

# Preface

The writings of Shakespeare have been justly termed “the richest, the purest, the fairest, that genius uninspired ever penned.” Shakespeare instructed by delighting. His plays alone (leaving mere science out of the question), contain more actual wisdom than the whole body of English learning.

He is the teacher of all good—pity, generosity, true courage, love. His bright wit is cut out “into little stars.” His solid masses of knowledge are meted out in morsels and proverbs, and thus distributed, there is scarcely a corner of the English-speaking world to-day which he does not illuminate, or a cottage which he does not enrich.

His bounty is like the sea, which, though often unacknowledged, is everywhere felt. As his friend, Ben Jonson, wrote of him, “He was not of an age but for all time.” He ever kept the highroad of human life whereon all travel. He did not pick out by-paths of feeling and sentiment.

In his creations we have no moral highwaymen, sentimental thieves, interesting villains, and amiable, elegant adventuresses—no delicate entanglements of situation, in which the grossest images are presented to the mind disguised under the superficial attraction of style and sentiment.

He flattered no bad passion, disguised no vice in the garb of virtue, trifled with no just and generous principle. While causing us to laugh at folly, and shudder at crime, he still preserves our love for our fellow-beings, and our reverence for ourselves.

Shakespeare was familiar with all beautiful forms and images, with all that is sweet or majestic in the simple aspects of nature, of that indestructible love of flowers and fragrance, and dews, and clear waters—and soft airs and sounds, and bright skies and woodland solitudes, and moon-light bowers, which are the material elements of poetry,—and with that fine sense of their indefinable relation to mental emotion, which is its essence and vivifying soul—and which, in the midst of his most busy and tragical scenes, falls like gleams of sunshine on rocks and ruins—contrasting with all that is rugged or repulsive, and reminding us of the existence of purer and brighter elements.

These things considered, what wonder is it that the works of Shakespeare, next to the Bible, are the most highly esteemed of all the classics of English literature. “So extensively have the characters of Shakespeare been drawn upon by artists, poets, and writers of fiction,” says an American author,—“So interwoven are these characters in the great body of English literature, that to be ignorant of the plot of these dramas is often a cause of embarrassment.” But Shakespeare wrote for grown-up people, for men and women, and in words that little folks cannot understand.

Hence this volume. To reproduce the entertaining stories contained in the plays of Shakespeare, in a form so simple that young people can understand and enjoy them, was the object had in view by the author of these Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare.



William Shakespeare  
(1564-1616)

*It may be said of Shakespeare, that from his works may be collected a system of civil and economical prudence. He has been imitated by all succeeding writers; and it may be doubted whether from all his successors more maxims of theoretical knowledge, or more rules of practical prudence can be collected than he alone has given to his country.*

*—Dr. Samuel Johnson*



Samuel Johnson  
(1709-1784)



Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford

## A BRIEF LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

In the register of baptisms of the parish church of Stratford-upon-Avon, a market town in Warwickshire, England, appears, under date of April 26, 1564, the entry of the baptism of William, the son of John Shakespeare. The entry is in Latin—"Gulielmus filius Johannis Shakespeare."

The date of William Shakespeare's birth has usually been taken as three days before his baptism, but there is certainly no evidence of this fact. The family name was variously spelled, the dramatist himself not always spelling it in the same way. While in the baptismal record the name is spelled "Shakespeare," in several authentic autographs of the dramatist it reads "Shaksper," and in the first edition of his works it is

printed “Shakespeare.”

Halliwell tells us, that there are not less than thirty-four ways in which the various members of the Shakespeare family wrote the name.

Shakespeare’s father, while an alderman at Stratford, appears to have been unable to write his name, but as at that time nine men out of ten were content to make their mark for a signature, the fact is not specially to his discredit.

The traditions and other sources of information about the occupation of Shakespeare’s father differ. He is described as a butcher, a wool-stapler, and a glover, and it is not impossible that he may have been all of these simultaneously or at different times, or that if he could not properly be called any one of them, the nature of his occupation was such as to make it easy to understand how the various traditions sprang up.

He was a landed proprietor and cultivator of his own land even before his marriage, and he received with his wife, who was Mary Arden, daughter of a country gentleman, the estate of Asbies, 56 acres in extent.

William was the third child. The two older than he were daughters, and both probably died in infancy. After him was born three sons and a daughter. For ten or twelve years at least, after Shakespeare’s birth his father continued to be in easy circumstances. In the year 1568 he was the high bailiff or chief magistrate of Stratford, and for many years afterwards he held the position of alderman as he had done for three years before.

To the completion of his tenth year, therefore, it is natural to suppose that William Shakespeare would get the best education that Stratford could afford. The free school of the

town was open to all boys and like all the grammar-schools of that time, was under the direction of men who, as graduates of the universities, were qualified to diffuse that sound scholarship which was once the boast of England.

There is no record of Shakespeare's having been at this school, but there can be no rational doubt that he was educated there. His father could not have procured for him a better education anywhere. To those who have studied Shakespeare's works without being influenced by the old traditional theory that he had received a very narrow education, they abound with evidences that he must have been solidly grounded in the learning, properly so called, was taught in the grammar schools.

Nor was Stratford shut out from the general world, as many country towns are. It was a great highway, and dealers with every variety of merchandise resorted to its markets. The eyes of the poet dramatist must always have been open for observation. But nothing is known positively of Shakespeare from his birth to his marriage to Anne Hathaway in 1582, and from that date nothing but the birth of three children until we find him an actor in London about 1589.

How long acting continued to be Shakespeare's sole profession we have no means of knowing, but it is in the highest degree probable that very soon after arriving in London he began that work of adaptation by which he is known to have begun his literary career.

To improve and alter older plays not up to the standard that was required at the time was a common practice even among the best dramatists of the day, and Shakespeare's abilities

would speedily mark him out as eminently fitted for this kind of work. When the alterations in plays originally composed by other writers became very extensive, the work of adaptation would become in reality a work of creation. And this is exactly what we have examples of in a few of Shakespeare's early works, which are known to have been founded on older plays.

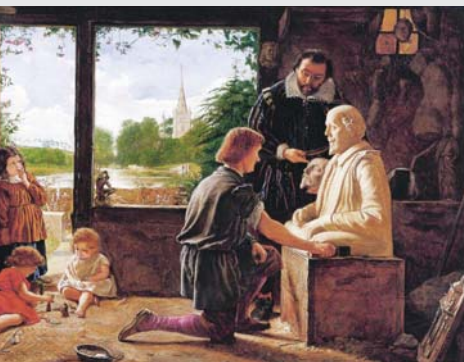
It is unnecessary here to extol the published works of the world's greatest dramatist. Criticism has been exhausted upon them, and the finest minds of England, Germany, and America have devoted their powers to an elucidation of their worth.

Shakespeare died at Stratford on the 23rd of April, 1616. Shakespeare's fellow-actors, fellow-dramatists, and those who knew him in other ways, agree in expressing not only admiration of his genius, but their respect and love for the man. Ben Jonson said, "I love 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."

He was buried on the second day after his death, on the north side of the chancel of Stratford church. Over his grave there is a flat stone with this inscription, said to have been

written by himself:

*Good friend for Jesus sake forbear  
To digg the dust enclosed heare:  
Blest be ye man yt spares these  
stone,  
And curst be he yt moves my bones.*



Shakespeare's funerary monument

# 1 Hamlet





Hamlet was the only son of the King of Denmark. He loved his father and mother dearly—and was happy in the love of a sweet lady named Ophelia. Her father, Polonius, was the King’s Chamberlain.

While Hamlet was away studying at Wittenberg, his father died. Young Hamlet hastened home in great grief to hear that a serpent<sup>1</sup> had stung the King, and that he was dead. The young Prince had loved his father so tenderly that you may judge what he felt when he found that the Queen, before yet the King had been laid in the ground a month, had determined to marry again—and to marry the dead King’s brother.

Hamlet refused to put off mourning<sup>2</sup> for the wedding.

“It is not only the black I wear on my body,” he said, “that proves my loss. I wear mourning in my heart for my dead father. His son at least remembers him, and grieves<sup>3</sup> still.”

Then said Claudius the King’s brother, “This grief is unreasonable. Of course you must sorrow at the loss of your father, but . . .”

“Ah,” said Hamlet, bitterly, “I cannot in one little month forget those I love.”

1 serpent [ˈsɜːr.pənt] (n.) a snake, especially a large one 大蛇

2 mourning [ˈmɔːr.nɪŋ] (n.) the period during which somebody’s death is mourned 服喪

3 grieve [ɡriːv] (v.) to feel or express great sadness 悲傷



With that the Queen and Claudius left him, to make merry over their wedding, forgetting the poor good King who had been so kind to them both.

And Hamlet, left alone, began to wonder and to question as to what he ought to do. For he could not believe the story about the snake-bite. It seemed to him all too plain that the wicked Claudius had killed the King, so as to get the crown and marry the Queen. Yet he had no proof, and could not accuse Claudius. And while he was thus thinking came Horatio, a fellow student of his, from Wittenberg.

“What brought you here?” asked Hamlet, when he had greeted his friend kindly.



Hamlet, Prince of Denmark



“I came, my lord, to see your father’s funeral<sup>4</sup>.”

“I think it was to see my mother’s wedding,” said Hamlet, bitterly. “My father! We shall not look upon his like again.”

“My lord,” answered Horatio, “I think I saw him yesternight<sup>5</sup>.”

Then, while Hamlet listened in surprise, Horatio told how he, with two gentlemen of the guard, had seen the King’s ghost on the battlements<sup>6</sup>.

Hamlet went that night, and true enough, at midnight, the ghost of the King, in the armor he had been wont<sup>7</sup> to wear, appeared on the battlements in the chill<sup>8</sup> moonlight.

Hamlet was a brave youth. Instead of running away from the ghost he spoke to it—and when it beckoned<sup>9</sup> him he followed it to a quiet place, and there the ghost told him that what he had suspected was true.

4 funeral [ˈfjuːnərəl] (n.) a ceremony for burying or burning the body of a dead person 喪禮

5 yesternight [ˈjestənaɪt] (ad.) on the last night [古] 昨天夜裡

6 battlements [ˈbætlmənts] (n.) (pl.) a low wall around the top of a castle, that has spaces to shoot guns or arrows through  
設有槍砲眼的城垛

7 wont [wɔːnt] (a.) be accustomed 習慣於

8 chill [tʃɪl] (a.) unpleasantly cold 寒冷的

9 beckon [ˈbɛkən] (v.) to move your hand or head in a way that tells someone to come nearer 招手示意