

William Shakespeare, His Family and Friends. By the late Charles Isaac Elton. Edited by A. Hamilton Thompson. With a Memoir of the Author by Andrew Lang. (Murray. 15s. net.) The late Mr. Elton was an antiquarian of large research and considerable judgment. This interesting volume sheds abundant dry light on its fascinating theme. The dryness of that light is due partly to the state in which the contents were found. They are, in fact, archaeological rambles—*mémoires à servir*, rather than ordered essays. They form notes random yet precise, full yet pregnant, with regard not only to the domain of their subject, but also to its boundaries and border-lands, and they must remain invaluable to any future depicter of the poet and his friends in their habit as they lived. The outlines are wide, varied and minute, rather than large and lively. The whole book is more a work of survey rather than of art, and from such a map neither atmosphere nor portraiture are to be expected. Even if Mr. Elton had lived to shape his material, we doubt if his temperament would have enabled the explorer to turn painter. His extraordinary acquaintance with the laws and customs of land-tenure, with pedigree and phraseology, while it illuminates much that has been obscure in Shakespeare's origin and connections, is hardly a source of strength when Mr. Elton comes to consider coincidences and sidelights. His rod, in fact, is of the sort that demarcates far more than divines, and there is occasionally something of the conveyancer in his style. And so it happens that these "curiosities of Shakespeare," as they might well be called, lack that poetic perception which is perhaps necessary for the portrayer of a poet. But, if the enchanter's wand be missing, a judicial faculty of the highest order, a broad grasp of difficult details, an untiring and informing knowledge, a wide acquaintance with the contemporary literature, an intimate familiarity with local nature, are in striking evidence, while the curious union of extreme accuracy, with some want of connected sequence, gives one the impression of a gypsy scholar. It would be ungracious to cavil, but