

**REMARKS ON SHAKESPEARE, HIS
BIRTH-PLACE, ETC., SUGGESTED
BY A VISIT TO
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON IN THE
AUTUMN OF 1868**

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Remarks on Shakespeare, his birth-place, etc., suggested by a visit to Stratford-upon-Avon in the autumn of 1868 by C. Roach Smith

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C. ROACH SMITH

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SUGGESTED BY A VISIT TO STRATFORD-UPON-AVON
IN THE AUTUMN OF 1868.

BY
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HON.M.HUM.SOC.LON.,
MEMBER OF THE SOCIÉTÉ FRANÇAISE D'ARCHÉOLOGIE, ETC.

Second Edition.

LONDON:
GEORGE BELL AND SONS, YORK STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

1877.

TO
JOSEPH MAYER, ESQ., F.S.A., F.R.A.S.,
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE HISTORIC SOCIETY OF LANCASHIRE AND
CHESHIRE, ETC.;

H. B. MACKESON, ESQ., F.G.S.,
MAYOR OF HYPHE;

AND
JOHN GREEN WALLER, ESQ.,
AUTHOR OF A "SERIES OF MONUMENTAL BRASSES FROM THE
13TH TO THE 16TH CENTURY";

IN MEMORY
OF A VISIT TO
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON;
WITH THE SINCERE REGARDS OF THEIR FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

TEMPLE PLACE, STROOD,
April 28th, 1877.

P R E F A C E .

THESE pages, written for private distribution in 1868, have procured me considerable correspondence, and many applications for copies.

The portion relating to Shakespeare's country life has been wholly superseded by the pamphlet entitled "The Rural Life of Shakespeare, as Illustrated by his Works," of which a third edition is being prepared.

The suggestions offered as to the proper and consistent, as well as the most obviously successful mode of extending a knowledge of Shakespeare's works, were not entertained by the friends to whom they were specially addressed; but elsewhere they have been received so flatteringly that I cheerfully accede to requests to make them public.

C. R. S.

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON AND SHAKESPEARE.

A VISIT to the town in which our great bard was born ; in which he passed his early youth ; and in which he died ; is at least projected by all of his countrymen who have been so fortunate as to receive an education to qualify them to understand and master his wonderful works. Many succeed in performing this rational pilgrimage, as the walls of his birthplace and of Anne Hathaway's cottage testify ; for they are covered with thousands upon thousands of signatures of noble as well as gentle, of eminent as well as of obscure, regardless alike of the questionable good taste of their scribbling, and of the perishable material. More durable will be the records in the books which have been kept at the chief inns now for many years. They fill rapidly ; and disclose the remarkable fact that full one-third of the signatures seem to be American, an auspicious sign of community of feeling created by the humanising writings of the Stratford-born poet. " You cannot imagine", said an American lady to us, " how much we think of Shakespeare."

From the obscurity in which his life is shrouded, the coeval remains of Stratford-upon-Avon have far greater importance than they would have possessed had Shakespeare received from his contemporaries notice such as has so frequently been lavished on inferior men. We cannot look upon him through

biographers, through correspondence, or through any of the influences which, at the present day, secure immortality to thousands; but we may, in the streets of Stratford, and in the highways and bye-ways of the neighbourhood, in the fields, meadows, and villages, see objects which must constantly have been before his eyes; the impress of many of these objects is reflected most vividly throughout all his works.

Documentary evidence and tradition combine to vindicate the house in Henley Street as his birthplace; for although John Shakespeare, his father, had other houses in and about Stratford, yet the honour has never been claimed for any other; and it is considered as certain that he lived in Henley Street about the time of the Poet's birth. Here we may safely trust to tradition. The Poet, in his lifetime, must have had some friends and neighbours who were proud of him; who knew his history, and who had been his companions: to them, no doubt, were well known all the particulars of his early life, and among these the house in which he was born. At his death many persons were probably living who could prove this; and for a long time afterwards could point it out from their personal knowledge. At his death there was nothing so likely to be at once embalmed in the memory as his birth-place; and nothing less likely to be allowed to be misplaced. New Place, where he died, has recently received from the pen of Mr. Halliwell a minute historical description, comprised in two hundred and forty-six folio pages.* It was purchased by Shakespeare some twenty years before his death; and to this spacious house with its gardens and grounds, he retired in what may be termed the prime of life. The house, alas! is no more; and no authentic engravings remain of it, if any were ever made: but the site is unquestioned; and Mr. Halliwell, who has become the Guardian Genius of all that is left to us connected with the personal life of Shakespeare, has caused to be preserved what was spared of the foundations of the house; and to his strenuous exertions we mainly owe the purchase for

* An Historical Account of the New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon. By James O. Halliwell, Esq., F.R.S. Folio, London, Adlard, 1864.

the public of the Poet's great garden. In it stands a modern theatre which is yet private property; this it is contemplated to buy and pull down; but surely there is no necessity for destroying a structure which, properly managed, could be made useful for instructing the Stratford public in a fuller knowledge of the works of their great townsman.* For such a purpose a theatre or hall should be raised in every town in the kingdom; but that upon ground which was once the Poet's, and which is hallowed by the fact that he there recreated his health and spirits in the intervals he could spare from a wearying London life, must hold a charm and preeminence over all others. Shakespeare was also an actor; and his merits as an actor have been questioned apparently without much reflection. His name stands first among the actors in Ben Jonson's plays of "Every Man in his Humour", and "Sejanus"; and he who could lay down such rules for truly good acting as he has done in "Hamlet", must himself, we may suppose, have been practically, as well as theoretically, accomplished.

In his History of the New Place, Mr. Halliwell has brought together a very large amount of hitherto unpublished documentary evidence, illustrative, not only of New Place and its vicissitudes, but of the habits and manners of the people of Stratford; and the state of the town in and after the time of Shakespeare; but the darkness which has surrounded the great object of his researches is almost as dense as ever; still the historian toils on with unflagging industry and unfailing hope; not despairing of yet finding in some old chest or long locked cupboard in some old manor house, correspondence or other documents which may in a slight degree fill the present void. Among the most interesting materials which Mr. Halliwell has brought together are those which show the condition of Stratford in the time of Shakespeare; and he draws from them sound inferences to account for the poet's almost sudden death. Ward, who wrote in 1662, says,—“Shakspear, Drayton, and

* Since our visit it has been pulled down. It must have its history, which it would be interesting to learn. A complete collection of its playbills, it is hoped, is preserved in the Shakespearean Museum.

Ben Jhonson had a merry meeting, and, it seems, drank too hard, for Shakspear died of a feavour there contracted." That he died of a fever is highly probable; but Mr. Halliwell, after patiently weighing Ward's statement and traditions, concludes that in all human probability he died of typhoid fever, arising from the bad drainage of the town, and the neglected state of Chapel Lane which flanked New Place. The filthy condition of this lane for a long series of years is proved by the town archives, from which Mr. Halliwell extracts numerous startling revelations; and this view is confirmed by the cast of Shakespeare's face, taken after death, which shows the countenance unemaciated, as it would have been after a short illness. Stratford has only during the present century, and, indeed, of late years, put on the garb of modern cleanliness in which it now appears, at the sacrifice of much that was picturesque and Shakespearean. Even at the time of the Jubilee it drew from Garrick, in a letter to Mr. Hunt, (the grandfather of the present Town Clerk), a strong remonstrance. He speaks of it as "the most dirty, unseemly, ill-paved, wretched-looking town in all Britain."

But there are yet standing houses of the time of Shakespeare; and, above all, the Grammar School in which he was educated; the Chapel of the Trinity, opposite New Place; and the Church close to the Avon, in which he was buried. All these may be considered as pure and fine relics of Shakespeare and his times, free from all doubt. Of minor objects there are many varieties: some are old enough, but they want certificates or connecting links. Of the few which may be said to have belonged to him, the most remarkable, perhaps, is the square of glass from New Place, with the letters S. W. A., for William and Ann Shakespeare, tied in "a true lover's knot," and the date, 1615, beneath. This was first published by Mr. Fairholt in his excellent little guide-book.* The mulberry tree which grew in the garden of New Place, and was cut down in about 1756, has been turned into a variety of ornaments and utensils. Mr.

* The Home of Shakspeare Illustrated and Described. By F. W. Fairholt. Chapman and Hall, 1847.