



CRITICAL ESSAYS ON THE PLAYS
OF SHAKESPEARE.



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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