

IV.

NOTE ON A COPY OF THE FIRST FOLIO SHAKESPEARE IN THE LIBRARY OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND. BY W. K. DICKSON, SECRETARY.

There is in the Library of the Society a copy of the First Folio Shakespeare, the famous edition of 1623, the existence of which is, I believe, unknown to the public, and indeed to many members of the Society. It is not included in Mr Sidney Lee's "Census of Extant Copies," and apparently there is no record of it in our *Transactions*. It is, so far as I am aware, the only copy in Edinburgh, and (now that the Scott and MacGeorge copies have changed hands) one of the only four copies in Scotland, the others being one in the library of Glasgow University, one in the library of the late Mr A. B. Stewart, Glasgow,¹ and one belonging to Mr W. L. Watson, Ayton, Abernethy. I have noted a few particulars regarding ours.

I need not dwell on the exceeding interest and value of such a possession. Mr Sidney Lee has said of the First Folio that it "forms the greatest contribution made in a single volume to the secular literature of any age or country. By the English-speaking peoples it must always be regarded as the proudest monument of their literary history. Its publication first gave permanent record to the full range of Shakespeare's work. Of the thirty-six plays which appeared in the volume, only sixteen had been printed at earlier dates—fifteen in the author's lifetime, and one, 'Othello,' posthumously. . . . No less than twenty dramas—of which the greater number rank among the literary masterpieces of the world,—nine of the fourteen comedies that were here brought together for the first time, five of the ten histories, and six of the twelve tragedies, were rescued by the First Folio from urgent peril of oblivion. Whatever be the typographical or editorial imperfections of the First Folio, it is the fountain-head of knowledge of Shakespeare's

¹ *Athenæum*, 10th March 1906, p. 300.

complete achievement." "That book," writes Mr W. E. Henley, "is so demonstrably the greatest gift ever made to English letters, that praise too liberal, or gratitude too lavish, to them that made it could not be. Since it came to us life and art have been of another colour, another inspiration, another purpose, than in its absence they must have shown themselves; so that to consider Shakespeare at all is to be for ever beholden to the two playmongers, his yoke-fellows in trade, who with the help (so Mr Justice Madden very plausibly suggests) of Ben Jonson, his comrade in art, did what was in them to secure for their fellow such immortality as is within the provision of paper and print."

During the past century and a half the Folio has vastly increased in money value. It was originally published at the price of £1. In the middle of the eighteenth century a good copy could be bought for £3, 3s. In 1790 the copy now belonging to the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth was bought at the Watson-Reed sale by the Duke of Roxburghe for £35, 14s., then considered a great price; it was sold at the Duke's sale in 1812 for £100. During the nineteenth century prices rose steadily, and in our own time the appearance in the market of the American collector has sent them to enormous figures. In 1891 a copy was sold in New York for 4200 dollars—£840—then the record price. In June 1899 Mr Pierpont Morgan bought a copy from a London bookseller for £1000. (Mr Morgan, by the way, owns three copies.) In the following month Mr B. B. MacGeorge of Glasgow paid at Christie's for the Belleruche copy £1700; and in 1901 the Dormer-Hunter copy was bought at Christie's by Mr Bernard Quaritch, junior, for £1720. (Both this copy and Mr MacGeorge's have gone to America.)

I quote the following paragraph from an article recently published by Mr Alfred W. Pollard:—"A Gutenberg Bible and a fine First Folio Shakespeare are now the prizes most valued by Americans. There are five Gutenberg Bibles at present in New York, and I do not know how many First Folios. If these come into the market when their owners die, the game may go on. If they are all left to public institutions, the supply cannot be kept up, and when

copies of the most fashionable books are unattainable private collecting may cease to attract. How near we are to this point it is difficult to guess. In lecturing last autumn I remarked that so far from £1750 being an astonishing price for a First Folio to fetch, it was only its extreme commonness that kept it so cheap; when public institutions had absorbed a few more of the good copies, a really fine example might be expected to fetch £10,000. As I write this article the prediction has already come very near fulfilment by the sale of the MacGeorge set of the four Folios for this precise sum, of which the 1623 edition must be reckoned as accounting for considerably more than half. Since the publication of Mr Sidney Lee's census of copies of the First Folio, it has become evident that, while there are plenty of made-up copies in private hands, the number of fine ones is already approaching exhaustion, and thus we are already within the zone of famine prices." (*Book Lovers' Magazine*, vol. vi., p. 30, Dec. 1905.)

These great prices only apply to fine copies, but even a comparatively inferior copy is a thing of no small value. Mr John Scott's copy, for example, of which all the preliminary leaves and the last leaf had been restored in facsimile, sold at Sotheby's in March 1905 for £255. It may be noted that when "extreme commonness" is predicated of a First Folio, that only means that it is common in comparison with Caxtons and the like. Mr Sidney Lee notes 158 existing copies. Of these only fourteen are classed as being perfect and in unrestored condition, and of these fourteen only six are in private hands on this side of the Atlantic.

Mr Lee's well-known facsimile was issued by the Clarendon Press in 1902. It is a photographic reproduction, page for page, of the Chatsworth copy. In his Introduction and in the annexed "Census of Extant Copies" Mr Lee has collected all available information as to the editing, printing, and publishing of the volume, its typography and bibliography, the reproductions of it which have been produced, and the whereabouts of the surviving copies. All who are concerned with First Folios, or indeed with Shakespearean study in any form, must acknow-

ledge their constant indebtedness to Mr Lee's work. A detailed collation of the Folio is given by Lowndes (*Bibliographers' Manual*, ed. 1863, part viii., pp. 2254-5). It is sufficient here to refer to these authorities.

Our copy has been in the Society's possession for 121 years. The minutes of a meeting held on 2nd November 1784 bear: "There was also presented from Miss Clark of Dunbar Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies, published according to the true original copies by John Heminge and Henrie Condell, small folio, the first edition." There is no other record of its history. It has been bound in dark brown morocco, with gilt edges, by Messrs Orrock & Son of Edinburgh, apparently about thirty-five years ago. Mr A. Orrock, the present head of that firm, has been good enough to search their books for any entries relating to it, but without success.

Although not perfect, it is in fairly good condition as First Folios go. It measures $12\frac{1}{8}$ inches in height by $7\frac{1}{8}$ inches in width. (The largest known copy measures $13\frac{1}{2}$ by $8\frac{3}{4}$ in.) The title-page has been re-backed and mended; the first three letters of Shakespeare's name and the imprint at the foot of the page are torn off and have been supplied by the pen. The Droeshout portrait is in fair condition. The lower right-hand corner has been slightly torn, and an injury to the left eye of the portrait has been mended, apparently at an early date—not very skilfully. The fly-leaf has also been re-backed, apparently early; its margins are entirely gone, but the printed portion, facing the portrait, is complete, with Ben Jonson's well-known lines:—

TO THE READER.

This Figure, that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the Graver had a strife
With Nature, to out-doo the life;
O, could he but have drawne his wit
As well in brasse, as he hath hit
His face; the Print would then surpasse
All that was ever writ in brasse.
But, since he cannot, Reader, looke
Not on his Picture, but his Booke.

The leaf with the dedication to the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery is missing, also the first set of memorial verses, "To the Memorie of the deceased Authour, Maister W. Shakespeare," and the List of Actors. The rest of the preliminary matter is complete, namely, the address "To the great Variety of Readers," Ben Jonson's verses "To the memory of my beloved, the Author Mr William Shakespeare, and what he hath left us," the verses by Hugh Holland, and the "Catalogue."

Of the text four leaves are missing, the two first of "Romeo and Juliet" (pp. 53 to 56 of the Tragedies) and the two last of "Cymbeline" (pp. 397-399). These, the end pages of the book, are often missing.

A leaf of the "Comedy of Errors" (Comedies, p. 85) has been somewhat badly torn across the lower corner, and a leaf of "Macbeth" (Tragedies, p. 133), one of "Hamlet" (p. 155), and two of "King Lear" (pp. 287, 289), have the margins considerably torn and soiled. There are a few slight tears on other pages, generally affecting the margin only; I have noted them as affecting the letterpress on the following pages: "Tempest," p. 3, "King John," p. 19, "Henry V.," p. 70, "Julius Cæsar," p. 111, "Lear," p. 283, "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 355, and "Cymbeline," pp. 393, 395. In "2 Henry VI.," at p. 137, there are some very old ink-stains, which look as if an attempt had been made to wash them out with water immediately after they were made. The margins, as usual in the case of old books which have been re-bound, have suffered from the binder's plough; one or two of the running titles have been slightly cut into.

The First Folio was printed with a curious carelessness; it swarms with misprints. The Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies are separately paged, and there are numerous errors in pagination and in the signatures. These are of considerable bibliographical interest, as many of them were corrected while the book was being printed off, and they help us to place any particular copy in the edition. For example, in some of the earlier copies the following misprints occur:—In "The Taming of the Shrew," p. 214 is misprinted 212; in "All's Well," p. 237 was mis-

printed 233 ; and in "Richard II.," p. 37 was misprinted 39. All these mistakes are corrected in our copy. On the other hand, our copy contains the misprinted signatures Vv instead of V in the Comedies, and 1 3 instead of m3 in the Histories, which were afterwards corrected. It has to be kept in mind that sheets which had been worked off before a correction was made were not destroyed ; in making up a copy of the book they were bound up indifferently with others which had been corrected. Thus our copy contains, and the Chatsworth copy does not, the misprint in "King Lear" of p. 307 for 309, and the Chatsworth copy contains, and ours does not, the well-known misprint in "Othello," by which the words "And hell gnaw his bones" are grotesquely misplaced in the dialogue between Roderigo and Iago (Act iv. sc. 2).

The torn leaves which I have mentioned have been carefully repaired. There has, however, been no attempt at restoration or at the insertion of facsimile pages. So far as I can judge, the book, though imperfect, is entirely genuine. The Society is fortunate in its possession, and it is matter for satisfaction that so good a copy is permanently preserved in Edinburgh.