

**THE LIFE OF WILLIAM
SHAKSPERE: TER-
CENTENNIAL ADDRESS**

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The Life of William Shakspere: Ter-centennial Address by Willard Gibson Day

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WILLARD GIBSON DAY

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WILLIAM SHAKSPERE

Ter-Centennial Address

By WILLARD GIBSON DAY, A. M.

Fac Similes of Shakspeare's Authentic Signatures, and the Title Page of His First Edition of Hamlet

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The Life of William Shakspere.

ADDRESS BY WILLARD GIBSON DAY, A. M.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The journey hence to London, is, in thought, an easy one; and hardly more difficult on to Oxford, forty-six miles west of London. Thence we may go again northwest, sixty miles, by the wagon road, to the ever classic river Avon. Stratford-on-Avon is situated in a wide valley, at a ford of the river, and hence called Stratford, or Valley Ford. It is an ancient town: was three hundred years old at the time of the Norman conquest. It has now about five thousand people, old and young, and had fourteen hundred in the time of Shakspere.

In the early days of the town, the little river let or hindered people's crossing, according to its own capricious will, until a plain, long, rumbling and uncertain wooden bridge was built. That lasted until the reign of Henry VII. when a low stone structure of fourteen pointed arches, took its place. The bridge still remains.

Approaching Stratford by the London road, there may be seen, across the river, on the west bank, the east or chancel end of Stratford Church, with its high and wide old-English chancel window. You see also the churchyard, filled with graves, extending down to the edge of the water.

Crossing the Avon, by the bridge, you turn to the left, along the nearest street, and soon you are at the entrance of the church. Then, going forward to the chancel, you see at your feet, and toward the left or north side, three graves, covered by stone slabs, and with inscriptions surmounted by coats-of-arms. The

grave nearest the middle of the church, is that of Susanna Hall, eldest daughter of William Shakspeare. Next to her's is that of her husband, Dr. John Hall, an eminent physician of Stratford. Close by the grave of Dr. Hall, is that of Thomas Nash, who married the daughter of the Halls, and thus the grand-daughter of William Shakspeare, and his last lineal descendant. Adjoining this grave, is that of the great poet. This is covered by a stone slab, on which is the now well known inscription:

"Good friend, for Iesu's sake, forbear
To digge ye dust enclosed here:
Blest be ye man yt spares these stones,
And curst be he yt moves my bones."

These words alone, doggerel as they are, have, by their magic influence, kept the bones of Shakspeare in their proper resting-place in Stratford; whereas otherwise they would long since have been removed to some great corner among the less noble but mighty dead that lie buried at Westminster.

Beyond the slab that covers Shakspeare's grave, is a wider one, extending to the north wall of the church. This covers the grave of "Anne, beloved wife of Wm. Shakspeare," who died in 1623, aged sixty-seven.

Looking up from this last grave, we see immediately over it, on the left or north wall of the church, the bust of Shakspeare, taken in a sitting posture; his hands resting on a cushion before him; his left hand holding a pen. This bust was placed in its position within seven years after his death. It was made from a cast taken from the face, and though very inartistic in its details, is generally regarded as giving the most correct representation of the poet's personal appearance. It was even painted, to make it as life-like as possible: the face and hands flesh-color, the eyes hazel and the costume such as he had been accustomed to wear.

The Stratford Church is in the southern portion of the town, while in the northern part, on Henley street, is still shown the house, and even the room, where the poet was born. This event took place on the

23rd of April, 1564. It was St. George's Day; and all the military, civil and ecclesiastical officials were parading in their fullest uniforms. They passed the Shakespere birth-place, on their way to the great elm, at the northern boundary of the town, and where they halted in their march, read portions of the Holy Scriptures, chaunted psalms, and sung hymns, led by choristers, in their white robes and surplices. There were also mimic shows, representations of St. George killing the dragon; and other holiday sports; and at every turn of the street there went up shouts that filled the air, for "St. George and merry England!"

Well were they given on that happy anniversary; for then indeed was born a man that did more for England and for us, for his mother tongue, and for mankind, than all the Georges in the calendar, and whether commons, doctors, saints, or kings!

Born of whom? Of John and Mary Shakspere; then very plain and simple names; but now more than honorable titles. Mary Shakspere was the daughter of Agnes Webbe and Robert Arden, son of Robert Arden, groom of the bed-chamber in the royal household of Henry VII. The Arden family trace their lineage back to the time of Edward the Confessor.

Mary Arden was a mild, amiable, lovable woman. Her father had died a year before her marriage; and left her a home, in which she lived apart from her mother and sisters; a little lonesome, perhaps, until John Shakspere became a frequent visitor at the place. They were hardly married before she put her husband in the fullest possession of this home, and of all the other property she had.

As Mary Shakspere came of somewhat gentle blood, John Shakspere boasted also of his descent from a valiant soldier in the army of the Earl of Richmond, who conquered Richard III., on the field of Bosworth. So when the poet William set out to glorify the Earl of Richmond, he was partly engaged in brightening the shield of his own ancestors. And after Wm. had gained some reputation and influence in London, one of his first efforts was to have established by coat-of-

arms the right of plain John Shakspeare to write his name,—if haply had been able to write,—Magister, or Mr. John Shakspeare.

Like most of his fellow-citizens, however, poor John Shakspeare could not write his own name. So in his earlier married life, in the solid ardor of an honest flame for the lovely lady of his heart, he took the first letter of her name, A, for his sign manual. Mary Shakspeare had a little more education than her husband; and she wrote the letters M-y for her signature; and even between those two letters and the few undoubted signatures of William Shakspeare, we may see a distinctly recognizable family resemblance in handwriting. She doubtless placed the pen and held it for the crooked marks of the poet in his earliest beginnings.

Mary Arden no doubt condescended a little in her marriage with John Shakspeare, who was a pushing, enterprising, and generally miscellaneous kind of a man; one who only needed, however, the gentle support and kindly counsel of a wise and quiet wife, to become as he did become, the most prominent politician of Stratford. He climbed through all the grades of office, and finally, in 1568, became a high bailiff of the borough and chief magistrate of the town.

A great deal of ink has been wasted in the discussion of John Shakspeare's occupation; or occupations, as we should say; for he had several, chief among which we may always reckon the rearing of a large and excellent family. His most ordinary business was that of a farmer. With this he combined some town employments. He no doubt attended to the butchering of his own cattle, hogs and sheep, and bought others, to his profit. So in the representations of the poet's birth-place there is a front shop, with a butcher's stall and a sale window. There can be little doubt that meat was sold at the Henley-street residence, and by the Shakspeare family; although John Shakspeare was called a wool-stapler, in order to dignify his employment as much as possible.

It has been said that William Shakspeare was in his youth apprenticed to a butcher; but in the light of

recent discoveries that was not possible. And yet he knew all about the processes of butchering, and in a way that no man ever learns without seeing and engaging in the work. He mentions things seldom or never observed outside of a slaughter-pen. Thus, in *Hamlet*, he talks of "coagulate gore." He makes the old nurse, in "*Romeo and Juliet*," discourse of bloody deeds done by Romeo, "in blood, all in gore blood!" In *Henry V.*, he pictures the "fetlock deep in gore." And again he says, "in gore he lay ensteeped." Men see gore in a slaughter house, and hardly any where else, except in imagination. Shakspeare does not hesitate to mention a "barrow of butcher's offal;" thus indicating that he had seen butchering done, but only in a small way. And there are many other such allusions. He did not forget his early avocations even in his latest life and work. In the play of *Henry VI.*, Shakspeare makes the rebel Cade say to Dick, the butcher of Ashford, about his destruction of enemies: "They fell before thee like sheep and oxen; and thou behavedst thyself as thou hadst been in thine own slaughterhouse." Again he makes another butcher say:

"Then is sin struck down, like an ox;
And iniquity's throat cut, like a calf."

All these illustrations show that Shakspeare had seen butchering done, and probably had often assisted his father in the work.

Mary Shakspeare took care of her own children; and it may be partly owing to this fact, under Providence, that the plague which visited the low fevery town of Stratford, in Shakspeare's infancy, did not take him to the other world, as it did one-sixth of the entire population of within six months. The doors of the houses were all marked with a red cross and the Latin words, "Miserere, Domine!" and the prayer itself, "Lord, have mercy upon us!" went up that year from many a sorrowing heart in that ill-fated town.

When the poet was four years old, his father was mayor of the village, and held his court sessions in a chamber of the guild; and the large-eyed, light-haired boy began with his earliest memory to take in with