

**THE YOUTH OF
SHAKSPEARE. IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. II**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649738427

The Youth of Shakspeare. In Three Volumes. Vol. II by Robert Folkestone Williams

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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ROBERT FOLKESTONE WILLIAMS

**THE YOUTH OF
SHAKSPEARE. IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. II**

THE
YOUTH
OF
SHAKSPEARE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"SHAKSPEARE AND HIS FRIENDS."

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players,
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts.

SHAKSPEARE.

Triumph, my Britain! thou hast one to show
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.

BEN JONSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

PHILADELPHIA:
LEA AND BLANCHARD,
SUCCESSORS TO CAREY AND CO.

1840.

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1918

THE YOUTH OF SHAKSPEARE.

CHAPTER I.

O fortune, now my wounds redress,
And help me from my smart,
It cometh well of gentleness,
To ease a mourning hearte.

OLD SONG.

Away with these self-loving lads,
Whom with cupid's arrow never glads !
Away poor souls that sigh and weep
In love of those that lie asleep !
For Cupid is a merry god,
And forceth none to kiss the rod.

LORD BROOKE.

These strange and sudden injuries have fallen
So thick upon me, that I lose all sense
Of what they are. Methinks I am not wronged ;
Nor is it aught, if from the censuring world
I can but hide it. Reputation !
Thou art a word, no more.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

ON recovering consciousness, the youthful Shakspeare found himself lying stretched on the grass, with a confused sense of pain and sickness, which prevented him from forming any distinct idea of where he was. He could just discern divers black masses of sundry shapes, moving around and about him, whilst above, myriads of stars were twinkling upon the surface of the surrounding sky ; a thick white haze floated over the grassy earth as far as he could see ; and not a sound, save the rustling of the leaves,—which at first came upon his ear with a most unnatural strangeness—could be heard. His earliest perception was that the ground was wet with the dews, and he almost immediately afterwards discovered

that his clothes were saturated with the same moisture. This made him make an immediate attempt to rise, whereupon he felt that his limbs were stiff and aching. Sitting, supporting himself by one arm, he strove to ascertain where he was ; but everything upon which he turned his eyes floated in such shadowy outline he could distinguish nothing ; and so fearful a pain was in his head, he was forced to lean it upon his hand as he rested his elbow on his lap. He then found his brows covered with a clammy moisture, which stuck to his palm with a peculiar unpleasantness, and an overpowering sense of sickness prevented him from attempting to regain his feet. In this position, and with these sensations, he remained for some time.

Nature appeared, in the rising dews beneath her starry canopy, like to some mighty empress lying in her shroud under a jeweled pall ; but this awful magnificence was now lost upon him, who at any other time would have seen and felt it more thoroughly than could any other. In his present state she might have put on herself her proudest appareling, and he would have paid no more heed to it than if he had had no foreknowledge of her visible existence ; and for the time being, in his comprehension not only all this glorious garnishing in which he had oft taken such exquisite delight, was utterly done away with, but that absolute and unrivaled Beauty, whose infinite attractions so set off, had bound his spirit to her will, seemed to have suffered a perfect dissolution into the elements from which she sprung ; and had at once become a darkness—a chaos—and a nothing. This, however, as must be manifest to all, was a mere fantasy. The chaos lay in the mind, and not in Nature ; who, however funereally she may choose to array herself, hath a perpetual life, that cannot be made the property either of Time or Death. All the singular fine faculties and curious conceptions of the young student, in the state of half-consciousness in which he now existed, were as if they had never been ; and in intelligence—alack that there should be so humiliating a truth,

—a sudden visitation of physical pain had reduced the promising scholar below the level of the most unlettered hind.

At last he managed to raise himself upon his feet, and leaned against the trunk of a tree close by which he had fallen. He looked around, and it appeared as though everything wore an unfamiliar and unfriendly countenance; helpless and faint with pain, he turned his appealing gaze to those fair ministers on high, who at such numberless occasions, had looked down so invitingly on his meditations; but they seemed at this present to regard him with a cold indifference which struck a chill to his heart. He felt weaker and weaker every moment; the mists appeared to be thickening around him so that he could scarce breathe; the tree passed away from his touch; the ground slipped from under his feet; and with a look of anguish that was a most deep reproach unto Nature for having so abandoned him in his extremity, he again fell out of all sign of existence.

At this moment, lights were seen in the distance, and a confused shouting of men and barking of dogs was plainly audible. Amid this the name of Mabel might be distinguished, called out by several, different voices, and other cries, which proved that the party were in search of the poor foundling.

"Mabel!" shouted Sir Thomas Lucy, some yards off, as loud as he could for the wrapper his careful dame had put around his throat to protect him from the damp mist. "Murrain on the wench, what bath become of her I wonder?"

"Hoy!" bawled out a stout old game-keeper for the space of nigh half a minute, carrying of a lantern which great cry of his brought on such a fit of coughing there seemed to be no end of it.

"Prithee when we return, good Sampson, ask some of my julep of me," said Dame Lucy, who prided herself hugely on her skill in medicaments, and was ever as anxious to lay hold of a patient as was any 'pothecary

in the land; "'tis famous for the cure of all manner of coughs, asthmatics, quinsies, cold, hoarseness, and other diseases of the like sort,—so if thou wilt take it steadily it cannot help to be a sovereign remedy for thy asthma."

"Ay, mistress, an' it please you," replied Sampson, although he knew full well the virtues of that same julep, having had it put upon him for a good score years, let him have whatever complaint he might.

"A fig for such villainous stuff!" exclaimed Sir Thomas; "I'll cure thy asthmatics, I'll warrant! When I was at college, I was as famous for my studies in medicine as was any physician of them all. Indeed, I got me the name of little Esculapius, I had acquired such great cunning in it. There was no such cures ever heard of as I have made. But it led me so into the playing of tricks, that I was obliged to give it up, or I should have been expelled for my many mischiefs. Oh, the love powders I have made that distressed damsels came to me for! Oh, the wonderful charmed philtres, and magical elixirs, I have given them for bringing back their stray lovers. By cock and pye, I tickled them so with my stuff, that if a man of any kind, whatever he might lack in handsomeness, did but show himself in the High Street, women of all ages, sorts, and conditions, rushed from every house with a monstrous uncontrollable eagerness, intent upon the having him whether he would or no."

"By'r lady, I never heard this before, Sir Thomas!" cried his dame, in some surprise, yet in the fullest conviction here was another wonderful proof of her husband's extraordinary rare wisdom. "Believe me, had I known of it, I would have asked your advice numberless times when I have not."

"Mabel!" shouted the knight again, and again Sampson set up a prolonged cry, and half choked himself in the midst of it, and two dogs they had with them recommenced barking, as if they thought their voices stood as good a chance of being recognised by their kind friend, the poor foundling, as any.

"Plague on't!" exclaimed Sir Thomas; "I am nigh hoarse with bawling; and despite of our mufflers and other covering, I doubt not we shall have terrible colds from wandering about here when the dew is so thick."

"Ay, Master Justice," observed the game-keeper, scarce ceasing one minute to give evidence this coming out agreed not with his asthma.

"I marvel she should serve us this way," added the knight, after another call from him, another broken-winded cry from his man, and another famous howl from the two dogs, with as little success as had attended them all along; "I hope no harm hath come to her."

"By my troth a thought strikes me!" cried Dame Lucy, suddenly coming to a full stop in her walk, to the exceeding astonishment of the justice and his man.

"Marry, I hope 'twill strike thee hard enough to tell us what 'tis about, dame," said her husband merrily.

"Doubtless that pestilent fine fellow hath run away with her," added she, as if horror-struck at the deed.

"Ey, who? What fine fellow?" exclaimed the knight, rapidly; "run away with a servant of a justice o' the peace! 'Slight! 'tis as heinous a matter as sheep-stealing! But who's the villain? 'Fore George; if he be a low person, he shall swing for't; and if he be one of any sort of quality, I'll make a Star-Chamber matter on't. I will be no rearer of coney for other men's catching, I promise you." And thereupon he thumped the ground with the end of his stick a most determined blow.

"Nay, good heart, be not in so deadly a passion," cried the good dame, earnestly.

"Passion!" bawled the justice, in a louder voice, and seemingly in an increased rage. "Wounds! but methinks here is fine occasion for it. It is but fitting I should be in a passion—in a horrible, tearing passion, at such a villainous affront as this. O' my life, I should be monstrous glad now to do some deadly mischief." And at this he pulled his rapier a little out of the sheath, and