

**SHAKESPEARE SELECT
PLAYS; THE FAMOUS
HISTORY OF THE LIFE OF
KING HENRY THE EIGHTH**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649581450

Shakespeare Select Plays; The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth by William Shakespeare & William Aldis Wright

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Cover @ 2017

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & WILLIAM ALDIS WRIGHT

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Clarendon Press Series

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W. ALDIS WRIGHT

London
HENRY FROWDE



OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS WAREHOUSE
AMEN CORNER, E.C.

Clarendon Press Series

SHAKESPEARE

SELECT PLAYS

THE FAMOUS HISTORY OF THE LIFE OF
KING HENRY THE EIGHTH

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AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

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Oxford

PRINTED AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
BY MORACE HART, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

P R E F A C E.

'THE famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eight' was first printed in 'Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies,' a folio volume which was brought out in 1623 by the players Heminge and Condell, and is known as the first Folio. This is the only external evidence which connects the play with the name of Shakespeare. In a letter to his nephew, Sir Edmund Bacon, on July 2nd, 1613, Sir Henry Wotton writes: 'Now, to let matters of State sleep, I will entertain you at the present with what hath happened this Week at the Banks side. The Kings Players had a new Play, called *All is True*, representing some principal pieces of the reign of *Henry the 8th.* which was set forth with many extraordinary Circumstances of Pomp and Majesty, even to the matting of the Stage; the Knights of the Order, with their Georges and Garter, the Guards with their embroidered Coats, and the like: sufficient in truth within a while to make Greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous. Now, King *Henry* making a Masque at the cardinal *Wolsey's* House, and certain Cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the Paper, or other stuff, wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the Thatch, where being thought at first but an idle smoak, and their Eyes more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole House to the very ground.

'This was the fatal period of that virtuous Fabrique; wherein yet nothing did perish, but Wood and Straw, and a few forsaken Cloaks; only one Man had his Breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have broyled him, if he had not by the benefit of a provident wit put it out with Bottle-Ale.' *Reliquiæ Wottonianæ*, ed. 1685, p. 425.

This is confirmed in a MS. letter from Thomas Lorkin to

Sir Thomas Puckering in the Harleian Collection (N^o 7002, fol. 268), quoted by Tyrwhitt, and written on the last day of June, 1613; 'No longer since then yesterday, while Bourbage his companie were acting at y^e Globe the play of Hen: 8: and there shooting of certayne chambers in way of triumph; the fire catch'd & fastened vpon the thatch of y^e house and there burned so furiously as it consumed the whole house & all in lesse then two houres (the people hauing enough to doe to saue themselves).'¹

Again, Chamberlaine, writing to Sir Ralph Winwood from London on the 8th of July, 1613, gives him the news of the town: 'But the burning of the Globe a Playhouse on the Bankside on St Peter's Day cannot escape you; which fell out by a Peale of Chambers (that I know not upon what Occasion were to be used in the Play,) the Tampin or Stopple of one of them lighting in the Thatch that covered the House, burnd it down to the Ground in less than two Hours, with a Dwelling-house adjoining; and it was a great Marvaile and fair Grace of God that the People had so little Harm, having but two narrow Doors to get out.' Winwood's Memorials, ed. Sawyer, iii. 469.

Ben Jonson, though this is disputed by Gifford, was apparently present when the theatre was burnt, and commemorated it in his Execration upon Vulcan:

'But O those reeds! thy mere disdain of them
Made thee beget that cruel stratagem,
Which some are pleased to stile but thy mad prank,
Against the Globe the glory of the Bank:
Which though it were the fort of the whole parish,
Flank'd with a ditch, and forced out of a marrish,
I saw with two poor chambers taken in,
And razed; ere thought could urge this might have been!
See the World's ruins! nothing but the piles
Left, and wit since to cover it with tiles.'

¹ For the exact reference to this passage in the MS., and for the fuller quotation, I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. E. Maunde Thompson, Principal Librarian of the British Museum.

It is evident from the contemporary accounts that the play which was acted on this occasion was a play called *Henry VIII*, and that it had a second title *All is True*. This is confirmed by Howes, the Continuator of Stow's *Chronicle*, who in the year 1615 (p. 926), in relating the incident, records that it took place, 'the house being filled with people, to behold the play, viz. of Henry the 8.' About the further question, whether this play of Henry the Eighth is the same as that with which we are familiar, there are considerable differences of opinion. Gifford, in his *Life of Ben Jonson* (ed. 1816), p. cclxxiii, maintained 'that the piece acted in 1613 was "a new play, called *All is Truth*," constructed, indeed, on the history of Henry VIII, and, like that, full of shows; but giving probably a different view of some of the leading incidents of that monarch's life.' But this is merely part of an argument by which he defends Ben Jonson against the charge of malignity towards Shakespeare, which had been urged by Malone and Steevens, and he proceeds on the assumption that Malone was right in assigning the original appearance of *Henry VIII* to the year 1601, in which case it could not have been described as a new play when it was revived in 1613. He was therefore driven to conjecture that *All is True* was something entirely distinct from the piece attributed to Shakespeare. For a different reason Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps, in the eighth edition of his *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*, pronounced against their identity. 'It is true,' he says (i. 241), 'that some of the historical incidents in the piece that was in course of representation when the accident occurred are also introduced into Shakespeare's play, but it is not likely that there was any other resemblance between the two works.' The only reason for this confident opinion appears to be that in a ballad¹ which

¹ Two ballads were entered at Stationers' Hall the very day after the fire: one by Symon Stafford, under the title of 'The sodayne Burning of The Globe on the Bankside in the Play tyme on Saint Peters day last 1613'; the other by Edward White, called 'A