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SHAKESPEARE.

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I.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE was the greatest genius of our world. He left to us the richest legacy of all the dead—the treasures of the rarest soul that ever lived and loved and wrought of words the statues, pictures, robes and gems of thought. He was the greatest man who ever touched this grain of sand and tear we call the world.

It is hard to overstate the debt we owe to the men and women of genius. Take from our world what they have given, and all the niches would be empty, all the walls naked—meaning and connection would fall from words of poetry and fiction, music would go back to common air, and all the forms of subtle and enchanting Art would lose proportion, and become the unmeaning waste and shattered spoil of thoughtless Chance.

Shakespeare is too great a theme. I feel as though endeavoring to grasp a globe so large that the hand obtains no hold. He who would worthily speak of the great dramatist should be inspired by “a muse of fire that should ascend the brightest heaven of invention”—he should have “a kingdom for a stage, and monarchs to behold the swelling scene.”

More than three centuries ago, the most intellectual of the human race was born. He was not of supernatural origin. At his birth there were no celestial pyrotechnics. His father and mother were both English, and both had the cheerful habit of living in this world. The cradle in which he was rocked was canopied by neither myth nor miracle, and in his veins there was no drop of royal blood.

This babe became the wonder of mankind. Neither of his parents could read or write. He grew up in a small and ignorant village on the banks of the Avon, in the midst of the common people of three hundred years ago. There was nothing in the peaceful, quiet landscape on which he looked, nothing in the low hills, the cultivated and undulating fields, and nothing in the murmuring stream, to excite the imagination—