

Old English Jest-Books.

VOL. I.

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Shakespeare Jest-Books;

REPRINTS OF THE EARLY
AND VERY RARE JEST-BOOKS SUPPOSED TO
HAVE BEEN USED BY SHAKESPEARE.



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I.

A Hundred Merry Tales,

FROM THE ONLY KNOWN COPY.

II.

Merry Tales and Quicke Answers,

FROM THE RARE EDITION OF 1567.

Edited, with Introduction and Notes,

BY

W. CAREW HAZLITT,

OF THE INNER TEMPLE, BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

— *That I was disdainful,—and that
I had my good wit out of the Hundred Merry Tales.*
BEATRICE, in Much Ado about Nothing

LONDON:

WILLIS & SOTHERAN, 136, STRAND.

MDCCLXIV.

-1957

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им. В. И. Ленина

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INTRODUCTION.

WHEN a small impression of these quaint old books issued from the Chiswick Press, many years ago, under the auspices of the late Mr. S. W. Singer, that gentleman merely designed the copies struck off for presentation to a select circle of literary friends who, like himself, felt a warm interest in every relic of the past which helped to illustrate Shakespeare and ancient English manners. He did not consequently feel under the necessity of furnishing notes, and he preserved not only the old orthography, but the old punctuation, and the most palpable errors of the press. His edition unfortunately laboured under one disadvantage: when he printed, in 1814, the *Mery Tales and Quick Answers* from Berthelet's edition, he imagined that this was the book to which Beatrice is made to allude in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and

under this idea he christened the volume *Shakespeare's Jest Book*. He also thought he was safe in assuming that the edition by Berthelet was the only one extant. But Mr. Singer discovered, before his undertaking was a year old, that he had come to an erroneous conclusion on both these points: for an impression of the *Mery Tales, &c.* printed by Henry Wykes in 1567, and containing, with all the old matter, twenty-six additional stories, was brought under his notice, and about the same time a totally unknown work, bearing the very title mentioned by Beatrice, was accidentally rescued from oblivion by the Rev. J. J. Conybeare, who, it is said by Dunlop, picked up the treasure at a bookstall. This was no other than A. C. MERY TALYS.

The copy of *C. Mery Talys* thus casually brought to light, had been used by a binder of or about the time of its appearance as pasteboard to another book, and it was in this state when it fell in the way of Mr. Conybeare. As might have been expected, many of the leaves were damaged and mutilated; but (which rendered the matter still more curious) it happily chanced that *more than one copy* had been employed by the aforesaid binder in fashioning the aforesaid pasteboard, and the consequence was that a much larger fragment