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THE
LIFE
OF
SHAKSPEARE;
ENQUIRIES

INTO
THE ORIGINALITY OF HIS DRAMATIC PLOTS
AND CHARACTERS;

AND
ESSAYS
ON THE
Ancient Theatres and Theatrical Usages.

BY AUGUSTINE SKOTTOWE.

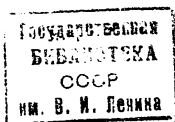
IN TWO VOLUMES.

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TO
CHARLES MILLS, Esq.

AS A SINCERE
TESTIMONY OF RESPECT FOR HIS TALENTS AND
LITERARY ATTAINMENTS,
AND OF GRATITUDE FOR HIS FRIENDSHIP,

THESE VOLUMES
ARE, WITH PRIDE AND PLEASURE,

MOST AFFECTIONATELY

INSCRIBED.

April, 1824.

PREFACE.

IN 1753, Mrs. Lennox published a work entitled "*Shakspeare Illustrated*; or, the Novels and Histories on which the Plays of Shakspeare are founded." The subject was well chosen; for as Johnson, the friend of the authoress, observed with regard to Milton's great poem, "it must be interesting to find what was first projected, whence the scheme was taken, ~~how it was improved, by what assistance~~ it was executed, and from what stores the materials were collected; whether its founder dug them from the quarries of nature, or demolished other buildings to embellish his own."

Of the thirty-five plays usually ascribed to Shakspeare, Mrs. Lennox entirely neglected no less than twelve. Of the twenty-three on which she wrote essays, she failed in six instances of

tracing them to their correct sources; and of ten of the rest, she gave imperfect accounts of Shakspeare's materials. Without offering any criticism on her "Illustrations" of the remaining seven plays, it is evident that there is room for another work on the subject.

Our great dramatist almost invariably selected for the plot of his drama an event of history, a romantic tale, or some previous dramatic composition, and imposed upon himself an almost implicit adherence to his authorities, even in cases where great improvement might have been effected with little pains. For the *alterations* which he chose to make, he is not often to be praised: ~~his additions to his originals~~ are, however, almost always excellent; and so beautifully has he blended the separate actions, that they appear always to have formed one consistent whole.

The characters of Shakspeare's absolute creation are as many as those which he prepared on previous hints; and, though his serious dramas far outnumber his comedies, his

comic portraits are somewhat more numerous than his tragic. In point of importance, however, the preponderance is greatly on the side of the tragic characters, and the fact is easily accounted for : the materials borrowed were mostly serious fables, or grave historical events ; the personages engaged in their transaction were of a corresponding tone of mind, and the poet was compelled to concede them a prominence on the scene in some degree commensurate with their prominence in the narrative.

Scarcely one of Shakspeare's tragic characters was conceived by himself ; a singular fact, considering that his comic characters, with the exception of about half-a-dozen, were entirely his own. The conclusion is inevitable that the bent of his mind was decidedly comic. Why, with such a disposition, so large a majority of the subjects selected by him were serious, it is in vain to enquire ; but it appears, that he eagerly sought every opportunity which such a selection left him, to indulge his fancy's course. His predilection for the ludicrous required a wider field for

its display than was afforded him in his few comedies ; and, with the mask and sock, he gaily rushed upon the consecrated ground of the tragic muse, engrafting incidents purely comic on subjects the most serious.

The biography of Shakspeare, and the History of the Stage are subjects on which every lover of the poet is desirous of information, and with a view of making these volumes a COMPANION TO SHAKSPEARE, both have been added to the original design of illustrating the dramatist by comparing his plays with the materials used in their construction. These additions will contribute, it is hoped, to the general utility of the book ; and, with the ~~aid of such~~ information as the commonest editions of the poet afford, the general reader will be furnished with all the elucidatory information he can require, and be spared the pain of wading through the commentators' tomes of controversy.

THE
LIFE OF SHAKSPEARE.*

A FAMILY variously named Shaxper, Shakspeare, Shakspere and Shakspeare†, was spread over the woodland part of Warwickshire in the sixteenth century. They were tradesmen and husbandmen, and their property was at least respectable; different depositories of legal writings proving it to have been frequently the subject of judicial controversy and testamentary disposition.

Of that particular branch of the family whence the poet descended, nothing whatever is known beyond his immediate parent‡, John Shakspeare, who was originally a glover§, and, subsequently,

* Note A.

† Note B.

‡ Rowe's account of the family is this: "It appears by the register, and other public writings of Stratford, that the poet's family were of good figure and ~~fashion~~ there, and are mentioned as gentlemen." This is extremely inaccurate.

§ A manuscript of the proceedings of the Bailiff's Court in 1555, which so describes him.

a butcher*, and also a dealer in wool in the town of Stratford.† He filled various municipal offices in the borough; among the records of which his name first appears in 1555, in an account of the proceedings of the bailiff's court. In Michaelmas, 1557, or some time very slightly subsequent‡, he was admitted a member of the corporation. In September, 1561, he was elected one of the chamberlains, and filled that office during two successive years. In 1565 he was invested with an alderman's gown; and in 1568 he attained the supreme honours of the borough, by serving as high-bailiff from Michaelmas in that year to the same festival in the following. Two years afterwards, 1571, he was elected and sworn chief alderman for the ensuing year.§

* Aubrey.

† Rowe.

‡ On Michaelmas day, 1557, John Lewis was the last on the list of burgesses, and there were then four vacancies. The next existing enumeration of burgesses is one dated 1564, in which John Shakspeare stands next but one to Lewis: he, therefore, probably, was elected into one of the vacancies mentioned. On this occasion Malone says, in the text of his *Life of Shakspeare*, "It appears from a paper inserted below, &c." We look below, and are met by, "See Appendix." We look in the Appendix, and search in vain for the promised document. Similar disappointment is occasioned in the two succeeding pages, 76, 77.

§ *Registr. Burg. Strat.* Whatever respectability the corporation of Stratford boasted, their claims to erudition must have been most humble: out of nineteen members of that

The progress of John Shakspeare in municipal distinctions is an implication of respectability which is supported by other considerations. His charities rank him in the second class of the townsmen of Stratford* ; a public document, referring to the year of his magistracy, states him to have been possessed of property to the amount of five hundred pounds † ; so early as 1556 he was the holder of the leases of two houses, one in Greenhill, the other in Henley-street, Stratford, and in 1570 he rented fourteen acres of land, called Ingon, or Innton, meadow.‡ His prosperity was undiminished in 1574, when he purchased two houses, with a garden and orchard annexed to each, in Henley-street, Stratford.§

body who signed a paper in 1564, only seven could write their names, and among the twelve who set their mark is John Shakspeare ; he is kept in countenance, however, by the then chief magistrate, whose cross is ostentatiously termed "the sign manual of the high bailiff."

* In a subscription for the relief of the poor in 1564, out of twenty-four persons, twelve gave more, six the same, and six less than John Shakspeare : in a second subscription by fourteen persons, eight gave more, five the same, and one less.

† Grant of arms to John Shakspeare, 1596.

‡ Regist. Burg. Strat. Two indentures in the Roll's chapel.

§ Chirograph of a fine levied to John Shakspeare, by Edmund Hall, and Emma his wife, in 1574. Deed executed by Elizabeth and Thomas Nash in 1639.

While in the exercise of his magisterial office, John Shakspeare obtained from the Herald's College a concession of arms. From some unexplained cause, he made another application for a grant of arms in 1596, with similar success; and, in 1599, procured a confirmation, or exemplification, of the former grants, with permission, in consideration of his marriage with Mary Arden, to impale his own with the arms of that ancient family.* Some property in money, an estate in land, and an exaltation in rank, were the beneficial consequences of this alliance.†

Mary was the youngest daughter of Robert Arden, of Wilmecote in Warwickshire. The Arden family was of great antiquity, and, in the reign of Henry the Seventh, in particular, of some consideration. Sir John Arden, the elder brother of Mrs. Shakspeare's great-grandfather, was squire for the body of that king; her grandfather was groom, or page, of the bedchamber to the same monarch, who rewarded his fidelity by constituting him keeper of the park of Aldercar, and bailiff of the lordship of Codnore.‡

* Note C.

† Robert Arden's will. John Shakspeare's bill of complaint against Lambert.

‡ Grant of arms to John Shakspeare. Fuller's Worthies.

In 1574, John Shakspeare's affairs began to fall into decay. In 1578, he mortgaged the small estate he enjoyed through his wife, for forty pounds*; and his difficulties were so well known to his brothers of the corporation, that they remitted to him, in the same year, the payment of half the sum of six shillings and eight pence levied upon each alderman, and entirely exempted him from a weekly contribution of four pence to the poor.† At the same time, also, he was indebted five pounds to a baker at Stratford, and compelled to obtain collateral securities for its payment.‡ In the following year his name is among the defaulters to a contribution for the purchase of defensive armour and weapons.§ In 1585-6, a distress was issued for the seizure of his goods, which his poverty, however, rendered nugatory, it being returned "Joh'es Shackspere nihil habet unde distr. potest le-

Dugdale's Antiq. Sir John Arden's will, 1526, Prerog. Off. Grants to Robert Arden. An Inquisition made in 1591.

* John Shakspeare's bill of complaint against John Lambert.

† Regist. Burg. Strat.

‡ List of debts appended to Roger Sadler's will. Prerog. Off.

§ Regist. Burg. Strat.

vari.”* He was shortly after dismissed from the corporation for a neglect of attendance at the halls for the seven preceding years†; and, in 1587, subjected to an action for debt.‡ The precise state of his affairs during the ten succeeding years is not known, but it does not seem likely, from his describing himself in 1597 as of “very small wealth and very few friends,” that the sun of prosperity ever again shone upon him§; and a supplication from the bailiff and burgesses of Stratford, in 1590, records the hopeless depression of the once highly prosperous trade of a woolstapler. The town had then “fallen into much decay for want of such trade as heretofore they had by clothing and making of yarn, employing and maintaining a number of poor people by the same, which now live in great penury and misery, by reason they are not set at work as before they have been.”¶

John Shakspeare died in 1601. His family was numerous: Jone, Margaret, William, Gilbert, Jone, Ann, Richard, and Edmund.|| The

* Register of the Bailiff's Court.

† Regist. Burg. Strat.

‡ Declaration filed in the Bailiff's Court.

§ Bill of complaint against John Lambert.

¶ Supplication to the Lord Treasurer Burghley.

|| Note D.

first born, Jone, died in earliest infancy, and Margaret when only five months old. William was the poet. Of Gilbert nothing appears after the registry of his baptism*: the register, indeed, mentions the burial of "Gilbert Shakspeare, adolescens," in 1611-12, who might, or might not, have been the son of the elder Gilbert. Jone married William Hart, a hatter in Stratford. She died in 1646, leaving three sons.† She was remembered in her immortal brother's will by a contingent legacy of fifty pounds to her and her children; a bequest of twenty pounds, all his wearing apparel, and the house which she then occupied, at a yearly rent of one shilling, for her life. The Harts have continued in Stratford during the two centuries which have elapsed since the poet's death. In 1794, one of Shakspeare's two houses in Henley-street was the property of Thomas Hart, a butcher, the sixth in descent from Jone. Ann Shakspeare died in infancy.‡ Richard was buried in 1612-13.§ Edmund Shakspeare embraced the calling

* The text states the fact literally; but I have no doubt that Gilbert lived till after the Restoration of Charles II., and was that brother of Shakspeare of whom Oldys reports, that he saw the dramatist perform the character of Adam in *As You Like It*. See Note N.

† Parish Register of Stratford.

‡ Ibid.

§ Ibid.

of an actor, influenced, probably, in his choice by the connection of his brother with the theatre. He was a player at the Globe, lived in St. Saviour's, and was buried in the church of that parish on the 31st of December, 1607.*

WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, in April, 1564†, a fact which comprises the whole of the poet's history till he is found, "for some time," at the free grammar school of his native town‡, where he, doubtless, acquired the Latin, "the small Latin," that his friend Ben Jonson assures us he was master of. The narrowness of his parent's circumstances was an insuperable bar against the progress of his education, and he was summoned home to assist in the occupation of his father§, which, at the period now spoken of, was that of a butcher, if the tradition is to be credited which relates that young Shakspeare killed a calf in "high style," and graced his slaughter by a speech.¶ The same authority assigns also to

* Register of Saint Saviour's parish.

† Parish Register. He was baptized on the 26th, and the day of his birth is said to have been the 23d, but on no sufficient authority.

‡ Rowe.

§ Rowe.

¶ Aubrey. A good story is seldom good enough for Aubrey. He adds, "There was at that time another butcher's son in this town, that was held not at all inferior to