

Editor's Note:

Discovered amongst Kern family memorabilia in the early 20th century and first performed at Calumet's new Opera House under the direction of a young Jefferson Trelore Kern, *The Gospel According to WILL* was touted by some to be the lost last tragicomedy of William Shakespeare (but apparently never performed in Elizabethan England due to its sacrilegious content coupled with an allusive poetic challenge to the Divine Right of British Monarchy as claimed by King James I).

How this sole copy of the Bard's final play survived to be passed down through the Kern family was never adequately explained nor was their copy of the "original manuscript" ever produced so its provenance could be thoroughly examined. A brief uproar followed its first and only staging on April 6, 1906 but this local scandal was quickly overshadowed by news of the great earthquake in San Francisco. As for those few traditional scholars of Avon's "Sweet Swan" who've since taken time to examine the text of Jefferson's *The Gospel According to WILL*, all but one have denounced it as a blasphemous forgery modeled on *The Gospel According to MARK*.

Here, handed down to me from my grandfather Jefferson, is a transcription of the **Prologue** to that play which he directed and performed in more than a century ago.

Havrylak Kern
April 6, 2018

The Gospel According to WILL

Prologue.

Scene I.-Forest of Arden, near the river Avon

Enter JACK FALSTAFF, clothed in deer hide and munching on crickets with a drool of wild clover honey dripping from his blistered lips.

Jack. Prepare ye the way of Prince Will thou idle creatures and make his paths straighter than an Amesbury leyline. There cometh one mightier than I after me, a mender of bad soles, the latchet of whose shoes I am unworthy to stoop down and loosen.

Recruit 1. Will he baptizeth us with muddy water as well, feral preacher?

Jack. Nay, thou witless rogue! He for whom I am but an uncouth and abrasive messenger wilt shower thy balding pate with ghostly will-o'-the-wisp fire!

Enter WILL

Will. Where hath ye wandered off to all crocked on kecksy, coz? The Wroxall chapel's been too quiet of late without your booming baritone to rupture our tympanums.

[JACK grabs WILL by the shoulders and smacks him down onto the watery canvas where they wrestle furiously like Little John and Robin Hood before resurfacing to warmly embrace.]

Recruit 2. Look! A *white* rook hath landed upon the smaller one's head.

Recruit 1. Where it now squawks into his sun-scalded ear!

God [backstage from above]. SILENCE! This is my beloved bastard son most pleasing and he'll beareth me nobly down to the tragic end.

Will. I must hasten now, bounteous Jack.

Jack. What? So soon mild Will? We 'ave an errant flock to gather.

Will. Yonder beige chough winging skyward hath counseled me to hie west for Arden's beast-filled tangle. It's foretold Stan Beazzleboob of Baddesly Clinton shall then tempt me yon unto three fortnights 'til faery folk intervene and restore me from the frailty of my prophetic exhaustion.

Jack. Be off then you velvet rascal whilst I further enlighten these pitiful ragged misfits.

[Exeunt.]

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