

**SHAKESPEARE: A
PLAY IN
FIVE EPISODES**

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Shakespeare: A Play in Five Episodes by Harold Frederick Rubinstein & Clifford Bax & A. W. Pollard

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HAROLD FREDERICK RUBINSTEIN & CLIFFORD BAX & A. W. POLLARD

**SHAKESPEARE: A
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A PLAY IN FIVE
EPISODES

BY
H. F. RUBINSTEIN
" AND
CLIFFORD BAX

WITH A PREFACE
BY
A. W. POLLARD

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
1921

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"All we know with any degree of certainty concerning Shakespeare is that he was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, married and had children there; went to London, where he commenced as actor, and wrote poems and plays; returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried."

STEVENS.

"I dare to say that I know you as intimately as though I had been your closest fellow from youth upward. Your poems, your plays and your sonnets—I have read them with understanding."

"A YOUNG POET" (Episode V).

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PREFATORY NOTE

A friend of the authors left a type-written copy of this play with me one evening, and as soon as he had gone I took it up and began to read. I didn't agree with it. I don't agree with it. Some of it made me very angry, very indignant. But when I had taken it up I read it through at a sitting, and I shouldn't have done that if it hadn't gripped me. I had been reading Shakespeare for half a century, and here were two young men cornering me and forcing me to do at last what I had always steadily refused to do—fall a-wondering what Shakespeare was really like. I had refused to do this, partly from a temperamental dislike of the insoluble, partly because I grew up amid a generation for whom Shelley's poetry was so largely spoilt by a discordant burden of "chatter about Harriet" that a reaction against all such chatter, more especially against that most abominable kind which is documented, argumentative, exegetical, and interminably long-winded, was almost necessarily provoked.

Chatter about the Dark Lady is a good deal worse than chatter about Harriet Westbrook, and I thank my stars that I have been compelled to read very little of it. Mr. Baz and Mr. Rubinstein cannot be accused of chattering. They have thought out their problem, their insoluble problem, and they present their view of it not argumentatively as a theory, but creatively in the five acts of a play. In fact, they have tried, perhaps consciously (they haven't told me), to do for Shakespeare what Mr. Drinkwater has done, with so large a measure of success, for Abraham Lincoln.

Mr. Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln" was based on a mass of authentic evidence, and yet I have met

PREFATORY NOTE

Americans who challenged its truth. Mr. Baz and Mr. Rubinstein have essayed a far harder task with much scantier and less trustworthy materials. Whatever the ultimate verdict on the play, their attempt must be reckoned a gallant adventure, carried out with a craftsmanship which commands respect. It is extraordinarily difficult to make Elizabethans talk without their talk jarring on the reader who has even a slight acquaintance with Elizabethan English as incongruous and impossible. The talk in this play very seldom jars. The stage management of the episodes is good, and often shows real imaginative power. If the jar comes, it will come from the characterisation; yet here also the authors show themselves good craftsmen, for their characterisation is consistent, all of a piece. If the first "episode" may be accepted as truly showing what Shakespeare was like in his early days as a playwright, the other episodes may be accepted. A belief that Shakespeare from first to last was more truly master of his own soul than is here shown may be my own contribution to the "idolatry" from which few lovers of his plays escape. Most of those who have written on him have found in him what they wished to find. If Mr. Baz and Mr. Rubinstein in their determination to overleap this weakness have fallen on the other side of the saddle, it is part of their adventure. In any case the adventure seems to me, as I have said, a gallant one. Coming after Mr. Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln" it raises a hope that the English drama may escape from the monotony of artificial plots into the rich variety of human life by becoming biographical.

ALFRED W. POLLARD.

EPISODE 1

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