

THE FLOATING ISLAND

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The floating island by Ernest Godfrey Hoffsten & William Strode

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ERNEST GODFREY HOFFSTEN & WILLIAM STRODE

THE FLOATING ISLAND

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THE FLOATING ISLAND

By

WILLIAM STRODE

TOGETHER WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE OF THE
AUTHOR, AND A REVIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY DRAMA
IN ENGLAND, CHIEFLY AFTER THE YEAR 1800



PRESENTED IN THE FORM OF A THESIS TO THE
FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

By ERNEST GODFREY HOFFSTEN

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

St. Louis.
1908.

PREFACE

THE original scope of this thesis consisted of an edition of William Strode's play "The Floating Island," with an introduction and notes; but the recent publication of the poems and play of the author, in one volume, by Mr. Dobell of London, precludes the advisability of another edition. As emphasized so strongly in Dobell's edition, Strode is worth studying. Our especial interest in him lay in the consideration of the part he played in the development of the drama within the college walls, notably Oxford and Cambridge. The reader is referred to Dobell's edition for the text of the play.

The writer wishes to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Dr. F. E. Schelling for his uniform kindness and advice.

St. Louis, 1908.

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PART I.

**A GENERAL SKETCH OF THE UNIVERSITY DRAMA
IN ENGLAND, SHOWING ITS DISTINCT
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The University Drama in England may be said to have had its inception in the year 1350, when the Latin play, "Ludus Filiorum Israelis," was presented at Corpus Christi College in Cambridge.¹ The greater number of plays that were presented at both Oxford and Cambridge before the reign of Queen Elizabeth were written in Latin. Playwriting appears to have been largely an exercise for the purpose of displaying a student's knowledge and mastery of the Latin tongue; in fact, Latin and playwriting went hand in hand as educational values. And it is therefore not surprising that Latin was upon every college man's lips. For example, in the play "Albumazar," presented at Trinity College, Cambridge, in the year 1614, there is a reference to the frequency of Latin usage indicated in the mention of English being spoken as a foreign language. The following lines reveal this fact:

"If't be a fault to speak this foreign language,
(For Latin is our Mother tongue) I must entreat you
To frame excuses for us; for whose sake
We now speak English."²

Under such conditions it was but natural that the poet, John Skelton, in the reign of Henry VIII, should have been crowned at Oxford for certain Latin verses. This precedent, which was, indeed, the continuation of an old mediaeval custom, paved the way for the subsequent instance of a degree being conferred, in 1512, on one Edward Watson, upon condition that he write a Latin comedy.³ The early University Drama was thus an expression to be made practical use of in an educational way.

It was but a step, in the line of didactic influences, for the University Drama to be affected by the allegorical elements in the school drama. The characteristics of the moral play

¹Retrospective Review, Vol. 12—"The Latin plays acted before the University of Cambridge," by W. L. Courtney, London, 1876.

²Cf. Dodaley's "Old English Plays," ed. Hazlitt; "Albumazar," in Vol. 11, London, 1878.

³P. F. Schelling, Elizabethan Drama, Vol. 2, p. 68.

are at once discernible in the play of "Narcissus," presented at St. John's College, Oxford, in the year 1602. In the play entitled, "Apollo's Siroving," acted 1626, "the enduring manner of the later moralities" is apparent. Says Dr. Ward: "The idea of the action, such as it is, consists in the conflict between the claims of Learning and the wiles of the Queen Hedone, practiced by the agency of the messenger, the sea-nymph Siren." This is an English play, and was composed for the scholars of the Free School of Hadleigh in Suffolk, and acted by them on Shrove Tuesday, February 6, 1626.¹ Strode's "The Floating Island," presented before King Charles, at Christ Church, Oxford, in the year 1636, was reported "too full of *morality* to please the court."²

From its very nature, and because of the counter dramatic influences of the school drama to which it was naturally susceptible, the University Drama became at once limited in its appeal to the public mind. It was just as much, if not more, of an occasional character as were the plays at court.

The University Drama, does, however, reveal a distinct growth. While the subject matter of the plays, written before the year 1600, was of little or no interest to the public, those plays which were composed after this date, and, in fact, up to the time of the Restoration, exhibit rather a wide range of subject matter and diversity of treatment. The elements of satire, especially of a strongly personal tone, came to be used frequently and attracted the attention of the public mind to the life in the colleges. The numerous allusions in the three famous Parnassus Plays were bound to attract the eye of an interested public.³ These plays "contain several passages in outspoken criticism of poets and dramatists of the day, thus affording us an excellent example of the academic attitude toward the new popular literature that luxuriated beyond the college walls."⁴

The interest thus manifested in popular literature reacted upon the college playwright and made him susceptible to its influences. In 1614, "Sicelides, a Piscatory," because of its pastoral qualities, may point to a Spenserian influence upon its

¹Ward: History of English Dram. Lit., London and New York, 1909. Vol. 8, p. 188.

²Halliwel: Dict. of Old Plays, p. 88.

³The Pilgrimage to Parnassus with the Two Parts of the Return from Parnassus. —Ed. from Ms. by the Rev. W. D. Macray, M. A., F. S. A. Oxford, 1886.

⁴Schelling—ibid., Vol. 2, 68.