

**MEMORANDA ON THE
MIDSUMMER
NIGHT'S DREAM, A.D.
1879 AND A.D. 1855**

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Memoranda on the Midsummer Night's Dream, A.D. 1879 and A.D. 1855 by J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps

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J. O. HALLIWELL-PHILLIPPS

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Midsummer Night's Dream.



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BY

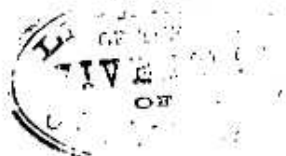
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1879.



MEMORANDA.—A.D. 1879.

THE "Introduction" reprinted at the close of these Memoranda was written by me in the year 1855. It is, I hope, unnecessary to observe that many of the opinions and arguments therein advanced are now seen to be untenable.

The most foolish perhaps of all of them is the form of contrast suggested between the *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, and taking it for granted that the latter must be an earlier composition. It may certainly be so, but *Love's Labour's Lost* was probably written *in its amended form* in the year 1597, and first acted *in that state* before Queen Elizabeth in the Christmas holidays of that year. There is no good evidence that the *Midsummer Night's Dream* was written any length of time before the month of September, 1598; at which period it is mentioned by Meres under the title of *Midsummers night dreame*.

The accounts of the bad weather of 1594 are valueless in the question of the chronology, and, indeed, as Mr. Knight has observed,

Stowe's notice of the "fair harvest" in August is inconsistent with Titania's description. Let us hope that the following new evidence derived from Spenser may be considered to be of a more decisive character.

It is this. There seems to be a certainty that Shakespeare, in the composition of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, had in one place a recollection of the sixth book of the *Faerie Queene*, published in 1596, for he all but literally quotes the following line from the eighth canto of that book,—"*Through hills and dales, through bushes and through breres,*" *Faerie Queene*, ed. 1596, p. 460. As the *Midsummer Night's Dream* was not printed until the year 1600, and it is impossible that Spenser could have been present at any representation of the comedy before he had written the sixth book of the *Faerie Queene*, it may fairly be concluded that Shakspeare's play was not composed at the earliest before the year 1596, in fact, not until some time after January the 20th, 1595-6, on which day the Second Part of the *Faerie Queene* was entered on the books of the Stationers' Company. The sixth book of that poem was probably written as early as 1592 or 1593, certainly in Ireland and at some con-

siderable time before the month of November, 1594, the date of the entry of publication of the *Amoretti*, in the eightieth sonnet of which it is distinctly alluded to as having been completed previously to the composition of the latter work.

The following passage in the comedy of the *Wisdom of Doctor Dodypoll*, 1600,—

'Twas I that lead you through the painted meades,
Where the light fairies daunst upon the flowers,
Hanging on every leafe an orient pearle,
Which, strooke together with the silken winde,
Of their loose mantels made a silver chime,

has been thought to have been imitated from the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. As Dr. Dodypoule is mentioned by Nash as early as 1596, this argument would prove Shakespeare's comedy to have been then in existence; but surely the imagery is too vague for such a conclusion to be safely arrived at. In all these discussions we should be careful to exclude the reception of evidence from similarities of language that might by any possibility be accidental. This can scarcely be the case with the coincidence above cited from Spenser.

According to Mr. Stokes, who derives his information from books with which I am not

acquainted,—“Elze, Kurz and Dowden think the *Midsummer Night's Dream* was written to do honour to the marriage of the Earl of Essex in 1590,” *Attempt to Determine the Chronological Order*, 1878, p. 48. A variety of similar conjectures, equally gratuitous and equally silly, are mentioned in the same elegant and useful work.

In reference to Mr. Gerald Massey's opinion that “Shakespeare unquestionably borrowed from Drayton's *Nymphidia* to enrich his fairy world of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*,” it may be well to observe that there is no doubt that Drayton's poem was written after the publication of the comedy. Bindley, the celebrated collector, possessed a copy of Drayton's *Battaile of Agincourt*, *Miseries of Queen Margarite*, *Nymphidia*, &c., fol. Lond. 1627, with the following manuscript note in the author's own handwriting,—“to the noble knight, my most honored frend, Sir Henry Willoughby, one of the selected patrons of *thes my latest poems*, from his servant, Mi. Drayton.”

The woodcut on the title-page of Fisher's edition of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1600, is the printer's device. It is repeated in the second part of *Antonio's Revenge*, “Printed

for Thomas Fisher, and are to be soulede in Saint Dunstans Church-yard, 1602." It may be just worth notice that the wood-block used on the title-page of Roberts's edition of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1600, was slightly cracked.

"A Midsommers Nights Dreame, comedie," occurs in a list of books read by Drummond of Hawthornden in the year 1606, a list of which is preserved in manuscript in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of Edinburgh. The play is also named by him in a list of books in his possession in the year 1611.

It should be mentioned that the comedy of the *Fleire*, which furnishes so curious an illustration of the character of *Thisbe* as represented in Shakespeare's time, was entered on the books of the Stationers' Company in May, 1606, as, "A Comedie called the *Fleare*."

Unless the sentence was a proverbial one, Sir T. Hoby must be considered to quote the *Midsummer Night's Dream* in a letter to Mr. T. H., 1609,—"*And yet let mee tell you this, for ought that ever I could reade, there is no such great difference betweene our practise and S. Augustines custome as you surmise.*"