

**LECTURES ON THE  
DRAMATIC LITERATURE  
OF THE AGE OF ELIZABETH**

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Lectures on the dramatic literature of the age of Elizabeth by William Hazlitt

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**WILLIAM HAZLITT**

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BY WILLIAM HAZLITT.



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AS A TRIBUTE  
TO PUBLIC VIRTUE AND PRIVATE WORTH,  
AND AS A MEMORIAL OF LONG AND TRIED FRIENDSHIP,  
THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED, IN THE  
NAME OF ITS AUTHOR,  
TO  
BASIL MONTAGU.

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ADVERTISEMENT TO THE LAST LONDON EDITION,

BY THE AUTHOR'S SON.

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THE former editions of the Lectures, originally delivered by the author at the Surrey Institution in 1818, and published in the same year, having become exhausted, the present reprint has been undertaken, for the purpose of supplying the constant and increasing demand which is made for it.

There is no feature in the retrospect of the last few years, more important and more delightful than the steady advance of an improved taste in literature: and both as a cause and as a consequence of this, the works of William Hazlitt, which heretofore have been duly appreciated only by the few, are now having ample justice done them by the many. With reference to the present work, the Edinburgh Review eloquently observes, "Mr. Hazlitt possesses one noble quality at least for the office which he has chosen, in the intense admiration and love which he feels for the great authors on whose excellencies he chiefly dwells. His relish for their beauties is so keen, that while he describes them, the pleasures which they impart become almost palpable to the sense, and we seem, scarcely in a figure, to feast and banquet on their 'nectared sweets.' He introduces us almost corporally into the divine presence of the great of old time—enables us to hear the living oracles of wisdom drop from their lips—and makes us partakers, not only of those joys which they diffused, but of those which they felt in the inmost recesses of their souls. He draws aside the veil of time with a hand tremulous with

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mingled delight and reverence ; and descants with kindling enthusiasm, on all the delicacies of that picture of genius which he discloses. His intense admiration of intellectual beauty seems always to sharpen his critical faculties. He perceives it, by a kind of intuitive power, how deeply soever it may be buried in rubbish ; and separates it in a moment from all that would encumber or deface it. At the same time, he exhibits to us those hidden sources of beauty, not like an anatomist, but like a lover. He does not coolly dissect the form to show the springs whence the blood flows all eloquent, and the divine expression is kindled ; but makes us feel in the sparkling or softened eye, the wreathed smile, and the tender bloom. In a word, he at once analyzes and describes—so that our enjoyments of loveliness are not chilled, but brightened by our acquaintance with their inward sources. The knowledge communicated in his lectures breaks no sweet enchantment, nor chills one feeling of youthful joy. His criticisms, while they extend our insight into the causes of poetical excellence, teach us, at the same time, more keenly to enjoy, and more fondly to revere it."

# LECTURES

ON THE

## AGE OF ELIZABETH, &c.

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### LECTURE I.—INTRODUCTORY.

#### General View of the Subject.

THE age of Elizabeth was distinguished, beyond, perhaps, any other in our history, by a number of great men, famous in different ways, and whose names have come down to us with unblemished honours; statesmen, warriors, divines, scholars, poets, and philosophers, Raleigh, Drake, Coke, Hooker, and higher and more sounding still, and still more frequent in our mouths, Shakspeare, Spenser, Sidney, Bacon, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, men whom fame has eternized in her long and lasting scroll, and who by their words and acts were benefactors of their country, and ornaments of human nature. Their attainments of different kinds bore the same general stamp, and was sterling: what they did had the mark of their age and country upon it. Perhaps the genius of Great Britain (if I may so speak without offence or flattery) never shone out fuller or brighter, or looked more like itself, than at this period. Our writers and great men had something in them that savoured of the soil from which they grew: they were not French, they were not Dutch, or German, or Greek, or Latin; they were truly English. They did not look out of themselves to see what they should be; they sought for truth and nature, and found it in themselves. There was no tinsel, and but little art; they were not the spoiled children of affectation and refinement, but a bold, vigorous, independent race of thinkers, with prodigious strength and energy, with none but