

**SIDELIGHTS ON SHAKESPEARE: BEING  
STUDIES OF THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN.  
HENRY VIII. ARDEN OF FEVERSHAM. A  
YORKSHIRE TRAGEDY. THE  
TROUBLESOME REIGN OF KING JOHN.  
KING LEIR. PERICLES PRINCE OF TYRE**

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Sidelights on Shakespeare: being studies of The two noble kinsmen. Henry VIII. Arden of Feversham. A Yorkshire tragedy. The troublesome reign of King John. King Leir. Pericles prince of Tyre by H. Dugdale Sykes

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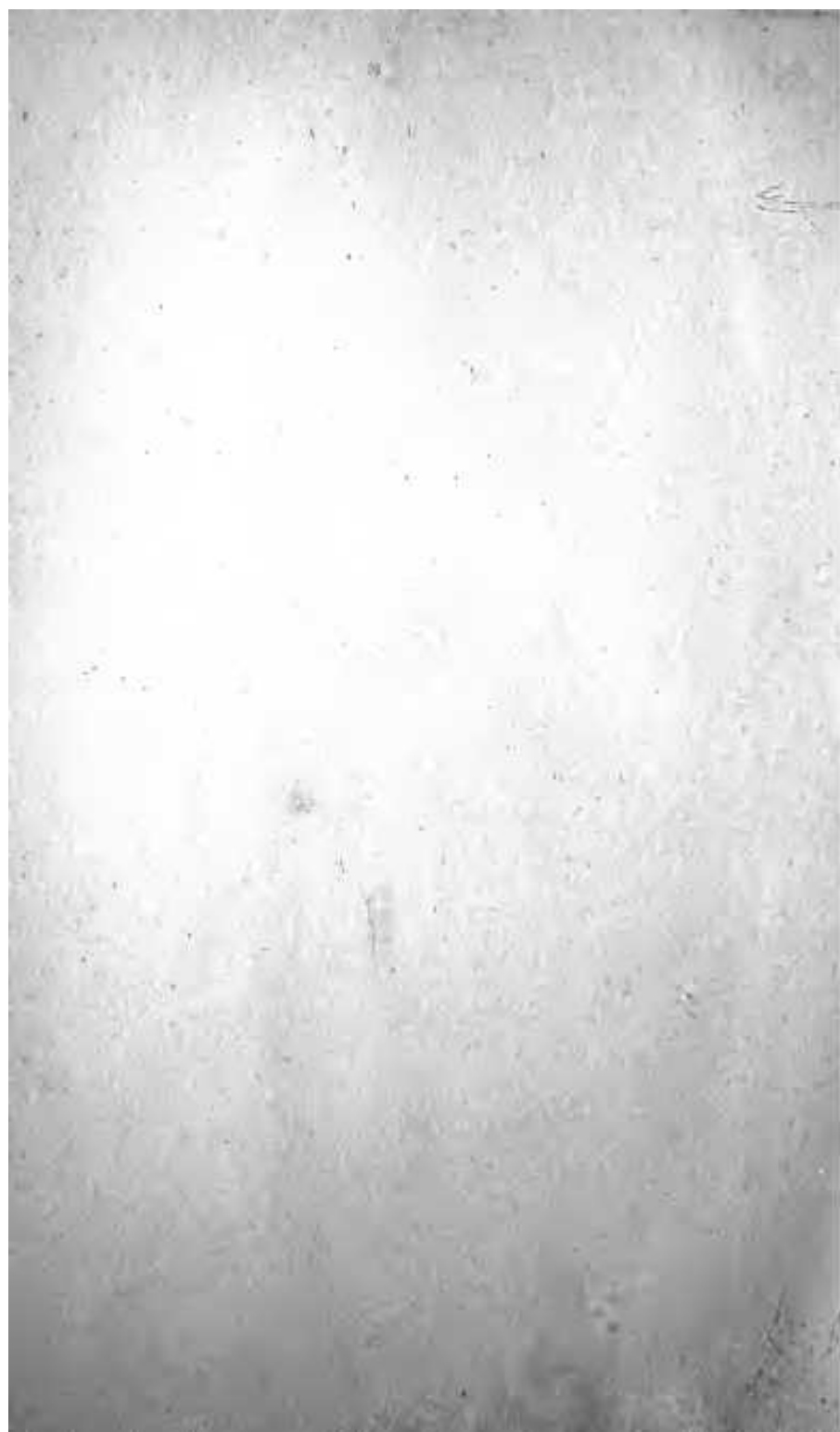
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**H. DUGDALE SYKES**

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Henry  
Sykes

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*Being studies of*

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

The author of these *Sidelights on Shakespeare* is a skilful and adroit disputant; further, he is fair-minded and sincere, having but one aim—to seek and find the truth. The late F. G. Fleay was a Shakespearean scholar of extraordinary acuteness, but we sometimes feel in reading him that he is more disposed to indulge a vein of freakish ingenuity than to strive after accuracy. I well remember that on one occasion, when I objected to some peculiarly far-fetched theory of his, he protested that it was not to be taken seriously but was “intended as a skit on the New Shakspeare Society;” whereupon I reminded him of the fact (which he had forgotten) that he originally announced this theory in a school-edition of *King John* (when he was headmaster of Skipton Grammar School); and I mildly expostulated with him for mystifying schoolboys.

Mr. Sykes will not allow that Shakespeare was in any way concerned with the authorship of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* or *Henry VIII.* Nearly forty years ago Robert Boyle maintained that those two plays were written by Massinger and Fletcher in collaboration. In the early eighties on the occasion of one of his rare visits to England (he lived at St. Petersburg, where he was tutor to the late Czar Nicholas II of unhappy memory), he called on me at Hampstead and we then discussed *The Two Noble Kinsmen.* “Do you really say,” I asked, “that Massinger wrote the invocation to Mars?” And I quoted:—

“Thou mighty one, that with thy power hast turn'd  
Green Neptune into purple; whose approach

Comets prewarn ; whose havoc in vast field  
 Unearthed skulls proclaim ; whose breath blows down  
 The teeming Ceres' foison ; who dost pluck  
 With hand armipotent from forth blue' clouds  
 The mason'd turrets ; that both mak'st and break'st  
 The stony girths of cities ; me thy pupil,  
 Youngest follower of thy drum, instruct this day  
 With military skill, that to thy laud  
 I may advance my streamer, and by thee  
 Be styl'd the lord o' the day !”

“Where in Massinger's acknowledged plays shall we find such poetry ?” “Read *The Duke of Milan*,” was his answer. But I have read *The Duke of Milan* more than once without finding anything at all comparable to that passage. When the life of Tennyson (by his son Hallam) was published, I saw with satisfaction that the lines “who dost pluck . . . stony girths of cities” were singled out by him as bearing Shakespeare's “impress”. In Act I, Scene i :—

“But touch the ground for us no longer time  
*Than a dove's motion when the head's plucked off.*”

the italicised line is styled by a good critic (Mr. Morton Luce) “as definitely and delightfully Shakespeare as a single line can well be,” and few will quarrel with this dictum. But after reading the articles of Robert Boyle and Mr. Sykes it is impossible to resist the conviction that though a few Shakespearean passages are to be found in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the play as a whole (with its merits and defects) must be given to Massinger and Fletcher. If there is little of Shakespeare in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* there is perhaps even less in *Henry VIII.* The trial-scene of Katherine (II. iv.) is conducted with much dignity and impressiveness, but it follows closely—very closely—the actual wording of Holinshed ; and, to

show that Massinger was quite capable of writing this scene,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sykes refers the reader to *The Unnatural Combat* (IV. i.), where Theocrine, pleading to her father,

“Alas, Sir,  
Did I but know in what I give offence,” &c.

recalls “in tone, phrasing and metre” the voice of Katherine. With Katherine’s vision he aptly compares the apparition of the heavenly messenger in Massinger and Dekker’s *The Virgin Martyr* (V. i.), and he concludes:—

“If, as the critics admit, Buckingham’s dying speech and the famous farewell utterance of the disgraced Wolsey are Fletcher’s, and if (as I submit I have proved) the whole of the first scene, and Queen Katherine’s impassioned address to the King in the trial scene are Massinger’s, what is left for Shakespeare? If Fletcher and Massinger wrote what is best in the play, we shall surely not be asked to believe that Shakespeare had any part in the remainder?” Yet in the very first scene Buckingham’s speeches have in them a *vivida vis* that we seldom find in Massinger’s acknowledged plays; and the delightful old lady (in II. iii., a scene which Mr. Sykes assigns to Massinger) will continue to be regarded by many as a typically Shakespearean character, whom Juliet’s nurse would have recognised as a kindred spirit.

*Arden of Feversham*, the subject of the third essay, is clearly shown by Mr. Sykes to be the work of Thomas Kyd. No shred of external evidence has ever been found to connect the authorship with Shakespeare. In the scene of the quarrel and reconciliation of Alice Arden and

<sup>1</sup> I trust that nobody will want to claim the trial-scene of Hermione (*Winter’s Tale*) for Massinger. If a critical school of reckless spoliators were to spring up, our Shakespeare, like his own Lord Timon, would soon

“be left a naked gull,  
Which flashes now a Phoenix.”