

## SHAKESPEARE IN THE CLASS-ROOM.

In the empire of Literature, Shakespeare rules alone. No other poet has so quickened the human mind. No classics are worthier than his to be permanent text books in our literary institutions. None ministers such varied development to all the mental powers.

Let us first consider Shakespeare as a school-reading book for advanced classes. Reading is a fine art, but if it do not voice the *soul*, it is a mere mechanical art. No force of will, no painstaking can raise it above that level. A clear, flexible, musical voice, distinct articulation, pauses nicely adjusted and skilful inflexions may make one a perfect *mechanical* reader, but is such vocalizing good reading? What is it, but a mill so grinding its grist of words as to crush out the soul in them, leaving their corpses laid out upon the lips of the elocutionary undertaker. There can be no good reading, of that, in which the reader takes no vital interest, and other things being equal, the deeper the interest the better the reading. If the words read are the reader's pulses, if in his tones you feel his heart beat, your's will throb too.

A keen relish of the subject matter read, its pithiness, wit, rythm, beauty and force, is indispensable to all really fine reading. By a month's practice in such reading, one would improve incomparably more than plodding a life time through worlds of words that touch not this life.

Shakespeare as a reading book in schools would, under a competent teacher, excite in the pupil a vivid interest, and hold it unflagging to the end. No other bears so triumphantly the test of the recitation room. Other books grow dull upon re-reading, and frequently intolerable, if often read. Shakespeare never tires, and if the pupil be appreciative, his zest increases at each reading.

Finally, no other book furnishes such ample means for vocal culture, nor such incentives and aids to natural and impressive reading.

### II. Advantages of Shakespeare as a study.

First. It is our best model of idiomatic English, the staunchest bulwark of our grand old Saxon, beating back the floods that threaten to overwhelm it.

Nothing would so withstand the rush into our language of vapid,

foreign dilutions, as a baptism into Shakespeare's terse, crisp, sinewy Saxon.

Second. While the study of Shakespeare keeps thought hard pushed, its difficulties attract and stimulate rather than dishearten.

Though often taxing the powers of the pupil, yet such is the interest excited that each knotty point proves a magnet to draw out his best thinking, and a premium to pay him for it.

Third. Of all writers, Shakespeare affords the largest scope for the analysis of language as an instrument of thought.

If language were a mere vehicle of ideas, then in using it, the chief mental exercise would be in selecting words to express them, but it is hardly less necessary to thinking than to utterance. If we do not think in words, we do not think *with* them.

What mental process can be carried on without them? How vast then the force of language, as an educator of mental power. Words are intellectual developers. They generate ideas, make them fast,—fixtures in the mind, and hold it still to contemplate and thus multiply them. Our conceptions, our logical processes, even our abstractions, give birth to ideas, only when shaped in the mould of words. Since words then, are both the symbols and inspirers of thought, inciting as well as transmitting it, the more vividly they express it, the more powerfully do they stimulate it. Such words so used are thought generators, their function is creative.

Shakespeare being pre-eminent, not only as a master of thought, but as a word master, a system of education that ignores the study of his language as a mental discipline fails in a vital point.

Fourth. The study of Shakespeare not only quickens the pupil's thinking powers, but trains him to the use of apt and telling words.

In action upon matter, two things combine in every proper instrument; substance and form, or a fit material and a fit shape. Dough in the shape of an axe, and steel without shape are but dough and steel, the axe is wanting. So in mind as wrought out in language, the same things combine, substance and form, thought and speech. Thought without expression is life unborn, expression without thought is a birth still-born. Thought ill expressed is a born monster. Fit words not less than fitly *spoken* are apples of gold. What hands, assigned to dress and keep throughout the ages the gardens of literature, have caused to grow in them, such and so many golden apples, as those of Shakespeare. Who that has regaled his sight and taste with fruits and flowers such as his, can turn from them to those tepid dilutions, thinnest platitudes, tawdry fineries, daubed with prismatic streaks and strung with tinsel to tinkle and dazzle—those grandiloquent mouthings, misty ambiguities and mawkish sentimentalities, which, tricked out in a motley patch work ablaze with pyrotechnics, flaunt their gewgaws in our sensational literature.

Such is the marvellous mosaic of his words that each word, attracted to

the thought it reveals, seems to have dropped by gravitation into its own place. Let him who doubts this take a page of Shakespeare's and substitute for any of its words better ones of his own if he can.

The study of such works tends to form a correct taste, habits of critical analysis, a terse, vivid and graceful style, and that keen discrimination which separates the dross or strained fancies, pragmatic conceits and tinsel word painting, from the beaten gold of a sterling literature.

Fifth. Being works of transcendent imagery their appeal is incessant to the imagination, and, as every faculty plied by its appropriate stimulant gains vigor thereby, the imagination of the student, thus under the tuition of the greatest of masters must be hopelessly stolid not to profit by such training.

Besides, the relation of the imagination to the other faculties is such that their scope, grasp, hardy growth, their symmetry, poise, and point are greatly determined by the force and range of its conceptive power, which becomes thus pre-eminently their educator, beckoning them out and up,—their watchword and talisman, their badge, beacon and banner. No power of the mind performs for it so high a service as this. When wisely developed it is the standard bearer for them all. It alone buoys us from our low actuals, toward a higher possible. It comes to us where we are, points us to where we should be, and lifts and lures us along the way. Without it we should have neither ideals, nor standards of excellence in art, science, literature, or moral attainment. It is the patron of all progress, hovering over and moving before us, our pillar of cloud, our pillar of fire, uplifted ever, and spanning our vision with its bow of promise and of hope. Without it life would slug itself away stifled in the miasms of its own stagnation,

Such being the special function of the imagination, its training and general culture become of vast moment in education.

What can minister to the pupils' powers of conception such training and discipline as the study of Shakespeare under a direction instinct with his spirit and roundly in earnest. But the works of Shakespeare are not merely those of the imagination, he was pre-eminently a thinker. Thoughts the deepest, keenest, wittiest, the most far-reaching and myriad-phrased glow on every page.

He is the greatest of dramatists, and poets, the greatest of wits, humorists and literary artists, the most profound in his æsthetic intuitions, the most original and subtile of mental analysts—*too* profound, as well as *too* simple and true, to parade the machinery of philosophy, or be lavish of its technics; so acute as a metaphysician that the delicacy of his dissections, sometimes escapes the scrutiny of his ablest commentators, baffling the skill of even Pope, Arbuthnot, and Dr. Johnson. May I not add to this that Shakespeare was also the wisest of sages. Does he not give us more lessons of practical wisdom and fraught with deeper meaning in the conduct of life, than ever fell

from any lips save his of whom astonished crowds declared "Never man spake like this man." Shunning the formalities of scholastic logic, its elaborate methods and techinics, he yet inwrought its very gist through his works,—not logic as an art with its routine and formulæ, but those principles which an analysis of the art reveals. None of its terms are in his nomenclature, but the laws of thought that underlie them are presupposed throughout.

Sixth. Another advantage of the study of Shakespeare is the culture of the dramatic element. This is a universal power. Why not give it its due? We have special appliances for training the other powers—why not give this, too, its due. If undeveloped; the other powers suffer. Its special function seems to be, to act, not only as a sort of universal mental lubricant, but to minister vividness, piquancy, compass, conceptive force, and general momentum to all the powers. Its development gives self-poise, quickens perception, memory, imaginative, taste, and intuition, gives keener appreciation of beauty, strength and grace, and to volition a firmer grasp and wider sway.

To exercise this power seems a kind of instinctive mental necessity. No intellectual element has more persistently asserted itself through all time; and of all way-marks with which civilization has spaced off its progress, none have been projected into higher relief than the dramatic. Through phases of manifestation endlessly diversified, its exercise has formed in all nations the most attractive of diversions. True, it has thus often been in bad company, and put to evil uses, and thus come to be associated with the lax morals of theatres in their perlieus.

But does the abuse of a thing forbid its use? Is it not rather a plea all the stronger for its *right* use? What good things are not abused, and the best the most? Shall all good things be ruled out, because they *only* can be abused? Shall we deny education to the dramatic power because the theatre is its special sphere?

Far more plausibly might the scouter of all Christian churches put under his ban the dramatic element, because formerly its almost exclusive public exercise was in the service of the church, its houses of worship being thrown open for its representation, and presided over throughout Christendom by bishops and the clergy.

Accustomed to associate the exercise of this power with the theatre alone, we are apt to overlook the vastly wider scope and relations of the dramatic element in mind. To illustrate this, I refer you to the fact that the teachings of Jesus Christ, the very essence of practical Christianity are an appeal to the dramatic element in mind. How am I to determine my duty to my neighbor? I am to *put myself in his place*, to make his case my own, I am to be to *myself* the representative of his rights, interests, and well-being. In a word, I am in the highest sense to impersonate him, at the bar of my own conscience, just as in any other case of personation, I do in my conception assume



the personality of another, and so regarding *myself* as *himself*, I am to judge the case accordingly, and thus determine what is his due from me. "Love thy neighbor as thyself." "As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." These are the dramatics of Christianity.

The universality of the dramatic instinct, and the strong tendency to act it out are seen in earliest childhood. Children almost as soon as they can totter, begin to go out of themselves. The boy turns into a dog and bow-wows—a cock, he flaps his wings and crows—a cow, he fetches a long drawn moo—a horse broke loose, he curvets, prances and kicks fearfully among his nursery blocks—a big bull, he waxes dangerous as he bellows and paws the carpet—a locomotive, he blows his steam whistle and dashes round the nursery with puffs and yells spasmodic, or taming down, sticks a feather in his cap and struts a soldier. The girl chirps and sings, a birdie, a dove, she coos—a lamb, she bleats—or a loving mother, she lullabies her sick baby doll as she rocks it to sleep. What mother upon answering tiny raps at her nursery door, has not seen entering there distinguished guests?—the teacher, the doctor, the squire, the minister, or their wives—next come world-wide travelers, and authors known to fame, gravely sifted in with peddlers, beggars, and gypsies, and with pomp and circumstance, Generals, Governors, Presidents, Kings and Queens, the Sultan, the Pope, the Grand Lama and the Great Mogul.

How much both of the happiness and development of childhood, thus wells up in spontaneous out-flow from the dramatic element. In this the child is but the father of the man. True, far less of it is seen in adults, the hard facts of the real strike down the ideal, while fashion, conventionality, fictitious standards, the general artificiality of society, tend to stifle that with every other spontaneity. In proportion as we identify ourselves with others we are all dramatic. Thus, entering into sympathy with their situations and states, we reproduce them in ourselves. In our tones, attitudes, gestures, and expressions of countenance, we unconsciously look, act, and seem like them.

Though the term *dramatic faculty* means the power by which one personates others, yet when analyzed, we find it identical with that by which we express our own thoughts and emotions. We are all when natural, and thoroughly in earnest, dramatic. One can personate others only so far, as he by his conception, passes into their life, making their sentiments and emotions, as well as their words his own, and, as such, expressing them. Thus, whether expressing in natural action one's own thoughts and feelings, or those excited by his conception of others, the relation of thought and feeling to action, is, in both the same. Consequently, every outacting of one's own mental states, becomes when natural and in earnest, dramatic. But besides this, the development of the dramatic faculty is invaluable, as an intellectual discipline. The process is itself an educator. It trains to

high force the power of conception, inasmuch as the personation of a character, necessitates its vivid conception. It also shapes and kindles distinct ideals, gives acuteness and zest to the literary appreciation, brings attention to a focus till it burns there, thus giving special vigor to that without which, mind has no power worthily to achieve. Finally, it trains the mind to such self-adjustment, that it can hold itself still, while the will compels all the powers to combine in representing its conception of the character assumed.

Besides this general educational force, it tends to break the slavery of a special class of pupils, embracing often the finest organizations. In this class are natures keenly sensitive—those lacking self-esteem—the timid—the morbidly self-conscious—the self-distrustful—those who intensely crave approbation, and wither under disparaging comment. Pupils with these peculiarities underrate their powers. In measuring themselves they judge from false data. Their intense sensitiveness stifles manifestation. Thus they can neither show nor know their own strength. Their light is within ground glass, and they judge of it by the few rays that struggle through. The manifestations of mind made by their schoolmates, they compare with their own, not considering that *they cannot show* what they have, their powers having to force a passage through non-conductors, which stop half of them, and so hard beset the rest, that they come out warped and battered; consequently such natures shrivel under a false sense of inferiority. This morbid sensitiveness, with the aversion to class exercises that it begets, this disheartening sense of inferiority, with the other disturbing forces in its train, not only makes the pupils miserable, but keeps half his powers dormant, and fetters the rest.

Though such cases abound in both sexes, yet far the larger number of them are girls; multitudes of these writhe through their school-days, the impaled victims of a morbid self-consciousness, and diffidence, that make every movement and expression, artificial and distorted, a stifling constraint, half-paralyzing thought, utterance, and action, intensifying self-distrust, and mortification, and thus perpetuating a misery self-inflicted and intolerable. Such cases demand a special process to call out self-assertion, and to make it a habit.

Till this be done the successful development of the mind is impossible. While such a palsy sits upon the powers they cannot act. To set them free is the first thing. If you demand speed, strike off fetters, if you want ready speech—away with gags, clear vision—unbandage the eyes.

I have dwelt the longer upon these cases because they are so common, so afflictive to the subject, such a bar to development, and because, especially in the case of girls, our schools provide no adequate remedy. Each case must be prescribed for according to its own symptoms. The end to be reached in all is the same, to put the pupil into her own custody, to develop self-poise and self-sway. To

state in detail the means to this end is aside from my present purpose. I will only add that I have found the persistent exercise of the dramatic element in such persons, vastly more effectual, and that too, in a far shorter time, than in the use of all other means combined. The teacher must of course begin his process in private, and continue it until the pupil acquires sufficient confidence to bear the presence of others. These morbidly sensitive pupils always think that they lack utterly dramatic power, whereas, they usually possess it in a rare degree. Consequently, when this is developed it gives self-confidence in other respects, substitutes freedom for fetters, tells favorably upon all their studies and elevates their intellectual tone.

In selecting pieces for recitation and assigning parts in dramatic scenes, the teacher can provide in other ways for the needs of his pupils. Such selections being left to the pupils themselves, they choose what they can speak and act most easily, thus, instead of those elements being called out which most need development, those may be stimulated, which are already so prominent as to disturb the balance of mind and character. Thus instead of restoring an equilibrium already jostled, they jostle it all the more. The true educator will ask, not who will act this part *best*, but who most needs its stimulation. With him, dramatic exercises are not an exhibition to show off his scholars, but a discipline to develop them, a process consecrated to their symmetrical unfolding. He will study the peculiarities of each, and prescribe accordingly. Thus to excessive timidity he will assign characters full of self assertion—to chronic gravity, mirth: in a word, he will prescribe for each undesirable habit, its special corrective, and generally for whatever is defective, or redundant, the personation of those opposite traits which antagonize each.

In thus urging the claims of development of the dramatic power, I advocate no novelty, I do but ask that our system of education be made self-consistent. All our schools provide dramatic training in one respect. What is taught in a reading lesson? Is it merely to speak plain, and mind the stops? Many a parrot is taught to do that. Must the pupil stop where the parrot stops? Such reading is the mere saying off of words.

To teach reading is to train the pupil to express meaning, to voice in varying tones the shifting shades of the author's thought and feeling. This expression in tones of the ideas and emotions of the writer is dramatic action, none the less dramatic because only vocal action. Those dramatics are professedly taught in every school-house in New England.

All teachers *assume* to develop the dramatic element in vocal expression. Let us then be self-consistent. Why develop the dramatics of sound and leave out those of sight. Why teach the pupil to reproduce the author's conception to the ear, and not to the eye? In the former, he has a daily drill for years, in the latter not a lesson.

Why not? What we see stirs us more than what we hear. It sinks deeper, stays longer and, and suggests more. While voice reveals thought and feeling in sound alone,—posture, attitude, gesture, manifold action, with expressions of face and feature diversified in countless phases, reveal them in lines, shapes, figures, hues and pictures, in lights and shades vastly more multiform. As thought and feeling reveal in voice their own sounds, so in gesture, posture and attitude they reveal their own shapes.

Why should these last be all ignored in our system, while the former are strictly enjoined? "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." *He* has so blended mind with body, that earnest thought and feeling express themselves, not only by the tongue, but by the entire person. The eye speaks as well as the tongue and better too; clearer, louder, softer, more ravishing, awe inspiring and sublime. What fore-ground, play-ground and battle-ground, has the mind like that of the human face? Let one's soul be but kindled, and how light breaks, and fires flash from the dilated form. Then posture, gesture, presence, the head, the hand, the planted foot, the bearing, the whole person become mind visible, at once its glowing focus, and its flaming radiator.

I advocate then an adequate provision in our higher schools for the due education of the dramatic as well as the other powers of the pupils.

I advocate its development, not merely as a relaxation to relieve the monotony of study, and give zest to the intervals of sterner work, nor as a graceful accomplishment, giving ease, elegance, and dignity to manners—nor yet as an innocent and beautiful amusement, adding to the attractions of home, though in each of these respects it does invaluable service; nor do I advocate it for ostentatious display on days of, so called, public exhibition, but I plead for it as a most salutary, greatly needed, and almost utterly neglected mental discipline and culture. This neglect is the greater marvel because the dramatic art is initiatory to all art—the natural pioneer to each.

Seventh. Again, the study of Shakespeare stimulates general mental activity, luring almost constraining the pupil into habits of vigorous thought. The tendency of the pupil to slug and drone, is to the earnest teacher his "gorgon dire," seeming sometimes a very demoniacal possession, defying exorcism. If the demon be not deaf, dumb, blind, and besotted, as well as dead asleep, Shakespeare taught as he should be. could hardly fail to cast the monster out.

His page is ever astir and aglow—thought quivers and flashes—pulses throb, and life leaps along the lines. Thoroughly plied with such forces, and inspired by a skillful teacher, the pupils mind must be a marvel of matter, if not inspired to mental activity.

Eighth. Further, I advocate the study of Shakespeare in our higher schools because nothing in our literature so tends to beget in youth an earnest love of nature. In the good time coming to education, that

vast developing force, the love of nature, will at last receive its due as an educator of mind.

More than all other books, Shakespeare deals with *universal* nature, animate, and inanimate, material, mental, social, and moral, without and within. Oceans, and rills, worlds, and molecules, and all between. Mind infinite, and infinitesimal; life vegetable, and animal, with its aspects, modes, acting forces and effects, thoughts, affections, passions, motives and relations, shapes, hues, uses, and stages of growth and decay: these and a myriad beside form each a thread in the tissue of Shakespeare's universal net work.

It is the testimony of two and a half centuries that no human productions have so variously expressed the inmost and utmost of nature, physical and mental, as those of Shakespeare. Five words of the inscription upon his monument, in the Church of Stratford-on-Avon proclaim this profound appreciation,—

Shakespeare with whom quick nature died.

While he yet lived the wise estimate in which his works were held by his own generation were thus chronicled. "They serve for the most common commentaries upon all the actions of our lives." Pope says of him, Shakespeare is not so much an imitator as an instrument of nature, and it is not so just to say, that he speaks *for* her as that she speaks through him.

Nature was in the order of time the first divine lesson to man, and the vast instrumentalities of inspiration, providence, and spiritual ministry have been superadded, yet all are lessons assigned by the same infinite teacher, the later not superseding, but amplifying and enforcing that original lesson.

The blessings that are always with us we most undervalue. Such await our birth, ply every grade of our growth, throng in through the senses, throb in every pulse, flash in every ray, ring in all tones, float in every odor, and savor, live in every thought, feeling, volition, and physical action, ever acting without us and upon us at each moment of our lives, and peopling even the vagaries of our dreams. These myriad influences do so seem parts of ourselves, that we see not what they are, life long educational forces, each a lesson and a teacher, sent to us on a divine mission.

These stimulants, acting through our external senses and our internal consciousness, are pulsations from the heart of universal nature, from the constitution and laws of things and of mind. This universal nature is a revelation of God's will to man upon the subject of education. To each individual he has delivered a copy. Let him con it well. This unwritten revelation, is in two testaments. One is born in every man—the faculties of his own being, the other lies all around him through his senses.



Why is this revelation in nature so radiant with glory? Why is it traced all over with lines of beauty and no other lines? Why but to attract mind to its contemplation, and thus illumine, dilate and develop it throughout! Has God made every tittle of nature a magnet to attract mind only to amuse it? drawing it to itself to give it nothing for coming there?

Nature is not a mere store-house of things, events, facts, entities, masses, atoms, and isolations, but an exhaustless fountain of principles, laws, causes and effects, fixed relations, affinities, combined elements, balanced forces, means and ends, processes, necessities and motives, and thus an infinite magazine of susceptibilities and powers, each a stimulus inciting the mind to clothe itself with beauty and strength.

Well doth it become us then, reverently to uncover in the presence-chamber of nature the earliest, divinely commissioned educator of man, the only one that begins to teach him at his birth, and provides that every moment shall bear to him a new lesson on its wings. In recounting the intellectual characteristics of the Bible, one of the most marked rarely receives its due. I mean its recognition every where of the fact that nature is a universal educator.

There is in our literature, but one book besides, that thus teems throughout with nature, and that is Shakespeare. Many other writers move us with her melodies, some with her grand harmonies, but Shakespeare alone sweeps the diapason of all nature's symphonies besides. In others, nature glows in the beauty of her leaf, bud and blossom, but in Shakespeare only, in all the wealth and glory of her golden fruitage too. Other writers represent nature while she sits passive, as her picture is sketched. In Shakespeare she paints her own portrait full-length, using his hand to hold her pencil, and guiding it with her own. Thus in Shakespeare we find the original of nature, in others but copies, often faint-lined. On every page of Shakespeare we find nature herself at home; not her proxy, her effigy, shadow, nor echo; not her attorney, consignee, nor man of all work; not even her minister plenipotentiary, nor premier, but her own very self, in her own dress, with her simple looks, artless ways and all unconscious air. There in free disport, all quick with life, she basks at full length in her own sunshine, ever humming her fancies as they come and go, now in frolic, now in battle, musing now, and now in tears, in ecstasy, in prayer, all in her own sweet way, and saying and doing all, only because she cannot help it, if she would, and would not help it if she could.

All honor to those educators who give high prominence to the *sciences* of nature in our schools; but shall we restrict our pupils to the study of nature's mere *scientific* ics, and ologies stiff with scholastic formulas? While doing all that we are doing in physics, (and much more may we do,) yet, let us never ignore the fact, that outside

of these sciences of nature, lives vast nature herself, all aglow, above, beneath, around and within us,—its great heart beat stirring our pulses too, thrilling us with its vitalities till we grow plastic in their warmth, absorb their forces, and thus dilate into a larger development, and rise into higher life. This Nature illumines every page of Shakespeare, her representative, pupil and child, speaking in her own vernacular, trained by herself and commissioned by her to train others. Let Shakespeare have conferred upon him the freedom of her schools and right royally will he execute his high commission.

The last consideration that I urge, is that Shakespeare's works are in themselves an epitome and a summary of universal literature wrought out in endless forms of philosophic structure, and æsthetic texture, in felicities of thought and style, regrouping and refining the shapeliest features of other writers. What characteristic of universal literature is not sublimated in Shakespeare?

Intuition, invention, acuteness, grasp, philosophic depth, subtle wit, and humor, the loftiest creations with the lowliest simplicities, all varieties of verse in faultless rythm, of prose in tersest form and fittest words, highest utilities of practical wisdom, with profoundest moral inculcations, adorned with all felicities of diction, welling ever from unsounded depths,—in a word, beauties and sublimities in endless novelties of form, lavished with unconscious prodigality, and yet adjusted with a marvellous nicety of taste and skill, spring spontaneous in his pages.

Our text books in English literature contain biographical sketches of hundreds of authors with brief extracts from their works. Such books furnish details not easily accessible elsewhere. They are convenient collections of literary statistics, relieved by quotations characteristic of the writers. But what means do such fragmentary scraps afford for the literary education of pupils, enabling them to discriminate and combine the elements of literature, grasp its scope, master its analysis and form a critical taste that shall be its touchstone, separating its gold from all alloy? Such scrap-books do, in this respect, mock the pupils' real need. Apart from the biographical notices, they constitute a sort of literary confection made up of all sorts of ingredients, and often like other confections, neither easy of digestion, nor convertible into aliment. Such collections afford no adequate means for literary training. When the pupils in our advanced classes are, under a wise supervision, put to the study and critical analysis of Shakespeare, there will then be taught in our schools, not only an English literature, but all that is fundamental in Universal Literature, not its mere outline, but its essential self, with whatever is vital in æsthetic philosophic detail.

And now to sum up in a word, let me say that, regarding Shakespeare, as without a peer not only as a poet, but as a thinker, a philosopher, a moralist, a metaphysician, a logician,—though without the

mechanism of logic,—as the most acute and profound mental analyst, that ever threaded the mazes of human nature, I look upon the critical study and analysis of his works as indispensable to the completeness of a liberal culture. I regard it not mainly as a discipline, unfolding the æsthetic elements, but quickening and giving momentum to the whole mind, a general educational force, a normal stimulant to all the faculties, rousing the inert, developing the latent and giving symmetry and equipoise to the whole.

This is not theoretic abstraction, but historic detail, embodying the results of many years in classes of both sexes, under a supervision inspired by these convictions. In conclusion, I notice a grave objection to the study of Shakespeare, which is, that his dramas abound in such representations of vice as tend to corrupt the mind.

Shakespeare's dramas present multiform phases of human nature. They teem with good and very good, bad and very bad, men and women. The good speak their own vernacular, the bad theirs. Truth and falsehood, fidelity and treachery, love and hatred, revenge and forgiveness, blessing and cursing, innocence and guilt, are all there in high relief. On the one hand, Christian meekness, humility, and repentance, compassion and the rendering of good for evil; on the other, bloated pride and self-will, envyings, jealousies and hypocrisies, malignity and diabolic rage. We have already noticed a marked resemblance between Shakespeare and the Bible in their peculiar modes of presenting thought. We have here another in the impartial presentation of the differences in moral character. In that respect the method of Shakespeare is exactly the method of the Bible, with this exception, that only the good of Shakespeare's best characters appears. In the Bible the falsehoods, impurities, injustice and other sins and shames into which the good sometimes fall, are, with stern impartiality told in detail.

There is another striking similarity between the methods of Shakespeare and those of the Bible. The latter records crimes, sometimes describes them in detail, yet it not only never *gilds* them, but it un-masks their ugliness, and so encases them in a dark setting of circumstances and consequences that their grim features disgust and repel. This Bible method is also the method of Shakespeare. He draws in minute detail Iago, Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Claudius, Shylock, Queen Margaret, Macbeth, and Richard III, monsters all, but who is attracted to their diabolisms by his description? Nay, who does not the rather recoil from them all the more, for the graphic hideousness with which he stamps them.

A word with regard to the alleged indecencies of Shakespeare's dramas. The words decency and indecency, are not for the most part, absolute in their meaning, but comparative, not intrinsic but relative, not invariable, but incessantly shifting with phases of civilization, grades of development and the progress of refinement, with

local usages, time, place, surrounding, and even with the changing fashions of the hour. True there are such things as intrinsic indecencies, such always and every where throughout Christendom, yet, whatever in speech outrages the common feeling of fitness, modesty and purity, is, by the rightminded eschewed, as *then and there* an indecency, not necessarily intrinsic, but relatively such. Thus numbers of words and phrases in our language, once universally used in refined society or in sermons on the gravest occasions, are now regarded as indecent, and are used only by persons utterly gross in all their tastes and tendencies. Words expressing such ideas are a necessity, in the language, but when in the advance of society they become clustered with associations specially repulsive, they thus become indecent, and give place to synonyms that are not so, though representing the same ideas. The very *gist* of all indecency is, as a general rule, the doing of conscious violence to that sense of moral fitness, which usage has made its standard. Some of the best books in our older literature contain expressions, not at all indecorous when they were written, but if used now by the *North American Review*, the *Atlantic*, or *Harper's Monthly*, would sentence them to instant death "without benefit of clergy." In some of the most advanced of our old English classics, are passages and descriptions, which, were I to read to you now as apt illustrations of the topic under discussion, you would justly regard it as an indignity to be resented, and my address as a nuisance to be abated on the spot. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, is a text book in most of our higher schools. Shall that, the grandest poem since Job, be ruled out of them for alleged indecencies? And yet, when under reading in the school room, what teacher does not quietly arrange to have certain passages passed without being read in the class." Who would dislodge from the household shelf, the old family Bible, because it contains details, which in selections for reading to an audience would be quietly passed over.

On the same principle of discretionary selection and omission, Bowdler's Family Shakespeare was long since compiled. Near twenty years ago, Prof. Hows of Columbia College, New York City, published his *Shakespearian Reader* as a school text book, and ten years since his *Historical Shakespeare*. More recently Rev. Henry N. Hudson of Boston has published his *School Shakespeare*, an admirable text book for advanced classes.\*

It is surely no small marvel that it should be charged against the dramas of Shakespeare that they allure youth to disparage virtue and to lead immoral lives. They never deck pollution with the robe of purity; nor call evil good; nor smooth the brow, nor the pathway of evil passions; nor strew with flowers the road to crime.

Milton in his immortal *Paradise Lost*, fills pages with impious

\* And still more recently Mr. W. J. Rolfe, A.M., and the Clarendon Press Editors have printed their carefully and judiciously expurgated editions.

vaunts, glozing lies, and profane scoffings, but they are the swaggerings, hypocrisies, malignities and blasphemies of Devils. Who would be allured to lies, hates, and impieties by such examples? So Shakespeare prints with graphic vividness his human Satans, Beelzebubs, Belials, and Molochs, but he compels each to show his cloven foot, and flaunt his own devilish livery. If Milton's Satan plot to steal the robes of Michael or Gabriel, he is sure to be caught in the act and stripped, naked, and gnashing, under the lash of scorn.

No works not professedly religious, are so rife with moral sentiments as those of Shakespeare. They infect with no moral taint the pure, nor lead the innocent to tolerate the atmosphere of guilt. Gentleness, and human sympathy, love and justice meet, embrace and blend.

The religious literature of Christendom furnishes no statement of the law of love, the golden rule, and the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, more terse, comprehensive and radiant with beauty than scores of passages in the works of Shakespeare. I close with one of them, selecting it, not because it is the most striking, but because it is seldom quoted. It is in the speech of the Duke to Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, I, i, 30.

Thyself and thy belongings  
 Are not thine own so proper, as to waste  
 Thyself upon thy virtues, them on thee.  
 Heaven doth with us, as we with torches do;  
 Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues  
 Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
 As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touch'd  
 But to fine issues, nor nature never lends  
 The smallest scruple of her excellence,  
 But like a thrifty Goddess, she determines  
 Herself the glory of a creditor,  
 Both thanks and use.

THEODORE D. WELD.