

SHAKESPEARE'S
TRAGEDY OF CYMBELINE.

EDITED BY
WILLIAM J. ROLFE

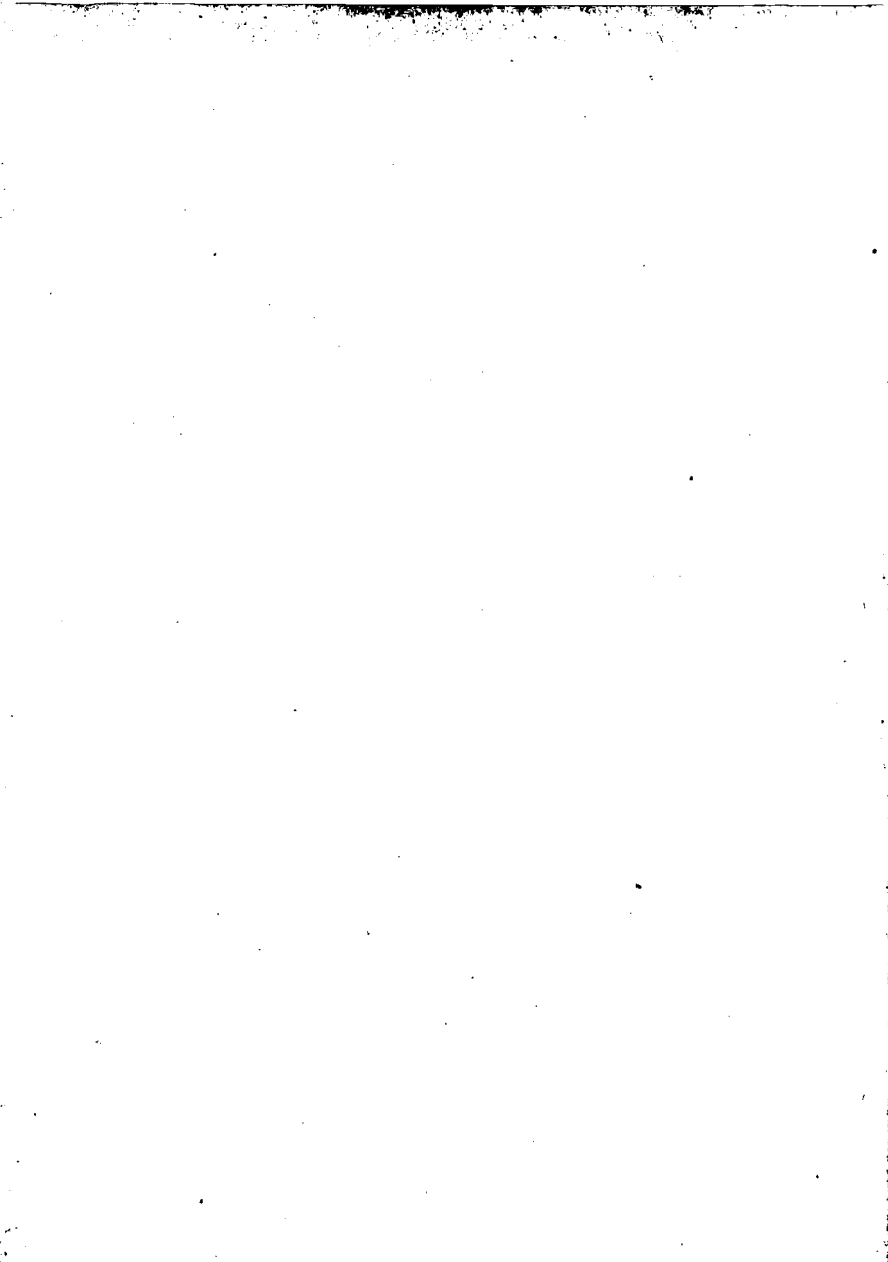


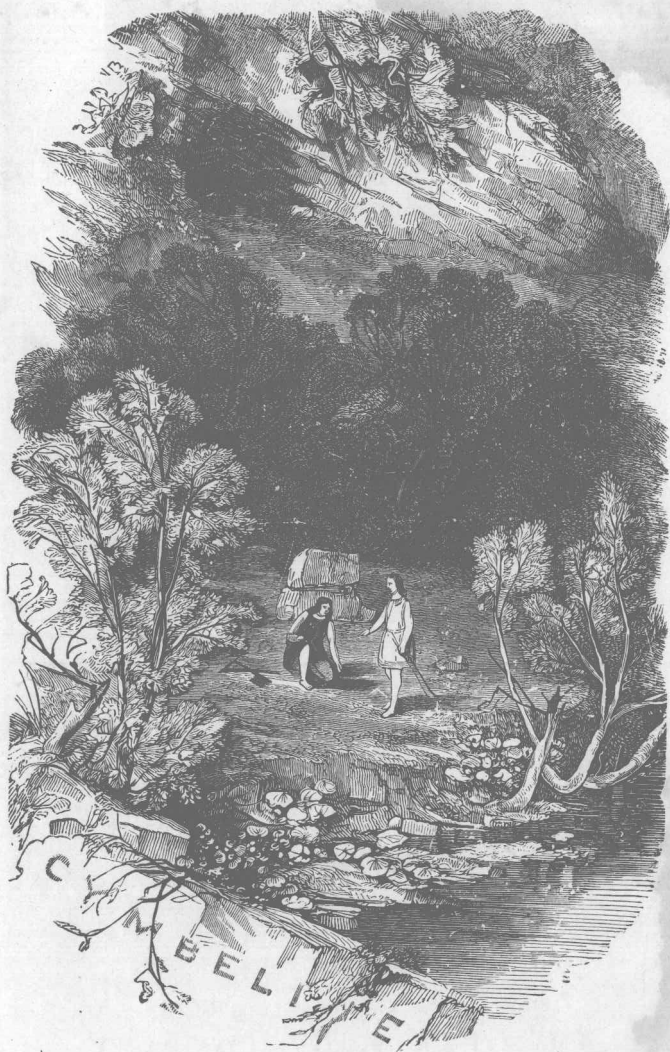
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OF

CYMBELINE







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TRAGEDY OF
CYMBELINE.

EDITED, WITH NOTES,

BY

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WITH ENGRAVINGS.



NEW YORK ··· CINCINNATI ··· CHICAGO
AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

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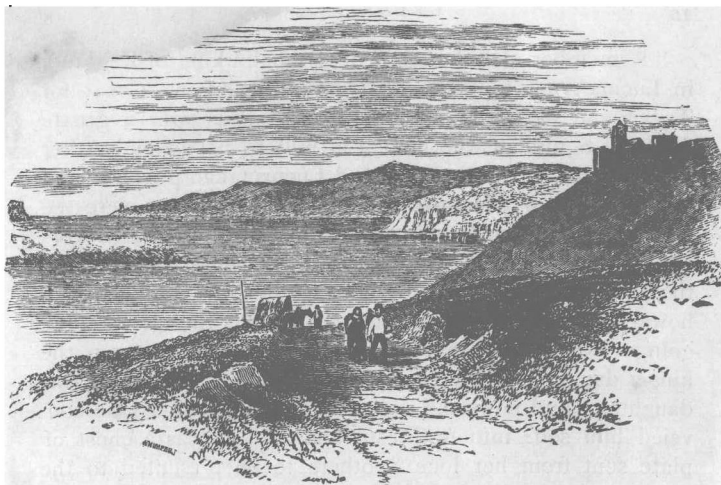
Cymbeline.

W. P. 10

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VIEW NEAR MILFORD.

INTRODUCTION TO CYMBELINE.

I. THE HISTORY OF THE PLAY.

Cymbeline was first printed in the folio of 1623, where it is the last play in the volume, occupying pages 369-399 (misprinted 993) in the division of "Tragedies." The earliest allusion to it that has been discovered is in Dr. Simon Forman's MS. Diary (see *Richard II.* p. 13, *M. N. D.* p. 10, and *IV. T.* p. 10), which belongs to the years 1610 and 1611. His sketch of the plot (not dated) is as follows : *

* As given in the *New Shaks. Soc. Transactions* for 1875-6, p. 417.

"Remember also the storri of Cymbalin king of England, in Lucius tyme, howe Lucius Cam from Octauus Cesar for Tribut, and being denied, after sent Lucius *with* a greate Arme of Souldiars who landed at milford hauen, and Affter wer vanquished by Cimbalin, and Lucius taken prisoner, and all by means of 3 outlawes, of the *which* 2 of them were the sonns of Cimbalin, stolen from him when they but 2 yers old by an old man whom Cymbalin banished, and he kept them as his own sonns 20 yers *with* him in A caue. And howe [one] of them slewe Clotan, that was the quens sonn, goinge To milford hauen to sek the loue of Innogen the kinges daughter, whom he had banished also for louinge his daughter. and howe the Italian that cam from her loue conueied him selfe into A Chestre, and said yt was a chest of plate sent from her loue & others, to be *presented* to the kinge. And in the depest of the night, she being aslepe, he opened the cheste & cam forth of yt, And vewed her in her bed, and the markes of her body, & toke a-wai her braslet, & after Accused her of adultery to her loue, &c. And in thend howe he came *with* the Romains into England & was taken prisoner, and after Reueled to Innogen who had turned her self into mans apparrell & fled to mete her loue at milford hauen, & chanced to fall on the Caue in the wodes wher her 2 brothers were, & howe by eating a sleping Dram they thought she had bin deed, & laid her in the wodes, & the body of cloten by her in her loues apparrell that he left behind him, & howe she was found by lucius, &c."

The play was probably a new one when Forman saw it in 1610 or 1611. Drake dates it in 1605, Chalmers in 1606, Malone in 1609 (after having at first assigned it to 1605), Fleay (*Introd. to Shakespearian Study*) "circa 1609," White "1609 or 1610," Delius, Furnivall, and Stokes in 1610, Dowden and Ward at about the time when Forman saw it. The internal evidence of style and metre indicates that it was one of the latest of the plays.

Cymbeline is badly printed in the folio, and the involved style makes the correction of the text a task of more than usual difficulty. The critics generally agree that the vision in v. 4 cannot be Shakespeare's. Ward considers that "there is no reason, on account of its style, which reminds one of the prefatory lines to the cantos of the *Faerie Queene*, to impugn Shakespeare's authorship of it;" but it seems to us very clearly the work of another hand. Cf. the rhymed episode in *A. Y. L.* v. 4. 113 fol., and see our ed. p. 199 (note on 136).

II. THE SOURCES OF THE PLOT.

The poet took the names of *Cymbeline* and his two sons from Holinshed, together with a few historical facts concerning the king; but the story of the stealing of the princes and of their life in the wilderness appears to be his own.*

The story of *Imogen*, which is so admirably interwoven with that of the sons of *Cymbeline*, was taken, directly or indirectly, from the *Decamerone* of Boccaccio, in which it forms the ninth novel of the second day. No English translation of it is known to have been made in Shakespeare's time. A version appeared in a tract entitled *Westward for Smelts*, which was published in 1620. Malone speaks of an edition of 1603; but this is probably an error, as the book was not entered upon the Stationers' Registers until 1619-20. This translation, moreover, lacks some important details which the play has in common with the Italian original.†

* It has been pointed out by K. Schenkl that the incidents of *Imogen's* seeking refuge in the wilderness and her deathlike sleep occur in the German fairy-tale of *Schneewittchen*.

† For an outline of Boccaccio's novel, see the extract from Mrs. Jameson below. The chief incidents of the story had been used in a French miracle-play of the Middle Ages, and also in the old French romances of *La Violette* and *Flore et Jehanne*; but we have no reason to suppose that Shakespeare made any use of these. In one of the romances the lady has a mole upon her right breast; in Boccaccio, as in Shakespeare, it is on her left breast. This mark is not mentioned at all in *Westward for*

But, as Verplanck remarks, "from whatever source the idea of the plot might have been immediately drawn, the poet owes to his predecessors nothing more than the bare outline of two or three leading incidents. These he has raised, refined, and elevated into a higher sphere; while the characters, dialogue, circumstances, details, descriptions,—the lively interest of the plot, its artful involution and skilful development,—are entirely his own. He has given to what were originally scenes of coarse and tavern-like profligacy a dignity suited to the state and character of his personages, and has poured over the whole the golden light, the rainbow hues, of imaginative poetry."

III. CRITICAL COMMENTS ON THE PLAY.

[From Schlegel's "*Dramatic Literature*." *]

Cymbeline is one of Shakspeare's most wonderful compositions. He has here combined a novel of Boccaccio's with traditionary tales of the ancient Britons, reaching back to *Smells*. In the latter, moreover, the person corresponding to Iachimo conceals himself under the bed in the lady's chamber, while in the French and Italian versions he is conveyed thither in a chest.

White has noted another circumstance which seems to show that Shakespeare went directly to Boccaccio, and that the *Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* were composed at about the same period: "In Boccaccio's novel the convicted slanderer is condemned by the Sultan to be anointed with honey, and exposed to the rays of the sun, tied to a stake upon some elevated spot, and to remain there until his flesh falls away from his bones. From this doom it seems quite clear that Shakespeare took the hint for that mock sentence which Autolycus passes upon the young clown in *W. T.* iv. 4. 812: 'He has a son who shall be flayed alive; then 'nointed over with honey . . . then, raw as he is, and in the hottest day prognostication proclaims, shall he be set against a brick wall, the sun looking with a southward eye upon him, where he is to behold him with flies blown to death.'"

Westward for Smells is reprinted in the "Variorum" ed. of 1821, vol. xiii., and in Collier's *Shakspeare's Library*, vol. ii.

* *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, by A. W. Schlegel; Black's translation, revised by Morrison (London, 1846), p. 397 fol.

the times of the first Roman Emperors, and he has contrived, by the most gentle transitions, to blend together into one harmonious whole the social manners of the newest times with olden heroic deeds, and even with appearances of the gods. In the character of Imogen no one feature of female excellence is omitted: her chaste tenderness, her softness, and her virgin pride, her boundless resignation, and her magnanimity towards her mistaken husband, by whom she is unjustly persecuted, her adventures in disguise, her apparent death, and her recovery, form altogether a picture equally tender and affecting. The two Princes, Guiderius and Arviragus, both educated in the wilds, form a noble contrast to Miranda and Perdita. Shakspeare is fond of showing the superiority of the natural over the artificial. Over the art which enriches nature, he somewhere says, there is a higher art created by nature herself. As Miranda's unconscious and unstudied sweetness is more pleasing than those charms which endeavour to captivate us by the brilliant embellishments of a refined cultivation, so in these two youths, to whom the chase has given vigour and hardihood, but who are ignorant of their high destination, and have been brought up apart from human society, we are equally enchanted by a naïve heroism which leads them to anticipate and to dream of deeds of valour, till an occasion is offered which they are irresistibly compelled to embrace. When Imogen comes in disguise to their cave; when, with all the innocence of childhood, Guiderius and Arviragus form an impassioned friendship for the tender boy, in whom they neither suspect a female nor their own sister; when, on their return from the chase they find her dead, then "sing her to the ground," and cover the grave with flowers—these scenes might give to the most deadened imagination a new life for poetry. If a tragical event is only apparent in such case, whether the spectators are already aware of it or ought merely to suspect it, Shakspeare always knows how to mitigate the impres-

sion without weakening it: he makes the mourning musical, that it may gain in solemnity what it loses in seriousness. With respect to the other parts, the wise and vigorous Belarius, who after long living as a hermit again becomes a hero, is a venerable figure; the Italian Iachimo's ready dissimulation and quick presence of mind is quite suitable to the bold treachery which he plays; Cymbeline, the father of Imogen, and even her husband Posthumus, during the first half of the piece, are somewhat sacrificed, but this could not be otherwise; the false and wicked Queen is merely an instrument of the plot; she and her stupid son Cloten (the only comic part in the piece) whose rude arrogance is portrayed with much humour, are, before the conclusion, got rid of by merited punishment. As for the heroical part of the fable, the war between the Romans and Britons, which brings on the denouement, the poet in the extent of his plan had so little room to spare that he merely endeavours to represent it as a mute procession. But to the last scene, where all the numerous threads of the knot are untied, he has again given its full development, that he might collect together into one focus the scattered impressions of the whole. This example and many others are a sufficient refutation of Johnson's assertion, that Shakspeare usually hurries over the conclusion of his pieces. Rather does he, from a desire to satisfy the feelings, introduce a great deal which, so far as the understanding of the denouement requires, might, in a strict sense, be justly spared: our modern spectators are much more impatient to see the curtain drop, when there is nothing more to be determined, than those of his day could have been.

[From Drake's "*Shakespeare and his Times*." *]

This play, if not in the construction of its fable one of the most perfect of our author's productions, is, in point of poetic

* *Shakespeare and his Times*, by Nathan Drake, M.D. (London, 1817), vol. ii. p. 466.

beauty, of variety and truth of character, and in the display of sentiment and emotion, one of the most lovely and interesting. Nor can we avoid expressing our astonishment at the sweeping condemnation which Johnson has passed upon it; charging its fiction with folly, its conduct with absurdity, its events with impossibility; terming its faults too evident for detection and too gross for aggravation.

Of the enormous injustice of this sentence, nearly every page of *Cymbeline* will, to a reader of any taste or discrimination, bring the most decisive evidence. That it possesses many of the too common inattentions of Shakspeare, that it exhibits a frequent violation of costume, and a singular confusion of nomenclature, cannot be denied; but these are trifles light as air when contrasted with its merits, which are of the very essence of dramatic worth, rich and full in all that breathes of vigour, animation, and intellect, in all that elevates the fancy and improves the heart, in all that fills the eye with tears or agitates the soul with hope and fear.

Imogen, the most lovely and perfect of Shakspeare's female characters—the pattern of connubial love and chastity, by the delicacy and propriety of her sentiments, by her sensibility, tenderness, and resignation, by her patient endurance of persecution from the quarter where she had confidently looked for endearment and protection—irresistibly seizes upon our affections.

The scenes which disclose the incidents of her pilgrimage; her reception at the cave of Belarius; her intercourse with her lost brothers, who are ignorant of their birth and rank; her supposed death, funeral rites, and resuscitation, are wrought up with a mixture of pathos and romantic wildness peculiarly characteristic of our author's genius, and which has had but few successful imitators. Among these few stands pre-eminent the poet Collins, who seems to have trodden this consecrated ground with a congenial mind, and who has sung the sorrows of Fidele in strains worthy of their sub-

ject, and which will continue to charm the mind and soothe the heart "till pity's self be dead."

When compared with this fascinating portrait, the other personages of the drama appear but in a secondary light. Yet are they adequately brought out and skilfully diversified: the treacherous subtlety of Iachimo; the sage experience of Belarius; the native nobleness of heart and innate heroism of mind which burst forth in the vigorous sketches of Guiderius and Arviragus; the temerity, credulity, and penitence of Posthumus; the uxorious weakness of Cymbeline; the hypocrisy of his Queen; and the comic arrogance of Cloten, half fool and half knave, produce a striking diversity of action and sentiment.

Poetical justice has been strictly observed in this drama; the vicious characters meet the punishment due to their crimes; while virtue, in all its various degrees, is proportionably rewarded. The scene of retribution, which is the closing one of the play, is a masterpiece of skill; the development of the plot, for its fulness, completeness, and ingenuity, surpassing any effort of the kind among our author's contemporaries, and atoning for any partial incongruity which the structure or conduct of the story may have previously displayed.

[From Mrs. Jameson's "*Characteristics of Women.*" *]

Others of Shakspeare's characters are, as dramatic and poetical conceptions, more striking, more brilliant, more powerful; but of all his women, considered as individuals rather than as heroines, Imogen is the most perfect. Portia and Juliet are pictured to the fancy with more force of contrast, more depth of light and shade; Viola and Miranda, with more aerial delicacy of outline; but there is no female portrait that can be compared to Imogen as a woman—none in which so great a variety of tints are mingled together into

* American ed. (Boston, 1857), p. 253 fol.