

**THE RIVERSIDE
LITERATURE SERIES;
KING HENRY THE FIFTH**

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The Riverside Literature Series; King Henry the Fifth by William Shakespeare & Richard Grant White

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & RICHARD GRANT WHITE

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The Riverside Literature Series

KING HENRY THE FIFTH.

BY
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

FROM THE RIVERSIDE EDITION EDITED BY
RICHARD GRANT WHITE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
AND ADDITIONAL NOTES

By **EDWARD EVERETT HALE, JR., Ph. D.**
Professor of English in Union College



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TO THE
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INTRODUCTION

Henry V was first presented in the summer of 1599. This we may infer from certain lines in the Prologue to Act V. Chorus has been telling of the welcome of the King to London after Agin-
court; he goes on — Date of the
Play.

“As, by a lower but loving likelihood,
Were now the general of our gracious empress,
As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,
How many would the peaceful city quit,
To welcome him!”

“The general of our gracious empress” was the Earl of Essex, who went to Ireland in the spring of 1599 and returned in the fall.

The date of a play is not in itself a matter of very great importance, yet it is of interest here. We know from the date that this play followed the two parts of *Henry IV*, making with them a trilogy of which Henry the Fifth was the hero. *Henry VI*, on the other hand, was written a good while before and has no connection with our play. We know from the date, too, that *Henry V* was the last of the historical plays, excepting *Henry VIII*, which is a play of a different kind. We know it to belong to a period about the same as the strong and joyous comedies, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, and just before the tragedies of *Julius Cæsar* and *Hamlet*. We know Shakespeare's general temper and disposition while he was writing the play: it was the time

when he was beginning to make a success in a business way. Certainly we could read the play intelligently or enjoy it on the stage without knowing these things; still it does add to our appreciation of the strong soldier-king to remember, for instance, that Shakespeare drew his figure just before he imagined Brutus and Hamlet, those two so much greater and weaker. One does not want to give too much stress to the date of a play, but a recollection of it often helps one at a pinch. Thus one of the catchwords of Nym in the play is "That's the humour of it." *Humour* is such an important Elizabethan word that one ought to look it up a little, but without further study Nym's constant use of it in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* (I, iii) is almost sufficient comment on his use in this play. As the *Merry Wives* was written about the same time as *Henry V* (before, unless Falstaff, Bardolph, and Nym are all brought to life for the occasion), we see that Nym was using a popular catchword, or one associated with his character. Both in a large way and in a smaller, then, a knowledge of the date may help us. Fortunately it is something that we may learn with very little trouble, for so many students have looked into these matters that the results are open to anybody.

The sources of this play are, as in the case of most of the histories, entirely clear. Shakespeare took the narrative of the chronicler Holinsbed¹ as a basis.

Sources of the play. Shakespeare often followed his authority very closely; sometimes in facts, as in I, i, 1; I, i, 75; III, vi, 40; sometimes in words, as in II, iv, 102; III, vi, 164; V, ii, 341; sometimes in names,

¹ Raphael Holinsbed compiled the *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, which were published in 1578.

as III, v, 40. Those who study dramatic construction will notice a number of points of interest in comparing the play with the sources. Thus, Shakespeare shortens up the matter: from the play one gets the idea that Act V, with the negotiations for peace, follows directly after the battle of Agincourt. But really the Treaty of Troyes was five years after Agincourt, and in that time there was a whole campaign in France of which Shakespeare says nothing. That would not have done on the stage. Shakespeare wanted to give a striking picture of a glorious campaign; so he gives merely the cause of war, the victory, and the peace. Absolute historic accuracy is something too complicated to present on the stage.

The language, also, of this play, as of every play of Shakespeare's, is something we must pay attention to. In a general way everybody that reads English can understand Shakespeare; still three centuries have made changes in language. Some of Shakespeare's words are now out of use. These we must know, nor is it a great task to learn them. But there are others which are a little more difficult, namely, words that are not obsolete in form, but which had then a meaning different from the modern one. There are sometimes a good many such words. Thus in Act II, Scene ii:—

by and by, l. 2	= at once
enlarge, l. 40	= set at liberty
distemper, l. 54	= drunkenness
dear, ll. 68, 181	= extreme
quick, l. 79	= alive
praetis'd on, l. 99	= cheated
admiration, l. 108	= wonder
instance, l. 119	= motive
discover'd, l. 151	= laid open
rub, l. 188	= obstacle

Here are a number of words that every one knows. But if we pass over them without thought, we shall miss a full understanding of the passages where they occur. So one must put some study upon Shakespeare's language, the meanings of his words, and his grammatical constructions.

There are other lines of Shakespearean study which are most interesting. The text of any play offers problems that must be solved by somebody, if we

Lines of study offered by the play.

are to know what Shakespeare really wrote. The metre always offers some difficulties that cannot be settled, as most can, by a good ear and a habit of reading poetry. There are a number of allusions to things common in Shakespeare's day but unfamiliar now. Thus, when Pistol spoke of "plain-song" (III, ii, 7) he was talking of something familiar to every one; so was the boy when he called Pistol "this roaring devil i' th' old play" (IV, iv, 73). There are a number of ideas that may be found elsewhere in literature: thus, the long speech describing the polity of the bees (I, ii, 183-220) has a parallel in Lyly's *Euphues*, and the two passages open a very interesting line of literary history, namely, ideas of nature in our older literature. And there are endless other lines of interesting literary study in this, as in every other play of Shakespeare's.

But it would be a mistake if we should allow ourselves to be distracted by these things, interesting or necessary as they are, from an appreciation and enjoyment of the poetry,—of the play itself.

The poetic quality the main interest.

Some of these things, as the language and the text, are, while we are studying literature, only means to an end. The language of Shakespeare, as of any other Elizabethan, is an interesting

matter for the student of language to work upon. It is a proper subject for linguistic study, just as the language of a nation is; and the student need have nothing to do with the poetry if he be so inclined. But the student of literature has a very different object, and with him the language is only a means to the end. So is study of the text. Other matters may have an independent interest to the student of literature: he may wish to have a clear idea of the mind of Shakespeare, of the spirit of the Elizabethan Age, of the development of the drama. Those are parts of the history of literature and good matters for study. But language and the history of literature, though connected with poetry, are matters very different from poetry. So if our aim is poetry, we shall want particularly to gain from the play true poetic enjoyment. And this will depend in a measure on our temperament and our taste. We may like poetry and read it eagerly; we may not care for it and prefer to read something else. But whatever our taste and whatever our temperament, there is something more than pure enjoyment in the matter. As with every art, indeed every game, we need some knowledge. We want to know what Shakespeare was aiming at. There are many kinds of poetry: we are quite accustomed to some; but in poetry of an older time especially, there are often conditions or circumstances that, if known, will give us the true spirit of the piece, which we might otherwise have missed. Now *Henry V* is an interesting play to read because it gives us an excellent example of one characteristic of the Elizabethan drama, namely, the rhetorical quality. It gives us this more fully than any other play of Shakespeare's and it gives it to us with less admixture of other things.