

**HENRY IV:
SECOND PART**

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Henry IV: second part by William Shakespeare

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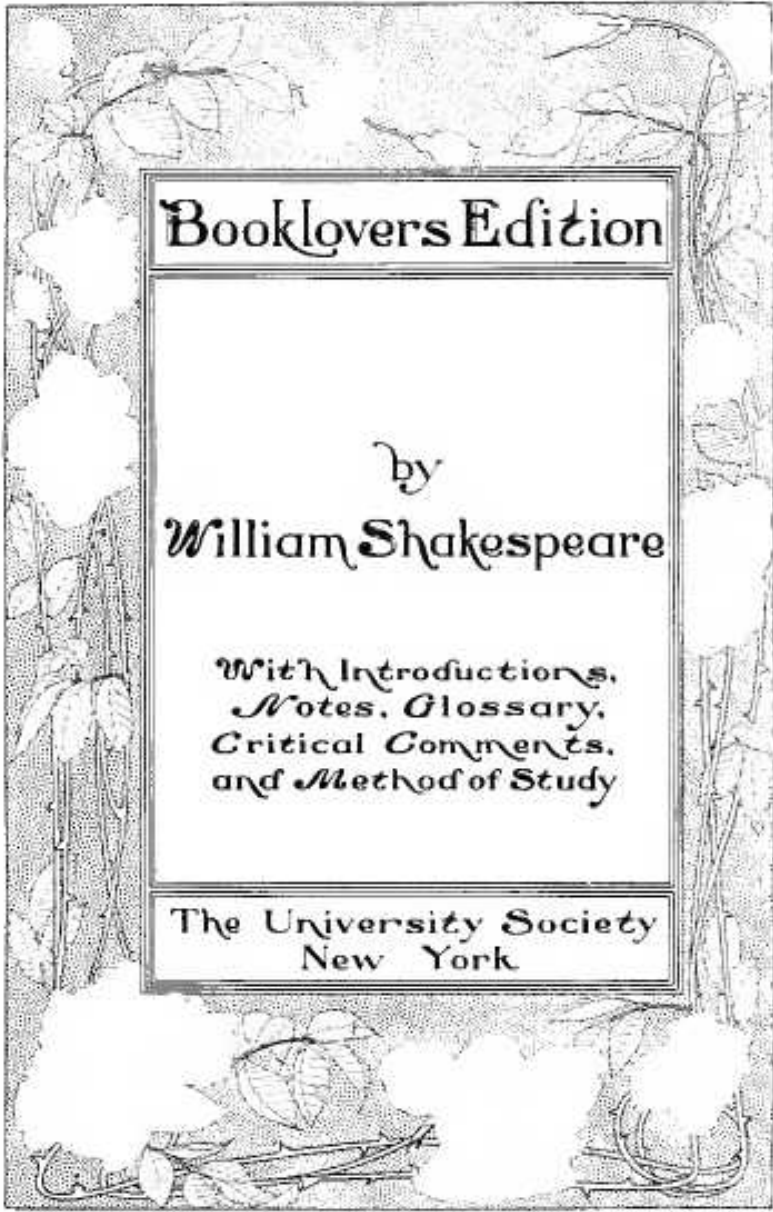
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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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SECOND PART**

A decorative border of stylized flowers and leaves surrounds the central text. The flowers are large and light-colored, with detailed leaves and stems. The background within the border has a fine, stippled texture.

Booklovers Edition

by
William Shakespeare

*With Introductions,
Notes, Glossary,
Critical Comments,
and Method of Study*

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The Second Part of
King Henry IV.

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2311
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1921

Critical Comments.

I.

Argument.

I. The Earl of Northumberland receives news of his son Hotspur's defeat and death; also that the King has despatched against him an army under the conduct of his second son, Prince John of Lancaster, and the Earl of Westmoreland. Though in feeble health, he resolves to resist. Meantime the generalship of the insurgent forces devolves upon Scroop, Archbishop of York.

II. Sir John Falstaff, though entrusted with a commission for levying a company of royal troops, cannot neglect his personal interests at the tavern. He runs up an account with the Hostess and narrowly escapes being sued for the debt. He is found in the tavern by the Prince of Wales, who has just returned from his victorious engagement at Shrewsbury; and the corpulent knight is summoned to forsake his cups and resume his military duties.

III. Falstaff's recruiting is more successful for his purse than for the army, since he releases able-bodied men who can buy themselves out of service, and retains weak, indifferent fellows who hardly serve for targets.

The King grows despondent on account of failing health and the northern insurrection. He cannot be persuaded but that the rebels will menace his throne; and he bemoans the wars which prevent his crusade to the Holy Land.

IV. The insurgent army under the Archbishop of York faces the royal forces of Prince John in Gaultree Forest, Yorkshire. The latter, instead of hazarding a general engagement, invites the rising chieftains to a conference, in which he promises redress of their alleged grievances, proclaims peace, and urges a dispersion of both armies. The insurgents take him at his word and dismiss their forces; whereupon the perfidious prince, who had previously given secret instructions to his own army to fall upon the scattered insurgent bands, seizes on the persons of York and the other rebel leaders and condemns them to be executed for treason. The news of the discomfiture of the insurgent army is carried to the sick King, who, however, is too feeble to evince much interest in the tidings. He sinks rapidly. The Prince of Wales is summoned from his tavern circle to attend his father, whom he finds in a stupor, with the crown beside him on the pillow. Believing him to be dead, the Prince removes the crown to another room—and thereby incurs the bitter reproaches of the King, who believes his son desirous of his death. Prince Henry justifies his conduct, and the two are reconciled.

V. Shortly afterwards Henry IV. passes away, and the Prince of Wales is crowned Henry V. No sooner does he assume his regal dignities than he dismisses from his society Sir John Falstaff and his convivial crew, and resolves henceforth to prove worthy of his high office.

McSPADEN: *Shakespearian Synopses*.

II.

Falstaff.

A man with a great flow of animal spirits is sometimes, especially if he is liable to sudden bursts of this exuberance, mistaken to be under the influence of wine. Falstaff's average rate of mirth is so high that wine refuses to contest it. The blood of his vein can afford to be

handicapped against the blood of the grape. The monstrous quantities of sack sink through the porosities of his rotundity, and mildly percolate a subterranean world; so that his abstinence in the article of bread is a very nice instinct that balancing bulk enough exists already.

Falstaff, by every ordinary law of human nature, should be inebriated. His exemption is a kind of atheism. But he prefers to have his own vices overdone in the persons of his companions, all of whom seem to have anticipated the sanitary argument in favor of the use of liquor that an American suggested: "If water will rot a cedar-post, what will it do to the human stomach!" . . .

Sir John does not intend to be readily put down. In the matter of arrest at Dame Quickly's suit for debt, how airily he gives the Chief Justice tap for tap, and urges that the officers are hindering him from going on the King's errand! He is hard to get fairly cooped in a corner; most invaluable counsel to defend a ring, big enough to break through the most carefully woven indictment. When you think you have him neatly at bay, the bulky culprit floats over your head in a twinkling of resource and is gone: it is done so cleverly that you have not the heart to pursue him farther, or, if you do, it is only for the sake of enjoying an encore of this trapeze-shifting of his wit.

It is comic when his tone of protestation that he will discharge his debt to Dame Quickly succeeds in taking in her who has been so often deceived before. But one weakness is always too strong for another; so he is constantly betrayed into expense by her, and that is at once her vice and its reward. "I owe her money; and whether she be damned for that I know not."

It is also comic that his vanity prevents him from suspecting himself of cowardice and evasion of duty; so that he indulges the most inflated self-appreciation, and no misadventure is sharp enough to prick it. "Embowelled! 'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit."