly, and am not aware of any thing that should hinder my viewing it fairly; and I can but give it as my firm and settled judgment that the main body of the play is certainly Shakespeare's; nor do I perceive any clear and decisive reason for calling in another hand to account for any part of it.

In such a diversity of opinions resting on internal evidence, probably our best way is to fall back upon such clear points of external evidence as the case may afford. Now the mere fact of the play's being set forth as Shakespeare's by the Editors of the first folio certainly infers a strong presumption as to the authorship. I cannot indeed affirm such presumption to be so strong that no possible force of internal evidence can overthrow it, for I think this is fairly done in the case of *Titus Andronicus*; but in that play the internal evidence is of quite another cast and texture from what we have in the play under consideration. But, as regards *King Henry the Sixth*, we have another piece of external evidence, which, taken along with the former, seems to me well nigh conclusive of the question. Shakespeare's *King Henry the Fifth* was registered at the Stationers' on the 4th of August, 1600, and a quarto edition of it was published in the course of that year; the title-page having these words, "as it hath been sundry times played by the Right-Honourable the Lord Chamberlain's Servants." The play closes with a brief epilogue, in which we have the following:

Henry the Sixth, in infant bonds crown'd King  
Of France and England, did this King succeed;  
Whose State so many had the managing,  
*That they lost France, and made his England bleed:*  
*Which oft our stage hath shown;* and, for their sake,  
In your fair minds let this acceptance take.

I am by no means certain that this epilogue was written by

Shakespeare, but that is nothing to the present purpose. The claim here put forth fairly covers the whole of *King Henry the Sixth*, the First Part of which is mostly occupied with the losing of France, as the Second and Third are with the making of England bleed. It also appears that the three earlier plays had been often performed by the company of which Shakespeare is known to have been a member; and the words quoted infer all four of the plays to have been written by the same author.

Shakespeare's usual authority in matters of British history was Holinshed, whose *Chronicles* were first published in 1577, when the Poet was thirteen years old. The corresponding work of Hall was published some thirty years before. The Poet was doubtless familiar with both of these writers; and it is beyond question that for the historic material of the play now in hand he drew more or less from the work of Hall. It is to be noted, however, that in this case he took much greater freedom than usual with the actual order of events, marshalling them here and there upon no settled principle, or upon one which it is not easy to discover. The play extends over the whole period from the death of Henry the Fifth, in August, 1422, when his son was nine months old, till the marriage of the latter with Margaret of Anjou, which took place in October, 1444. In some cases the scattered events of several years are drawn together, and presented in one view; as in the first scene, where we have the angry rupture of Gloster and Beaufort occurring at the same time with the funeral of Henry the Fifth, and reports coming in of losses in France, some of which did not occur till after the events set forth in several of the later scenes. In like manner, in the early part of the play the King is made much older, and in the latter part much younger, than he really was; the effect of which is, as it was probably meant to be, to give an impression of greater unity than were compatible with a more literal adherence to facts. So, again, the death of the Talbots is drawn back many years before the time of its actual occurrence, in order, as would seem, that the foreign wars, and the disasters attending them, may be dispatched in the First Part, and thus leave the Second and Third free for a more undistracted representation of the civil wars.