

**SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY OF
HAMLET; WITH INTRODUCTION,
AND NOTES EXPLANATORY AND
CRITICAL; FOR USE IN SCHOOLS
AND CLASSES**

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Shakespeare's Tragedy of Hamlet; With Introduction, and Notes Explanatory and Critical; For Use in Schools and Classes by William Shakespeare & Henry N. Hudson

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & HENRY N. HUDSON

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WITH
INTRODUCTION, AND NOTES EXPLANATORY AND CRITICAL.

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND CLASSES.

BY THE
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PREFACE.

SINCE the first volume of my *School Shakespeare* made its appearance, which was about nine years ago, very considerable advances have been made in the way of furniture and preparation needful or desirable for such a work. This is especially the case with the play here presented in a new dress. And my own long and constant occupation in teaching classes in Shakespeare has, I would fain hope, now brought me a somewhat larger and riper fitness for doing what is requisite in this particular field. Moreover the stereotype plates of this play, as also of some others, have been so much and so often used for the pamphlet sections of the volume, that they have become not a little worn and defaced. These are the principal reasons for setting forth the present edition.

I still adhere to my old plan of foot-notes, instead of massing the annotation all together at the end of the play. This is because ample experience has assured me, beyond all peradventure, that whatever of explanation young students need of Shakespeare's text — and they certainly need a good deal — is much better every way when placed directly under the eye, so that they can hardly miss it; and because at least nineteen in twenty of such pupils will pass over an obscure word or phrase without understanding it, rather than stay to look up the explanation in another part of the volume. In this instance, however, I have meant to exclude from the foot-notes all matter but what appeared fairly needful or useful

for a proper understanding of the Poet's language and meaning. As will readily be seen from some of the foot-notes, I am indebted to Mr. JOSEPH CROSBY, of Zanesville, O., for most valuable aid towards this part of my task. The matter so used has been communicated to me in a private correspondence with that gentleman, running through several years, and extending over the whole field of Shakespeare, and throwing more light on dark and difficult passages than I have received from any other living commentator on the Poet.

Another advantage of the method of foot-notes is, that it operates as a wholesome restraint against overdoing the work of annotation. And surely, if we may judge from what has been done, it is so much easier to multiply superfluous notes than to keep within the bounds of what is fairly needful in this kind, that some such restraint seems eminently desirable. Shakespeare, it scarce need be said, has suffered a great deal from this sort of exegetical incontinence. And perhaps the tendency is stronger now than ever before to smother his workmanship beneath a mass of needless and even obstructive annotation. An inordinate fecundity of explanation is quite too much the order of the day. There have been divers instances, of late, where we find the gloss, I cannot say out-weighting, but certainly far out-bulking, the text. Surely it is better to leave students a little unhelped than thus to encumber them with superfluous help. These burdens of unnecessary comment are really a "weariness of the flesh"; and even hungry minds may well be repelled from a feast so overlaid with quenchers of the appetite. Nor have the Poet's editors yet got their minds untied from the old vice of leaving many of his darkest things unexplained, and of explaining a multitude of things that were better left to

take care of themselves. For pupils ought not to be put to studying Shakespeare at all, until they have grown to such a measure of intelligence, that they may be safely presumed to know several things without being told.

Such being the case, or at least my view of the case, I am not without apprehension, that some excess may be justly charged upon what is here done. Self-restrained and sparing as I have meant to be, still there is a considerable addition to the number of notes given in my former edition. But, in the matter of annotation, it is not easy to strike just the right medium between too much and too little. Here, again, I have been mainly guided by the results of my own experience in teaching; aiming to give such and so many notes as I have found needful or conducive to a fair understanding of the Poet's thought.

In the present stage of Shakespearian study, I suppose it would hardly do, even in a book designed for school use, to leave the matter of textual comment and textual correction altogether untouched. Accordingly there will be found, at the end of the play, a body of CRITICAL NOTES, wherein I have drawn together whatever seemed necessary or desirable to be said in the way of textual criticism, and of comment on such particulars of textual correction as are here admitted. In doing this, I have almost unavoidably been led to note a few instances of different readings.

These few cases excepted, I have purposely, and with full deliberation, abstained from every thing in the line of variorum comment and citation. For, indeed, such matter, however right and good in its place, can hardly be of any use or interest save to those who are making or intending to make a specialty of Shakespearian lore. But, of the pupils and even the teachers in our schools and colleges, probably

not one in five hundred has, or ought to have, any thought of becoming a specialist in Shakespeare, or a linguistic antiquary in any department of study. To such students, a minute discussion or presentation of various readings must needs be a stark impertinence; and its effect, if it have any, can hardly be other than to confuse and perplex their thoughts. In this, as in other walks of human service, the processes of elaborate study are of very limited use, and may well be confined to a few; while the last results of such study are or may be highly useful to all. I hold, indeed, that Shakespeare ought to be made much more of than he is in our higher education: not, however, with the view of fitting people to be editors and critics; but that they may have their minds and hearts rightly attuned to the delectations of his poetry and eloquence and wisdom; and that they may carry from the study some fair preparation of liberal thought and culture and taste into the common pursuits and interests of life. The world is getting prodigiously overstocked with authors; so many are aspiring to gain a living by their wits, that the thing is becoming a dreadful nuisance: and it really seems full time that we should begin to take more thought how a condition of "plain living" may be sanctified with the grace of "high thinking"; and how even the humbler and more drudging forms of labour may be sweetened by the pure and ennobling felicities of unambitious intelligence.

A question has lately been raised, and is still pending, as to the comparative value of verbal and of what is called æsthetic criticism; and some have spoken disparagingly, not to say contemptuously, of the latter, as a mere irrelevancy, which they would fain be rid of altogether. Verbal criticism certainly has its place, and in its place is not to be dispensed with; and it has at least this advantage over the

other, that it is strictly necessary in the study of such authors as Shakespeare, who abounds in words and phrases which, to common readers, are quite unintelligible without such help. This, however, may easily be overdone, and in fact sometimes has been hugely overdone, insomuch as to become little better than a sheer incumbrance ; nevertheless, on the whole, it has been of incalculable service. But the other, I must think, has done good service too, and has fairly justified its claims to a high estimate in Shakespearian lore : albeit I have to confess that some discredit has of late come upon it, from the fact that, in divers cases, it has taken to very odd and eccentric courses, and has displayed an ill-starred propensity to speculate and subtilize the Poet's workmanship clean out of its natural propriety. Transcendental metaphysics, whether applied to science, to philosophy, to art, or to whatsoever else, of course loves to "reason high, and finds no end, in wandering mazes lost." Whatever it takes in hand, it can easily discover any meaning it wants, and as easily argue away any meaning not in accordance with its idealistic predilections ; so using its alchemy as to "extract sunbeams from cucumbers," or to resolve gold into vapour, just as it happens to list. But these abuses may very well be struck off without casting away the thing itself. And the æsthetic criticism of Coleridge, Schlegel, Charles Lamb, Hazlitt, and Mrs. Jameson, has probably done more to diffuse and promote the study of Shakespeare, than all the verbal criticism in the world put together.

The *Introduction* here given, as also some of the foot-notes, is mainly occupied with matter in this line ; the aim being, to aid such students as may care to be aided, towards what may be termed the *interior* study of Shakespeare's characters. Ordinarily, in books designed for such use as the