

In the long run he was blessed for it, not only in his fame and in the "blessings of the basket and of the store," but also in the *supreme* blessing of a sweet and gracious and tranquil home whence emanated some of his most marvellous conceptions. If his wife did not altogether fill his "ideal," and if for a time he lavished his sentiment elsewhere, it is too common a conjugal experience for the marriage to be thereupon branded as "disastrous" or "unhappy." Who can tell how he might have wasted himself in a wild career in London had he not left behind him in Stratford close ties always tugging at his heart strings? The latest discovery that people often make is the discovery of the romance that they have overlooked at their own hearth-stone, and many never stumble upon it at all! Certain, it is, that exquisite and cherished *daughters* form the most poetic figures in Shakspeare's later plays, and that in the very last of all, "The Winter's Tale," the heroine is the patient and injured *wife* who had been misconceived for sixteen years, i. e., about as long as Shakspeare lived away from home in London.

From the church we retraced our steps through the town to the sordid cottage where Shakspeare was born, and which has been so often described that I will only say of it, that though it looks rude to us it was probably a far better house in its day than it seems now, when the comforts and luxuries of life have so immensely increased, and the standard is so much raised. They told us that it was visited by about 10,000 persons a year! I saw the deed by which his father secured the property, and it was only signed with his *mark*. Think of Shakspeare's parents not being able to write! But though his father was only a tradesman, his mother, like the sacred mother of Our Lord, was of gentle blood, and descended from an old family. Her name, too, was Mary, and what aspirations backward toward her father's lineage must have smouldered within her to have flamed upon the world in such a master of language and of all lofty situations as Shakspeare! I have long thought, by the way, that the hymn of the Virgin Mary after the Annunciation, betokened anything but the meek and lowly spirit usually attributed to her. It is rather the pæan of a free and high nature, which had deeply felt its personal and family and national humiliations, and was rejoicing in

the prospect of their termination. Perhaps "the sword had to pierce through her own heart also" before she thoroughly comprehended that "humility" which she was to place upon the brow of her sex as the true crown of perfect womanhood. Alas! it is a crown we American women seem too much inclined to scoff at and fling away; but some of the women of Shakspeare's family must have worn it in all its soft and perfumed, if thorn-lined, loveliness, or he never could have painted women as he did. The type still characterizes his native land. "They are like flowers," said a keen observer to me in speaking of Englishwomen. "They are all, even the reckless ones, like flowers; while in France even the ladies seem to belong to the demi-monde."

In driving finally away, we left the town by a road which follows the river on the side opposite the church, and it was a little way below the latter, in giving my last look at the quiet, quiet stream bordered with its perennial reeds, that I suddenly realized that SHAKSPEARE must often have stood precisely there and seen everything with his living eyes that I was then gazing at with mine. I even thought of him as a boy with his trousers turned up, wading down barefoot among those reeds; and it is impossible to express or to explain why that excessively simple landscape, that common-place scene, should have been so wondrously appropriate to him. But so it was.

Stratford as a whole seemed to me the most sacred place I was ever in. Not the church alone, as some have said, but the whole town is but a monument to Shakspeare, and the spell of that mighty spirit casts such a repose over the place that one longs to lay down the agitations of life and take up a calm and contemplative abode there. It is a neat, primitive, hushed little village, with wide stone-paved streets, and low continuous cottages opening directly on to them. The only wonder to me is that it has been permitted to remain so small. One would think that loads of people would have liked to live there. But no doubt this very all-pervadingness of Shakspeare's presence encroaches too much upon the precious self-hood, and lesser mortals would either have to profane it by forgetting it or be subdued by it. So it is well that the world has almost unanimously declined to reside in Stratford, and that from that time to this the Great One