

**SHAKSPEARE'S TRAGEDY OF
OTHELLO: WITH EXPLANATORY
AND
ILLUSTRATIVE NOTES, SELECTED
CRITICISMS ON THE PLAY, ETC.**

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Shakspeare's Tragedy of Othello: With Explanatory and Illustrative Notes, Selected Criticisms on the Play, Etc. by William Shakespeare & John Hunter

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & JOHN HUNTER

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WITH EXPLANATORY
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ON THE PLAY, ETC.

*Adapted for Scholastic or Private Study, and for those qualifying for University
and Government Examinations.*

BY THE REV. JOHN HUNTER, M.A.

Instructor of Candidates for the Civil Service and other Public Examinations; and
formerly Vice-Principal of the National Society's Training College, Battersea.

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INTRODUCTION TO OTHELLO.

In 'Extracts from the Accounts of the Revels at Court,'—one of the Shakspeare Society's reprints, we find the earliest known record of the performance of Othello. 'The King's Players,' it is there said, 'performed the play of the Moor of Venice at the Banqueting-house at Whitehall, on the 1st of November (Hallowmas Day), 1604.' We have other records of its performance in the author's life-time, informing us of its having been represented at the Globe Theatre on the last day in April, 1610, and at the Court early in the year 1613. We may well suppose that it was very popular; yet it appears to have remained unpublished till the year 1622, when it was issued in the usual small quarto form, with the following title: 'The Tragedy of Othello, The Moore of Venice. As it hath benee diverse times acted at the Globe, and at the Black-Friers, by his Majesties Servants. Written by William Shakspeare. London, Printed by N. O. for Thomas Walkley, and are to be sold at his shop at the Eagle and Child, in Brittans Barse, 1622.' This was only one year in anticipation of Heminge and Coudell's folio publication of the first collection of Shakspeare's plays. Another quarto edition of Othello appeared in 1630.

Reed says 'The time of this play may be ascertained from the following circumstances. Selymus the Second formed his design against Cyprus in 1569, and took it in 1571. This was the only attempt the Turks ever made upon that island after it came into the hands of the Venetians (which was in the year 1473); wherefore the time must fall in with some part of that interval. We learn from the play that there was a junction of

the Turkish fleet at Rhodes, in order for the invasion of Cyprus; that it first came sailing towards Cyprus, then went to Rhodes, there met another squadron, and then resumed its way to Cyprus. These are real historical facts, which happened when Mustapha Selymus's general attacked Cyprus in May, 1570, which therefore is the true period of this performance.'

Othello was probably composed in 1603 or 1604, when its author was about 40 years of age, and his genius had attained, and begun to exercise continuously, its full vigour. The story on which it is founded is one of the *Hecatommithi*, or 'Hundred Tales,' of Giraldi Cinthio, being the 7th novel of the 3rd decade. A French translation of Cinthio's novels, by Gabriel Chappuys, was published in 1584; but no ancient English translation has come down to us, though in all probability it was some English version of the story of the Moor of Venice that suggested the tragedy. There are two modern English translations of that story: one by Wolstenholme Parr, 1795, the other by John Edward Taylor, 1855. We shall here give a brief summary of the earlier portion of the story, with the addition of a few abridged quotations from the latter part of Taylor's translation.

*Abstract of Giraldi Cinthio's Story of
The Moor of Venice.*

There once lived in Venice a valiant and handsome Moor, highly esteemed by the Signiory of the Republic for his military talents. A virtuous and beautiful lady, named Desdemona, admiring his valour, fell in love with him, and won his affection; and, in spite of the opposition of her parents, they were married. They lived together in great harmony for some time. The Signiory of Venice, however, happening to make a change in the troops that garrisoned Cyprus, appointed the Moor commander of the soldiers ordered to that island. Desdemona was eager to accompany him in the expedition; but he was as reluctant to let her thus encounter toil and danger, as to leave her behind. She said that she apprehended no danger, but if there were any toils and perils, she would share them

with him. The Moor kissed her, and said, 'God keep you long in such love, dear wife!' Then speedily preparing for his voyage, he took her with him on board his galley with the troops. The sea was calm, the voyage very pleasant, and they arrived safely at Cyprus.

Now, there was one of the soldiers, an ensign, in great favour with the Moor. He was a very handsome man, but of a very depraved nature. The villany of his mind was, however, cloaked with a plausible manner. His artful speech made him appear honourable and heroic. He, too, had taken his wife to Cyprus, a young Italian lady, fair and virtuous, and much beloved by Desdemona, who spent much time with her.

There was another of the soldiers, a captain of a troop, and he being also in great favour with the Moor, Desdemona, with her husband's approval, showed him great kindness.

Now, the wicked ensign fell violently in love with Desdemona, and sought in various ways to make known to her his passion. But all his attempts to gain her love proving vain, he took it into his head that his ill success was owing to Desdemona's love for the captain; and he therefore began both to hate the lady, and also to seek means of removing the captain from her sight; and at length he became bent on compassing the death of the captain, and alienating the Moor's affection from Desdemona. He resolved to contrive occasion for making the Moor suppose that Desdemona was unfaithful, and that the captain was her paramour.

Shortly afterwards, it happened that the captain drew his sword upon a soldier of the guard, and struck him, and was for this offence deprived of his captaincy by the Moor. Desdemona, deeply grieved at this, tried all she could to reconcile her husband to the dismissed soldier. The Moor made known her importunity to the ensign, and this circumstance the ensign immediately took advantage of, and therewith began to work his web of treachery. He said to the Moor that possibly Desdemona had good cause to look kindly on the man; but when the Moor asked him what he meant, the