

supposed to be genuine. We know that he bought some land—that he had two or three law-suits. We know the names of his children. We also know that this incomparable man—so apart from, and so familiar with, all the world—lived during his literary life in London—that he was an actor, dramatist and manager—that he returned to Stratford, the place of his birth,—that he gave his writings to negligence, deserted the children of his brain—that he died on the anniversary of his birth at the age of fifty-two, and that he was buried in the church where the images had been defaced, and that on his tomb was chiseled a rude, absurd and ignorant epitaph.

No letter of his to any human being has been found, and no line written by him can be shown.

And here let me give my explanation of the epitaph. Shakespeare was an actor—a disreputable business—but he made money—always reputable. He came back from London a rich man. He bought land, and built houses. Some of the supposed great probably treated him with deference. When he died he was buried in the church. Then came a reaction. The pious thought the church had been profaned. They did not feel that the ashes of an actor were fit to lie in holy ground. The people began to say the body ought to be removed. Then it was, as I believe, that Dr. John Hall, Shakespeare's son-in-law, had this epitaph cut on the tomb:

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

Certainly Shakespeare could have had no fear that his tomb would be violated. How could it have entered his mind to have put a warning, a threat and a blessing, upon his grave? But the ignorant people of that day were no doubt convinced that the epitaph was the voice of the dead, and so feeling they feared to invade the tomb. In this way the dust was left in peace.

This epitaph gave me great trouble for years. It puzzled me to explain why he, who erected the intellectual pyramids,—great ranges of mountains—should put such a pebble at his tomb. But when I stood beside the grave and read the ignorant words, the explanation I have given flashed upon me.