A VISIT TO STRATFORD-ON-AVON

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AMONG this year's most interesting commemorations must be noted the tercentenary of the publication of the First Folio of Shakespeare, England's greatest book, and—after the Bible—the most cherished possession of the English-speaking peoples. The words of Ben Jonson's famous panegyric are being verified, though the tributes of praise now extend far beyond his specified confines:

> Triumph, my Britain; thou hast one to show
> To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.

It is fitting for the world, far and wide, to recognize its debt to the pious labours of the poet's comrades, Heminges and Condell, who collected the plays "without ambition either of self-profit or fame, only to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive, as was our Shakespeare." The actual publication of the volume took place towards the end of 1623, after November 8th, when license was entered on the register of the Stationers' Company to publish sixteen hitherto unprinted plays under the title of *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies, printed in London by Isaac Jaggard and Ed. Blount, 1623.* Happily the British Museum has recently been enriched through a generous donor by the possession of a precious copy of the First Folio. This has the famous Droeshout frontispiece in its first state, before it was elaborated and darkened as in the engraving generally reproduced. The portrait—regarded as our only authentic likeness of Shakespeare—is signed in the left-hand corner "Martin Droeshout, sculpist, London," and is accompanied by the following verses ascribed to Ben Jonson:

To the Reader.

> This figure, that thou here sees put
> It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
> Wherein the Graver had a strife
> With Nature, to out-doo the life;
> O, could he but have drawne his wit

As well in brasse, as he hath hit
His face; the Print would then surpass
All that was ever writ in brasse.
But, since he cannot, Reader, looke
Not on his Picture, but his Booke.

This tribute, in conjunction with the following lines by John Milton who at the time of Shakespeare's death was a boy—the son of a prosperous London scrivener—prove the falsity of the view that Shakespeare was throughout life an obscure person, whom neither his contemporaries nor their immediate successors regarded as a genius:

What needs my Shakespeare for his honored bones
The labor of an age in piled stones?
Or that his hallowed reliques should be hid
Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyself a lasting monument.
For whilst to the shame of slow-endeavoring art
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,—
Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving,
And so sepulchred in such pomp dost lie
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

Various committees are now actively engaged in preparing for the commemoration in England, and the British Academy—of which the Earl of Balfour is President—has decided that the next annual Shakespeare Lecture shall be given by Professor A. W. Pollard, a recognised authority on Shakespearian bibiliography, on the publication of the First Folio. The Shakespeare Association, too, is initiating a survey of the poet's works in the different languages and countries of the world, under the general editorship of its chairman, Sir I. Gollancz.

St. George's Day celebrates not only the fame of the patron saint of England, but also the birth and death of her greatest writer. The day falls at a time when Stratford-on-Avon is arrayed in all the glory of an English spring, with the verdure looking its best, and the birds all in full song, as if to greet the season joyously and to welcome the large number of strangers who gather for the performance of the plays or to view the scenes amid which the poet spent his youth and his closing years. During our own stay in

Leamington we visited the quaint old market-town, so charmingly situated—fifteen miles distant—in the very heart of England, and found its atmosphere so imbued with the name and genius of its illustrious son that we echoed Washington Irving's words:

> The mind refuses to dwell on anything that is not connected with Shakespeare..... The whole place seems but his mausoleum.

The first object of interest seen after one arrives at Stratford is the massive Memorial Fountain and Clock Tower, with chimes, standing in Rother Market, which bears the following dedication:

> The gift of an American citizen, George W. Childs, of Philadelphia, to the town of Shakespeare in the Jubilee Year of Queen Victoria.

Over the drinking conduit is the line from *Timon of Athens*, "Honest water, which ne'er left man i' the mire". Beneath the triangular canopies terminating in representation of Puck, Mustard Seed, Peasblossom and Cobweb, are the following appropriate inscriptions:

> In her days every man shall eat in safety....not by blood.
> (*Henry VIII*, Act V., Scene 4)
>
> Ten thousand honours and blessings on the bard who has gilded the dull realities of life with innocent illusions.
> (Washington Irving's *Stratford-on-Avon.*)

Though the town of Stratford existed three centuries before the conquest and is referred to in the Domesday Book, its world-wide fame is centred largely on the two-storied, gabled house in Henley street, where in 1552 lived John Shakespeare, using the adjoining house (with communicating doorways) for his business as a woolstapler and glover. This unpretentions half-timbered structure with its dormer windows and wooden porch, the birth-place on April 23rd, 1564, of that "myriad-minded man"—William Shakespeare the third child of John and Mary Shakespeare—was (before the war) the shrine of 30,000 pilgrims of forty nationalities annually, since being carefully restored to its original appearance in 1857-8 by a committee of Trustees at a total cost of £6000.

Opening the antique latched door, the visitor steps at once into the small main room of the house—evidently used by the Shakespeare family as a sitting and dining room, and still retaining its original floor of worn and broken unsquared stones. On either side of the large fireplace are the familiar "ingle-nooks" of that period.

From hence a raised step leads to the doorway of the quaint old kitchen with its heavily-timbered low oak ceiling and leaded casement windows. Across the huge chimney runs a mantel consisting of a solid beam of oak, in which are hooks where once hung the cooking utensils; and on the left of the interior of the fireplace is a bacon cupboard just opposite an arched recess for a seat. The room has a Jacobean kitchen dresser, but unfortunately none of the original furniture of the house remains. The original oak staircase of ten steps (cased over, however, to preserve them) leads directly from the kitchen to the Birthroom, and there certainly cannot be a space of ten square feet in this world containing evidence of more intense human interest than does this small chamber as seen in the mass of hieroglyphics covering the timbered walls and ceiling. On the long low window-panes may be deciphered the signatures of Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Carlyle, and the blackened ceiling records the autographs of Browning, Helen Faucit, Byron, General and Mrs. Tom Thumb, Edmund and Charles Kean, among thousands of other famous people of several centuries, ranks and nationalities.

This room, which overlooks the street, has been the scene of the greatest joys and sorrows of the Shakespeare family, for doubtless here were born the eight of John Shakespeare's children; the probabilities are strong that both father and mother, as well as their daughter, Joan Hart, and her husband, died within its walls. The room to-day has its original fireplace, and the furniture consists of a large dower chest, chairs of finely-carved oak, and a small table upon which stands a desk formerly belonging to the old Priest's College (demolished in 1799) and a fine print of Garrick leaning against the bust of Shakespeare, the original of which—by Sir Joshua Reynolds—hangs in Stratford Town Hall. Of this interesting Birthroom Washington Irving said "This apartment in the sixteenth century, hung with painted cloths and appropriately furnished, would not have induced that idea of discomfort which now pervades it. Shakespeare was not born in a room enclosed by white-washed wall, and it must always be recollected that the house of the poet in its present state can at best only suggest a mere outline, from the existence of a few of the more enduring features of what it originally was."

From this room we pass into another at the rear where our attention is immediately riveted on the "Stratford" oil painting of the bard, which was presented to the Birthplace after £3000 had been refused for it. The portrait is fixed in an iron safe for protection, and is the only known painting of old date which represents

the poet in the same costume as in the monumental effigy in Holy Trinity Church. In addition to a portrait of the donor, Mr. W. O. Hunt of Stratford, clerk of the Peace for Warwickshire, may be also found here two ancient sign-boards announcing that "the immortal Shakespeare was born in this house." From the window of this room we look down upon the beautiful flower garden which is most ingeniously planted with specimens of all the flowers, shrubs and fruit trees mentioned in Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, while the central walk contains the base of a fourteenth century Market-Cross of Stratford.

The portion of the house formerly used as a woolshop is now utilised as a Museum of relics connected with the poet and his times; and among these are an old desk from the Grammar school at which he is reputed to have sat, a sword and a gold signet ring, probably worn on the forefinger and having the initials "W. S." intertwined with the Elizabethan Knot much used on seals of that period. Among the deeds in connection with the family is an Indenture made in 1596 of the purchase of the Birthplace, to which is attached John Shakespeare's mark. On the upper floor is a cabinet containing volumes of notes illustrating the poet's plays, and a letter found amongst the Corporation Records in 1793, written by Richard Quincy, soliciting in 1598 a loan of thirty pounds for Shakespeare—the only existing specimen of the bard's correspondence. Numerous portraits, engravings and photographs of Shakespeare are there; also a perfect copy of his great First Folio (1623); copies, too, of the Second, Third and Fourth Folios, and early Quarto editions of several plays—some of them published during the poet's lifetime.

Continuing to High St., we had our attention next arrested by the quaint old building known as Harvard House, bearing on its finely carved timbered front the date 1596. Erected by Thomas Rogers, an Alderman of Stratford—whose daughter, Katherine, married John Harvard, from whom sprang the founder of the famous University—it has been lately restored under the direction of Miss Marie Corelli, and will probably be used as a gathering-place for Americans in Stratford.

As is well known, Shakespeare went to London about 1585, but returned to his native town to spend the closing years of his life in the mansion which he called "New Place," of which only the foundations now remain. Built orginally by Sir Hugh Clopton in the reign of Henry VII, the house had probably fallen into disrepair when Shakespeare purchased it in 1597 for sixty pounds; but he restored it to suit his own views, and planted an orchard as

well as a smaller flower-garden near the house. Here he died on April 23rd, 1616, and the property descended to his daughter, Susanna; her mother probably died here in 1623, as well as her husband, John Hall, in 1635.

Eight years later Henrietta Maria, Queen of Charles I, was entertained here by Mrs. Hall for three days till joined by Prince Rupert, who conducted her to the King. The property was eventually sold, one of the owners being the Rev. Francis Gastrell, Vicar of Frodsham, Cheshire, who razed the building to the ground in order to evade the taxes levied by the Corporation, and also cut down the famous mulberry tree planted in the garden by Shakespeare in 1609, because he was so "pestered" by visitors desirous to see it. The site was finally acquired as national property in 1861, and the grounds are now converted into an ornamental garden open to the public during the summer months. Magnificent roses and pansies of all colours filled the beautifully decorative beds, which are laid out to represent the letters "W. S." and 1564-1616; an ivy-covered well from which the house obtained water still remains, as well as two mulberry trees—slips from the original tree.

Overlooking these grounds, which are surrounded by a railing with the gilt-initials "W. S." on all the posts, is the picturesque group of buildings comprising the ancient Guild, Chapel of the Holy Cross, and the Grammar School, which still serves in that capacity as in Shakespeare's day. Here the future "poet of Nature" received his early education—"small Latin and less Greek" as Ben Jonson says—and his first introduction to the drama is surmised to have taken place in the Guild Hall below, during the visits of some strolling players. The venerable gray tower of the Guild Chapel has witnessed many interesting events in this old town, and its clock, which admonished the boy Shakespeare as he "crept like a snail unwillingly to school," still regulates the movements of the burgesses; while its great bell, that tolled when the poet's remains were carried past to their resting-place, yet rings the curfew every winter evening as it has pealed for centuries.

Just opposite these historic buildings and the ancient timber-fronted Alms-houses in Church street, stands the creeper-clad residence of Miss Marie Corelli, which is noticeable from the lavish profusion of flowers displayed in perfect taste in its carved oak window boxes. This antique brick and timbered building of the Elizabethan period, known as Masoncraft, has still its quaint gables and dormer windows, and has been the home of the distinguished novelist for several years.

The winding road leads for a quarter of a mile from the Birthplace over "this classic ground," as Boswell called it, to Holy Trinity Church—a stately cruciform edifice so admirably situated on the bank of the Avon and worthy of its world-wide fame as the poet's resting-place. The approach is by an avenue of pollarded lime-trees, the boughs of which interlace, admitting fitful streaks of golden sunshine over the buttressed porch and panelled oak doors of the venerable pile. The Sanctuary knocker—which in olden times afforded criminals refuge as soon as it was grasped—is an iron monk's head with a large ring through the mouth, dating from the thirteenth century. This imposing pointed Gothic church consists of a nave with aisles, transepts and chancel, but has been so much altered as to lose many of its original characteristics. The grey marble pulpit was given by Sir Theodore Martin in memory of his wife, Helen Faucit; and the central crowned figure of St. Helena, bearing a cross on her left arm and three nails in her right hand, is modelled after the face of the famous actress. Among the monuments are recumbent figures of the Clopton family as well as a memorial to the Earl of Stafford and his son, Sir Thomas Stafford. Two ladders of Shakespeare's time and two stone heads taken from the old college building are here treasured, as well as the Union Jack given by King Edward VII.

A very fine stained glass window in a side chapel was presented to the church by American friends, and depicts—besides the Epiphany and Madonna and Child—the figures of Americus Vespucius, Christopher Columbus, William Penn, and the Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers on Plymouth Rock. The east window—the gift of an Englishwoman—shows the patron saints of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales; while the choir, divided from the transepts by a fifteenth-century oak screen, has antique stalls with *miserere* seats carved in grotesque designs of animals, jesters, monks' heads, etc. The finest of the choir windows represents the Seven Ages of Man—another gift at a cost of $1,250 from American admiers, and the scenes were kindly pointed out by the rector as being (1) The Finding of Moses, (2) Samuel being presented by Hannah, (3) Jacob saluting Rachael, (4) Joshua on horseback, (5) King Solomon deciding about the children, (6) Abraham talking with the angels, (7) Isaac blessing Esau.

On the wall of the chancel is the famous monumental bust of Shakespeare—the work of Gerard Johnson, a sculptor of Southwark—generally believed to have been modelled from a cast taken after death and erected, as the verses of Leonard Digges in the first edition of the plays show, at some period before the year 1623.

It consists of a bust of the poet in an ornamental arch between two black marble Corinthian columns surmounted by a death's head, under which appear armorial bearings with the motto *Mon sauz droict.* On each side is a cherub in a sitting position, that on the left holding a spade in his left hand and that on the right—whose eyes are closed—having in his left hand an inverted torch while his right rests on a skull, as emblems of mortality. In 1861 the original colouring of this lifesize bust—obliterated by Edmund Malone, the critic, about 1793—was restored, and to-day we find the eyes of light hazel hue, the hair and beard of auburn. It may be regarded as one of the best portraits of the bard extant. The dress consists of a scarlet doublet, slashed on the breast and covered with a loose seamless black gown with plain bands around the neck and white wristbands; the lower part of the cushion in front of the bust is crimson, and the upper part green with gilt tassels. Underneath is the following inscription.

Judicio Pylium, Genio Socratem, Arte Maronem
Terra tegit, populus maeret, Olympus habet.

Or: "In wisdom a Nestor, in genius a Socrates, in art a Virgil, The earth shrouds him, The nation mourns him, Olympus guards him"; and the well known lines

Stay Passenger, why goest thou by so fast?
Read, if thou canst, whom envious Death has plast
Within this monument Shakespeare, with whome
Quicke nature dide: whose name doth deck ys Tombe
Far more than cost; sich (sith) all yt he hath writt
Leaves living Art, but page to serve his witt.
obiit Ano Doi 1616, *aetatis* 53, *die* 23 *Ap.*

Immediately below the monument and within the altar rails are the gravestones of the Shakespeare family, owing to the purchase of the great tithes by the poet, and a small brass plate set into the flat stone is inscribed—

"Here lyeth interred the body of Anne, wife of William Shakespeare who depted this life the 6th day of Aug. 1623, being of the age of 67 yeares."

Next comes the slab over the poet's grave with its famous lines:

Good frend, for Jesus' sake, forbeare
To digg the dust encloased heare;
Bleste be ye man yt spares these stones
And curst be he yt moves my bones.

This epitaph is said to have been written by Shakespeare himself, in view of the fact that there then existed a charnel house in the church containing a vast collection of bones thrown up when fresh graves were dug, and horror of the piles of skulls no doubt prompted the lines. It will be remembered that while a statue was erected to the poet in Westminster Abbey in 1740, no attempt has been made to translate his ashes thither after this strong anathema.

In the north aisle on a modern shaft is the broken font in which the poet was baptized, and the old Register of the Church (guarded under glass) lies open at the pages recording that event and his burial (1564 and 1616). It contains many other entries concerning the family, photographs of which hang above it for examination; while a large chained Bible of the 1611 edition, bearing on its cover the date 1695, is found near the door.

Leaving this interesting church, we strolled through the graveyard to the quiet terrace overlooking the beautiful Avon, which as of yore

> Makes sweet music with the enamelled stones,
> Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
> He overtaketh in his pilgrimage.

Following a lane beside the river bank we next reach the imposing and picturesque Shakespeare Memorial—a red brick structure of early Elizabethan style—erected by public subscription, largely supplemented by the liberality of the late Mr. Charles Edgar Flower, who gave upwards of £25,000. Since 1879 Shakespearian Festivals have been annually held in its pretty theatre (except during the war)—at first for a few days, now extended to three weeks —about twenty-one performances being given. It has been a rule to make a special feature of the reproduction of one play yearly, called the "revival" play—this year *Measure for Measure* being chosen, and in this way some thirty of Shakespeare's dramas have been presented, in recent years usually by Sir Frank Benson's well-known company.

Shakespeare's birthday, April 23rd, is always included within the period, and on that—St. George's Day—a floral procession to Holy Trinity Church takes place. On the ground floor of the Memorial Building is a Library filled with oak presses intended to contain every procurable edition of Shakespeare's plays and the works associated with his name and history, as well as general dramatic literature published in any part of the globe. These latter include critical, controversial, bibliographical, biographical, historical, histrionic, topographical and antiquarian treatises,

stage histories, biographies of famous actors and works bearing upon the history of Stratford and the neighborhood. An arched stone staircase of twenty-seven steps leading to the Picture Gallery is lighted by very artistic stained-glass lancet windows representing the "Seven Ages of Man," with a portrait of Queen Elizabeth at the bottom and Shakespeare at the head of the stairs. Perhaps the greatest attraction is its central tower—one hundred and thirty feet high—from whose balcony are afforded magnificent views of the surrounding orchards and fertile meadows studded o'er with "freckled cowslips", "daisies pied" and "lady smocks all silver white", and the manifold natural beauties which Shakespeare depicted with such exquisite grace and fidelity in one of his sonnets:

> Full many a glorious morning have I seen
> Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye;
> Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
> Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.

The moonlight scene in *The Merchant of Venice* was first enacted upon the banks of the Avon:—

> How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank,
> Here will we sit, and let the sound of music
> Creep in our ears; soft stillness of the night
> Becomes the touches of sweet harmony.
> Sit, Jessica, look how the floor of heaven
> Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.
> There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
> But in his motion like an angel sings
> Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims.
> Such harmony is in immortal souls;
> But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
> Does grossly close us in, we cannot hear it.

The Picture Gallery, lighted from above, has many of the choicest works of Art on Shakesperian subjects, including "Othello's Return" by Stothard; "Titania Reposing" by George Romney; "Macbeth and the Witches" by H. J. Challon; "Death of Cardinal Beaufort" by Sir J. Reynolds; also fine engravings and portraits of Mrs. Siddons, John Philip Kemble, David Garrick, and many other dramatic celebrities, as well as the famous "Droeshout Original" portrait of Shakespeare, added to the collection through the generosity of Mrs. Flower.

The fine drop scene representing the "State Procession of Queen Elizabeth to the opening of the Globe Theatre" was raised for the inaugural performance at this Memorial Theatre on April

23rd, 1879, with the comedy *Much Ado about Nothing*, when Helen Faucit made her final appearance on the stage. The theatre has also been the scene of many notable revivals of Shakesperian plays not usually staged, such as *Timon of Athens, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus*, and *Pericles*; while works of contemporary and other authors have also been presented, as Marlowe's *Edward II*, Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*, and Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. It was here too that Miss Mary Anderson, the brilliant American actress, made her debut as "Rosalind" (1895). In the ornamental Bancroft Garden attached to the Memorial, laid out as a pleasure ground in 1867, also at the expense of the late Mr. Charles Flower, stands the tasteful Shakespeare Monument, modelled (1888) by the donor, Lord Ronald Gower, who also designed the buildings. Crowning this handsome group of statuary is a seated figure of Shakespeare, pen in hand, apparently gazing in pensive attitude at the church in which lie his remains. Four other life-size figures stand on projecting bases representing varied attributes of dramatic arts. Tragedy is embodied by the figure of Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene; Comedy by that of Falstaff seated at his ease at Boar's Head Tavern with an empty sack-cup in his hand; Philosophy by a finely-modelled figure of Hamlet who sits musing over Yorick's skull; and History by Prince Hal in the act of assuming his father's crown—the figure being singularly graceful. Tragic and comic masks are placed at the corners of the statues, and the intervening spaces are filled with appropriate quotations from the bard.

No visit to Stratford would be complete without a pilgrimage along a chestnut walk to the little village of Shottery, about a mile distant, to see the half-timbered, thatch-roofed, ivy-covered cottage, in a rustic garden, where tradition says Shakespeare wooed and married Anne Hathaway. On entering, one finds a charming old room lighted by latticed windows, its wide fireplace having a cosy oak settee, and containing two or three chairs, a little round table covered with a plaid cloth, an old dresser, a frame of shelves and a stove chimney on which is carved "I. H. 1697"; while the cross-bar of the cupboard door also bears the same date with the initials "I. H.; E. H.; I. B." Up a narrow, winding stairway you climb to Anne's bedroom with its antique bedstead and carved chest containing some homespun linen. In 1892 this historic property was purchased by the Trustees of Shakespeare's Birthplace for £3500, and the walls of its principal rooms are lined with mementos from distinguished artists, poets, actors and others who have proved part of its pilgrim band.

Proceeding back to the town, we reach the great stone bridge erected in Tudor times by Sir Hugh Clopton, Lord Mayor of London, and gaze entranced from its parapet at the exquisite reflection of the graceful church spire and theatre in the placid river as it meanders through the poppy-strewn meadows, where the poet must often have stood with "the willow leaning aslant the stream" and listened to "the lark singing at heaven's gates". One instinctively strives to recall from his works references to the beautiful rural picture. In fact the inhabitants of Stratford maintain that nothing in his plays or sonnets is more convincingly local than his allusion to the characteristic shyness of that tiny waterfowl, the lesser 'grebe' or dabchick in *Venus and Adonis*:

> Like a dive dapper, peering through a wave,
> Who being look'd on, ducks as quickly in.

They say that the "bard of Avon" learned the habits of the bird from watching them on this picturesque old bridge.