

**LITTLE JOURNEYS TO THE
HOMES OF
GOOD MEN AND
GREAT, DECEMBER, 1894**

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Little Journeys to the Homes of Good Men and Great, december, 1894 by George Eliot

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GEORGE ELIOT

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GEORGE ELIOT

" May I reach

That purest heaven, be to other souls
The cup of strength in some great agony,
Rekindle generous ardor, feed pure love,
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty—
Be the good presence of a good diffused,
And in diffusion ever more intense.
So shall I join the choir invisible
Whose music is the gladness of the world."

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GEORGE ELIOT.

WARWICKSHIRE supplied to the world Shakespeare. It also gave Mary Ann Evans. No one will question but that Shakespeare's is the greatest name in English literature; and among writers living or dead, in England or out of it, no woman has ever shown us power equal to that of George Eliot in the subtle clairvoyance which divines the inmost play of passions, the experience that shows the human capacity for contradiction, and the indulgence that is merciful because it understands.

Shakespeare lived three hundred years ago. According to the records his father, in 1563, owned a certain house in Henley

The Baunts of

street, Stratford-on-Avon. Hence we infer that William Shakespeare was born there. And in all our knowledge of Shakespeare's early life (or later) we prefix the words, "Hence we infer."

That the man knew all sciences of his day, and had enough knowledge of each of the learned professions so that all have claimed him as their own, we know.

He evidently was acquainted with five different languages and the range of his intellect was world-wide, but where did he get this vast erudition? We do not know, and we excuse ourselves by saying that he lived three hundred years ago.

George Eliot lived—yesterday, and we know no more about her youthful days than we do of that other child of Warwickshire.

One biographer tells us that she was born in 1819, another in 1820, and neither state the day; whereas a recent writer in the *Pall Mall Budget* graciously bestows on us the useful information that "William Shakespeare was born on the 21st

George Eliot

day of April, 1563, at fifteen minutes of two on a stormy morning."

Concise statements of facts are always valuable, but we have none such concerning the early life of George Eliot. There is even a shadow over her parentage, for no less an authority than the *American Cyclopaedia Annual* for 1880, boldly proclaims that she was not a foundling and, moreover, that she was not adopted by a rich retired clergyman who gave her a splendid schooling. Then the writer dives into obscurity but presently reappears and adds that he does not know where she got her education. For all of which we are very grateful.

Shakespeare left five signatures, each written in a different way, and now there is a goodly crew who spell it "Bacon."

And likewise we do not know whether it is Mary Ann Evans, Mary Anne Evans, or Marian Evans, for she herself is said to have used each form at various times.

William Winter—gentle critic, poet, scholar—tells us that the Sonnets show a