



CRITICAL ESSAYS ON THE PLAYS
OF SHAKESPEARE.



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ON THE

PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

BY WILLIAM WATKISS LLOYD



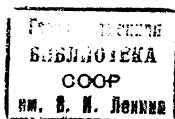
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IN looking over these Essays on the occasion of their proposed re-issue, I have found, and in some degree to my surprise, not alone how little I should now, after the lapse of years, think necessary to add to them, but also how little they contain that I am prepared to revoke or should be anxious to modify. They reappear in consequence unaltered, and in all but secondary and trifling respects are still to be accepted as enunciations of my deliberate views. These, I am well aware, will often be found counter to some that are just now most audibly pronounced, and even, it may be, rather indulgently listened to; but I am quite content, without strengthening my positions, to let Time try these issues as it has already decided others.

The Essays were originally written under circumstances that put laborious correction out of the question, and I believe that in a measure this was not entirely a disadvantage; they are certainly in consequence all the nearer to such an expression of an unforced but not on that account unstudied appreciation of the most truly national and popular of our poets, as it was my desire and only design to promulgate. I cannot do better, therefore, than repeat here words which I prefixed, some seventeen years since, to copies of a reprint for private circulation.

“ The book may be taken simply as a late response

to the great dramatist from the midst of that general English public which he addressed directly in the first instance, and which of its own unprompted motion admitted the supremacy of his genius, and adopted his national reputation at once full-grown. Of the lovers of Shakespeare, so numerous among the multitude, who are led to exercise their minds on the analysis of his art, many are content to dwell on their own reflections, and the rest to scatter their results in desultory conversation; by the concurrence of various aids and incitements, it has been at last the inclination or the destiny of one to write his conclusions down, and in this form, and with no claim beyond directness and simplicity, to deliver them in print."

One word more I must add of affectionate remembrance for the friend to whom it was due that my own reflections on the genius and art of Shakespeare found other expression than in conversations that remain associated in my mind with many a delightful ramble in his company over Box Hill and Mickleham Downs. At a time when zeal for the correction of Shakespeare's text is as ardent, and when it behoves solicitude for its conservation to be as watchful as ever, it is but just to Mr. Singer's memory to recall the fact that he was the first to discern, and on sufficient moral evidence, as distinguished from the material that afterwards accrued, the true character of "Emendations" asserted as authoritative, which were vitiating successive editions of the poet, and the first to demonstrate and denounce it in his "Text of Shakespeare Vindicated," with the decision and courage which were demanded by the occasion, and were up to the level of his devoted interest and critical acumen.

W. WATKISS LLOYD.