

career. The loss of his mother would be deeply felt by her favourite son, but there was no bitterness in the bereavement, and it even seems to have exerted a tranquillizing, elevating effect on the poet's mind and character. As he laid her in the grave he would recall and realize afresh the early years during which her loving presence and influence were the light and guide of his boyish life. With these vivid and varied family experiences a strong wave of home-yearning seems to have set in, which gradually drew the poet wholly back to Stratford. During the autumn visit connected with his mother's death Shakespeare must have remained several weeks at the New Place, for on the 16th of October he acted as godfather to the infant son of an old personal friend, Henry Walker, who was an alderman of the borough. The child was called William after his godfather, and the poet must have taken a special interest in the boy, as he remembered him in his will.

It seems most probable that soon after the chequered domestic events of this year, as soon as he could conveniently terminate his London engagements, Shakespeare decided on retiring to his native place. He had gained all he cared for in the way of wealth and fame, and his strongest interests, personal and relative, were now centred in Stratford. But on retiring to settle in his native town he had nothing of the dreamer, the sentimentalist, or the recluse about him. His healthy natural feeling was far too strong, his character too manly and well-balanced, to admit of any of the so-called eccentricities of genius. He retired as a successful professional man who had gained a competence by his own exertions and wished to enjoy it at leisure in a simple, social, rational way. He knew that the competence he had gained, the lands and wealth he possessed, could only be preserved, like other valuable possessions, by good management and careful husbandry. And, taught by the sad experience of his earlier years, he evidently guided the business details of his property with a firm and skilful hand, was vigilant and scrupulously just in his dealings, respecting the rights of others, and, if need be, enforcing his own. He sued his careless and negligent debtors in the local court of record, had various commercial transactions with the corporation, and took an active interest in the affairs of the borough. And he went now and then to London, partly on business connected with the town, partly no doubt to look after the administration and ultimate disposal of his own theatrical property, and partly it may be assumed for the pleasure of seeing his old friends and fellow dramatists. Even at Stratford, however, Shakespeare was not entirely cut off from his old associates in arts and letters, his hospitable board being brightened at intervals by the presence, and animated by the wit, humour, and kindly gossip, of one or more of his chosen friends. Two amongst the most cherished of his companions and fellow poets, Drayton and Ben Jonson, had paid a visit of this kind to Stratford, and been entertained by Shakespeare only a few days before his death, which occurred almost suddenly on the 23d of April 1616. After three days' illness the great poet was carried off by a sharp attack of fever, at that time one of the commonest scourges, even of country towns, and often arising then as now, only more frequently than than now, from the neglect of proper sanitary precautions. According to tradition the 23d of April was Shakespeare's birthday, so that he died on the completion of the 52d year of his age. Three days later he was laid in the chancel of Stratford church, on the north wall of which his monument, containing his bust and epitaph, was soon afterwards placed, most probably by the poet's son-in-law, Dr John Hall. Shakespeare's widow, the Anne Hathaway of his youth, died in 1623, having survived the poet seven years, exactly the

same length of time that his mother Mary Arden had outlived her husband. Elizabeth Hall, the poet's grandchild, was married twice, first to Mr Thos. Nash of Stratford, and in 1649, when she had been two years a widow, to Mr afterwards Sir John Barnard of Abington in Northamptonshire. Lady Barnard had no family by either husband, and the three children of the poet's second daughter Judith (who had married Richard Quiney of Stratford, two months before her father's death) all died comparatively young. At Lady Barnard's death in 1670 the family of the poet thus become extinct. By his will made a few weeks before his death Shakespeare left his landed property, the whole of his real estate indeed, to his eldest daughter Mrs Susanna Hall, under strict entail to her heirs. He left also a substantial legacy to his second daughter and only remaining child Mrs Judith Quiney, and a remembrance to several of his friends, including his old associates at the Blackfriars theatre, Burbage, Heminge, and Condell,—the two latter of whom edited the first collection of his dramas published in 1623. The will also included a bequest to the poor of Stratford.

From this short sketch it will be seen that all the best known facts of Shakespeare's personal history bring into vivid relief the simplicity and naturalness of his tastes, his love of the country, the strength of his domestic affections, and the singularly firm hold which the conception of family life had upon his imagination, his sympathies, and his schemes of active labour. He had loved the country with ardent enthusiasm in his youth, when all nature was lighted with the dawn of rising passion and kindled imagination; and after his varied London experience we may well believe that he loved it still more with a deeper and calmer love of one who had looked through and through the brilliant forms of wealthy display, public magnificence, and courtly ceremonial, who had scanned the heights and sounded the depths of existence, and who felt that for the king and beggar alike this little life of feverish joys and sorrows is soothed by natural influences, cheered by sunlight and green shadows, softened by the perennial charm of hill and dale and rippling stream, and when the spring returns no more is rounded with a sleep. In the more intimate circle of human relationships he seems clearly to have realized that the sovereign elixir against the ills of life, the one antidote of its struggles and difficulties, its emptiness and unrest, is vigilant charity, faithful love in all its forms, love of home, love of kindred, love of friends, love of everything simple, just, and true. The larger and more sacred group of those serene and abiding influences flowing from well-centred affections was naturally identified with family ties, and it is clear that the unity and continuity of family life possessed Shakespeare's imagination with the strength of a dominant passion and largely determined the scope and direction of his practical activities. As we have seen, he displayed from the first the utmost prudence and foresight in securing a comfortable home for his family, and providing for the future welfare of his children. The desire of his heart evidently was to take a good position and found a family in his native place. And if this was a weakness he shares it with other eminent names in the republic of letters. In Shakespeare's case the desire may have been inherited, not only from his father, who had pride, energy, and ambition, but especially from his gently descended mother, Mary Arden of the Asbies. But, whatever its source, the evidence in favour of this cherished desire is unusually full, clear, and decisive. While the poet had no doubt previously assisted his father to retrieve his position in the world, the first important step in building up the family name was the grant of arms or armorial bearings to John Shakespeare in the year 1596. The

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father, it may be assumed, had applied to the heralds' college for the grant at the instance and by the help of his son. In this document, the draft of which is still preserved, the grounds on which the arms are given are stated as two:—(1) because John Shakespeare's ancestors had rendered valuable services to Henry VII.; and (2) that he had married Mary, daughter and one of the heirs of Robert Arden of Wilmcote, in the said county, gentleman. In the legal conveyances of property to Shakespeare himself after the grant of arms he is uniformly described as "William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon, gentleman." He is so described in the midst of his London career, and this sufficiently indicates that Stratford was even then regarded as his permanent residence or home. In the following year another important step was taken towards establishing the position of the family. This was an application by John and Mary Shakespeare to the Court of Chancery for the recovery of the estate of the Asbies, which, under the pressure of family difficulties, had been mortgaged in 1578 to Edward Lambert. The issue of the suit is not known, but, as we have seen, the pleadings on either side occupy a considerable space and show how resolutely John Shakespeare was bent on recovering his wife's family estate.

Turning to the poet himself, we have the significant fact that during the next ten years he continued, with steady persistency, to build up the family fortunes by investing all his savings in real property,—in houses and land at Stratford. While many of his associates and partners in the Blackfriars company remained on in London, living and dying there, Shakespeare seems to have early realized his theatrical property for the sake of increasing the acreage of his arable and pasture land in the neighbourhood of Stratford. In 1598, the year after the purchase of New Place, his family are not only settled there, but he is publicly ranked among the most prosperous and well-to-do citizens of Stratford. In that year, there being some anticipation of a scarcity of corn, an official statement was drawn up as to the amount of wheat in the town. From the list contained in this document of the chief householders in Chapel Ward, where New Place was situated, we find that out of twenty holders of corn enumerated only two have more in stock than William Shakespeare. Other facts belonging to the same year, such as the successful appeal of a fellow-townsmen for important pecuniary help, and the suggestion from an alderman of the borough that, for the sake of securing certain private and public benefits, he should be encouraged to complete a contemplated purchase of land at Shottery, show that Shakespeare was now recognized as a local proprietor of wealth and influence, and that he had so far realized his early desire of taking a good position in the town and neighbourhood. It will be noted, too, that all the leading provisions of Shakespeare's will embody the same cherished family purpose. Instead of dividing his property between his two daughters, he left, as we have seen, the whole of his estate, the whole of his real property indeed, to his eldest daughter Mrs Susanna Hall, with a strict entail to the heirs of her body. This indicates in the strongest manner the fixed desire of his heart to take a permanent position in the locality, and, if possible, strike the family roots deeply into their native soil. That this purpose was realized in his own case seems clear from the special respect paid to his memory. He was buried, as we have seen, in the chancel of the parish church, where as a rule only persons of family and position could be interred. His monument, one of the most considerable in the church, holds a place of honour on the north wall of the chancel, just above the altar railing. While this tribute of marked official respect may be due in part, as the epitaph intimates, to his

eminence as a poet, it was no doubt, in a country district like Stratford, due still more to his local importance as a landed proprietor of wealth and position. Indeed, as a holder of the great tithes he was by custom and courtesy entitled to burial in the chancel.

If there is truth in the early tradition that Shakespeare originally left Stratford in consequence of the sharp prosecution of Sir Thomas Lucy, who resented with narrow bitterness and pride the presumption and audacity of the high-spirited youth found trespassing on his grounds, the victim of his petty wrath was in the end amply avenged. After a career of unexampled success in London Shakespeare returned to his native town crowned with wealth and honours, and, having spent the last years of his life in cordial intercourse with his old friends and fellow townsmen, was followed to the grave with the affectionate respect and regret of the whole Stratford community. This feeling was indeed, we may justly assume, fully shared by all who had ever known the great poet. His contemporaries and associates unanimously bear witness to Shakespeare's frank, honourable, loving nature. Perhaps the most striking expression of this common feeling comes from one who in character, disposition, and culture was so different from Shakespeare as his friend and fellow-dramatist Ben Jonson. Even his rough and cynical temper could not resist the charm of Shakespeare's genial character and gracious ways. "I loved the man," he says, "and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any. He was indeed honest, and of an open and free nature, had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions." As the genius of Shakespeare united the most opposite gifts, so amongst his friends are found the widest diversity of character, endowment, and disposition. This is only another way of indicating the breadth of his sympathies, the variety of his interests, the largeness and exuberant vitality of his whole nature. He touched life at so many points, and responded so instinctively to every movement in the complex web of its throbbing activities, that nothing affecting humanity was alien either to his heart or brain. To one so gifted with the power of looking below the surface of custom and convention, and perceiving, not only the deeper elements of rapture and anguish to which ordinary eyes are blind, but the picturesque, humorous, or pathetic varieties of the common lot, every form of human experience, every type of character, would have an attraction of its own. In the view of such a mind nothing would be common or unclean. To Shakespeare all aspects of life, even the humblest, had points of contact with his own. He could talk simply and naturally without a touch of patronage or condescension to a hodman on his ladder, a costermonger at his stall, the tailor on his board, the cobbler in his combe, the hen-wife in her poultry-yard, the ploughman in his furrow, or the base mechanicals at the wayside country inn. He could watch with full and humorous appreciation the various forms of brief authority and petty officialism, the bovine stolidity and empty consequence of the local Dogberries and Shallows, the strange oaths and martial swagger of a Pistol, a Bardolph, or a Parolles, the pedantic talk of a Holofernes, the pragmatism of a Polonius, or the solemn absurdities of a self-conceited Malvolio. On the other hand he could seize from the inner side by links of vital affinity every form of higher character, passionate, reflective, or executive,—lover and prince, duke and captain, legislator and judge, counsellor and king,—and portray with almost equal ease and with vivid truthfulness men and women of distant ages, of different races, and widely sundered nationalities.

As in his dramatic world he embraces the widest variety of human experience, so in his personal character he may



