

knowledge, and who turns from Theology, Philosophy, Medicine, and Law, the four sciences of the time, to the study of magic, much as a child might turn from jewels to tinsel and colored paper. In order to learn magic he sells himself to the devil, on condition that he shall have twenty-four years of absolute power and knowledge. The play is the story of those twenty-four years. Like *Tamburlaine*, it is lacking in dramatic construction,¹ but has an unusual number of passages of rare poetic beauty. Milton's Satan suggests strongly that the author of *Paradise Lost* had access to *Faustus* and used it, as he may also have used *Tamburlaine*, for the magnificent panorama displayed by Satan in *Paradise Regained*. For instance, more than fifty years before Milton's hero says, "Which way I turn is hell, myself am hell," Marlowe had written:

Faust. How comes it then that thou art out of hell?
Mephisto. Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
 In one self place; for where we are is hell,
 And where hell is there must we ever be.

Marlowe's third play is *The Jew of Malta*, a study of the lust for wealth, which centers about Barabas, a terrible old money lender, strongly suggestive of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. The first part of the play is well constructed, showing a decided advance, but the last part is an accumulation of melodramatic horrors. Barabas is checked in his murderous career by falling into a boiling caldron which he had prepared for another, and dies blaspheming, his only regret being that he has not done more evil in his life.

Marlowe's last play is *Edward II*, a tragic study of a king's weakness and misery. In point of style and dramatic construction, it is by far the best of Marlowe's plays, and is a worthy predecessor of Shakespeare's historical drama.

¹ We must remember, however, that our present version of *Faustus* is very much mutilated, and does not preserve the play as Marlowe wrote it.

Marlowe is the only dramatist of the time who is ever compared with Shakespeare.¹ When we remember that he died at twenty-nine, probably before Shakespeare had produced a single great play, we must wonder what he might have done had he outlived his wretched youth and become a man. Here and there his work is remarkable for its splendid imagination, for the stateliness of its verse, and for its rare bits of poetic beauty; but in dramatic instinct, in wide knowledge of human life, in humor, in delineation of woman's character, in the delicate fancy which presents an Ariel as perfectly as a Macbeth, — in a word, in all that makes a dramatic genius, Shakespeare stands alone. Marlowe simply prepared the way for the master who was to follow.

Variety of the Early Drama. The thirty years between our first regular English plays and Shakespeare's first comedy² witnessed a development of the drama which astonishes us both by its rapidity and variety. We shall better appreciate Shakespeare's work if we glance for a moment at the plays that preceded him, and note how he covers the whole field and writes almost every form and variety of the drama known to his age.

First in importance, or at least in popular interest, are the new Chronicle plays, founded upon historical events and characters. They show the strong national spirit of the Elizabethan Age, and their popularity was due largely to the fact that audiences came to the theaters partly to gratify their awakened national spirit and to get their first knowledge of national history. Some of the Moralities, like Bayle's *King Johan* (1538), are crude Chronicle plays, and the early Robin Hood plays and the first tragedy, *Gorboduc*, show the same awakened popular interest in

¹ The two dramatists may have worked together in such doubtful plays as *Richard III*, the hero of which is like Timur in an English dress, and *Titus Andronicus*, with its violence and horror. In many strong scenes in Shakespeare's works Marlowe's influence is manifest.

² *Gammer Gurton's Needle* appeared c. 1562; *Love's Labour's Lost*, c. 1591.

English history. During the reign of Elizabeth the popular Chronicle plays increased till we have the record of over two hundred and twenty, half of which are still extant, dealing with almost every important character, real or legendary, in English history. Of Shakespeare's thirty-seven dramas, ten are true Chronicle plays of English kings; three are from the legendary annals of Britain; and three more are from the history of other nations.

Other types of the early drama are less clearly defined, but we may sum them up under a few general heads: (1) The Domestic Drama began with crude home scenes introduced into the Miracles and developed in a score of different ways, from the coarse humor of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* to the Comedy of Manners of Jonson and the later dramatists. Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and *Merry Wives of Windsor* belong to this class. (2) The so-called Court Comedy is the opposite of the former in that it represented a different kind of life and was intended for a different audience. It was marked by elaborate dialogue, by jests, retorts, and endless plays on words, rather than by action. It was made popular by Lyly's success, and was imitated in Shakespeare's first or "Lilian" comedies, such as *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the complicated *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. (3) Romantic Comedy and Romantic Tragedy suggest the most artistic and finished types of the drama, which were experimented upon by Peele, Greene, and Marlowe, and were brought to perfection in *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Tempest*. (4) In addition to the above types were several others, — the Classical Plays, modeled upon Seneca and favored by cultivated audiences; the Melodrama, favorite of the groundlings, which depended not on plot or characters but upon a variety of striking scenes and incidents; and the Tragedy of Blood, always more or less melodramatic, like Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, which grew more blood-and-thunderly in Marlowe and reached a climax of horrors in Shakespeare's

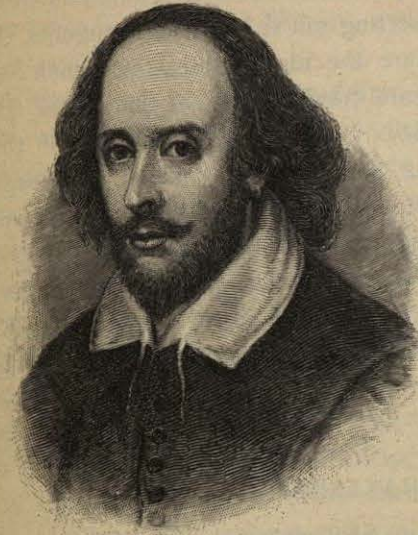
Titus Andronicus. It is noteworthy that *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth* all belong to this class, but the developed genius of the author raised them to a height such as the Tragedy of Blood had never known before.

These varied types are quite enough to show with what doubtful and unguided experiments our first dramatists were engaged, like men first setting out in rafts and dugouts on an unknown sea. They are the more interesting when we remember that Shakespeare tried them all; that he is the only dramatist whose plays cover the whole range of the drama from its beginning to its decline. From the stage spectacle he developed the drama of human life; and instead of the doggerel and bombast of our first plays he gives us the poetry of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In a word, Shakespeare brought order out of dramatic chaos. In a few short years he raised the drama from a blundering experiment to a perfection of form and expression which has never since been rivaled.

IV. SHAKESPEARE

One who reads a few of Shakespeare's great plays and then the meager story of his life is generally filled with a vague wonder. Here is an unknown country boy, The Wonder of Shakespeare poor and poorly educated according to the standards of his age, who arrives at the great city of London and goes to work at odd jobs in a theater. In a year or two he is associated with scholars and dramatists, the masters of their age, writing plays of kings and clowns, of gentlemen and heroes and noble women, all of whose lives he seems to know by intimate association. In a few years more he leads all that brilliant group of poets and dramatists who have given undying glory to the Age of Elizabeth. Play after play runs from his pen, mighty dramas of human life and character following one another so rapidly that good work seems impossible; yet they stand the test of time, and their poetry is

still unrivaled in any language. For all this great work the author apparently cares little, since he makes no attempt to collect or preserve his writings. A thousand scholars have ever since been busy collecting, identifying, classifying the works which this magnificent workman tossed aside so care-



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

lessly when he abandoned the drama and retired to his native village. He has a marvelously imaginative and creative mind; but he invents few, if any, new plots or stories. He simply takes an old play or an old poem, makes it over quickly, and lo! this old familiar material glows with the deepest thoughts and the tenderest feelings that ennoble our humanity; and each new generation of men finds it more wonderful than the last. How did he do it? That is still an unanswered question and the source of our wonder.

There are, in general, two theories to account for Shakespeare. The romantic school of writers have always held that in him "all came from within"; that his genius was his sufficient guide; and that to the overmastering power of his genius alone we owe all his great works. Practical, unimaginative men, on the other hand, assert that in Shakespeare "all came from without," and that we must study his environment rather than his genius, if we are to understand him. He lived in a play-loving age; he studied the crowds, gave them what they wanted, and simply

reflected their own thoughts and feelings. In reflecting the English crowd about him he unconsciously reflected all crowds, which are alike in all ages; hence his continued popularity. And in being guided by public sentiment he was not singular, but followed the plain path that every good dramatist has always followed to success.

Probably the truth of the matter is to be found somewhere between these two extremes. Of his great genius there can be no question; but there are other things to consider. As we have already noticed, Shakespeare was trained, like his fellow workmen, first as an actor, second as a reviser of old plays, and last as an independent dramatist. He worked with other playwrights and learned their secret. Like them, he studied and followed the public taste, and his work indicates at least three stages, from his first somewhat crude experiments to his finished masterpieces. So it would seem that in Shakespeare we have the result of hard work and of orderly human development, quite as much as of transcendent genius.

Life (1564-1616). Two outward influences were powerful in developing the genius of Shakespeare, — the little village of Stratford, center of the most beautiful and romantic district in rural England, and the great city of London, the center of the world's political activity. In one he learned to know the natural man in his natural environment; in the other, the social, the artificial man in the most unnatural of surroundings.

From the register of the little parish church at Stratford-on-Avon we learn that William Shakespeare was baptized there on the twenty-sixth of April, 1564 (old style). As it was customary to baptize children on the third day after birth, the twenty-third of April (May 3, according to our present calendar) is generally accepted as the poet's birthday.

His father, John Shakespeare, was a farmer's son from the neighboring village of Snitterfield, who came to Stratford about 1551, and began to prosper as a trader in corn, meat, leather, and other agricultural products. His mother, Mary Arden, was the daughter of a prosperous farmer, descended from an old Warwickshire family of

mixed Anglo-Saxon and Norman blood. In 1559 this married couple sold a piece of land, and the document is signed, "The marke + of John Shacksper. The marke + of Mary Shacksper"; and from this it has been generally inferred that, like the vast majority of their countrymen, neither of the poet's parents could read or write. This was probably true of his mother; but the evidence from Stratford documents now indicates that his father could write, and that he also audited the town accounts; though in attesting documents he sometimes made a mark, leaving his name to be filled in by the one who drew up the document.

Of Shakespeare's education we know little, except that for a few years he probably attended the endowed grammar school at Stratford, where he picked up the "small Latin and less Greek" to which his learned friend Ben Jonson refers. His real teachers, meanwhile, were the men and women and the natural influences which surrounded him. Stratford is a charming little village in beautiful Warwickshire, and near at hand were the Forest of Arden, the old castles of Warwick and Kenilworth, and the old Roman camps and military roads, to appeal powerfully to the boy's lively imagination. Every phase of the natural beauty of this exquisite region is reflected in Shakespeare's poetry; just as his characters reflect the nobility and the littleness, the gossip, vices, emotions, prejudices, and traditions of the people about him.

I saw a smith stand with his hammer, thus,
The whilst his iron did on the anvil cool,
With open mouth swallowing a tailor's news;
Who, with his shears and measure in his hand,
Standing on slippers, which his nimble haste
Had falsely thrust upon contrary feet,
Told of a many thousand warlike French
That were embattailed and ranked in Kent.¹

Such passages suggest not only genius but also a keen, sympathetic observer, whose eyes see every significant detail. So with the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, whose endless gossip and vulgarity cannot quite hide a kind heart. She is simply the reflection of some forgotten nurse with whom Shakespeare had talked by the wayside.

Not only the gossip but also the dreams, the unconscious poetry that sleeps in the heart of the common people, appeal tremendously

¹ *King John*, IV, 2.

to Shakespeare's imagination and are reflected in his greatest plays. Othello tries to tell a curt soldier's story of his love; but the account is like a bit of Mandeville's famous travels, teeming with the fancies that filled men's heads when the great round world was first brought to their attention by daring explorers. Here is a bit of folklore, touched by Shakespeare's exquisite fancy, which shows what one boy listened to before the fire at Halloween:

She comes

In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
On the fore-finger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atomies
Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep;
Her waggon-spokes made of long spinners' legs,
The cover of the wings of grasshoppers,
The traces of the smallest spider's web,
The collars of the moonshine's watery beams,
Her whip of cricket's bone, the lash of film,
Her waggoner a small grey-coated gnat,

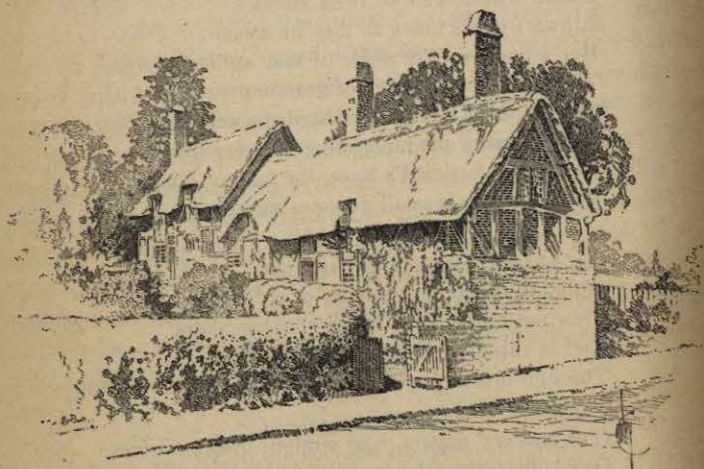
Her chariot is an empty hazel nut
Made by the joiner squirrel, or old grub,
Time out o' mind the fairies' coachmakers.
And in this state she gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;

O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees,
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream.¹

So with Shakespeare's education at the hands of Nature, which came from keeping his heart as well as his eyes wide open to the beauty of the world. He speaks of a horse, and we know the fine points of a thoroughbred; he mentions the duke's hounds, and we hear them clamoring on a fox trail, their voices matched like bells in the frosty air; he stops for an instant in the sweep of a tragedy to note a flower, a star, a moonlit bank, a hilltop touched by the sunrise, and instantly we know what our own hearts felt but could not quite express when we saw the same thing. Because he notes and remembers every significant thing in the changing panorama of earth and sky, no other writer has ever approached him in the perfect natural setting of his characters.

¹ Queen Mab, in *Romeo and Juliet*.

When Shakespeare was about fourteen years old his father lost his little property and fell into debt, and the boy probably left school to help support the family of younger children. What occupation he followed for the next eight years is a matter of conjecture. From evidence found in his plays, it is alleged with some show of authority that he was a country schoolmaster and a lawyer's clerk, the character of Holofernes, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, being the warrant for one, and Shakespeare's knowledge of law terms for the other. But if we take such evidence, then Shakespeare must have been a botanist, because of his knowledge of wild flowers; a sailor,



ANNE HATHAWAY COTTAGE

because he knows the ropes; a courtier, because of his extraordinary facility in quips and compliments and courtly language; a clown, because none other is so dull and foolish; a king, because Richard and Henry are true to life; a woman, because he has sounded the depths of a woman's feelings; and surely a Roman, because in *Coriolanus* and *Julius Cæsar* he has shown us the Roman spirit better than have the Roman writers themselves. He was everything, in his imagination, and it is impossible from a study of his scenes and characters to form a definite opinion as to his early occupation.

In 1582 Shakespeare was married to Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a peasant family of Shottery, who was eight years older than her boy husband. From numerous sarcastic references to marriage made by the characters in his plays, and from the fact that he soon

left his wife and family and went to London, it is generally alleged that the marriage was a hasty and unhappy one; but here again the evidence is entirely untrustworthy. In many Miracles as well as in later plays it was customary to depict the seamy side of domestic life for the amusement of the crowd; and Shakespeare may have followed the public taste in this as he did in other things. The references to love and home and quiet joys in Shakespeare's plays are enough, if we take such evidence, to establish firmly the opposite supposition, that his love was a very happy one. And the fact that, after his enormous success in London, he retired to Stratford to live quietly with his wife and daughters, tends to the same conclusion.

About the year 1587 Shakespeare left his family and went to London and joined himself to Burbage's company of players. A persistent tradition says that he had incurred the anger of Sir Thomas Lucy, first by poaching deer in that nobleman's park, and then, when haled before a magistrate, by writing a scurrilous ballad about Sir Thomas, which so aroused the old gentleman's ire that Shakespeare was obliged to flee the country. An old record¹ says that the poet "was much given to all unluckiness in stealing venison and rabbits," the unluckiness probably consisting in getting caught himself, and not in any lack of luck in catching the rabbits. The ridicule heaped upon the Lucy family in *Henry IV* and the *Merry Wives of Windsor* gives some weight to this tradition. Nicholas Rowe, who published the first life of Shakespeare,² is the authority for this story; but there is some reason to doubt whether, at the time when Shakespeare is said to have poached in the deer park of Sir Thomas Lucy at Charlescote, there were any deer or park at the place referred to. The subject is worthy of some scant attention, if only to show how worthless is the attempt to construct out of rumor the story of a great life which, fortunately perhaps, had no contemporary biographer.

Of his life in London from 1587 to 1611, the period of his greatest literary activity, we know nothing definitely. We can judge only from his plays, and from these it is evident that he entered into the stirring life of England's capital with the same perfect sympathy and understanding that marked him among the plain people of his native Warwickshire. The first authentic reference to him is in 1592, when

¹ By Archdeacon Davies, in the seventeenth century.

² In 1709, nearly a century after the poet's death.

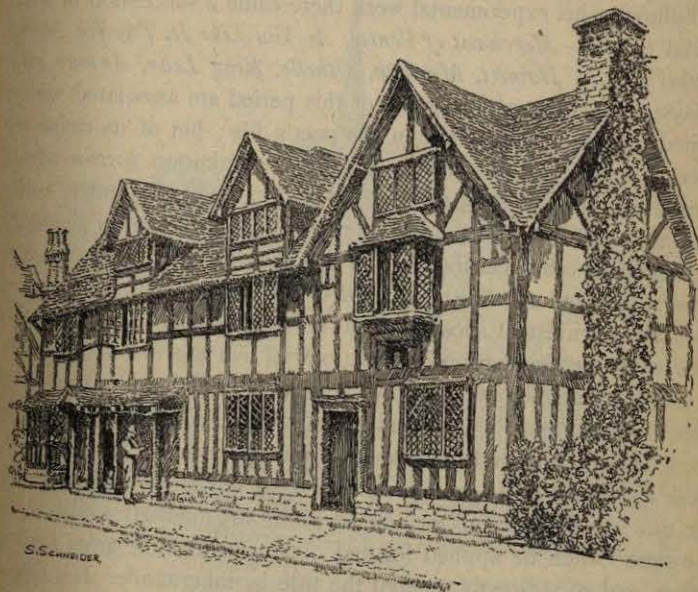
Greene's¹ bitter attack appeared, showing plainly that Shakespeare had in five years assumed an important position among playwrights. Then appeared the apology of the publishers of Greene's pamphlet, with their tribute to the poet's sterling character, and occasional literary references which show that he was known among his fellows as "the gentle Shakespeare." Ben Jonson says of him: "I loved the man and do honor his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was indeed honest, and of an open and free nature." To judge from only three of his earliest plays² it would seem reasonably evident that in the first five years of his London life he had gained entrance to the society of gentlemen and scholars, had caught their characteristic mannerisms and expressions, and so was ready by knowledge and observation as well as by genius to weave into his dramas the whole stirring life of the English people. The plays themselves, with the testimony of contemporaries and his business success, are strong evidence against the tradition that his life in London was wild and dissolute, like that of the typical actor and playwright of his time.

Shakespeare's first work may well have been that of a general helper, an odd-job man, about the theater; but he soon became an actor, and the records of the old London theaters show that in the next ten years he gained a prominent place, though there is little reason to believe that he was counted among the "stars." Within two years he was at work on plays, and his course here was exactly like that of other playwrights of his time. He worked with other men, and he revised old plays before writing his own, and so gained a practical knowledge of his art. *Henry VI* (c. 1590-1591) is an example of this tinkering work, in which, however, his native power is unmistakably manifest. The three parts of *Henry VI* (and *Richard III*, which belongs with them) are a succession of scenes from English Chronicle history strung together very loosely; and only in the last is there any definite attempt at unity. That he soon fell under Marlowe's influence is evident from the atrocities and bombast of *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard III*. The former may have been written by both playwrights in collaboration, or may be one of

¹ Robert Greene, one of the popular playwrights of the time, who attacked Shakespeare in a pamphlet called "A Groat's Worth of Wit Bought with a Million of Repentance." The pamphlet, aside from its jealousy of Shakespeare, is a sad picture of a man of genius dying of dissipation, and contains a warning to other playwrights of the time, whose lives were apparently almost as bad as that of Greene.

² *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

Marlowe's horrors left unfinished by his early death and brought to an end by Shakespeare. He soon broke away from this apprentice work, and then appeared in rapid succession *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the first English Chronicle plays,¹ *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. This order is more or less conjectural; but the wide variety of these plays, as well as their unevenness and frequent crudities, marks the first or experimental stage of Shakespeare's work. It is as if the



BIRTHPLACE OF SHAKESPEARE

author were trying his power, or more likely trying the temper of his audience. For it must be remembered that to please his audience was probably the ruling motive of Shakespeare, as of the other early dramatists, during the most vigorous and prolific period of his career. Shakespeare's poems, rather than his dramatic work, mark the beginning of his success. "Venus and Adonis" became immensely

¹ *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, *King John*. Prior to 1588 only three true Chronicle plays are known to have been acted. The defeat of the Armada in that year led to an outburst of national feeling which found one outlet in the theaters, and in the next ten years over eighty Chronicle plays appeared. Of these Shakespeare furnished nine or ten. It was the great popular success of *Henry VI*, a revision of an old play, in 1592 that probably led to Greene's jealous attack.

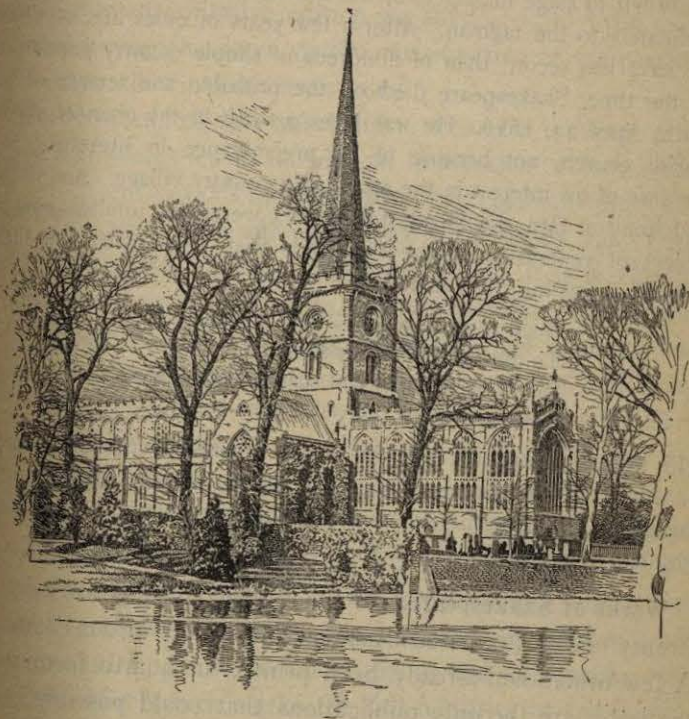
popular in London, and its dedication to the Earl of Southampton brought, according to tradition, a substantial money gift, which may have laid the foundation for Shakespeare's business success. He appears to have shrewdly invested his money, and soon became part owner of the Globe and Blackfriars theaters, in which his plays were presented by his own companies. His success and popularity grew amazingly. Within a decade of his unnoticed arrival in London he was one of the most famous actors and literary men in England.

Following his experimental work there came a succession of wonderful plays, — *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*. The great tragedies of this period are associated with a period of gloom and sorrow in the poet's life; but of its cause we have no knowledge. It may have been this unknown sorrow which turned his thoughts back to Stratford and caused, apparently, a dissatisfaction with his work and profession; but the latter is generally attributed to other causes. Actors and playwrights were in his day generally looked upon with suspicion or contempt; and Shakespeare, even in the midst of success, seems to have looked forward to the time when he could retire to Stratford to live the life of a farmer and country gentleman. His own and his father's families were first released from debt; then, in 1597, he bought New Place, the finest house in Stratford, and soon added a tract of farming land to complete his estate. His profession may have prevented his acquiring the title of "gentleman," or he may have only followed a custom of the time¹ when he applied for and obtained a coat of arms for his father, and so indirectly secured the title by inheritance. His home visits grew more and more frequent till, about the year 1611, he left London and retired permanently to Stratford.

Though still in the prime of life, Shakespeare soon abandoned his dramatic work for the comfortable life of a country gentleman. Of his later plays, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline*, *Winter's Tale*, and *Pericles* show a decided falling off from his previous work, and indicate another period of experimentation; this time not to test his own powers but to catch the fickle humor of the public. As is usually the case with a theater-going people, they soon turned from serious drama to sentimental or more questionable spectacles; and with Fletcher, who worked with Shakespeare and succeeded him as the

¹ See Lee's *Life of William Shakespeare*, pp. 188-196.

first playwright of London, the decline of the drama had already begun. In 1609, however, occurred an event which gave Shakespeare his chance for a farewell to the public. An English ship disappeared, and all on board were given up for lost. A year later the sailors returned home, and their arrival created intense excitement. They had been wrecked on the unknown Bermudas, and



TRINITY CHURCH, STRATFORD-ON-AVON

had lived there for ten months, terrified by mysterious noises which they thought came from spirits and devils. Five different accounts of this fascinating shipwreck were published, and the Bermudas became known as the "Ile of Divels." Shakespeare took this story — which caused as much popular interest as that later shipwreck which gave us *Robinson Crusoe* — and wove it into *The Tempest*. In the same year (1611) he probably sold his interest in the Globe and Blackfriars theaters, and his dramatic work was ended.

A few plays were probably left unfinished¹ and were turned over to Fletcher and other dramatists.

That Shakespeare thought little of his success and had no idea that his dramas were the greatest that the world ever produced seems evident from the fact that he made no attempt to collect or publish his works, or even to save his manuscripts, which were carelessly left to stage managers of the theaters, and so found their way ultimately to the ragman. After a few years of quiet life, of which we have less record than of hundreds of simple country gentlemen of the time, Shakespeare died on the probable anniversary of his birth, April 23, 1616. He was given a tomb in the chancel of the parish church, not because of his preëminence in literature, but because of his interest in the affairs of a country village. And in the sad irony of fate, the broad stone that covered his tomb — now an object of veneration to the thousands that yearly visit the little church — was inscribed as follows:

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here;
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones.

This wretched doggerel, over the world's greatest poet, was intended, no doubt, as a warning to some stupid sexton, lest he should empty the grave and give the honored place to some amiable gentleman who had given more tithes to the parish.

Works of Shakespeare. At the time of Shakespeare's death twenty-one plays existed in manuscripts in the various theaters. A few others had already been printed in quarto form, and the latter are the only publications that could possibly have met with the poet's own approval. More probably they were taken down in shorthand by some listener at the play and then "pirated" by some publisher for his own profit. The first printed collection of his plays, now called the First Folio (1623), was made by two actors, Heming and Condell, who asserted that they had access to the papers of the poet and had made a perfect edition, "in order to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive." This contains thirty-six

¹ Like *Henry VIII*, and possibly the lost *Cardenio*.

of the thirty-seven plays generally attributed to Shakespeare, *Pericles* being omitted. This celebrated First Folio was printed from playhouse manuscripts and from printed quartos containing many notes and changes by individual actors and stage managers. Moreover, it was full of typographical errors, though the editors alleged great care and accuracy; and so, though it is the only authoritative edition we have, it is of little value in determining the dates, or the classification of the plays as they existed in Shakespeare's mind.

Notwithstanding this uncertainty, a careful reading of the plays and poems leaves us with an impression of four different periods of work, probably corresponding with the growth and experience of the poet's life. These are: (1) a period of early experimentation. It is marked by youthfulness and exuberance of imagination, by extravagance of language, and by the frequent use of rimed couplets with his blank verse. The period dates from his arrival in London to 1595. Typical works of this first period are his early poems, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Richard III*. (2) A period of rapid growth and development, from 1595 to 1600. Such plays as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *Henry IV*, all written in this period, show more careful and artistic work, better plots, and a marked increase in knowledge of human nature. (3) A period of gloom and depression, from 1600 to 1607, which marks the full maturity of his powers. What caused this evident sadness is unknown; but it is generally attributed to some personal experience, coupled with the political misfortunes of his friends, Essex and Southampton. The *Sonnets* with their note of personal disappointment, *Twelfth Night*, which is Shakespeare's "farewell to mirth," and his great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Julius Cæsar*, belong to this period. (4) A period of restored serenity, of calm after storm, which marked the last years of the poet's literary work. *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*

are the best of his later plays; but they all show a falling off from his previous work, and indicate a second period of experimentation with the taste of a fickle public.

To read in succession four plays, taking a typical work from each of the above periods, is one of the very best ways of getting quickly at the real life and mind of Shakespeare. Following is a complete list with the approximate dates of his works, classified according to the above four periods.

FIRST PERIOD, EARLY EXPERIMENT. *Venus and Adonis*, *Rape of Lucrece*, 1594; *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI* (three parts), 1590-1591; *Love's Labour's Lost*, 1590; *Comedy of Errors*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1591-1592; *Richard III*, 1593; *Richard II*, *King John*, 1594-1595.

SECOND PERIOD, DEVELOPMENT. *Romeo and Juliet*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1595; *Merchant of Venice*, *Henry IV* (first part), 1596; *Henry IV* (second part), *Merry Wives of Windsor*, 1597; *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1598; *As You Like It*, *Henry V*, 1599.

THIRD PERIOD, MATURITY AND GLOOM. *Sonnets* (1600-?), *Twelfth Night*, 1600; *Taming of the Shrew*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, 1601-1602; *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, 1603; *Othello*, 1604; *King Lear*, 1605; *Macbeth*, 1606; *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Timon of Athens*, 1607.

FOURTH PERIOD, LATE EXPERIMENT. *Coriolanus*, *Pericles*, 1608; *Cymbeline*, 1609; *Winter's Tale*, 1610-1611; *The Tempest*, 1611; *Henry VIII* (unfinished).

Classification according to Source. In history, legend, and story, Shakespeare found the material for nearly all his dramas; and so they are often divided into three classes, called historical plays, like *Richard III* and *Henry V*; legendary or partly historical plays, like *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Julius Cæsar*; and fictional plays, like *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare invented few, if any, of the plots or stories upon which his dramas are founded, but borrowed them freely, after the custom of his age, wherever he found them. For his legendary and historical material he depended largely on *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, and on North's translation of Plutarch's famous *Lives*.



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After the portrait by John Everett Millais

A full half of his plays are fictional, and in these he used the most popular romances of the day, seeming to depend most on the Italian story-tellers. Only two or three of his plots, as in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*, are said to be original, and even these are doubtful. Occasionally Shakespeare made over an older play, as in *Henry VI*, *Comedy of Errors*, and *Hamlet*; and in one instance at least he seized upon an incident of shipwreck in which London was greatly interested, and made out of it the original and fascinating play of *The Tempest*, in much the same spirit which leads our modern playwrights when they dramatize a popular novel or a war story to catch the public fancy.

Classification according to Dramatic Type. Shakespeare's dramas are usually divided into three classes, called tragedies, comedies, and historical plays. Strictly speaking the drama has but two divisions, tragedy and comedy, in which are included the many subordinate forms of tragi-comedy, melodrama, lyric drama (opera), farce, etc. A tragedy is a drama in which the principal characters are involved in desperate circumstances or led by overwhelming passions. It is invariably serious and dignified. The movement is always stately, but grows more and more rapid as it approaches the climax; and the end is always calamitous, resulting in death or dire misfortune to the principals. As Chaucer's monk says, before he begins to "biwayle in maner of tragedie":

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie
Of him that stood in great prosperitee,
And is y-fallen out of heigh degree
Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly.

A comedy, on the other hand, is a drama in which the characters are placed in more or less humorous situations. The movement is light and often mirthful, and the play ends in general good will and happiness. The historical drama aims to present some historical age or character, and may be either a comedy or a tragedy. The following list includes