

SHAKESPEARE'S MARRIAGE

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SHAKESPEARE'S MARRIAGE

HIS DEPARTURE FROM STRATFORD
AND OTHER INCIDENTS
IN HIS LIFE

BY
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P R E F A C E

THE enquiries of which the following pages are the outcome were commenced with the intention of rectifying certain apparently erroneous impressions upon the subject of Shakespeare's marriage licence. Other results obtained in the course of the investigation seem, however, to be of sufficient interest to place on record, although some of them, certainly, add to the great mass of inference and assumption to which few writers on the incidents of the poet's life avoid making a contribution.

Of the two marriage licence documents now preserved at the Worcester Diocesan Registry the bond alone possesses any biographical value, the entry in the bishop's register, recording the issue of the licence, being of interest only on account of certain differences from the bond, one of which, however, affords a possible clue to the place of marriage or the residence of one of the parties to the application.

Many years have elapsed since these writings were discovered, and both have been the subjects of much discussion; but it does not appear that a complete explanation of the discrepancies has yet been given or the suggestive value of the bond fully realized. With the object of ascertaining whether some new light could be thrown upon the points of disagreement and the circumstances under which the licence was obtained, I have examined such of the contemporary matrimonial and other records as appeared likely to afford

information. And as the traditions relating to the date of the poet's removal to London recorded by Aubrey do not appear to have received the attention they deserve, while undue importance has been attached to Rowe's version of the incident, the more trustworthy accounts of the departure from Stratford and the various theories founded upon them have been submitted to the test of knowledge gained in the course of my investigations. Other matters, some of little moment, and worthy of notice only because they have been dealt with by one or other of the poet's biographers, are also discussed.

A somewhat free use has been made of the contents of my note-book, with the result that much of antiquarian and local rather than Shakespearean interest has been introduced into some of the chapters. The nature of the evidence upon which most of my conclusions are founded and the frequent dissent from existing theories upon which I have ventured seem, however, to necessitate this copious reference to authorities and quotation therefrom. For instance, in arguing against the assumption that some irregularity was covered by Shakespeare's marriage licence, it was necessary to give an account of Bishop Whitgift's policy and administration and of his efforts to prevent the use of licences for clandestine marriages.

The proper scope of my work extends only to the year 1593, after which date Shakespeare's life is told mainly in connection with his literary career; but, in order to make the chronicle of events more complete and the book more useful to general readers, the principal occurrences of the remaining twenty-three years of the poet's life are briefly detailed.

I should esteem it a favour to be informed of any errors that, in spite of careful verification of all references, may be found in the following pages.