A Discourse of the Common Weal of This Realm of England

Lamond Elizabeth
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A Discourse of the Common Weal of this Realm of England
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Discourse of the Common Weal
of this Realm of England

First printed in 1581 and commonly attributed to W.S.

Edited from the MSS
by the late
ELIZABETH LAMOND
Girton College

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1929
NOTE.

WHEN Miss Lamond became aware that she could not hope to complete this book before her death, I undertook to see it through the press. She worked at it till the last. On Tuesday evening, August 11, 1891, she spent an hour or more in reading the proofs with Mr Lambarde's MS. in Cambridge. Two days later she travelled to her home in Edinburgh, where she died on the following Sunday morning.

The lines of Miss Lamond's plan for the work were clearly laid down, but I have felt a grave responsibility in trying to execute the remainder of a task for which her critical taste and unwearied patience rendered her specially fitted.

When the work came into my hands I found that a good deal remained to be done, and other engagements have rendered this long delay in publication inevitable. Miss Lamond had prepared the transcript of Mr Lambarde's MS. from which the text has been printed, as well as the transcript of the table of contents and side-notes from the Bodleian MS.; she had also compared the proofs of the
first dialogue with the Lambarde MS. Her article in the
*English Historical Review* (April 1891), together with
suggestions for recasting it, supplied materials for the intro-
duction. Two or three pages of the notes were also
complete, but there was a considerable quantity of material
which required to be entirely re-arranged. The introduction
and notes do not in all cases represent her matured
opinion; on more than one point she hoped to be able to
go through the evidence again, though her main conclusions
have already received general acceptance. (Cossa, *Intro-

For cordial assistance received, I venture to express
Miss Lamond’s thanks as well as my own; to Mr Lambarde,
for consenting to the long continued use of the very
interesting manuscript which forms the basis of the text,
and to the authorities of the Bodleian for their kindness in
giving her special facilities for collating the MS. in their
possession; also for assistance on special points to Mr
J. D. Duff, Fellow of Trinity College; to Professor Foxwell,
Fellow of S. John’s College; to Mr Hubert Hall, of the
Record Office; to Miss E. A. McArthur, of Girton
College; to Mr F. B. Smart, of King’s College; to Professor
Sapsworth, of Zurich, and to Mr A. Rogers, of the Uni-
versity Library.

W. CUNNINGHAM.

*Trinity College, Cambridge.*

*9 August 1893.*
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ERRATA.

p. 9, l. 10; for provydyd read provydyd.
p. 56, l. 4 margin; for set read sel.
p. 92, l. 1 margin; for spend read spendes.
INTRODUCTION.

I.

The Dialogue which is now published in its earlier form has had a curious history. It was first printed in 1581, and the authorship was then claimed by W. S.; but it now appears that whoever he may have been, he had little to do with the composition of the tract. He erased a few passages and made one important addition; for the most part he was content to modify tell-tale phrases, and took little pains to bring the work up to date. Still, though much controversy has arisen as to the name and identity of W. S., no serious doubt appears to have been entertained as to his claim to authorship. One enterprising publisher in 1751 boldly assigned the Dialogue to W(illiam) S(hakespeare); though the audacity of the suggestion prevented it from meeting much acceptance, a fictitious interest has attached to this tract as a supposed description of England in the time of Shakespeare’s youth. Indeed it has been very generally adopted—despite marked discrepancies from Harrison—as a leading authority for the social condition of England in the latter half of Elizabeth’s reign. But the note written by William Lambarde, the Kentish antiquary, in his copy of the Dialogue, effectually disposes of the claim to authorship advanced by W. S., and proves that the book was written long before the date at which it appeared in print. “Note that this booke was published in printe, under the Title of a briefe conceipte of ‘Inglishe policie, by one W. S. in the yeare 1581; whearas it ‘was long sync penne by S’ Thomas Smythe (as some say),

L.  b
“or, Mr Jhon Hales (as others thinke) eyther in the reigne of
“H. 8 or E. the 6. And I my selfe have long had this copie of
“it which I caused to be written out in the yeare 1565 1.” This
information throws a fresh light on all the questions connected
with the Dialogue. This new edition aims at presenting the
treatise in its earliest known form, and exhibiting the modifica-
tions and alterations which were made by W. S. when he had it
printed in 1581. The question of authorship can no longer be
treated as a mere discussion of the identity of W. S., but must
be examined afresh with the help of the internal evidence fur-
nished by the treatise in its earlier form. The field for conjecture
is narrowed if we suppose that the Dialogue gives, as it purports
to do, the record of an actual conversation, and investigate the
definite indications it affords of the date and the locality at which
such a conversation could have occurred; when these limits of
time and place are assigned, we shall be in a position to examine
the evidence as to the originals of the characters who take part in
the debate, and especially as to the identity of the knight, who
poses as the narrator of the whole affair. The question as to
the date when the report of the Dialogue was written, is therefore
to be regarded as distinct from the question as to the date when
the conversation occurred. The careful discussion of these
various points in turn will throw considerable light on the
character of the piece and the circumstances to which it refers,
even if the precise form in which it is cast is thought to be a
mere literary device.

1 This note is reproduced on the plate fig. 4. Nichols mentions it
in his catalogue of Lambard’s MS. (Bibliotheca Topographica Brit-
nannica (Kent), p. 512), but he read the note “Sir Thomas Smythe
or John Yates.” A more careful examination of the writing shews that
this is a mistake; the H is a peculiar one, and was not used very
commonly even by Lambard himself; but he occasionally adopted
this form, as for example in the word Hallyling in the last line of a letter,
29 July 1585 (Brit. Mus. Cotton Julius C. V. f. 25), also in the same
word in the date of a letter, 2 December 1584 (Brit. Mus. Lansdowne
43 f. 44, No. 21).