

**OXFORD LOCAL EXAMINATIONS OF 1865;
SHAKSPEARE'S TRAGEDY OF HAMLET, WITH
NOTES, EXTRACTS FROM THE OLD 'HISTORIE
OF HAMBLET,' SELECTED CRITICISMS ON THE
PLAY, ETC. ETC. ADAPTED FOR USE IN
SCHOOLS AND FOR PRIVATE STUDY**

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & JOHN HUNTER

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BY THE

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PREFACE.

THE legend of Amleth, or Hamlet, is first met with in the Third and Fourth Books of the 'History of Denmark,' written in Latin by Saxo Grammaticus, a native of Elsinore, about the end of the twelfth century, but not printed till 1514. About fifty years after the publication of Saxo's history, Belleforest, in a French collection of stories, called 'Histoires Tragiques,' introduced that of Amleth, in a form pretty nearly corresponding to the Danish historian's account, leaving out a few gross and absurd details, and considerably amplifying some of the sentimental portions; but presenting, like the original, a very poor treasury of incident and thought for the purposes of dramatic adaptation. From the 'Histoires Tragiques,' an English translation, called the 'Historie of Hamlet,' was made before the close of the sixteenth century; but the only perfect copy of it known to exist is a black-letter quarto, bearing the date of 1608, and now in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge. A modern reprint of it (1841) will be found in J. P. Collier's 'Shakspeare's Library.'

If this 'Historie' was the only source from which Shakspeare derived materials for the framework of his 'Hamlet,' all the excellence of that wonderful drama is his own. As Capel observes, 'None of the relater's expressions have got into the play, except when Hamlet kills the counsellor behind the arras: here, beating the hangings, he cries out, "A rat! a rat!"' But from some allusions by old writers, it seems tolerably certain that the story of Hamlet had been dramatised, with the introduction of a ghost scene, before Shakspeare had reached his 24th year; and therefore our poet may have taken the outline of his plot from a previous play, rather than from the Danish historian's legend, which makes no mention of a ghost. But, as Collier, in his edition of Shakspeare, says, 'How far that lost play might be an improvement upon the old translated *Historie* we have no means of deciding, nor to what extent Shakspeare availed himself of such improvement.' *

* The following extract from Sir Thomas Overbury's *Characters* deserves to be read by the student of Shakspeare's *Hamlet*. I cannot help thinking that it was seen in manuscript, if not in print, by our dramatist before the *Hamlet* was written:—

'*A Melancholy Man* is a strayer from the drove: one that nature made sociable, because she made him man, and a crazed disposition hath altered. Impleasing to all, as all to him, straggling thoughts are his content; they make him dream waking, there's his pleasure. His imagination is never idle, it keeps his mind in a continual motion, as the poise the clock: he winds up his thoughts often, and as often unwinds them; Penelope's web thrives faster. He'll seldom be found without the shade of some grove, in whose bottom a river dwells. He carries a cloud in his face, never fair weather; his out-

The first production of Shakspeare's 'Hamlet,' in the original form (for he afterwards altered it), was certainly not later than 1602, and probably not later than 1589, when he was only twenty-five years of age. The earliest edition of it known is the small quarto of 1603, of which one copy is in the library of the Duke of Devonshire, and another, discovered in 1856, is deposited in the British Museum. In the year 1604, another edition came forth, under the title of 'The Tragical Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke. By William Shakspeare. Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie. At London, printed by I. R. for N. L. and are to be sold at his shoppe vnder Saint Dunston's Church in Fleetstreet. 1604.' Only three copies of this second quarto are known, one of them

side is framed to his inside, in that he keeps a *decorum*, both unseemly. Speak to him; he hears with his eyes, ears follow his mind, and that's not at leisure. He thinks business, but never does any: he is all contemplation, no action. He hews and fashions his thoughts, as if he meant them to some purpose, but they prove unprofitable as a piece of wrought timber to no use. His spirit and the sun are enemies; the sun bright and warm, his humour black and cold.'

That Shakspeare had read some of Overbury's *Characters* before the production of the *Hamlet* may appear somewhat probable from a comparison of the following passages:—

'Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers,

Not of the dye which their investments show.—*Hamlet*, i. 3.

'*He dyeth his means and his meaning into two colours*; he baits craft with humility, and his countenance is the picture of the present disposition. He allures, is not allured, by his affections, for they are the brokers of his observation.'—OVERBURY'S *Dissembler*.

belonging to the Duke of Devonshire. Exact reprints of the two 'Devonshire Hamlets' were published, in one volume, in 1860.

It is very probable that the vilely-printed quarto of 1603 is a surreptitious version, by some ignorant copier or shorthand writer, of Shakspeare's first draft of his noble tragedy of 'Hamlet.' And we can easily suppose that draft to have been one of the earliest of his dramatic compositions. The second quarto, as well as the first, was surreptitious; but both are of great value in enabling us to rectify many mistakes and to supply several omissions in the folio of 1623, the first edition of the collected plays of Shakspeare.

In the present edition of the 'Hamlet,' we have endeavoured, by carefully collating the early quartos with the first folio, to give the text in the best *warrantable* form; but in order to render the book suitable for schools and family reading, we have omitted one or two of the more grossly indelicate sentences, the expurgation being of very slight extent.

It will be observed that we have departed from the usual practice of substituting an apostrophe for the silent vowel in the verbal affix *-ed*. On this subject we concur with Professor Craik, who, in the Prolegomena to his 'English of Shakspeare' (p. 62), says, 'It is true that the cases in which the *-ed* makes a separate syllable are more numerous in Shakspeare

than in the poetry of the present day; but the reader who cannot detect such a case on the instant is disqualified by some natural deficiency for the reading of verse. If any distinction were necessary, the better plan would be to represent the one form by *loved*, the other by *lov-ed*.'

With respect to the Notes, we hope they will not be thought more numerous than necessary. Sir Thomas Overbury says of one of his *Characters*, 'Where the gate stands open, he is ever seeking a stile, and where his learning ought to climb, he creeps through.' This description, unfortunately, is to a great extent applicable to many of Shakspeare's commentators. They often overload and mystify, and sometimes even pervert with comment, sentences or expressions of which the meaning is sufficiently obvious, while in too many instances they fail to mark the footsteps of the poet's less direct and obvious transitions, and leave unexplained what in the mind of the general reader is likely to be mistaken or very inadequately followed. But it is to be regretted that the injury done to our great dramatist by injudicious comment should have excited in not a few of his worshippers a prejudice against all attempts to elucidate his meaning. It is true that referring to marginal comments during the perusal of a play must disturb the reader's enjoyment of it, even when the exposition is sound and the illustration pertinent. But it is also true that the kind of pleasure felt by