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978-1-108-00162-5 - Shakespeare and Stratford-upon-Avon: A 'Chronicle of the Time'

Robert E. Hunter

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### Shakespeare and Stratford-upon-Avon

A detailed account by the secretary to the festival committee of the extensive Tercentenary celebrations of Shakespeare's birth held in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1864. The jubilee, inspired by Garrick's of 1769, included performances of several of the plays in a specially built pavilion on the Paddock in Southern Lane. There were also a banquet, a ball, fireworks, church services, a pageant and several concerts. Planning was fraught with difficulties and disagreements such as the committee's refusal to provide the pageant (organised in the end by the townsfolk) and walked a financial tightrope. The event nevertheless was a success and paved the way for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, opened in 1879. A short biography of the playwright, with an assessment of previous biographies, a topographical narrative of the town and description of the three previous jubilees held there (especially Garrick's) provide context and the perspective of the time.

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# Shakespeare and Stratford-upon-Avon

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## *Shakespeare's Monument,*

STRATFORD ON AVON CHURCH.

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SHAKESPEARE  
AND  
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON,  
A "CHRONICLE OF THE TIME:"  
COMPRISING  
THE SALIENT FACTS AND TRADITIONS,  
BIOGRAPHICAL, TOPOGRAPHICAL, AND HISTORICAL,  
CONNECTED WITH  
THE POET AND HIS BIRTH-PLACE;  
TOGETHER WITH  
A FULL RECORD OF THE  
TERCENTENARY CELEBRATION.  
BY  
ROBERT E. HUNTER,

LATE SECRETARY TO THE STRATFORD-UPON-AVON COMMITTEE.

"It should not be overlooked that the Stratford authorities have undertaken an onerous and costly scheme in deference to the public voice of demand. It is also to be remembered that the matter will be discussed a hundred years hence, with sharp curiosity, to discern what the appreciation of Shakespeare really was about the year 1863."—*Daily News*.

LONDON:  
WHITTAKER AND CO., AVE MARIA LANE.  
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON: EDWARD ADAMS.

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## P R E F A C E .

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THE "paragon of all patience" thought he should hear of something to his advantage if his enemy would write a book. Book-making in all forms has been a serious undertaking at all times—never more so than at present; but I am in this work free from many of the anxieties of authorship. I have not written a book: this is only a compilation. The confession will strike the intelligent reader, who may have dipped into these pages before glancing at the preface, as less necessary than that of the very "old master" who, having painted a model specimen of the feline tribe, attached the celebrated inscription—"This is a cat."

To the making of some record of the celebration at Stratford in 1864 I felt myself bound. The festival had no ordinary purpose, neither was it of common magnitude. It appealed to the sympathies of the nation, and sought support from the entire country. The object was one which engaged the attention, and, to some extent, aroused the enthusiasm of all classes of the community. A very considerable sum of money was involved in the undertaking, and in the carrying of it out an amount of labour, mental and physical, was expended which cannot be over estimated. Without much exaggeration, it may be said that for nearly a year the inhabitants of an entire

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town devoted all their leisure, and not a few of their business hours, to what was commonly called "tercentenary affairs;" and as a very praiseworthy result was achieved, some history of their labours and the fruits thereof—beyond that contained in the newspapers of the day—appeared desirable and due to the Stratford Committee and to the public.

Accordingly, as no one else indicated any intention of making such a "chronicle of the time," I undertook the task; but in the performance of it have travelled considerably outside the boundary to which I originally thought of confining myself. In the first place, some account of the old jubilees appeared requisite, in order to show the more comprehensive character of the tercentenary celebration; then a history of the four festivals in honour of a poet's memory, without any description of the town in which they took place, or memoir of the man to whom these repeated triumphs were voted, appeared to me likely to prove unsatisfactory. Hence the extent of this volume. I would have willingly avoided the biography of Shakespeare had I thought that the facts in relation to his life and character which have been ascertained were sufficiently known to the public; but I had found such startling proofs to the contrary as forced me to venture on a work much more likely to result in censure than applause to the author.

In detailing the labours of the Committee, reference to documents and public correspondence became unavoidable; and I have preferred reproducing these documents *in extenso* rather than giving abstracts, epitomes, or descriptions of them which might engender unpleasant discussion hereafter. To the general reader they may not appear very interesting, but to all who have been connected with the



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## PREFACE.

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festival they will possess some degree of importance. A "Blue Book" may not be a very amusing volume, but it is generally a valuable one; and that occasionally more for future reference than for present information.

But whether diverting or instructive—both or neither—this volume owes its existence to the encouragement and assistance I received from Mr. William Greener and Mr. Edward Adams, of Stratford, whose kindness I can never forget until the "warder of this brain shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason as a limbeck only."

I have only, in conclusion, to express a hope that *this* "chronicle of the time" will be received amongst readers and critics on the principle laid down by *Hamlet*, for the reception of "the abstract and brief chronicles" of his time—that is "after their own honour and dignity: the less it deserves the more merit is in their bounty."

*London, 1st June, 1864.*

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