

**SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORY OF KING
JOHN. WITH INTRODUCTION, AND
NOTES EXPLANATORY AND
CRITICAL: FOR USE IN SCHOOLS
AND FAMILIES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649703326

Shakespeare's History of King John. With Introduction, and Notes Explanatory and Critical: For Use in Schools and Families by William Shakespeare & Henry N. Hudson

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & HENRY N. HUDSON

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1880, 1881, 1882

SHAKESPEARE'S

HISTORY OF KING JOHN.

WITH

INTRODUCTION, AND NOTES EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL.

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES.

BY THE

REV. HENRY N. HUDSON,

PROFESSOR OF SHAKESPEARE IN BOSTON UNIVERSITY.

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY GINN & HEATH.

1880.

TO TEACHERS.

HOW TO USE SHAKESPEARE IN SCHOOL.

AS I have long been in frequent receipt of letters asking for advice or suggestions as to the best way of using Shakespeare in class, I have concluded to write out and print some of my thoughts on that subject. On one or two previous occasions, I have indeed moved the theme, but only, for the most part, incidentally, and in subordinate connection with other topics, never with any thing like a round and full exposition of it.

And in the first place I am to remark, that in such a matter no one can make up or describe, in detail, a method of teaching for another: in many points every teacher must strike out his or her own method; for a method that works very well in one person's hands may nevertheless fail entirely in another's. Some general reasons or principles of method, together with a few practical hints of detail, is about all that I can undertake to give; this too rather with a view to setting teachers' own minds at work in devising ways, than to marking out any formal course of procedure.

In the second place, here, as elsewhere, the method of teaching is to be shaped and suited to the particular purpose in hand; on the general principle, of course, that the end is to point out and prescribe the means. So, if the purpose

be to make the pupils in our public schools Shakespearians in any proper sense of the term, I can mark out no practicable method for the case, because I hold the purpose itself to be utterly impracticable; one that cannot possibly be carried out, and ought not to be, if it could. I find divers people talking and writing as if our boys and girls were to make a knowledge of Shakespeare the chief business of their life, and were to gain their living thereby. These have a sort of cant phrase current among them, about "knowing Shakespeare in an eminent sense"; and they are instructing us that, in order to this, we must study the English language historically, and acquire a technical mastery of Elizabethan idioms.

Now, to know Shakespeare in an eminent sense, if it means any thing, must mean, I take it, to become Shakespearians, or become eminent in the knowledge of Shakespeare; that is to say, we must have such a knowledge of Shakespeare as can be gained only by making a special and continuous, or at least very frequent, study of him through many long years. So the people in question seem intent upon some plan or program of teaching whereby the pupils in our schools shall come out full-grown Shakespearians; this too when half-a-dozen, or perhaps a dozen, of the Poet's plays is all they can possibly find time for studying through. And to this end, they would have them study the Poet's language historically, and so draw out largely into his social, moral, and mental surroundings, and ransack the literature of his time; therewithal they would have their *Shakespeare Grammars* and *Shakespeare Lexicons*, and all the apparatus for training the pupils in a sort of learned verbalism, and in analyzing and parsing the Poet's sentences.

Now I know of but three persons in the whole United

States who have any just claim to be called Shakespearians, or who can be truly said to know Shakespeare in an eminent sense. Those are, of course, Mr. Grant White, Mr. Howard Furness, and Mr. Joseph Crosby. Beyond this goodly trio, I cannot name a single person in the land who is able to go alone, or even to stand alone, in any question of textual criticism or textual correction. For that is what it is to be a Shakespearian. And these three have become Shakespearians, not by the help of any labour-saving machinery, such as special grammars and lexicons, but by spending many years of close study and hard brain-work in and around their author. Before reaching that point, they have not only had to study all through the Poet himself, and this a great many times, but also to make many excursions and sojournings in the popular, and even the erudite authorship of his period. And the work has been almost, if not altogether, a pure labour of love with them. They have pursued it with impassioned earnestness, as if they could find no rest for their souls without it.

Well, and what do you suppose the result of all this has done or is doing for them in the way of making a living? Do you suppose they can begin to purchase their bread and butter, or even so much as the bread without the butter, with the proceeds of their great learning and accomplishments in that kind? No, not a bit of it! For the necessaries of life, every man of them has to depend mostly, if not entirely, on other means. If they had nothing to feed upon but what their Shakespeare knowledge brings them, they would have mighty little use for their teeth. If you do not believe this, ask the men themselves: and if they tell you it is not so, then I will frankly own myself a naughty boy, and will do penance publicly for my naughtiness. For my own poor

part, I know right well that I have no claim to be called a Shakespearian, albeit I may, perchance, have had some foolish aspirations that way. Nevertheless I will venture to say that Shakespeare work does more towards procuring a livelihood for me than for either of the gentlemen named. This is doubtless because I am far inferior to them in Shakespearian acquirement and culture. Yet, if I had nothing but the returns of my labour in that kind to live upon, I should have to live a good deal more cheaply than I do. And there would probably be no difficulty in finding persons that were not born till some time after my study of Shakespeare began, who, notwithstanding, can now outbid me altogether in any auction of bread-buying popularity. This, no doubt, is because their natural gifts and fitness for the business are so superior to mine, that they might readily be extemporized into what no length of time and study could possibly educate me.

In all this the three gentlemen aforesaid are, I presume, far from thinking they have any thing to complain of, or from having any disposition to complain; and I am certainly as far from this as they are. It is all in course, and all just right, except that I have a good deal better than I deserve. And both they and I know very well that nothing but a love of the thing can carry any one through such a work; that in the nature of things such pursuits have to be their own reward; and that here, as elsewhere, "love's not love when it is mingled with regards that stand aloof from th' entire point."

Such, then, is the course and process by which, and by which alone, men can come to know Shakespeare in any sense deserving to be called eminent. It is a process of close, continuous, life-long study. And, in order to know

the Poet in this eminent sense, one must know a good deal more of him than of any thing else ; that is to say, the pursuit must be something of a specialty with him ; unless his mind be by nature far more encyclopedic than most men's are. Then too, in the case of those who have reached this point, the process had its beginning in a deep and strong love of the subject : Shakespeare has been a passion with them, perhaps I should say the master-passion of their life : this was both the initiative impulse that set them a-going, and also the sustaining force that kept them going, in the work. Now such a love can hardly be wooed into life or made to sprout by a technical, parsing, gerund-grinding course of study. The proper genesis and growth of love are not apt to proceed in that way. A long and loving study may indeed produce, or go to seed in, a grammar or a lexicon ; but surely the grammar or the lexicon is not the thing to prompt or inaugurate the long and loving study. Or, if the study begin in that way, it will not be a study of the workmanship as poetry, but only, or chiefly, as the raw-material of lingual science ; that is to say, as a subject for verbal dissection and surgery.

If, then, any teacher would have his pupils go forth from school knowing Shakespeare in an eminent sense, he must shape and order his methods accordingly. What those methods may be, or should be, I cannot say ; but I should think they must be quite in the high-pressure line, and I more than suspect they will prove abortive, after all. And here I cannot forbear to remark that some few of us are so stuck in old-fogyism, or so fossilized, as to hold that the main business of people in this world is to gain an honest living ; and that they ought to be educated with a constant eye to that purpose. These, to be sure, look very like

self-evident propositions ; axioms, or mere truisms, which, nevertheless, our education seems determined to ignore entirely, and a due application of which would totally revolutionize our whole educational system.

Now knowing Shakespeare in an eminent sense does not appear to be exactly the thing for gaining an honest living. All people but a few, a very few indeed, have, ought to have, must have, other things to do. I suspect that one Shakespearian in about five millions is enough. And a vast majority are to get their living by hand-work, not by head-work ; and even with those who live by head-work Shakespeare can very seldom be a leading interest. He can nowise be the substance or body of their mental food, but only, at the most, as a grateful seasoning thereof. Thinking of his poetry may be a pleasant and helpful companion for them in their business, but cannot be the business itself. His divine voice may be a sweetening tone, yet can be but a single tone, and an undertone at that, in the chorus of a well-ordered life and a daily round of honourable toil. Of the students in our colleges not one in a thousand, of the pupils in our high schools not one in a hundred thousand, can think, or ought to think, of becoming Shakespearians. But most of them, it may be hoped, can become men and women of right intellectual tastes and loves, and so be capable of a pure and elevating pleasure in the converse of books. Surely, then, in the little time that can be found for studying Shakespeare, the teaching should be shaped to the end, not of making the pupils Shakespearians, but only of doing somewhat — it cannot be much — towards making them wiser, better, happier men and women.

So, in reference to school study, what is the use of this cant about knowing Shakespeare in an eminent sense? Why