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ISBN 9780649572700

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LONDON
PERCIVAL AND CO.
1892

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INTRODUCTION

I CAN conceive some readers, not necessarily frivolous, anticipating little pleasure from a volume devoted to examples of Elizabethan and Jacobean pamphlets. It must be the business of the volume I have planned to convince them that they are wrong. But even before that volume is read, I think it not impossible to show cause for its right to exist. The originals of these pamphlets, except a few which have become familiar in consequence of their bearing on Shakespearian questions, were till recently almost unknown, except to a few scholars and antiquaries, and are still for the most part inaccessible except in the original editions, which are bought at large prices by collectors, or in limited and often privately issued modern reprints. Yet their interest is very great. The pamphlet of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth

century corresponded much more nearly to the modern periodical than to anything else, unless, indeed, it be the modern newspaper. It included fiction, sketches of society, accounts of travel, literary criticism, personal controversy, theology,—the whole farrago, in short, of the non-political columns of our journals. It was in many cases written by men of much greater talent than the average journalist of the present day. In one remarkable case—that of the so-called Martin Marprelate controversy—it holds a position almost unique, or only shared by the not wholly dissimilar groups of literature which included and grew up round Pascal's *Provinciales* and the *Tracts for the Times*. Above all, it has the advantage of a singular variety of subject, and of presenting the opportunity of making a great number of lively extracts, certainly faithful to the manners of the time, and showing those manners in a fashion not easy to surpass in freshness, contrast of colour, and incisive outline.

The pamphlet was one of the most immediate and necessary creations of the printing press. Before that invention it was hardly possible, and a very considerable time had to elapse afterwards before the combination of education in the reader, command of mechanical means in the diffuser, and changed