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Shakespeare's plays contain a rich abundance of metaphors, similes and phrases relating to animals and the natural world, much of which can seem obscure to us today. First published in 1883, Emma Phipson's classic study sets in context the animal lore of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to show how it affected the literature of the time. Drawing on a collection of compelling sources, this book explores the beliefs about natural science that influenced the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Phipson considers obscure writings by naturalists and antiquarians on a wide range of animals from the familiar to the exotic, and from the real to the mythical. Whether discussing hedgehogs or unicorns, the text shows how the Elizabethans' understanding of animals was coloured by hunting, travel, folklore and the Bible, and how this had a lasting impact upon language and culture.

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BY

EMMA PHIPSON



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PREFACE.

THE object of the following compilation is to bring together in an accessible form waifs and strays of information, collected from various sources, relating to medieval natural history, so far as animal life is concerned. Descriptions, more or less accurate, of the birds and quadrupeds known in the Middle Ages are to be found in the writings of Gesner, Belon, Aldrovandus, and other naturalists. A knowledge of the state of natural science during the period in which our great dramatist lived may be gained, not only from the writings of naturalists and antiquaries, but from similes, allusions, and anecdotes introduced into the plays, poems, and general literature of England during the latter half of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries.

The chief works already published on this branch of Shakspearian literature are *The Insects mentioned in Shakespeare's Plays*, by Robert Patterson, 1848, a series of letters on entomology with a sprinkling of quotations from Shakespeare to add to the interest; a *Natural History of Shakespeare*, by Bessie Mayou, 1877, in which passages relating to flowers, fruits and animals are quoted without comment; and *The Ornithology of Shakespeare*, by Edmund Harting, 1871, a very valuable work.

I have endeavoured to keep the book as much on a chronological level as possible, chiefly referring to ancient

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authors in order to trace the origin of some fable or myth, and to modern writers when they explain or correct an erroneous impression.

As Mrs. Cowden Clarke's *Concordance* renders reference to Shakspeare's pages so easy, I have thought it unnecessary to increase the size of the volume by numerous passages from his works. The text of the "Globe" edition is that from which I have quoted.

Relinquishing all claim to originality, I have given, in most cases, the actual words of the authors quoted, in preference to incorporating their facts and ideas into the body of the book. I trust that the advantage of being able to refer to the original sources will compensate the reader for the tiresome interruptions that constant quotation entails. The quaint phrases employed by many of the early writers seem also to harmonize with the antiquarian nature of the subject.

In consequence of the charming indifference displayed by older writers on natural history to the necessity for any system of animate nature, I have followed the modern classification of the animal kingdom, although I have purposely avoided introducing scientific nomenclature. The plan of arrangement is that adopted by Dr. Percival Wright, in his recent work, *Animal Life*.

I must express my thanks to Mr. F. J. Furnivall, Dr. Brinsley Nicholson, Dr. J. E. Shaw and other friends, who have kindly assisted me in various ways; and, in conclusion, I may add that I shall be much indebted to any reader who will point out mistakes or give me suggestions for a future edition.

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