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THE FOOLS OF SHAKESPEARE

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Frederick Warde as "Cecco" in "The Duke's Jester"

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THE FOOLS OF SHAKESPEARE

An Interpretation of Their Wit, Wisdom and Personalities

BY

FREDERICK WARDE

1915

McBRIDE, NAST & COMPANY

ROLLS HOUSE, 2 BREAMS BUILDINGS

LONDON

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To
the memory of that gallant gentleman, loyal friend and splendid actor,
LOUIS JAMES,
in close association with whom were spent the happiest years of my professional life, is dedicated all that may be found worthy in the following pages.

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PREFACE

Foolery, sir, does walk about the orb like the sun; it shines everywhere.

How far the above epigram may apply to the compiler of this work, may be a matter of opinion.

Among the legion of books dealing with the characters of Shakespeare, I have found the majority to be devoted to his tragic and serious creations, a few to his humorous types, but none to his fools.

In the course of a lengthy career upon the stage, which has been chiefly devoted to the plays of Shakespeare, I have witnessed the performance of these fools by accomplished actors whose skill has illuminated the text, and whose abilities have vitalized the poet's creations till they lived in my mind, not as imaginary beings, but as real men who walked, talked, and gamboled before me. I have listened to their words, laughed at their wit, pondered on their wisdom, and have marveled

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that their point and significance have apparently escaped the notice of so many readers and students.

This must be my excuse, if not my justification, for the book.

The matter was the subject of one of my lectures, under the title, "The Wit and Wisdom of Shakespeare's Fools" and included in my series "Shakespeare and His Plays." I found, however, the material so abundant I could not include it in the limited time at my command on the platform. I have therefore elaborated the theme, enlarged the scope of the design, and divided it into chapters, which I hope will entertain the reader, instruct the student, and prove of some interest generally.

I make no claim to originality, and have endeavored in all instances to credit the author with the thoughts I have quoted.

I have found occasion in several instances, to differ with some of the well known Shakespearean scholars; but it must always be remembered that I speak from the view-point of the actor, for whom, and for whom alone the plays were written.

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I have not entered the literary dissecting room, nor invaded the realm of psychology. The line of demarcation between humor and imbecility, folly and insanity, I leave to the professional alienist.

I have taken the characters as they appear in the plays and as I conceive the author intended them, with due reference to their relation to th. other characters.

I proceed upon the fact that Shakespeare, being an actor, wrote these plays to be acted. That his purpose was to create or draw the characters as he saw or imagined them for dramatic presentation. I believe their literary quality was a matter of comparative indifference to him, the creation of the plot, the conception of the characters, and the arrangements of the incidents being his first, if not his only consideration. The beauty of diction, the delicate imagery, the exquisite poetry, and the sublime philosophy, were the spontaneous expression of his transcendent but unconscious genius

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