

also the best from another point of view; because he is so full of interesting subordinate matter—so full of history, archæology, folk-lore, allusiveness to obsolete manners and customs, sports and pastimes of our ancestors, together with a vocabulary and grammar sufficiently unlike our own to justify and necessitate any amount of careful study. One could lecture for a whole session upon the difficulties in "*Coriolanus*" (where there is also for the examiner the additional joy of an extremely obscure text), without ever arriving at the nobility and pathos of the dramatist's treatment of his subject. One might even achieve a famous traditional impossibility, and so study the play of "*Hamlet*" as to leave out the Prince of Denmark altogether! But do not suppose for one moment that I think all this subordinate matter superfluous or unimportant. It is of the first importance and absolutely necessary. I at once admit that no study of Shakespeare is worth anything that does not primarily take account of such things. Anyone coming to that study with no previous acquaintance with Shakespeare's grammar and idiom—with the general differences of Elizabethan English from our own—does indeed "see through a glass darkly." Without some knowledge in the directions I just now indicated, how large a part of Shakespeare is obscure; how many of his similes and allusions miss their mark; how much of his wit and humour is absolutely without point! We are really indebted to the scholar and the antiquarian for any thorough enjoyment of a dramatist separated from us by three hundred years. Without their help (to use a homely metaphor), we are as those who gaze at a beautiful landscape through a window of imperfect glass, soiled and overcrusted with age; to enjoy the view, it is absolutely necessary that the window

be first cleaned. Now by successive scholars and antiquarians this service has been amply rendered; and in our time two scholars, Mr. Aldis Wright and Dr. Abbott, have done invaluable work towards this end. The former of these gentlemen has done more to make Shakespeare intelligible, and therefore profitable to younger students—yes, and to children also of a larger growth—than any one I could name. To have mastered Mr. Wright's notes to the plays in the Clarendon Press series is to have become in the most effectual way acclimatized to Elizabethan English. And few of the most generally well-informed Englishmen can afford to despise such help. Now and then we meet with those who profess to find their Shakespeare quite intelligible and to be scornfully intolerant of the commentator's proffered aid. I should very much like to test such persons with a few picked passages, and see whether by the light of nature alone, and their own good wits, they can make sense out of metaphors drawn from some superstition or sport familiar to Shakespeare's contemporaries, but of which no trace now remains. Take Shakespeare's metaphors from Hawking, for instance. That being the one familiar field-sport, dear to all classes of society from the king to the yeoman, no wonder that in the hands of a great poet it becomes a perpetual fountain of imagery—from Desdemona's "I'll watch him tame" to Othello's magnificent threat:—

If I do prove her haggard,
Though that her jesses were my own heart-strings,
I'd whistle her off, and let her down the wind
To prey at Fortune.

Mr. Aldis Wright in one of his prefaces mentions that various correspondents had demurred to his filling his notes with matter of this kind, and had wished for some fine-art criticism