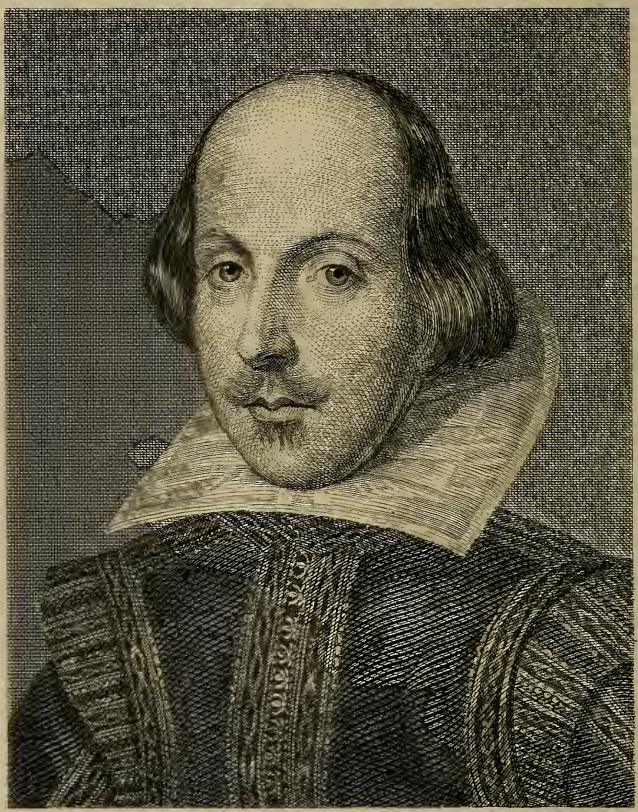

SHAKESPEARE

A BIOGRAPHIC ÆSTHETIC STUDY

BY

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SHAKESPEARE.

TO SHAKESPEARE.

Effulgent Presence, who dost ceaseless shine
Unbodied benefaction on the blest, —
Thy lifted myriad-millions, aye possest
Of that wide speech, in whose unwearied mine
Thou art the richest vein, — phrases of thine,
The largest, most embossed, the fiery best,
He needs who, cheered by gratitude, would crest
His love and awe with epithets so fine
They shall exhale some flavor of thy worth,
A fraction speak of what men owe to thee,
Thou lonely one, at whose still modest birth
Were born new worlds of truth and ecstasy,
Thou great emblazoner of man and earth,
Thou secret-holder of humanity.

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SHAKESPEARE.

I.

First Decades.

In Stratford on Avon, a small town of Warwickshire, England, in a small room of a cottage on Henley Street, lay, in the summer of 1564, a babe asleep in his cradle. Beside the cradle sat a young woman, with broad, open brow and large hazel eyes, that were a light to clear symmetrical features. This woman was Mary Arden, wife of John Shakespeare, and, three months before, the babe had been christened William Shakespeare.

Evenly came the breathings of the infant; his forehead was cool, and his cheeks, flushed by the healthy currents from his heart, glistened with the warmth of the midsummer noon. But the clear countenance of his mother, as she gazed on her beautiful boy, instead of being arrayed in the joy of such a possession, her eyes beaming with deepest and sweetest mater-

nal gladness, was shadowed with alarm. The thought that their little angels may be suddenly snatched from them back to heaven is common to all mothers, and the deeper the motherly tenderness the more biting is the thought. But the mist of such conceits, quickly routed by the morning glow of love, makes but a flitting shadow. The shadow on the brow of Mary Shakespeare was not flitting; it passed not away, and at times was deepened by some inward motion. It was a wave from the general gloom that hung over the little town of Stratford. The plague had shown there its hideous skeleton.

Nature can afford to be a spendthrift, allowing myriads of young lives to be wasted, so teeming is she with new births, so deep her store of mysterious life-germs. But does she allow any of her capital buds to be cut off in infancy? When among the survivors (who are a vast majority) we find so few prime men, men of creative calibre, great poets, thinkers, discoverers, statesmen; when we remember that during the long Napoleonic wars but two generals earned the first rank as masters of their craft, Napoleon and Wellington; when we reflect how rare are Cavours and Washingtons,

how difficult it continues to be for us to find a man eminently suited to be the head of our republic, — a man able and just, watchful and scrupulous, temperate and energetic; when we behold everywhere this dearth of high gifts, may we not conclude that few, if any, infants of best promise are sacrificed at the threshold of life, and that probably the native excellence of such involves a self-protecting vitality to resist physical destruction?

The air inbreathed by the infant that lay asleep near his anxious mother was feeding a brain destined to be the seat of a deeper and fuller consciousness than ever quickened a human mind. If the vitality through which the soul indues itself with corporeal consistence be not strong enough to insure the material form against earthly disease, a soul of this exceptional power, as a resplendent boon from the soul of souls, will be shielded from above, and the modest cottage in Henley Street would have been encircled with a sanitary belt of guardian angels.

Much as the earliest years of human life may deserve to be called, what Alfieri in his autobiography calls them, "an unintelligent vegetation," still one catches at any fact about a great

man, authentically reported, out of that period; and the more luminous his nature the more welcome the fact, as in such a nature an infantile incident or speech would, we fancy, be the more significant. St. Augustine tells us that when an infant he laughed in his sleep. To take this as prophetic of the man Augustine, we should have to reckon by contraries, and thus to surmise that the infant Shakespeare (the man Shakespeare, in the proportions of his mental build, being the opposite of Augustine) might have wept in his sleep. About Goethe, that is a very significant statement that in his second or third year he cried at the sight of an ugly child, would not bear its presence, and had to be carried home.

From Shakespeare's prattling years no incidents have come down to us. Some sparkling ones, no doubt, there were; for from a central soul of such fiery force that it was to blaze into flames, to be forever a joy and warmth for his fellows, there must early have shot forth rays and jets significant and prophetic. But Shakespeare kept no diary and wrote no autobiography. He seems to have been without egotism. This we infer partly from the objectivity of his poetry, — but that appears to have been a

characteristic of his age, unlike herein to the age of Wordsworth and Byron. Alfieri, at the opening of his autobiography, confesses that what moves him to write his life, "among other feelings, but more imperious than any other, is the love of myself." Is not a little too much prominence here given to the pivotal feeling in human nature? and would it not have been truer to say of Alfieri's autobiography, as of St. Augustine's, — so different from it, and yet so similar in the depreciation of human nature, and also of Goethe's, so different from both, — that a love of self, not in these cases an unbecoming selfish love, combined with a love of their readers, had been the moving spring of their pens? A writer whose books have been read and liked by the best educated readers is justified in believing that a book about himself will be acceptable and instructive; as it certainly will be, if the writer is a large-minded, honest man. No more instructive, enduring volumes than these three autobiographies are found on library shelves.

The gift of self-love, Alfieri says, has been lavished upon writers, especially poets. To Shakespeare's non-egotism we owe, I think, some of his efficiency and range as poet. Too

much self-satisfaction opens the eyes ungracefully wide to one's own merits, and dulls their vision to the merits of others, and thus obstructs the avenues of the finer sympathies, closing the heart to nourishing admirations. Looks persistently turned inward self-complacently lose some of their curiosity towards abounding prospects and people about them. Self-esteem easily becomes a veil that dims for us our neighbors as well as distant things, and at the same time hides us from ourselves. To get out of and away from the little self is the best act a man can perform : it was one that Shakespeare performed often, and with immense results.

But if from Shakespeare's childhood no word or fact has come down to us, we have of his manhood the fullest, richest, truest, of autobiographies in his mighty works. And, after all, the incidents or sayings reported about great men in their childhood are neither many nor always expressive. Possibly, the most characteristic mental movements are internal, and make no outward sign, — sudden glows that swell the mind beyond its yet narrow compass, electric shootings in the brain, premature glimpses, flashing forerunners of rare manly

performance. Nevertheless, such is our intimacy with Shakespeare, our reverence for him is so profound, our love so personal, that we cannot but hang about his infancy and childhood. Aye, and we *know* as much about him as we do about other children; for in their joy of growth and sweet dependence, which is their whole life, nature makes them all alike. Do we not know that his mother carried little William every day in her arms, that great mother, the mother of Shakespeare? "In our mind's eye" we can easily see him there, and see his father come in smiling to refresh himself at his lively child. Mary and John gaze at him in speechless content; and may we not fancy parental partiality — a deep human feeling — mounting to mysterious, vague presentiment of his greatness, a momentary breath of consciousness of what a wonder they had given to the world? The babe in Mary's lap, and John looking on, to our exalted imagination they present themselves as a second holy family, becoming transfigured, with a halo round their heads.

We know, moreover, what Stratford was, — a small rural town in the very centre of England, open to fields and meadows, with the Avon gliding by. We know that brooks and

rivulets, — resorts and playmates so dear to children — ran into the Avon; that near and about it were woods and hills, copses and valleys, humble cottages, halls, and lordly castles; and all this in temperate England, where summer is kind and winter never cruel. What a nursery for a poet-boy, and what a boy to romp in such a nursery! Hear his birds sing, not in the leafy sunshine of *Midsummer-Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* merely, but soothing the cavernous gloom of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Their melody is the echo of what the boy heard in the fields and woods about Stratford. And when, after roving for half a day through the green and wooded country, he parted from his little comrades in the centre of the town, and went home, that home was not a spacious, superfluously furnished mansion, where, in the very vestibule, he would be met by luxury, greeting him in the shape of a gilded angel with soft smiles and caressing looks, and who, hypocritical demon instead of angel, would hourly filter poison into his soul through looks and touch and spiced meats. Nor had he to steal off towards a slatternly hovel, where penury gnaws into the vitals of childhood with not less fatal consequences to after-manhood than luxury.

But he cheerfully opened the door of a modest abode, small but tidy, where there was comfort and plain food, and some of the refinements of an age when refinements had not yet begun to be infinitely multiplied. We do know, — and it is much to know, — that Shakespeare's childhood was healthily natural, not tainted by the insidious malaria of artificial habits and manners, neither enervated by the sirocco of fashion, nor blasted by the foul breath of squalor. We know that, reveling in the deep, sunlit, breezy beauty of nature, the child bloomed into a vigorous, laughing boy.

And, thanks to the search of zealous biographers, we know something of his father and of his mother. John Shakespeare, son of a substantial farmer, and one of a family indigenous in Warwickshire, was at the time of William's birth a prosperous shop-keeper, dealing in gloves, in wool, in barley, in meat, offering to customers, as is still the usage in country towns, a miscellaneous variety. He was also a small land owner, held offices in the town government, and in 1571 was chosen chief alderman of Stratford. Later he fell into poverty, and had to mortgage his wife's land at Ashbies, near Stratford; and later still, he had

fallen so low pecuniarily as to be unable to pay his taxes.

William Shakespeare, the poet, was the soundest of idealists; we have a suspicion that his father, John Shakespeare, was an unsound idealist. Such likenesses, with a difference, are readily traceable in families. The sound idealist is one who, from the depth and accuracy of the perception and thought he brings to bear upon fact or fancy, sees them as they are more truly than common men; and thence, the clearest human light being thrown upon his thinking and his doing, these are exceptionally solid and successful. Your unsound idealist mistakes his dreams for fact, and, being prone to dream while awake, will ascribe to a real object a dreamy value; and so, some day, will lead home a horse, for which he has given a large price, to discover, a week later, that this is not the horse he meant to buy, and that the one he paid for was an ideal horse. A man in business who is subject to these airy exaltations (which have the same source as the exaltations of poetry) will be speculative without judgment, deluded by a shallow visionariness, and, reversing the maxim of trade, to buy cheap and sell dear, will

often buy when prices are risen, to find himself obliged to sell when they are fallen, and so come to grief. The same ideal tendency which, being buttressed by intellectual solidities and healthy emotions, impowered William to sweep safely along the track of the Sun-God, illuminating the world with a new day, when thus unsteadied, brought on John the fall of the adventurous Phaeton.

John Shakespeare married above him. Mary Arden was the daughter of a yeoman, and the Ardens were a gentry family of some distinction. Mary was the youngest of seven daughters. It is said that one of the safest matrimonial enterprises is to take a wife from a numerous family of girls. Probably the loving helpfulness, which is a cardinal womanly virtue, is here most finely cultivated through sisterly affection, the temper being kneaded by daily sympathetic contacts. This presupposes a good stock. To judge a tree by its fruit, where could the entire Caucasian race furnish a better stock than that from which sprang the mother of Shakespeare? Mary, though one of so large a flock, had, for her position in life, a pretty dower. John Shakespeare was, as we say familiarly, a lucky dog. Blessings on the

impulses that brought him and Mary Arden together! That was a match made indeed in heaven.

Was Mary beautiful? We know not. To be good and intelligent and beautiful were a rarely rich mental dower. The mother of Shakespeare need not to have been beautiful; she must have been good and intelligent, and being good and intelligent, her countenance would be attractive. If from a man's personal qualities, internal or external, we cannot with certainty infer those of his parents, yet the ground-plan of his features, bodily and mental, will be traceable in his parents, and especially must a transcendent mind draw much from father and mother. When a human stream that for generations has been flowing undistinguished, under ground as it were, of a sudden breaks through the earth, springing high into the air, a colossal perennial fountain, for the delight and invigoration of mankind, we cannot but believe that by its immediate predecessors it was concentrated for its mighty leap.

Where did Shakespeare get his mind? Primarily from the supernal spiritual source of all, of mind as of matter. Shakespeare's mind was

an intensely glowing spark from the celestial soul of the universe. The incarnation of every spark in human form takes place according to laws and conditions not inscrutable to human reason. Of first significance among these conditions are the moral and intellectual qualities of father and mother. John Shakespeare, we have seen, from prosperity sank into poverty, not being suddenly overtaken by some inevitable blow of adverse fortune, but growing gradually poor. Now, when a man, bred to active business, and prospering in it, begins, before he has passed the climax of middle life, to fall behind, to relax in his hold on the running threads, by the handling of which success is daily woven, we shall not go wrong if we ascribe his misfortunes to mental deficiencies, especially to want of equilibrium among forces whose coaction produces practical ability, — deficiencies which are by no means incompatible with intellectual cleverness, or even ableness, and still less with worth of character and attractiveness. From what is now positively known, through authentic, expressive, legal, and municipal records, of John Shakespeare's gradual decline from comfortable competency to depressing pecuniary straits, one is prompted

to imagine that in that conjugal union, so unutterably interesting to all English-speaking people forever, the gray mare was the better horse.

The first, the greatest, the most veritable fact is, that of this couple, John and Mary, the eldest son, William, was a transcendent being, a man of mental might, a new power in the world, a man of richest, deepest gifts. From the evident possession by parents of certain broad qualities, to say that their offspring will be so and so is not within our range. This is a prophetic going forward, where the mystery and affluence of nature baffle us. But to tell from matured, manly offspring what the parents were likely to be, this is a going back, and thus, being retrospective, is not so presumptuous an effort. Both the factors of this sum are present to us, whereas in the other case one of the two is an unknown quantity to be discovered.

After all, however, as we know nothing of Mary and little of John, it were perhaps barren to attempt to allot to each the share each had in "the large composition" of William. John may have furnished the imaginative swing, and Mary the elements of that common sense

which gives to all Shakespeare's poetry its solidity, its nourishing sap, and which to all mental work, to the most imaginative as to the prosaic, is as indispensable as to physics is gravitation, which to the motion of every form of matter gives its security and efficiency. While he probably got chiefly from his mother his clear judgment, his practical insight, he may at the same time have had from her his emotional expansibility, and much of his sensibility to the beautiful. Poetic genius is emotional, intuitive, loving, and thus leans to the feminine side. Poetic genius implies, moreover, refinement of organization, and this must have been a prominent parcel in the dower from heaven to the mother of Shakespeare.

With whatever fancies we may indulge ourselves in apportioning between this chosen pair the gifts which in the son flowered into such dazzling, unfading bloom, we stand on sure ground when we affirm that in their composition there could not have been malignity or meanness, neither pettiness nor insincerity. Both John and Mary were upright, earnest people. The seed of a sour apple will not yield sweet fruit.

Mary Arden, — what a melody in the syllables! To all whose speech is English the name Mary has a fuller sanctification than for the rest of Christendom. Besides the Holy Mary, the mother of Jesus, we have Mary, the mother of Shakespeare. And to us Americans there is a still added love and reverence for the beautiful name, as we have Mary, the mother of Washington.

Infants are more alike than children of three or four years, and small children than schoolboys. As the mind grows the differences unfold themselves, until in the matured man — and in different men maturity comes earlier or later — the individuality stands distinctly revealed. What that individuality will be on its intellectual side is generally veiled until early manhood, especially in genial natures. The poet was scarcely discerned in the young man Wordsworth; his family and friends were displeased with him because in his twenty-fifth year he had not yet gone to work at some bread-earning business. When Shakespeare wrote *Venus and Adonis* (supposed to have been about in his twentieth year), the most far-sighted and accomplished of his contemporaries could not thence have inferred, or remotely

guessed, that here was the forerunner of Hamlet. If he read the poem to any of his acquaintance in Stratford, he probably got the reverse of encouragement to go on in the new path he had opened, — except from his mother, whose intuition and maternal instinct and partiality would have made her scent in many of these luxuriant stanzas something more lasting than a youthful nosegay of fancy's flowers.

As the record of Shakespeare's life from birth to marriage, in his nineteenth year, is a blank, whether or not his boyhood foretokened any high performance we know not. Grateful as it were to have of him what we have of Wordsworth, of Coleridge, of Goethe, a complete biographical report, we can console ourselves with the reflection that, although "the child is father of the man," the poet child is not much different from other children, and that only when a *Hyperion*, or an *Adonais*, or an *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* comes before them, do the class-mates and contemporaries of the poet perceive and realize (and that only in part) the vast difference between themselves and him who had been their boyish companion. The soul, while laying the

foundations of greatness, keeps its own counsel; and what it had been doing and preparing is only revealed by the completed work. *The Tempest*, and *Lear*, and *Julius Cæsar* tell us, and tell us with the peal of resounding clarions, that Shakespeare was a wonderful child, and from them, and only from them, can this be learnt; so that we now know about the child William what his own father and mother had no inkling of.

Looking back upon the boy William from heights so resplendently illuminated by lights enkindled by himself, we have the privilege of perceiving in him traits, movements, not observed by his contemporaries; of discovering signs, of interpreting tones, unnoted by those, even, to whom he was dearest. By this far-gleaming light we behold the open-eyed boy slipping from his mother's lap to start, as all children do, on unending voyages of discovery, led and spurred by hope and curiosity, the delighted heir to a world of sparkling novelties; handling, questioning, more intently than other children do, everything; eagerly exploring the paths and by-ways of new beauty and knowledge; quickly dropping what soon gets to be old to grasp the new, his big eyes ever alight

with wonder and intelligence. Are we not entitled to believe that of this eager boy William, who was to become SHAKESPEARE, in the spontaneous, joyous feeding of the crescent faculties, the assimilations were more perfect, the transmutations of phenomena into knowledge more quickening, than in his playmates? The life of healthy childhood is a perpetual dawn, watching for sunrise. We cannot but think that in *his* watching the hope was more deep and radiant, the curiosity more enlivening. And may we not be permitted to catch a glimpse of him in one of those blissful premonitory moments, overflowing with vitality, when in his seventh or eighth year he would pause in his play or his ramble, the visible world suddenly shut out, the light thrown upon it by his senses swallowed up in an inward flash from the soul that flooded his brain with the glow of premature thought, startling him into ecstasy with its new power and mysterious whisper?

Stratford on Avon enjoyed a not common privilege: it had a free grammar-school. Of course, William Shakespeare was sent to it; he was a bright boy, and his father was one of the principal citizens of Stratford. In 1571,

when William was in his eighth year, John Shakespeare was elected first alderman; this placed him at the head of the municipal government. A quick boy, at a grammar-school of higher class, — say from his eleventh to his fourteenth year, — will learn and pick up much. A susceptible nature takes in as well by absorption as by direct appropriation. Happy, if little poison is absorbed. In a small country town of England, towards the end of the sixteenth century, the tone and influence of a school of this class would be healthy. Besides, from the brain of the boy who was to become Shakespeare would, through his native mental vigor and affluence, flow forth magnetic currents to meet and neutralize defiling invasions from without.

From the known fact that John Shakespeare's embarrassments obliged him to mortgage the estate of Ashbies in 1578, it is inferred that William was withdrawn from school, probably, so early as his fourteenth year, to assist his father in business. This inference is supported by tradition; and tradition, although never to be entirely trusted, has always some value. For one who was to be a world-poet this early apprenticeship to practical out-door

and in-door work was good discipline. How long it lasted no documents have yet been discovered to make known. Tradition says — and quite probably with truth — that for a while he was teacher in a school. His quick acquirement when himself a scholar would qualify him for this duty. Tradition likewise reports that he was, for a time, in a lawyer's office.

With his prompt apprehensiveness, and with the unresting mental activity implied in the production, during only thirty years, of what he produced, Shakespeare would easily seize and retain many professional phrases and facts; so that, to account for the numerous illustrations scattered through his pages, drawn from the professions, it is not necessary to suppose that he had been a lawyer and a doctor and a sailor and a farmer. But the fact that in the two poems written in his youth, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, illustrations taken from law forms and practices are frequent is circumstantial evidence, almost decisive, that he was for a year or two a student of law. These two poems were written before he went to London. That a young man should draw so many similes from the routine of a calling

whose requirements are uncongenial to the thoughts and feelings which would possess him while producing these two poems is incredible, except on the supposition that his young mind was just then in daily familiarity with this routine. Could he have strewn his pages with such figures of speech had not his brain been filled, through daily occupation, with the terms and processes of law? Country life and rural sports furnish the principal illustrations in the form of comparisons, similes, metaphors, or of direct description, as the picture of the hunted hare in *Venus and Adonis*, distinct and true as poet's pen can make it, and that of the terrible boar, so vividly depicted in the fears of Venus. Among these natural flexible presentations, — abundant as sunlit clouds in June, — the cold, rigid, legal terms are like patches of untimely snow on a May landscape.

These conjectural inferences as to what Shakespeare was during his later boyhood and early youth, are they not as reasonable as they are welcome? They harmonize with the matured mind and character of the man, as we learn these from his works; the self-helpfulness they involve befits a strong, manly nat-

ure. They give signs of rapid progress, under the momentum of aspiration and persistence of will. Can we conceive of the youth Shakespeare, with his capacities, being idle, — he who had early tasted, under his father's roof, the bitterness of poverty, and worse than poverty, impoverishment? For a clever boy, bent upon supporting, and at the same time improving, himself, how natural it was that he should seek the post of assistant teacher! To obtain the post would not be difficult for such a well-grown boy, with his intelligent, handsome face and winning deportment. He whose habitual bearing in after years won for him among his companions the epithet *gentle* could not but have pleasing manners in his youth. The outward expression of the inward being of one from whom issued that crowd of vivid, beautiful creations between *Venus and Adonis* and *The Tempest* could not but be prepossessing. As in his thoughts and feelings there never was any harshness, or falseness, or malevolence, so in his demeanor there could be naught forbidding. The inward spring that was bubbling with the fancies whence were to leap Rosalind and Orlando, Ferdinand and Miranda, Perdita and Florizel,

must have overflowed outwardly in graciousness and kindliness and delicacy.

By no means, therefore, will we refuse to accept the tradition that in his early youth Shakespeare was assistant teacher in a school. Such a place he would obtain through his scholarly competence, seconded by his engaging appearance. If he ever filled such a place, we may be sure that he did not get it by pushing. Was ever a genuine poet impudent or bold-faced? The refinement, which is a constituent of the poetic nature, so elevates his feelings, that his bearing cannot be other than appropriate and modest. Who can think of the young Shakespeare as obtrusive, malapert? As easy were it to think of the young Washington as deceitful and cringing.

From teacher the step upward to lawyer is easily taken by an aspiring youth. I say upward, because the vocation of teacher, honorable and useful as any, offers no outlook beyond itself, as does that of lawyer. In both he would have leisure for reading and study, for carrying on that, the most important, part of every man's education, — self-education. This is effective in proportion to the gifts and grit of the self-educator, who in these efforts is much fur-

thered by the knowledge and method acquired at school and college.

Perfectly accordant, then, with the character and performance of Shakespeare, as we learn them from his contemporaries and his works, is the tradition that he was, in his later youth, first a teacher, then a law student. These early occupations cultivated the Latin and other rudiments he had learnt at school, and left him spare time for self-instruction. England already possessed translations of Plutarch and Seneca, and of Italian tales. Through these were opened to him far-off worlds of literature and history and mythology. Genius is not self-subsistent. For his mind as well as for his body Shakespeare required food from without. To spin from his brain the silken threads of poetry, his brain needed that its exquisite juices be ripened and strengthened by nourishment sucked from the accumulated leaves of past knowledge and literature.

There is no greater mistake than that genius, by virtue of its inward power, can dispense with outward aid, with levying upon the granaries of stored knowledge. If genius spreads its shining sails without due ballast of fact, it is sure to founder. Knowledge, experience, other men's

experience besides its own, are a necessary part of the outfit that genius needs to produce substantial effects. The accumulations of the past are a richer inheritance to a man of genius than to other men; *he* knows how to use them. Such accumulations are to him a high vantage-ground. Dante saw the further and clearer for standing on the mound of knowledge raised by his predecessors; so did Michael Angelo; so did Rubens. Goethe said, with deep significance, that he had always found it profitable to know something. These were all industrious students, particularly in their younger days. So was Shakespeare. His faculties were strengthened, enlarged, tempered, polished, by closely handling the treasures piled up by the ages.

All this, and with it the alternations from comfort to poverty under his father's roof, was a good, — should we not say a necessary? — basis for the solid, uptowering superstructure of Shakespeare's after years. And moreover, for the structure that he was to uprear material was offered in Stratford with especial fullness, — material which, from his inborn bent and endowment, was a lively means of instruction and expansion. Here we step out from the fog of conjecture into clear sunlight; for we

know that Shakespeare was a brilliant, a mighty, poetic genius, and that likewise were innate in him an unsurpassed dramatic genius and dramatic talent. With what appetite, then, with what intentness, must his young eyes and ears have looked and listened to the symbolic pageants, the swelling dialogues, of the stage; and in what a prolific glow must have been laid upon his great, growing faculties flake upon flake of radiant visions and ardent conceptions, to be in after years shaped, distended, purified, magnified, into the most earnest and beautiful of artistic revelations!

From preserved records it is discovered that, during Shakespeare's youth, scarcely a year passed without some theatrical entertainment being offered to the inhabitants of Stratford. And it is a curious fact that 1569, the year in which a company was for the first time allowed to exhibit in the town hall, was the year in which John Shakespeare was bailiff, or chief magistrate. Halliwell, in his valuable *Life of Shakespeare*, infers from the municipal records that John Shakespeare was probably an especial patron of the stage. William, in 1569, was in his sixth year.

Theatrical shows and performances are to

boys as exciting as the *Arabian Nights*. In their presentations there is a mystery, a grandeur, a pretension, that fill the young imagination with seductive visions. What must they then have been to the boy who was born to elevate their grandeurs, to deepen their mysteries, to surpass their most astounding wonders? We may be sure that he never missed one of the many Stratford exhibitions. As he grew older he would be irresistibly drawn into personal acquaintance with the players, several of whom were from the town of Stratford. What more natural than that, when he felt in his brain some of the ambition of manhood, he should try his young hand on dramatic scenes! This, however, may not have been until he had got assurance of his poet gift by producing *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, conjectured, with great probability, to have been written about in his twenty-first year.

And what more natural than that, witnessing the prosperity of Burbage and others of his townsmen, urged by the innate dramatic and histrionic gifts throbbing dimly within him, depressed by the impoverishment of his father, pressed by the dreary outlook round

the hearth of his young family, this vigorous young genius should, at the age of twenty-two or three, have joined a theatrical company! Prepossessing he must have been, and handsome we have proof that he was, from his portraits, — both strong recommendations in the actor's profession. Knowing what powers lay dormant in him, how affable he was, we cannot doubt there was a magnetism in this youthful man that would draw to him the affections of his theatrical companions. They would readily admit him to their company; and once admitted, he would soon win them by his modest superiority in looks and manners, as in practical ability. Here I do not use the language of conjecture. He who carried in him such abounding sources of feeling and intellect, illumined by rarest poetic sensibility, must have been all this, and more. A creature pre-eminently endowed with sensibility and intellect, in the glowing circle of whose manifold gifts there was no chasm, no breach, could not but be captivating, attaching. The orbicular completeness of his superb faculties would insure gracefulness, together with sympathy of bearing.

The records of Stratford show that in the

year 1587 several theatrical companies performed in the town, among them one designated as the Queen's Players. To this company, afterwards styled the Lord Chamberlain's, Shakespeare belonged in 1589, as is proved by a petition in that year to the Privy Council. In this document are inserted the names of sixteen players, "all of them sharers in the blake Fryers playhouse;" and among the sixteen is the name of William Shakespeare. As 1586 is the earliest date assigned for his migration to London, this important document exhibits young Shakespeare as rising rapidly. He had become in two or three years a copartner in the principal theatre of London, at the age of twenty-six. At first his vocation was that of actor. And he was a good actor; but acting was in his case, as with several of his contemporaries, but initiatory discipline for the higher vocation of dramatist. Immediately on joining the company, he no doubt gave proof of skill as a playwright. Among his partners were several who wrote or adapted plays. It was a dramatic age.

Let us now go back to Stratford and 1582. Some years before he went to London, and towards the end of November, 1582, Shake-

speare, in his nineteenth year, married Anne Hathaway, a maiden of twenty-six, daughter of a yeoman in the neighborhood of Stratford. Save that she has the unparalleled distinction of being the wife of Shakespeare, we know nothing of Anne Hathaway, but what is told by a few dry public records. The disparity in years, on the wrong side, provokes curiosity. Shakespeare, with his warm temperament, was just the youth to be fascinated by the charms of a mature woman. What those charms were we have no means of even guessing. They may have been psychical rather than physical; they may have been both. One would fain believe that Shakespeare's first love was a richly endowed woman, a model of beauty and duty. But from what is known of the loves of poets, we are not justified in so concluding. Love seems intended by nature to be a blinder: a device, probably, of the god Hymen to promote marriage. For the performance of its incalculable function this predominating impulse takes from those under its sway the power of seeing things as they are. The marriage of William and Anne appears to have been attended with some haste and secrecy. As in that region betrothment was customary,

this ceremony being regarded as holy and binding, like marriage, one need have no uncomfortable thoughts because Susannah, their first child, came into the world within six or seven months after the marriage.

To them, early in 1585, twins were born, christened Judith and Hamnet. These with Susannah were the only children they ever had. From this fact, and Shakespeare's migration to London, probably within a year after the birth of the twins, inferences have been drawn as to the conjugal relations of the pair. Had Shakespeare been the happiest of young husbands and fathers, he would nevertheless, we doubt not, have joined the players; impelled by poverty and the bleakness of the pecuniary outlook at Stratford, tempted by the promises of his townsmen among the players, and moved by the promptings of his distinctive genius. Here was a strong array of outward and inward motions, prompting him to seek his fortune through a theatrical company in the metropolis of England. For himself he found in it fame and fortune; for humanity, priceless treasures.

From their susceptibility and fineness of feeling, poets are not less but more liable than their prosaic neighbors to disappointments and

crosses and losses in the fervent encounters of the affections. Of the personal matrimonial relations between these two we know nothing. Before their hearth fate has hung an impenetrable veil. We shall not sacrilegiously send our imagination behind this veil. Whatever thoughts shall present themselves shall come guarded by absolute impartiality and folded in tenderest sympathy for both. We say for both; for since Anne shares the august name of Shakespeare, she shares the unspeakable reverence which that name inspires. Nevertheless, seeing what a superb, immeasurable individual her husband was, we may be pardoned for doubting that in this particular dual oneness Anne was the better half.

The tradition that Shakespeare took deer from the park of Sir Thomas Lucy we are inclined to look upon as one of those derogatory, impeditive legends such as are sometimes fastened upon the opening career of a great man, originating in envy and jealousy, and fostered by malevolence. It is hard for men to be mutely passive when they behold the reputation of a neighbor going up. To keep it from rising there is apt to be a pretty universal simultaneous pull. In this down-dragging effort the

most active will be the ambitious, and among these the most rigidly swollen muscles will be those of the disappointed ambitious. By the brilliancy and rapidity of his ascending flight Shakespeare, "the upstart crow," was just the figure to stir up the bitterest dregs in ambitious aspirants for dramatic fame. He soon came up with and then passed the best of them in contemporary reputation. And to-day, Marlow, Ford, Chapman, Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, Kyd, Decker, Massinger, Webster, how much greater would be their renown had there been no Shakespeare? And with every generation the distance between them and him will be wider, until, in a century hence, while his name will glow with a still added brightness, they will have faded into shadows.

But, besides this comparatively limited class of competitors and rivals, many natures are so egotistic, and so negatively positive, that they can hardly bear to admit that another man is even as good as themselves; and, through inherent inexpansiveness, are incapable of reaching the superlative degree in their estimate of others. To some men praise of another feels very like dispraise of themselves. To the ears of a large and unhappy class, the names of

Dante, Luther, Milton, Newton, Shakespeare, Washington are sounds unmusical. And then, most people, — might we not say all? — are willing to listen to disparagement of the great. The discovery of spots on them brings about, in some mysterious way, the whitening of our own skins. To exhibit their short-comings is a substantiation of community of breed. To con the faults of uncommon people is a consolatory self-flattery to common human nature.

The *animus* of this story is betrayed in its wording; it is miscalled deer-stealing. Poaching — whatever the dictionaries may say — is not stealing. Punishable by law, it is not a moral offense; it does not break the seventh commandment. To catch and carry off a deer is not the same as to catch and carry off a sheep. One is wild, the other domestic; this makes the moral difference. To seize a deer, as the boldest kind of poaching, was a saucy, adventurous, defiant proceeding, and one which an honorable, well-conditioned youth might, for a frolic, commit once or twice. The public knowledge of the adventure would leave no stain on his character. As to *stealing*, we should as soon associate the thought of theft with the conduct of St. Paul as with that of Shakespeare.

Still less probable is the sequel to this tale, that Shakespeare had to quit Stratford in consequence of the legal prosecution of him by Sir Thomas Lucy for trespass on his park. (Some investigators think they have discovered that Sir Thomas Lucy had no park and no deer.) These extrinsic incidents, the trespass and the prosecution, may have been, but besides their merely traditional character, discredit is thrown upon them by this, that allsufficient to account for Shakespeare's quitting Stratford for London are the intrinsic causes, — his want of money, his acquaintance with actors who frequently performed at Stratford, their attraction towards a handsome young man of captivating address and conversation, and, deep within himself, an unconscious impetus towards the fulfillment of his high destiny.

By these urgent interior motives for his joining the players, especially by friendships formed, probably, with them at Stratford, is invalidated that other tradition which would make of Shakespeare a holder of horses for the frequenters of the theatre. In such an initiatory occupation there is nothing in the slightest degree disreputable; for any honest

work is honorable. Moreover, the lower the step from which Shakespeare started, the higher will be the admiration and wonder at the sweep and elevation of his flight. The story may have its origin in the exaggeration of some single incident, and then would owe its perpetuation and amplification to the spirit of detraction.

A young man with Shakespeare's necessities, temperament, talents, impulsions, capabilities, only needs a friendly opportunity to set to work with a will. Never had a beginner a more tempting, a more arable field. To be perfected, nay, to be created, was the drama of England. And here was the age in which, if created at all, it must be done; and here was the material, rich, abundant, wherewith it could be done; and here was the man, the only man, who could do it.

To lay the foundations whereon are to be reared *Macbeth*, and *Lear*, and *Twelfth Night*, and *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*, nature works in her most vital genial mood, and with her most electric instruments. To strengthen these foundations had concurred favoring circumstances. The boy had a healthy, happy childhood; in schooling he had enjoyed the

share of the chosen few: his not having been to Oxford or Cambridge was probably, in that age, to him not much loss. He had drunk of the sweet and the bitter of life, had been steeped in passion, was a husband and father, had written notable poems, had looked into ancient literature enough to learn what a range human thought and history can take; and now, at about the age of twenty-three, he found himself in London, toiling, strenuous, seething London.

Through the deep, mental stir caused by the Reformation, through the opening of America to enterprise and commerce, through the war-like spirit engendered by national commotions and rivalries, through the genius and vigor of English statesmen and naval leaders, and through the bold initiatives of her merchants and adventurers, London was become a chief pivot of European movement, a nervous centre throbbing with national and individual life, expanding with the expansion of the civilized world, which just at this era was taking one of its bounding leaps. As this young actor from Stratford there was not in Elizabeth's earnest capital another man so capable of growing with the new sapful growth of England, not

another whose pulses could absorb so much of the vitality of that impassioned age.

To become familiar with the business of the stage will be serviceable to him who is to do the business of the dramatist. The practice of the play-actor facilitated for Shakespeare the function of the play-writer. Poetry, and especially poetry intended to come upon the boards, should have a firm, material basis. It happened that in Shakespeare's case his fellow-actors were better instructors than would have been tutors at the university. To one whose first dramatic work was the adaptation to the stage of plays written by other hands, especially helpful was the practice of the performer.

In the heat of the lively histrionic competition in London at that time, quick-witted men like the Burbages would not be slow to discover what a jewel they had picked up at Stratford. Bear in mind that in 1586 — the earliest date assignable, according to the testimony we have, for his arrival in London — Shakespeare was twenty-three years of age, that he had already written *Venus and Adonis*, a poem of more than thirteen hundred ten-syllable lines, and *Lucrece*, a poem of about fifteen hundred similar lines. That he, more-

over, had tried his hand at drama before he quitted Stratford is probable. When he finished *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* (plausibly inferred to be about his twenty-first or twenty-second year) he took his degree as poet, and with highest honors. Read them, to learn what floods of poetic power and beauty, of originality and of intellectual strength, had early poured themselves through the pen of the glowing young giant.

By the knowledge and discipline gained through the writing of these two original luxuriant poems he was empowered, after a brief apprenticeship as actor, to take in hand plays already existing, and, by excisions, additions, substitutions, modifications, adapt them to the stage. This first period of his dramatic career, when he was chiefly engaged in getting up pieces for his company, might be called his playwright period. Shakespeare was a man of astonishing genius; and genius not only illumines the path of the intellect, as with a precursive pillar of fire, but feeds and strengthens the intellectual activities; so that, finding himself in a position most propitious to giving free swing to the drift of his genius, he laid rapidly bare his clear, strong talents in the

practical, and doubtless profitable, craft of remodeler, improver, and adapter of existing plays, that lacked organization, proportion, characterization, and poetry. One can fancy the rejoicing astonishment of the Burbages, and other of the older hands, at noting the rapid success of their young associate in transforming dull into vivid scenes, perfusing them with a phosphorescent light, like the rosy electric play of the mysterious aurora borealis, which warms and irradiates what just before was cold and dark. On many a passionate conjunction, out of the heaven of his poetic imagination would flash a beam, as sometimes through a rift in stormy night-clouds will shoot down stars to quiver on the billows of an agitated ocean.

What were the pieces on which Shakespeare first laid his magical hand cannot be positively affirmed; but the most clear-sighted and sympathetic of his commentators, led by Coleridge, and represented more recently by Gervinus, agree generally in looking upon *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI.*, *Pericles*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Taming of the Shrew*, as the plays which through his pen underwent *rifacimento*, or working over. We can readily believe him

to have first taken hold of Henry VI., and thus to have opened the vista of those magnificent poetic *Histories*, the creating of which constitutes Shakespeare the great National Poet of England. Two plays of Henry VI. by Robert Greene were the foundation on which he built his *Henry VI.* In this reconstruction, many times the creative maker breaks through the playwright's craft.

To the potential poetic dramatist a most vivacious apprenticeship is this furbishing, redressing, of other men's dramatic work, which only a poet's hand can do effectively. The want of poetry in these plays was the disabling want in them; thence, like hundreds of others, they had fallen into discredit, and lay unpresentable and lifeless. Into them young Shakespeare breathed some of the breath of poetic life, — that breath whereby alone can high literature be kept alive. He re-animated them; and only a Shakespeare could do that vital act.

But while remodeling and vitalizing the plays of others, the aspiring poet would be naturally — with his exuberant power we might say irresistibly — impelled to try an unassisted flight into the realm of drama.

Two Gentlemen of Verona and *Love's Labor Lost* bear clear internal evidence of having been written in the earlier years of his brilliant dramatic career; and they are wholly his. Nor has there been found for *Titus Andronicus* any earlier play than the one ascribed to Shakespeare. Only by tradition is it claimed that he wrought after a model. To Coleridge internal evidence proves *Titus Andronicus* to be not Shakespeare's except in passages; and it were hard to find a shrewder judge of that kind of evidence than Coleridge. The quick succession of bloody horrors, that are the chief incidents of the piece, are by some made an argument against its being by Shakespeare. But may not the young Titan have felt, and chosen to indulge, an impulse to outbloat Marlow and Kyd? To me the flow and texture of the verse do not seem quite those of the young poet who was already the author of *Venus and Adonis*, and *Lucrece*. In the characters, incidents, and verse there is an unshakespearean shallowness. A cardinal feature of Shakespeare's individuality, and a token of its greatness, is, under inward pressure of imaginative thought, to dip below the surface. In the lines of *Titus Andronicus*

one misses, too, that flashing into figures of speech which gives to Shakespeare's pages such a bloom. We cannot believe that he could have originally written five acts of shallow horrors, where the killing of men seems to be committed with as little quickening of the pulse as the slaying of oxen in a slaughter-house; where, save Lavinia, there is not a personage sympathy towards whom would not be a wasteful perversity. That Shakespeare even took in hand such monsters, to put a little poetic fire here and there into their ferocity, could only be from a half-frolicksome impulse of vaunt, to show that the young Hercules, even with his unknit sinews, wielded a club with which he could knock on the head the most savage of his bloody-penned contemporaries, and bespatter with their brains the pavement of degenerate Rome. Or did he not undertake to deepen the horrors of *Titus Andronicus*, in order to make the whole piece a surer irony of the raw-head and bloody-bones style of drama fashionable when he first came to London? Perhaps this is the best way of accounting for the connection of even Shakespeare's youthful name with such pseudo-tragic, unpoetic scenes.

Except what he did for *Henry VI.* (which had for him the healthy fragrance of nationality), *Titus Andronicus* stands isolated among the dramas of his first period. Tragedy need not be uncongenial to youthful dramatic genius; but historic drama demands a maturity of understanding and experience of life which only three or four decades can give.

By a petition of the sharers in the Blackfriars Theatre to the Privy Council in 1589, made acquainted with the important fact that in that year Shakespeare was one of the shareholders, we are prompted to ask, Might not his name have appeared in the petition had it been dated November, 1588, instead of November, 1589? For believing in this possibility we have warrant by what we positively know of his talents, his genius, and his industry. Through these he could not but make rapid progress when once on the broad, lively arena so suited to the fullest exhibition of his immense and varied powers. In a couple of years he might easily have earned the place of a sharer. The year 1588 was the year of the Spanish Armada, that ostentatious but most formidable enterprise aimed at the very national being of England; and it is a pleasant thought,

that, while English seamanship, courage, manhood, heroism, were dealing, in the Channel near by, deadly blows to this arrogant, portentous monster, in London the air was just beginning to vibrate to the chords of that new music of thoughtful speech that was gradually to swell into richest, deepest, most sonorous harmonies, worthy to be the chief glory of the English mind. It is not at all capriciously fanciful to suppose that, on the very days when Frobisher and Drake and Hawkins with gun, sword, and pike, were striking deep wounds into that proud, menacing colossus, the Spanish Empire, and thus, while saving the political power of England from overthrow, were strengthening for all Christendom the foundations of civil and religious freedom, Shakespeare, then in his twenty-fifth year, was with hopeful joy writing down the first scenes of his first original drama, — say of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, or *Love's Labor Lost*, — and thus announcing the poetical primacy of England among modern nations.

In both of these comedies we have the fragrant promise of the bountiful fruits of their author's after-growth. Of course, marks of immaturity are palpable; the characters are not yet definitely outlined or cunningly drawn, the

construction lacks compactness, the meditation is not profound. But there is here, as in the "first heir of his invention," *Venus and Adonis*, that wide and active thoughtfulness which is the characteristic of first-class minds, and, as concomitant of this, continuity, at once sprightly and logical, of the mental current, where, through the generative impulse given by poetic imagination, thought breeds thought in a fervid flow. In this distinctive attribute of large genius, the endless revivication of the mind by its own activity, Shakespeare is unequaled. We have here, too, his humorous, combined with his moral, view of life. In both plays there are sound and wise sayings, but not yet the wisest, and over and about both, emanating from the genial soul of the young poet, glistens an indescribable poetic atmosphere. Reading them we feel ourselves, as when we walk out in early spring, breathed upon by the virgin breath of unfurling leaves and peeping buds impatient for deeper drafts of solar warmth to shower about them their beauty of color and perfume, with here and there a privileged half-blown rose, that, through inward warmth, has burst prematurely forth on a bush of buds, proclaiming the near future splendors.

II.

RIPENESS.

In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare leapt from spring into summer. Among his works this glowing drama has the place of a fervent noon in May, tremulous with the heat of July, while still laden with vernal fragrance. In human growth indefinable is the line between ripeness and unripeness. A nature so deep, abundant, aspiring, as that of Shakespeare, is ever ripening. But as man, and still more pointedly as artist, Shakespeare had his period of crudeness. By good critical investigators he is believed to have been several years at work on *Romeo and Juliet*, from 1592 to 1594 or 1595, that is, from his twenty-eighth to his thirty-first year. As a bridge between his young manhood and his middle manhood it would be built carefully and slowly. Yet, in its final state, as we have it now in print, and as representative of the opening of the riper period, it stands in such contrast to others of

his plays, presumed to have preceded it in date, that we call it a leap from comparatively shallow streams into dramatic and poetic deeps.

"When I was in love I wrote love-poems," says Goethe; and so he wrote a great many, through a long series of years. To some of the good people who condemn Goethe for being so often in love, this were a pertinent question: "Dont you wish that you *could* be?" The man who wrote *Romeo and Juliet* had a large capability of love. It is the most impassioned drama Shakespeare ever wrote, and the passion which gives it such fiery life being the most powerful in human nature, it draws old and young, warm and even cold, into the whirlpool of its charm; — aye, but it does so through the might of poetry, for none but a great poet, the greatest of poets, could present becomingly, attractively, faithfully, the master-passion in its beautiful but terrific excess. Here, for the first time in drama (if we are not mistaken in dates), Shakespeare stood forth fully arrayed in the poetic splendors of his great calling. Juliet is first made visible to us by one of its liveliest flashes: when Romeo first beholds her, to him

"She seems to hang upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear."

It is in keeping that poetry should be made to sparkle its brightest at the introduction of her round whom it has thrown so vivid a lustre that in the imagination of men she will shine a magnetic light forever. With tenderest familiarity Shakespeare so nestles himself in the heart of the glowing girl that he can give voice to her most sacred feelings. It is as if, a delicate spirit, he had the privilege of riding on the quickened arteries of her richest blood, — those currents that carry from her heart to her cheek her sweetest desires and blushes. The multiplicity and sureness of his intuitions give to Shakespeare his unique supremacy.

Here, too, we have compact characterization, — in the intellectual, refined, high-minded Mercutio, in the truculent Tybalt, in the benevolent, indulgent, wise friar Laurence, in the carnal-minded, garrulous, spoilt old nurse, besides Romeo himself, of whom, being very young, we can only confidently say that there is in him the making of a noble, efficient man, as we cannot but exclaim of Juliet, with such a will and such capacity what a splendid woman she would have become.

Romeo and Juliet is the *tragedy* of love only because it is the drama of hate. But for the senseless, wicked animosity between the Capulets and Montagues, the love of these two innocents would not have been steeped in blood and death. Had Romeo been a bidden, a welcome guest at Capulet's ball, the mutual love at first sight would have enwrapt him and Juliet all the same in its peremptory folds. Instead of there being a secret, sudden marriage — the secrecy and the isolation of the lovers intensifying unhealthily their passion — they would have had a numerous, happy wedding, to the joy of both families. The feud between the two houses was the remote as well as immediate cause of the sudden, tragic end of the promising, impassioned pair.

While in *Romeo and Juliet* love is swallowed up in tragedy, in *Midsummer Night's Dream* love is bantered and flouted by comedy. The whole piece, after we have read it, and while reading it, makes the impression of a remembered, disjointed dream, in which reality is mocked. The play is a humorous mask gotten up by the master of the revels for the marriage festival of Theseus and Hyppolita. To give himself the fullest freedom,

Shakespeare throws the scene back beyond history into the legendary era of Athens. Through its crowd of individual beauties, through its creative potency in the delicate, delectable fairies, through the rounded, harmonious coalescence of diverse and contrasted personages, this play is a poetic masterpiece. It sparkles with fun, irony, and poetry. Shakespeare, the most poetically imaginative of men, is at the same time the most realistic. In his highest flights into dreamland or cloudland or fairyland, he ever binds himself to the earth with threads woven out of her bowels, however fine may be their filaments; and the infallibility of his intuitions gives to incidents a wise significance, to individualities a generic breadth, of which himself was hardly conscious at the moment. What a playful, meaningful irony may we not read in Titania's love for Bottom with the ass's head, and her disgust when she is disenchanted? In *Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare multiplies beauty and piles wonder on wonder with a lavishness of resource and joyous facility unsurpassed by anything one can think of but nature in her tropical luxuriance, or the teeming air which, on a calm, summer afternoon, adds glory to

glory in buoyant tiers of white, illuminated clouds, preparing to do honor to their begetter, the sun, who requites the homage by presently transforming the fleecy mountains of white into rosy gorgeousness.

It does not appear that Shakespeare was intellectually precocious. To be sure we have no line of his before 1584 or 1585, when, in his twentieth or twenty-first year, he probably wrote *Venus and Adonis*. But from the evidence of his progressiveness in dramatic writing, and from the qualities of his earliest in comparison with his later plays, we perceive that his power unfolded itself with a certain slowness, which, indeed, unless he were a miracle, could not be otherwise, however quick was his genius. This betokens depth of inwardness, which is not apt to be accompanied by prematurity.

Certain men rise quickly to a limited elevation, chiefly through memory; but not having in them the emotional susceptibility thoroughly to assimilate the sap of what observation and memory collect, they are, — unless they work in the domain of the exact sciences, whence emotion is excluded, — and cannot but be, superficial, and are thus doomed to be soon

forgotten. Of this type are Brougham and Macaulay, who stand in contrast to writers like Coleridge and Carlyle, who, to an equal degree of memory and a higher intellect, adding depth through emotional power, thus impart to their literary work the light which gives length of life.

Shakespeare's memory (and it was of rare compass and tenacity) he used as the servant of reason and poetry. And what service it did him already in *Venus and Adonis!* This remarkable poem — remarkable for itself as well as for being Shakespeare's first — was not published until 1593. The author, now in his thirtieth year, dedicated it, as the "first heir of my invention," to his young friend the Earl of Southampton. Is it through a delusion of the fancy that I think I discover in this poem prefigurement of all the great qualities of Shakespeare's mind? First to be marked, as fortifying the whole, is what might be called a constitutional quality of Shakespeare's poetry, namely, body. Poetry has its scale of specific gravities. An equal bulk of some poetry has the weightiness of gold in comparison with some other which ranks specifically with silver, or perhaps with composite

brass. This comes of the substantiality, with fine texture, of fresh thought; and when such thought is perfused with feeling and animated by poetry, verse has the spirit and perfume as well as the body of a rich Burgundian wine, which, deriving its strength and essential flavor from the soil, is fed by the prolific, invisible air, and ripened by genial sunshine.

Of *Venus and Adonis* although only a descriptive poem, another characteristic — and one which would have rejoiced a competent sympathetic critic with the splendor of its promise — is the obvious wealth of the quarry from which is drawn the material for its poetic structure. Here already is evidence of what a deep, inexhaustible mine it was, the interior endowment of Shakespeare. The Italian fashion of the day, which took pleasure in poetic artificiality, in strained conceits, in ostentation of mythology, furnished most of the defects as well as the subject of *Venus and Adonis*. The originality, the lively, intellectual current, the facility, flow from Shakespeare's own marvelous brain, which, at this first contact with a poetic enterprise, seems to bound and boil, like the horse of Adonis, with quick desire:

"His nostrils drink the air, and forth again,
As from a furnace, vapors doth he send.
His eye, which scornfully glistens like fire,
Shows his hot courage, and his high desire.
Sometimes he trots, as if he told the steps,
With gentle majesty, and modest pride;
Anon he rears upright, curvets and leaps,
As who should say, lo! thus my strength is tried."

What a picture of a horse! Instead of vapors, the poet's brain, with lavish superabundance, outbreathes figures of speech. In his great dramas these, being controlled by art, are more deeply planted in the texture of the thought, which it thus braces and illustrates. Of the wild exuberance of figurative treasures, displayed all through the poem, take this as an example:

"This ill presage advisedly she marketh:
Even as the wind is hushed before it raineth;
Or as the wolf doth grin before he barketh,
Or as the berry breaks before it staineth;
Or like the deadly bullet of a gun,
His meaning struck her ere his words begun."

In this early narrative effort another quality of the great dramatic poet is manifest — compression with copiousness. Having so full a mind, Shakespeare often dilates, while at the same time he concentrates meaning into single lines and sentences. Again, in *Venus*

and Adonis is charmingly conspicuous what is a token of the poetic organization, and is one of the happiest of possessions, vivifying especially Shakespeare's comedies, — without which, indeed, no successful poetic drama could be achieved, — I mean, delight in life. This delight comes of sympathy with living beings, and this sympathy breeds knowledge, and that of the most profitable kind — knowledge of the soul of things.

A young poet would take a subject like *Venus and Adonis* because he had warm thoughts and glowing pictures to give forth. Wordsworth never would have chosen such a subject, because he lacked this warmth of temperament. To this warmth we owe the charm of Shakespeare's numerous, peerless company of lovely women, from Rosalind to Miranda. In the poet Shakespeare this temperament was an immeasurable virtue, giving depth, truth, refinement, attractiveness to the "better half" of his characterizations. To the man, it seems to have been at one time a cause of suffering, self-reproach, contrition. Let us not be ready with pharisaic blame, but gratefully give our sympathy to a benefactor, that to him personally was a source of distress that

which to the highest department of our literature was a source of power and beauty. Through the union of a fine susceptibility to the beautiful with the amorous temperament is generated round the perceptions an atmosphere through which much that is most precious and lovable in life gains significance and light; while, at the same time, under certain conditions, this union adds a fiery force to temptation.

In a social state growing out of unsound principles of association, the passions, — the great factors of human life, — not having an open, broad, fair field for their play, and being irrepressible, will seek narrow, secret by-ways and forbidden precincts for their gratification. There are at present signs of a tendency to a higher order, but as yet our civilized society is as disordered as it was in the sixteenth century, and hence, especially through the action of the sexual feeling, vice, misery, crime. But Shakespeare, however personally a partial victim to perverted passion, had too clear a moral vision to be deceived as to the nature of the feelings. Into the mouth of Adonis, repelling the advances of Venus, he puts these two stanzas :

"Call it not love, for love to heaven is fled,
Since sweating lust on earth usurped his name,
Under whose simple semblance he hath fed
Upon fresh beauty, blotting it with blame;
Which the hot tyrant stains, and soon bereaves,
As caterpillars do the tender leaves.

"Love comforteth like sunshine after rain,
But lust's effect is tempest after sun;
Love's gentle spring doth always fresh remain,
Lust's winter comes ere summer half be done.
Love surfeits not, lust like a glutton dies;
Love is all truth, lust full of forged lies."

Venus and Adonis, if not a great poem, has in it the seeds of greatness. *Lucrece* is greater, deeper, more mature, palpitating with power, flooded with the overflow of genial abundance. It is an early black cloud surcharged with lightning, that announces afar off *Lear* and *Othello*. *Venus and Adonis*, decked with the rosy clouds and glittering dews of morning, cheery with rural sights and sounds and movements, is the harbinger of *As You Like It*. In these two brilliant poems the great master of tragedy and comedy is trying and tuning the youthful instruments of his immense orchestra.

Nor were these two poems, as we now read them, the pure product of a youthful mind.

First written, probably, between his twentieth and twenty-second years, they were first given to the public in his thirtieth and thirty-first. Can we believe that their author, now pointed at, with admiration or envy, in London as a dramatic poet of note and growing fame, would in 1593 publish, and dedicate to Lord Southampton, a poem written ten years earlier by his unpractised pen, and not first subject it to close revision? In this revision, by a mature hand, of an immature work, there would not fail to be numberless emendations, additions, subtractions, expansions, contractions, letting in more light here, heightening or mellowing the poetic color in places, enlivening while polishing the style, deepening this passage, softening this epithet, rejecting that, — in short, giving to a crude production of a youth, just out of his teens, the full benefit of the revising pen of an experienced artist of thirty. What thus applies to *Venus and Adonis* applies to *Lucrece*, published the following year, 1594, and likewise dedicated to the poet's young friend, Southampton; and applies with still more force, because *Lucrece* is a more ambitious work, and also because of the great immediate popularity of *Venus and Adonis*.

In both there are, it seems to me, indications that a trained proficient artist has studiously revised the stanzas of a young, powerful, exuberant poet: they bear evidence of the practised touch of artistic thoughtfulness. This adds vastly to their biographical interest.

More autobiographical than the two revised youthful poems are the Sonnets. In these Shakespeare speaks directly of himself. What the Sonnets are has, I think, been discovered by Charles Armitage Brown, who published in 1838 a volume entitled, *Shakespeare's Autobiographical Poems; Being his Sonnets clearly developed: with his Character Drawn chiefly from his Works.* This valuable volume is dedicated to Walter Savage Landor, to whom, in 1828, at Florence, Mr. Brown made known his important discovery.

They are not, properly speaking, sonnets (a sonnet being a completed, independent poem of fourteen lines), but poems in the sonnet stanza. Mr. Brown has deciphered that these poems are six in number, of about twenty-five stanzas each. The first five are addressed to W. H., that is, plausibly concludes Mr. Brown, to William Herbert, afterwards Earl of Pembroke, nephew to Sir Philip Sidney. To Pem-

broke and his brother Philip, Earl of Montgomery, Heminge and Condell dedicated their first folio edition of Shakespeare in these emphatic words: "But since your Lordships have been pleased to think these trifles something heretofore, and *have prosecuted both them*, AND THEIR AUTHOR LIVING, *with so much favor;* we hope (that they outliving him, and he not having the fate, common with some, to be executor to his own writings) you will use the same indulgence towards them *you have done unto their parent.*" The words in parenthesis give countenance to Mr. Brown's opinion, that it was Shakespeare's purpose to edit his works himself. Heminge and Condell, his personal friends, were cognizant of his plans. What an unconscious confession of the opinion and the blind ignorance of the day is the phrase "these trifles," applied to plays which are now esteemed the most weighty and brilliant treasures of all literature.

Mr. Brown, it seems to me, is justified in saying of his interpretation and division of the sonnets that "This key, simple as it may appear, unlocks every difficulty, and we have nothing but pure, uninterrupted biography." He divides them as follows: —

"First Poem. Stanzas 1 to 26. *To his friend, persuading him to marry.*

"Second Poem. Stanzas 27 to 55. *To his friend, who had robbed the poet of his mistress, forgiving him.*

"Third Poem. Stanzas 56 to 77. *To his friend, complaining of his coldness, and warning him of life's decay.*

"Fourth Poem. Stanzas 78 to 101. *To his friend, complaining that he prefers another poet's praises, and reproving him for faults that may injure his character.*

"Fifth Poem. Stanzas 102 to 126. *To his friend, excusing himself for having been some time silent, and disclaiming the charge of inconstancy.*

"Sixth Poem. Stanzas 127 to 152. *To his mistress, on her infidelity.*"

If any cold thoughts that the reader may have, caused by the subject of the sixth poem, are not melted by charity and gratitude, let him recall the pregnant words of the great poet himself: "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together; our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not: and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues."

These poems were probably written between the years 1597 and 1606, that is, when Shakespeare was at the height of his dramatic activity. Moods in the writer and aptness in the subject always affect poetic execution, and thence there are marked inequalities among the stanzas ; but most of them are alive with his thoughtful, poetic life, and some of them rise to the full Shakespearean height. Even were there not other internal and biographical evidence of their origin, these latter of themselves suffice to shatter the shallow doubts that now and then have been started as to their authorship : no other poet of that day could have written them, so packed are they with thought, so centrally lighted with the red heat of poetry.

Dante calls thirty-five the *mezzo del cammin*, the half-way year, reckoning, with the Psalmist, seventy as the healthy term of human life. Were it not wiser to call forty-five the half-way year, reckoning, not from birth, but from twenty, when consciousness is ripened and manhood begins ? This would be treating man less as animal and more as an intellectual spiritual being. Such better treatment of him is by no means yet prevalent in Christendom, where, besides the metaphysical materialism (if the

conjunction of these two words be not a solecism) so common among the higher educated, there obtains an almost universal practical materialism, men looking upon animal enjoyments and material externalities, not as being during earth-life a necessary foundation, a secondary adjunct, but as the chief purpose of living, the richest source of happiness, the main motive for exertion, an estimate of life which, mistaking the mortal means for the immortal end, deadens hope, lowers the tone of human feeling, deprives life of its deeper sweetness, and makes of it a lengthening series of disappointments, — an estimate born of groveling practice, against which, in these greedy, ambitious times, sermons and psalms are as effective as would be the shouts of an engineer to arrest his headlong locomotive.

In Shakespeare's day the fugacious advantages of youth appear to have been not less prized than at earlier epochs. Was there in this a trace of the Pagan influence of the *Renaissance*, so powerfully felt in the sixteenth century? One might think so, were it not that all through Christendom, at the present day, is conspicuous the same over-estimation of the transitory.

As these sonnets were circulated in manuscript in 1806, most of them were probably written before Shakespeare's fortieth year. The sixty-third, in the middle of the poem, "warning his young friend of life's decay," is likely to have been produced some years before he had reached forty; and yet, in it he speaks of himself as already o'erworn by age. This sonnet is otherwise biographically valuable as one of several which proclaim with calm confidence that his pen will preserve his friend's memory forever.

LXIII.

"Against my love shall be, as I am now,
With time's injurious hand crush'd and o'erworn;
When hours have drained his blood, and fill'd his brow
With lines and wrinkles; when his youthful morn
Hath travel'd on to age's steepy night;
And all those beauties, whereof now he 's king
Are vanishing, or vanished out of sight,
Stealing away the treasure of his spring;
For such a time do I now fortify
Against confounding age's cruel knife,
That he shall never cut from memory
My sweet love's beauty, though my lover's life:
His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,
And they shall live, and he in them still green."

The sixty-sixth reminds us of Hamlet's suicidal soliloquies; written probably while he was

busy with that masterpiece. It reveals a mood to which Shakespeare's poetic sensitiveness made him liable in those years, a mood, — far from being one of his deepest and best, — when the superficialities and artificialities and hypocrisies and injustices and meannesses and grossnesses of the world took him unawares, when his nerves were relaxed, and, descended from his poetic citadel, he was not able to repel, with the shafts of spiritual insight, the shower of thrusts from the coarse and crude and false side of humanity. The wounds were the more galling from the very sensibility which, when it was high-strung by creative impulse, sped his vision through these obscurations of the human spirit, making of them subjects for hopeful smiles rather than for despondent groans. But what compression, what pith in every one of the eleven lines that specify the abuses of the world :

LXVI.

" Tired with all these, for restful death I cry ; —
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honor shamefully misplaced,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
And strength by limping sway disabled,

> And art made tongue-tied by authority,
> And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill,
> And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,
> And captive good attending captive ill;
> Tir'd of all these, from these would I begone,
> Save that to die I leave my love alone."

In these biographically precious sonnets many sides of the man are undesignedly revealed. Shakespeare's poetic organization was so dramatic, that to get their best out of his marvelous faculties he needed the stir and momentum of dramatic precipitation, the lively interaction of scenic dialogue. In his dramas he exhibited what the highest drama demands, that subtle faculty of getting closer to the marrow, more intimate with the heart, of a thought, sentiment, or personage, than other poets. Milton, for instance, is, in comparison, aloof and intellectual. Still, as this profound power results from the closest union among several rare literary qualifications, intensity of feeling, instantaneous ignition by contact of feeling with intellect, instantaneous enfolding in words of the light thus kindled, his undramatic work will not fail to give tokens of the power whose original source is creative fire in the poet's soul.

The motive force of Shakespeare, as of every

poet, comes from interior warmth, a heat at the core, strong enough to set the whole man aglow, and thus impart fervor and flexibility to the intellect, which by itself is cold. In the sonnets this warmth often manifests itself in affectionateness. Take the following (a little overstrained, according to the fashion of the day, which Shakespeare had not yet outgrown) as an example of his loving disinterestedness :

LXXI.

"No longer mourn for me when I am dead,
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell :
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it ; for I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
Oh ! if (I say) you look upon this verse,
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
But let your love even with my life decay ;
Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
And mock you with me after I am gone."

Conscious of his powers, still more conscious of his integrity and his manliness, and feeling his essential superiority to men higher placed on the social scale than it was his lot to be,

Shakespeare was wounded by the public opinion which stamped his histrionic calling as disreputable; and having, no doubt, at times proofs of this damnatory opinion brought uncomfortably home to him in the assumptions and pretensions of acquaintance, gave relief to his wounded sensibility through a sonnet in which there is humility as well as plaintive protest. When we now read this sonnet, in the warmth of our sympathy we are startled into wonder at the contrast between the despised, struggling actor, heaving in the solitude of his chamber from the midst of his contemporaneous obscurity this sigh of despair, and the towering, honored, revered man, to whom on two continents statues are raised, about whom books are multiplied more and more in his own and other languages, in token of the admiration, the gratitude, the veneration felt by the most enlightened of all countries:

CXI.

"Oh! for my sake do you with fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means, which public manners breeds;
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand;
And almost thence my nature is subdued

To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.
Pity me, then, and wish I were renew'd,
Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink
Potions of eysel 'gainst my strong infection;
No bitterness that I will bitter think,
Nor double penance, to correct correction.
Pity me, then, dear friend, and I assure ye,
Even that your pity is enough to cure me."

In another sonnet he once more sends forth a protest against the injustice and slander of those whose tongues disparaged him; and the whole educated world thanks him cordially for this insight into his dear interior. What proud, firm self-assertion! "I am that I am:"

CXXI.

"'T is better to be vile, than vile esteemed,
When not to be receives reproach of being;
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed,
Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing:
For why should others' false, adulterate eyes
Give salutation to my sportive blood?
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
No, I am that I am; and they that level
At my abuses, reckon up their own:
I may be straight, though they themselves be bevel.
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown;
Unless this general evil they maintain,
All men are bad, and in their badness reign."

People sometimes give away presents not

without self-reproach. From his friend Shakespeare received a memorandum-book, which he gave to another. In the next sonnet to the one just quoted he subtly apologizes for the act. C. Armitage Brown reasonably suggests that the book was too fine for use:

CXXII.

"Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain
Full character'd with lasting memory,
Which shall above that idle rank remain,
Beyond all date, even to eternity;
Or, at the least, so long as brain and heart
Have faculty by nature to subsist;
Till each to raz'd oblivion yield his part
Of thee, thy record never can be miss'd.
That poor retention could not so much hold,
Nor need Italics thy dear love to score;
Therefore to give them from me was I bold,
To trust those tables that receive thee more.
To keep an adjunct to remember thee,
Were to import forgetfulness in me."

From an earlier sonnet we learn that he had presented his friend with a blank book for writing down what could not be trusted to memory. Thence may be inferred that he kept such a book by him for his own stray thoughts. If that book could be recovered!—

"Look, what thy memory cannot contain,
Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find

Those children nurst, deliver'd from thy brain,
To take a new acquaintance of thy mind."

The quick flight of time, the fruitlessness of "honoring the outward," the transitoriness of the world's shows, are thoughts that many passages in his plays and poems prove to have been often in Shakespeare's mind. Feeling the force of the temptation to flatter the present moment, to satisfy appearances at the cost of truth, he thus, at the close of a sonnet addressed to Time, fortifies himself with a resolve:

"Thy registers and thee I both defy,
Not wondering at the present, nor the past;
For thy records and what we see do lie,
Made more or less by thy continual haste.
This I do vow, and this shall ever be,
I will be true, despite thy scythe and thee."

Such fortifying Shakespeare needed less than most men, for falseness could not get hold of him. His brain was a palace "for the crowned truth to dwell in." He was held to fidelity of fact and feeling by a twofold bond, by reason, clear intellectual perception, and by a spiritual love of truth. It may be said that the fullness and completeness of his mental equipment involved the perception and the

choice of truth. Truth is the law of being; falsehood is a breach of law. The best-endowed man will be most in harmony with the laws of being, with the deep principles implanted in nature, for the maintenance and success of nature. Intuitively he will "think the thoughts of God." Shakespeare knew, as few men know, both how to reason and how to feel. Through his quick sympathy with life truth streamed in upon him from all sides, giving depth and vivacity to his faculties.

How clearly he perceived the evil of one-sided passion, passion perverted, as it is when we "mix us too freely with our dust," and how forcibly he could describe it we have evidence in Sonnet CXXIX. Of Shakespeare's insight into human feeling, his grasp and pertinence of thought, his plastic command of expression, his condensation, energy, rapidity, and the sparkling vividness of his page, in short, of his multiform ability, hardly in his greatest tragedies will be found a more glowing exemplification than this intense sonnet:

CXXIX.

"The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and till action, lust
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,

Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
Had, having and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof, — and prov'd a very woe;
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell."

Divided, according to the interpretation of Armitage Brown, into a series of six poems, the sonnets become a most valuable autobiographic record, — a record, in certain passages, painfully interesting. Shakespeare's conviction of his undying renown, distinctly uttered in several of the sonnets, is proclaimed, as by a triumphant blare of trumpets, in two, which are wholly given up to this proclamation. Listening to these, the blood tingles with the sonorous grandeur of the verse, rejoicing with still warmer bound to have such assurance that our gifted benefactor knew how great he was, how prized to be. Here is one of the two:

LV.

"Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;

But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death and all oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth: your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity,
That wear this world out to the ending doom,
So, till the judgment that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes."

This is the mighty Shakespeare speaking of himself appropriately. When in 1609 the sonnets were printed, this one may have raised some smiles and some sneers, as the flowering forth of a sovereign self-complacency; for then, and for several generations, only the writer of it knew what he was. But now that we have, by slow degrees in the past hundred years, been taking a more faithful measure of his colossal proportions, we discover that in him was simple modesty what in any of his contemporaries would have been a thrasonical brag.

Some years before Shakespeare wrote the first sonnets, he was at work on the third part of *Henry VI.* As Gloster is there the predominant personage, and as Shakespeare, through the apprenticeship of improving the first and

the second parts of *Henry VI.*, and mostly writing the third, discovered what a promising soil English history is for dramatic culture, *Richard III.* was produced in 1593 or 1594. Having in *Henry VI.* and *Richard III.* given the rise and fall of the House of York, he turned back to *Richard II.* to give the rise of the House of Lancaster. *King John*, the earliest chronologically, antedating by a century the opening of the Lancastrian series, was written later, and *Henry VIII.* much later.

Shakespeare did not dedicate several of his most vigorous poetic years to the illustration of English history, but he illustrated English history by tragic dramas, because English history, in the periods he treated, is peculiarly apt for dramatic presentation. It is thus apt, from the personal qualities of several of the kings, from the vigor and ambition of their powerful subordinate nobles, from the comparative limitation of the scene of action, from the primitiveness of habits and racy contrasts between classes, from the breadth and strength and courage of the mass of the population, by the means of whom, and for the sake of ruling over whom, the contestants were roused to battle. There was then, as there always has been, a breath of

freedom blowing through, and nerving the wills of the English people, impelling them to have a choice and a voice in who should rule them; and this breath is an inspirer of poetry.

Only a great poet can draw out of an historic epoch a genuine drama; for he alone has the selective power to group the dramatic personages, and the illuminating power to make each one shine with individual light. An element too of his greatness must be philosophic thought, that is, thought which, penetrating far below surfaces, grasps fundamental principles. Were the world of man, whether individual or national, not subject, in all its manifestations, to law, and supremely to moral law, it could not shape itself into consistency. History only grows into being through the prosperous activity of formative intellectual and moral principles; and the poet who will dramatically reproduce history, having to deal with the deepest and broadest motive powers, must cherish in his heart warm sympathies with the best in man. Thus only can he gain the insight to comprehend him in action, and to portray him poetically.

That Shakespeare could reanimate history, or recorded fact, with the spirit of poetry is

crowning evidence of his human and his artistic potency. In him the poetic idealist was rooted in the stout English realist, thence the combined solidity and beauty of his historical work. In handling the Richards and the Henrys, the idealist breathed into them a soul that made them buoyant and luminous, while the realist held them to the earth, filling their arteries with prosaic but lively blood, which gave them their command as Kings over Englishmen of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Those whom he handles he revivifies, and this he does by bringing out the latent spirit of humanity into attractive presence. With a holier anointing he reconsecrates certain Kings of England. Even the bloody crown of Richard III. he makes to glisten with a splendor that outdazzles the cold ferocity of that monster. The kings upon whom has been laid his glorifying hand are a privileged dynasty. He has greatened the greatest of them. With his immortal pen he has so burnished the Plantagenets that they alone look majestical; all the others seem under partial eclipse, opaque and pale, as though they were hastening to oblivion.

To write only the English historical plays implies and requires some learning and much

knowledge. Hollinshed and other chroniclers and writers were the sources of the learning; and we may be sure that Shakespeare read every book within his reach that bore upon any subject he was treating; but books in that age comparatively with this, were scarce, and — except the very few native classics, Chaucer, Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney — crude and ignorant. The chief source of the vast and extraordinary knowledge displayed in this historic series was his own marvelous brain.

A man gets his learning chiefly from without, from the kingdoms of nature, inspected by his intellect or reported and recorded for him by others; his knowledge he gets chiefly from within, from his intuitions, from his capacity of insight into things and persons. Now Shakespeare was all compact of intuitions; and thence, though there have been men far more learned than Shakespeare, never one had so much knowledge. He knew the wealth and motions of the human heart; he knew the scope and keenness of the intellect. The concretions of these fiery elements into men and women, he knew with such discernment, that his many personages are in their vivid personality as though God-created. Men, as they stir in his-

tory and society, he knew how to combine into such passionate groups, that from his incarnations we learn the secrets of our own bosoms. Such was his knowledge of things and men, that his sentences are braces of wisdom for the invigoration of sages ; such his knowledge of words, that his page is the dictionary of scholars ; such his knowledge of beauty, that from his verse the tints and perfumes of nature gather freshness.[1]

When Shakespeare, before the age of thirty, began to be talked of "about town" and at the theatres as a rising dramatist, envy — whose inflamed eyes glisten most venomously in the excruciating glare of a new radiance — writhed painfully, and then spit at him her foulest bile. All the men of talent, and those with some genius, were alarmed ; for in the port and speech of the new-comer there was that which announced more than a common competitor. The offensiveness of this intrusion was aggravated by the gross fact that the intruder was one of the untitled laity, nothing but an ungraduated Philistine : he had no university degree. The

[1] The above paragraph I have borrowed from a small volume published more than twenty years ago : *Introduction to Social Science.*

other leading dramatists were university men. Ben Jonson, many years after, when, on Shakespeare's decease, he bore almost generous testimony to his genius, wondered, no doubt, that he had grown to such stature, seeing that he had "little Latin and less Greek." Stalwart Ben had too much Latin and Greek, that is, more than he had inward juice to assimilate, his "classic" learning coming away from him in undigested lumps. Had Shakespeare happened to have taken in more Latin and Greek than even Jonson himself, it would have been thoroughly fused and incorporated, turned first into healthy chyle, then into blood, his learning mixing with, melted into, knowledge, and his knowledge kept nimble by use, strengthened and enlarged by new currents from within and without, especially from within.

In 1572 died Robert Greene, author of a *Henry VI.*, which Shakespeare had lately worked over. Greene left in manuscript a work entitled *A Groat's worth of Wit, bought with a million of repentance.* Three months after Greene's death this work, purporting to have been written during his last illness, was published by Henry Chettle, also a dramatist. The book was prefaced by an address from Greene:

"To those gentlemen, his quondam acquaintance, who spend their wit in making Plays." The following is the important part of the passage in this address which relates to Shakespeare: "There is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank-verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes Fac-totum*, is in his own conceit, the only Shake-scene in a country. Oh! that I might entreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses, and let these apes imitate your past excellence, and never more acquaint them with your admired inventions."

Among the dramatists of that day there appears to have been something like a community of literary goods. Each one appropriated to his present use whatever suited his purpose. The practice must have been generally countenanced, and not deemed dishonest. There is no uncertainty, we believe, as to the priority of Greene in *Henry VI.* Some critics ascribe the first *Henry VI.* jointly to Marlowe, Greene, and Peele. Except on this theory, we cannot account for Shakespeare's having seized upon Greene's handiwork and headwork during

Greene's life, and by his imposed partnership, while shaping his neighbor's scenes into less prosaic forms, saving himself much labor. No wonder that poor Greene in his last moments fired a shot at the "upstart crow." Greene was probably one of the least poetical among his contemporary dramatists; his name is not among the twenty-five whom Lamb thought worthy of being included in his *Specimens*. Shakespeare, in this case as in others, looked upon as legal booty whatever he by his touch could improve. He thus availed himself of an intellectual and literary right, that any fact or material, no matter where found, is open to the use and appropriation of him *who has the genius to turn it to best account.*

Charles Lamb, in a note to a passage from Decker on the Happy Man, says: "The turn of this is the same with Iago's definition of a Deserving Woman, 'She that was ever fair and never proud' etc: the matter is superior."

The lines put into Iago's mouth, if they be not in weight of matter equal to those of Decker, are less prosaic and are perfectly suited to their place. Lamb jumps at any opportunity, by a choice passage or scene, to bring, if only for a moment, one of the "Contemporaries" to

the side of Shakespeare. To show fully what they all are combined, in comparison with Shakespeare, an effective way would be to extract from Shakespeare's plays the same kind and quantity of passages and scenes that Lamb has culled from the best plays of twenty-five dramatists. We should then have a convincing view of the difference between the ever radiating and ever sparkling glow of a mass heated from within by deep unintermitted heart-warmth, intensified while refined by poetically imaginative light, and the fitful shooting forth of flame from a mass less interiorly heated, and more lighted by the superficial play of fancy than by inward beams of poetic imagination. And this contrast is heightened by the thought, that for the one mass the warmth is supplied by a single mind, in the other by more than a score of minds.

To me it has always seemed that the "old dramatists" contemporary with Shakespeare have been, and continue to be, overrated. Coleridge, seventy years ago, and Mr. Swinburne, recently, are the brilliant poetic representatives of this overestimation. The late revival of interest in them is commendable; for, whatever may be the final enlightened judgment as to

their intrinsic worth, they have a high historic value. Editions of several of the most celebrated have been issued. Certain scholars and book-buyers put these on their shelves; but what is the proportion of readers to buyers? Among the few who read them, who reads them twice? You grant a certain importance to them as acquaintance, but you are not drawn into intimacy with them. You cannot make a friend of any of their personages. These lack refinement, and individuality, and wholeness, and a still greater bar to your taking one of them into your heart for a lifelong friend, — they themselves lack heart.

In every department of human endeavor, all through the annals of mankind, supreme men are very rare. It is not surprising, therefore, that but one man of that strong age should have had the divine plenitude of power that Shakespeare had. As for his contemporaries, the best of them want the deep basis of dramatic competency, — lively, sure, moral sense. With this, and partly as effect of this, is want of refinement. Moreover, in comparison with Shakespeare, they want both intellectual nimbleness and intellectual reach. They want — and this is their most damaging want — spirit-

uality, and that which spirituality helps much to unfold, — poetic imaginativeness. And thence, they want freedom of movement. In them you find little gracefulness, which comes of an inward sense of poetry and proportion in combination with delicate sentiment. They have not that which is a mark of sure, solid mental power, they are not symbolical, significant, broadly generic. Nor have they that which gives to mental power its efficiency, namely, artistic mastery. Of them it cannot be said, as of many poets, that they have more art than inspiration. Here again Shakespeare is supreme, his judgment and his artistic tact being equal to his genius.

In that age fashion and profit drove all poets, and would-be poets, to the drama. Out of thirty who wrote plays probably not ten had dramatic gifts. This want we discover through Shakespeare, who has given us so lofty a poetic and dramatic standard, that he becomes our foremost teacher of æsthetic principles and mysteries.

Of most literary aspirants want of heart may be called the most frequent and intrinsic want, causing countless failures and half successes. Many writers are ever striving for the

impossible, that is, to make the intellect do the work of the sensibilities: as vain as to expect roses to spring into bloom out of the frost-bound mold of February. The intellect, that most exquisite and most potent of tools, is cold as an icicle, passionless as the blade that gleams in the hand of the humane surgeon or in that of the brutal murderer. The moving force behind it, the eager energy that wields and rules it, is the heart. We say the heart; but this is a figure of speech for the feelings. In the heart are the deeps whose storms convulse the being of man, and at times shake society out of its poise. The poet who would portray the convulsions must have these deeps in his own heart, — withheld in him from destructive upheaval by his moral sense, and directed to constructive ends by his æsthetic sense. What the capaciousness of that heart out of which could come forth the single play of *Julius Cæsar!* We behold in his colossal proportions, though depicted in a few pages, the "mighty Julius," to whom it seemed "most strange that men should fear." Brutus and Portia stand together before us in the first scene of Act ii., with such vividness that flesh-and-blood friends are scarcely more audible

and visible, with such beauty that they can never tire us, and with such pathos that our affections ever yearn towards them. The heart whence issued that one scene is deep and strong, and tender, and manly, and womanly.

From this single dialogue between Portia and Brutus might be deduced the first law of the "Literature of Power," as De Quincey calls it in contradistinction to the "Literature of Knowledge." In the literature of power, the higher literature, the aim is to move: it always appeals to the feelings. And by this great simple scene what feelings are moved! love, admiration, sympathy, each of them transfused with the healthiest fragrance of the beautiful. It cannot be too often repeated that Art — and than written poetry there is no higher fine art — can produce its genuine, its pure, effects, only through the beautiful. In Art the feelings must show themselves at their best, æsthetically clarified, spiritually refined; and none but the poet can effect this refinement, and he only through his finer capacity for the ideal. How deep and rich shall be the material he exalts through this capacity depends on the warmth, largeness, depth of his

heart, that is, of his sensibilities. By means of the coöperative union of these high qualities, and through faith in the feelings he depicts, he becomes productive, creative; for poetry is affirmative, religious, not negative, not skeptical. Your Mephistopheles, the denier, is incapable of poetry, which, therefore, he despises. Hence, he takes to criticism, and being one-sided, through want of the upper side, he makes sad work, the sadness of which he cannot perceive. In this department of literature there are even Calibans, who, while they would be the equals of Prosperos, will, for the strong drink of flattery, or for greasy pelf, kiss the feet of Stephanos.

Aye; poetry is affirmative, religious, because its source is in the heart, not in the head; that is, in the emotional part of our wonderful and composite organism, not in the intellectual. Subservient to the heart is the intellect, and when, itself strong and agile, it serves a large heart poetically inspired, it performs its most brilliant feats. It then soars highest and delves deepest, has access to the grandest vistas, insights into subtlest secrets; so that a Shakespeare, ranging in finer atmospheres, his knowledge is more precious than even that of a Bacon.

Take the opening scene of *Macbeth*, introduced by thunder and lightning. The interlocutors are three Witches ; these, after eleven short lines, vanish. These eleven lines, which seem low, fantastical, are deep with meaning. They come out of Shakespeare's heart, not out of his intellect : they are a birth, not a mere contrivance or manufacture. Brooding on his great theme, the poet goes to the bottom of his soul for the material needed for its outfilling. Whether he believes in such hags or not, he believes in perverted passion, and that is what he has to exhibit in its most terrific manifestation ; and as poet he uses for his purpose the popular belief in witches, making them represent the dark desires, the carnal lusts, of the human heart. They prefigure the motive force of the tremendous drama in its most cruel, most damnable, form, murderous selfishness. Short as is the scene, it is an overture to the whole play. Mere intellect, the most ingenious, the most powerful, could not write a line of it ; it is a flowing out of the profound sensibility that could harbor in its bosom Macbeth and his wife and all their fearful being. Out of his feeling of the whole tragic subject, the poet, the artist, wrought

this short scene to predenote the quality of the sublime poem.

The poem is sublime through the deep, glowing warmth at the core of its maker, warmth molding the vast material into suitable shapes under the plastic play of consummate artistic feeling, which, besides the resources of a large, tender heart, has at its service the instrumentality of a keen, potent, agile intellect. Without overstraining, one might make the lightning, wherewith the witches are announced, symbolic of the whole play, — of all Shakespeare's plays. The lightning that is in them gives them their enduring life. Lightning is believed to be the motive force, the very constituent, of life. It is the essence of literary life. To the literary man the primary inborn need is warmth, especially to the poet. The poet must have excess of internal heat. But, mark you, not animal heat only, but emotional heat, genial, steady warmth to temper and purify the animal heat. This inward warmth it is that imparts to Shakespeare's verse its rapidity, its irresistible animation, its unfading charm. A subtle superiority of Shakespeare lies in his mastery of the logic of feeling. He makes one feeling grow

out of another in a natural and lively continuity. This feature, in the degree he exhibits it, is a peculiarity of Shakespeare. It might be termed his art of spiritual joinery, whereby, through genial glow, innumerable elastic articulations and delicate connections are created and adjusted. In this fine work he is chiefly aided by his command of metaphor.

What is a metaphor? A short similitude, a similitude in a single word, an implied comparison, a transference of quality from one thing to a different. All this the dictionaries tell you, and, true as it is, a metaphor is more than all this. A metaphor is the flashing perception (or rather, an effect of the perception) of one of the countless links that bind all the constituents of the universe into unity. An infinite network of similitude holds all things with indissoluble ties, and Shakespeare's mental grasp is at once so large and so fine that he seizes an exceptional quantity of the threads of this network, and so is enabled to make his pages sparkle with the flames kindled by figures of speech, especially by the most compact of figures, metaphor.

The faculty of perceiving likenesses is purely intellectual, and while it is a potent instrument

when wielded by the poet, it is the chief power in science, being the source of classification and a main element in all generalization.

Of Shakespeare's judgment, tact, sense of fitness, knowledge, and especially poetic insight, we find brilliant exemplification there where one would hardly think of looking for it, — in his plots and personages taken from original sources, Hollingshed, Plutarch, Italian tales, Belleforest, and others. Through his intuitions, his knowledge, his sensibility, he heightens, deepens, beautifies the personages he adopts, modifying, regrouping them, refreshing them with new desires, cheering them with new companions. Thus, into a pleasant Italian story he incorporates his own Falstaff and breathes into the scenes and characters such an English life, that the whole has the air of his own invention, so that no one would suspect that the delightful rich comedy of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was not entirely, from root to shining leaves, of native English growth. Out of a long diffuse novel by Lodge he creates *As you Like it*, adding several characters, among them Jaques and Touchstone. Sometimes, with his firm, easy grasp and organizing talent, his fondness for a broad field

and doubly-weighted plot, he works up two different stories into one play, as in *Lear* and the *Merchant of Venice*. *Othello* is taken from a novel by Cinthio ; and whoever has wondered at the depth and clearness of characterization, at the art and subtlety of dramatic evolution, in this powerful drama, will not have his admiration lessened by learning from the novel how raw and rudimental is the material out of which, through the magic wheel of genius, were spun the golden threads that are interwoven in this profound poem.

A most exquisite and an instructive literary enjoyment it is, to watch, going on before your eyes, the work of artistic creation ; to see prose transmuted into poetry, the flat into the significant, the loose into the compact, the horrible into the terrible. Through the intense vivacity of Shakespeare's nature, successive scenes, and the parts of each scene, are knit closely together, enchained by the logic of passion. As in human nature so in Shakespeare, in a scene of feeling he is always near to the pathetic. And all his scenes have on them those stamps of power, — beaming life, expression, sinuous movement. In this he and his contemporary Rubens, were alike.

Both owed it, secondarily, to the eager stir of the times acting upon large, warm, responsive natures. In both, intellectual activity was by daily intercourse with their fellows ever freshened, instead of being deadened; and this was because of their sympathies, which stimulate and feed curiosity.

In a man of such large calibre and fine endowment as either of these, there are two individuals, the idealist and the realist, the thinker and the doer, the poet and the man; and upon the ready interchange of friendly offices between the two, the subtle interlocking of one with the other, depend in large measure the fruitfulness and validity of either the poet or the man. The poet needs to be steadied and consolidated by the common sense of the man, and the man, in order to expand and become elastic, needs the aspiration of the poet and the insight conferred by his finer susceptibility. The closeness of the union between the two individuals in Rubens gave to the work of the artist and to the work of the man much of their grandeur and efficiency. Even more palpable in Shakespeare's work is the intimacy of this union. The whole varied product of his mind is a brilliant exem-

plification of the necessity, for thorough manhood, of the warm co-working between the realist and the idealist. This cordial partnership empowered him to give such play to his faculties that their product constitutes him the supreme poet of the world, the highest, most important of Englishmen. Owing to this ever-present ideal in his reality, his pages are overhung by a wide, high, pure, airy heaven, just as the pictures of Rubens are; and there is nothing smothery about the presentations of either: open to heaven, they have a boundless breadth of fresh air about them.

Where this ideal power does not make its buoyant atmosphere felt, we suspect a play of having been wronged or badly mutilated before it came into the printer's hands, or of not being but partially by Shakespeare. In the beginning of his career he rewrought the scenes of others; but he would hardly do this towards its close. What, then, shall we think of *Timon?* His most enlightened commentators place *Timon* among his latest dramas.

To me *Timon* is a failure, and therefore but partially Shakespeare's. Not much of his hand is traceable, it seems to me, until the fourth Act. The whole delineation lacks

depth. Rather than the earnestness of tragedy its characterization exhibits the caricature of melodrama. If Timon be not an impossible, he is an uninteresting, character. He is like a youth who, after being spoilt by over-indulgence, is so shallow that he cannot be chastened by misfortune; he is hardened by it into snarling selfishness. To me there is crudeness in the whole play, and a lack of poetry. It is unknit, disjointed. Especially is there no fine blending of the real and ideal, such as there *must* have been in one of the mighty master's latest finished dramas. Apemantus is right when he tells Timon his is "a poor unmanly melancholy." Timon is a big baby. The spirit of Shakespeare does not shine through the characters. Shakespeare is always warm and always intellectual. In Timon there is only a tepid warmth, and the intellectuality is, therefore, not steeped in deep pools of feeling.

On closing *Timon*, open *The Tempest*, among the last, if not the very last play he wrote. It is like passing suddenly from twilight in a desert to sunlight in the valley of Tempe. In *The Tempest* we have the most luminous ideal together with the most juicy real, the two so

closely, so healthily interblended, that we almost feel as if heavenly nature were outdone; — possibly she is, for here is an unsurpassed exhibition of what heavenly genius can do. If Hamlet represents Shakespeare in his restless, interrogative, impassioned young manhood, Prospero represents his matured manhood, with its mellowed knowledge, its benignity, its intellectual potency, its moral cheerfulness, its humane wisdom, the grandeur of its spiritual power.

In the death of Falstaff — one of those unexpected tender passages one is liable to come upon in Shakespeare — we have another conspicuous illustration of the crowning of realism with the lustrous diadem of the ideal. Who would ever think of hearkening to Dame Quickley to seize some of the most pathetic words ever written. That such words do issue from her mouth is proof of the greatness of Shakespeare's art, which knows how to be natural, and knows that to be as unconventional as nature is the attainment of highest art.

When, at the end of the second part of *Henry IV.*, poor Falstaff is dismissed by the new king with a severe frown and cutting words, we are lifted to the kingly elevation

suddenly reached by a spring which Henry was empowered to make by the strength and loftiness of his nature. As the young king had "turned away his former self," it was fitting that he should turn away "those that kept him company." The memory of how they had flattered his idle, sensual, youthful tendencies added some sternness, no doubt, to his rebuke, especially towards Falstaff, "the tutor and the feeder of his riots." To a young man with the intellectual superiority of Prince Henry, Falstaff was the only one who could have misled him, or, rather, helped him to mislead himself; and this, though "so surfeit-swelled, so old and so profane," Falstaff did through the power of wit. His wit made his intellectual ingenuity sparkle with an attractiveness so fascinating to us, as well as to the Prince, that we have an æsthetic enjoyment in his very exhibitions of selfishness. By his creative puissance Shakespeare has imparted to Falstaff a personal magnetism that makes the fat Knight irresistible.

In that withering last address, which must have astounded Falstaff like a thunderclap out of a cloudless sky, the new King says to him:

> "Know, the grave doth gape
> For thee thrice wider than for other men."

Nevertheless, within that mound of superfluous flesh there dwelt a tender human soul; for, this treatment of him by his quondam regal boon companion, "killed his heart." So, he had a heart to break. Mrs. Quickley, Bardolph, and company were not his mere hangers on for the sake of his knighthood and his wit: they loved Sir John. Such as they don't love a heartless man. That, selfish and sensual, he was not utterly hard and incurable, his death-bed also shows. From the touching description of his death by Hostess Quickley some commentators would snatch the most significant flower from the wreath she lays upon his grave, substituting a prosaic phrase for "'a babbled of green fields." By these words, fat, sinful old Jack of Eastcheap is transfigured into innocent little boy Jack of the country, whereby sympathy is awakened to such a degree that our imagination is lured to follow him through his purgation in the after-life. The out-swollen bulk of the loose liver dissolves, and in its place uprises the image of innocence. The soul ever travels back to its primitive pure state, however long and arduous may be the journey. This is the inalienable privilege of its divine birth. Nor

does there exist on the earth a soul so blackened, but at its core there is a spark divine enough to finally purify and redeem it.

That we so follow Falstaff is a token that, like Bardolph and Mrs. Quickley, we, too, have got to love old Jack, in spite of his sins.

Shakespeare, a magnetic man, who drew other men to him by the fascination of his presence and his speech, went to London in his twenty-second or twenty-third year; grew there so famous that he achieved even a material success until then unparalleled in literature; retired early to his native rural town of Stratford on Avon; lived there an honored, prosperous citizen, and died on the 23d of April, 1616, in his fifty-third year. But did we know twenty times as much as this of his outward earthly life, what were it to what we know, and know with restful certitude, of the heavenly inward being of the man. Whom of our fellow-men do we know if we know not him out of whose one brain issued *Hamlet* and *Lear* and *Macbeth* and the *Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* and *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the kingly *Richards* and *Henrys* and *Julius Cæsar* and

Anthony and Cleopatra and *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest?* "What a piece of work" is such a man! What an ideal of human mental power! What an individuality for the expansion and elevation of the standard of man's capacity! How grandly and tenderly populous must have been that large, deep, viviparous brain! During those years of productive activity, how many hours and days of ecstatic delight, of joy unspeakable, to this peerless benefactor, while he was molding in the glow of thought, and consecrating with the precious oil of poetic genius the scores and hundreds of divers and distinct human individualities, whom, by the force of a superearthly imagination he launched into the world to live and move among us forever, our dear, constant, most wholesome, most instructive companions! Think what a divine existence here on the earth this man must have led while nursing in his great heart Kent and Cordelia, Hermione and Perdita, Posthumus and Imogen, Juliet and Romeo, Hamlet and Prospero, and all the other immortals who, through a long series of years, came forth in such rapid succession that they jostled one another as they grew up in their happy, gorgeous nursery, fed there by the light of that single brain.

A law, a profound, a benign law of our being it is, that every blessing we bestow upon others is a blessing to ourselves. The love that flows out of us in benefaction weaves a warming halo of smiles around our own life; while self-love, flowing inward, becomes a smoldered fire without radiance, around which crouch unrest and ennui, scorns and hates and coldnesses, that darken the daily being of ourselves and of those nearest us. Blessings, like curses, come back to roost at home. Our real recompenses, as our real punishments, grow from within ourselves, hereafter as well as here. A deep truth it is that the mind makes its own heaven or hell. What a heaven must have been the mind of Shakespeare, dedicated to such exalted beneficence.

That the beneficence was indirect weakens not its virtue. His mental progeny would not, could not, have had that soundness and sprightly health and beauty and fascination that make them a joy and an education, had not their creation been steadily presided over by those spiritual and moral powers, according to the degree of whose regency is a life sound and effective. Besides the active presence of these highest human faculties, general fullness and

richness of endowment was indispensable to Shakespeare for the performance of his unique part as myriad-minded dramatist, as mouthpiece of humanity, as poet in whom were married Æschylus and Aristophanes. That, in the present imperfect organization of society, this fullness exposed him to the lapses and unhappinesses of common men, was even a means of strengthening and deepening his moral consciousness through the testimony of personal experience. At the same time, be it observed, the great poet needs not practical, personal experience in order to depict passion or crime. Exceptionally gifted with feeling, he has a consciousness of its capabilities, and thus can faithfully reproduce a Macbeth or an Imogen, an Iago or an Isabella. Through his lively sympathies he can come near enough to the abyss to look into it: had he fallen in, he could not have described it so poetically, that is, so truthfully. He had set foot among the haunts of Falstaff, and he had acquaintance with the temptation of Anthony; but for no Cleopatra would he have ever forfeited the sovereignty of the poetic world, a sovereignty which, with all his poetic and intellectual power, depended ultimately on the depth and wholeness of his

spiritual and moral sensibilities, that is, on the greatness of his heart.

This greatness of heart constitutes the controlling greatness of the foremost leaders among men, the leaders in action as well as in thought. But for his moral greatness we should have had no Washington. Nay, by that great congress of 1775 he would not have been chosen commander-in-chief, had not his reputation been so high for honor and integrity. His military achievement had as yet been limited (fighting Indians under Braddock), nothing by itself to entitle him to the chief command; but for forty-three years he had been growing in wisdom, — and the sole matrix of wisdom is moral feeling, — and he had established a character for uprightness. But for this, honest John Adams, a leader in that august assembly, would not have been the first to point to Washington as the fittest man for chief command. All through those seven years of patriotic trial his great heart confirmed the leadership first won by it; aye, in moments of deepest depression, it was the love and confidence universally felt towards him, by the army, the Congress, the people, that made the continuance of that indispensable leadership possible.

Through the tenor of his whole life, with its high achievement, he is the choice exemplar of the practical, as Shakespeare is of the poetic, ideal.

We go back more than twenty-two hundred years for the ethical ideal, and we find it in the greatest man of the Pagan world, a man who, through greatness of heart, towered above the many giants who are the glory of his small Athenian land. Socrates, solidly self-centered, not self-seeking, moved by love for man and love for truth, wrought for the moral and intellectual improvement of his fellow-citizens. He did his high work by speech. Ever talking and ever seeking to lead whom he talked with to higher subjects, he never tried or wished to impose his opinions on any one, but strove to unfold what is true for all. A man he was most just, most loving, most disinterested, most pious, a man whose ideal of duty was so lofty and so binding that, on the trial for his life, he scorned to have recourse to the customary devices of defense, for fear of violating the laws, and, from the same sense of loyalty, refused, after his sentence of death, to escape from prison. Through the uplifting, liberating power of spiritual divineness and moral self-

command, Socrates was a freer man than any pagan of his matchless epoch, and than most Christians of our day, so free and strong that he eminently illustrates the deep, the sublime truth recently uttered by a great thinker:[1] "Man is not an object of fate; he is fate itself organized. He is not merely under law, but he is law; he is law arisen into self-cognition and volition."

To complete the vast, splendent circle of human capabilities, one more ideal is needed, the spiritual; and as all else grows out of spirit, the spiritual ideal ranges above the others. By his words and his works Jesus of Nazareth is the archetype of the spiritual ideal. In him so active was the spiritual vitality, his whole being was so translucent with celestial light, that during his brief sojourn on earth he seemed like a visitant from the transearthly sphere, — an angel who out of love for his earthly fellow-men, took up his abode among us. In his mind there was nothing earthy. Neither in word nor in deed was there a thought of self. When he healed the sick, or uttered simple but profoundly wise precepts of conduct, he gave forth spiritual ideals too lively

[1] Selden J. Finney.

with celestial life to be apprehended by those about him; and they continue to be too high to be apprehended by all in their full trans-earthly bearings and beautiful significance. By deed as well as by word he taught that the highest human act is to efface the self and give yourself to others. Such words and such deeds imply a consciousness of spiritual sufficiency that empowers the speaker and doer to be the spiritual, the religious, ideal, and prove the bond between earth and heaven, between man and God. And thus, the most important act in the momentous life of Jesus was his appearing to his disciples after the crucifixion. This reappearance meant, the bond between God and man, between heaven and earth, is not broken by the body's decease; man is a spirit, and there is no death.

These ideals run into each other: each one involves in some degree all the four. The practical ideal implies, rests upon, the moral ideal; and a large-minded doer, like Washington, in performing his many duties, will be strengthened by spiritual or religious sensibility, and, aiming always at the best, will feel the sway of the poetic ideal. His life is a poem, which all men should study. Socrates, striv-

ing to make men better, felt himself the better for submission to divine will. Love one another, be just, is the burden of Jesus' teaching: be true and clean and merciful and humble, and you have a foretaste of heaven; for the kingdom of heaven is within you. But it will not be within you, it cannot stay within you, if you habitually break the moral law. On the poetic ideal many of the luminous words of Jesus are an inspiring commentary, while his self-sacrificing life was a beautiful, sublime, tragic poem, carrying in it, like every high poem, a deep moral lesson.

Now, more than any of the others, the poetic idealist — especially if he be the many-sided, myriad-minded man that Shakespeare was — needs, in the execution of his literary task, to embrace in large measure all the others; for being, through his myriad-mindedness, the poetic spokesman of mankind, his conceptions, descriptions, characterizations require him to harbor in his brain the practical, the moral, the spiritual ideal, in order that he may, in situations, in combinations, in personages, present the multifarious vivid pictures of human life which we have in his teeming pages. A poet, with an endowment so compact and brilliant,

mellows the poetic ideal into the human ideal, not by embodying perfected human beings, — in this first stage of man's career such premature embodiments would suffocate in our dense earthly air, — but by making each individual embodied so true, at once to nature and to himself, that he becomes a type, and thus presents the astonishing union of vital individuality with generic breadth, a union which attests the highest poetic achievement, an achievement whose distinction consists in causing the soul of the personage represented to shine through his speech and his conduct. To accomplish this is the exclusive privilege of genius, of poetic genius, which alone has the interior light to illumine the depths of being, and thus make transparent in the individual generic characteristics.

Close upon these archetypal representatives of the highest in humanity follow others, whose large intellects were likewise so enlightened by disinterested aspiration, that they enjoy a similar immortality of gratitude and love as tutelary pioneers of their fellow-men. These let the reader select for himself; but were I to indicate by name a score of these gifted, high-hearted workers, these deep souls, in the

list would not be included four of the most prominent, brilliant, weighty names in history, those of Alexander, Cæsar, Cromwell, Napoleon. These men were great, not through greatness of heart, but solely through greatness of head. However dominant the parts they play in human affairs, whatever precedence they be entitled to as controlling factors in the evolution of history, they have no place in the love of mankind.

Our love towards Shakespeare for the greatness of his heart is equal to our admiration of the greatness of his head. To him were given, in brimming and equal measure, power of intellect and power of feeling; and finest sensibility to the beautiful, linking these in coöpertive action, concentrated and refined his deep mental currents into Art.

When we are enraptured and exalted by the unsurpassed artistic grandeur and beauty of *The Tempest*, and wonder ever anew at the untamed vigor, at the poetic splendor of *Cymbeline*, and know — in so far as evidence internal and external may be trusted — that these are among the latest of Shakespeare's works, we ask ourselves, why did this strong, clear, fresh current cease to flow, how could it cease?

Their author had not yet reached his fiftieth year. Shakespeare began life as a poor man, had suffered some of the bitterness of poverty ; his work of twenty-five years had made him rich. What ! is genius subject to such vulgar influences ? Not that ; but wealth gave him rest before the spring of his mind had begun to feel any relaxation of its fibre. The faculties that gave birth to *The Tempest* were not outworn. Yet, their work was done. And what work ! Well might he pause. His mind, though far from exhausted, may have felt that it had given forth its best, and enough. Shakespeare was finite. It is pretty well ascertained that during the last three years of his life Shakespeare produced nothing. Respected, esteemed, beloved, he spent these years amid family and friends in his large, comfortable house in Stratford on Avon, the small, rural town where he was born and brought up. In calm and content he enjoyed relief from the toil and turmoil of London. Independent and prosperous, through his own efforts, his mind daily glorified by the memory of the work it had accomplished, the quality of the work imparting to his consciousness the fragrance of its beauty, the illumination of its splendor, this

rare benefactor of his race was blessed in his latter years on earth with a unique happiness. He passed away without looking into old age. The pressure and clog of age he might not have felt, had he reached seventy instead of fifty-three, for the poetic nature is not so liable as the prosaic to bend under the earthly weight of time. Its springiness and creative vivacity keep the mind young, and open to new influences, to fresh sensations. In full possession of his incomparable faculties, Shakespeare went from the earth to resume, in a more spiritual world, his mental activity amid angelic compeers.

III.

KING JOHN.

READING lately *King John*, it seemed to me that I had never before enough admired this tumultuous prophetic prologue to the grand series of Shakespeare's historic dramas. In its rhythm there was a deeper music than ever, in its reflections a wider range, in its sentiment a wiser truth, its grandeur as a whole was more imposing. Like the earth's air, Shakespeare is inexhaustible; like the air, he renews himself from infinite reservoirs. At every contact with him we inbreathe fresh life.

One of his richest plays in passages of power, *King John* is more dramatic than most of the historic dramas; that is, the individuality of its personages brings about its collisions, and shapes their issues, more distinctly than in the others, in which the strongest wills, dominated by historic fatality, are swept on in a resistless *epic* current. Elinor, Pandulph, King John, Hubert, Philip of France, Constance, Lewis,

Salisbury, — here is a company of lively dramatic agencies. And then, besides the collisions of individuals, there is the direct terrible collision of kingdoms; while, through his active personality, the colossal Faulconbridge sways the whole movement, literally uplifting the entire action on his Herculean shoulders. Faulconbridge is one of the supreme splendors of Shakespeare, one of those ideal realities in which is most vividly exhibited the creative genius of this mighty mind.

In the first thirty lines of the opening scene are epitomized the drift and substance of the whole play.

SCENE I. — *Northampton. A room of state in the palace.*

Enter King JOHN, *Queen* ELINOR, PEMBROKE, ESSEX, SALISBURY, *and others, with* CHATILLON.

K. John. Now, say, Chatillon, what would France with us?
Chat. Thus, after greeting, speaks the king of France,
In my behaviour, to the majesty,
The borrow'd majesty of England here.
Eli. A strange beginning! — borrow'd majesty?
K. John. Silence, good mother; hear the embassy!
Chat. Philip of France, in right and true behalf
Of thy deceased brother Geffrey's son,
Arthur Plantagenet, lays most lawful claim
To this fair island, and the territories;
To Ireland, Poictiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine:
Desiring thee to lay aside the sword,

Which sways usurpingly these several titles,
And put the same into young Arthur's hand,
Thy nephew, and right royal sovereign.
K. John. What follows, if we disallow of this?
Chat. The proud controul of fierce and bloody war,
To enforce these rights, so forcibly withheld.
K. John. Here have we war for war; and blood for blood,
Controlment for controlment. So answer France.
Chat. Then take my king's defiance from my mouth,
The furthest limit of my embassy!
K. John. Bear mine to him, and so depart in peace!
Be thou as lightning in the eyes of France;
For ere thou canst report, I will be there,
The thunder of my cannon shall be heard.
So, hence! Be thou the trumpet of our wrath,
And sullen presage of your own decay.
An honorable conduct let him have: —
Pembroke, look to 't! Farewell, Chatillon!
[*Exeunt Chatillon and Pembroke.*
Eli. What now, my son? have I not ever said,
How that ambitious Constance would not cease,
Till she had kindled France, and all the world,
Upon the right and party of her son?
This might have been prevented and made whole
With very easy arguments of love,
Which now the manage of two kingdoms must
With fearful bloody issue arbitrate.
K. John. Our strong possesions, and our right, for us.
Eli. Your strong possession much more, than your right;
Or else it must go wrong with you, and me.
So much my conscience whispers in your ear;
Which none but heaven, and you and I, shall hear.

How natural all this is, and easy, how un-

avoidable! Each speech seems to carry the very words the speaker ought to utter; each speaker says just what he should say, neither more nor less. In poetry (and in prose too) that is the difficult thing to do; and, to do it, to say on every occasion, under all circumstance, what admits of being said, what is fittest, what the conditions of the moment require to be said, to accomplish this superlatively well, is Shakespeare's capital distinction. This distinction he achieves by virtue of the vast volume and briskness and purity of his mental currents, the combined amplitude and fineness of his faculties. Apt handling of words, skill and force in expressing, this is the literary gift. In this Shakespeare excelled; but the lustre and efficacy of the gift could be fully manifested only through wealth and variety in the power behind it, in the sparkling play of the multitudinous brain of Shakespeare. Judge of the significancy and wonder of speech hereby, that Shakespeare has been discovered to be the subtle, gorgeous, myriad-minded genius that he is solely through his words.

Observe how this opening scene is enlivened by the interruption of Elinor: "A strange beginning! borrowed majesty?" an interruption

which Shakespeare would not have allowed her to make, had she not, in making it, given a strong taste of her quality as a proud, grasping, intermeddling Queen-dowager. While adding life to the scene, the line she utters characterizes herself. Shakespeare thus kills two birds with one stone, and both game birds, a proceeding which he repeats oftener than — I had almost said — all other poets put together. What a double-edged weapon is his pen, the instrument of such penetrating thought, of such a far-ranging keen perception!

The plan and movement of the whole piece being succinctly prefigured in the first scene, the second presents to us the protagonist of the play, the stalwart champion of England, a very prototype of English independence, strength, humor, earnestness, pluck. History makes slight mention of Faulconbridge. A natural son of Richard Cœur-de-Lion there was who fought in John's French wars, and who is one of the dramatic personages in an older play of King John which Shakespeare largely used ; and a prose romance about a Lord Faulconbridge was early published. Our Faulconbridge is a child of Shakespeare, and one of his most vigorous offspring. No crea-

tion of his is more deeply stamped with the fiery mark of his plastic potency.

The Sheriff of Northamptonshire enters, and having whispered Essex, Essex speaks :

"*Essex.* My liege, here is the strangest controversy,
Come from the country to be judg'd by you,
That e'er I heard. Shall I produce the men ?
K. John. Let them approach ! — [*Exit Sheriff.*
Our abbies and our priories shall pay
Re-enter Sheriff, with ROBERT FAULCONBRIDGE, *and* PHILIP, *his bastard brother.*
This expedition's charge. — What men are you ?
Bast. Your faithful subject I, a gentleman,
Born in Northamptonshire, and eldest son,
As I suppose, to Robert Faulconbridge,
A soldier, by the honor-giving hand
Of Cœur-de-lion knighted in the field.
K. John. What art thou ?
Rob. The son and heir to that same Faulconbridge.
K. John. Is that the elder, and art thou the heir ?"

The dialogue that follows is an outburst of the exuberant mental power there is in Faulconbridge. Like a warm, fertile shower upon thirsty fields is this sudden downpouring of the Shakespearean opulence and masterly creativeness. The reader does not wonder when the king exclaims :

"*K. John.* Why, what a madcap hath heaven lent us here !
Eli. He hath a trick of Cœur-de-lion's face,
The accent of his tongue affecteth him.

Do you not read some tokens of my son
In the large composition of this man?
K. John. Mine eye hath well examined his parts,
And finds them perfect Richard. — Sirrah, speak,
What doth move you to claim your brother's land?"

This exhibition of racy humor and peerless art of characterization we are prohibited from reproducing here by the plainness of speech required for such a discussion of paternity, a plainness broadened by the freedom of that age, and, it may be added, by the temptations of wit.

Shakespeare is almost uniquely illustrious for two qualities, delicacy of feeling and depth of feeling. The bane of literature is its superficiality, palpable in much of the verse and prose of all ages, and especially notable latterly in the unceasing flood of pretentious novels, which one might suspect are easily produced, so easily are they forgotten.

This very scene, somewhat gross as it unavoidably is, exemplifies Shakespeare's delicacy, — that refinement of feeling which is an endowment indispensable to high attainment in art. In his admirable commentary on Shakespeare, Gervinus refers to several passages in the old play that were modified by Shakespeare in the spirit of this refinement.

On the same page Gervinus writes: "Shakespeare delineates his Faulconbridge (and himself in him)." In this, it seems to me, the eminent German critic says too much. He could hardly mean to affirm that in Faulconbridge Shakespeare drew his own portrait; and yet, his words will bear that construction. To contract himself into any one of his personages is an impossibility to Shakespeare. The fuller and greater the character, the more of himself will there be in it, as in Faulconbridge, Henry V., Prospero, Hamlet; but in all his work the great objective artist ever presides imperially, condescending never to one-sided, egotistic self-portraiture. His works, the whole of them together, enfold his full many-sided autobiography. He is in Sir Toby Belch as in Shylock, in Dogberry as in sweet Anne Page, in Desdemona as in Lear, — an omnipresent, poetic creator who veils his personality behind his creations. The every-day man, William Shakespeare, the husband and father and neighbor, was very like other men, and as such approachable and scrutable; but the poet, the poetic maker, dwelt on a plane high above that of the taxable citizen, the custom-ruled individual, joyed in a beatific sphere

inaccessible to worldly footsteps. Those most in sympathy with him catch glimpses of his supernal movement, but none can tell how he brings about his marvels: nay, he himself could not tell. The mysterious poetic procedure is inscrutable even to its possessor; it flows out of a spiritual infinitude, and it has no discernible or imaginable personality. This profound, æsthetic principle might suggest something to theological speculators, a class who are much prone to making God after their own image.

The controversy between the two Faulconbridges is settled as follows:

"*Eli.* Whether hadst thou rather be a Faulconbridge
And, like thy brother, to enjoy thy land:
Or the reputed son of Cœur-de-lion,
Lord of thy presence, and no land beside?
Bast. Madam, and if my brother had my shape,
And I had his, Sir Robert his, like him:
And if my legs were two such riding-rods,
My arms such eel-skins stuff'd; my face so thin,
That in mine ear I durst not stick a rose,
Lest men should say, Look, where three-farthings goes!
And, to his shape, were heir to all this land,
Would I might never stir from off this place,
I'd give it every foot to have this face;
I would not be Sir Nob in any case.
Eli. I like thee well. Wilt thou forsake thy fortune,
Bequeath thy land to him, and follow me?
I am a soldier, and now bound to France.

Bast. Brother, take you my land, I'll take my chance :
Your face hath got five hundred pounds a year ;
Yet sell your face for five pence, and 'tis dear. —
Madam, I'll follow you unto the death.
Eli. Nay, I would have you go before me thither.
Bast. Our country manners give our betters way.
K. John. What is thy name ?
Bast. Philip, my liege ; so is my name begun ;
Philip, good old Sir Robert's wife's eldest son.
K. John. From henceforth bear his name, whose form thou bear'st !
Kneel thou down Philip, but arise more great ;
Arise Sir Richard and Plantagenet ! "

In the interview between the Bastard and his mother Shakespeare again gives proof of superior refinement and his high quality as artist. In the old play, which supplied so much material to his animating mastery, the son, in order to draw from Lady Faulconbridge the secret of his birth, threatens her life. The occasion of the disclosure Shakespeare has converted into a humorous scene.

Shakespeare is the most genial as well as the most skillful of literary distillers : he extracts the substance out of a vast body of loose material, encloses in a phial the essence of a flood of fluid, imparting to it in the process of extraction that tonic fragrance which naught but poetry exhales.

The scene now shifts to France. The second Act opens before the walls of Angiers. France and Austria are allied to uphold the rights of the boy Arthur against usurping John. They are just about to bend their cannon "against the brow of this resisting town" when Chatillon, the ambassador, returned from England, enters and announces that England "hath put himself in arms," and is close at hand.

The trumpet and the drum always wake the warrior in Shakespeare. When he writes of battles and precipitated squadrons his verse has the bound and swing of cavalry charging: there is in it the music of a forest swept by a gale. He gives these combatants the help of gunpowder at the end of the twelfth century. In war cannon is a poetical element: its thunderous sound is a token of its might; and so Shakespeare anticipates the terrific play of artillery by more than a century. Had he been reminded of this he would have answered: "I know it, but I am not writing a chronological history of inventions."

The speech of Chatillon is cut short by the "churlish drums" of England, and thereupon enter King John, Elinor, Bastard, etc.

"*K. John.* Peace be to France; if France in peace permit
Our just and lineal entrance to our own!
If not, bleed France, and peace ascend to heaven!
Whiles we, God's wrathful agent, do correct
Their proud comtempt, that beat his peace to heaven.
K. Philip. Peace be to England; if that war return
From France to England, there to live in peace!
England we love; and, for that England's sake,
With burden of our armour here we sweat."

This mutual greeting of the two adverse sovereigns, how Shakespearean! Privileged kings, to have such a spokesman! In music and distinction these regal salutations are as much above the usual greetings of kings as the habitual utterance of Shakespeare's personages is above the customary speech of men. Shakespeare has been called *the Expresser*, and he deserves the designation; at the same time, his diction owes its brilliancy and effect to the beauty and weight of the substance to be expressed. In his capacious, luminous brain he carried more, and more compact, ideals than were ever carried by man. To his words splendor is imparted by the unique richness of his deeper resources. His words would not uplift us were they not themselves the sun-lit billows of a broad, fathomless sea of upmounting thought. This uplifting

function is the divine prerogative of poetic genius. Like flame, poetry always ascends. It is itself a flame, a flame kindled by the contact of two feelings, enjoyment and aspiration. Its nature is ethereal, and it ever seeks its upper home. Poetry is a celestial guest sojourning on our earth among mortals, with looks and thoughts ever tending to its supernal source, and ever striving to bend thitherward the thoughts of its earthly hosts. In its essence the poetical is a spiritual aspiration, a yearning for the better, for the best.

Shakespeare ever breathed the air agitated by the soaring wings of poetry. His eye was visionary; that is, while he saw what was before him in bodily figure and proportion, he at the same time beheld, with poetically-duplicated vision, that figure and proportion illuminated from within, thus obtaining insights into the essential nature of persons and things, — insights possible only to the mental eye thus poetically armed. He who is not gifted with the poetic second sight cannot see the thing or person as it is; he sees but part and that the grosser part. The significant glow wherewith each individuality is encompassed through an emanation, a perpetual efflux, from its own

soul, revealing its interior being, is only cognizable to the spiritual glance whetted on the poetic.

Much has been said of Shakespeare's knowledge, and justly said; his acquisition through experience and observation and reading was immense, but the deepest source of his knowledge was intuition; and this affluent intuitive gift it was that made his experience and reading effective; nay, his intuitions enlarged and strengthened and purified his experience, aye, created much of it. This highest order of mental action, the intuitive, clings occasionally to intellectual genius, but the widest, wealthiest field of its agency is feeling, — feeling through the emotional capabilities. By his exceptional inborn endowment with emotional sensibility, Shakespeare is the supreme Englishman. He need not to have had more intellect than Bacon, or Kant, or Daniel Webster; his superiority to them is in the deeper pulsations of his soul, sympathetic to the eternal beat of the human heart; in the intensity of his fellowship with enjoying, suffering humanity. His grandeur, his power, his fineness as poet, rest on his fullness and fineness of feeling, as their foundation and store-house.

Hence Shakespeare's truthfulness. A rare intellect, the instrument of richest, tenderest sympathies, does its noble work with such completeness, that truth — the instinctive desire of man, and his incomparable possession — is seized in an infinite variety of forms. As the quantity and quality of truth a man can master and practice, give him his rank on the scale of being, judge of the position of Shakespeare among men.

The chief agent in mastering and practicing truth is the highest and widest and purest of human feelings — love. A man must love a thing to do it well: he must love a fellow-man to know him thoroughly. Shakespeare loved not only Cordelia and Gonzalo, Brutus and Beatrice, he loved Trinculo and Juliet's nurse, Bardolph and Sir Toby Belch; nay, he loved Macbeth and King John; had he not loved them he could not have made them live as he has done. With his great warm heart suffering "with those he saw suffer," he was hereby empowered to suffer imaginatively.

Here let me (with due deference) protest against the oft-quoted dictum of Aristotle, that by scenes of pain and agony on the tragic stage, through the pity and fear they excite,

the sensibilities of the beholders are purged. On the contrary, the beholding of such scenes would, as such, be demoralizing and hardening. Then, and only then, do they become purifying when they are touched and penetrated by the transfiguring light, the spiritual light, the divine light, of the beautiful. Aristotle's celebrated treatise on poetry places the essence of poetry in imitation ; whereas the essence of the poetical is not in imitating, copying, nature, but in reproducing nature in the spirit of the original production, — a reproduction which is only possible to a mind so genially capable of sympathy with the creative process, as to be thereby exalted and inspired to lively re-animation, thus becoming, in its sphere, maker or poet. Far deeper than imitation is this mental action ; it uses imitation as its instrument. In Plato's dialogues are to be met with deeper and sounder views on poetry than in the formal treatise of Aristotle. Aristotle's mind, vast as it was, had by no means so much as Plato's of that gift which elevates and enlivens and enlightens all other mental gifts : he was less of a poet than Plato.

This gift which exalts and illumines all other gifts is the decisive gift in high literature and

fine art; for art is not fine art except it be poetical. It is the idealizing gift, whereby, through the insight and synthetic power it imparts, the delineator is enabled to see the person or thing before him more distinctly; and this, whether what is before him be a flesh-and-blood reality or a conception of his brain. Thus, the portrait-painter, in order to see his subject more thoroughly as he is, needs the illumination of this idealizing light. Hereby he is empowered to throw a flame into the interior of his subject and thus bring out into clearer individuality the outward features. In short, through his idealizing aptitude, he, like the delineator with pen, realizes reality more truly. He becomes not only a more brilliant but a more faithful limner. On the page of Shakespeare Anthony and Henry IV. and Richard II. and King John stand more vividly present than on the page of prosaic history. All his personages, all his scenes, all his dialogues, are steeped in this illuminative idealization, which perfuses them with its beams as the landscape is perfused at daybreak with the auroral splendor which makes the earth to sparkle in its inborn glory.

Shakespeare delights in making kings con-

front each other to bandy high words. In the times he depicts kings were not merely representative, they were the personal controllers of national destinies. By their almost unrestricted sway they then were real Majesties, not what they have now become in Europe, nominal Majesties. In the scene before us where the rival kings, with their royal and noble attendants, present a picture of irreconcilable ambitions and jealousies, the effect is deepened by the interchange of sharp, very sharp, words between those royal ladies, Elinor and Constance; an interchange which is a lively type of feminine vituperation, an ideal of recriminative give and take. The quality of their logomachy may be inferred from the conclusion.

"*Elinor.* Thou unadvised scold, I can produce
A will that bars the title of thy son.
Constance. Ay, who doubts that? a will! a wicked will;
A woman's will: a canker'd grandam's will!"

That this was the conclusion was owing to the French king, who, vexed by "these ill-tuned repetitions," exclaims to Constance:

"Peace, lady! pause, or be more temperate."

An important figure in the play of King John is Cardinal Pandulph, the Pope's legate.

At that period papal power was paramount. Of Pandulph Shakespeare avails himself to represent a typical priest, that is, a man who assumes that he is empowered by Heaven to be the exclusive, infallible expounder and interpreter of heavenly things, to guide and rule the spirituality of other men, — an assumption which, concentrating in itself the guilt of usurpation with the iniquity of despotism, is a blasphemy towards God and an offense and an insult to man. One wonders at the ignominious moral subjection of an age that bowed before such tyranny ; but a show of indignant scorn at its weakness and superstition is checked by the sudden reflection that ourselves live in the shadow of this tyranny, and that, if incorporated sacerdotalism has, through the working of mental emancipation, the strengthening and purifying of the individual conscience, been shorn of much of its authority, its black shadow shortened and thinned, still itself has not foregone a tittle of its inhuman pretention, and perseveres in grasping at supreme control, political as well as moral, crippling the wills of men even to paralysis, that it may sway their minds, ever ravenous of power, its master-passion an unholy ambition.

Writing in the aroused forceful age of Elizabeth, Shakespeare becomes the spokesman of English independence, of Protestant manliness, and, in a passage quivering with eloquent patriotism, makes the King of England defy the papal legate and his chief. Passages like this, — of which there are others in his works, — set forth the greatest poet and deepest dramatist of the world as not only the foremost national poet of England, but as the champion of Protestantism or free religion.

"*K. John.* What earthly name to interrogatories
Can task the free breath of a sacred king?
Thou canst not, cardinal, devise a name
So slight, unworthy, and ridiculous,
To charge me to an answer, as the pope.
Tell him this tale, and from the mouth of England,
Add thus much more: That no Italian priest
Shall tithe, or toll in our dominions;
But as we under heaven are supreme head,
So, under him, that great supremacy,
Where we do reign, we will alone uphold,
Without the assistance of a mortal hand.
So tell the pope; all reverence set apart,
To him, and his usurp'd authority!

K. Phil. Brother of England, you blaspheme in this.

K. John. Though you, and all the kings of Christendom,
Are led so grossly by this meddling priest,
Dreading the curse, that money may buy out,
And, by the merit of vile gold, dross, dust,
Purchase corrupted pardon of a man,

Who, in that sale, sells pardon from himself;
Though you, and all the rest, so grossly led,
This juggling witchcraft with revenue cherish;
Yet I, alone, alone do me oppose
Against the pope, and count his friends my foes."

Whether the movement be tragic grandeur, pathetic tenderness, patriotic fervor, with what ease this mighty penman rises to the elevation demanded by the occasion. Manly, stirring, burning words like these endear Shakespeare, with something of the warmth of personal affection and gratitude, to Englishmen forever, and to those who, in other hemispheres, drawing originally from that rich island-centre principles of religious and political freedom, enjoy as their dearest birthright the privilege of learning from their mothers' lips the language that Shakespeare spoke and wrote.

At the conclusion of King John's manly, sonorous defiance, when Pandulph excommunicates and curses him, Constance exclaims:

"*Const.* Oh, lawful let it be,
That I have room with Rome to curse a while!
Good father cardinal, cry thou amen
To my keen curses! for, without my wrong,
There is no tongue, hath power to curse him right.
Pand. There's law and warrant, lady, for my curse."

How profoundly must the humane, truly

Christian Shakespeare have felt the secret irony of this answer of Pandulph to Constance. Law and warrant for cursing a fellow-man! The bitterness of the fruit proves the poison of the ripening sap, — the monstrous, unhuman assumption of one man to govern the soul of any fellow-man. For the curse of poor Constance there is some warrant, the warrant issued by the wronged, bleeding heart of a mother.

Constance is another of Shakespeare's wonderful ideals that are more real than the historic report of the reality. She is an everlasting mouthpiece of maternal agony, an agony out of which, to the reader or spectator, the sting is taken by the balm of the beautiful. Of this surpassing scene, in which acutest affliction and grief are clothed with radiance, I make room for the conclusion:

"And, father cardinal, I have heard you say
That we shall see and know our friends in heaven.
If that be true, I shall see my boy again;
For, since the birth of Cain, the first male child,
To him, that did but yesterday suspire,
There was not such a gracious creature born.
But now will canker sorrow eat my bud,
And chase the native beauty from his cheek,
And he will look as hollow as a ghost,
As dim and meagre as an ague's fit,

And so he 'll die, and, rising so again,
When I shall meet him in the court of heaven
I shall not know him. Therefore never, never
Must I behold my pretty Arthur more.
Pand. You hold too heinous a respect of grief.
Const. He talks to me, that never had a son.
K. Phi. You are as fond of grief, as of your child.
Const. Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form.
Then, have I reason to be fond of grief.
Fare you well! Had you such a loss, as I,
I could give better comfort, than you do."

Here we have the transmuting virtue there is in poetry that it can make suffering spiritually attractive, draw a beatitude out of intense misery. Carrying dormant in his broad, deep manhood the joys and sorrows his fellow-men are liable to, when Shakespeare depicted a Lear or a Constance a poetic light shone upon his fellow-feeling and wakened it to such rhythmic moans that the deepest pangs of the heart become transfigured into beauty, mankind eagerly welcoming them to its breast, and appropriating them in their exquisiteness as a purifying cordial. In such passages Shakespeare's doing may be likened to that of some radiant Titan who, grasping the trunk of an

oak, through a latent might in his nervous arm should by shaking it make it, instead of acorns, drop glittering diamonds, to the wonder, delight, and enrichment of the beholders.

This great play abounds in scenes of tender or terrible pathos. What a picture of the tartarean interior of an assassin's brain, bemastered by thoughts too damnable for utterance, when King John puts Arthur into the keeping of Hubert!

"I had a thing to say, — But let it go:
The sun is in the heaven, and the proud day,
Attended with the pleasures of the world,
Is all too wanton, and too full of gawds,
To give me audience. — If the midnight bell
Did, with his iron tongue and brazen mouth
Sound one unto the drowsy race of night,
If this same were a church-yard where we stand,
And thou possessed with a thousand wrongs;
Or if that surly spirit, melancholy,
Had bak'd thy blood, and made it heavy, thick,
(Which, else, runs tickling up and down the veins,
Making that idiot, laughter, keep men's eyes,
And strain their cheeks to idle merriment,
A passion hateful to my purposes;)
Or if that thou could'st see me without eyes,
Hear me without thine ears, and make reply
Without a tongue, using conceit alone,
Without eyes, ears, and harmful sound of words:
Then, in despite of brooded watchful day,
I would into thy bosom pour my thoughts.

This scene, like all his greatest scenes, is pure Shakesperean invention. Arthur's end is shrouded in mystery, which only the conscience of John can penetrate. History does not know how his death was brought about. It knows that John took him prisoner; and that was the last heard of him.

With such a picture before us as that of Constance, all glistening with poetic tears, we pause and say, "here the poet must have reached the maximum of excellence," when, only a few pages further, listening, in exquisite awe, to the talk of John to Hubert, we find ourselves reveling with delight in the inmost hideousness of the blackest of murderers. And still a few pages further, this Proteus — far more mobile and mutable than the Greek sea-god — transforms himself out of the ghastly, royal assassin, not into Prince Arthur, — for no Prince ever spoke such words as does this "pretty child" of Shakespeare when pleading with Hubert for his eyes, — but into one of the most heavenly creations of Art, and yet so natural as to give no hint of Art, so simple and soulful that it stands for every bright-minded, innocent boy that ever was or ever will be, and yet, so poetical that, while within

the bounds of nature, it transcends by its truthful perfection the reality of any reported boyhood.

Nevertheless the chief power of the play is Faulconbridge. Him Shakespeare makes the plenipotentiary of England, to represent and act out English backbone, courage, common sense, patriotism. 'Tis he whom, in the battle with the invading French, Salisbury describes:

> "That misbegotten devil Faulconbridge,
> In spite of spite, alone upholds the day."

In the scene over the dead body of Arthur, when the nobles, in their holy rage, draw their swords and would slay Hubert on the instant, Faulconbridge interposes:

> "*Pem.* Cut him to pieces!
> *Bast.* Keep the peace, I say!
> *Sal.* Stand by, or I shall gall you, Faulconbridge.
> *Bast.* Thou wert better gall the devil, Salisbury.
> If thou but frown on me, or stir thy foot,
> Or teach thy hasty spleen to do me shame,
> I'll strike thee dead. Put up thy sword betime!
> Or I'll so maul you and your toasting-iron,
> That you shall think the devil is come from hell."

This is one side of his strength; here is another. When the angry lords are gone Faulconbridge thus addresses Hubert:

"*Bast.* . . . . Knew you of this fair work?
Beyond the infinite and boundless reach
Of mercy, if thou didst this deed of death,
Art thou damn'd, Hubert.
Hub. Do but hear me, sir!
Bast. Ha! I'll tell thee what:
Thou art damn'd as black — nay, nothing is so black;
Thou art more deep damn'd, than prince Lucifer.
There is not yet so ugly a fiend of hell
As thou shalt be, if thou didst kill this child.
Hub. Upon my soul, —
Bast. If thou didst but consent
To this most cruel act, do but despair!
And, if thou want'st a cord, the smallest thread,
That ever spider twisted from her womb,
Will serve to strangle thee; a rush will be
A beam to hang thee on; or would'st thou drown thyself,
Put but a little water in a spoon,
And it shall be as all the ocean,
Enough to stifle such a villain up. —
I do suspect thee very grievously.
Hub. If I in act, consent, or sin of thought,
Be guilty of the stealing that sweet breath,
Which was embounded in this beauteous clay,
Let hell want pains enough to torture me!
I left him well.
Bast. Go, bear him in thine arms!"

And then he exclaims, in words that every day of every year carry the thoughts and feelings of thousands of strugglers when startled and confounded by the crimes and moral confusions that glare suddenly upon them:

"I am amazed, methinks; and lose my way
Among the thorns and dangers of this world."

Nowhere does Shakespeare exhibit with more distinctness his intellectual lucidity and his artistic mastership than in foreshortening history. He condenses a decade or a reign into five acts, with such picturesque perception and historic grasp that we get the spirit of a period compactly bound, but faithfully preserved, in a poetic condensation.

Looking from a height over a mountainous region the eye seizes the peaks; the lower hills out of which they rise are scarcely seen. So in a genuine historical drama only the altitudes of history are noted by one looking from the sunny summit of poetry, and these, with the vigorous personages who make the altitudes, give the reader the most vivid view of a marked period and the actors in it. A variously and brilliantly and deeply gifted man, Shakespeare, in the majestic strength of his large manhood, stood above history. History, owing its interest and significance to the unfolded faculties of man, Shakespeare, through his fellow-feeling with all humanity, and thence his sure insight into it, dominated history, and as poet-thinker reproduced its very spirit, as he does in King John.

The nobles having returned to their allegiance, and the invading French army having been routed, from the mouth of Faulconbridge are made to issue those great concluding words that have ever since been resounding in the ear of England:

"This England never did, (nor never shall,)
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true."

IV.

HAMLET.

TRUTH to the moral law is the life of poetic drama. Tragedy, especially, cannot draw the long breaths needed for the full sweep of its function unless it have above it, alive with sanitary currents, a deep, clear, spiritual atmosphere. Only when behind the wrecks of perverted passion is visible the background of moral allegiance and security, can the gloom be illuminated by the transfiguring bow thrown by the sun of poetry. The degree of fullness in moral regency being the measure of human well-being, poetic tragedy — the richest fruit of man's literary productiveness — can only prosper through acknowledgement of the absoluteness of this regency.

To invent and organize a tragic drama, to group a number of figures so that each shall move to the spring of its own individuality, and each and all, by their movements and collisions, shall tend to a given catastrophe, ob-

serving throughout due moral and æsthetic proportions, animating each scene with lively progressive dialogue and effective action, breathing into all the parts the breath of poetic health, so that the whole may be a thing of life and beauty, — to do this, is to accomplish a work of finest human achievement.

The value of a dramatic work depends primarily upon the mental calibre of its chief personages ; that is, upon their warmth and strength of feeling and their intellectual competency. These present the substance that is to be vivified by poetic glorification, and these depend, of course, entirely upon the poet : his personality is the source of all. And only a poet can fully reproduce a human being. Coriolanus and Anthony, Richard II. and Henry V., were never, since their decease, vividly present to men until they were resuscitated by Shakespeare. Of King Duncan's murderer you can get an outside view in Hollingshed ; but if you would be acquainted with the very being of the man, you must go to Shakespeare. His Macbeth stands there forever a distinct, terrible, towering colossus, supplanting legend, superseding history.

Like Macbeth and Lear, Hamlet was begot-

ten on national legend. Thus, possessing, like them, a dim, historic background, wherein popular belief is tenaciously rooted, it has under it a basis of rudimentary actuality; at the same time there is no circle of historic certitude to control the poet's invention. Thence human possibility — in all high poetry a sublime element — opens to these masterpieces its widest reaches for the play of creative lordship.

With all his universality of sympathy, and what might be called his impartial poetic bounteousness, Shakespeare had his favorites, — favorites in this sense, that some tasked his creative energy with a more vivid, and therefore more joyful, presence than others. Lear could not but give him hours of more rapturous work than Gloster. The drawing from the secret recesses of his nature the fearful Macbeth gave him a deeper joy than to portray the blameless Banquo. In the multitude of his vivacious, captivating, infinitely diversified dramatic progeny, more than by any other, we are captivated and stimulated by Hamlet, because Hamlet drew more deeply from his poetic maker's best resources, from his warmest and finest sensibilities, from his highest, most elastic intellectual forces.

The plot of *Hamlet*, — being founded on fratricide and adultery, tending for its culmination to the slaying of a king, the poisoning of a queen, the treacherous killing of a prince; having for its incidents the homicide of the father of two leading personages, the lacerating rupture of love-vows, the lunacy and death of the maiden-lover; and thus involving outrage of the primary affections of humanity, the warm, elementary feelings which are the necessary bonds of the family and society, — this plot harbors within its bosom more of the portentous wreckful elements of tragedy than any other of Shakespeare's great dramas. Here, then, was the poet's richest opportunity. The manifold antagonistic conjunctions, the passionate collisions, calling on him for more than usually diversified utterance, poetical as well as pungent, stirred the deeps of his being and drew delightfully upon his radiant store of ideals.

In so far as logic can work with rather vague materials, external evidence confirms the internal to show that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* between his thirty-third and thirty-ninth years; that is, when he had just entered upon the full enjoyment of his vast mental es-

tate, and when all his faculties, ripened by strenuous exercise and various production, were at their flood, boiling, bursting with life, exuberant with power, craving larger delivery. Upon this flood, as his cradle, was Hamlet rocked. Shakespeare wanted a drama, and especially a controlling personage in it, to embody in them, more plenteously than he had yet done, his brimming wealth; and finding in Belleforest's *Historie of Hamblet* (borrowed from Saxo Grammaticus) a germ, a rude skeleton, he took it, and out of a crude, semi-barbarous tale, out of an æsthetic nothing, he wrought into grand, graceful porportions a poetic world. He wanted a character through whom he could give issue to that lofty inquisitiveness into man's destiny, that active meditativeness on the mystery and end of being, which are the growth of a mind at once large-thoughted and palpitating with sensibility, and which on the wonderfully endowed poet were just then pressing with the fervor of young manhood, now fully launched on infinite seas of thought.

For the seething plot which his poetically imaginative invention had wrought out of a raw, bloody legend he needed, as a more im-

mediate representative of himself a protagonist in whom should be active a high reason, ever seeking causes, binding together remotest motions, and with this reason sympathies that should shed their revealing light upon all forms of being. On this broad, profound plan he organized his greatest drama. The whole multitude of personages in his many dramas are, in greater or less degree, exponents of Shakespeare himself, — and this is their deepest virtue; but now he wanted a mouthpiece of his searching meditation and his sententious wisdom, and so he seized upon the Hamlet of Danish legend, transformed and transfigured him, and made him, counter to probabilities, thirty years of age. Counter to probabilities, for the university student-age rarely extends beyond twenty-five; and it was also far less probable that the usurpation of a throne by an uncle would succeed against a man with the ripened feelings and the experience of thirty years in his brain than against a youth who had just reached manhood. In the original story Prince Hamlet, at the time of his uncle's usurpation, is a minor. But these external proprieties Shakespeare readily sacrificed to the internal propriety of not putting into the

mind and mouth of a youth of twenty the profound philosophical questionings, the large knowledge, and pithy sayings of a matured man. Hamlet, aged thirty, is the chief agent of the drama; but behind Hamlet is one more powerful than he. Let us look into the play to learn who this is.

The first scene opens thus: Francisco, sentinel on the platform before the royal castle of Elsinore, anxiously challenges a comer, who turns out to be Bernardo, a fellow-soldier, who to relieve Francisco is come punctually upon his hour, which is midnight. The relieved sentinel is most thankful, for it is "bitter cold" and he is "sick at heart." As he is taking leave arrive Marcellus and Horatio. No sooner has Bernardo welcomed them than Marcellus asks eagerly: "What, has this thing appeared again to-night?" These few simple words are the hinge upon which turns the greatest tragedy, the highest poem, of literature.

The commentators make no account of the Ghost. They treat him pretty much as the editors of the play treat him who place him towards the end of the *Dramatis Personæ*, not even clothed, like the other personages, in capital letters. In the Rugby edition (1873),

edited by the Rev. C. E. Moberly, the Ghost is put after "Messengers and other attendants," as though he were the most insignificant of the supernumeraries. The editor would apparently like to get rid of him altogether!

Coleridge, in his celebrated essay on Hamlet, gives two or three pages to the Ghost, but only for the purpose of showing the admirable judgment of Shakespeare in preparing for and managing the introduction of the Ghost at his several entrances; and he adds: "Hume himself could not but have had faith in this ghost dramatically, let his antighostism have been as strong as Sampson against other ghosts *less powerfully raised.*" I have italicized the last words to show that the verisimilitude and effectiveness of the Ghost are solely due, in the opinion of Coleridge, to the skill with which he is handled by the poet. On the third appearance of the Ghost, in Hamlet's presence, Coleridge speaks of its "fearful subjectivity." By this he can only mean that the Ghost was a brain-vision, caused by the intensely excited feelings of Hamlet and his companions. On being once asked if he believed in ghosts, Coleridge answered; "No, I have seen too many

of them." He looked upon them as in all cases not objective, but subjective, that is, images on the brain of the beholder, mistaken by him for outward objects. In the essay, to exemplify his view of Hamlet as one who is overmeditative and thought-oppressed, he says: "Hamlet's thoughts and the images of his fancy are far more vivid than his actual perceptions, and his very perceptions, instantly passing through the medium of his contemplations, acquire, as they pass, a form and a color not naturally their own." Now, by his treatment of the Ghost he verifies a remark about himself in his reported *Table-talk*: "I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so;" that is, of Hamlet as he interprets him above; for he permits his critical perceptions to be so smothered in his meditations as not to allow him to become aware that Shakespeare has with marked design and care guarded the Ghost of Hamlet's father against the damaging imputation of subjectivity. To shield him from the possibility of such impeachment, he brings "this dreaded sight" twice, on two different nights, before the sentinels Marcellus and Bernardo. When Marcellus relates to Horatio what they have seen,

the calm, clear-headed Horatio assured him that it was a subjective ghost, that is, an image on their brains. Had there been but one brain the explanation of Horatio would have been more plausible. And so Marcellus has

> . . . . "Entreated him along
> With us to watch the minutes of this night,
> That if again this apparition come,
> He may approve our eyes and speak to it.
> *Horatio.* Tush, tush 't will not appear."

In a few moments it does appear, and Horatio is harrowed with fear and wonder. The Ghost stalks away, but reappears in the midst of their talk. Here are three men who have seen the Ghost, all three of them twice, and two of them four times. But for his strong desire thus to secure his great Ghost against the dishonoring suspicion of being taken for a brain-born phantom, Shakespeare would have had him appear to Hamlet alone. There was no other motive for his appearance, and repeated appearance, to the sentinels.

And now let us make acquaintance with Hamlet before he has seen the Ghost, or has heard of him.

When, at the opening of the second scene of the play, Hamlet first comes before us, in the

suite of the King and Queen, he is suffering from two stunning, moral blows. The brother of his father had, a few weeks before, by foul arts, usurped the throne which by expectation and legitimate right was Hamlet's; and his mother, within less than two months after his father's sudden death, had made an incestuous marriage with the usurper. The first words uttered by Hamlet are a significant *aside*. The King, — after despatch of some public business and the granting of Laertes' petition to return to France, — with hypocritical demeanor, in words which to the deeply wronged and wounded Prince must have seemed almost mockery, addresses Hamlet:

> "But now, my cousin Hamlet and my son, —
> *Ham.* [Aside] A little more than kin, and less than kind.
> *King.* How is it that the clouds still hang on you?
> *Ham.* Not so, my lord: I am too much i' the sun."

Kind, in the second line, is the German word for child, and was, doubtless, intelligible in that sense in England in Shakespeare's day. Being "too much i' the sun" means, to be turned out of doors, Hamlet bitterly veiling what he felt in a proverb.

Mortified, subdued by his mother's unholy marriage, humiliated by his own abased posi-

tion, Hamlet, not a self-asserter or self-seeker, is just in that depressed, flaccid state to yield to his mother's request that he go not back to Wittenberg. A few moments after this compliance, being alone, he breaks forth into the first great soliloquy. In this frank communion with himself is suddenly brought to view the depth as well as tenderness of his nature:

> "*Ham.* O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
> Or, that the Everlasting had not fix'd
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!
> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fye on't! O fye! 'tis an unweeded garden,
> That grows to seed; things rank, and gross in nature,
> Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
> But two months dead! — nay, not so much, not two:
> So excellent a king; that was, to this,
> Hyperion to a satyr: so loving to my mother
> That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
> Visit her face too roughly."

To write what Shakespeare wrote, — aye, to write only this one play, — the writer's brain must be a glowing globe whose healthy pulses shoot forth beams that inflame whatever they fall on with a new warmth and a new light, darting forth at the same time, under the resistless impulse of feeling, intellectual

threads to bind to itself with its thought the highest as well as the subtlest relations among created things. A being thus sensitive and sympathetic and thoughtful is especially liable to hours of reaction from the raptures of its creative liveliness, — hours when the blank contrast between the world its own flames have lighted up and the flat, brutish, shallow doings around it wring from it a cry of despair. The soul is then disgusted with its temporary clay tenement, and would flee away to its eternal home. Shakespeare was strong too in animal passion ; had he not been, we should have had no *Shakespeare's dramas*. This passion will not always keep in its place, but will be pushing the legitimate, spiritual rulers from their throne, or intoxicating them with sensuous incense. Hence lapses and errors and crimes. Moreover, to a certain kind of lapse the poetically imaginative is more exposed than his prosaic fellow. What conflicts and remorses and depressions dear Shakespeare may have been subject to in London, away from wife and family, we may conjecture from the glimpses vouchsafed us. And here let us have no whining, biographical impertinence, and, least of all, no self-righteousness : we will

keep that for contemporary neighbors. Wishes that would modify, even by a tittle, this transcendent fellow-man are sacrilegious. God gave him the richest, deepest mind that vigorous England has bred, and thus made him a light and a benefaction to the race. He is so great and wide and perennial a benefactor because, whatever may have been his aberrations and self-indulgences, they touched not his core. His poetic imagination, braced and vivified by the passionate realism of his life, took from it nor stain nor taint; and thence, the breaths that blow from the vast domains of his beautiful creation bring with them moral health as well as æsthetic cheer and intellectual strength.

Shakespeare's poetic faculty, working upon his wealth of sensibilities and perceptions, wrought easily into shape an Iago or a Cordelia, a Miranda or a Cloten, but, as before intimated, there is reason to believe that at the epoch in his personal history when the tragedy of Hamlet was produced he found a high satisfaction and a gain in putting more of his every-day personality into the mouth of its protagonist. And so, when Hamlet longs for death, and is withheld from suicide by religion,

we may have had a glance at a shadow which at times darkened the being of Shakespeare himself. At a younger age Goethe was familiar with such thoughts.

Of this expressive, touching first soliloquy the most significant line is the last :

"But break my heart ; for I must hold my tongue."

His heart was ready to break from filial shame. As for his own wrong, for that he must bide his time. If his usurping uncle (for as yet Hamlet has no thought that he is a fratricidal seducer) should estrange the people by his wicked ways, or should stumble and fall, or end himself through plethora and drink, the rightful heir is ready to assume his just place. To that place he must be lifted, not pushed into it from behind, from self-seeking, from ambition, from lust of rule. Hamlet is not a politician, that he should set to work by largess and intrigue and the demagogue's arts — so prosperously plied by his uncle — to build a party that should work for him. He is one who by fair means would gain an honest end, not one who could work for any end by foul means. In Hamlet, Shakespeare, it seems to me, designed to draw a man of deep inwardness, not on that account incapable of outward

acts, energetic and wise. Few men, and still fewer public men, possess this deep inwardness; hence Oxenstierna's complaint of the little wisdom with which the world is governed. Louis Napoleon is a full exemplification of a man of shallow outwardness instead of deep inwardness. A man whose sole thought is self is by necessity shallow. Louis Napoleon, thus singly possessed, spurred by the most worldly ambition, lured by the Jack-o-lantern flicker of luxurious fruition, paused not at foul means to gain a foul end, and, having reigned without conscience, fell ingloriously, dragging down into the mire of humiliation — to expiate their false trust in him and his name — a great, gallant, sensitive people, while himself, hurled from his factitious throne, died in a deserved exile, leaving a reputation from which has already faded the false lustre of an unworthy Imperialism, and leaving a name that will forever stink in the nostrils of history. Hamlet was the opposite of this.

Not more absolute and peremptory over the course of planets is gravitation than in the conduct of life, private or public, is the moral law. Its judgments execute themselves, often but partially in this earthly portion of our life;

the intertwisted threads of our activity here get completely straightened out only by winding themselves upon the long hereafter. But enough is seen and felt of the paramount sway of this law to make us know its divine healthfulness as well as its absoluteness. And in no literary product are its ascendancy and its beauty more distinctly and impressively exhibited than in the pages of Shakespeare. Hamlet was a darling pupil of this supreme power: he was a man of scruples.

In this state of refined sorrow, of virtuous passiveness, when with a heavy sigh of present resignation he has just exclaimed, —

"But break my heart; for I must hold my tongue;"

enter to him Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo, come to tell him of the sight they have seen on the castle platform at midnight.

A cardinal literary virtue of Shakespeare is, that he always rises to the poetic level of the scene before him; and the claim of *Hamlet* to superiority over any and all of its fellow-dramas springs from this, that there are in this play more and more diversified scenes that task to their utmost the best faculties of the poet. In the present scene, what a dialogue follows the momentous announcement of Ho-

ratio to Hamlet that he saw Hamlet's father yesternight! Awe, wonder, filial devotion, intense curiosity, so stretch of a sudden the cords of Hamlet's intellect that they seem as they would snap with the tension. One after the other his gasping interpellations leap out with such hungry impatience as they could not brook the delay even of moments. When, after having engaged to meet them on the castle-platform between eleven and twelve, he dismisses them, he exclaims:

> "My father's spirit in arms! all is not well;
> I doubt some foul play."

Before the coming of the night-watch with their great tidings Hamlet was in such a state of apathy, of supineness, that, had not the startling report from the platform been brought to him, we should have had to follow him back to Wittenberg, whither the king — maugre his hypocritical protest — would have been glad to have him go; and then there would have been no play of Hamlet. That we have this play — the choice jewel in the poetic diadem of our language, — we must be forever thankful to the Ghost. For now, instead of being a prey to apathy, Prince Hamlet's breast heaves with tumult; his best faculties are aroused and alight.

Eager with ominous expectation, every minute that divides him from midnight seems an hour.

> "If it assume my noble father's person,
> I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape
> And bid me hold my peace."

At last the lagging hours are gone; in the "nipping and eager air" Hamlet stands on the platform beside Horatio and Marcellus.

> "*Horatio.* Look, my lord, it comes!"

Aye, it comes, for the fifth time, and in the form of the Majesty of buried Denmark.

> "Angels and ministers of Grace defend us!"

The first speech of Hamlet seems long for an awe-struck man to address to a palpable portentous visitant from the other world. But Art hath its privileges, privileges needful for its suitable manifestation.

When at the end of Hamlet's speech the Ghost beckons him, and his companions would dissuade him from going with it, Hamlet's sublime exclamation, —

> "Why what should be the fear?
> I do not set my life at a pin's fee;
> And for my soul, what can it do to that,
> Being a thing immortal as itself,"

is in contradiction to these lines in the speech,

> " Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
> Have burst their cerements; why the sepulcre,
> Wherein we saw thee quietly inurned,
> Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws,
> To cast thee up again."

By the unearthly grandeur of the moment roused to liveliest self-assertion, Hamlet affirms his essential equality with the Ghost, and in so doing recognizes in the apparition a spirit. In the passage just quoted from the speech to the Ghost he accepts the common error of the *body's* resurrection, an error which to the thought of resurrection gives a material grossness, a repulsive ghastliness. The bones are in the sepulchre; the sepulchre has not opened its marble jaws to cast them up again. Hamlet sees before him what St. Paul names the spiritual body. When, in his last hour, the disciples of Socrates would comfort him with the assurance that they would see to his being fittingly buried, this greatest of the great Greeks, who had seized intuitively the deep truth about soul and body, answered them cheerfully; "You will have to catch me first."

The *me* Socrates knew was not the corporeal body. In Shakespeare's day the popular belief was that the identical body rises again. This is still the popular, derived from the the-

ological, belief. The stoutest in self-substantiality cannot entirely withstand the pressure of general opinion. Socrates himself, in his last moments, requested his disciples to sacrifice on his behalf a cock which he owed to Æsculapius.

By the terrible disclosure of the Ghost the intellect of Hamlet is quickened to keenest vivacity. In the few moments that elapsed between the departure of the Ghost and the reëntrance of Horatio and Marcellus he has taken a notable resolution, which is, for his protection, to affect madness. This Shakespeare got from the legend as rendered by Belleforest. The perilous tragic revelation of the Ghost, with its overwhelming effect on himself and his future conduct, impels Hamlet to another hard resolution, namely, to break with Ophelia.

On a man such as Shakespeare has depicted Hamlet — one in whom, among the qualities that make up his remarkable individuality, are affectionateness, sincerity, earnestness — the passion of love would be likely to fasten with a strong, clinging hold. Under pressure of the revealment of his uncle's heinous guilt, — a guilt so monstrous and damnable that the spirit

of its victim has come from his transearthly home to lay it bare, with piteous ghostly voice putting upon his son a solemn commandment of revenge, — under this pressure, feeling that from the table of his memory he must "wipe all trivial fond records," his first thought is of Ophelia, for, in the face of this new, awful responsibility, even his love becomes a triviality. How shall he break with her? If to him this is a heavy blow, what will it not be to her? And Hamlet is tender-hearted, and deeply loves Ophelia. Yet, the breach must be. A fearful deed, to be done by his hand, has taken tyrannous possession of him, and it is his duty, to her as to himself, that the dear tie between them be rent. To himself as well as to her his mask of madness shall weaken the force of the blow. This is to be the first trial of his feigned lunacy. The trial completely succeeds. Ophelia comes running in to her father exclaiming, —

"O, my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted!"

In the midst of her description of the unusual bearing and appearance of Hamlet, the profound, infallible Polonius interrupts her:

"Mad for thy love?" —
"I do not know, my lord; But truly I do fear it."

When Hamlet, having hold of Ophelia's wrist, "raised a sigh so piteous and profound that it did seem to shatter all his bulk and end his being," the sigh was a real sigh, telling of real agony; but the mask of madness enabled him to heave it in Ophelia's presence. Of this extraordinary scene, — not presented visibly but only in the relation of Ophelia, — the most marked feature is the last:

> "That done, he lets me go;
> And, with his head over his shoulder turned,
> He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
> For out o' doors he went without their help,
> And, to the last, bended their light on me."

Hamlet's mind is now strung to its utmost. Instead of the languor of his first appearance, with his sad submissiveness to the King and his mother, his faculties are now alert, eager, aggressive. His scorn of Polonius he delights in giving vent to in ridicule and bitter railing; his wrathful hatred of the King breaks out in sarcasm or innuendo, to which feigned lunacy empowers him to give a keener edge.

The first interview with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is a lively exhibition of this mental alertness. His talk is thoughtful and imaginative. He quickly detects that they

have been sent for by the King and Queen, to pluck out the heart of his mystery. His touching appeal to them they cannot withstand: "Let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligations of our ever-preserved love, and by what more dear a better proposer could charge you withal, be even and direct with me, whether you were sent for, or no?" This disconcerts them, and they confess that they were sent for. Then follows that passage which for grandeur and beauty and truth of thought, for marvelous transparence and charm of style, one feels tempted to place at the very top of the interminable array of splendent sentences that flow with tropic affluence from Shakespeare's pen: "I have of late — but wherefore I know not — lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is man! how noble in

reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!"

Observe that this passage is prose in form. It is not measured off into iambic lines of ten syllables, nevertheless, it is melodiously rhythmical, and it is poetical, for it had its birth in a glow of creative sensibility, and it flows out with a golden cadence. The dialogue between Hamlet and his two friends is appropriately in prose. When to Hamlet, depicting to them his mental condition, it occurs that he can best do it by a blaze of poetic imaginativeness, which by contrast will give a vivid notion of the darkness of his individual mental mood, Shakespeare — delighted, as he always is, with an opportunity for the blooming of the ideal — gives him full swing. A patch of blank verse, thrust into a prose dialogue, would have been a blotch instead of a beauty, and so Shakespeare, knowing the predominancy of substance over form, of soul over body, made poetic feeling to beam through a passage of prose without thereby losing any of its lustre or effect. This passage is precious, too, as

laying open to us Shakespeare's creed on man and nature:

"What a piece of work is man!"

A tempting field for brilliant maneuvering of intellectual forces is the interview with the players. Here let it be remarked, that to give fresh lively play to the wider and deeper faculties of the mind is the highest achievement of tragedy; and as the passionate conjunctions and collisions — the best of this highest — are necessarily limited in space and number, to fill the scenes with sparkling intellectual display, enkindled by feeling, lifts a tragedy to the nobler plane of Art. Hamlet, with his large, lively gifts, enjoyed this nobler plane. Like his maker, Shakespeare, he was prone to reflection and generalization. He went readily on excursions of psychological discovery. Nevertheless, when, at the conclusion of the very long scene, he has dismissed the players, then Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his first words come out on a long-drawn breath of relief: "Now I am alone." To a man of Hamlet's thoughtfulness and inwardness, self-communion is his chief need and enjoyment. He enjoys and profits by communion with other men, but his favorite company is his own thoughts.

The self-communion which follows the exclamation, "I am alone," must not be taken too literally. A richly endowed idealist, Hamlet likes to give the reins to his poetic imagination, and this bears him, like an eagle before the wind, swiftly away over abysses of feeling, over mountain-heights of human possibility, as in a waking dream; and when he becomes aware of this alteration, and lets himself suddenly down from it, his present actuality seems to him unworthy and base. Moreover, — and is not this the key to Hamlet's conduct? — alongside of the loathing for his uncle, and the conviction that it is almost a sin to let him live, there is a shrinking back from the thought of deliberately slaying him with his own hand, a shrinking back with a shudder as searching as that against self-slaughter. Hamlet is by nature gentle-minded, with deep moral sensibility. Under the terrible spell of his father's spirit he promised to be his active representative, the executor of his vengeance. But he could not be what he promised to be. Happily there are many men who cannot do deliberate deadly execution even upon a vile fratricide. The Ghost wrought powerfully upon Hamlet's feelings, but could not change his nature,

could not make his "thoughts be bloody." The ideal exaltations of a man like Hamlet tend not at all to quicken action counter to his natural bent; but they do tend to enrich his mind and to qualify him for future efficiency, and for present good deeds.

In the soliloquy at the close of Act II., Hamlet deals in the wildest self-reproaches for not executing vengeance on the

"Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!"

but he cannot lash himself up to the killing point. More than half conscious that he has it not in him to fulfill the promise to his father's spirit, in the soliloquy at the beginning of Act III. there is a reaction against the desire to live, which was so lively just after the interview with the Ghost. Again, — as before the interview, — he entertains the thought of escaping by suicide from a task he feels to be too weighty for him. Again he throws the immense line of his thought into the ocean of infinitude; but he finds he is not on soundings, even with so long a line as he can throw.

In Shakespeare's greatest passages, — and he has hundreds of greatest passages, — the literary lustre is so bright, that for the moment we deem the one we are reading his master-

piece. Literary lustre implies much. Only literary diamonds are susceptible of the highest lustre: you can smooth and polish pudding-stone, but polish as much as you will you will get no sparkle from it; sparkles come from within. As with Shakespeare there is so much within, his pages sparkle like the heavens at cloudless midnight. The gravity of the problem, the reach of the thinking that is brought to bear upon it, the logical compactness of the reasoning, the idiomatic raciness of the diction, which flows into poetic rhythm as naturally as the breath from a musical throat into melody, — all this, with the insight gained into Hamlet's core, makes us reread "To be or not to be," and believe that even in Shakespeare we shall meet with no page more perfect.

The intellectual current, so deep yet so rapid, so clear yet so full, that streams through Shakespeare's tragedies, binding into indissoluble interdependence all the parts of the gorgeous region it traverses, in Hamlet winds so sinuously that, like the bends in the great Mississippi, the current at times seems running counter to its own course. But with the severe unity of design there is so rich a com-

plexity of meaning, managed with such art and riding on such buoyant mental floods, that we are never provoked to complain of irrelevancy or undramatic delays. Who would like to read Hamlet shorn of the advice to the players? The super-excellence of every scene, and the immense soul-momentum that projects the whole into being, carry you forward ever swiftly over this and other seeming anomalies. The glow of genius, at whitest heat, fuses the outwardly heterogeneous mass into one splendent orb of beauty and power.

After the deep drafts upon his inmost in writing the soliloquies and the more impassioned dialogues, how welcome must have been to Shakespeare the writing down of the advice to the players, — welcome as relaxation after strenuous work, and welcome as an opportunity to put forth practical precepts on an art of which he was master.

"Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue." In the word *trippingly* there is a wide and a subtle significance. To the writer as well as to the declaimer of sentences the best advice is involved in this one word. The nimbleness and lightness enjoined by the word *trippingly*

imply a full control of mind over material. In the best acting, as in the best writing, the words, however brilliant and weighty, are secondary, mere tools of the mind, a transparent vehicle, a medium through which the spirit is to shine. He who is intensely possessed by the spirit, the thought, the sentiment, will fix and hold the attention and charm the faculties of reader or auditor. In the dull writer the material is not enough informed with soul: instead of his being intensely possessed by the spirit, by the thought, the mere robe of spirit and thought overlaps him, smothers him. The reason why Shakespeare is the least dull and the most captivating of writers is because his words are interpenetrated, vivified, electrified by thought and feeling. His life-work was to put into words the vast and various movements of his mighty mind. As in acting his own Ghost he did not "mouth" his words, that is, make them too corporeal and heavy, so in writing the Ghost, as in all the pages he wrote, he showed the body subservient to the spirit, ennobled, glorified by the spirit.

At the end of the advice to the players, having in a princely style got rid of them and likewise of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern, he calls Horatio.

What a boon to Hamlet is Horatio! The Ghost takes the initiative; he gives the tragic impulse to his son. But the son, without such a friend as this unselfish rational Horatio, could not have gone forward. "Benetted round with villanies," pressed by a solemn charge, a charge too bloody for his tender scrupulous nature, but for Horatio he would have rushed away from the haunts of men, or laid violent hands on himself. Through his love for Horatio, and Horatio's full worthiness of his love and his confidence, he is saved from despair, his hope rewarmed with a new life. To Horatio Hamlet says:

> "Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
> As e'er my conversation coped withal."

What a eulogy! The cardinal virtue is Justice: unsustained by justice even love and piety waste their substance. Justice ties the most necessary bond among men. Without some justice, much justice, society could not hold together; and when justice shall have become universally supreme, we shall have reached the millennium, — but not till then.

In his sorest need a greater blessing could not have been granted to Hamlet than just such a friend, in whom — his character being

founded on justice — the distressed Prince could put absolute trust, a man who has been

> "As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,
> A man, that fortune's buffets and rewards
> Hast ta'en with equal thanks: and bless'd are those,
> Whose blood and judgment are so well co-mingled,
> That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please. Give me that man,
> That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
> In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
> As I do thee."

And without this dear new warmth in it, his heart would have broken. A man, even when in straits, shuns making another man the confident of his criminal aims; but to one incapable of harboring such aims, like Hamlet, with his sympathies and heart-hungers, such a friend at a time of such a trial was a better self.

The play, as Hamlet purposed that it should, "catches the conscience of the king." It does something else: it proves to Hamlet that the Ghost is truthful. It should do still more: it should help to prove to the reader, that Shakespeare believed in the Ghost. Did Shakespeare, could he, create what he did not believe in? Was he a juggler? Was that solemn preparation for the midnight coming of the "Majesty of buried Denmark" a mock

solemnity, to gull the groundlings with a mock apparition? Was Shakespeare one to give to a sham such power as the Ghost wields? Even if we could conceive that the man, Shakespeare, was capable of such trifling with himself and his readers, the artist, Shakespeare, was not capable of it. He would not and could not make a ghost the moving spring of his deepest tragedy, had he not himself believed in the possible influence and intervention of spirits out of the body in the doings of spirits still in the body. Remember that Shakespeare (and it is his highest claim to honor and veneration) is an apostle of truth. With inspired vision he seized the truth in man, in nature, in the procedure of divine rule. With Socrates, he knew that the essential man is, not the visible incarnation, but the invisible spirit. It may be that, with Socrates, he personally felt that no man was ever truly great without celestial inspiration.

That there is an all-embracing unity of life, an infinite infrangible interchainment among all the elements and beings of the universe, is a deep ground-fact and principle, which the mind must recognize, if it would give food and scope to its best desires, its trustiest aspira-

tions. Between the clod your foot flattens on its path and the farthest star whose light, from the immeasurable depths of space, has just reached us, the tie is indissoluble. Equally indissoluble is that between the worm under the clod and the beings whose range is among the stars, and whose life is fed by beams to which those from Suns are twilight. In this vast unity the strongest link, or rather that which holds all the links together, is the ineffable, invisible life-essence, the creative, spiritual might which causes and permeates all being. From Homer to Wordsworth the great intuitive poets have been the assertors of the intimate bond between the two worlds, the unseen and the seen. Of Homer it has been written:

> "On thy vast horizon Gods and men
> Shame history with the grandeurs of their strife,
> Inbreed delight, wrath, wonder, love, and ruth,
> And deepen man's outworn fast fading ken
> With teachings of the dear religious truth,
> That Heaven and earth live intermingled life."

In the universe there is no such thing as isolation, as complete solitude. The prisoner in lonely dungeon, the most desolate and unfriended outcast, the Crusoes on speechless islands, —

"Think you that these are all alone,
Because bereft of human gaze?
Never was aught but on it shone
Incessant superhuman blaze.

"The blindest worm, the proudest throne
Is ever blest with company:
Who were an instant left alone,
That instant would he cease to be.

"And that first death would shake the stars,
With terror rack creation's face,
That sprung were life's eternal bars,
And God no more was in his place."

Empyrean supervision is unintermitted for aye. By the law of universal unity it must be so. Life depends on the unceasing activity of the causative, the creative, element, which is spiritual potency. Milton says:

"Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep."

What moved Milton to put into words this seemingly extravagant audacious belief? His deep consciousness, which placed him in closer relation with the creative mightiness than is reached by any but the greatest poets and discoverers, — an intuitive perception, whereby he became prophetically cognizant of that he could not yet know. A man is a poet by virtue

of his intenser and finer sympathy with life in all its forms, and with the generative principle whence life springs. To the poet, according to his degree, are vouchsafed interior views that are revelations. To be a poet, that is, a creator, he must be nearer to the world of causes, the creative world, the spiritual world.

Owing to this nearness Milton felt that

"Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth Unseen."

Shakespeare, with similar sympathetic instinct, was so assured of their presence that, a vivid depictor of human life, into his marvelously active scenes he frequently brought them as fellow-participants in human doings. The sleeping Posthumus in prison he comforts with the apparitions of his father, mother, and brothers. With what a company of spiritual visitors he encircles the couches of Richard and Richmond, the night before the battle of Bosworth. On no account would he miss the opportunity, given him by Plutarch, of making the spirit of Cæsar appear to Brutus on the eve of Philippi. In Holinshed's account of Macbeth there is a murdered Banquo, but, half an hour after his murder, no bloody apparition of him at a banquet, to shake the nerves even of a Macbeth. What a lurid cloud of poetry, shadow-

ing the whole dread picture, are the Witches, those grotesque incarnations of the evil possibilities of man's heart, figures who put on human form because they are an offspring of foulest human fancies! The Witches represent the negative side of humanity in malignant activity when, under sway of the fiercest lusts, it works destructively, and struggles, with demoniacal impotency and with momentary success, to thwart the beneficent productive bent of man's spiritual motions. To make such loathsome hags poetical, what angelic sympathy must coöperate with the resources of creative might!

And Ariel and Caliban! Only an archbeliever in spiritual beings could have produced Ariel. Ariel is a human being relieved of his material load, a type of the subtle, the elementary intellectual. Caliban is a being in human form with the higher human, the moral and spiritual, subtracted from him. What an illuminated look into the innermost workshop of life there must have darted forth to project these two from a human brain. Gifted in brightest degree with the higher, the distinctive attributes of humanity, Shakespeare's thought swept beyond the confines of the concrete and

held unconscious converse with the invisible potencies, empowered by the Infinite spirit to nourish and disenthral mental life.

Was it at all times entirely unconscious this converse? Shakespeare's gifts were so superlative, his outlook so clear and far, his inlook so transcendant, his sensitiveness so exquisite, he was so wisely visionary, that, especially in his more exalted moods, he may easily have felt the influence, almost the contact of guardian spirits. Under this influence he puts Hamlet, and that to vital purpose. On his way to England, to banishment he believed on account of the slaying of Polonius, attended by Rosencrants and Guildenstern, one night, he tells Horatio, "in my heart there was a kind of fighting that would not let me sleep." Thus mysteriously moved to get up, while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern slept he "fingered their packet," unsealed the royal commission, wherein he finds "an exact command to the King of England to strike off his, Hamlet's, head the moment he should arrive, no leisure bated, no, not to stay the grinding of the axe."

Biography sparkles with similar cases of unvoiced premonition. Shakespeare may have had such himself. He may have anticipated

the intuitive Kant, the great solid Idealist, who said:—

"There will come a day, when it will be demonstrated that the human soul throughout its terrestrial existence lives in a communion, actual and indissoluble, with the immaterial natures of the world of spirits; that this world acts upon our own, through influences and impressions, of which man has no consciousness to-day, but which he will recognize at some future time."

From Hamlet's bearing towards those around him and from the words that issue from his mouth, we perceive that Shakespeare has bestowed upon him the master-powers of the human mind: he is as high in reason as he is deep in sensibility. His intellect is as quick and nimble as it is profound; he is penetrating and versatile, witty and philosophical. A thoughtful idealist, — like Shakespeare himself, — Hamlet is surrounded by shallow realists; and no one is so shallow as your thorough unimaginative realist. Such a man could not but be isolated; he is not quite so much so to-day as in the reign of Elizabeth. How sorely must Shakespeare at times have felt this isolation. Not a soul of his contemporaries un-

derstood him. Among his countless profound sentences he never uttered a wiser than when he makes Hamlet beg his mother to forgive him his virtue, and never one dyed in more intimate personal experience:

> "Forgive me this my virtue;
> For in the fatness of these pursy times
> Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
> Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good."

To depict such a man, richly, superbly endowed, Shakespeare wrote the play of *Hamlet*, and wrote it with a degree of personal zest, it seems to me, in his work such as he never felt while embodying the protagonist of any other play. From Hamlet's mouth come more lines than from any other two of Shakespeare's chief personages; and lines, carrying what thought, what life, what wit, what beauty, what wisdom! From his quality, character, and position, Hamlet is grandly, profoundly symbolical: he represents the boundless capabilities of man, his vast sweep of mental faculty, his tragic liabilities, his mysterious fatalities.

Coleridge says that in Hamlet "we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it." What right has any one

to say that Hamlet is not capable of action? That was a pretty energetic action which thrust a sword through the arras, hoping to strike the king. The getting up of the play gave proof of anything but that "the images of his fancy are far more vivid than his actual perceptions." Hamlet is not placed in circumstances that offer a field for *his* powers of action. If a Quaker holds his tongue in the company of profane swearers, would you on that account set him down as born dumb? Claudius and Laertes are the men of action suited to the atmosphere around Hamlet. It is not in Hamlet deliberately to slay a man even to avenge a father's murder, no, not even when under a promise solemnly imposed by that father's spirit. Under the spell of this awful presence he resolves to revenge his father's murder, and he does not, as Coleridge says, "lose the power of action in the energy of resolve," but he is potently withheld from action by deep scruples. Hamlet has in him too much of the milk of humanity in cold blood to commit a homicide, and he is too pure and noble a man for revenge. The paternal Ghost brings out more pointedly a virtue there is in Hamlet, his inaptitude to expiate one murder by an-

other. To do this was counter to the constitution of his being. Even the voice of his father, sounding from beyond the tomb, had no power, and no right, to move him to do violence to his sensibility. A man's own reason and moral sense are his supreme guides against all voices and commands, come from whence they will. He lames his manhood if he surrenders his moral freedom. The deed Hamlet was required by his father's spirit to do was a vile deed. Not to do it, instead of showing defect of mental power, proved its very fullness, revealing not his weakness but his strength. The defect is in the deed, not in the doer.

And thus, instead of Shakespeare depicting, as Goethe thinks, "a great deed laid upon a soul unequal to the performance of it," it is the soul of Hamlet which is too great for the performance of a bad deed.

Where there is neither conscience nor forethought, to kill a man is easy, as we may learn every day. The following short paragraph was lately read in the newspapers:

"Out of the seventy-seven white people whose deaths the Standford (Ky.) *Journal* recorded last year (1878) only fifty-five died natural deaths."

Does any one suppose that the state of things in the region of Standford was bettered by the bloody deeds implied in this short but expressive paragraph? And we cannot help surmising that the "poor Ghost," when he went back at dawn to his "prison house," would not, for the injunction of revenge be so impressively laid upon his son, find in any degree softened the fierceness of the fires to which he says he was doomed during the day.

It seems to me that the opinions of Goethe and Coleridge on the design of Shakespeare in writing the drama of *Hamlet* not only lower the protagonist of the tragedy, but also let down the great poem itself from its poetic preeminence. With all deference for the judgment of such gifted men (and my deference for both of them is great) I cannot but think that to attribute to Shakespeare a predetermination to illustrate, through the embodiment of a character, some especial psychological combination in the make up of the character, or to elucidate the effects of some mastering passion or of some social principle, is to mistake Shakespeare's mode of procedure, and to ascribe in his creative work an undue place to the mere understanding. Such a mode of proceeding

may be necessary to dramatists of less mental reach and power of feeling. Shakespeare chose a subject for tragedy for its passionate capabilities, and having strong in himself the healthiest moral sensibilities, his penetrative plastic intellect manipulated his material with such masterly artistic skill, that the dramatic result was a vivid poem in which the profoundest quality is the conspicuous leadership of these moral sensibilities, which by divine creative will are supreme in man. God did not produce Napoleon to signalize the evil of a godless ambition. Shakespeare, an inspired man, a God-chosen man, did not produce Macbeth to present to the world, for its edification and discipline, the dire effects of unscrupulons lust of dominion, but to present Macbeth and his associates in their individual characteristics and their relations to one another, these individualities and relations being such as to offer rich material for an impressive poem. Human existence and history, wisely scanned, glow with moral lessons. So deep and true was Shakespeare's soul, so pure his nature, so warm his sympathies, that in his dramas, as in history and contemporaneous life, we may read high moral lessons clothed in the gorgeous robes of

poetry. But Shakespeare did not write dramatic poems for the purpose of inculcating and enforcing these moral lessons. Had he done so, I affirm that his dramas, instead of being the juicy, palpitating, rounded, glowing, electric creations that they are, would have been comparatively jejune, tame, angular, and unpoetical.

Shakespeare is so broad and deep in thought, in sensibility so strong and clean, in fellow-feeling so full and fine, and so luminous in presentation, that in the life-like personages he sets in motion we find, in most of them, the predominance of some passion or principle, just as we do in the tragedies of real life or in the epochs of history. But to impute to him the studious purpose of writing a drama to exhibit the effects of this predominance of passion or principle, is to lower the poet to the monotonous level of the didactic doctrinaire. This were to give to prosaic subjectivity an initiative fatal to inspiration, as blasting to the bloom of poetry as untimely frost to the buds of spring. In Art as in life the moral lesson is latent, and on that very account the more effective. The discovery of design, of preconceived idea, has been, I cannot but think, car-

ried much too far. The notion of an idea being by Shakespeare intended to rule his plays is a prosaic notion, and can therefore throw no light on the wondrous products of his art.

That it was Shakespeare's purpose to exhibit in Hamlet a one-sided man with a disabling preponderance of ideal thoughtfulness, I cannot perceive, and did I perceive it, I should think the less of Hamlet as a poetic concretion. Hamlet was one-sided; who is not? Shakespeare himself, the "myriad-minded," had, even as poet, his weak side, according to Coleridge, who thinks he was too thoughtful for narrative poetry. Certainly in the roll of men he would be registered as a man of thought. Burleigh and Walsingham were men of action. What Shakespeare could do as a man of action is shown by the records of the Globe theatre, where he early became not only a leading proprietor, but the owner of all the "properties," an ownership which implies steady practical talent. When he began — and he began early — to put aside some of the pecuniary fruits of his genius, he proved himself a match for shrewd money-investers. Who can say but that, had he not been called to move in a still higher sphere, he might have

done the duties of Burleigh or Walsingham more efficiently than they did them, well as they did their work? And their work was well done in proportion as their path was precedently illuminated by thought, aye, by ideal thought. But neither of them could have put a hand to *his* great work. We have seen, almost in our own day, the poet Goethe chief minister of the Duchy of Weimar, giving evidence of rare administrative ability in diverse departments, — ability which he never would have been believed to possess, had not the Duke of Weimar discerned his worth and superiority as a man of action. But for the Duke's sagacity this part of Goethe's inherent power would have lain dormant. That in Hamlet was latent a vigorous clear-headed man of action is proved by the slaying of Polonius, by the practical scheme of the detective play, by his quick substitution, in the royal commission, of the names of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for his own name in self-defense at sea, on the way to England, where he expected to arrive with them, by his choice of such a friend as Horatio, by his conduct as well as his words in the last scene.

A man with Hamlet's mental force and en-

dowment is conscious of the presence in him of motions which, if uncurbed, would bring quick ruin to all around him. Such a one, unmastered by conscience and noble sympathies, might become a devouring scourge like Macbeth. Hamlet is not held before us by Shakespeare as an ideal perfection, by no means; but among his defects is neither a shallow willfulness nor an incapable dreaminess, and among his virtues is a profound tender scrupulousness. A man of this caliber and quality will not be so easy to understand as one of less complex composition. The momentum of weighty faculties, under the impulsion of swelling eagerness, will project his thought, and even his action, so much beyond the common range, that he will seem eccentric and dangerous. To others, aye, and to himself, his conduct will at times appear to contradict his character. Hence, Hamlet appears mysterious, enigmatical. This is not the fault of Shakespeare. Far was he from such an artistic blunder as designedly to present him as unintelligible. He endowed Hamlet with his own best and deepest, with a profound susceptibility coupled with an intellect of large grasp and keenest edge, with an omnivorous mental

hunger, — an equipment rare in its fullness and fineness. Your cold man is not at all mysterious; mystery begins and grows with warmth. Where the whole brain is involved in productive heat, the mystery deepens; and when a man with such a brain, aglow with aspiration and thought, is suddenly thrown upon a conjunction caused by grossest guiltiness, he irresistibly recoils. Afront of the lurid fires of crime his noble glow is quenched, as the sun is by eclipse, by the interposition of part of the earth itself. Hamlet has the thought and sympathy and will to be a broad benefactor to his kind, but the unexpected glare of most damnable guilt daunts him. It is not that he is too weak for the occasion; he is too high to reach down to it. After the revelation of his uncle's double criminality, and his father's ghostly cry for revenge, he is forced to exclaim:

> "The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!"

Because, with a deep despondent sigh, he feels that this is not his sphere, he is not on that account an incapable dreamer, a laggart, a mere metaphysical talker; only he has no vocation to right the murder of one king by the murder of another.

Of this unique drama, this supreme poem, where, throughout an unparalleled diversity of impassioned scenes, the marriage of poetry and thought gives birth to a crowded offspring of sentences, paragraphs, dialogues, soliloquies, all aflame with truth and beauty, — of this choice literary enchantment, the most exquisite constituents, as art, the deepest as nature, are the brief scenes that Ophelia irradiates with her madness:

> "Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,
> She turns to favor and to prettiness."

Under the spell of these touching scenes our admiration of Shakespeare reaches its climax. Here his sympathy and love for humanity glisten with their tenderest light. His creative insight reveals a dear maiden's faculties all jangled and untuned, out of which his human feelings and his heavenly art draw a melody that startles while it enchants us.

And now the impassioned lines converge towards a point for the catastrophe, in their convergence enclosing, like the wide seine of the fisherman, many nimble glittering lives to be in a few moments dimmed and stiffened in death, the bloody devices of treachery clutching the traitors themselves and quickly hurling

them with their victim into the grave they had dug for him, the catastrophe being true to life, where we often behold the innocent included in the immolation of the guilty, even when they are not so near to their doings as Hamlet was to his associates. Are we not always near to the depraved and the wicked, so near that we can not escape some responsibility for their acts? so near that we are exposed to the effects of their lives and deeds, whether these effects show themselves in the tainting of the atmosphere we and our children breathe, or in the engulphing of the innocent into the fatal whirlpool of crime?

The catastrophe rushes into its sudden all-embracing whirl by the accidental exchanging of rapiers between Laertes and Hamlet, that is, by chance. Who can say what is chance? Who can say, there is any chance? When in the carrying out of our plans there occurs something undesigned by ourselves, something unexpected, which we call a chance, and which diverts the whole scheme from the channel we had prepared for it into another, who can say, because the incident or movement, which thus thwarted us, was not anticipated by us, that it was fortuitous, that it could be so, to the de-

signer of us and our being, to the all-designer, the all-enfolder? Has not every visible material fact, must it not have, an invisible spiritual soul or cause, whether the visible fact be the fall of a sparrow or the fall of an empire? A healthy mind, a mind of tolerable fullness of endowment, cannot conceive of a fact or an act without a cause. Who shall say that this or that fact comes from nowhere?

The cords that hold our physical life run into nervous threads so fine that there needs an armed eye to distinguish them; and into how much finer filaments these run, in order to bind to themselves the causal spiritual forces that rule them, we can only approximately conjecture. The solar beams, that illuminate and nourish our earthly life, — only visible when through an aperture they shine upon floating atoms, — are yet of such power that, were they withdrawn, our earthly life would instantly shrivel and quickly cease. These invisible material beams, that command our physical being, are gross in comparison with the spiritual beams that command our psychical being. In a scene like this fearful catastrophe of Hamlet the seemingly accidental circumstance which swiftly produces it, is one end of

a long thread whose other end is in the abounding mysterious realm of causes, the prolific spiritual source of all being, and which, thence projected to sweep from the earth a whole family by a violent shock, is in perfect harmony with the laws of cause and effect as with those of love and justice. A Shakespeare is more than other men in sympathy with overruling spiritual power.

Dealing, as a tragic poet, with the warmest, deepest passions and inward motions of man, with the most momentous problems of human life, a quickening sensibility to the moral law, an intuitive perception of divine methods, was a primary need in Shakespeare's poetic equipment; and, more to his superiority here than to any other of his superiorities is it due, that he towers above his contemporaries. Hence, concordant with moral justice is his poetic justice.

At last the wicked king lies stretched in death, struck by the hand of Hamlet, not immediately directed by the vengeful injunction of his father's spirit. The royal criminal is caught in the deadly trap he set for Hamlet, who, warned by the dieing repentant Laertes, pierces the wretch with the unbated envenomed

foil, and makes him drink of the poisoned bowl set there for Hamlet himself. Poetic justice is done to the Queen. Though not privy to the murder of her husband, she was indirectly participant in it through her criminal intercourse with his brother. Peculiarly appropriate it is that she should die by her own act, ignorantly committed through her close proximity to the miscreant king. The executive art of Shakespeare is nowhere more conspicuously exhibited than in the catastrophe of this magnificent drama.

That the groundwork of the plot is laid by the revelation of a spirit, a spirit come from the transearthly home of spirits to make the revelation, imparts to this drama a unique mysterious grandeur. In presence of every genuine catastrophe (genuine because in harmony with divine judgments and methods), as in presence of every earthly catastrophe, and indeed of every human event, these words of Shakespeare shine as an indelible inscription on the gloom :

> "There 's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will."

These profound words issue from the mouth of Hamlet in the fifth act, as if on this drama,

with its calamitous events and wofully tragic end, they were inscribed with more than usual distinctness; and thus inscribed, because the whole procedure of the play is ruled by a revelation from beyond the grave, — a revelation of crime which would not otherwise have been known, and being thus made known to the earth-inhabiting son of the revealer, influenced his thought and action from the beginning to the end.

In the whole human being, in body and in soul, every movement, every impulse, every act, voluntary or involuntary, in its beginning, growth and consequences, is subject to law, to law ever active and inexorable, — law from which, in its multiform activity, there is no escape, no more than there is from the air you breathe. And above all other law ranges and reigns spiritual law.

Thus, it seems to me, that the Ghost, who sets the drama in motion, gives to it a peculiar significance. He unveils, and is he not purposely designed by Shakespeare to unveil, the influence of spirits out of the flesh on spirits in the flesh, and thence their interest and agency in earthly doings. That the play of Hamlet is a commentary on human life even

more intellectual, sympathetic, profound, poetical, spiritual, than Shakespeare's other great commentaries, is it not due to the ghostly element in it, a deep, true, powerful element, which fed and heightened the inspiration of its transcendent author ?

Transcendent I call him, because, in the higher capabilities of humanity, he exceeds most poets and thinkers, but especially because, in the completeness of his mental array, in the swarming fullness, ingrained with the fine quality of his literary endowment, he excells all men.

His were the master-powers of the mind; the supreme Reason, that sits in easy dignity on the throne of judgment, upon whose supremacy depend the success of life and the validity of artistic interpretation of life, the broad keen intellectual potency that ranges over and penetrates into all existence, grasping the deepest relations among things, feelings, and thoughts, the ultimate tribunal in human doings and thinkings, from whose sentence there is no wholesome appeal; joined to this the large Emotional Sensibilities, so large, that, looking beyond the self, they embrace the widest, deepest, warmest interests of mankind,

so far-stretching that their bearings are universal, and yet so intimately involved in every man's daily conduct, tending ever to purify it, that, without their activity, the jurisdiction of the supreme magistrate, Reason, would be circumscribed, his high function maimed; and with these sovereign agencies, that one that gives to each its finest edge, that endows each with perspicuous vision, illuminating each and all with so divine a light, that Heaven, earth, and man glisten in the glow of the beautiful. These three predominating human faculties, or, properly, sheaves of faculties, were, in their fullest breadth and wakefulness, the rich dower of Shakespeare. In order that in the boundless field of his poetic movement every want be instantly supplied, every emergency quickly and aptly met, gorgeously were these sovereignties attended by thronging trains of ministers, registrars, assistants, subordinates. All the Loves were there, their tender eyes ready to be flooded by tears or to sparkle with smiles; all the passions, their eager glances softened by hope or fierce with defiance, some bounding through blossoms towards sunlit goals, others only visible by the glare of their tiger-eyes, as they crouch in the dark, watching to make a

tragic spring. Wit stood ready, armed with his polished blades, and a greater than he, Humor, not only giving more elastic step to individual passages and persons, but enclosing the whole work of the master in a buoyant atmosphere of divine tolerance.

And all this multiform power was enjoyed by the possessor with such vivacity of consciousness, with such intensity of belief, that his mind, overflowing in its opulence, grew plastic, creative, projecting itself with such a gush of light that, like a first dawn breaking into full day, it revealed a new world of grandeur and beauty, so braced and graced with humanity, that when we survey and recall the vivid multitudinous offspring of this one brain, we stand dazzled, amazed, enraptured, in presence of the resplendent majesty of Shakespeare.

ON FIRST SEEING, IN CENTRAL PARK, THE STATUE OF SHAKESPEARE, BY WARD.

On an early Autumn day,
With sunny shadows bright,
Warmed was I in a new ray,
Awed by the sudden might
Of a great presence, as I stood,
Flushed into fullest mood,
Before the mightiness
Of Shakespeare, springing
From beamy shaft, and bringing
Deep admiration's joy, to bless
The thankful gazer's eye
With his dear majesty.

In a hushed gladness,
In love and tender sadness,
We looked, almost with reverence bent,
As there his image sprang,
In beautiful embodiment,
From a fit pedestal,
As though the Muses nine, all musical,
At its creation's feat together sang
When it uprose into the air,
A living form of strength and grace,
Crowned with that thoughtful face,
And holy head so fair

Vaulted and swol'n by tides of urgent deeps
From earth and heaven and man,
Itself a central depth, wherein there leaps
A life that can
Feed hungering humanity;
Men, women, children, grouped to see
Each other kindled (part unconsciously)
By this refulgent effigy
Of a perennial splendor,
Nature a brimful lender
Of glory and of light,
To consecrate a power, a delight,
A triumph aye to feeling, thought, and sense,
A boon given by heavenly art,
Through sympathy of heart,
And made to bloom in ever-fresh magnificence.