

**ENGLISH MEN OF  
LETTERS.  
SHAKESPEARE**

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English men of letters. Shakespeare by Walter Raleigh

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**WALTER RALEIGH**

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# SHAKESPEARE

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## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER I

	PAGE
SHAKESPEARE . . . . .	1

### CHAPTER II

STRATFORD AND LONDON . . . . .	20
--------------------------------	----

### CHAPTER III

BOOKS AND POETRY . . . . .	63
----------------------------	----

### CHAPTER IV

THE THEATRE . . . . .	94
-----------------------	----

### CHAPTER V

STORY AND CHARACTER . . . . .	128
-------------------------------	-----

### CHAPTER VI

THE LAST PHASE . . . . .	209
--------------------------	-----

INDEX . . . . .	229
-----------------	-----



# SHAKESPEARE

## CHAPTER I

### SHAKESPEARE

EVERY age has its own difficulties in the appreciation of Shakespeare. The age in which he lived was too near to him to see him truly. From his contemporaries, and those rare and curious inquirers who collected the remnants of their talk, we learn that "his Plays took well"; and that he was "a handsome, well shaped man; very good company, and of a very ready and pleasant smooth wit." The easy-going and casual critics who were privileged to know him in life regarded him chiefly as a successful member of his own class, a prosperous actor-dramatist, whose energy and skill were given to the business of the theatre and the amusement of the play-going public. There was no one to make an idol of him while he lived. The newly sprung class to which he belonged was despised and disliked by the majority of the decent burgesses of the City of London; and though the players found substantial favour at the hands of the Court, and were applauded and imitated by a large following of young law-students and fashionable gallants, yet this favour and support brought them none the nearer to social consideration or worshipful esteem. In the City they were enemies, "the caterpillars of a common-wealth"; at the Court they were servants, and service is no heritage. It was not until the appearance of