

**SHAKESPEARE: A
BIOGRAPHIC
AESTHETIC STUDY**

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Shakespeare: A Biographic Aesthetic Study by George H. Calvert

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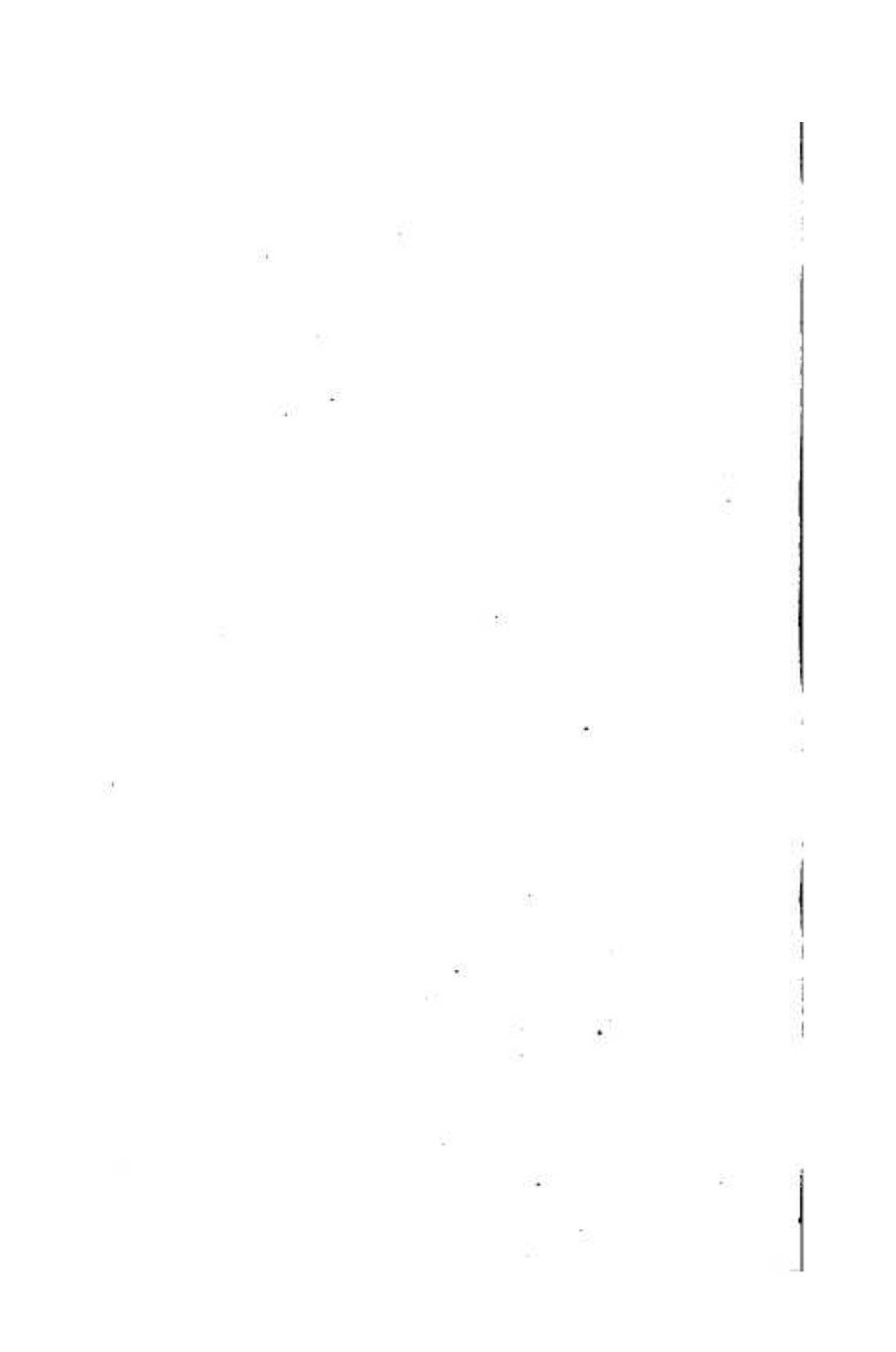
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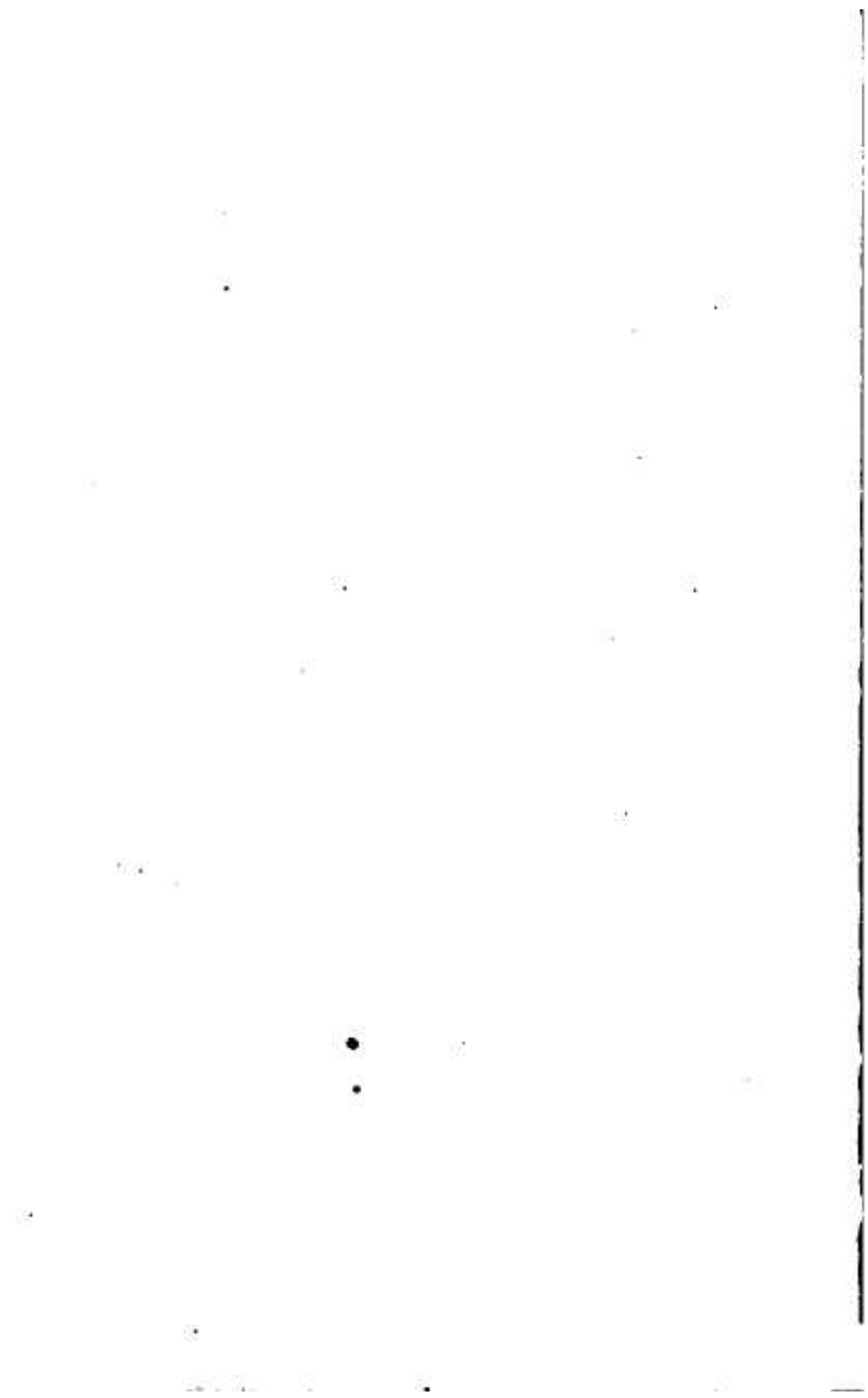
TO SHAKESPEARE.

EFFULGENT Presence, who dost ceaseless shine
Unbodied benefaction on the blest, —
Thy lifted myriad-millions, aye possess
Of that wide speech, in whose unwearied mine
Thou art the richest vein, — phrases of thine,
The largest, most embossed, the fiery best,
He needs who, cheered by gratitude, would crest
His love and awe with epithets so fine
They shall exhale some flavor of thy worth,
A fraction speak of what men owe to thee,
Thou lonely one, at whose still modest birth
Were born new worlds of truth and ecstasy,
Thou great emblazoner of man and earth,
Thou secret-holder of humanity.



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SHAKESPEARE.

I.

FIRST DECADES.

IN Stratford on Avon, a small town of Warwickshire, England, in a small room of a cottage on Henley Street, lay, in the summer of 1564, a babe asleep in his cradle. Beside the cradle sat a young woman, with broad, open brow and large hazel eyes, that were a light to clear symmetrical features. This woman was Mary Arden, wife of John Shakespeare, and, three months before, the babe had been christened WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

Evenly came the breathings of the infant; his forehead was cool, and his cheeks, flushed by the healthy currents from his heart, glistened with the warmth of the midsummer noon. But the clear countenance of his mother, as she gazed on her beautiful boy, instead of being arrayed in the joy of such a possession, her eyes beaming with deepest and sweetest mater-

nal gladness, was shadowed with alarm. The thought that their little angels may be suddenly snatched from them back to heaven is common to all mothers, and the deeper the motherly tenderness the more biting is the thought. But the mist of such conceits, quickly routed by the morning glow of love, makes but a flitting shadow. The shadow on the brow of Mary Shakespeare was not flitting; it passed not away, and at times was deepened by some inward motion. It was a wave from the general gloom that hung over the little town of Stratford. The plague had shown there its hideous skeleton.

Nature can afford to be a spendthrift, allowing myriads of young lives to be wasted, so teeming is she with new births, so deep her store of mysterious life-germs. But does she allow any of her capital buds to be cut off in infancy? When among the survivors (who are a vast majority) we find so few prime men, men of creative calibre, great poets, thinkers, discoverers, statesmen; when we remember that during the long Napoleonic wars but two generals earned the first rank as masters of their craft, Napoleon and Wellington; when we reflect how rare are Cavours and Washingtons,

how difficult it continues to be for us to find a man eminently suited to be the head of our republic, — a man able and just, watchful and scrupulous, temperate and energetic ; when we behold everywhere this dearth of high gifts, may we not conclude that few, if any, infants of best promise are sacrificed at the threshold of life, and that probably the native excellence of such involves a self-protecting vitality to resist physical destruction ?

The air inbreathed by the infant that lay asleep near his anxious mother was feeding a brain destined to be the seat of a deeper and fuller consciousness than ever quickened a human mind. If the vitality through which the soul indues itself with corporeal consistence be not strong enough to insure the material form against earthly disease, a soul of this exceptional power, as a resplendent boon from the soul of souls, will be shielded from above, and the modest cottage in Henley Street would have been encircled with a sanitary belt of guardian angels.

Much as the earliest years of human life may deserve to be called, what Alfieri in his autobiography calls them, "an unintelligent vegetation," still one catches at any fact about a great