

**SHAKESPEARE AND HIS
FELLOWS: AN
ATTEMPT TO DECIPHER THE
MAN AND HIS NATURE**

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Shakespeare and his fellows: an attempt to decipher the man and his nature by D. H. Madden

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AN ATTEMPT TO DECIPHER
THE MAN AND HIS NATURE

BY

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SHAKESPEARE

AND HIS FELLOWS

‘ALL that we know of Shakespeare is that he was born at Stratford-on-Avon, married, and had children there ; went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote plays and poems ; returned to Stratford, made his will, and died.’ These words, written by Steevens, served for more than a century as a fair summary of the events in the life of Shakespeare, so far as they were then known. But the pious labours of succeeding generations have added so much to our stock of knowledge that a presentment of the life of Shakespeare is now possible, not, indeed, complete in all respects, but far in advance of earlier efforts. ‘An investigation extending over two centuries has brought together a mass of detail which far exceeds that accessible in the case of any other contemporary professional writer.’ It is not probable that any important addition will be made in the future to our know-

SHAKESPEARE AND HIS FELLOWS

ledge of the facts of the life of Shakespeare, or that they will be presented with better effect than by Sir Sidney Lee in the great work from which these words are taken.*

Shakespeare's life was the uneventful life of a successful player and dramatist. His greatness, unlike that of a commander or statesman, did not depend on the happening of great events. But great events are not those from which we derive the clearest insight into character. The object which the Father of Biography set before him in writing the life of a great man was to 'decipher the man and his nature,' and he thus explains his omission to record some facts of historical interest: 'For the noblest deeds do not alwaies shew mens vertues and vices, but oftentimes a light occasion, a word, or some sport, makes mens naturall dispositions and maners appeare more plaine than the famous battels won, wherein are slaine ten thousand men; or the great armies, or cities won by siege or assault.'† The student of Plutarch's *Life of Alexander the Great* would not have been enabled by it to give an account of the battles of the Granicus and of Issus, or to show how these

* *A Life of William Shakespeare*, by Sir Sidney Lee. New edition, 1925.

† *Plutarch's Lives*, Sir Thomas North's version (*Life of Alexander*).