SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDY OF A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM: EDITED, WITH NOTES

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Shakespeare's Comedy of a Midsummer-Night's Dream: Edited, with Notes by William Shakespeare & William J. Rolfe

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & WILLIAM J. ROLFE

SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDY OF A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM: EDITED, WITH NOTES





A PLAY AT THE BLACKPRIARS.

SHAKESPEARE'S

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COMEDY OF

A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM.

EDITED, WITH NOTES,

HA.

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WITH ENGRAVINGS.



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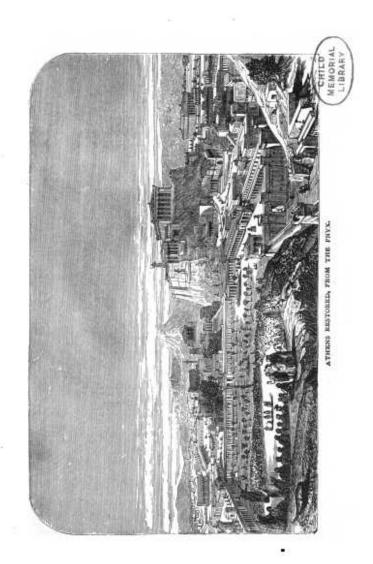
Sonnets. Titus Andronicus.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION TO A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM	. 9
I. THE HISTORY OF THE PLAY	9
II. THE SOURCES OF THE PLOT	. 14
HL CRITICAL COMMENTS ON THE PLAY	16
A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM	41
ACT I	43
" II	55
# IIL	69
* IV	91
* v	100
Notes	IIC



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INTRODUCTION

TO

A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM.

I. THE HISTORY OF THE PLAY.

The earliest known reference to A Midsummer-Night's Dream is in the Palladis Tamia of Francis Meres, published in 1598.* It is the opinion of the best critics that it was

* The passage is as follows: "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latines, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage: for comedy, witnes his Gentlemen of Verona, his Errors, his Love Labors Lost, his Love Labours Wonne, his Midsummers Night Dreame, and his Merchant of Venice; for tragedy, his Richard the 2., Richard the 3., Henry the 4., King John, Titus Andronicus, and his Romeo and Juliet."

written some years before that date, perhaps as early as 1594. Probably in ii. 1. 88-117 there is an allusion to the unseasonable weather of that summer, which is thus described in the MS. Diary of Dr. Simon Forman:*

"Ther was moch sicknes but lyttle death, moch fruit and many plombs of all sorts this yeare and small nuts, but fewe walnuts: this monethes of June and July wer very wet and wonderfull cold like winter, that the 10. dae of Julii many did syt by the fyer, yt was so cold; and soe was yt in Maye and June; and scant too faire dais together all that tyme, but yt rayned every day more or lesse: yf yt did not raine, then was yt cold and cloudye: there were many gret fludes this sommer, and about Michelmas, thorowe the abundaunce of raine that fell sodeinly, the brige of Ware was broken downe, and at Stratford Bowe, the water was never sine so byg as yt was; and in the lattere end of October, the waters burste downe the bridg at Cambridge, and in Barkshire wer many gret waters, wherwith was moch harm done sodenly."

See our Richard II. p. 13. We give the passage as it appears in Halliwell's folio ed. of Shakespeare.

† Stowe, in his Chronicle (quoted by Halliwell), says of the same

"This year, in the month of May, fell many great showers of rain, but in the months of June and July much more; for it commonly rained every day or night till St. James' day, and two days after together most extremely; all which notwithstanding, in the month of August, there followed a fair harvest, but in the month of September fell great rains, which raised high waters, such as stayed the carriages, and broke down bridges at Cambridge, Ware, and elsewhere in many places."

Churchyard, in his Charitie, published in 1595, refers to the preceding year as follows:

"A colder time in world was never seene:

The skies do lowre, the sun and moone wax dim;

Sommer scarce knowne, but that the leaves are greene.

The winter's waste drives water ore the brim;

Upon the land great flotes of wood may swim.

Nature thinks scorne to do hir dutie right,

Because we have displeased the Lord of Light."