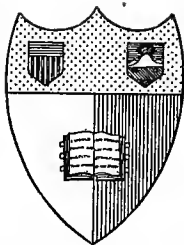


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THE MIDSUMMER NIGHT.
OR SHAKESPEARE AND
THE FAIRIES.

FROM THE GERMAN OF LUDWIG TIECK.

BY MARY C. RUMSEY.



LONDON:
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1854.



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To the Memory of
L U D W I G T I E C K
AND HIS DEVOTION TO
SHAKESPEARE
THIS VERSION OF HIS YOUTHFUL
TRIBUTE TO THE POET IS
DEDICATED

Repl. white lie copy

EDWARD BULOW being with his honoured old friend Tieck during the winter of 1847, their conversation often led to remembrances of the Poet's youth, and Bulow frequently had the pleasure to hear him read some of his earlier Poetical Essays, chiefly Dramas, which he had fortunately preserved.

I say fortunately, adds Bulow, not that I at all believed that these productions would be available now for the press, as Tieck had made his choice and already printed several of them in his collected works.

Yet, for the man of letters, even the least successful and defective attempts of a great genius that he has studied, loved, and honoured, must always be interesting as marking the youthful developement of his powers.

Tieck's brother, who had been his companion at the time of their production, was of the party; and Tieck occasionally read to them some of these early effusions. They afforded especial evidence of the two poetical elements by which the poet in later times had first obtained the favour and love of the public, by that intense and inexhaustible love of nature, evinced in his "Phantasmus," and the deep overpowering pathos displayed in his "Lowell."

They undoubtedly manifested in him even then the same courageous derision of the follies of the time which is handled in so masterly a manner in his "Gestiefelte Kater," and repeated in his "Zerbino;" but the governing tone of his first poems remains always what we have named.

Of all these youthful poems, one appeared to Bulow the most remarkable, which Tieck had written in 1789, when he was only sixteen years old, entitled, "Die Sommernacht." This, even at the first reading, fixed Bulow's earnest attention. Tieck was surprised that he admired this poem so much above the others,

and did not rely on his judgment alone, but afterwards read it to other friends at Bulow's request, and the pleasure they all derived from this poetic trifle fully justified the impression it had made on him.

For a long time Bulow pressed Tieck in vain to let the "Sommernacht" be printed, but he was not able to overcome his dread of the interpretation which ill-natured criticism might put upon his compliance. At last, on Bulow's perseverance, Tieck gave him to understand that if he published it on his own responsibility he would not object.

Bulow gladly availed himself of this reluctant permission, and gave this little gem to the world in the "Rheinisches Taschenbuch" for 1851.

It is certainly a wonderful production considering the age at which it was written, and would not, I think, have been deemed unworthy of him at any time.

It is interesting as evidence of how deeply and early the foundation was laid of Tieck's enthusiastic devo-

tion to Shakespeare in after life, and there are few if any of the poetical tributes to his memory that at all approach it.

Like Bulow, I have obtained a reluctant consent from the fair friend to whom we are indebted for the following spirited version, to print it. I trust it is not saying too much to pronounce it worthy of the original; and I cannot but regret that Tieck did not live to see it. It would have gratified him living,—and I have therefore inscribed it to his memory.

S. W. S.

Mickleham,

December 10, 1853.



THE MIDSUMMER NIGHT.

(A DRAMATIC SCENE).

An Open Place. Trees growing about it—low shrubs and a Wood close at hand.

Enter SHAKESPEARE—a boy, from the wood.

SHAKESPEARE.

PSHAW! I have taken the wrong path again!
Plague on those tempting bushes! 'Twill
be long

Ere I come here for berries any more.—

'Tis growing dusk: how shall I find my way?

And I so weary too! Well, bye and bye,

When the moon rises, I can try again

With better chance. Meantime I must lie down,
And rest awhile. The sun will soon have set.—

[Sits down, and gradually becomes drowsy.]

How soft the breeze steals thro' yon alderbrake,
Waving the slender blossoms to and fro !
A gentle shiver creeps o'er all my limbs,
Sleep presses on my weary eyelids. Ha !
How gloriously . . . the sun . . . sets . . .

[Falls asleep—Distant music in the Wood.]

Enter PUCK—an Elf, from the Wood.

PUCK.

Yonder the day declines—trailing behind
His gold and purple robes. Those stately pines
Have caught the reflex on their slender tops
Which tremble to the breeze. Twilight descends.
The Glow-worm now lights up her em'rald lamp ;
Bright crystal dew's fill every flow'ret's cup ;
The wan moon's disk assumes a golden hue ;
The Cricket's chirp sounds from the stubble-field ;

The Bat flits silent from his ivy-home :—

Now shall I lure some wand'rer from his way?
Mislead the thirsty Pilgrim from the brook?
Or fill, with chink of gold, the dreaming ear
Of thrifty Housewife, nodding at her wheel,
That waking, she may fret its loss?—But stay.
Evening's last gleam has faded into night,
I must wait here, to meet the Fairy King.—

(*Sings.*)

O'er the briny floods,
Thro' dark leafy woods,
Over mountain, over vale,
Over mead, and flow'ry dale,
Troop, ye merry elves of night,
Here to hold our revels light!

See, the stars on high
Gem the azure sky;
And, the grassy meads along,
Sounds the Cricket's happy song:

Over mountain, heath and wood,
 Over sea, and lake, and flood,
 Troop, ye merry elves of night,
 Here to hold our revels light!—

SONG OF FAIRIES (*answering in the distance*).

We swim in the vapours grey,
 Saluting the parting day;—
 We glide on the white moon-ray—
 Merry Elves all,
 Hither,
 Together,
 We troop to thy call! [*They enter.*]

PUCK.

Where have ye stayed so long?

FIRST FAIRY.

The sun, but now

Has sunk below th' horizon—and thou know'st

While one of his bright beams yet glows in heaven,
I dare not leave the covert of the wood.

PUCK.

Hast thou collected from the last blown rose
The dewy drops, which, warmed by Cynthia's beam,
Do form the bath, wherein our gracious Queen
Her lovely person laves?

SECOND FAIRY.

I have them here
Collected lucent, in this diamond-drop.

THIRD FAIRY.

And I—look! in this Chalice, deftly wrought
Of tender rose-leaves, I do hold enshrined
The perfume of a whole sweet violet bed.

FOURTH FAIRY.

Hast *thou* fulfilled our Lord's commands thyself?

PUCK (*scornfully*).

As if I were a laggard, more than they!—
Why, in an instant, I could reach the moon;
Thrice, in an hour, could girdle the round earth,
And with more time, should I accomplish less?
Here are the Lilies, here the rose-buds moss'd
And Linden flowers, that I was bid collect;
And spices rich from Ceylon's gorgeous Isle.
See, with what lavish hand I scatter round
All sweets that grow upon the utmost shores
Of Asia, or of burning Africa,
Or in deep vallies, hid from human ken.—
Ye will trip gaily over them, and spice
The air, at every step with frankincense.—
And yonder too—for our sweet Fairy Queen
I've spread a dainty couch of downy plumes.
Azure, and green and gold, stripp'd from the wings
Of Butterflies.

FIRST FAIRY.

A right brave Spirit thou!

PUCK.

They come! they come! Listen, how thro' the trees
Celestial murmurs breathe, and silver tones
Float to our charmed ears.—Our King draws nigh.

CHORUS OF FAIRIES.

In the darkling wood
Owlets, hoot no more;
Hence! to some far shore
Slimy viper-brood,—
All things vile and ugly, fly,
For our Fairy King draws nigh!—

Rest, and silence, fill
This enchanted ground;
Winds, be hush'd around;
Rustling leaves, be still.
All rude tones in softness die,
For our gentle Queen draws nigh!

Chirp no Cricket here,
 Flit no wanton breeze,
 But from out yon trees,
 Gushing full and clear,
 Philomel, be thy sweet lay
 On the night-air, borne away!

*Enter OBERON and TITANIA (soft music
 attending them).*

CHORUS OF FAIRIES.

To our Fairy-dance
 See the Queen advance,
 All in rosy garlands dight
 Floating hither in the soft moonlight:
 High is her command,
 In the Spirit-land;
 For her wise and gentle sway,
 We small Elves do love, and cheerfully obey.—

TITANIA.

Trace now the ruddy circle, in whose bound

We spirits may our airy measures weave ;
Then link yourselves together, Fays, and glide
Wave-like above the spiry blades of grass.
How the dew fills the flowers' sweet eyes, like tears—
They weep because to-morrow they must die.—

FAIRIES (*singing as they dance*).

Where the moon's trembling light
Falls on the misty green,
Where the dew sparkles bright
Wild flowers and leaves between,
There we flit—
Weaving our airy maze :
Tripping it,
By those clear silver rays
Mocking the watcher's gaze ;—
Thus do we,
Merrily,
Live in the nightly gleam ;
Thirstily,

Drinking the stars' soft beam :—
And the tears nightly poured
Into the flowret's bell,
Furnish our dainty board,
Nourish us well.—

Over the tall rank grass we hie,
In the flower-bells nestling lie,
But flowers, nor grass
Bend when we pass,
So lightly the Fairies' feet trip by !
I' the tangled weed, by ocean's brim,
O'er the smooth lake, we sport and swim ;
But on sea, nor lake,
Will a bubble break,
Where Fairy feet do lightly skim.

TITANIA.

Break off! sleep steals upon my drooping sense :
Murmur some gentle lullaby—and wave
Your fans of rose leaves, and the delicate wings

Of moths—to woo around me cool soft airs,
And shade mine eyes from Cynthia's glancing ray.

FAIRIES (*chaunt low*).

Pour, Nightingale,
Thy tenderest wail,
Rise, mists, and veil
Our Fairy Queen.

Flowers, bow your head,
And perfume shed
Around the bed
Of our sweet Queen.

Winds, hushed be ;
Oh, Linden-tree,
Wave silently
Above our Queen.

TITANIA.

'Tis vain ! sleep will not rest upon mine eyes,—
Some mortal sure is lurking near, unseen.

OBERON.

A mortal?

PUCK.

Who could be so madly rash?
Give me command, and I will punish him—
I'll fetch the Ignis-fatuus from the marsh,
And sting him with its blue unholy flame.
I'll search the wood, and sharpest thistles stick
Under his clothes, to vex his flesh profane:
I'll make his bold cheek tingle red with shame,
For daring on our mystic rites to gaze.

TITANIA.

Stay!—look! oh look!—it is a lovely Boy;
How peacefully he sleeps, while on his face
The moonbeams play—sure some enchanting dream,
All full of sunshine, holds him captive now,
For see, he smiles—how softly! Oberon,
It was but yesternight, we joyful held

Our feast of reconciliation—shall it be
That our first act, united, is revenge?
Is not this Boy as beauteous as a Child
Of Fairy-land? Shall we misuse the power
That we are gifted with, to work him ill?
Nay—how much better, how much nobler 'twere,
Worthier of spirits good, our might t'employ,
For good alone. Is not the feeling sweet,
Unspeakably, when we may furtherers be
Of happiness, to any? Is it not
This same most holy feeling, that makes men
Grow to resemble gods? Then, Oberon,
My Lord—my love—yield to my pleading now;
Let us, instead of harming, send him hence
Enriched with blessings.

OBERON.

Yet, thou know'st thyself
How strict the laws are of our Spirit-realm;
This bold intruder, who . . .

TITANIA.

Nay, blame not him ;

He lost his way in the wild wood, and Chance
 Led him to rest too near this haunted ground ;
 And must he suffer for the trick of Fate ?
 No—let us, kindly spirits, give him cause
 To-morrow morn, to bless that wanton Fate.
 Oberon ! this is the first prayer of thy Queen,
 Of thy so lately reconciled love ;
 Thou wilt not—canst not—sternly say her nay !

OBERON.

Be it then, as thou wishest.—But, what gifts
 Would'st thou bestow on him ?

TITANIA.

Not riches—no,
 The base desire of little minds.—Go, Fays,
 Fetch me Forget-me-nots and Violets,
 That so I may endow him worthily.—
 But pluck no flower that has not first to-night

Opened its virgin bud, unsunned and pure.
Bring odorous Thyme, and Lilies, sweet and pale
Gleaming by moonlight.—Hasten, and return
Ere Time's quick pulse has numbered many beats.

FAIRIES (*departing*).

Off! through the wood,
 With the speed of light,
We fly to gather
 The buds of night.
Their scent we'll bear,
Through the dewy air,
Thither, and back in an instant's flight.

[*Exeunt.*]

TITANIA.

Upon his brow I'll press their balmy juice,
And consecrate him to the minstrel art.

OBERON.

Fly like a moonbeam, Puck! outstrip the wind!
Far to the north there lies a moss-grown rock

Adown whose side dashes a mountain stream,
Thousands of flowers bloom lovely at its foot,
These gather,—and then westward fly beyond
The sea, whose restless billows lash the cliffs
Which curb their mad career, and send their roar
Far inland—heard amid the hush of night—
There wilt thou find a rugged mountain, clothed
From base to summit, with a dark pine wood,
And in the midst thereof, a lonely spot
Where ray of sun or moon hath never pierced—
Under the bushes, dry and withered, there,—
Amidst the stones and moss, grows a white flower ;
Within its cup a single drop of dew
Has slowly, slowly gathered—till it now
Imparts to the wan flower its own warm blush—
This bring me quick—but shake not from its breast
The precious drop.—Haste, lest the other sprites
Be here before thee.

PUCK.

Nay—I'd run a match

With any of the winds, and come in first ! [*Exit.*

TITANIA.

How knew'st thou of that flower ?

OBERON.

In the sad time

Of our estrangement, Sweet, I wandered oft
On that rude mountain, thro' that sombre wood,
Oft sat forlorn in the waste solitude,
Or pined in dim caves, with the hooting Owl :
'Twas then I watch'd the drop gradual distil
Into the flower. All such slow-ripened fruits
A spirit pervades, that with the human soul
Hath a mysterious sympathy—in some
A healing virtue dwells, to cure disease.
Some will excite Ambition—Hatred—Love—
The flower my servant seeks, will kindle high
The glow of fervid phantasy. They come.

Enter PUCK *and the* FAIRIES.

PUCK.

I'm first, remember !

D

FIRST FAIRY.

As we left the wood
We heard thee rushing o'er the farthest mead.

SECOND FAIRY.

Here are Forget-me-nots.

THIRD FAIRY.

Sweet Violets here.

FOURTH FAIRY.

All have unfolded since the day's decline.

PUCK.

Here are the blossoms gathered from the dell
Beside the waterfall—here the pale flower—
See! in its bosom—like a ruby gem,
Gleams undisturbed the precious mystic drop.

TITANIA (*stooping over SHAKESPEARE*).

These various flowers I scatter o'er thy brow,

And as their mingled fragrance round thee floats,
Let golden visions wreathe thine inner sense ;
O sing, as none before thee ever sung,
As never mortal after thee shall sing !
These odorous buds, that on thy breast I lay,
Wake in thee tenderest sensibility,
The might of love, a fancy pure and bright—
More heavenly bright, than ever yet has burned
In mortal breast. A Poet thou shalt be,
The greatest earth has known—whose altitude
No after spirit shall have power to reach.
Gaze thou entranced upon the rising sun,
Or golden light of eve.—Wander alone
By dewy moonlight thro' the still, green wood,
And with a pulse, whose every beat is joy,
Watch how the buds swell from the dark brown rind
Call'd forth by spring.—Be great, yet nothing reck
Of thine own greatness—keep an innocent heart,
Unsoiled by taint of pride. Not to thyself,
Though to all else, seem thou the first of men.

OBERON.

Lo! I pour out on thee this mystic drop,
And thro' thy bosom inspirations throng
Dazzling, tumultuous! Thoughts, whose lofty flight
Shall touch all matters, penetrate them all,
Or boldly leap o'er ev'ry dim abyss—
Thy genius shall transport thee far beyond
All circumscribing limits.—Deep beneath
In the earth's bowels, shall thy spirit search
Her magic secrets—then rebound aloft,
And take its flight to heaven.—Thou shalt know
A strange delight, when midnight tempests roar,
When storms uproot the huge Oaks from the hill,
And hurl them crashing to the vale below.—
On nature's terrors, thou with fearless joy
Shalt gaze; thy heart throb with wild ecstasy,
When on the precipice's giddy brink
Thou standest, marking where the torrent boils,
Roaring and surging, fathoms under thee!
Oh sing, as none before thee ever sung,

As never mortal after thee shall sing!—
Shine thou, thy happy country's richest gem—
Live thou, delight of ages yet to come—
Let thy renown survive the lapse of time
In undimm'd splendour, and posterity
The most remote, with rev'ence naming thee
And envy, say, "Would I had Shakespeare been!"

FAIRIES (*sing*).

Thrice happy thou!
Whom Oberon doth delight,
With our Ladie bright,
Thus to endow!

Thrice happy thou!
Whom a godlike race,
With such godlike grace,
Richly endow.

TITANIA.

When thou becom'st a man—grateful recall

This night eventful—and to after times
In sweetest numbers sing, what now thou dream'st.
Tell them of Oberon and Titania's strife
And their glad reconciliation—This, the meed
Of thanks, thou shalt requite our gifts withal.—

Now dawn, soft blushing, calls the slumbering day;
The moon looks pale, faint gleams the morning star,
Back to our woods we Fairies must away;—
But often near thee, gentle Boy, will I
Hovering, fill all thy soul with keen delight.
On moonlight nights, when pensively thou sit'st
Musing beside some silver rill, or rov'st
In spring-tide, drinking in with ravished ear
The song of Philomel—I will be by.

OBERON.

Now fare thee well! Thou spirit-favoured child;
I too will visit thee, when with deep awe
Thou mark'st the cataract leap o'er some tall rock,
Or silent track'st the forest solitudes,
Or climb'st the mountain peak, to watch the clouds

Pregnant with thunder, gathering far below
In solemn blackness—when thy bosom heaves
With a tumultuous bliss, and thy cheeks glow,
I will be near, and cool thy fever-flush,
And send a shivering transport to thy soul!

CHORUS of Fairies.

Morning awakes,
To thickets and brakes
 Away we hie ;
Before the day's beam,
The wan moon's gleam,
 And the night-stars fly.

In deep green dells,
In the lily's bells,
 We crouch all day.
But again at night,
When the stars shine bright,
 We shall frisk and play. [*Exeunt.*]

PUCK.

Must I depart, and nothing leave with thee?
I am no spirit of high rank—'tis true—
Such royal gifts, as Oberon and his Queen
I have not to bestow.—Yet, I can breathe
A merry humour into thee.—Be thine
The power, whene'er thou will'st, to drive away
Black melancholy from each human breast!
No trifling priv'lege—So forget me not!—
When thou art dead, Boy, what a strife I'll raise
Among a hundred little carping souls,
Who will misjudge, with endless blunderings,
Thy noble works.—Yet all the brighter thence
Shall grow the light of thy world-wide renown.—

Now from the village crows the wakeful cock
Rousing the laggart Day—cool breezes blow,
Paler and paler still, the wan moon fades.
The Owl flits noiseless home to the dark wood,
Already on her nest the sky-lark shakes
The night-dew from her wings—I must away! [*Exit.*

SHAKESPEARE (*slowly awakes*).

Where am I? oh! where have I been? who spoke?
How heavenly pure seems every breath I draw!
How sunny bright the rushing thoughts, that chase
Each other through my soul! and oh, how sweet
The melody, still echoing on my ear!
What spot was that I saw, veil'd in soft mist?
Where have ye vanished, bright celestial forms?
Are your enchanting voices silent now?
Ah me! It was but a delicious dream!—
Day dawns apace—how cheerful is this place
That lately look'd to me so blank and drear.
My very spirit seems to grow more light
As I inhale this fresh elastic air.
What means this longing for some good unknown?
Why beats my heart so wildly? Whence this deep
Emotion, that would fain have vent in tears?
'Twas never so before—e'en the green wood
Wears now a different look from yesterday.
Yonder shines Hesperus, and there the sun

Rises in glory, and mine eyes are wet.—
Oh whence these strange, these more than human, these
Godlike sensations? All is ecstasy!
I feel strong and elate, as I could spring
Up to the very moon—as if inspired
With new-born life, I could, all powerful, grasp
Great Nature, in a loving, close embrace.
My thoughts in freedom revel, and expand.
'Twas but a few hours since, weary and dull,
I flung myself beneath this tree to rest,
And now!—My past life, seems like a dark night,
That vanishing gives place to day's bright gleams,
Which chase the shadows one by one away,
Till every object stands revealed and clear.—
Oh! that I had an Eagle's towering wing
To soar aloft, and meet the golden dawn.
Oh! that I might on yon white fleecy cloud
Float thro' the blue expanse, or drive along
In wild career before the tempest blast!—
The sun's first beams have woven a rich couch
Whereon pale Hesper bows his head to rest,

And thro' the crimson portals of the east
Gush down a thousand golden streams of light.
The Nightingale still chaunts from the deep grove,
The Lark mounts upward, with exulting trill.
How wondrous fair this world! Each pulse, each
 breath,
Each fibre of my body, thrills with joy!
Whither? ah whither? I am rapt! am lost!

F I N I S.



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