

**AN AUTHENTIC ACCOUNT
OF THE SHAKSPERIAN
MANUSCRIPTS, &C.**

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An Authentic Account of the Shaksperian Manuscripts, &c. by W. H. Ireland

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W. H. IRELAND

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SHAKSPERIAN MANUSCRIPTS.

IN Justice to the world, and to remove the odium under which my father labours, by publishing the manuscripts brought forward by me as *Shakspear's*, I think it necessary to give a true account of the business, hoping that whatever may occur in the following pages will meet with favor and forgiveness, when considered as the act of a boy.

My education is no otherwise material to the public, than to shew that the schools at *Kenfington*, *Ealing*, *Soho-square*, and three years spent at *Amiens*, and the College of *Eu* in *Normandy*, were to qualify me for the law, and at the age of sixteen, I was articled to a gentleman of eminence in *New-Inn*.

My father having a taste for old and curious tracts, I imbibed a liking for the same pursuit, and attended much more to book-stalls, than to *Blackstone*, or *Coke* upon *Littleton*.

Frequently after dinner my father would read the different accounts of *Shakspear*, and say, it was wonderful, out of so many thousand lines which he must have wrote, that no vestige remained but his signature to the will in the *Commons*, and his name affixed to the mortgage deed presented by *Mr. Wallis* to *Mr. Garrick*; this was often repeated, and, with enthusiastic praises of *Shakspear*, my father would often say, that if there ever was a man inspired, *Shakspear* was that man.

Curiosity

Curiosity led me to look at the signatures publishing in *Stevens's Shakspear*, and it occurred to me, that if some old writing could be produced, and passed for *Shakspear's*, it might occasion a little mirth, and shew how far *credulity* would go in the search for anti-*quities*

Having one day purchased a thin quarto tract of the time of *Elizabeth*, illuminated and bound in vellum, with her arms on the cover, I determined on trying an experiment with it, and for the purpose wrote a letter (in imitation of the hand of that period) as from the author of the book, making it the presentation copy from himself to the queen.

I wrote this epistle with common ink, weakened with water, but found its appearance too modern, notwithstanding I determined on shewing it; but before I went home from chambers, where it was contriv'd, I call'd on a book-binder in *New-Inn* passage, of the name of *Laurie*, and laughingly told him

him what I had contrived; then, producing the letter, I ask'd him his opinion? he told me it was well done, and might deceive many.

A young man working in the shop then said, he could give me a composition which would have much more the appearance of old ink; I begg'd he would, upon which he mix'd a few drops of acid with some other liquid (used in marbling the covers of books) in a vial; then writing a few words on paper, held it to the fire to shew its effect, when the letters turn'd completely brown. Having procured this, I went back to chambers, and re-wrote the letter, which I took home and shewed my father, who thought it genuine. This, and the book I exchanged with him for some other tract. It was the first thing of the kind I ever attempted, but after I had wrote a great quantity of the *Shakspear* manuscripts, I thought my first attempt, so badly executed, that I again got it from my father, and destroyed it, fearing a discovery.

Soon

Soon after my father went into the country, it being long vacation, I obtained permission of the gentleman with whom I was articled, to accompany him. The last place we visited before our return to town, was *Stratford upon Avon*, where we remained about ten days; during which time, my father made eager enquiries concerning *Shakspear*, but acquired little more knowledge than those who went before him:

We visited *Clopton House*, about a mile from *Stratford*, the gentleman who occupied it, behaved to us with much civility. On my father saying, he wished to know any thing relative to our *Bard*? the gentleman replied, that had he been there a few weeks sooner, he could have given him a great quantity of his, and his family's letters. My father, much astonished, begged to know what was become of them? The gentleman's answer was, that having some young partridges which he wished to bring up, he had, for the purpose, cleared out a small apartment wherein these papers lay, and burnt a large basket-full of them,