

**AN ACCOUNT OF THE
ONLY KNOWN
MANUSCRIPT OF
SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS**

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An Account of the Only Known Manuscript of Shakespeare's Plays by James Orchard Halliwell

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JAMES ORCHARD HALLIWELL

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AN ACCOUNT
OF
THE ONLY KNOWN MANUSCRIPT
OF
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.

BY
JAMES ORCHARD HALLIWELL, Esq. F.R.S.
HON. M.B.L.A., F.S.A., &C.

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AN ACCOUNT,

ſc. ſc.

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-

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 Glouc'shire Justice, uncle to Master Slender.*

SIR HUGH EVANS, *a Welch Priest : Curate and Schoolmaster at Windsor.*

MR. GEORGE PAGE, *a rich country Gentleman, in or near Windsor.*

Mrs. MEG PAGE, *his wife.*

MR. 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. ABRA: SLENDER, *nephew to Justice Shallow.*

DOCTOR CAIUS, *a French Physician.*

MR. FENTON, *an expensive Courtier.*

}	Sutors to	(FATHER.
	Mrs. ANNE) MOTHER.
	PAGE, each) favored by (Mrs. ANNE.

SIR JOHN FALSTAFFE, *a fat old decayed lecherous Court Officer.*

BARDOLFE,

NYM,

PISTOLL.

}	} His late vnder-officers, now hangers on.
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ROBIN, *his page.*