

ESSAYS ON THE DRAMA

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Essays on the drama by William Bodham Donne

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WILLIAM BODHAM DONNE

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BY

WILLIAM BODHAM DONNE.



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1858.

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PREFACE.

—♦—

THESE Essays on the Drama, or on subjects connected with it, were written for the occasion, and accordingly any little interest they may have possessed at the moment will probably by this time have become extinct. I have been repeatedly urged, however, by persons in whose judgment I confide, to reprint them, and I have yielded to their wishes rather than my own.

By additions, retrenchments, and modifications, I could perhaps have rendered these Essays better worth reproduction. But I prefer leaving them as they were originally written, since in that form they attained the approbation I most value.

My grateful acknowledgments are due to Mr.

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Murray, Mr. J. Chapman, and Messrs. John W. Parker and Son, for their permission to reprint from the 'Quarterly' and 'Westminster Reviews' and 'Fraser's Magazine,' respectively, the contents of this little volume.

W. B. D.

*The Grove, Blackheath,
November 2, 1857.*

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ESSAYS ON THE DRAMA.



ATHENIAN COMEDY.*

M. GUIZOT'S *Essay upon the 'Life, Writings, and Age of Menander,'* belongs to that order of 'studies' of classical antiquity in which Germany and France abound, but which are in little esteem at our own Universities. To this department the contributions of English scholars are few in number and inconsiderable in value. They have generally preferred the practical but somewhat dreary paths of pure philology, and left to foreigners the more attractive regions of biography and general criticism. Our periodical Journals occasionally present the reader with some excellent essays on ancient authors; but such lively and learned treatises as M. Guizot's are seldom, if ever, published under the auspices of the Pitt or the Clarendon press. We do not imagine our Bachelors and

* Reprinted from the 'Westminster Review.'

Méandre; Etude Historique et Littéraire sur la Comédie et la Société Grecques. Par Guillaume Guizot. 8vo. Paris, 1855.

Masters of Arts to be less sensible than Continental scholars of the beauties of Classical Literature; but either they lack encouragement from the public, or are earlier engrossed by the cares of the world.

While the tragic drama and the Aristophanic comedy of the Athenians have attracted their due share of notice, both from those who amended their text, and those who entered into their dramatic or philosophical spirit, the new, or, as we may venture to phrase it, the Gented Comedy of Athens, has elicited comparatively little attention. This partial neglect may be ascribed to two causes,—to the fragmentary condition in which the latest offspring of the Attic theatre has come down to us; and to the grander forms of imagination and art embodied in the elder drama. Through every disguise, through the change of creeds and ethical ideas, through the resisting medium of a dead language, through mutilation of parts and corruption of texts, through the mists of an extinct religion, and the veils of obsolete party feuds, the presence as of a great spirit standing before us is perceptible in the Athenian drama. Never was the indestructible life of Grecian genius more apparent than when, some years ago, Mendelssohn's 'Antigone' was produced on the London stage. The music alone was worthy of the story: the *libretto* was alternately tumid and feeble in its language; the actors were encumbered by the stilted sentiments put into their mouths, and baffled by the slow and sculpturesque evolutions and