

**DISCUSSIONS OF  
THE DRAMA, III:  
PROSPERO'S ISLAND**

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Discussions of the drama, III: Prospero's Island by Edward Everett Hale

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**EDWARD EVERETT HALE**

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*of the*  
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DISCUSSIONS OF THE DRAMA

III

Prospero's Island

BY

EDWARD EVERETT HALE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

HENRY CABOT LODGE



Printed for the

Dramatic Museum of Columbia University  
*in the City of New York*

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## I N T R O D U C T I O N

During the last three centuries there has grown up an immense literature solely concerned with the play and the character of 'Hamlet.' It is not merely that this 'Hamlet' literature makes of itself a respectable library; it has been stated by Professor Lounsbury, I think, that there is a larger literature devoted to 'Hamlet' than to any other man, whether fictitious or historical, excepting of course the founders of religions. Brandes says that the literature of Hamlet is larger than that of some of the smaller nationalities of Europe, the Slovak for example. Before such evidence as this of the creative power of a great imagination one can only marvel silently and hold one's peace. And yet 'Hamlet' is only one item in the vast Shaksperian literature. In varying degrees all the plays have gathered a literature about them, each one its own, ever growing larger

as the years pass by. Among these plays other than 'Hamlet' the 'Tempest' is conspicuous in commentary and annotation. Mr. Furness, than whom there can be no higher authority, in his preface to the 'Tempest' says that despite the unusual excellence of the text "there is scarcely one of its five acts which does not contain a word or a phrase that has given rise to eager discussion; in one instance, the controversy assumes such extended proportions that in its presence even Juliet's 'runaway's eyes may wink' and veil their lids in abashed inferiority." Mr. Furness then adds that "certain it is that with the exception of 'Hamlet' and 'Julius Caesar' no play has been more liberally annotated than the 'Tempest.'"

I confess that I was surprised to find that 'Julius Caesar' came next to 'Hamlet' in the amount of criticism, commentary and speculation which it had called forth. But it is entirely natural that notwithstanding its unusually excellent text the 'Tempest' should be third on the list. There are abundant reasons why this should be so. In the first place it is now generally accepted by those most competent to judge; indeed it may be said

that it is now proved that the 'Tempest' was Shakspeare's last play and in this final creation the genius of the master shone with undiminished luster. It also contains allusions, like Prospero's breaking his wand, which the lovers of Shakspeare have been pleased to fancy were related to the writer himself.

In the 'Tempest,' moreover, the unities, of which it was the fashion to say at one time that Shakspeare knew nothing, are observed with the most extreme care. More than once the time supposed to be occupied by the events upon the stage is pressed upon our attention so that we are compelled to realize that the action of the play occurs within limits of time but little more extensive than that actually consumed in its representation. The unity of place is assured by the fact that the scene is on an island and is confined largely to the immediate neighborhood of Prospero's cell. The unity of action is obvious, for the story and the plot are simple and direct, unbroken by digression or underplots in a most remarkable degree. It seems as if we could hear Shakspeare saying "before I retire to silence I will show the world and