

**THE TWO NOBLE
KINSMEN. PART 2,
SERIES 2, NO. 15**

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The two noble kinsmen. Part 2, Series 2, No. 15 by William Shakspeare & John Fletcher

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WILLIAM SHAKSPERE & JOHN FLETCHER

**THE TWO NOBLE
KINSMEN. PART 2,
SERIES 2, NO. 15**

New Shakspeare Society
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Series 2. Plays

No. 15

37

THE
TWO NOBLE KINSMEN.

BY
WILLIAM SHAKSPERE AND JOHN FLETCHER.

Edited from the Quarto of 1634

BY
HAROLD LITTLEDALE, B.A.

PART II.

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DEDICATED
TO MY WIFE.

H. L.

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INTRODUCTION.

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§ 1. THE source of this play is the *Knights Tale*, in Chaucer's ^{Sources of} Canterbury Tales; and a comparison of play and poem will show ^{the play.} how closely the original story has been adhered to in the structure of the main plot. Unlike many of the plays which Shakspeare ^{Chaucer.} produced, we have no evidence, beyond the vaguest conjecture, to suggest that this play has been based on an earlier drama on the same subject.

§ 2. We know that in 1566 a play called *Palæmon and Arcté*, ^{Edwardes's} by Richard Edwardes, was performed before Queen Elizabeth at ^{Palæmon and} Oxford; but certain indications make it quite clear, though this play ^{Arcté.} has perished, that it can have had little likeness to the *Two Noble Kinsmen*, and may rather have resembled the *Damon and Pythias* (see Hazlitt's Dodsley, vol. iv.) of the same author.

§ 3. Wood's account in the *Athenæ Oxonienses* has mention of ^{Wood mentions} the play several times, but the following passages,¹ ^{Edwardes's play} communicated several times to Nicholls, the historian of Elizabeth's Progresses, by Mr. Gutch, from Wood's MSS., are more detailed, and clearly show that Edwardes's play and the play before us must have differed so materially as to make it almost certain that the authors of the latter

¹ Previously pointed out by me in Introduction, *Leopold Shakspeare*, p. xcix.

Wood's chief
accounts of play
of 1566 quoted.

can have known nothing of the former. "Sept. 2, 1566. At night the Queen heard the first part of an English play, named *Palamon*, or *Palamon Arcyte*, made by Mr. Richard Edwards, a gentleman of her chapel, acted with very great applause in Christ Church Hall At the beginning of which play, there was, by part of the stage which fell, three persons slain; namely, Walker, a scholar of St. Mary Hall; one Penrice, a Brewer, and John Gilbert, Cook of Corpus Christi College, beside five that were hurt: which disaster coming to the Queen's knowledge, she sent forthwith the Vice-chancellor and her Chirurgions to help them, and to have a care that they want nothing for their recovery. Afterwards the actors performed their parts so well, that the Queen laughed heartily thereat, and gave the author of the play great thanks for his pains. (p. 210—11.)

. . . . Sept. 4, 1566. At night the Queen was present at the other part of the play of *Palamon and Arcyte*, which should have been acted the night before, but deferred because it was late when the Queen came from disputations at St. Mary's. When the play was ended, she called for Mr. Edwards, the author, and gave him very great thanks, with promises of reward, for his pains; then, making a pause, said to him and her retinue standing about her, this relating to part of the play: 'By Palæmon, I warrant he dallieth not in love when he was in love indeed; by Arcyte, he was a right martial knight, having a swart countenance¹ and a manly face; by Treccatio, God's pity, what a knave it is; by Perithous, throwing St. Edward's rich cloak into the funeral fire, which a stander-by would have stayed by the arm with an oath, Go fool, he knoweth his part, I warrant.' In the said play was acted a cry of hounds in the Quadrant, upon the train of a fox in the hunting of Theseus, with which the young scholars, who stood in the windows, were so much taken (supposing it was real), that they cried out, 'Now, now!—there, there!—he's caught, he's caught!' All which the Queen merrily beholding, said, 'O excellent! these boys, in very troth, are ready to leap out of the windows, to follow the hounds!' This part it seems, being repeated before certain courtiers, in the lodgings of Mr. Robert Marbeck, one of the Canons of Christ Church, by the

Elizabeth's
criticisms.

¹ Cf. *Two Noble Kinsmen*, IV. ii. 44: Arcyte is "a mere gipsy."

players in their gowns (for they were all Scholars that acted), before the Queen came to Oxford, was by them so well liked, that they said it far surpassed *Damon and Pythias*, than which, they thought, nothing could be better. Likewise some said, that if the author did any more before his death, he would run mad: but this comedy was the last he made, for he died within a few months after. In the acting of the said play, there was a good part performed by the Lady Amelia, who, for gathering her flowers prettily in a garden then represented, and singing sweetly in the time of March [? May], received eight angels for a gracious reward by her Majesty's command. By whom that part was acted I know not, unless by Peter Carew, the pretty boy before mentioned." (pp. 212—13.)¹

§ 4. I have given this curious extract in full. Surely it eliminates the Oxford play of 1566 from the possible sources of the *Two Noble Kinsmen*? Play of 1566 not a source.

§ 5. And the evidence seems equally explicit on the remaining hypothetical source of this play: a piece called *Palamon and Arsett*, which, we learn from Henslowe's *Diary* (pp. 41, 43, 44, ed. Shakespeare Soc.), was "acted several times at the Newington theatre in 1594. Mr. Collier conjectures that the last-mentioned piece may have been a rifacimento of Edwards's play, and that in 1594 Shakespeare may have introduced into *Palamon and Arsett* those alterations and additions which afterwards 'were employed by Fletcher in the play as it was printed in 1634.' But I suspect," continues Mr. Dyce,² "that the *Palamon and Arsett* of 1594 was a distinct piece from the academical drama of 1566; and I cannot persuade myself that the 'Shakespearian' portions of the *Two Noble Kinsmen* were composed so early as 1594—stamped as they everywhere are with the manner of Shakespeare's later years." *Palamon and Arsett* (Henslowe's Diary), 1594. Collier's theory answered by Dyce.

¹ Nicholls, *Progr. of Eliz.*, new edit., 1823, pp. 210—13; old edit., vol. iii. pp. 110—112; see Furnivall's *Harrison*, p. liv.

² Shakespeare, vol. viii. p. 118, ed. 1876. These are strong words from Mr. Dyce, who previously, in the preface to Aldine edition of Shakspeare's poems (p. xliii, note 65), said: "The title-page of the first edition of Fletcher's *Two Noble Kinsmen* attributes the play partly to Shakespeare; I do not think our poet had any share in its composition: but I must add, that Mr. C. Lamb (a great authority in such matters) inclines to a different opinion."