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Shakespeare's Life (1564 - 1616)

William Shakespeare was born on or about the 23rd April, 1564, at Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire. He was the son of a prosperous tradesman of the town, who a little later became its 'High Bailiff' or 'mayor'. Though there is no actual record of the fact, it is practically certain that, like other Stratford boys of his class, he went to the local Grammar School, an excellent institution of its kind, where he was taught Latin and arithmetic. While he never became a learned man, his few years at school thus gave him a sound education as far as it went. Financial misfortunes presently overtook his father, and when he was about fourteen, he was taken from school that he might help the family by earning money on his own account. Of the nature of his employment, however, we know nothing. In his 19th year he married Anne Hathaway,

a woman eight years his senior, the daughter of a well-to-do yeoman of the neighbouring village of Ghottery. This marriage was hasty and ill-advised and appears to have been unhappy. Three children were born to him Susannah and the twins, Judith and Hamnet. Tradition says that meanwhile he fell into bad company and that a deer-stealing escapade in the woods of Charlecote Hall obliged him to fly from home. There may or may not be truth in this story we cannot tell. It is certain that a few years after his marriage roughly, about 1587 he left his native town to seek his fortunes in London. At this time the drama was gaining rapidly in popularity through the work of the 'University Wits'. Shakespeare soon turned to the stage and became first an actor and then a playwright. An ill-natured reference to him in a

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Pamphlet written by Greene on his death-bed, shows that in 1592 he was well known as a successful author. He remained in London upwards of twenty years after this, working hard, producing on an average a couple of plays a year and growing steadily in fame and wealth. He became a shareholder in two of the leading theatres of the time the Globe and the Blackfriars and purchased property in Stratford and London. But the years which brought prosperity also brought domestic sorrows. His only son died in 1596, his father in 1601, his younger brother Edmund also an actor in 1607, his mother in 1608. Then between 1610 and 1612 he retired to Stratford, where he had bought a house - the largest in the town known as New Place. His elder daughter had already married Dr. John Heull, who was later

celebrated as a physician, on February 10, 1616, Judith became the wife of Thomas Quincy, whose father had been one of the poet's ~~closest~~ closest friends. By this time Shakespeare's health had broken down completely, and he died on the 23rd April of that year.

The end.

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