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SHAKSPEARE.

—
AN ODE

FOR

His Three-hundredth Birthday.

—

¶

Immortal! risen to thy Rest,
Immortal! throned among the Blest,
Immortal! long an heir sublime
Of realms outreaching space and time,—
How shall we dare, or hope, to raise
A fitting homage of high praise
To please thy Spirit, sphered on high
Where planets roll and comets fly?
How may not thy pure fame be marr'd
By the damp breath of earthly bard,
Presuming in his zeal too bold
To gild the bright refinèd gold?

Or how canst Thou, fill'd with GOD's love,
And tranced among the faints above,
Endure that men should seem and be
Idolators in praise of Thee ?
Forgive our love, forgive our zeal,—
We cannot guess how spirits feel ;
And may our homage offered thus
Please HIM who made both thee, and us !



Immortal also on this darker Earth
As in those brightest spheres,
Now will we consecrate our Shakspeare's birth,
This day three hundred years !
And so from age to age for evermore
His glory shall extend,
With men of every land the wide world o'er,
Till Time itself shall end !
For, he is our's ; and well with pride and joy
England may bless her son,
The Stratford scholar and the Warwick boy
That every crown hath won !
Let others boast their wisest and their best,
To each a prize may fall ;
Genius gives one apiece to all the rest,
But Shakspeare claims them all !

A Homer, in majestic eloquence,
 A Terence, for keen wit and stinging sense,
 Brighter than Pindar in his loftiest flight,
 Darker than Æschylus for deeds of night,
 An Ovid, in the story-pictured page,
 A Juvenal, to lash the vicious age,
 Graceful as Horace and more skill'd to please,
 Tender as pity-stirring Sophocles,
 Free as Anacreon, as Martial neat,
 Than Virgil's self more delicately sweet,—
 O let those ancients bend before Thee now,
 And pile their many chaplets on one brow!—
 Milton was great, and of divinest song,
 Spenser melodious, Chaucer rough and strong,—
 The vigorous Dryden, and the classic Gray,
 And awful Dante, soaring far away,
 Schiller and Goethe, stirring up the strife,
 And Molière, dropping laughter into life,
 Burns, a full spring of nature, Hood of wit,
 And Tennyson, most rare and exquisite,
 To each and all belongs the laurell'd crown,—
 And woe to him who drags their honours down,—
 Yet, Shakspeare, Thou wert all these lights combined,
 O many-sided crystal of mankind!

The jealous Moor, the thoughtful Dane,
 The witty rare fat knight,

And grand old Lear half-insane,
And fell Iago's spite,
And Romeo's love, and Tybalt's hate,
And Bolingbroke in regal state,
And he that murdered sleep,—
And ruthless Shylock's bloody bond,
And Prosper with his broken wand
Long buried fathoms deep !
Frank Juliet too,—and that soft pair
Helen and Hermia, lilies fair
As growing on one stem,
Love-crazed Ophelia, drown'd, ah ! drown'd,
And wanton Cleopatra, crown'd
With Egypt's diadem ;
The young Miranda most admired,
Cordelia's filial heart,
Sly Beatrice with wit inspired,
And Ariel's tricksey part,
Fair Rosalind,—sweet banishèd,
And gentle Desdemona—dead !—
Ay, these — all these, and crowds beside,
Heroes, jesters, courtiers, clowns,
Girls in grief, or kings in pride,
Threats and crimes, and jokes, and frowns,
Witches, fairies, ghosts, and elves,
All our fancies, all ourselves,—
O ! Thou hast pictured with thy pen
All phases of all hearts of men,
And in thy various page survives
The Panorama of our lives !

Quoniam unthought before,
 O miracle of self-taught lore,
 A universe of wit and worth,
 The admirable Man of earth,
 There is nor thing, nor thought, nor whim,
 Untouch'd and unadorn'd by him ;
 No theme un Sung, no truth untold
 Of Earth's museum, new or old :
 All Nature's hidden things he saw,
 Intuitive to every law ;
 Glancing with supernal scan
 At all the knowledge spelt by man ;
 While, for each rule and craft of Art
 He grasp'd it amply, whole and part :
 Like travel-wise Ulysses well he knew
 Peoples and cities, men and manners too ;
 With shrewd but ever charitable ken
 He read, and wrote out fair, the hearts of men ;
 Yet, in self-knowledge vers'd, a sage outright,
 His giant soul was humble in its might !
 O gentle, happy, modest mind,
 O genial, cheerful, frank and kind,
 Not even could domestic strife
 Sour the sweetness of thy life,—
 But, wheresoe'er thy foot might roam,
 Divorced from that Xantippe'd home,
 Friends ever found thee,—ay, and foes,
 Cordial to these, and kind to those ;
 Brave, loving, patient, generous, just, and good,—
 Beloved by all, our matchless Shakspeare stood !

Where are thy glorious works unknown?
 Who hath not heard thy fame?

On every shore, in every zone,

The World, with glad acclaim,

Yea, from the cottage to the throne,

Hath magnified thy name!

From far Australia to Vancouver's pines,

From the High Alps to Russia's deepest mines,

From China, with her English lesson learnt,

To Chili, wailing for her daughters burnt;

There, everywhere, our Shakspeare breathes and moves

In the sweet ether of all human loves!—

Where rent America now writhes in woe,

Where Nile and Danube, Thames and Ganges flow,

Wherever England fails, and human kind

Anywhere feels in heart, and thinks in mind,

There, everywhere, our Shakspeare's voice is heard,

By him all souls are thrill'd, and cheer'd, and stirr'd;

Each passion flows or ebbs, as Shakspeare speaks,

Hate knits the brow, or terror pales the cheeks,

Love lights the eyes, or pity melts the heart,

And all men bow beneath our Poet's art!

What monument to rear,
 What worthy offering?—
 Nought lacks thy glory here

Of all thy fons can bring :
 Long since, a twin-sphered brother spake,
 How vain it were to raise
 To such a Name, for Memory's sake,
 Its pyramid of praise :

Our Shakspeare needs no sculptured stones,
 No temple for his honoured bones !

But haply, in his native street
 Beside the rescued home
 Hallowed by his infant feet
 Where to all pilgrims roam,
 A College well might rear its head,
 That Townsman's name to bear,
 And brother-actors' fons be bred
 To light and learning there !

And, for great London and its throngs,—
 To Shakspeare of old right belongs
 The Shakspeare Bridge, with Shakspeare scenes
 Sculptured upon its pannell'd screens,
 Colossus-like the Thames to span,
 And telling every passing man
 Where a poor player in his youth
 Served Heaven and Earth by mimic truth,
 And wrapped in Art's and Nature's robe,
 Leafed,—'twas his Heritage—the Globe !—

111.

Great Magician for all time,
Denizen of every clime,
Darling poet of mankind,
Master of the human mind,
Nature's very priest and king,—
Take the gifts thy children bring!
Let thy Spirit, hovering o'er
Thine earthly home and haunts of yore,
In its wisdom, wealth, and worth,
Shine upon us from above,
While thy kinsmen here on earth
Thus with pious care and love
Celebrate our Shakspeare's birth.

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