Shakespeare's England. An Account of the Life and Manners of His Age by Shakespeare

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Shakespeare's England. An Account of the Life and Manners of his Age. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1916. 8vo. xxiv + 546, xi + 610 pp.

The Tercentenary year has produced one book which combines the unusual merits of cheapness, interest, sound scholarship and lavish illustration. Eleven years ago, we are told, Sir Walter Raleigh sketched its plan, and his introductory chapter on the Age of Elizabeth is followed by more than forty special articles, dealing with the life of the period in some detail. Such a method is liable to produce an overlapping and disconnected encyclopædia, but in this case the result is a readable book with a loose but sufficient unity of subject.

Where each department is dealt with by an expert, mistakes are naturally few, and these volumes are likely to remain a standard work of reference for many years. A number of errors have already been dealt with by the present writer and another correspondent in the *Times Literary Supplement* of August 24th and 31st, 1916. It is possible to find further trifling inaccuracies; Mr Arthur Underhill, in a valuable but carelessly written chapter on Elizabethan Law, defends a dubious legal reference by Hamlet on the ground that it is spoken by a grave-digger; a mere slip (I, 406). Again when Mr Nichol Smith states (II, 186) that Sir John Harington received on many occasions a personal gift from the Queen, he has evidently read the lists of New Year's Gifts in Nichols' *Progresses* without regard to their dates, and confused the knight with his father. And Mr Forbes Sieveking, to judge from the inverted commas in which he speaks of the 'murder,' takes an unusually lenient view of the crime for which Lord Sanquhar was hanged¹.

But from petty criticism of this kind it is far easier to turn to solid merits, and a number of passages deserve special mention for the light thrown on main questions or particular points. Sir Edward Maunde Thompson, in an excellent chapter on Handwriting, claims 'that there is still room for emendation of not a few of the doubtful passages in the printed text of Shakespeare by bringing to bear upon them, more systematically than has been done, exact and practical knowledge of the construction of the English handwriting of his time.' The suggestion carries such evident practical wisdom that no future commentator on Shakespeare can afford to neglect it; one of the weaknesses of too many editors of Elizabethan texts is a lack of acquaintance with the contractions, and even the main features, of contemporary MSS. The

¹ I am indebted to Mr H. B. Charlton for the discovery of an error in the chapter on Voyages by the late J. D. Rogers, who mentions (I, 182) Giles Fletcher's account *Of the Russe Common Wealth* (1591), and quotes some travellers' tales of dog-headed men and the like for which he gives parallel passages from Shakespeare. It appears however that Mr Rogers used, not Fletcher's original edition, but the reprint of it in Vol. I of Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* of 1598, and failed to notice that Hakluyt had interpolated among the material taken from Fletcher a description of the regions, peoples and rivers lying North and East from Moscovia... taken out of Sigismundus ab Herberstein; whose marvels have accordingly been wrongly attributed to Fletcher in this chapter.

chapters on the Navy (Mr Carr Laughton) and the Army are both very good, and Lord Dillon's section of the latter, on Armour and Weapons, contains a conclusive interpretation of the crux in *Othello*, 'The Ise brokkes temper' (I, 132). The Hon. J. W. Fortescue is good on the Soldier, and even better on Hunting, where experience with the Devon and Somerset stands him in good stead in an analysis of Ben Jonson's careful blunders in the *Sad Shepherd* (II, 335). Mr Percy Simpson, in *Actors and Acting*, is particularly suggestive in his pages (II, 273-4) on stage directions and the danger of editorial tinkering with them. The chapter on Authors and Patrons might easily have been made dull, but Mr Nichol Smith has kept it from any such danger, and his summary of Southampton's position as a literary patron (II, 199-202) is a valuable contrast to the view expressed in Sir Sidney Lee's Fourth Appendix to *A Life of Shakespeare* (1915). The sections on the Fine Arts are all good, and the second volume ends with two notable expert contributions, Professor Firth on Ballads and Broad-sides, and Dr Henry Bradley on Shakespeare's English. We could wish that the latter had dealt also with Shakespeare's Irish (in *Henry V*), for an authoritative pronouncement on early literary renderings of the Irish dialect would have been valuable; but the chapter is already long and full of interest.

In other sections Mr Underhill should have explained in what respect 'Mortgages were on a very different footing from what they are now' (I, 407), and from Mr Macquoid some fuller information would have been welcome on the brief and unexpected statement (II, 141) that 'There were public baths.' Also, in view of the obvious possibilities of the subject, one wishes that Sir John Sandys had lightened his chapter on Education with a few of the 'graphic touches of school-life' to be found in Vives' *Exercitatio*. As things are, the pedantically human law-report quoted at I, 400 provides the best comic relief in the two volumes.

The illustrations are many, well chosen, and well reproduced, though not, it may be feared, on durable paper. Misprints are rare, and the only one which is likely to escape attention in a second edition is on p. 548 of vol. II, line 31, where 'daylie' and 'daylie' must be intended to represent different spellings. Every quotation from Shakespeare is systematically referenced throughout, and most of the writers are careful of that first principle of good scholarship, particularly needful in such a work, the giving of exact references for quotations or statements of which the source is not obvious. To Sir Walter Raleigh the gratitude of every reader is due for the project here carried out, and for a brilliant summary of the age; and the amount of work done by Sir Sidney Lee and the later editors is not the less praiseworthy because it cannot easily be measured.

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