

**SHAKSPERE: AN ADDRESS,
DELIVERED ON APRIL 23, 1916, IN
SANDERS THEATRE AT THE
REQUEST OF THE PRESIDENT AND
FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE**

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Shakspeare: An Address, Delivered on April 23, 1916, in Sanders Theatre at the request of the president and fellows of harvard college by George Lyman Kittredge

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GEORGE LYMAN KITTREDGE

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SHAKSPERE

22 May 16 G.L.K. 8

SHAKSPERE

DR. JOHNSON was a wise man and a four-square, though not an intolerant, moralist. Incidentally he has proved himself one of the most sensible and serviceable in that long array of professed Shakspeareans that bids fair to stretch out to the crack of doom. In all of these capacities I think the more of him, the older I grow; and such, it seems, is the common experience of literary men. To-day, and on this occasion, he sustains me—nay, he comes to my rescue—with one of the most pregnant and unforced, yet most searching, of his many admirable truisms, to the effect that men need, in general, not so much to be informed as to be reminded.

But for that supporting adage, I know not how I should have mustered courage to approach this hour. For I have neither conceit enough to fancy that I can say anything new; nor stodginess enough to rehearse old saws with the self-conviction of

Sir Oracle; nor sophistry enough to turn commonplaces into paradoxes by standing them on their heads; nor enough of the philosopher or the modern critic in me to parade them as novelties by draping their shrunk shanks in the ample robes of an esoteric jargon.

I am not here to rationalize the miracle of Shakspeare, or to define poetry, or to account for its emergence, or the emergence of genius either, in the history of mankind at large, or in any particular period in the annals of a given race, a given nation, or a given language.

My liege and madam, to expatiate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time —
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.

Frankly, I can solve none of these problems. I am quite as much amazed at the splendid accident of genius in the supreme dramatic poet, as I am aghast at the same splendid accident in the skin-clad savage (name and date unknown) who first invented the fish-hook or the blowgun or the fire-drill, or dis-

covered that a dugout is a handier craft than a solid log. Of Shakspeare's life we know a good deal, but nothing that explains him. Nor should we be better off in this regard if we had his pedigree to the twentieth generation, with a record of everything that his forbears did and said and thought and imagined and dreamed. God is great, and from time to time his prophets come into the world. "The wind bloweth where it listeth—and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the spirit."

Still, I can analyze Shakspeare roughly, though I cannot account for him. He had the ability to put himself in your place, and then — to speak. Sympathetic knowledge of human nature we call it, and the gift of expression. Rarely, very rarely, do they hunt in couples. William Shakspeare of Stratford and London, actor, poet, good fellow, dramatist, theatrical proprietor, and Englishman of the most thorough and indubitable breed — like Geoffrey Chaucer,