AN ACCOUNT OF THE ONLY KNOWN MANUSCRIPT OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS: COMPRISING SOME IMPORTANT VARIATIONS AND CORRECTIONS IN THE MARRY WIBES OF WINDSOR

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An Account of the Only Known Manuscript of Shakespeare's Plays: Comprising some important variations and corrections in the Marry Wibes of Windsor by James Orchard Halliwell

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JAMES ORCHARD HALLIWELL

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THE ONLY KNOWN MANUSCRIPT

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SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS,

COMPRISING

SOME IMPORTANT VARIATIONS AND CORRECTIONS

IN THE

Merry Wives of Windsor,

OBTAINED

FROM A PLAYHOUSE COPY OF THAT PLAY

RECENTLY DISCOVERED.

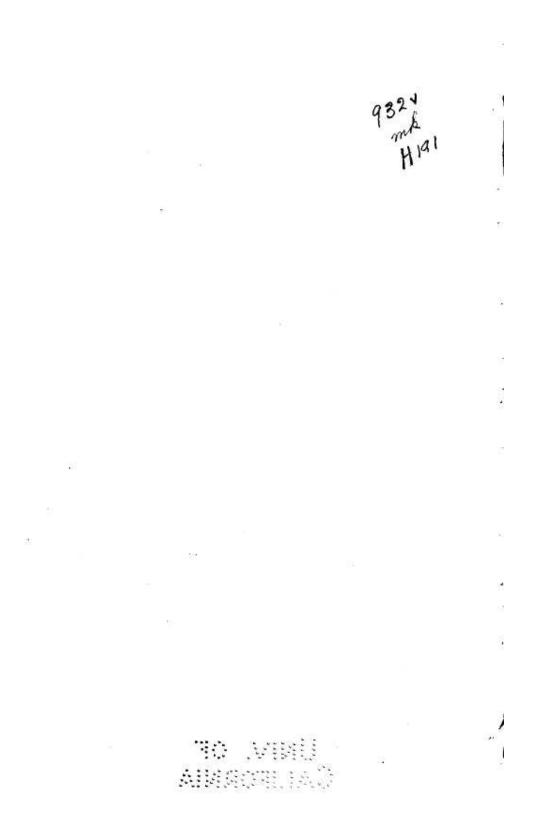
JAMES ORCHARD HALLIWELL, Esq. F.R.S. HON. M.R.I.A., P.S.A., ETC.

LONDON:

JOHN RUSSELL SMITH, 4, OLD COMPTON STREET, SOHO SQUARE. MDCCCXLIII.

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MR. COLLIER, in a recently published work, has justly observed that although "dramatic pieces in manuscript by Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Middleton, and others, are in existence, it is a remarkable fact that not a single written fragment of any of the plays of Shakespeare has come down to us, with the exception of a few passages in some unprinted poetical miscellanies." In Shakespeare's own handwriting, it is well known that nothing has been discovered, save his autograph; but Mr. Collier refers to early copies which may be supposed to contain either authorised variations from the commonly received text, or at least conjectural emendations rendered valuable by the time at which they were made. It is reason-

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able to suppose that persons contemporary, or nearly so, with our great poet, were more likely to alter advisedly than modern editors, because they probably had a better knowledge of his language and allusions, if they were not so competent to judge of his excellencies.

If we had letters of Shakespeare, his mere autograph would not have sold for a hundred guineas; and had there been autograph copies of his plays extant, the public would probably never have been asked to peruse the following pages. But in the previous absence of every evidence of the kind, it is a satisfaction to me to be the first to place before the reader's notice a brief account of the only known manuscript copy of any of Shakespeare's plays,—not a mere transcript, which would be comparatively worthless, but containing constant variations from every known printed edition.

This curious relic is a manuscript of the Merry Wives of Windsor, one of Shakespeare's best comedies, not contemporary with the author, but written during the time of the Commonwealth, in all probability for some private playhouse. It is entitled "The Merry Wives of Old Windsor, written by William Shakespeare," and has the following list of *Dramatis Personæ*, not given in any edition, and was therefore probably the earliest ever made :

ROBERT SHALLOW, Esq., A Gloc'shire Justice, vncle to Master Slender.

Sir HUGH EVANS, a Welch Priest : Curate and Schoolcmaster at Windsor.

Mr. GEORGE PAGE, a rich country Gentleman, in or neer Windsor.

Mrs. MEG PAGE, his wife.

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Mrs. ANNE PAGE, their daughter.

BILLY, their son, Schollar to Master Evans.

Mr. FRANCIS FORD, a rich jealous curmudgeon of Windsor.

Mrs. ALICE FORD, his wife.

Mr. ABBA: SLENDER, nephere ..

to Justice Shallow. Doctor CAIUB, a French Mrs. ANNE Phisitian.

Phisitian. Mr. FENTON, an expensive favord by Mother. Courtier.

Sir JOHN FALSTAFFE, a fat old decayed leacherous Court Officer.

BARDOLFE,

NYM, PISTOLL. His late vnder-officers, now hangers on.

ROBIN, his page.