

TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE

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Tales from Shakespeare by Charles Lamb & Mary Lamb

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CHARLES LAMB & MARY LAMB

**TALES FROM
SHAKESPEARE**

*EVERYMAN, I will go with thee,
and be thy guide,
In thy most need to go by thy side*

MARY ANN LAMB

CHARLES LAMB

Mary Ann Lamb was born in 1764;
Charles Lamb in 1775. He was her sole
protector from 1796 until he died on 27th
December 1834. Mary lived on until 1847.

This edition is illustrated by
Arthur Rackham

CHARLES AND MARY LAMB

Tales from Shakespeare



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EDITOR'S NOTE

CHARLES LAMB was still a young man, not yet known as 'Elia' of the essays, when he and his sister and life-long companion, Mary, wrote together in 1806 the *Tales from Shakespeare*; they were living at the time in Mitre Court Buildings, Temple. In a letter to a friend in that year, Mary Lamb says that plays, novels, poems, and 'all manner of such-like vapouring and vaporous schemes are floating in my head,' the result being that Charles, writing on 10th May, speaks of Mary as having already completed six of the tales: 'The Tempest,' 'Winter's Tale,' 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' 'Much Ado,' 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' and 'Cymbeline.' 'The Merchant of Venice' was in preparation; Charles himself had done 'Othello' and 'Macbeth,' and said it was his intention to do all the tragedies.

We get other interesting glimpses of the tales from Mary. 'You would like to see us,' she says, 'as we often sit, writing on one table (but not on one cushion sitting), like Hermia and Helena in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream'; or, rather, like an old literary Darby and Joan; I taking snuff, and he groaning all the while, and saying he can make nothing of it, which he always says till he has finished, and then he finds that he has made something of it.' And in one of Charles's letters he writes: 'Mary is stuck fast in "All's Well that Ends Well." She complains of having to set forth so many female characters in boys' clothes. She begins to think Shakespeare must have wanted imagination! I, to encourage her (for she often faints in the prosecution of her great work), flatter her by telling her how well such a play and such a play is done. But she is stuck fast, and I have been obliged to promise to assist her. To do this it will be necessary to leave off tobacco.' Later on, Mary writes that 'Charles has been reading over the tale I told you plagued me so much, and he thinks it one of the very best; it is "All's Well that Ends Well."' Finally, we find on 29th January 1807, Charles writing to Wordsworth: 'We have booked off from Swan and Two Necks, Lad Lane, this day (per

coach), the *Tales from Shakespeare*. . . . We think "Pericles" of hers the best, and "Othello" of mine; but I hope all have some good.'

Charles Lamb died at Edmonton in 1834. Mary Lamb lived for some years after him, and dying in 1847, was buried by his side in Edmonton churchyard.

Besides the *Tales from Shakespeare*, 1807, we have three tales by Charles in Mary Lamb's *Mrs. Leicester's School*, 1808, and *Poetry for Children*, which he wrote with her in 1809. The *Essays of Elia*, 1823, and the *Last Essays of Elia*, 1833, are his most precious books. How precious they are you will know when you read Elia's reverie upon Dream-Children, and his boyish *Recollections of Christ's Hospital*.

ERNEST RHYS.

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