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LESSON 29

LIFE OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE—II

Shakespeare Acts for the Queen

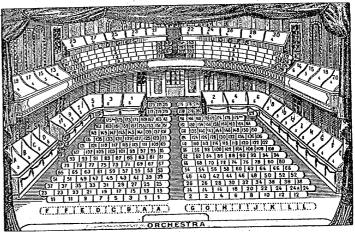
In the time of Shakespeare, theatres usually gave their plays in the afternoon. Great crowds of people flocked outside the limits of London to see the performances. Sometimes it was not a play but a fencing match or a fight with an angry bear.

A minister of that time complained:

"If they hear word of a wicked play, a thousand people will go there. But if church bells ring an hour, there won't be even a hundred at the sermon."

It was common to charge a penny for each person who came to the theatre. That was just for standing-room, or for a chance to sit in "the pit." which was then an open space in front of the stage. If one wanted to sit in a gallery, he had to pay an extra penny. If he wanted "a very good seat," he

per-fôrm'anç-eş [pəfə:mənsiz] com-plained' [kəmpléind] wikk'ed [wikid] ser'mon [sé:mon] stănd'ing-room [stændinrum] stage [steid3] găl'Ler-y [gæləri] ěx'tra [ékstrə]



THE INTERIOR OF A PRESENT-DAY THEATRE

would have to pay still a penny more.

Shakespeare was not in London many years before he obtained work inside a theatre. It is said that his first inside job was as "promoter's assistant." That means he helped actors when they forgot their lines.

By and by, he was given a chance to show what he could do in putting a play in shape for the stage. Some of the plays of that time were well written, but were not put together in the best

jŏb [dʒəb] ĭn-ter'ĭ-or [intierie] as-sis'tant [əsistənt]

pro-mō'ters [prəmóutəz] ăc'tors [æktə]

possible way. Shakespeare proved that he had a talent for picking out the best parts of a play, and he put them together in a manner which pleased the audience.

Besides improving plays, Shakespeare tried his hand at acting. He must have shown ability in this line, for he was soon given the honour of acting before Queen Elizabeth. An old record shows that he was one of three actors who were rewarded for taking part in two plays given in the queen's palace at Greenwich. Shakespeare was then about thirty years old.

Shakespeare's Mighty Work

Shakespeare was not content to shorten old plays, or to put parts together in different ways. He began to feel that he could write some parts over again and make them better. This he tried on play after play. Another great writer named Marlowe seems to have helped him sometimes in this work.

The earliest play Shakespeare wrote "all by him-

aŭ'dience [ś:djəns] a-bĭl'i-ty̆ [əbíliti] Grê&n'wich [grínidʒ] shôrt'&n [ʃś:tn] Mär'lōw& [má:lou]

self" seems to have been "Love's Labour Lost." After that, his time was given largely to the writing of plays. Now and then he made up a plot from his own thinking. More often, he took an old plot,—some story that many persons knew—and turned it into a play of beauty and power.

I cannot here give you an idea of the wonder of Shakespeare's plays. As you grow older, you will read them for yourself. They are stories well told, and just from that viewpoint, they are worth reading. You will find that some of them contain cheap "puns," but those were put in only to please the playgoers who were usually not of a high type. The "puns" do not spoil Shakespeare. You can forget them when you read his noble lines on nature, or when you see how true to life he made some of his characters.

When you read "Romeo and Juliet," be sure to pause a while on the lines which tell about the fairy queen, who brought dreams to lovers when she large'ly [lá:dʒli] p'ot [plot] viēw'point [vjú:point] plāx'gō-ers [pléigouəz] type [taip] Rō'mē-ō [róumiou] Jū'liet [dʒú:ljət] paase [pɔ:z]

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drove over them. Her chariot was "an acorn shell" with dainty wheels, her horses were mites, "her whip a film."

Shakespeare is one of the few men of genius who ever made a good living. During most of his grown-up life, he not only wrote plays but also acted in them. He produced long poems which were printed and widely read. For some years, he was the head of a company of actors, which made tours of England and gave plays in dozens of towns.

The gentle poet of Stratford-on-Avon died when he was fifty-two years old. Many writers have lived to be much older, but never has one equalled him as a maker of plays.

Shakespeare's only son died in childhood, but the poet lived to see both of his daughters married.

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chăr'ĩ-ọt [tʃæriət] dāṇn'tỷ [déinti] mĩtes [maits] film [film] ġē'nius [dzí:njəs] gröṇn'-ŭp'' [gróun λ p] com'pạ-nỹ [k λ mpəni] doz'ens [d λ znz]

avoid'	avoid'ance	avoid'able	avoid'ably
improve'	improve'ment	improv'able	improv'ably
perform'	perform'ance	perform'able	
complain'	complaint'	complain'able	complain'ingly
assist'	assist'ance	assist'ant	
ena'ble	abil'ity	a'ble	a'bly
please	plea'sure	pleas'ant	pleas'antly
receive'	recep'tion	recep'tive	recep'tively
beau'tify	beau'ty	beau'tiful	beau'tifully
	the'atre	theat'rical	theat'rically

TEST QUESTIONS

- 1. I had taken my aunt into my confidence; without her in trouth I should have made but little advance, for to her belonged the credit of the most sensible piece of advice. It was she who suggested the solution which opened the path out of our difficulties.
- 2. I do confess that I am much pleased with your boy: from the first I saw what a capital engineer he would make, and he has not disappointed me.

cŏn'fĭ-dence [kɔ́nfidəns] con-fess' [kənfés] ad-vänçe' [ədvá:ns] ĕn''gi-neer' [èndziníə]