

**Shakespeare : 'testimonied in his own bringingsforth'.**

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# SHAKSPEARE:

"Testimonied in his own Bringingsforth."



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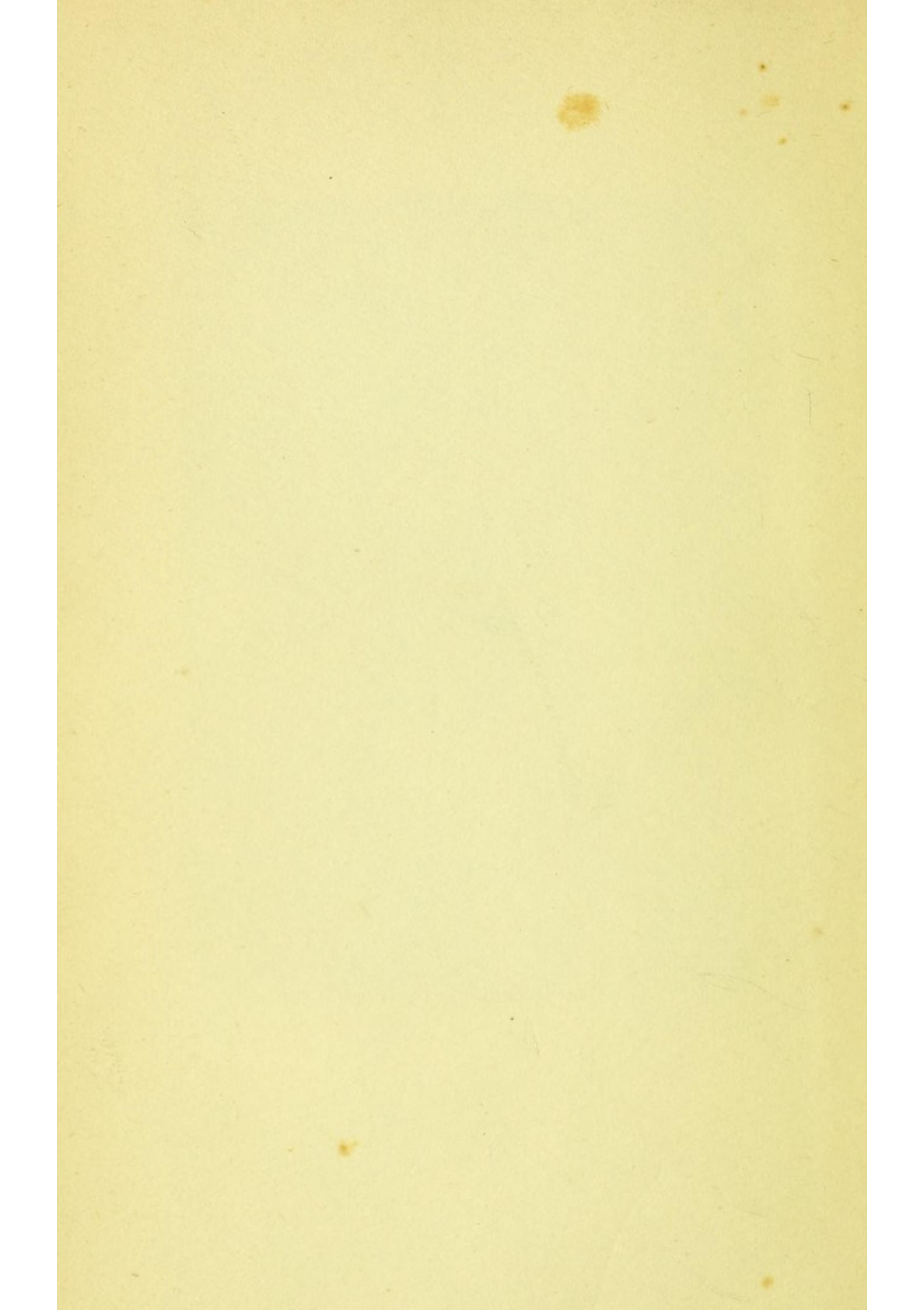




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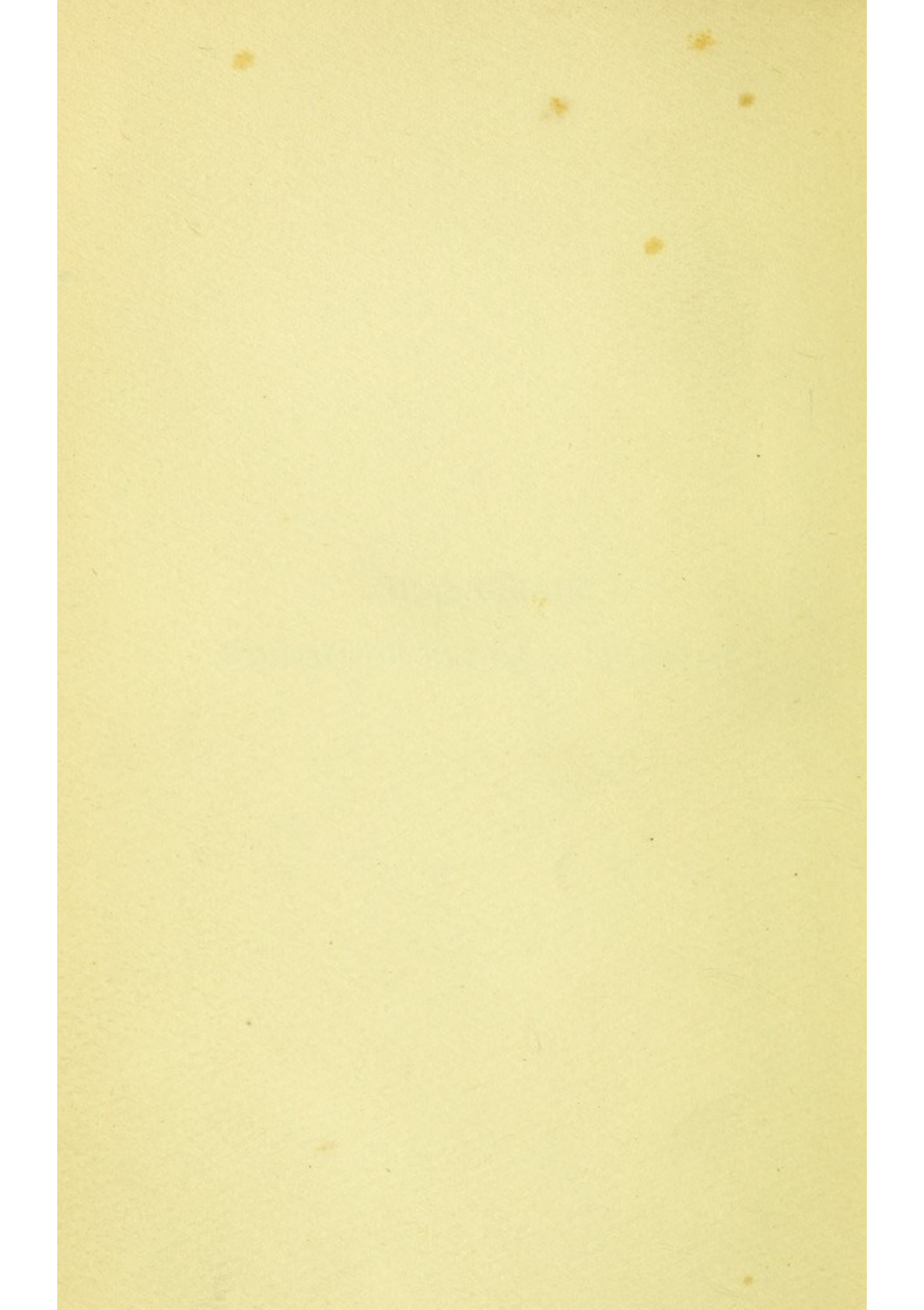




SHAKSPEARE :

*“ Testimonied in his own Bringingsforth.”*







# SHAKSPEARE :

“ Testimonied in his own Bringingsforth ”

“ Let him be but testified in his own bringingsforth,  
the very stream of his life and the business he  
helmed ”

—*Measure for Measure*

BY

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London

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## PREFACE.

A NEW book about Shakspeare nowadays will certainly need, but not easily frame, a valid excuse for itself if it appeal to public suffrage. This short Essay, which has grown out of the limits of a proposed lecture on the self-revelations of the *Sonnets*, makes no such appeal. The occasion of its birth was a recent voyage to Australia and back. To the emerging question, before starting, what provision of readable literature to make in order to relieve the tedium of the voyage, the final resolve was to take one book only, and that a single volume containing the whole of Shakspeare's works. The fruit of the ensuing study is presented in this attempt to set forth his life and thoughts and character as testified by himself. Much of what is said has no doubt been said before in one or another of the innumerable disquisitions which have been published concerning the great poet, and it may well be that some things are said wrongly which a perusal of these disquisitions—were life long enough for the labour—might correct. The result



is nothing more than a simple, direct, sincere survey of the man and his works as they appear to a mind of ordinary insight and judgment, uninstructed and therefore unbiassed, trying plainly to see things as they seem to be, not wilfully to see that they are not what they naturally seem to be.

One of my earliest literary essays was a psychological study of *Hamlet*, published in the *Westminster Review* of 1864, and afterwards republished in the second edition of a volume of lectures and essays on "Body and Mind" (now out of print). Some years after its publication I received the following letter of enquiry from a puzzled reader of it who was a stranger to me:—

———— HOUSE, BIRKENHEAD,  
August 28th, 1879.

MY DEAR SIR,—

Allow me to ask whether you have written any other Essay than the one appended to your work on "Body and Mind," 2nd Edition? I am prompted to this by meeting with the following by Professor Dowden, at page 160 of his "Shakspeare, his Mind and Art":

"The Doctors of the Insane have been studious of state of Hamlet's mind. Drs. Ray, Kellog, Conolly, Maudsley, Bucknill—they are unanimous in wishing to put Hamlet under judicious medical treatment.

My great interest in the matter must plead as my apology for thus troubling you.

I am, dear Sir,  
Yours truly,



As the main motive and endeavour of my Essay was to show that there was not the least ground to suppose that Hamlet was mad or meant by Shakspeare to be thought mad, it would seem that the learned literary Professor has represented me as saying the clean contrary of what I really said. And, if my memory be not at fault, his summary statement is equally untrue of Dr. Bucknill, whether true or not of the other writers mentioned. I take advantage, therefore, of this opportunity to warn anybody who may see or hear of this Essay, without reading it, that, although written by a doctor, it is not written to prove that Shakspeare ought to have been "put under judicious medical treatment," strange as that may seem to a literary Professor.







## SHAKSPEARE :

“TESTIMONIED IN HIS OWN BRINGINGSFORTH.”

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### 1. *His Life and Genius.*

It is hard to echo the sorrowful complaints of those who lament the little that is known of Shakspeare's private life, harder still to sympathise with their fanciful conjectures when, naïvely measuring his thoughts and feelings by those which they imagine they would have had, and him therefore to have had, in his circumstances, they go on to accumulate idle surmises how he must have thought and felt and spoken, he being Shakspeare and they what they are. We cannot, it is true, tell exactly what he ate and drank, at what o'clock he went to bed, what sort of gartered hose he liked best, how many lines of verse he composed at a sitting, in what terms of affection he wrote to his wife at Stratford, if he wrote to her at all, and the like petty particulars which build the bulky masses of present biographies and autobiographies—the real facts striking



to the quick and betraying essential character, if not liked, being scrupulously disguised or unscrupulously ignored—but we know the principal events and chief aim of his career and the spirit in which he pursued it; and such history, rightly read, is the disclosure of character. Moreover, his plays and poems contain ample record of his thoughts and feelings concerning men and things. Why crave to know such trivial details, much like the sorry details of any other life—and better not known—which admiring affection minutely records, or itching curiosity, prying through keyholes, delights to discover and disclose?

Instructive it no doubt would be to possess a full and exact genealogy of the family stock from which he sprang, and thus from the heritage of ancestral qualities, good or bad, and their complexities of composition in marriages, to endeavour to trace and exhibit the general qualities of his character as an ordinary man. For assuredly he, like every other mortal, proceeded by rigorous laws of descent and development from an ancestral line of beings and testified to his stock, was what he was, they being what they were, and could not have been otherwise. That it was not a poor stock, but pregnant with native vigour, is proved by the splendid fruit which it bore when, by a happy conspiracy of circumstances, a slip of it lighted on very favourable condi-



tions of growth, albeit after that supreme effort the exhausted stock drooped and died. But such information, even if we had it in fairly good shape, would at best be but general ; it would not help us in the least to understand the origin of the extraordinary qualities as a man of genius possessed by him yet not possessed by his brothers born and bred in the same circumstances nor by his children in the next generation. To understand how such special and unique endowments came about, it would be necessary to find out many hidden things—to wit, the various physiological impressions affecting silently the informing processes of the particular parental germs, and the subtleties and complexities of their compositions in reproductive union, which are yet quite unknown ; the many fine, yet most subtile-potent impressions made by varying bodily states and mental moods of the parents upon the intense rapid and complex motions of the many million constituent atoms of the combining germs at the reproductive crisis ; and the subsequent influences of the mother's moods of body and mind upon the intra-uterine processes of embryonic development. As long as these things are mysteries, so long will speculations be futile and the expositions of them words void of meaning. The man of genius may not be begotten under a specially auspicious star or conjunction of stars, but he is undoubtedly conceived



at a lucky moment and from a lucky conspiracy of co-operating conditions.

Born on April 23, 1564, William Shakspeare was the eldest son of John Shakspeare of Stratford-on-Avon, a well-to-do tradesman, who married in 1557 Mary Arden, the daughter of a substantial yeoman, from whom she inherited a small estate called Asbies, consisting of a house and sixty acres of arable land. This land she seems to have farmed herself until her marriage to the Stratford tradesman, with whom she may previously have had dealings in the sale of wool and other farm produce.

Possessed of this property by his marriage, John Shakspeare entered on the business of a farmer, selling his own grain and wool, and probably killing some of his fat stock and selling the meat at Stratford. At that time, indeed, to a much later date, such mixed business was no unusual thing in country districts ; and the circumstance may explain why he has been differently spoken of as a glover, a wool-merchant, a butcher. He had a large family of ten children, but as some of them died young not more than five alive at the same time. At first his affairs flourished ; he was alderman, high bailiff, and in 1571 chief alderman of the borough. But his prosperity did not endure ; business went badly with him after a time, and gradually from bad to worse ; in 1577-8, when his son William was thir-



teen years old, he was taxed to pay only half what other aldermen paid, and in November of that year he was exempted from any payment, having no goods to distrain on. In the same year he mortgaged his wife's inheritance to Edmund Lambert, to whom then also he became indebted for five pounds borrowed on security, and in 1592 he was prosecuted as a recusant for not going once a month to the Parish Church, presumably because of debt and fear of process.

The story of his father's failure points to a fault of character in him which the son happily did not inherit directly. Like many other eminent men he doubtless owed much to his mother's part in him, either directly or intermediately through fortunate compositions or neutralisations of qualities in the combining parental germs. It was she probably who endowed him with the rich affective qualities of his nature, his sympathetic feeling and imagination, whereby he became the great poet he was. In whichever line, paternal or maternal, fault or virtue was ingraft, certain it is that he, like every great genius, was the brilliant blossoming of a modest line of obscure ancestors, whose sober thought and feeling, silently stored, now emerging from the dark, came to light and life in him. In them—in whom, so to speak, he lived before he was born—was stored the latent energy which,



reincarnate in him, was actualised in his life. For assuredly the instincts and aptitudes of genius import a fund of unconscious ancestral acquisition silently accumulated, which, working subconsciously in the individual mind, it knows not why nor how, arrives at conscious inflorescence there. Such basis of justification is there at the bottom of theories of successive reincarnations and of the ceremonial worship of ancestors.

Educated at the Free Grammar School of Stratford, he there learnt writing, arithmetic, "a little Latin and less Greek." The qualifications required for admission were to be resident in the town, seven years old, and able to read. Seeing that he was only thirteen years old when his father was in debt, paid no taxes, and mortgaged his wife's inheritance, it is pretty certain that he left school when he was comparatively young, either to assist in his father's business or to be put to some other occupation. The Parish Clerk of Stratford, who was then eighty years old, said (in 1693) that he was apprenticed to a butcher and ran away from his master to London. That was the tradition in his native town; and as it is not contrary to any evidence, and is moreover inherently probable, it is, in the absence of any reason to doubt it, foolish to try to discredit it only because ardent adorers, tuning belief to liking, dislike to believe that Shakspeare was ever



so humbly occupied.<sup>1</sup> Another conjecture is that he was employed in an attorney's office, for it was possibly at Shakspeare that the angry snarl of Thomas Nash in 1589 was aimed when he sneered at those who leave the trade of *Noverint* (the technical beginning of a bond) and busy themselves with the endeavours of art. If that were so, his work in the office might account for the easy use which he freely makes of legal technical terms in his plays.<sup>2</sup> After all, he most likely had more places than one

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<sup>1</sup> If there is no positive evidence either for or against a traditional story, it is not to be forthwith rejected as false. When nothing certain is known of the circumstances of its origin and growth, its mere existence, although worth very little as proof, is after all the only evidence there is—evidence at any rate of what somebody thought probable and others easily believed. An anecdote may be essentially true although not circumstantially accurate; and many absurdities of human thought, custom and action in all parts of the earth demonstrate the vital fixity of tradition from generation to generation.

<sup>2</sup> Not that he possessed so accurate a knowledge of law as the indiscriminating commentator somewhat rashly proclaims when he speaks of his "minute and undeviating accuracy" in his references to legal matters. He was sometimes wrong in his law as he was wrong in his chronology, wrong in his geography, wrong in his history, wrong in his physiology, wrong in his medical psychology, wrong in various details of his comprehensive expositions. Wrong in details, no doubt, but true to the principles and essences of men and of things. He knew how to make wrong details teach more truth than heaps of right details by prosaic writers can ever teach.



between leaving Stratford and leaving school, and may therefore have been both butcher's boy and attorney's office-boy.

All the more probable, seeing that he was not a tame-spirited boy who always behaved quietly and never got into mischief; like that of most boys, his conduct was wild and unruly sometimes. Two undeniable events of his youthful life are certainly significant. He was prosecuted and punished for deer-poaching in Charlecote Park, and is said to have retaliated by a lampoon fixed to the gates of its owner, Sir Thomas Lucy, whom, later in life, he rudely and vindictively caricatured as Justice Shallow; after which, to avoid further pains and penalties, as alleged, he hastily left Stratford. Before that, however, he had plunged into a more serious trouble from which he could not quite run away; he had married Anne Hathaway, a woman eight years older than himself, when he was not yet nineteen years old, apparently forced to so early and imprudent a marriage by the unlucky consequence of an out-blaze of youthful passion. The marriage took place on November 25, 1582, and his first child was baptised six months after, on May 6, 1583. As he had two more children (twins) before he was twenty-one years old, there were no doubt good reasons, besides probably the spur of an instinct to gain a fuller life—"as one that leaves a shallow



plash to plunge him in the deep"—for seeking his fortune elsewhere; which he did in 1585 or 1586.<sup>1</sup>

Remembrance in mature age of the bitter fruits of his own indiscretions in the flush of turbulent youth might well put real feeling into the protests against the reckless behaviour of "boiled brains of nineteen," which the Old Shepherd makes in *Winter's Tale*.

I would there was no age between sixteen and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting.

That "between" is no long space within a length of life, yet many an one safe in haven at the close of life's toil and turmoil, looking back in reflective survey of his course—its haps and mishaps, its checks and chances—might see good reason to bless and praise the kind fortune which then frustrated a folly, cancelled an error, prompted the right turn at

<sup>1</sup> Either observation or experience had certainly impressed him deeply with the sequent miseries of a forced marriage—

"For what is wedlock forcéd but a hell,  
An age of discord and continual strife?"—

*Henry VI.*, Act v., Scene v.

Again, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act v., Scene v., Fenton speaking:—

"You would have married her most shamefully where there was no proportion held in love . . . therein she doth evitate a thousand irreligious cursed hours which forced marriage would have brought upon her."



a critical moment, contrived the happy accident, guided safely through peril recklessly provoked : in the mysterious fate of things

Fortune brings in some boats that are not steer'd.

That his wife and children whom he left behind him at Stratford must have been dependent on her relations for support is pretty certain, seeing that he was not at first in a position to maintain them, as he no doubt did so soon as he began to prosper. The supposition is perhaps confirmed by two curious facts : first, that the only mention made of his wife after her marriage is as having borrowed 40s. from Thomas Whittington, who had been her father's shepherd, payment of which his executors, after his death in 1601, had to enforce from the poet ; secondly, that his daughter Judith (twin sister of his son Hammeth), born in 1585, attested the signature of a deed of conveyance, in 1611, by her mark, whereas his eldest child Susannah wrote a firm and vigorous hand, and was said to be "witty above her sex." For one reason or another, at any rate, the one had been taught to write, the other apparently had not.

The eager haste of enthusiastic admirers to discredit the stories of his youthful indiscretions savours of uninstructed feeling rather than of instructed understanding : they would have a divine poet to



have been a divine boy, and thenceforth divine in all his doings, which is absurd. One may say, as Plutarch reports Themistocles to have once said, "A ragged colt ofttimes proves a good horse, especially if he be well ridden and broken, as he should be." In his humble occupations and wild excursions he gained a real knowledge of nature in all its aspects, of which he afterwards made exact and excellent use. Had he not known the habits of deer as well as the ways of men by direct observation, he could hardly have written the soliloquy of Jacques on the poor stricken stag, or pictured the behaviour of the frightened deer when it stands at gaze, bewildered which way to fly;<sup>1</sup> if he had not himself run with the harriers he could not well have described so vividly the devious course and wily shifts and thousand doubles of the dew-bedabbled hare, limping wearily to die near the seat from which it was started; and poor Wat's last panting agonies when, listening erect on hind-legs, in fearful hope to have escaped, it hears renewed the clamorous cry of its loud pursuers—

And now his grief might be compared well  
To one sore-sick that hears the passing bell;

if he had not many times been out before sunrise he

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<sup>1</sup> As the poor frightened deer that stands at gaze,  
Wildly determining which way to fly.—*Rape of Lucrece.*



could not have written with fresh and eloquent feeling, as he often does, of the gentle lark mounting up high from its moist cabinet to wake the morning with its song, and of the many a glorious morning which he had seen burnish the cedar-tops with gold and gild pale streams with heavenly alchemy; had he never witnessed the pompous stupidity of the parish constable, big with his sense of office, and the vain and testy feebleness of the self-important justice of the peace, he could hardly have presented with such rare force and humour the characters of Dogberry and Justice Shallow; and without the memory-ache of his own lustful youth, he might not have thought of making Prospero twice grossly obtrude a coarse warning against incontinence before marriage, and recount its odious consequences in words whose grating shock goes near to spoil the sweet idyll of the loves of Ferdinand and Miranda. Why again the somewhat gratuitous admonition to the supposed page in *Twelfth Night* not to marry a woman older than himself, and the explicit reason why such marriage will not turn out well, if he was not generalising too largely from his own unfortunate experience? <sup>1</sup> A marriage in his case which,

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<sup>1</sup> In *Midsummer's Night's Dream*, again, one reason why the course of true love never did run smooth is a disproportion of years.

*Lysander*.—Or else misgraffed in respect of years.

*Hermione*.—Oh spite! too old to be engaged to young.



as things turned out, was a fortunate folly, a rashness that might well be praised, seeing that had prudence always ruled his conduct at Stratford he might have lived a quiet undistinguished life there, as many a person of equal natural endowments to his, never having been cast on the exactly suitable conditions of his best development, doubtless has done in his native town. Singularly fortunate, if we think on it, was the fateful conspiracy of circumstances by which he was made what he was: first, the happy co-operation of compositions and impressions in the germinal production of him, and afterwards the several succeeding conditions of his development through life, propitious in the result even when they seemed accidents, misfortunes, errors at the time. By such blessed coincidence of gifts of nature and fate of fortune, not by merit of his own, it is that the great genius is evolved, however described—whether as the man of destiny, the illumined seer, the inspired prophet, the incarnate spirit of the age, the co-worker with nature in its process of human evolution.

It may be said, of course, that his dramatic presentations were only abstract creations of his great imaginative faculty; but their difference from such mere inventions was that they were vital products, not artificial constructions, deriving their life and substance from actual experience of men and things,



the organic flowering of a most rich and rare imagination full nourished by realities and ruled by a large and well-instructed understanding. Having observed much, noted what he saw, and drawn large reflective profit from every observation—found “sermons in stones and books in the running brooks”—and apparently so well stored that which he had once seen and thought, either in the table of his memory or in written tablets, as never to lose good use of it—he was able to embody the quintessence of rural nature, animate and inanimate, and the traditions and beliefs of the countryside in forms of exquisite art. Therein he pursued instinctively the method which is just the method, conscious or unconscious, of organic progress in all mental growth, namely, the fit incorporation and transformation of nature through living union with it. As the scientific enquirer does advisedly and methodically, so he observed naturally, meditated, made inductions or inferences, which he did not then leave as mere untried theories, “thoughts unacted,” but unfolded and tested by deductive application to particulars; knowing well, as he says, that

Thoughts are but dreams till their effects be tried.

Assimilating all nature directly and freshly, not stalely and conventionally at second hand, he carried forward its organic development through nature;



which is just what every great leader of thought or action does in his sphere of work, but visionary theorists often barrenly fail to do.

If one thing is certain it is that Shakspeare was sanely human and sagely practical in every quality of him, virile in character as in verse, nowise a tense-strung neurotic, nor overstrained idealist, nor mere barren melody-monger, and that his work in life and art was the sincere, full, free expression of his whole self, material and spiritual. A joy and relief, no doubt, it was thus to fulfil himself by the complete realisation of his whole being in the discharge of every function of which its richly endowed nature was capable, his natural instinct urging him to do well in business what he had to do—he could not have borne to do it ill—and to reap the ensuing profits ; and the silent melody in his nature translating itself outwardly into the elegance and golden cadence of poesy, which was its own pleasing reward.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the professional poet of the closet, therefore, who, without having been structurally informed mentally by feeling and working in union and collision with men and things in the stress and strife of life, sets himself with deliberate purpose and labouring endeavour to write dramas, he bodied

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<sup>1</sup> “Elegance, facility, and golden cadence” of poesy.—*Love's Labour's Lost*.



forth living experience of them in his scenes and characters ; his art was the full, fresh, incorporate expression of a life of work and thought, in which might have been said of him, as he makes Cæsar say of Casca—

He reads much ;  
He is a great observer, and he looks  
Quite through the deeds of men.

That which he saw, felt and meditated on was wrought into the living structure of his mind and discharged as its natural function. A wonderful achievement of a more wonderful being it would be, were any one to obtain a real knowledge of human nature and think or write profitably about it by living apart from it, not acting on it nor acted on by it. Not observing only, but ever deeply reflecting on the many and diverse relations, subtile as well as obvious, wide-reaching as well as near, of that which he observed, he reflected facts and their relations in just ideal presentations through his rare and rich nature.<sup>1</sup> His art itself was Nature, for nature made

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<sup>1</sup> The would-be poet, before poeticising, might perhaps do worse than betake himself to a serious study of Shakspeare's works, in order to note the number and variety of the facts, small and great, observed and noted by him—it would almost seem that there was nothing which he did not observe—and made good use of, descriptive, illustrative, and in prodigal similes ; he could not then fail to learn : (1) How much he himself had not observed which he might easily have observed ;



that art ; so much so that it sounds strange, almost derogatory, to call him artist : it was nature working through him, a living part and organ of it, not the forced labour and poor produce of the conventional poetic market. Therefore it is that he transports his reader out of himself to feel and think with his characters, allowing no time nor halt to examine and criticise even when they perchance talk blatant bombast or make for them quite impossible speeches ; wafts him in fancy from scene to scene with a magic power and celerity ; so subdues imagination to present surrender as to make him almost a simple child in submissive faith. Inevitably so, for attention is not called interruptedly to the many processes, the separate details, the million incidents, the long drawn-out periods and series of things as they pass with slow pace through the length of times, but continuously to the distilled and abstract essence of them condensed into compact scenes and acts by his insight and imagination ; and that sometimes with indifference to artistic form and sublime disregard of the classic

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(2) how little he had reflected on the universal relations of every single fact which he did observe—whole nature comprehended in each small circle of it ; (3) how poorly qualified without such large observation of facts and full reflections on them he must needs be to write poetry possessing Shakspearian substance and vitality.



unities of time, place and action. His method of mental production was truly organic—in fact, just Nature's own method of progressive evolution through time in its work of building up an ascending series of organic tissues, structures, and beings by processes of minute concentrations of time, space and motion, through increasing complexities and specialities of structure and function up to the finest mental organisation, in which such concentration reaches its utmost height.

Being the close, clear-sighted and sympathetic observer of nature he was—in such intimate communion with it that he and it were one, he in it and it in him—the nature-spirit so imbues his thought and feeling that his melodious language is no garment skilfully put on but its natural living vesture, the fresh and spontaneous eloquence, sometimes even exuberance, of their organic union; for which reason it is capable of awaking by subconscious associations in kindred minds intimations and intuitions of the deepest and most subtle harmonies and relations of things. In exemplification of the immense difference in this respect between him and other poets, one may compare or contrast Shakspeare with Wordsworth in their respective references to the daffodils. By the former we are told of

The daffodils

That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty—



where in simplest words paling winter and fresh-budding spring, the forefelt lays and flights of coming bird life, the hues and scents of flowers, are blent and suggested in one sweet harmony of brief expression; nature's pure fresh spontaneous utterance of itself through him, marred by no subjective jar of self-conscious individuality. In the latter, we fail not to feel the egotistic note which intrudes into the contemplation of the poet, whose delighted heart, with pleasure filled, "dances with the daffodils"; his mind not merged and blent in the subject, but construing it consciously in terms of his dominant mood, just as if things in nature were created for him, as he lay "couched upon the grass" or sat at ease in his pensive moods of reverie, to weave webs of similes, to moralise on, to joy or sorrow in, to find spiritual meanings in, to devise prettinesses of imagination and language: not he created to express nature simply and singly as its living organ, without bias or distortion by any self-conscious intrusion of self.<sup>1</sup> In Wordsworth's poems, therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> Oft do I sit by thee at ease,  
And weave a web of similes.—

Ode to the Daisy.

Again, in *Poems of the Imagination*, speaking of the daffodils.

For oft when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the joy of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.



great poet of nature as he was, the admiring reader reflects sympathetically the feeling he feels, its individual specialisation, rather than the deeper unity of self and nature to which Shakspeare gives full, direct, melodious utterance; enjoys nature partially and indirectly, as translated through the poet's well-woven thoughts and self-watched, self-fondled feelings of it.

That he was likewise a close and sympathetic observer of human nature needs no saying—in such intimate sympathy with all its moods and tenses in its procession through time, that the generic quality of humanity, the spirit of its being, is displayed by him in the characters and events of imaginative drama more essentially and truly than by the persons and doings of actual life. When the clown moralises more sagely and makes more witty speeches than any particular clown ever did, it is not the individual clown—he would have been aghast at his own wit—but the universal clown-spirit which views and speaks through him the comedy of life. When Lady Constance, refusing to obey the King's summons, seats herself on the ground and bids kings attend on her unexampled grief, it is a summons to the pride of humanity to bow before the spectacle of its transcendent humiliation. When the over-meditating Hamlet, thinking ever too precisely on the event, finds excuse after excuse



for not doing that which, resolute to do when he broods on his wrongs, he has not the will to do when he might do it easily, and does at last as the unconscious instrument of destiny, it is an universal instance of the influence of over-meditation to paralyse action, and of the fate-wrought issue of that which was to be.

Not that over-meditation was the sole or even main factor in Hamlet's irresolution to act; he may well have had that constitutional indisposition to decide and do which is characteristic of certain natures, and the much meditation have been the result and after-excuse, rather than the reason, of the indecision and inability. It is wonderful to see how strongly possessed over-meditative natures of that kind are by a constitutional and almost invincible reluctance to determine and act, whether in small or in great matters, and more perhaps in small than in great things—for all the world as if they were held back secretly by some invisible power; in the end postponing, positively shirking action until forced to it by necessity, or impelled by an explosive mood emanating from the subconsciously gathering forces of fermenting thoughts and feelings. It requires usually an extraordinary stimulus, the excitement of strong feeling, or even an artificial stimulant, to elicit the latent energies of their nervous systems, in which case they show themselves capable of vigorous



and effective action. If Shakspeare perchance had that sort of temperament—Hamlet is proof, anyhow, how well he understood it—it might account for the modest tenour of his life and his carelessness or aversion to push himself socially in London.<sup>1</sup>

Everywhere in his poems we perceive the same lesson of organic unity with nature. Because he realised intimately that he was a living part of nature, could have no individuality separate from it, and dimly felt the vast unintelligible mysteries of things, he brings nature and human nature into mysterious, transcendent, almost awful sympathies: raging tempest, thunder-crashes, lightning-flashes to attend Lear's mad raving; monstrous prodigies of nature to forebode great Cæsar's assassination; strange and ominous phenomena to mark the foul night of Duncan's treacherous murder. Intellectual disbelief of a superstition is not inconsistent with an emotional half-belief of it, which half-belief shall in moments of great mental perturbation become a positive conviction; as perhaps it was with Gloucester in *King Lear* when he says:—

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects: love

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<sup>1</sup> A morbid exaggeration of this incompetence of will characterises a distressing form of mental affliction which grows even sometimes to actual malady.



cools, friendships fall off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discords; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father.

Instead of unwise haste to blink or minimise the disreputable events of his career, it might be wiser to look upon them as having been the necessary outcome of his character; just as essential a part of his life as his patient industry and imaginative fertility, and nowise therefore deplorable. Anyhow they were a part of it, even if nature had done amiss in his composition and they ought properly not to have been. More likely there was no such cosmic blunder, and it was only from the deep basic materiality of his nature that the sane and rich splendour of its robust spirituality was or could have been sublimed. Is not this inference perchance a simple law of organic growth which, when he clearly apprehends it, will dissolve the amazement of the psychologist who, feeling his foundations sink under him, staggers blindly at the seeming inconsistency of vice and virtue in the same person? Had nothing been known of the first half of the life of Saul, the fierce Jewish persecutor, a suggestion that Paul, the enthusiastic apostle of Christianity to the Gentiles, had ever been Saul would have been scouted as blasphemous; and if Augustine in his *Confessions* had not with complacent remorse re-savoured the lickerish taste of his youthful sensuali-



ties, it would have been thought a monstrous slander to hint at the licentious life of the saintly Bishop of Hippo. So also with a more adequate mental equipment for its task might literary criticism cease to marvel at Burns as a monstrous incongruity, because of the mixture of gross sensuality and fine spirituality he was. The truth is that there is nothing strange in such combination of seeming contraries ; the strange thing is to think them strange ; and the ideal designer of a perfect human being who should go about to eliminate the material part from his composition would make but a poor devirilised and devitalised product in the end. It is not the way of nature, it is the custom of cloistered critics only, to make organic disunities, for nature's frequent fashion is

To mingle beauty with infirmities,  
And pure perfection with impure defeature.<sup>1</sup>

Humanity has lived untold thousands of years on earth, but it has not yet had time to become perfect or even to fashion a perfect human being ; still only in the slow making it is a long way from that far-off end. Not observation only of men and things, but the ideal use also of his own very mixed experience it was which instructed and qualified

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<sup>1</sup> Again :—

But no perfection is so absolute  
That some impurity does not pollute.



Shakspeare to be the wonderful delineator of humanity he was. Even he, all-heeding as he seemed to be, would have been much wanting as an observer of nature had he left out that part of it which he could observe best and with least risk of error—namely, himself.

Did he, when he left Stratford, drift straight to London? That has been the usual assumption; nevertheless some ingenious considerations set forth by Judge Madden in his *Diary of William Silence* suggest that he may have crossed the borders of the county into Gloucestershire, where some of his relations were then or subsequently settled, and found humble employment there. The author adduces many striking arguments to prove that he gained there the special and accurate knowledge which he shows of falconry, and of the way to tame and train a falcon by starving it of food and sleep, of the virtues and faults of particular hounds, and of their behaviour and that of the hunted stag when at bay. Certainly he never could have known horses, hounds, hawks and hunting so well as he did had he not had to do with them practically by actual attention to, or care of, and work among them.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Besides his well-known exposition in *Venus and Adonis* of the good qualities which a perfect horse ought to possess, he shows an extraordinary acquaintance with the diseases of



On reaching London, whether directly from Stratford or indirectly after humble work of some sort elsewhere, he made his way to the playhouse in Blackfriars; there his first employment, according to report, was to take charge of the horses of those who rode to it on horseback. So good was the care he took of them that he soon had a large business and found it necessary to employ boys to assist him, who, known as Shakspeare's boys, were much in request. Be the story true or not, certain it is that his occupation about or in the playhouse was at first of a mean sort. How he was attracted to it is not known, but it is probable that he had made acquaintances in the companies of players or their hangers-on who, under the patronage of different noblemen, visited Stratford from time to time and performed plays in the Town Hall at the cost of the Corporation. He may, too, have been drawn there by his love of the theatre and the premonitory poet's throes which he could scarce fail to have felt, even if he had not already given youthful utterances to them in the doggerel rhymes which, as an unauthenticated story tells, he declaimed when flourishing the knife to kill a calf, and in the lampoon fixed on Sir Thomas

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the horse, particularising in *The Taming of the Shrew* some dozen different ailments with which Petruchio's horse was said to be afflicted.



Lucy's park gate. For it is not to be believed that, "born under a rhyming planet" and having eagerly attended the performances of the players at Stratford as a boy, he had not been stirred by any rhyming impulses before he was twenty-one years old. Think, in this relation, on the case of Burns, whose clever verses, satirical and amorous, gained for him local celebrity as a village poet of notable merit some time before he grew to be the public idol which, unfortunately for him, he became for a time. So far from incontinently rejecting the stories of Shakspeare's early poetical exercises as unworthy calumny, a wiser reflection, pondering his inborn aptitudes and the mean conditions of his boyhood, might perceive in them evidence of his poetical drift and their truth.

Between the date of his leaving Stratford, in 1585 or 1586, and the publication of *Venus and Adonis* in 1593 ("the first heir of his invention"), dedicated to the Earl of Southampton, he rose steadily to a position of growing influence and authority in the theatre as actor and dramatist. Besides his work as player of small parts on the stage, he was occupied in revising, recasting and adapting old plays, in examining new plays submitted for representation, and in writing his own plays. That he made the largest use for his purposes of the old plays in store at the playhouse, adapting plots, characters and even



whole passages freely wherever he found suitable spoil, is certain. Therein he was literally many-minded, since he deliberately absorbed the works of many minds. But he so assimilated what he took from the available material as by the magic of his genius, bettering their best, often to convert things crude and indigest into something new and rare. Like Virgil, he might have sometimes said *ex stercore Ennii aurum colligo*. If that be plagiarism there was no greater plagiarist in the world than Shakspeare, unless it be Milton. To take silent possession, conscious and unconscious, of the best fruits of past thought and feeling, and to fashion them into finer forms of more concentrated art, that is the natural course of evolution of human genius and the destined fulfilment of organic growth through it.

No wonder, then, that he inflamed the envy and malice of those who had been accustomed to supply the theatres with plays. He had superseded them; their occupation was gone; and the rare merit of his work they could not choose but see, howsoever loth to own it. Before the publication of *Venus and Adonis*, in 1593, the angry jealousy of Greene, the dramatist, shortly before his death in abject poverty after a life of profligacy, broke out in his *Groat's Worth of Wit* (1592) in a warning to his boon companions, Marlowe, Lodge, and Peele, to relinquish the labour of writing for the stage—



Is it not strange that I to whom they have been beholding shall (were ye in that case I am now) be both of them at once forsaken? Yes, trust them not, for there is an upstart crow beautified with our feathers that with a tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide\* supposes that he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and being an absolute Johannes Factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shakescene in a country.

“Johannes Factotum,” since he was actor, author, manager all in one; “an upstart crow beautified with our feathers,” since he freely used and adapted the works of others, taking for himself all that he could profitably glean from them; “a tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide,” since he, writing plays himself, rejected plays of which the theatre had no need, thus saving it payments of which Greene and his companions were in sore need; “the only Shakescene in a country,” since he combined unequalled dramatic genius with a practical knowledge of stagecraft and all the qualities of a good manager.

Not that the description of him as a tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide was in the least warranted by his character and behaviour. It was the rancorous explosion of festering envy. Indeed, Chettle, the publisher of the pamphlet, in a work published a few months afterwards, made frank amends to Shakspeare, who had been justly offended by what had been unjustly said of him. Expressing

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\* A tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide.—*Henry VI.*



his regret for his fault, he says : " Because myself have seen his demeanour, no less civil than he excellent in the quality he professes. Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, which approves his art."

Evidently, then, Shakspeare was not only esteemed highly for his genius and civil behaviour by men of rank, but well thought of for his gentle demeanour and his upright dealings in business. Certainly he was a good husband of his affairs and looked warily after his own ; no tradesman in Blackfriars probably surpassed him in the watchful care which he bestowed on them, in the rigorous exaction of punctual payment of debts due to him, in the diligent industry with which he steadily added to his growing gains. A conclusive proof once for all that the highest genius, the flower of human evolution at its best, may go along with—might one not truly say must go along with?—the capacity of patient attention to the dull routine of common labours and perfect sanity of mind ; a lesson to inferior genius disdaining irksome self-discipline that it has no right, just because of its single strain of merit, to wail and rail in puling whine against fate and to call on gods and men to help it ; a warning perhaps to genius of every sort, if it would lay its basis sure, that the fullest and most wholesome mental development



can be achieved only by actual work and discipline among men and things in manifold relations and reactions of adaptation to a whole environment, nowise by the forced cultivation of a special strain in the sheltered seclusion of the closet. Excellent as originality and individuality are in their place and proportion to initiate and sustain new thought, provided they be duly nourished and ruled by realities, they are futile and ridiculous when they degenerate into nervous over-strains counted spiritual, or into mere eccentricities out of tune and proportion with realities. Were they meritorious by themselves the lunatic who carries eccentric originality and overweening individuality to the highest pitch might claim the palm of merit, as he, superbly self-satisfied with himself, often quite confidently does.

Steadily gaining increase of influence and property in the theatre by his prudent conduct and diligent industry after he had got his footing there, he also grew steadily in poetical power and reputation. Although in dedicating *Venus and Adonis* (published in 1593), to the Earl of Southampton, from whom he received large pecuniary favours and to whom he was otherwise indebted, he calls it the first heir of his invention, he had contributed plays to the theatre, five of which had then been printed. This poem he might think right so to describe since it was original, whereas his previously printed plays



were no doubt in great part adaptations and improvements of material which he found ready to hand, or perhaps written in collaboration, and his sonnets were then only circulated privately. However that be, *Venus and Adonis*, followed as it was in the year following by the *Rape of Lucrece*, proved at once to all the world that, far from being only an adapter and imitator of other men's works, he was an original poet of rare genius. Even Greene, penitent on his deathbed, might—one would fain think it—have rued and retracted his angry censure.

From the beginning of his connection with the theatre he not only attended sedulously to its business but was diligently occupied with the cultivation and improvement of his mind by the serious study of great writers. As Prospero says of himself—if not he of himself in the person of Prospero—he “was living in closeness and occupied with the bettering of his mind.” He read and no doubt re-read Montaigne, Rabelais, Plutarch, Seneca, Horace, and Ovid, and most likely made notes of the thoughts which they expressed and suggested. It has been a question whether he read Latin authors in the original or only in translation, but it is a question hardly worth asking; for it is certain that a person of his capacity and industry might easily so improve his knowledge of the little Latin learnt at school as to be able to read it fairly well. If *Titus Andronicus* with its gross blood-and-horror



scenes be one of his immature products (supposing, that is, that he wrote much of it), it might perhaps yield a significant hint that he was then applying himself to better his reading of Latin ; for the quotation of a whole verse from Horace, if it does not show a pride of knowledge, is hardly what he would have introduced into the best work of his riper season.<sup>1</sup> That he made systematic notes of what he read and thought for profitable use afterwards I make no question. The advice which he deliberately gives to his friend in Sonnet 77 to imprint his thoughts on "vacant leaves" at the time, so that, thus committing to writing what his memory could not contain, he might find them nursed

To make a new acquaintance of thy mind,

points to that which was probably his own method of work.<sup>2</sup> It belies common sense to suppose that

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<sup>1</sup> In other plays, however, scraps of Latin are rather gratuitously if not incongruously introduced ; whatever their purpose, they have no other effect than to show that the author was reading Latin and had a knowledge of it which would have been surprising in the person who made the quotation. In the *Taming of the Shrew*, for instance, Tranio, a so-called "serving-man," speaks of "Aristotle's checks" and quotes a line at length from Ovid.

<sup>2</sup> Look, what thy memory cannot contain  
Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find  
These children nursed, delivered from thy brain  
To make a new acquaintance of thy mind ;  
These offices, so oft as thou shalt look,  
Shall profit thee and much enrich thy book.



he poured out deep thoughts in "native wood-notes wild" spontaneously, without effort and without need of revision; no great work that has survived oblivion was probably ever done in that easy fashion; his sonnets bear unquestionable evidence of labouring pains taken in invention, construction and artistic finish, and were probably revised, corrected, amended and re-written several times.

Mindful how surely conduct bespeaks character, and how precise and careful his character showed itself in affairs of business, it is no unreasonable surmise that he bestowed an equally diligent care on his best poetic work, howbeit little enough on some passages of bombastic rhetoric which he poured out hastily for present use, and would have done well, as Ben Jonson thought, to have blotted out. He probably accumulated and laid by a rich store of observations, reflections and similes as systematically as he accumulated material riches, and he certainly was no less keenly vigilant to gather scenes, plots and ideas for his dramatic use than to gather and lay by the profits of his skill and industry in business. The ideas of other writers, their felicities of style, even whole passages from their writings, were appropriated without scruple when it suited him, and gloriously translated by his matchless powers of varied and melodious expression. Nor did he allow the reflections and similes,



the wise saws and modern instances which he had stored, to go to waste, but took care to place them, fitting or unfitting, in the mouth of one or another of his characters, perhaps introducing scene or person into a play, without regard to dramatic unity and with small regard to artistic proportion, in order to make use of them. Of all persons in the world the speakers of them would sometimes have been the most surprised at their own wit and eloquence if they had heard themselves utter them.

As everything suitable was thus absorbed by his widely receptive mind, transformed by its plastic genius, and skilfully used by his practical knowledge of stagecraft, his plays incorporate the condensed wisdom of the greatest moralists and the best dramatic skill of his literary predecessors essentially assimilated and freely used. "Myriad-minded," as Coleridge styled him, he was, because his capacious mind was able to absorb and express the essences of myriad minds. Impersonal, too, he seems in his dramas, just because no formal training, no conventional taste nor distaste, no exclusive sympathies, no subjective hues of personal feeling, interfered with the full and impartial exercise of his calm and close observation, his large assimilative capacity, his detached reflection, and the wondrous excellence of his objective presentation of men and things, his own varying moods included. Despite the French



proverb, it might be said of him that at the same moment he joined in the procession and watched it from a window.

Think on the good luck it was for him not to have received a complete classical education. Had he been painfully trained after traditional rules the freshness and originality of his genius might well have been hurt, or quite ruled out of existence, his thoughts forced into beaten tracks, his utterance tied to conventions of expression ; such system of education, instead of educating his native powers, being suited rather to check, if not suppress, their throes of growth and mould him to the common type of the average citizen.

If springing things be any jot diminished  
They wither in their prime, prove nothing worth.

Think again on his possible fate if he had been born in the present age of rank literary profusion, and run the risk of mental devastation by its deluge of books, magazines and newspapers. There may be more than one reason why genius is often bred of parents in humble life ; not the freshness and vigour of an unexhausted stock only, but the freedom granted to its full expansion by the absence of rules which, being constraints, are sometimes restraints of growth. How many hapless buds of genius may not exhibitions and scholarships have rudely blighted, or forced pitifully from their fruitful



bent to blossom barrenly into College Dons? Is it, when all is said, the worthiest aim and happiest achievement of human art to transform a Board School boy into a Senior Wrangler, who may thenceforth spend his life in the emendation of a Greek text, pleasing and useful as such-like work may be to him if it be his assiduous joy? Certainly it was a blessed hap to Shakspeare, would have been a pitiful mishap had it chanced otherwise, that his intellectual nourishment was limited to the study of a few great writers whom he read diligently and inwardly digested; his native genius could have had no mental foodstuff better suited to nourish and invigorate its splendid growth or been afforded a freer scope of development; thereby in the event happily preserving unlamed its gift to look through the show into the very heart of things, to disregard the fetters of conventional rules and unities, to grow in living touch with nature, to feel freshly, see directly, and utter sincerely that which he saw and thought. Inevitably therefore was he somewhat out of tune with conventional thought and art; his pre-eminence above his fellows not recognised by his contemporaries, perceived perhaps by a few discerning persons only, not one of whom probably ever dreamed that he was destined to be counted through the ages as the foremost poet of all time. Had there been in England such a self-recruiting Academy as the French Academy it is not



in the least likely that he would have been elected one of the forty; like Balzac, Diderot, and some other great French writers, he would too surely have violated the susceptibilities of mediocrity by his originality, offended its tender taste by his direct sincerity, exasperated its vanity by his superiority.

After all is said of his extraordinary genius, it has taken the world two or three hundred years to discover and appreciate it properly. Now, too, the admiration has become such a caked and sacred custom that there is often small intelligence in it, loud-mouthed homage and tongue-rooted adulation only. It is the old story: admiration, adulation, adoration—in other words, wonder, worship, prayer—such are the rising steps of man's retrospective man-worship in quest of the ideal, and his consequent craving to idealise the real. In the paradise of the ideal it is natural to plant gods. Moreover, his language, like that of the Bible, has been so intimately wrought into the tissue of the English mind, and is now so familiar a possession, that rhetorical passages which would be deemed obscure, confused, even bombastic in a writer of the present day pass easily—nay, are received with a sort of awful reverence without thought of their incongruity or crudity. True and discriminating admiration is smothered in the incensing adulation which creates its idol and will then have its idol without a flaw, making the



man a god. What would critics to-day say of a living poet who, speaking of love, were to liken love's fine feelings to "tender horns of cockled snails"?<sup>1</sup> Or make it the special praise of a maiden's slender fingers that they were white as milk? Or compare the instant falling in love of two lovers at first sight to the behaviour of two rams which, looking up suddenly when pasturing quietly, pause for an instant, then rush headlong full butt, skull against skull, with loud-sounding crash? Or represent a common prostitute like Doll Tearsheet as declaiming magniloquently about Hector and Agamemnon? Furthermore, this often happens nowadays, that a trite and obvious reflection or an old proverb rhythmically expressed in his melodious language is accounted his, admired as if it had never been spoken before, and enshrined for evermore.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Love's feeling is more soft and sensible

Than are the tender horns of cockled snails.—

*Love's Labour Lost.*

<sup>2</sup> If he was Homer-like in his fresh and direct converse with realities and pure melody of natural utterance, his absolute return to nature, it is all the more wonder nowadays that our modern poets, who make that the great praise of him and of Homer, and praise them as the greatest poets of all time, should for the most part set themselves painfully to work to get as far as possible from living touch of real life and direct simplicity of diction; the more pleased with themselves, apparently, the more fancifully ingenious, the more thinly spiritual, and the more startling and obscure they can strain themselves to be.



In 1604 or 1605, after twenty years of industrious work as play-writer and player, he left London to reside at Stratford, making periodical visits thenceforth to town to see his friends and look after his interests. All the while he had steadily added to his possessions, purchasing land, houses and the leases of tithes in Stratford, besides increasing his shares in the theatre and buying at least one tenement in Blackfriars. From the first he had a definite aim which he pursued definitely: was persistently bent on retrieving the family fortunes and on retiring to live in dignity and reputation at Stratford. When his father, who in 1592 had been in debt and distress, applied to the College of Arms in 1596 for a grant of armorial bearings, stating that he was worth £500 in lands and tenements, the application was doubtless made at the instance of his son, who conveyed to him the necessary qualification, and in the year following himself purchased the best house in Stratford. A grant of armorial bearings Shakspeare subsequently solicited and obtained from the Court of Arms, and retained, although some of its grants to other players were afterwards cancelled as scandals. Such was the mortal ambition of the great immortal: to possess land and houses, to enjoy the blazonry of a coat-of-arms, to entail a real estate on the eldest son of the family through successive descents. The result we know



was failure. He most heeded apparently that which he did not gain, but gained that of which, being assured, he took little heed. No one, not even a Shakspeare nor Goethe, emancipates himself from the social atmosphere of his time and place; be the human ever so great it is still not superhuman; earth-planted feet tread the ground, however sky-aspiring the thought.

## 2. *Sonnets.*

WHOEVER was the mysterious "W. H.," "the onlie begetter" of the Sonnets, one thing is plain, that they were addressed to a person of high social rank and of such cultivated intelligence as to be worth the homage and to appreciate their worth. No doubt one of the young gallants of fashion went to frequent the theatre for his entertainment who had contracted a close intimacy with the poet; one, too, who, joining grace and wit to birth and beauty, had quite a woman's delicate features, was gentle-hearted as a woman but not inconstant, "as is false women's fashion," withal wantonly addicted to the dissipations of lustful youth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A woman's face, which Nature's own hand painted,

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A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted  
With shifting change, as is false women's fashion.



The feelings of affection are set forth with profuse ingenuity and garnished with all the sparkling conceits of wit and fancy which the special theme of each sonnet lent itself to: exuberant imagination spent in the invention of exquisite variations on the central thought, these for the most part wonderfully devised and executed, now and then overstrained to an irritating excess, two or three of distinctly unworthy artifice.

That Shakspeare was actually consumed by the passion which he metes out elaborately in fine streams of melodious wail is nowise probable; had his feelings been more deep they would have been more simple and more simply uttered; of set purpose he made each sonnet a finished piece of clever art, using his complaints deliberately as material for his poetic compilation, and pleasing and easing himself by such outward embodiment of them. The sonnets are not, therefore, the single outpourings of much moved feeling, the smooth flow of a deep stream, they are rather exquisitely laboured exercises of the finest imaginative art to which some real feeling lent motive, just skilfully infused with such essence of personal experience as could be utilised for the best artistic effects. That he never went at all through such experiences and emotions as he depicts, but evoked wholly out of his own consciousness by forced poetic aspiration a tissue of purely abstract



conceits and sentiments, is a theory which, besides being contrary to the known facts of his life, is psychologically absurd. Because his richly productive imagination was rooted in realities and grew into its opulent splendour organically, as flower from stem and stem from root, therefore a vital embodiment of thought and feeling in his verse appeals vitally to thought and feeling.

Denn es muss von Herzen gehen  
Was auf Herzen wirken soll.

—GOETHE.

Notable in this respect it is how widely his pregnant verse, full-fraught with thought and feeling, differs from the thin poetic stuff, the matterless melodies, in which laboured ingenuities of expression, strained touches of rhetoric, feverish feats of rhythm and alliteration, refined pretiosities of diction speak nothing substantial. Concocted studiously with writhing strains and pains not to say something which the authors have to say, burdened inwardly to unburden themselves outwardly, but because they torture their minds to say something in singular fashion when they have little or nothing to say, such productions are at best lifeless artifice, not matter to which true "art gave lifeless life,"<sup>1</sup> garlands of cut flowers with no flow of vital

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<sup>1</sup> *Rape of Lucrece.*



sap in them, the barren work of fanciful invention lacking the pith and pulse of real life. A man "full of warm blood" who lived a man's life of work in the world, Shakspeare wrote poems and plays imbued with experience as incidents of his life-function, if not by the way, at all events on his way; thoroughly masculine in every quality of him, his work was male and strong without sign of strain; they, poets by profession, are driven oftentimes to bring forth with difficult travail various elegancies of laboured artifice. Using Bacon's simile, one might say that he, the "honey-tongued" songster, like the bee, gathered honey from every fact of life; they, like the spider, spin fine-patterned cobwebs out of their own insides.

In the series of sonnets addressed to his noble friend and patron three things are made manifest: first, that Shakspeare was calmly conscious of his own great powers and of the value and vitality of his verse; secondly, that he felt keenly and resented bitterly the contrast between the low station in which fortune's spite had placed him and the social eminence of his friend; thirdly, that they were closely associated in a looseness of life which had somehow cast a slur on his name and hindered just social recognition of his genius.

(1) Assured belief of his own worth was scarce wanting to one who could aspire, as he did, to confer



“ immortal name ” on his friend by praise in  
“ eternal lines ” of which he dared predict :—

So long as men shall breathe, and eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee ;

who proclaimed that

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 besmeared with sluttish time ;

who foretold to him an immortal name in verse

Which eyes yet uncreated shall o'er-read  
When all the breathers of this world are dead ;

who boldly declared

And thou in this shalt find thy monument  
When tyrants' crests and tongues of brass are spent ;

who was serenely sure that he had written that  
which would “ outlive a gilded tomb,” and make  
the memory of his friend “ live in the eyes of all  
posterity ” to the world's ending doom.

Such tranquil conviction of the value of his verse  
is a striking comment on the conventional cant of  
mediocrity that great genius is too modest to know  
its own greatness ; that as it is not conscious in the  
least how it creates, so it is unconscious of the  
superior worth of that which it creates. Strange,  
indeed, if the superior man had no inward feeling of  
the power which uplifted him and, uprisen, was the  
one person in the world blind to his superiority.



As if height of mind were something less positive and manifest than height of body !

No one, if we may interpret literally, has ever made a bolder claim of everlasting merit for his verse than Shakspeare, and certainly no prophet of his own immortal fame in a mortal world has been better justified by the event. Genius is nowise arrogant when, knowing its value, it does not claim more than its due ; if its distinction is to do something new and true after its special kind which no one else can do so well, or do at all in the same or equal kind, it has as good a right to its characteristic distinction as a man has to his name or his face. It is another thing when the special fashion is not the spontaneous well-proportioned expression of native genius, its inevitable and inimitable outcome, but the writhing disproportioned antic of one who, in order to make distinction, on purpose strives to put himself into the trick of singularity.<sup>1</sup> An ugly not a pleasing spectacle of human vanity it is that he makes who weakly pretends to personal merit in mental any more than in bodily height, and a pitiful display of over-tender self-love when he vexes himself to trumpet the merits which he is vexed that others do not see or will not acknowledge. Shak-

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<sup>1</sup> "Put thyself into the trick of singularity"—the advice given to Malvolio in the forged letter which betrayed him to become the subject of such excellent fooling.



speare showed no such silly conceit either in his demeanour, which was uniformly simple and modest, or in his supremacy as a poet, which he minded so little as to have seemed indifferent to it. To all appearance he was more seriously interested in the purchase of land at Stratford than in the fate of his dramas, and more ambitious to enjoy a position of dignity and consideration in his native town when he retired from the stage of the theatre than to live in the eyes of all posterity on the world's stage. The one was at all events a present positive joy, the other at best only a joy of expectation; and he was far too practical-minded a person to forego positive riches for riches of the imagination, "to starve present appetite for the bare imagination of a feast."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In a contemporary tract, entitled *Ratsey's Ghost*, there is what appears to be a direct allusion to Shakspeare. The author advises a player whom he meets to go to London, "for if one man were dead they will have much need of such as thou art." The "one man" was Burbage, who excelled in playing Hamlet. He goes on to speak as follows: "There thou shalt learn to be frugal (the players were never so thrifty as they are now about London), and to feed upon all men; to let none feed upon thee; to make thy hand a stranger to thy pocket; thy heart slow to perform thy tongue's promise; and when thou feelest thy purse well lined buy thee some place of lordship in the country, that, growing weary of playing, thy money may then bring thee to dignity and reputation; then thou needest care for no man—no, not for them that before made thee proud with speaking their words on the stage." "Sir, I thank you," quoth the player, "for this good council; I promise you I will make use of it, for I have heard, indeed, of some that have gone to London very meanly, and have come in time to be exceedingly wealthy."



Is that a scarce credible supposition? Adequate reflection may show that it is not only credible but easily admissible. Overrating vastly its fugitive approbations and shifting standards of merit, mankind easily concludes that the great writer writes out of praiseworthy ambition to earn its praise—its praise of to-day being often the oblivion of to-morrow or the next day, the censure of yesterday the praise of to-day or to-morrow—whereas he writes because he must perforce formulate clearly what he thinks and feels; combine into shape the many fine and swift undulations, subconsciously active, of nascent thought and feeling; ease himself by bringing forth the perfected products of his mental gestation. Having done diligently the work which it came in his way to do for a livelihood and fulfilled his life-function in the sincere utterance of himself, Shakspeare left his productions, good and bad, with cool equanimity to the fate of time and events, well knowing that, when all is said—

Thought is the slave of life and life the fool of time,  
And time that takes survey of all the world  
Will have a stop.

What did it matter in the end when the end was “silence and eternal sleep”? The Destinies above all would in no case fail to make the right use of all that he had done in their service; might be trusted to pursue their fated course of compensating good and



ill in unceasing alternations and balances of production and destruction through time until time itself was at an end ; at any rate, it was their affair through the length of times, not his within the brief length of a single life. Having the wonderful imagination he had, it is not likely that he lacked the imagination to picture a present proceeding always by rigorous law from a past and preparing a future essentially consistent with it, no wiser nor worthier, perhaps, not really much different on the whole and in the long run of its human course. Is it not a little naïve to suppose that one who showed such insight into the springs and movements of the human drama on this little ball of earth, and grasped its infinitesimal significance in the cosmic course of things, should set much store by thoughts of what would not concern him in the least when he was not ? Why, having so short a lease, disquiet himself in vain about what might be in the eternity after he was, any more than about that which was in the eternity before he was ? Seeing that the people then alive would be the same sort of mechanical mortals, moved by the same passions in their limited circle, going through the same routine of plays in the same automatic fashion, the actors only changed, it was of small import what they might think of him and his work. Within the brief date and span of every life eagerly aspired aims once passionately pursued come to look like the



remembrance of toys which pleased in childhood. In the mind only of him who imagines it is the joy of posthumous fame; to nobody is it fame when he is, and it is nothing to him when he is not. Small then might its mortal attractiveness seem to one whose large oversight could calmly view this great stage of the world as presenting naught but shows and men as such stuff as dreams are made of; whose retrospective imagination took remote survey of blind oblivion swallowing cities up and "mighty States characterless grated to dusty nothing"; yea, who foresaw in prospective imagination the time to come when, "like the baseless fabric of a vision,"

The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all that it inherit, shall melt away, and  
Like this unsubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a wrack behind.

This pensive reflection in his last and leave-taking play, where in person of Prospero he finally abjured his magic and broke his staff, was a kind of musing on the universal flux and transitoriness of things which was often in his mind, as several passages in the Sonnets show. In the play of *Henry IV.* (Act iii. Scene i.) the sore-tried and weary-laden king, ruminating sadly that if one could read the book of fate and see the revolutions of things—valleys raised and mountains levelled, continents pushed into seas



and seas swallowing up continents, all the manifold changes and chances and passings-away of the world—exclaims

O, if this were seen  
The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,  
What perils past, what crosses to ensue,  
Would shut the book and sit him down and die.<sup>1</sup>

If these were not Shakspeare's opinions, as it will no doubt be said, but reflections put fitly into the mouths of his characters, at all events they were his reflections, which he never could have made and placed so feelingly if he had not in some moods known and knowingly felt what he thus uttered. His, indeed, was the transcending faculty of objectifying his moods and reflections in scenes and characters and then calmly contemplating these from outside. Let it be borne in mind clearly and constantly that he had read much—not *multa sed multum*, according to Pliny's maxim—and profited much by reading such authors as Seneca, Plutarch, Montaigne, Rabelais, and perhaps "murderous Machiavel," taking heed while thus pursuing his studies in philosophy not to be so exclusively

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<sup>1</sup> In the *Rape of Lucrece* his thoughts expand in detailed exposition of the destructive work of time which ruins proud buildings, tarnishes their golden towers, fills stately monuments with worm-holes, spoils antiquities of hammered steel, wastes huge stones with water-drops, dries the oak's sap, feeds oblivion with decay of things.



devoted to it as to abjure the poets, especially his favourite Ovid, but advisedly using music and poesy to quicken his feeling<sup>1</sup>; and it will appear utterly unreasonable to suppose that the sympathetic appreciation and large assimilation of their philosophy which he made could fail to involve an emancipation of mind from the customary estimate of life and things which gratifies the vulgar mind and it glorifies. Like his great philosophic teachers, he was able to survey the course of human affairs in a spirit of detachment—with something like the penetrating insight and philosophic intelligence of Montaigne, the large and humorous survey of Rabelais, the cool scientific analysis of Machiavelli. Nevertheless, a detachment which was intellectual only, not at all personal; as an ordinary citizen he was nowise emancipated from the common aims and ambitions of his fellows, being as philistinely eager to gain wealth, have a good house, and found a family, as ever Walter Scott was to buy land, build a mansion, and be a laird in Scotland.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the *Taming of the Shrew*, Act i., Scene i., Tranio advises Lucentio, while studying philosophy, to be no stoic,

Or so devote to Aristotle's checks

As Ovid be an outcast quite abjured

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Music and poetry use to quicken you.

<sup>2</sup> Though one can hardly imagine him so jubilant to carry off a glass out of which Queen Elizabeth had drunk—as a precious



(2) While it is proof of the rare quality of his wit and genius that he was on terms of friendly intimacy with persons so much above him in social rank as the Earls of Pembroke and Southampton, he makes it plain that he had spells of gloomy dejection, when all alone bewailing his situation in life and the impossibility of social intercourse on equal level he was tempted to curse his fate—

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes  
I all alone bewail my outcast state  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries  
And look upon myself and curse my fate.

The grief of it was that though "undivided in love" he and his friend were "divided in life," owing partly to his low station, partly also apparently to some darkly hinted imputation on his name which made it impossible for the latter openly to acknowledge their intimacy—

I may not evermore acknowledge thee  
Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee shame,  
Nor thou with public kindness honour me,  
Unless thou take that honour from thy name.

However that be, he was certainly sometimes oppressed with moods of melancholy, deepening at worst into almost dismal despair, else why, brooding darkly on the wrongs in the world—on "desert a

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memento—as Sir Walter triumphantly carried off a glass out of which George IV. had drunk in Edinburgh, unluckily breaking it on its way to Abbotsford.



beggar born," on "purest faith unhappily forsworn," on "maiden virtue rudely strumpeted, on "gilded honour shamefully misplaced," on "simple truth miscalled simplicity"—should he have called out for "restful death?" why spoken of having drunk potions of Siren tears distilled from limbecks foul as hell within? why even hinted at the quick ending of his life as

The coward conquest of a wretch's knife  
Too base of thee to be remembered?<sup>1</sup>

It is important always to take due account of the profitable use advisedly made of experience for the ideal effects of art and largely to discount the

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<sup>1</sup> Not that he there probably hinted at suicide, as has been suspected. If perchance that were so, he no doubt soon eased himself of his moody thoughts, either by spending their energy in active work of some sort, or by bodying them forth in a sonnet, just as Goethe delivered himself from like gloomy thoughts by writing the *Sorrows of Werther*. The feeling lines really express his sense of the insignificance of the bodily life compared with that of the spirit, the better part of him, and of the easy and base means by which in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, its poor being might be ended. Still, in his dark moods he may, like Hamlet, half wishing the end but shrinking from the means, have sometimes craved that this too solid flesh would melt, or that the Almighty had not fixed his canon against self-slaughter. A person so superiorly endowed mentally and surely conscious of his superiority, yet at the same time capable of nourishing seriously the common ambitions which he cherished as an honest citizen, could not be so detached as to be uniformly serene; in encounter with the realities of life he might well fall at times into fits of dejection and disgust.



fulsome extravagancies of the dedications then in vogue. Shakspeare was not the only poet who, after the abject fashion of the time, addressed adulatory verses to noble patrons and was rewarded with liberal gifts of money; indeed, he makes it his merit that he did not, in order to compete with those who spent all their might in richly compiled sonnets and polished form of "well-refined pen," alter his style and adopt new found methods, but kept to true plain words of his own pen, so that every word almost told whence they proceeded, and other pens had even taken to imitate his style. Still, he was not only profoundly discontented with his situation but keenly self-reproachful for his past conduct of life. "The frailties of his sportive blood" had, he confesses, betrayed him into irregularities which had injured his reputation; he had "gored his own thoughts," "wasted his affections," "looked askance at truth," and he bitterly blamed fortune that did not provide better for his life than "public means which public manners breed." His name had received a brand and his nature been subdued to an employment and environment which sank him socially below the lofty eminence on which his genius then entitled him to stand and has now in glory throned him. Yet, after all, he passionately resents the censorious comments of the world, defiantly declaring that it is better to be



esteemed vile than to lose the just pleasure of conduct which, although esteemed vile by others, is not so to his own feeling, they counting bad what he thinks good,

No, I am that I am ; and they that level  
At my abuses reckon up their own ;  
I may be straight, though themselves be bevel,  
By their rank thoughts my deed must not be shown.

He foresees clearly the day when the friendly communion with his patron shall end and the latter by advised respects and reasons of settled gravity pass him strangely with scarce a greeting glance, much in fact as in the play of *Henry IV.* he represents Prince Hal as passing his old companion, Falstaff, without mark of recognition. Such, however, is his extravagantly professed devotion that in meekest self-abnegation he entreats him not ever to think of him if it would be a pain to remember him, not so much as mention his name lest the world should mock and shun him for his former friendship, protesting that he on his side will bear without his help all the blots that remain from it and never say a word to tell of their old familiar converse :—

My name be buried where my body is  
And live no more to shame nor you nor me.

What brand other than the disesteem, if any, of his occupation as a common player vulgar scandal



stamped on Shakspeare's name it is bootless to guess, unless it were scandal or slander arising out of participation in his friend's profligate proceedings. However loose the morals of the time and place, some blame—was there no warrant for blame?—might haply light on the mature husband who, leaving his wife and children to live asunder at Stratford, wasted misplaced affection on a wanton mistress whom, though it was “a sin to love,” he “loved dearly.” Be that as it may, what is plain is that something in his situation prevented equal social intercourse with his noble patrons, and not only debarred him of “public honours and proud titles,” as he declares or deplores, but for some reason or other kept him out of such society as his poetical fellows of inferior genius enjoyed freely. His contemporary Alleyn, an eminent player, who was the munificent founder of Dulwich College, occupied a good social position, entertaining persons of rank and learning; Marlowe, his master of the “mighty line” of heroic verse, was the welcome guest of Sir Thomas Walsingham at his country house and on friendly terms with Sir Walter Raleigh. His friend, Ben Jonson, whom he used to meet at the Mermaid Tavern and contend with in sprightly wit-combats, and whose play *Sejanus* he put on the stage, was the friend of Bacon and of many other noble and learned persons, and he him-



self, like Ben Jonson, had most likely listened to Bacon's grave and stately eloquence in Court, as well as read his Essays; but there is no evidence that he was known personally to the great Chancellor, or ever in the company of persons above him in station, except when they were visitors to the theatre or the tavern. For some reason or other his social standing was not that which his rare genius might have been expected to ensure. To all seeming his life was mostly passed between his industrious work at the theatre, his prudent investments and care of his gains, his recreations at the tavern, his intercourse with his mistress, an excursion to Dover or elsewhere perhaps to make studies of sea and sky, meeting with deafening clamour, of the ship now "boring the moon with her mainmast and anon swallowed with yest and froth," of cliffs from whose tops men moving on the beach looked like mice crawling—and the periodical visits latterly made to his native town.<sup>1</sup> There it was that so soon as he began to prosper he was intent on acquiring land

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<sup>1</sup> Not that it is in the least likely his vivid descriptions of tempests at sea were made from personal observations, even if he ever got outside Dover harbour; the scenes of noise, tumult and confusion on board the labouring ships tossed about in furious storms, as described in the *Tempest* and in *Pericles*, are manifestly taken from *Rabelais*. One thing he and his Elizabethan contemporaries never missed doing, namely, to take their spoil with full hands wherever they found



and houses and holding the social position denied to him in London, and there, having solicited and obtained the grant of a coat of arms, he hoped to found a family.<sup>1</sup>

(3) Of his young companion's dissolute doings and their close intimacy the tender reproaches and reiterated remonstrances of the Sonnets yield ample proof. After elaborate praises of the unnamed person's singular beauty, grace and wit, grave deprecations of his licentious life as a gay and gallant libertine, repeated exhortations to marry

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it. On his way to Stratford he used to stay at a tavern kept by John d'Avenant, the father of Sir William Davenant, where he was exceedingly respected. "Mrs. d'Avenant was a very beautiful woman of a good wit and conversation, in which she was imitated by none of her children but by this William." Contemporary scandal imputed the boy's paternity to Shakspeare. There is a story that one day young d'Avenant, being asked whither he was hurrying, and he saying that he was going to see his godfather Shakspeare, was met with the retort, "Have a care that you don't take God's name in vain." An allusion to the scandal apparently occurs in some doggerel rhyme on Sir William Davenant, where there is a play on the words *Avenant* and *Avon*.—*Article, Davenant, Sir William, in Dictionary of National Biography.*

<sup>1</sup> It is a probable surmise that in the *Tempest* he introduces some essence of his own experience and feeling: kept out of the supreme place to which he knew his genius entitled him, pursued by the rancour of his rivals, easily triumphing by his magic power over their plots and enmities, finally forgiving their hostility—"the rarer action" being "in virtue than in vengeance"—and taking leave of his art and them in tranquil assurance of his supremacy through the ages.



and transmit a living copy of such precious features to posterity, so that his likeness may be kept alive and he survive in it, he seriously admonishes him that youth and beauty soon fleet, wasting fast by wear, and will in his case otherwise perish barrenly. It is true that he now makes shame lovely by his graces, gracing even disgrace, so that those who blame him excuse his frailties on the ground of youth, making a kind of praise of their dispraise, yet he ought to take heed of the certain consequences of reckless excesses—

The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,  
Though to itself it only live and die ;  
But if that flower with base infection meet,  
The basest weed outbraves its dignity :  
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds,  
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

He warns him that although his beauty is admired by all, even by his foes, yet they, measuring the beauty of his mind by his deeds, add dispraising comments and blame. And why? Because he was too free in his loose intimacies—

The solve is this that thou dost common grow.

Solemnly, therefore, he adjures him to think of the time to come when, crushed and o'erworn with age, his brow filled with lines and wrinkles, his beauty shall live only in the lines addressed to him ; where only it does now live.

Besides these general admonitions, a special re-



proach—most significant in relation to the loose kind of life the two were living—he is forced sadly to make because of a treacherous wrong done to him, quite unlooked-for and touching him to the very quick. This was nothing less than a loose intrigue with the mistress whom he dearly loved. In extenuation of the gross perfidy, it was true, might be pleaded the woman's seductive arts and the overpowering temptation, when a woman wooes, to succumb to the insidious flattery of her wiles and guiles.<sup>1</sup>

To promise so fairly and act so falsely was a sore-wounding offence, nor did the repentance which followed cure the hurt and disgrace of the wrong. Nevertheless, such is his extravagantly professed affection or advised devotion that although it is greater grief to bear love's wrong than hate's known injury, yet he will forgive the robbery and not quarrel with "the gentle thief"—

Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows,  
Kill me with spite ; yet we must not be foes.

The forgiveness was not immediate ; there was a

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<sup>1</sup> And when a woman wooes what woman's son  
Will sourly leave her until she do prevail ?  
Ay, me ! but yet thou might'st my seat forbear  
Who lead thee in the riot, even there,  
Where thou art forced to break a twofold truth,  
Hers by thy beauty tempting her to thee  
Thine by thy beauty false to me.



temporary breach of friendly intercourse, during which, suffering from the wrong done to him and the consequent estrangement, he protests that he passed "a hell of a time"; but a reconciliation into which, maybe, consideration entered as much as affection, took place and the intercourse was renewed—

And ruined love, when it is built anew,  
Grows fairer than at first, far greater,  
So I return rebuked to my content.

To the mistress who had betrayed him, the mature husband now showing the presaging signs of withering age, for the handsome young lover he addresses sterner reproaches, not only for torturing him but for seducing his friend, so that—

Of him, myself and thee I am forsaken.

Whoever she was, she was plainly not a common woman, but a lady of musical accomplishments and cultivated understanding, else he could not have spoken of the chips dancing under sweet fingers which "made dead wood more blest than living lips," or thought of inditing to her a series of exquisitely elaborated sonnets which she could hardly have inspired or ever have appreciated. That she was not beautiful, he confesses; with her dusky complexion, her dark eyes and wiry-black hair, "a colour not of old counted fair," she was easily ex-



celled in graces of feature and person, had not, indeed, as some said, a face to make love groan ; yet to his doting heart she was the fairest and most precious jewel. It was not through his eyes which saw a thousand faults that he was bewitched, it was his fond heart which doted ; therefore he refuses to believe his eyes, and, knowing all the while what beauty is, sees beauty where it is not. Neither his five senses nor his five wits can dissuade his foolish heart ; like the ecstasised courser of Adonis when it broke loose at sight of the young and lusty jennet—

He sees his love and nothing else he sees,  
For nothing else with his proud sight agrees<sup>1</sup>.

Such is his infatuation that he cannot help believing her oaths of fidelity, although he knows she lies, and crediting her false-speaking tongue when she flatters him that he is still young, although both she

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<sup>1</sup> Of the exclusive, all-absorbing rapture produced by the ecstasy or hypnotism of the love-passion and its blunting or paralysing effects on all sense and thought not enthralled in its workings he frequently dilates, estimating its operation and effects as perfectly as if he had possessed a physiological intuition of the cerebral structure and the consequences of its organic mechanism being thrown out of gear. His psychology is not general and barren ; it is concerned with real things and men and women in real action, not with sublime abstractions out of all touch with realities ; cannot compare, still less compete, with that of the clever mental acrobat who tries strenuously with wondrous agility metaphysically to wriggle out of his own skin and to make himself and others believe that he has succeeded.



and he know that his days are past their best.  
Vanity in years will not own to itself that he is old  
and she is false—

But wherefore says she not she is unjust?  
And wherefore say not I that I am old?  
O, love's best habit is in seeming trust  
And age in love loves not to have years told.

He is content, therefore, so she will not forsake her poor Will, that they should live in mutual deception, lying to one another, she to him in swearing that she loves him, he to her in befooling himself to believe her assurances when he is sure they are lies—

Therefore I lie with her and she with me,  
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

Herein doubtless much customary poetic exaggeration, but not therefore without any foundation in fact, seeing that such things have been and are, however sad to see: it is no strange thing for the depraved appetite to feed gladly on that which nurses the disease<sup>1</sup>.

Meanwhile he implores her not to wound him

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<sup>1</sup> If she were the lady whom conjecture has perhaps identified, her free love certainly merited what might well have been the description of her in *Love's Labour Lost*.—

A wightlly woman with a velvet brow,  
With two pitch-balls stuck in her face for eyes;  
Ay, and by heaven one that would do the deed  
Though Argus were her eunuch and her guard.



with her cunning, to forbear darting love-glances aside in his sight, not to press him too hard with her disdain by open show of preference for another, but rather to pretend that she loves him, as physicians speak of recovery to sick men near death, lest otherwise his patience give way and he speak ill of her. So overpowering is his passion, so abject his thrall, that he protests he is desperate and, being past cure, past care. To his mind what is worst in her exceeds the best in others, and he loves her the more the more he hears and sees just cause why he should hate her—

O, though I love what others do abhor,  
With others thou should'st not abhor my state !  
If thy unworthiness raised love in me,  
More worthy I to be beloved of thee.

The very extravagance of enthralling passion this, were his wail to be interpreted literally, albeit the exhibition of a truth exemplified every day by the spectacle of two mutually enchanted lovers, never able to get too close to one another, however little in either to attract, or however much to repel, dispassionate onlookers wondering see. But his woeful plaint was not meant literally, it is just an instructive instance teaching how prettily he used a little experience for large reflective and artistic effects. Feeling that he sees so falsely as to worship his mistress's defects, he asks whether, after all, it is really



his eye that is at fault and not rather his judgment which judges falsely what his eye sees aright, but is forced to acknowledge, as the wiser sense of the world well denotes,

Love's eye is not so true as all men's ; no,  
How can it ?

Then follows the ingenious conceit to explain why that is so—

O cunning love, with tears thou keep'st me blind  
Lest eyes well-seeing thy foul faults should find.

Could there be plainer proof of the skilful use made of woes for the artistic construction and embellishment of an effective sonnet ? Throughout he is able composedly to analyse and reflect on his grief, to consider its psychological bearings, curiously to perceive to what poetical uses it lent itself, all the while keeping quiet possession of himself, nowise so fatuously possessed by his passion as he protests he is. With whatever illusions unreasoning admiration veil its vision, Shakspeare himself cherished no illusions concerning the deceit and guilt of his equivocal situation. He frankly confesses that he was forsworn, that his sin was sinful loving, but strenuously maintains that it was not for her to reproach him who was herself twice forsworn, had sealed false bonds of love and shamelessly robbed others' beds of their dues. A comfortable discharge of bad humour, no doubt, this dolorous



recrimination, for it was the subtle trick of a soothing self-excuse, not that he, knowing the woman, could expect that she would in the least mind it; in no case can reproof by playfellow in the sinful pleasure have much moral weight; as fellowship in woe assuages woe, so fellowship in sin blunts sense of guilt.

The characteristic arts of the unfaithful mistress, the tricks and shifts that lurk in her, and the foolish vanity of the doting lover, especially of him who is in the afternoon of life—his waning vigour madly fired with the force of young passion—he could depict with excellent force and truth, as also the harrowing suspicions, the torturing jealousies, the repulsive imaginings which assail and besiege when, sure that he is betrayed, he clings in spite of proof to wilful self-deception.<sup>1</sup> Wondrous strange it is

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<sup>1</sup> Provoked by his languishing appeals the lady hastily mutters "I hate—" but, checking herself on seeing his woeful look, alters the end of the intended sentence by adding "not you," and perhaps kindly bids him "Good-night."—*Sonnet*.

Good-night, good rest. Ah, neither be my share;  
 She bade good night that kept my rest away;  
 And daff'd me to a cabin hanged with care  
 To descant on the doubts of my decay—  
 "Farewell," quote she, "and come again to-morrow."  
 Farewell I could not, for I supped with sorrow.—

*The Passionate Pilgrim.*

Descant on his decay was no passing lament apparently:—

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
 When yellow leaves, or few, or none, do hang, &c.—*Sonnet*.



how fatuously in such case the amorous fool resents the notion of a sharer in his mistress's dearest favours, even though the lawful sharer be her own husband, perhaps by insidious questionings actually soliciting her to assert and himself to credit, when he knows she lies, that she is somehow pure and chaste; for her unchastity with him counts nobly as purity of love.<sup>1</sup> In the blind passion of young Troilus for the fair and false Cressida and in the infatuation of mature Anthony for the licentious Cleopatra, is striking proof how well alive Shakspeare was to the tricks and guiles of the faithless mistress, the lurking dumb-discoursing devil of her each cunningly tempting grace, and the overpowering fascination with which the chasteless creature attracts and holds captive her doting victim. Is it not quite preposterous to suppose that the characters of Cressida and Cleopatra could have been drawn so effectively by one who had never learnt by personal experience what treachery in love was, as likewise that the coarse scenes and brutal persons of the brothel into which the gentle Marina's ungentle fortune cast her for a

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<sup>1</sup> Un homme amoureux oublie à l'instant même ce qu'il sait le mieux à l'égard des femmes en général. Telle femme, eût elle trente ans et quatre enfants, il lui fera des questions insidieuses pour voir si vraiment elle n'aurait pas gardé jusqu'au hazard de sa rencontre avec lui une précieuse virginité.—

*Alphonse Karr.*



while, could have invaded the imagination of him who had not seen anything like that which he represented dramatically? The illuminating flash of intuition emergent from sympathy of feeling is no less necessary rightly to conceive and dramatically delineate a vicious than a virtuous person; even the wildest vagaries of dreams and the mad fantasies of the brain-sick imagination need and use the observed forms and motions of real things, however incongruously mixed and fashioned these be.

A marvel of sublimation without substance it would verily be if these pictures of licentious love and its base treacheries were only unsubstantial excursions of sportive fancy, not the buildings of imagination on a basis of personal experience. He who believes possible or probable such real life in that which had no personal root might do well to recollect and ponder the angry words impatiently flung by Romeo at Friar Lawrence's proffered comforts of philosophy:—

Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel.

Of no more worth is the artist's barren skill who paints with imagination without observation than the skill of him who paints with observation without imagination; into the art that is to live must life-blood enter. Interesting and not un instructive in this connection it will be to recollect the scenes



in the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap, in which Prince Hal, Poins, Falstaff, Bardolph, Dame Quickly and the rest of the dissolute crew figure, especially the scene in which Doll Tearsheet, flattering and fooling Falstaff while sitting on his knee and kissing him, assures him that he is in excellent good condition, his pulse beating as well as heart could desire and his colour as red as any rose, and protests, in answer to his lament "I am old, I am old," that she loves him "better than she loves e'er a scurvy young boy of them all." Instead of such coarse picture being the abstract creation of imagination uninformed by observation, it probably represented something like that which Shakspeare had observingly noted in the intercourse between his noble friend and his loose tavern-companions; their profligate doings may well have furnished the raw material of the humorous scenes in which the Prince took part with the low company frequented by him before he put off his loose behaviour.<sup>1</sup> The Blackfriars Theatre was nowise a holy shrine of innocence situate in the midst of peaceful surround-

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<sup>1</sup> See *Richard II.*, Act v., Scene iii., where the Prince's father speaks thus:—

Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there,  
For there, they say, he daily doth frequent,  
With unrestrained loose companions,  
Even such, they say, as stand in narrow lanes  
And beat our watch and rob our passengers.



ings; on the contrary, it was a nuisance to the neighbourhood and such a damage to surrounding property that when its proprietors, Burbage, Shakspeare and their partners applied for leave to enlarge and improve it, they encountered so strong an opposition on the part of the inhabitants as to oblige them to solicit the help of their powerful patrons in support of their humble petition to Lords of the Privy Council against the petition of the inhabitants that the theatre should "be shut up and closed, to the manifest and great injury of your petitioners, who have no other means to maintain their wives and families but by the exercise of their quality as they have heretofore done."

That a sane and fruitful imagination implies the food and training of real experience, wanting which an unrul'd imagination runs into wild and barren stalk, is proved by innumerable examples of poets and novelists—signally by the eminent example of Sir Walter Scott, in whose romances the most real scenes and living characters can be traced to diligently obtained information and carefully noted observations of actual places and persons, translated and more or less ideally transformed by a richly stored and well ruled imagination. To suppose that Shakspeare had no personal part either as observer or actor in the dissipations which he describes, is to suppose it only because unreasoning devotees, crav-



ing to have be that which they wish should be and counting it virtuous in such case to practise wilful self-deception, hug the opinion that a transcendent genius must have been a person of transcendent morality, although the experience of all the world proves the contrary in the general and his history exemplifies in the particular. As well believe that Burns, because he wrote the *Cotter's Saturday Night* and *Holy Willie's Prayer*, was not a lustful drunkard, debauched no village maiden, wrote no verses unfit for publication; that Goethe because he wrote *Faust* had no selfish love adventures, and did not in the end marry his common mistress when she had borne a child to him, burdening himself thenceforth with a drunken wife; that Byron was a saint who masked a pious life beneath the impious show of a dissolute Don Juanism; that the gentle and genial Lamb was not set in the stocks once for brawling on the Sabbath day.

Such phrases as inconsistent, inconceivable, incongruous, contradictory, and their like, when used in the examination and interpretation of the qualities of a character, only betray imbecilities of analysis.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> If it be "a great philosophical truth" that "contradictions cannot coexist," that is only to call contradictories things which we cannot conceive to coexist, because they affect us so oppositely; whereas the truth may be that they are fundamental continuities. It might perhaps be a deeper truth to say that because they coexist in the whole they are necessarily contradictory in the individual part of it.



At bottom the man is always an organic unity and the bad as essential and logical a constituent of his nature as the good; for what strange compounds soever nature makes, and

Nature has framed strange fellows in her time,  
it does not make organic disunities, contrives somehow to hold opposite polarities in unity of being. To my mind it would be the most wonderful thing in the psychological wonder which Shakspeare is, if one who had never felt it could have known "the expense of spirit in a waste of shame," and expressed with tersest force and consummate art of diction the fierce quest, the brief bliss, and the sequent hated woe of lust in action—

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 proved a very woe;  
Before a joy proposed behind a dream.

No one has depicted the alternating joys and pains of lustful love, its blissful now and hateful then so forcibly, with compressed energy of feeling and words, because no one, having felt them, had such power to body forth his experience, and convert tears of remorseful memory into gems of matchless art. On the other hand, no one has insisted else-



where with more delicate feeling on the contrast between the tender grace of pure love with its refined joys and the coarse passion of bestial lust with its loathed satiety: the one as gentle as the soft lighting of a seagull on its cradling wave, the other as coarse as the plunging splash of a tame duck on to a weedy pond.

Studying the sonnets critically and candidly without preconceived notions of something mysterious or mystic which they must obscurely mean and wilful blindness to that which they plainly say—or with an indolent content to enjoy them diffusely as word-melodies without caring to discover the least meaning in them—they disclose a deep wading through dirty waters at one period of Shakspeare's life in London, drawing their spirit and substance from what he saw, felt and thought in his pilgrimage. To the easy objection that he never could have thus exposed his private feelings to public view, the simple and easy answer is that they were only circulated privately at first and that it is not certain they were ever intended for public perusal. It is a question, indeed, whether they were ultimately published with his open consent.<sup>1</sup> Written separ-

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<sup>1</sup> Such anonymous publication of that which the author did not care openly to father, though he could not bear to destroy it, was not unexampled. Edward Blount, a respectable bookseller and himself a man of letters, who was a partner in the



ately perhaps as occasional pieces, according as he conceived the central thought of each sonnet, one may well suppose that he would hardly like such masterpieces of poetic art, when perfected and collected, to be quite lost. All the more unlikely seeing that some of them had been surreptitiously printed and others might eventually have been likewise pirated.

It is nowise beyond belief—is perhaps the most likely key to them—that the special plaintive outpour of his wrongs as a forlorn lover, basely betrayed by mistress and friend, was thus poetically vented for the perusal and amusement of the guilty couple as well as for his own relief; that he was not so deeply hurt at heart but that he could entertain him and her and himself with the elaborate fretwork of poetic fancies in which, making sport of his pains, he represented things. What real feeling is there discernible in the over-strained conceits of Sonnet 42 about the unity of her and his friend with himself after their treacherous lechery, or in the unpleasing punnings on the word Will in Sonnets 135 and 136, where she, having one Will, is said to have another Will beside him and “Will to boot and Will in overplus!”

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first edition of Shakspeare, spoke of Earle's *Microcosmographie* as “so many dispersed transcripts which obliged him to play the midwife to these infants which the father would have smothered.”



The elaborate expenditure of invention in punning on the words Will and Wills is pretty plain proof that his feelings were not so badly wounded but that he could use and enjoy a deliberate intellectual treatment of them for the purposes of art.<sup>1</sup>

Those who fondly strain admiration to idolatry, wilfully shunning the light they dislike, cannot conceive that so great a genius could ever have done so unworthy a thing as address such verses to the lecherous mistress who had discarded the ageing lover for the wanton young gallant; their "cloistered virtue," untainted by a debauched atmosphere, cannot realise the low tone and vicious habit of thought and talk prevailing among persons living a licentious life and making "lascivious comments on their sport." They innocently overlook two things: first, the inevitably vitiating influence of the bad moral atmosphere emanating from the corrupt medium in which the verses were engendered and their perusal probably enjoyed—habits of thought, feeling and bearing being caught as men take diseases of one another, wherefore, as Falstaff says,

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<sup>1</sup> How easy it was for a good wit to play with words and sentences he tells us in *Twelfth Night*. *Clown*: To see this age! A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit: how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward. *Viola*: Nay, that's certain; they that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton.



“men ought to take heed of their company;” secondly, the twofold aspect of the man—that of the poet writing divinely in his chamber as an idealist, and that of a companion, yet not compeer, living in undivine intercourse with mistress and friend and in his real person eating, drinking, and behaving much like any common mortal.

### 3. *Character.*

It sounds nowadays almost like sacrilege, indeed a blaspheming of one's mental breed, to hazard the conjecture that Shakspeare possessed a deep fund of still self-love, caring much to acquire property and position in his native town, not caring to let aught else take deep hold of his feelings. Of this strong quality in his nature he at any rate seemed not to have been ignorant—

Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye,  
And all my soul, and all my every part;  
And for this sin there is no remedy,  
It is so grounded inward in my heart.—S. 72.

If he had not more head than heart, he certainly had a head which kept the heart well in hand, realising, no doubt, that self-love in the end is not so vile a sin as self-forgetting. Could he have lived the life of sinful loving he lived in London, leaving his wife and children at Stratford, had he not possessed a solid basis of cool-headed egoism? What



proper answer could he have made to the straight question which a friend, dealing faithfully with him, might have pertinently put?

And may it be that you have quite forgot  
A husband's office? <sup>1</sup>

If it be true that there was such a deep egoistic bottom to his character—in what great character was there ever not?—that is no matter of sensible regret to the world, which has had the inestimable profit of it and could not have had him without it. Wanting a large measure of mental aloofness from men and things incompatible with keen personal feeling, he could hardly have surveyed them so calmly and objectively as he did. Vices and virtues, loves and hates, follies and crimes, good and bad deeds of all sorts, human doings in all their aspects he placidly observed with impartial insight and detachment, lucidly unfolding with sympathetic imagination their complex interworkings of causes and effects, because he contemplated them as a philosopher and felt them as an artist without being much

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<sup>1</sup> *Comedy of Errors*, Act ii., Scene ii., where Luciana explains at length how smoothly the husband who truants with his bed should counterfeit to the deceived wife, bidding him, if he likes elsewhere, to do it by stealth, to muffle his love with some show of blindness, to look sweet, speak fair, become disloyalty, bear a fair presence—

Be secret false; what need she be acquainted?



moved by them as a man. Why scruple to think true and say of him that which all the world agrees to be true, and say of Goethe—the modern poet next in greatness—who, having pursued his love adventures at the cost of others, freed himself from all after-pangs by embodying his experiences in a poem or a romance, passing thenceforth on his serene way of systematic self-culture with an almost Olympian indifference? An excellent medicine by which a loving self-lover so cures his hurt, turning hurts to pearls, as to love the use of the hurt! This Goethe did of set purpose and with consistent execution, whereas Shakspeare's placid egoistic course was apparently pursued with even pace and benign temper, unillumined by any formulated theory of self-development. There is nothing to be said, then, but to praise egoism for it, seeing that had he been a sapless saint he would not have been Shakspeare, and mankind would have lost the priceless fruits of his depth of insight, his extent of oversight, his world-wide multipolar assimilation, his large-reaching reflection, and the cool self-detachment and indulgent humour with which he took survey of all the world, seeing all as one and all in the one.

In the seeming contrast between the ordinary routine of his life as a man of business and pleasure and his poetic work as a man of genius there is



nothing incompatible to wonder at; examples of similar startling contrasts between the material man, plodding through his daily labours and pursuing his pleasures in the world, and the ideal man of his chamber, as he works imaginatively and others imagine him, are notable enough in the lives of other men of genius. Is there ever a great character that does not exhibit apparent inconsistencies? "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together," and the one as constituent a part of its structure as the other. Having his two poles of being, so to speak, he displayed a two-fold function in relation to two different orders of impression; not a dual being really, but two seeming inconsistencies whose contrary features, marking quite different functions in relation to different circumstances, we cannot duly correlate because we know nothing yet of the subconscious mental workings of the physiological being which holds them in vital unity. Is not that the full stop to which the psychologist must always come who is content to count science the little that he can learn of his own mind, be it great or small, by introspection? And, more strange still, to think he can by such poor means sound the depths of a subconscious mind which has at last thrust itself on his unwilling notice and he would fain away with?

On the one hand, then, we have the smoothly



shrewd, hard-working, thrifty, self-contained man of the world able to take excellent care of himself<sup>1</sup> and not much unlike other men in daily life; caring so little to distinguish himself from them that he might not have astonished or entertained gladly, might indeed have vastly disappointed, the gushing interviewer; on the other hand, the great poet and dramatist whose rare and rich faculties have given him a distinction above all men: the former with his merits and his faults, his frailties and his virtues, a subject of eager interest to the curious inquirer but of no lasting consequence, the latter a momentous event and agent in the process of human evolution, likely to be an enduring inheritance so long as nature, "sovereign mistress over wrack," continues its human progress towards a far-off end, when at last

Her audit, though delayed, answered must be.

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<sup>1</sup> Not forgetting to take note of a rogue when he heard of one nor to exact his just dues from a debtor. For example, one day Mrs. Alleyn, wife of the celebrated Edward Alleyn, had a visit from an impostor wanting to borrow money and saying that he was known unto Mr. Shakspeare of the Globe, who, however, when he came, said, "that he knew hym not, only he herde of him that he was a rogue . . . so he was glad we did not lend him the money."

Again, in 1604 he sued Philip Rogers in the Borough Court at Stratford for 35s. 10d. for corn delivered, the delivery of the corn being stated to have taken place at several times.



So much, then, for the real Shakspeare as revealed by the living language of his verse and proclaimed by the very stream of his life and the business which he helmed. He died at New Place, Stratford, on April 23, 1616, aged fifty-two years, having made his last will and testament on the 25th day of the previous March, the carefully considered will of a thoroughly *bon bourgeois*. The story was that Drayton, Ben Jonson and he had a merry meeting and drank too much, and that he died of a fever contracted in consequence. That he died of a fever is probable enough, but it was more likely contracted from the bad drains in which Stratford long abounded. Was it perchance with prophetic soul dimly dreaming of the advent of the modern body-snatcher who might rifle his grave and carry off his bones to Westminster Abbey, there to lay them among bones not all worthy of such sepulchral honour, that he wrote the well-known lines placed above his tombstone.<sup>1</sup>

Good Friend, for Jesus sake forbear,  
To digg the dust enclosed here :  
Blest be the man that spares these stones,  
And curst be he that moves my bones.

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Godfrey Kneller is reported to have exclaimed on his death-bed, "By God, I will not be buried in Westminster Abbey." Asked the reason why, he replied, "They do bury fools there."



The solemn deprecation has happily been effective, for there after life's fitful fever still lies all that is mortally left of him who by the grandeur of his intellectual powers, the prodigality of his imaginative creations, and the melodious splendour of their dramatic presentations, has built himself an immortal monument in the world's wondering admiration.

Secure from worldly chances and mishaps,  
Here lurks no treason, here no envy swells,  
Here grow no damned grudges, here are no storms,  
No noise, but silence and eternal sleep.













