

BOOK REVIEWS

THE BIRDS OF SHAKESPEARE or the Ornithology of Shakespeare Critically Examined, Explained and Illustrated by James Edmund Harting, including "Of Men and Birds Prolegomena to the Birds of Shakespeare" by Grundy Steiner. Published by Argonaut Inc. Chicago, 1965. xxxviii + 321 pp. Price \$US 7.50.

"Even the most dedicated and disciplined contemporary ornithologist is likely to find ornithology a science of many by-paths, for living birds with their manifold shapes and colors and calls and their manifold personalities . . . constantly lure the student toward enjoyable digressions." In this fashion does Steiner argue in his scholarly introduction to this reproduction of Harting's work, and few would disagree with him. Indeed this work itself can be read as an enjoyable digression quite apart from for its own sake.

Harting's work was initially published in 1871. This edition reproduces the engraved illustrations and is enriched by Steiner's "Of Men and Birds," an essay that furnishes historical insight into the community of man and birds from ancient times to the days of Shakespeare.

Harting's thesis—that Shakespeare was a genuine naturalist, who had gained greatly from his own practical observations, read widely and knew falconry well—has been attacked in its first respect. It is not always easy to show that observation rather than literature was the source of Shakespeare's allusions. One could go further and say that Harting hastens too quickly from Shakespeare to his birds. Yet this would be to rob the books of the knowledge of detail and bird lore that Harting possessed and which gives it such interest and charm. Harting ranges over a diversity of subjects, from the "seeling" of a hawk's eyes to the mythical origins of the Barnacle Goose, from the Roman Eagle and Mahomed's Dove to bat-fowling and "springes to catch woodcocks."

This is, then, a book worthy of this new edition and will provide eminent satisfaction to those whose digressions lead them to it. It is excellently produced and of a quality format. Perhaps we shall one day have modern editions of some of the texts of nineteenth and early twentieth century Australian naturalists. For such editions "The Birds of Shakespeare" would prove an excellent model.

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