

A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM

Date of the Play.

A Midsummer-Night's Dream was probably written about the year 1594 or 1595. It is mentioned in a list of Shakespeare's comedies contained in a book called *Palladis Tamia*, or *Wit's Treasury*, by Francis Meres, published in 1598. But the style of the play itself seems to indicate that it was written some years earlier. It is probable that Titania's description of the unseasonable weather (Act II., Scene I., ll. 88-114) has reference to the year 1594, when the summer was unusually cold and rainy. It is supposed by some editors, also, that in the lines:

"The thrice-three Muses mourning for the death
Of Learning, late deceas'd in beggary;"

(Act V., Scene I., ll. 49-50), there is a reference to the death of the poet Robert Greene, who died in 1592; but this is, of course, a mere conjecture.

A Midsummer-Night's Dream was first published in 1600, in quarto form, and it was included in the edition of Shakespeare's works known as The First Folio Edition, published in 1623.

Sources of the Plot.

The plot of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* is almost entirely Shakespeare's own invention. For the story of Theseus and Hippolyta, Shakespeare was indebted to Plutarch's *Lives* translated by Thomas North, and to *The Knight's Tale* in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe is to be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with which Shakespeare was familiar through a translation by Arthur Golding, published in 1565. For the other incidents in the play, in the stories of the lovers, the fairies, and the clowns, Shakespeare drew very largely upon the popular beliefs and superstitions of his own day.