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William John Thoms
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Three Notelets on Shakespeare

A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, William John Thoms (1803–85) pursued literary and bibliographical interests and conversed with the likes of Thomas Macaulay and Charles Dickens. Most notably, he coined the term ‘folklore’ in 1846 and founded the scholarly periodical *Notes and Queries* in 1849. Having been published separately, these three essays on Shakespeare were brought together in this 1865 work. ‘Shakespeare in Germany’ (1840) spells out how German drama was influenced by English playwrights and by English actors performing plays in Germany from the late sixteenth century onwards. ‘The Folk-Lore of Shakespeare’ (1847) considers fairy lore and names, with particular attention paid to the characters of Puck and Queen Mab. In ‘Was Shakespeare Ever a Soldier?’ (1859), Thoms acknowledges that little is known for sure about Shakespeare’s life, but careful scrutiny of the evidence has made him ‘morally certain’ that the dramatist had seen military service.

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WILLIAM JOHN THOMS



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SHAKESPEARE.

I. SHAKESPEARE IN GERMANY.

II. THE FOLK-LORE OF SHAKESPEARE.

III. WAS SHAKESPEARE EVER A SOLDIER?

BY WILLIAM J. THOMS, F.S.A.



LONDON:
JOHN RUSSELL SMITH,
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1865.

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TO
H E R
WHO IN HERSELF REALIZES MANY OF SHAKESPEARE'S
TYPES OF WOMANLY EXCELLENCE,
AND TO WHOSE AFFECTIONATE COMPANIONSHIP
AND WISE COUNSELS
THE AUTHOR OWES ALL THE HAPPINESS HE HAS ENJOYED
FOR THE LAST SIX-AND-THIRTY YEARS,
THIS VOLUME
IS
DEDICATED.

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P R E F A C E.

THE following Illustrations of the Life and Writings of Shakespeare are reprinted as they were originally published in 1840, 1847, and 1859, without addition and without alteration.

It would have been easy to have enlarged them, but for many reasons, I have not thought it expedient to do so. I have seen with pleasure that they have been found useful. With reference to several of the points which were first raised in them, subsequent writers have pursued the same line of inquiry* with excellent but as yet incomplete results.† I have thought that it might facilitate further investigation if they were gathered together out of the Journals in which they were first printed, and were published in a form in which they might be more easily accessible.

* In some cases with very little acknowledgment, and though my thunder may be as gentle as Bottom's roar, like Dennis, I claim my own.

† I am glad to learn that Mr. Albert Cohn, a gentleman who has enjoyed peculiar facilities for investigating the history of the early English Comedians in Germany, is about to publish a volume upon that interesting subject.

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Preface.

The desire to add my name in however humble a character to that band of brothers—like some other brothers occasionally not on the best terms with one another, but who all unite in the endeavour to illustrate the Life and Writings of our great Dramatist, has also operated in some slight degree to induce me to bring these papers together in the present volume. Many of Shakespeare's admirers look upon such comments with distaste, and liken the writers to the thoughtless and giddy who scratch their names on every spot they visit, from a bench in Greenwich Park to the Pyramids of Egypt.

But all names are not so inscribed from foolish or unworthy motives. On the monument of Isaac Casaubon, in Poets' Corner, may be seen the well-known monogram of good old Isaac Walton, graven, there can be no doubt, by his own hand, in love and admiration of that departed worthy.

In that same spirit,

“On the vast monument of Shakespeare's fame
With reverent hand, I write my humble name.”

WILLIAM J. THOMS.

40, St. George's Square,
16th Nov. 1864.