# 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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### AUTHENTIC ACCOUNT

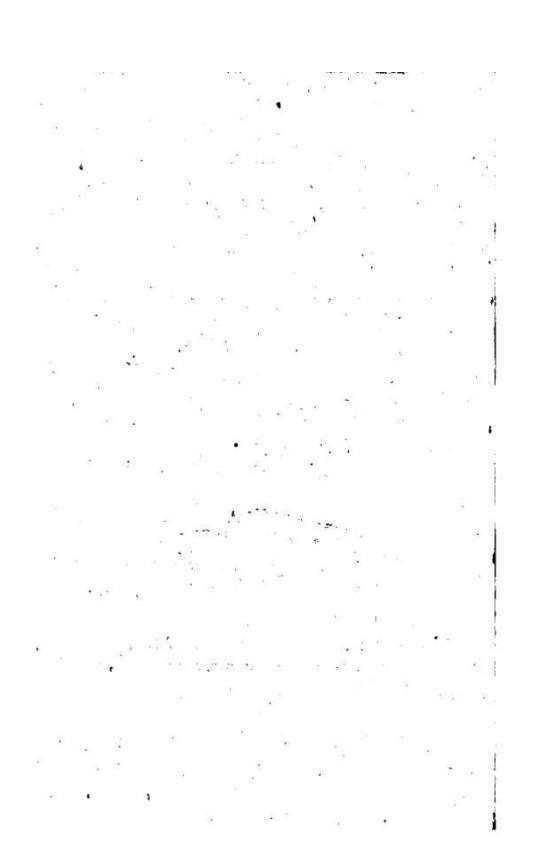
OF THE

# SHAKSPERIAN MANUSCRIPTS, &c.

BY 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:

1

My education is no otherwise material to the public, than to shew that the schools at Kensington, 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 bookstalls, than to Blackstone, or Coke upon Littleton.

Frequently after dinner my father would read the different accounts of Shakspear, and fay, 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.

Curiofity

Curiofity led me to look at the fignatures publishing in Stevens's Shakspear, and it occured 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 antiquities

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 epiftle 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 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 faid, 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. 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 fome other tract. It was the first thing of the kind I ever attempted, but after I had wrote a great quantity of the Shakfwar manuscripts, I thought my first attempt, so badly executed, that I again got it from my father, and destroyed it, fearing a discovery.

Soon after my father went into the country, it being long vocation, I obtained permiffion 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 appartment wherein these papers lay, and burnt a large basket-full of them,