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INTRODUCTION.

Date of the Composition.

IN Shakespeare's time there lived in London one Simon Forman, M.D., to whom we are indebted for our earliest notice of *THE WINTER'S TALE*. He was rather an odd genius, I should think; being a dealer in occult science and the arts or magic, and at the same time an ardent lover of the stage; thus symbolizing at once with the most conservative and the most progressive tendencies of the age: for, strange as it may seem, the Drama then led the van of progress; Shakespeare being even a more audacious innovator in poetry and art than Bacon was in philosophy. Be this as it may, Forman evidently took great delight in the theatre, and he kept a diary of what he witnessed there. In 1836, the manuscript of this diary was discovered in the Ashmolean Museum, and a portion of its contents published. Forman was at the Globe theatre on Wednesday, the 15th of May, 1611, and under that date he records "how Leontes King of Sicilia was overcome with jealousy of his wife with the King of Bohemia, his friend that came to see him, and how he contrived his death, and would have had his cup-bearer poison him, who gave the King warning thereof, and fled with him to Bohemia. Also, how he sent to the oracle of Apollo, and the answer of Apollo was that she was guilt-

less; and, except the child was found again that was lost, the King should die without issue: for the child was carried into Bohemia, and there laid in a forest, and brought up by a shepherd; and the King of Bohemia's son married that wench, and they fled into Sicilia, and by the jewels found about her she was known to be Leontes' daughter, and was then sixteen years old."

This clearly identifies the performance seen by Forman as *The Winter's Tale* of Shakespeare. It is altogether probable that the play was then new, and was in its first course of exhibition. For Sir George Buck became Master of the Revels in October, 1610, and was succeeded in that office by Sir Henry Herbert in 1623, who passed *The Winter's Tale* without examination, on the ground of its being an "old play formerly allowed by Sir George Buck." As the play had to be licensed before it could be performed, this ascertains its first performance to have been after October, 1610. So that *The Winter's Tale* was most likely presented for official sanction some time between that date and the 15th of May following, when Forman saw it at the Globe. To all this must be added the internal characteristics of the play itself, which is in the Poet's ripest and most idiomatic style of art. It is not often that the date of his workmanship can be so closely marked. *The Winter's Tale* was never printed, so far as we know, till it appeared in the folio of 1623.

Source of the Plot.

In the plot and incidents of this play, Shakespeare followed very closely the *Pandosto*, or, as it was sometimes called, the *Dorastus and Fawnia*, of Robert Greene. This novel appears to have been one of the most popular books of the

time; there being no less than fourteen old editions of it known, the first of which was in 1588. Greene was a scholar, a man of some genius, Master of Arts in both the Universities, and had indeed much more of learning than of judgment in the use and application of it. For it seems as if he could not write at all without overloading his pages with classical allusion, nor hit upon any thought so trite and commonplace, but that he must run it through a series of aphoristic sentences twisted out of Greek and Roman lore. In this respect, he is apt to remind one of his fellow-dramatist, Thomas Lodge, whose *Rosalynd* contributed so much to the Poet's *As You Like It*: for it was then much the fashion for authors to prank up their matter with superfluous erudition. Like all the surviving works of Greene, *Pandosto* is greatly charged with learned impertinence, and in the annoyance thence resulting one is apt to overlook the real merit of the performance. It is better than Lodge's *Rosalynd* for this reason, if for no other, that it is shorter. I must condense so much of the tale as may suffice to indicate the nature and extent of the Poet's obligations.

Pandosto, King of Bohemia, and Egistus, King of Sicilia, had passed their boyhood together, and grown into a mutual friendship which kept its hold on them long after coming to their crowns. Pandosto had for his wife a very wise and beautiful lady named Bellaria, who had made him the father of a prince called Garinter in whom both himself and his people greatly delighted. After many years of separation, Egistus "sailed into Bohemia to visit his old friend," who, hearing of his arrival, went with a great train of lords and ladies to meet him, received him very lovingly, and wished his wife to welcome him. No pains were spared to honour the royal visitor and make him feel at home. Bellaria, "to

show how much she liked him whom her husband loved," treated Egistus with great confidence, often going herself to his chamber to see that nothing should be amiss. This honest familiarity increased from day to day, insomuch that when Pandosto was busy with State affairs they would walk into the garden and pass their time in pleasant devices. After a while, Pandosto began to have doubtful thoughts, considering the beauty of his wife, and the comeliness and bravery of his friend. This humour growing upon him, he went to watching them, and fishing for proofs to confirm his suspicions. At length his mind got so charged with jealousy that he felt quite certain of the thing he feared, and studied for nothing so much as revenge. He resolved to work by poison, and called upon his cup-bearer, Franion, to execute the scheme, and pressed him to it with the alternative of preferment or death. The minister, after trying his best to dissuade the King, at last gave his consent, in order to gain time, then went to Egistus, and told him the secret, and fled with him to Sicilia. Full of rage at being thus baffled, Pandosto then let loose his fury against the Queen, ordering her forthwith into close prison. He then had his suspicion proclaimed as a certain truth; and though her character went far to discredit the charge, yet the sudden flight of Egistus caused it to be believed. And he would fain have made war on Egistus, but that the latter not only was of great strength and prowess, but had many kings in his alliance, his wife being daughter to the Emperor of Russia.

Meanwhile the Queen in prison gave birth to a daughter; which put the King in a greater rage than ever, insomuch that he ordered both the mother and the babe to be burnt alive. Against this cruel sentence his nobles stoutly remonstrated; but the most they could gain was, that he

should spare the child's life; his next device being to put her in a boat and leave her to the mercy of the winds and waves. At the hearing of this hard doom, the Queen fell down in a trance, so that all thought her dead; and on coming to herself she at last gave up the babe, saying, "Let me kiss thy lips, sweet infant, and wet thy tender cheeks with my tears, and put this chain about thy little neck, that if fortune save thee, it may help to succour thee."

When the day of trial came, the Queen, standing as a prisoner at the bar, and seeing that nothing but her death would satisfy the King, "waxed bold, and desired that she might have law and justice," and that her accusers might be brought before her face. The King replied that their word was enough, the flight of Egistus confirming what they had said; and that it was her part "to be impudent in forswearing the fact, since she had passed all shame in committing the fault." At the same time he threatened her with a cruel death; which she met by telling him that her life had ever been such as no spot of suspicion could stain, and that, if she had borne a friendly countenance towards Egistus, it was only as he was her husband's friend: "therefore, if she were condemned without further proof, it was rigour, and not law." The judges said she spoke reason, and begged that her accusers might be openly examined and sworn; whereupon the King went to browbeating them, the very demon of tyranny having got possession of him. The Queen then told him that, if his fury might stand for law, it was of no use for the jury to give their verdict; and therefore she begged him to send six of his noblemen to "the Isle of Delphos," to inquire of Apollo whether she were guilty or not. This request he could not refuse. The messengers using all haste soon came back with the sealed

answer of Apollo. The court being now assembled again, the scroll was opened and read in their presence, its contents being much the same as in the play. As soon as Apollo's verdict was known, the people raised a great shout, rejoicing and clapping their hands, that the Queen was clear. The repentant King then besought his nobles to intercede with the Queen in his behalf, at the same time confessing how he had tried to compass the death of Egistus; and while he was doing this word came that the young Prince was suddenly dead; at the hearing of which the Queen fell down, and could never be revived: the King also sank down senseless, and lay in that state three days; and there was nothing but mourning in Bohemia. Upon reviving, the King was so frenzied with grief and remorse that he would have killed himself, but that his peers being present stayed his hand, entreating him to spare his life for the people's sake. He had the Queen and Prince very richly and piously entombed; and from that time repaired daily to the tomb to bewail his loss.

Up to this point, the play, so far as the mere incidents are concerned, is little else than a dramatized version of the tale: henceforth the former diverges more widely from the latter, though many of the incidents are still the same in both.

The boat with its innocent freight was carried by wind and tide to the coast of Sicilia, where it stuck in the sand. A poor shepherd, missing one of his sheep, wandered to the seaside in search of it. As he was about to return he heard a cry, and, there being no house near, he thought it might be the bleating of his sheep; and going to look more narrowly he spied a little boat from which the cry seemed to come. Wondering what it might be, he waded to the

boat, and found the babe lying there ready to die of cold and hunger, wrapped in an embroidered mantle, and having a chain about the neck. Touched with pity he took the infant in his arms, and as he was fixing the mantle there fell at his feet a very fair rich purse containing a great sum of gold. To secure the benefit of this wealth, he carried the babe home as secretly as he could, and gave her in charge to his wife, telling her the process of the discovery. The shepherd's name was Porrus, his wife's Mopsa; the precious foundling they named Fawnia. Being themselves childless, they brought her up tenderly as their own daughter. With the gold Porrus bought a farm and a flock of sheep, which Fawnia at the age of ten was set to watch; and, as she was likely to be his only heir, many rich farmers' sons came to his house as wooers; for she was of singular beauty and excellent wit, and at sixteen grew to such perfection of mind and person that her praises were spoken at the Sicilian Court. Nevertheless she still went forth every day with the sheep, veiling her face from the Sun with a garland of flowers; which attire became her so well, that she seemed the goddess Flora herself for beauty.

King Egistus had an only son, named Dorastus, a Prince so adorned with gifts and virtues, that both King and people had great joy of him. He being now of ripe age, his father sought to match him with some princess; but the youth was little minded to wed, as he had more pleasure in the exercises of the field and the chase. One day, as he was pursuing this sport, he chanced to fall in with the lovely shepherdess, and while he was wrapt in wonder at the vision one of his pages told him she was Fawnia, whose beauty was so much talked of at the Court.

The story then goes on to relate the matter of their court-

ship; how the Prince resolved to forsake his home and inheritance, and become a shepherd, for her sake, as she could not think of matching with one above her degree; how, forecasting the opposition and dreading the anger of his father, he planned for escaping into Italy, in which enterprise he was assisted by an old servant of his named Capnio, who managed the affair so shrewdly, that the Prince made good his escape, taking the old shepherd along with him; how, after they got to sea, the ship was seized by a tempest and carried away to Bohemia; and how at length the several parties met together at the Court of Pandosto, which drew on a disclosure of the facts, and a happy marriage of the fugitive lovers.

Departures from the Novel.

From the foregoing sketch, it would seem that the Poet must have written with the novel before him, and not merely from general recollection. Here, again, as in case of *As You Like It*, to appreciate his judgment and taste, one needs to compare his workmanship in detail with the original, and to note what he left unused. The free sailing between Sicily and Bohemia he retained, inverting, however, the local order of the persons and incidents, so that Polixenes and Florizel are Bohemian Princes, whereas their prototypes, Egistus and his son, are Sicilians. The reason of this inversion does not appear. Of course, the Poet could not have done it with any view to disguise his obligations; as his purpose evidently was, to make the popular interest of the tale tributary to his own success and profit. The most original of men, he was also the most free from pride and conceit of originality. In this instance, too, as in others, the instinctive rectitude of his genius is manifest in that, the subject once chosen, and the

work begun, he thenceforth lost himself in the inspiration of his theme; all thoughts of popularity and pay being swallowed up in the supreme regards of Nature and Truth. For so, in his case, however prudence might dictate the plan, poetry was sure to have command of the execution. If he was but human in electing what to do, he became divine as soon as he went to doing it. And it is further considerable that, with all his borrowings in this play, the Poet nowhere drew more richly or more directly from his own spring. The whole life of the work is in what he gave, not in what he took; the mechanism of the story being used but as a skeleton to underpin and support the eloquent contexture of life and beauty. In the novel, Paulina and the Clown are wanting altogether; while Capnio yields but a slight hint, if indeed it be so much, towards the part of Antolycus. And, besides the great addition of life and matter in these persons, the play has several other judicious departures from the novel.

In Leontes all the revolting features of Pandosto, save his jealousy, and the headstrong insolence and tyranny thence proceeding, are purged away; so that while the latter has neither intellect nor generosity to redeem his character, jealousy being the least of his faults, the other has a liberal stock of both. And in Bellaria the Poet had little more than a bare framework of incident wherein to set the noble, lofty womanhood of Hermione, — a conception far, far above the reach of such a mind as Greene's. In the matter of the painted statue, Shakespeare, so far as is known, was altogether without a model, as he is without an imitator; the boldness of the plan being indeed such as nothing but entire success could justify, and wherein it is hardly possible to conceive of anybody but Shakespeare's having succeeded. And yet here it is that we are to look for the idea and formal

cause of Hermione's character, while her character, again, is the shaping and informing power of the whole drama. For this idea is really the living centre and organic law in and around which all the parts of the work are vitally knit together. But, indeed, the Poet's own most original and inimitable mode of conceiving and working out character is everywhere dominant.

Historical Anachronisms.

So much has been said about the anachronisms of this play, that it seems needful to add a word concerning them. We have already seen that the making of seaports and landing of ships in Bohemia were taken from Greene. Verplanck conjectures that by Bohemia Shakespeare meant simply the land of the Boii, an ancient people several tribes of whom settled in the maritime parts of France: but I hardly think he would have used the name with so much license at a time when the boundaries of that country were so well fixed and so widely known. For the events of the Reformation had made Bohemia an object of special interest to the people of England, and there was much intercourse between the English and Bohemian Courts. I have no notion indeed that this breach of geography was a blunder: it was meant, no doubt, for the convenience of thought; and such is its effect, until one goes to viewing the parts of the work with reference to ends not contemplated in the use here made of them. And the same is to be said touching several points of chronological confusion; such as the making of Whitsun pastorals, Christian burial, Julio Romano, the Emperor of Russia, and Puritans singing psalms to hornpipes, all contemporary with the Oracle of Delphi; wherein actual things are but marshalled into an ideal order, so as to render Memory subser-

vient to Imagination. In these and such points, it is enough that the materials be apt to combine among themselves, and that they agree in working out the issue proposed, the end thus regulating the use of the means. For a work of art, as such, should be itself an object for the mind to rest upon, not a directory to guide it to something else. So that here we may justly say "the mind is its own place"; and, provided the work be true to this intellectual whereabouts, breaches of geography and history are of little consequence. And Shakespeare knew full well, that in poetical workmanship Memory stands absolved from the laws of time, and that the living order of art has a perfect right to overrule and supersede the chronological order of facts. In a word, history and chronology have no rights which a poet, as such, is bound to respect. In his sphere, things draw together and unite in virtue of other affinities than those of succession and coexistence. A work of art must indeed aim to be understood and felt; and so far as historical order is necessary to this, so far it may justly claim a prerogative voice. But still such a work must address itself to the mind and heart of man as man, and not to particular men as scholars or critics. That Shakespeare did this better than anybody else is the main secret of his supremacy. And it implies a knowledge far deeper than books could give, — the knowledge of a mind so intuitive of Nature, and so at home with her, as not to need the food of learning, because it fed directly on that which is the original food of learning itself.

Hence the conviction which I suppose all true Shakespearians to have, that no amount of scholastic advantages and acquirements could really do any thing towards explaining the mystery of his works. To do what he did at all, he must have had a native genius so strong and clear and penetrative,

as to become more than learned without the aid of learning. What could the hydrants of knowledge do for a mind which thus dwelt at its fountain? Or why should he need to converse with Wisdom's messengers, whose home was in the very court and pavilion of Wisdom herself? Shakespeare is always weakest when a fit of learning takes him. But then he is stronger without learning than any one else is with it, and, perhaps, than he would have been with it himself; as the crutches that help the lame are but an incumbrance to the whole.

Perhaps I ought to add, touching the forecited anachronisms, that the Poet's sense of them may be fairly regarded as apparent in the naming of the piece. He seems to have judged that, in a dramatic *tale* intended for the delight of the fireside during a long, quiet Winter's evening, such things would not be out of place, and would rather help than mar the entertainment and life of the performance. Thus much indeed is plainly hinted more than once in the course of the play; as in Act v. scene 2, where, one of the Gentlemen being asked, "What became of Antigonus, that carried hence the child?" he replies, "Like an *old tale* still, which will have matter to rehearse, though credit be asleep, and not an ear open."

Much the same is to be said touching the remarkable freedom which the Poet here takes with the conditions of time; there being an interval of sixteen years between the third and fourth Acts, which is with rather un-Shakespearian awkwardness bridged over by the Chorus introducing Act iv. This freedom, however, was inseparable from the governing idea of the piece, nor can it be faulted but upon such grounds as would exclude all dramatized romance from the stage. It is to be noted also that while the play thus divides itself

into two parts, these are skillfully woven together by a happy stroke of art. The last scene of the third Act not only finishes the action of the first three, but by an apt and unforced transition begins that of the other two; the two parts of the drama being smoothly drawn into the unity of a continuous whole by the introduction of the old Shepherd and his son at the close of the one and the opening of the other. This natural arrangement saves the imagination from being disturbed by any yawning or obtrusive gap of time, notwithstanding the lapse of so many years in the interval. On this point, Gervinus remarks that, "while Shakespeare has in other dramas permitted a twofold action united by a common idea, he could not in this instance have entirely concentrated the two actions; he could but unite them indistinctly by a leading idea in both; though the manner in which he has outwardly united them is a delicate and spirited piece of art.

Character of Leontes.

In the delineation of Leontes there is an abruptness of change which strikes us, at first view, as not a little a-clash with nature: we cannot well see how one state of mind grows out of another: his jealousy shoots in comet-like, as something unprovided for in the general ordering of his character. Which causes this feature to appear as if it were suggested rather by the exigencies of the stage than by the natural workings of human passion. And herein the Poet seems at variance with himself; his usual method being to unfold a passion in its rise and progress, so that we go along with it freely from its origin to its consummation. And, certainly, there is no accounting for Leontes' conduct, but by supposing a predisposition to jealousy in him, which,

however, has been hitherto kept latent by his wife's clear, firm, serene discreetness, but which breaks out into sudden and frightful activity as soon as she, under a special pressure of motives, slightly overacts the confidence of friendship. Here needed but a spark of occasion to set this secret magazine of passion all a-blaze.

The Pandosto of the novel has, properly speaking, no character at all: he is but a human figure going through a set of motions; that is, the person and the action are put together arbitrarily, and not under any law of vital correspondence. Almost any other figure would fit the motions just as well. It is true, Shakespeare had a course of action marked out for him in the tale. But then he was bound by his own principles of art to make the character such as would rationally support the action, and cohere with it. For such is the necessary law of moral development and transpiration. Nor is it by any means safe to affirm that he has not done this. For it is to be noted that Polixenes has made a pretty long visit, having passed, it seems, no less than nine lunar months at the home of his royal friend. And he might well have found it not always easy to avoid preferring the Queen's society to the King's; for she is a most irresistible creature, and her calm, ingenuous modesty, itself the most dignified of all womanly graces, is what, more than any thing else, makes her so. What secret thoughts may have been gathering to a head in the mind of Leontes during that period, is left for us to divine from the after-results. And I believe there is a jealousy of friendship, as well as of love. Accordingly, though Leontes invokes the Queen's influence to induce a lengthening of the visit, yet he seems a little disturbed on seeing that her influence has proved stronger than his own.

Leon. Is he won yet?

Herm. He'll stay, my lord.

Leon. At my request he would not.

Hermione, my dear'st, thou never spokest
To better purpose.

Herm. Never?

Leon. Never, but once.

Herm. What! have I twice said well? when was't before?
I pr'ythee tell me.

Leon. Why, that was when

Three crabbed months had sour'd themselves to death,
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand,
And clap thyself my love: then didst thou utter,
I'm yours for ever.

There is, I think, a relish of suppressed bitterness in this last speech, as if her long reluctance had planted in him a germ of doubt whether, after all, her heart was really in her words of consent. For the Queen is a much deeper character than her husband. It is true, these notices, and various others, drop along so quiet and unpronounced, as hardly to arrest the reader's attention. Shakespeare, above all other men, delights in just such subtle insinuations of purpose; they belong indeed to his usual method of preparing for a given issue, yet doing it so slyly as not to preclude surprise when the issue comes.

So that in his seeming abruptness Leontes, after all, does but exemplify the strange transformations which sometimes occur in men upon sudden and unforeseen emergencies. And it is observable that the very slightness of the Queen's indiscretion, the fact that she goes but a little, a very little too far, only works against her, causing the King to suspect her of great effort and care to avoid suspicion. And on the same principle, because he has never suspected her before, therefore he suspects her all the more vehemently now: that his confidence has hitherto stood unshaken, he attributes to