

**KING HENRY THE EIGHTH.
WITH INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES**

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King Henry the Eighth. With Introduction and Notes by William Shakespeare & K. Deighton

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & K. DEIGHTON

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WITH INTRODUCTION
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SHAKESPEARE

KING HENRY THE EIGHTH

WITH
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY
K. DEIGHTON

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1895

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INTRODUCTION.

As to the date at which *Henry the Eighth* was written we have no evidence whatever. Even as to the date when it was first acted there is no certain proof; while if that more generally accepted could be settled beyond doubt, it would still remain a question whether the play was then a new one. All that we know is, that a play which seems to have been the one we now have under the title of *Henry the Eighth* was produced at the Globe Theatre on the 29th of June, 1613, and that the theatre was on that occasion accidentally burnt to the ground. Of this event we have three accounts written within a few days of its occurrence. Thus, in the Harleian Manuscripts, a letter from Thomas Lorkin to Sir Thomas Puckering, dated "this last day of June, 1613," relates that "No longer since than yesterday, while Bourbage his companie were acting at the Globe the play of Henry viii., and there shooting of certayne chambers in way of triumph, the fire catch'd," etc. Sir H. Wotton, writing on the 6th of July of "a new play called *All Is True*, representing some principal pieces of the reign of Henry viiith," similarly ascribes the accident to "certain cannons shot off at the King's entry to a masque at the Car-

Date of the
Play.

dinal Wolsey's house"; and John Chamberlain, in a letter to Sir Ralph Winwood, dated July 12th, describes "the burning of the Globe, or playhouse, on the Bank-side, on St. Peter's day, which fell out by a peale of chambers, that I know not on what occasion were to be used in the play." Further, Howes, the continuator of Stowe's "Annales," writing two years later, records that the fire took place, "the house being filled with people, to behold the play, viz., of Henry the 8." From these various accounts, and from the fact that, in *H. VIII.* i. 4, we have the stage direction, "Chambers [*i.e.* small cannon] discharged," it may be taken as pretty well established that the play then represented was our *Henry the Eighth*, and that it originally had a second title, viz., *All Is True*.

Disputed
authorship of
the Play.

If there are doubts as to the date of the play, these are of minor importance when compared with the question of its authorship. Doubts on this point are of long standing. Johnson observed that the genius of Shakespeare comes in and goes out with Katharine; Coleridge, recognizing the strangeness of its structure, spoke of the play as a sort of historical masque; Ulrici regarded it as meant only for a first part, to be followed by a second part, in which what was incomplete would be made complete; Roderick, in Edwards' *Canons of Criticism* drew attention to the metre of the play as being different from anything to be elsewhere found in Shakespeare's undoubted work. But the first person thoroughly to investigate the matter was Mr. Spedding, who in a paper entitled "Who Wrote Shakspeare's Henry VIII.?" published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for August, 1850, arrived at the conclusion that two,

if not three, hands are to be found in the play, more than half of which he assigned to Fletcher. This conclusion is based upon two considerations: (1) the incoherence of the general design of the play; (2) metrical peculiarities. Having glanced at the latter, Mr. Spedding writes, "I shall have something further to say on these points presently. I mention them here only to show that critical observers have been long conscious of certain singularities in this play which require to be accounted for. And, leaving the critics, I might probably appeal to the individual consciousness of each reader, and ask him whether he has not always felt that, in spite of some great scenes which have made actors and actresses famous, and many beautiful speeches which adorn our books of extracts (and which, by the way, lose little or nothing by separation from their context, a most rare thing in Shakspeare), the effect of this play as a whole is weak and disappointing. The truth is, that the interest, instead of rising towards the end, falls away utterly, and leaves us in the last act among persons whom we scarcely know, and events for which we do not care. The strongest sympathies that have been awakened in us run opposite to the course of the action. Our sympathy is for the grief and goodness of Queen Katharine, while the course of the action requires us to entertain as a theme of joy and compensatory satisfaction the coronation of Anne Bullen and the birth of her daughter; which are, in fact, a part of Katharine's injury, and amount to little less than the ultimate triumph of wrong. For throughout the play the king's cause is not only felt by us, but represented to us, as a bad one. We