

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
BY
HIS EMINENCE
CARDINAL WISEMAN.



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

IN PREPARATION.

THE LIFE
OF
HIS EMINENCE
CARDINAL WISEMAN.

Any persons possessing Manuscripts, Letters, &c., or having the knowledge of any facts of importance connected with the life of His Eminence, are requested to communicate, by letter, with the Right Reverend H. E. Manning, D.D., care of Messrs. Hurst and Blackett, 13, Great Marlborough Street, London.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

BY

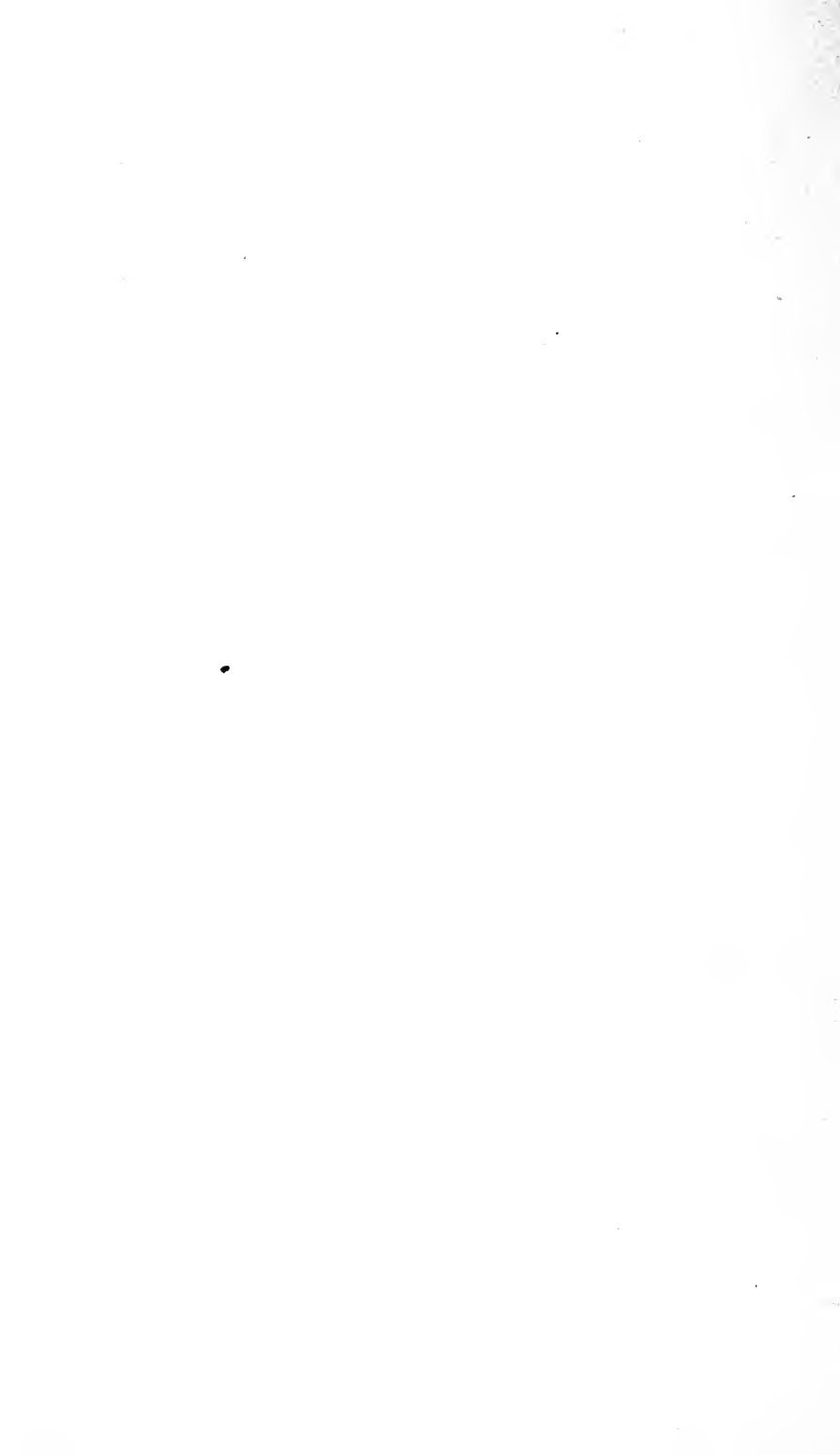
HIS EMINENCE

CARDINAL WISEMAN.

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P R E F A C E.

IN the autumn of last year a communication was made to His Eminence the late Cardinal Wiseman by H. Bence Jones, Esq., M.D., as Secretary of the Royal Institution of Great Britain, requesting him to deliver a lecture before that society. The Cardinal, with the prompt kindness usual to him, at once assented. The Shakespeare Tercentenary seemed to prescribe the subject, which His Eminence therefore selected.

The following pages were dictated by him in the last weeks of his life. The latter part was taken down in the beginning of January ; the earlier part was dictated on Saturday the fourteenth of that month. It was his last intellectual exertion, and it overtaxed his failing strength.

The Rev. Dr. Clifford, Chaplain to the Hospital of S. John and S. Elizabeth, who acted as his

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

I.

THERE have been some men in the world's history—and they are necessarily few—who by their deaths have deprived mankind of the power to do justice to their merits, in those particular spheres of excellence in which they had been pre-eminent. When the “immortal” Raphael for the last time laid down his palette, still moist with the brilliant colours which he had spread upon his unfinished masterpiece, destined to be exposed to admiration above his bier, he left none behind him who could worthily depict and transmit to us his beautiful lineaments: so that posterity has had to seek in his own paintings, among the guards at a sepulchre, or among the youthful disciples in an ancient school, some figure which may be considered as representing himself.

When his mighty rival, Michelangelo, cast down that massive chisel which no one after him was worthy or able to wield, none survived him who could venture to repeat in marble the rugged grandeur of his countenance ; but we imagine that we can trace in the head of some unfinished satyr, or in the sublime countenance of his Moses, the natural or the idealized type from which he drew his stern and noble inspirations.

And, to turn to another great art, when Mozart closed his last uncompleted score, and laid him down to pass from the regions of earthly to those of heavenly music, which none had so closely approached as he, the science over which he ruled could find no strains in which worthily to mourn him except his own, and was compelled to sing for the first time his own marvellous Requiem at his funeral.*

No less can it be said that when the pen dropped from Shakespeare's hand, when his last mortal illness mastered the strength of even his genius, the world was left powerless to describe in writing his noble and unrivalled characteristics. Hence we turn back upon himself, and endeavour to draw

* The same may be said of the celebrated Cimaroza.

from his own works the only true records of his genius and his mind.*

We apply to him phrases which he has uttered of others ; we believe that he must have involuntarily described himself, when he says,

“ Take him all in all,
We shall not look upon his like again ;”

or that he must even consciously have given a reflection of himself when he so richly represents to us “ the poet’s eye in a fine phrenzy rolling.” (“ *Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” act v., scene 1.)

But in fact, considering that the character of a man is like that which he describes “ as compounded of many simples extracted from many objects” (“ *As You Like It*,” act iv., scene 1), we naturally seek for those qualities which enter into his composition ; we look for them in his own

* Even in his lifetime this seems to have been foreseen. In 1664 an Epigram addressed to “ Master William Shakespeare,” and first published by Mr. Halliwell, occurred the following lines :—

“ Besides in places thy wit windes like Mæander,
When (*whence*) needy new composers borrow more
Thence (*than*) Terence doth from Plautus or Menander,
But to praise thee aright I want thy store.
Then let thine owne words thine owne worth upraise
And help t’ adorne thee with deserved baies.”

HALLIWELL’S *Life of Shakespeare*, p. 160.

pages ; we endeavour to cull from every part of his works such attributions of great and noble qualities to his characters, and unite them so as to form what we believe is his truest portrait. In truth, no other author has perhaps existed who has so completely reflected himself in his works as Shakespeare. For, as artists will tell us that every great master has more or less reproduced in his works characteristics to be found in himself, this is far more true of our greatest dramatist, whose genius, whose mind, whose heart, and whose entire soul live and breathe in every page and every line of his imperishable works. Indeed, as in these there is infinitely greater variety, and consequently greater versatility of power necessary to produce it, so must the amount of elements which enter into his composition represent changeable yet blending qualities beyond what the most finished master in any other art can be supposed to have possessed.

The positive and directly applicable materials which we possess for constructing a biography of this our greatest writer, are more scanty than have been collected to illustrate the life of many an inferior author. His contemporaries, his friends, perhaps admirers, have left us but few anecdotes

of his life, and have recorded but few traits of either his appearance or his character. Those who immediately succeeded him seem to have taken but little pains to collect early traditions concerning him, while yet they must have been fresh in the recollections of his fellow-countrymen, and still more of his fellow-townsmen.*

It appears as though they were scarcely conscious of the great and brilliant luminary of English literature which was shining still, or had but lately passed away; and as though they could not anticipate either the admiration which was to succeed their

* As evidence of this neglect we may cite the "Journal" of the Rev. John Ward, Incumbent of Stratford-upon-Avon, to which he was appointed in 1662. This diary, which has been published by Doctor Severn, "from the original MSS.," preserved in the library of the Medical Society of London, contains but two pages relating to Shakespeare, and those contain but scanty and unsatisfactory notices. I will quote only two sentences:

"Remember to peruse Shakespeare's Plays—bee much versed in them, that I may not bee ignorant in that matter, whether Dr. Heylin does well, in reckoning up the dramattick poets which have been famous in England, to omit Shakespeare" (p. 184). Shakespeare's daughter was still alive when this was written, as appears from the sentence that immediately follows: it seems to us wonderful that so soon after the Poet's death a shrewd and clever clergyman and physician (for Mr. Ward was both) should have known so little about his celebrated townsman's works or life.

duller perceptions of his unapproachable grandeur, or the eager desire which this would generate, of knowing even the smallest details of its rise, its appearance, its departure. For by the biography of Shakespeare one cannot understand the records of what he bought, of what he sold, or the recital of those acts which only confound him with the common mass which surrounded him, and make him appear as the worthy burgess or the thrifty merchant; though even about the ordinary common-place portions of his life such uncertainty exists, that doubts have been thrown on the very genuineness of that house which he is supposed to have inhabited.

Now, it is the characteristic individualizing quality, actions, and mode of executing his works, to whatever class of excellence he may belong, that we long to be familiar with in order to say that we know the man. What matters it to us that he paid so many marks or shillings to purchase a homestead in Stratford-upon-Avon? The simple autograph of his name is now worth all the sums that he thus expended. One single line of one of his dramas, written in his own hand, would be worth to his admirers all the sums which are known to have passed between him and others.

What has become of the goodly folios which must have once existed written in his own hand? Where are the books annotated or even scratched by his pen, from which he drew the subjects and sometimes the substance of his dramas? What Vandalism destroyed the first, or dispersed the second of these valuable treasures? How is it that we know nothing of his method of composition? Was it in solitude and sacred seclusion, self-imprisoned for hours beyond the reach of the turmoil of the street or the domestic sounds of home? Or were his unrivalled works produced in scraps of time and fugitive moments, even perhaps in the waiting-room of the theatre, or the brawling or jovial sounds of the tavern?

Was he silent, thoughtful, while his fertile brain was seething and heaving in the fermentation of his glorious conceptions; so that men should have said—"Hush! Shakespeare is at work with some new and mighty imaginings!" or wore he always that light and careless spirit which often belongs to the spontaneous facility of genius; so that his comrades may have wondered when, and where, and how his grave characters, his solemn scenes, his fearful catastrophes, and his sublime maxims of original wisdom, were conceived, planned, matured, and

finally written down, to rule for ever the world of letters? Almost the only fact connected with his literary life which has come down to us is one which has been recorded, perhaps with jealousy, certainly with ill-temper, by his friend Ben Jonson—that he wrote with overhaste, and hardly ever erased a line, though it would have been better had he done so with many.

This almost total absence of all external information, this drying-up of the ordinary channels of personal history, forces us to seek for the character and the very life of Shakespeare in his own works. But how difficult, in analysing the complex constitution of such a man's principles, motives, passions, and affections, to discriminate between what he has drawn from himself, and what he has created by the force of his imagination. Dealing habitually with fictions, sometimes in their noblest, sometimes in their vilest forms—here gross and even savage, there refined and sometimes ethereal, how shall we discover what portions of them were copied from the glass which he held before himself, what from the magic mirrors across which flitted illusive or fanciful imagery? The work seems hopeless. It is not like that of the printer, who, from a chaotic heap of seemingly unmeaning lead, draws out

letter after letter, and so disposes them that they shall make senseful and even brilliant lines. It is more like the hopeless labour of one who, from the fragments of a tessellated pavement, should try to draw the elegant and exquisitely tinted figure which once it bore.

This difficulty of appreciating, and still more of delineating, the character of our great poet, makes him, without perhaps an exception, the most difficult literary theme in English letters.

How to reduce the subject to a lecture seems indeed a literal paradox. But when to this difficulty is added that of an impossible compression into narrow limits of the widest and vastest compass ever embraced by any one man's genius, it must appear an excess of rashness in anyone to presume that he can do justice to the subject on which I am addressing you.

It seems, therefore, hardly wonderful that even the last year, dedicated naturally to the tercentenary commemoration of William Shakespeare, should have passed over without any public eulogy of his greatness, in this our metropolis. It seemed, indeed, as if the magnitude of that one man's genius was too oppressive for this generation. It was not, I believe, an undervaluing of his merits

which produced the frustration of efforts, and the disappointment of expectations, that seemed to put to rout and confusion, or rather to paralyse the exertions so strenuously commenced to mark the year as a great epoch in England's literary history. I believe, on the contrary, that the dimensions of Shakespeare had grown so immeasurably in the estimation of his fellow-countrymen, that the proportions of his genius to all that had followed him, and all that surround us, had grown so enormously in the judgment and feeling of the country, from the nobleman to the workman, that the genius of the man oppressed us, and made us feel that all our multiplied resources of art and speech were unequal to his worthy commemoration. No plan proposed for this purpose seemed adequate to attain it. Nothing solid and permanent that could either come up to his merits or to our aspirations seemed to be within the grasp either of the arts or of the wealth of our country. The year has passed away, and Shakespeare remains without any monument, except that which, by his wonderful writings, he has raised for himself. Even the research after a site fit for the erection of a monument to him, in the city of squares, of gardens, and of parks, seemed only to work perplexity and hopelessness.

Presumptuous as it may appear, the claim to connect myself with that expired and extinct movement is my only apology for my appearing before you. If, a year after its time, I take upon myself the eulogy of Shakespeare, if I appear to come forward as with a funeral oration, to give him, in a manner, posthumous glory, it is because my work has dropped out of its place, and not because I have inopportunately misplaced it. In the course of the last year, it was proposed to me, both directly and indirectly, to deliver a lecture on Shakespeare. I was bold enough to yield my assent, and thus felt that I had contracted an obligation to the memory of the bard, as well as to those who thought that my sharing what was done for his honour would possess any value. A task undertaken becomes a duty unfulfilled. When, therefore, it was proposed to me to perform my portion of the homage which I considered due to him, though it was to be a month too late, I felt it would be cowardice to shrink from its performance.

For in truth the undertaking required some courage; and to retire before its difficulties might be stigmatised as a dastardly timidity. It is a work of courage at any time and in any place to

undertake a lecture upon Shakespeare, more in fact than to venture on the delivery of a series. The latter gives scope for the thousand things which one would wish to say—it affords ample space for apposite illustration, and it enables one to enrich the subject with the innumerable and inimitable beauties that are flung like gems or flowers over every page of his magnificent works. But in the midst of public, or rather universal, celebration of a national and secular festival in his honour, in the presence probably of the most finished literary characters in this highly-educated country, still more certainly before numbers of those whom the nation acknowledges as deeply read in the works of our poet as the most accomplished critic of any age has been in the writings of the Classics—men who have introduced into our literature a class-name—that of “Shakespearian scholars,”—to have ventured to speak on this great theme might seem to have required, not courage, but temerity. Why, it might have been justly asked, do none of those who have consumed their lives in the study of him, not page by page, but line by line, who have pressed his sweet fruits between their lips till they have absorbed all their lusciousness, who have made his words their study, his thoughts their

meditation, why does not one at least among them stand forward now, and leave for posterity the record of his matured observation? Perhaps I may assign the reason which I have before, that they know, too, the unapproachable grandeur of the theme, and the rare powers which are required to grasp and to hold it.

Be it so; but at any rate if in the presence of others so much more capable it would have been rash to speak, to express one's thoughts, when there is no competition, may be pardonable at least.

And yet, when everybody else is silent, it may be very naturally asked have I a single claim to put forward upon your attention and indulgence? I think I may have *one*; though I fear that when I mention it, it may be considered either a paradox or a refutation of my pretensions. My claim, then, to be heard and borne with is this—that I have never in my life seen Shakespeare acted; I have never heard his eloquent speeches declaimed by gifted performers; I have not listened to his noble poetry as uttered by the kings or queens of tragedy; I have not witnessed his grand, richly-concerted scenes endowed with life by the graceful gestures, the classical attitudes, the contrasting

emotions, and the pointed emphasis of those who in modern times may be considered to have even added to that which his genius produced ; I know nothing of the original and striking readings or renderings of particular passages by masters of mimic art ; I know him only on his flat page, as he is represented in immoveable, featureless, unemotional type.

Nor am I acquainted with him surrounded, perhaps sometimes sustained, but, at any rate, worthily adorned and enhanced in accessory beauty by the magic illusion of scenic decorations, the splendid pageantry which he simply hints at, but which, I believe, has been now realised to its most ideal exactness and richness—banquets, tournaments, and battles, with the almost deceptive accuracy of costume and of architecture. When I hear of all these additional ornaments hung around his noble works, the impression which they make upon my mind creates a deeper sense of amazement and admiration, how dramas written for the “Globe” Theatre, wretchedly lighted, incapable of grandeur, even from want of space, and without those mechanical and artistical resources which belong to a later age, should be capable of bearing all this additional weight of lustre and magnificence

without its being necessary to alter a word, still less a passage, from their original delivery.* This exhibits the nicely-balanced point of excellence which is equally poised between simplicity and gorgeousness ; which can retain its power and beauty, whether stript to its barest form or loaded with exuberant appurtenances.

After having said thus much of my own probably unenvied position, I think I shall not be wrong in assuming that none of Shakespeare's enthusiastic admirers, one of whom I profess myself to be, and that few of my audience are in this

* The chorus, which serves as a prologue to "King Henry V.," shows how Shakespeare's own mind keenly felt the deficiencies of his time, and almost anticipatively wrote for the effects which a future age might supply :

" But pardon, gentles all,
This flat unraised spirit that hath dar'd,
On this unworthy scaffold, to bring forth
So great an object. Can this cock-pit hold
The vasty fields of France ? Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt.

.
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts ;
Into a thousand parts divide one man,
And make imaginary puissance :
Think, when we talk of horses, that ye see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth ;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings."

exceptional position. They will probably consider this a disadvantage on my side ; and to some extent I must acknowledge it—for Shakespeare wrote to be acted, and not to be read.

But on the other hand is it not something to have approached this wonderful man, and to have communed with him in silence and in solitude, face to face, alone with him alone ; to have read and studied and meditated on him in early youth, without gloss or commentary, or preface or glossary ? For such was my good or evil fortune ; not during the still hours of night, but during that stiller portion of an Italian afternoon, when silence is deeper than in the night, under a bright and sultry sun, when all are at rest, all around you hushed to the very footsteps in a well-peopled house, except the unquelled murmuring of a fountain beneath orange trees, which mingled thus the most delicate of fragrance with the most soothing of sounds, both stealing together through the half-closed windows of wide and lofty corridors. Is there not more of that reverence and that relish which constitute the classical taste to be derived from the concentration of thought and feelings which the perusal of the simple unmarred and unoverlaid text procures ; when you can ponder on a verse, can linger over a word, can

repeat mentally and even orally with your own deliberation and your own emphasis, whenever dignity, beauty, or wisdom invite you to pause, or compel you to ruminate?

In fact, were you desired to give your judgment on the refreshing water of a pure fountain, you would not care to taste it from a richly-jewelled and delicately-chased cup; you would not consent to have it mingled with the choicest wine, nor flavoured by a single drop of the most exquisite essence; you would not have it chilled with ice, or gently attempered by warmth. No, you would choose the most transparent crystal vessel, however homely; you would fill at the very cleft of the rock from which it bubbles fresh and bright, and drink it yet sparkling, and beading with its own air-pearls the walls of the goblet. Nay, is not an opposite course that which the poet himself censures as “wasteful, ridiculous excess?”

“To gild refined gold, to paint the lily;
To throw a perfume on the violet.

.
Or with a taper light

To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to varnish.”

(“King John,” act iv., scene 2.)

You will easily understand, from this long and almost apologetic preamble, in the first place, that

I take it for granted that I am addressing an audience which is not assembled to receive elementary or new information concerning England's greatest poet. On the contrary, I believe myself to stand before many who are able to judge, rather than merely accept, my opinions, and in the presence of an assembly exclusively composed of his admirers, thoroughly conversant with his works. A further consequence is this, that my lecture will not consist of extracts—still less of recitations of any of those beautiful passages which occur in every play of Shakespeare. The most celebrated of these are present to the mind of every English scholar, from his school-boy days to his maturer studies.

II.

It would be superfluous for a lecturer on Shakespeare to put to himself the question, What place do you intend to give to the subject of your discourse in the literature of England or of Europe? Whatever difference of opinion may exist elsewhere, I believe that in this country only one answer will be given. Among our native writers no one

questions that Shakespeare is supremely pre-eminent, and most of us will probably assign him as lofty a position in the whole range of modern European literature. Perhaps no other nation possesses among its writers any one name to which there is no rival claims, nor even an approximation of equality, to make a balance against it. Were we to imagine in England a Walhalla erected to contain the effigies of great men, and were one especial hall to contain those of our most eminent dramatists, it must needs be so constructed as to have one central niche. Were a similar structure prepared in France, it would be natural to place in equal prominence at least two figures, or, in classical language, two different muses of Tragedy and of Comedy would have to be separately represented. But in England, assign what place we may to those who have excelled in either branch in mimic art, the highest excellence in both would be found centered in one man; and from him on either side would have to range the successful cultivators of the drama.

But this claim to so undisputed an elevation does not rest upon his merits only in this field of our literature. Shakespeare has established his claim to the noblest position in English literature on a

wider and more solid basis than the mere composition of skilful plays could deserve. As the great master of our language, as almost its regenerator, quite its refiner—as the author whose use of a word stamps it with the mark of purest English coinage—whose employment of a phrase makes it household and proverbial—whose sententious sayings, flowing without effort from his mind, seem almost sacred, and are quoted as axioms or maxims indisputable—as the orator whose speeches, not only apt, but, natural to the lips from which they issue, are more eloquent than the discourses of senators or finished public speakers—as the poet whose notes are richer, more wondrously varied than those of the greatest professed bards—as the writer who has run through the most varied ways and to the greatest extent through every department of literature and learning, through the history of many nations, their domestic manners, their characteristics, and even their personal distinctives, and who seems to have visited every part of nature, to have intuitively studied the heavens and the earth—as the man, in fine, who has shown himself supreme in so many things, superiority in any one of which gains reputation in life and glory after death, he is pre-eminent above all, and beyond the reach of envy or jealousy.

And if no other nation can show us another man whose head rises above all their other men of letters, as Shakespeare does over ours, they cannot pretend, by the accumulation of separated excellences, to put in competition with him a type rather than a realization of possible worth. Until, therefore, some other writer can be produced, no matter from what nation, who unites in himself personally these gifts of our bard in an equally sublime degree, his stature overtops them all, wherever born and however celebrated.

The question, however, may be raised—Is he so securely placed upon his pedestal that a rival may not one day thrust him from it?—is he so secure upon his throne that a rebel may not usurp it? To these interrogations I answer unhesitatingly—Yes.

In the first place, there have only been two poets in the world before Shakespeare who have attained the same position with him. Each came at the moment which closed the volume of the period past and opened that of a new epoch. Of what preceded Homer we can know but little; the songs by bards or rhapsodists had, no doubt, preceded him, and prepared the way for the first and greatest epic. This, it is acknowledged, has never been

surpassed ; it became the standard of language, the steadfast rule of versification, and the model of poetical composition. His supremacy, once attained, was shaken by no competition ; it was as well assured after a hundred years as it has been by thousands. Dante again stood between the remnants of the old Roman civilization and the construction of a new and Christian system of arts and letters. He, too, consolidated the floating fragments of an indefinite language, and with them built and thence himself fitted and adorned that stately vessel which bears him through all the regions of life and of death, of glory, of trial, and of perdition.

A word found in Dante is classical to the Italian ear ; a form, however strange in grammar, traced to him, is considered justifiable if used by any modern sonneteer.* He holds the place in his own country which Shakespeare does in ours ; not only is his *terza rima*, considered inimitable, but the concentration of brilliant imagery in our words, the flashes of his great thoughts and the copious variety of his learning, marvellous in his age, make his volume be to this day the delight of every

* Any one acquainted with Mastrofini's "Dictionary of Italian Verbs" will understand this.

refined intelligence and every polished mind in Italy.

And he, too, like Homer, notwithstanding the magnificent poets who succeeded him, has never for a moment lost that fascination which he alone exercises over the domain of Italian poetry. He was as much its ruler in his own age as he is in the present.

In like manner the two centuries and more which have elapsed since Shakespeare's death have as completely confirmed him in his legitimate command as the same period did his two only real predecessors. No one can possibly either be placed in a similar position or come up to his great qualities, except at the expense of the destruction of our present civilization, the annihilation of its past traditions, the resolution of our language into jargon, and its regeneration, by a new birth, into something "more rich and strange" than the powerful idiom which so splendidly combines the Saxon and the Norman elements. Should such a devastation and reconstruction take place, whether they come from New Zealand or from Siberia, then there may spring up the poet of that time and condition who may be the fourth in that great series of unrivalled bards, but will no more inter-

fere with his predecessor's rights than Dante or Shakespeare does with those of Homer.

But further, we may truly say that the legislator of a people can be but one, and, as such, can have no rival beyond his own shores. Solon, Lycurgus, and Numa are the only three men in profane history who have reached the dignity of this singular title. The first seized on the character of the bland and polished Athenians, and framed his code in such harmony with it, that no subsequent laws, even in the periods of most corrupt relaxation, could efface their primitive stamp, cease to make the Republic proud of their lawgiver's name.

Lycurgus understood the stern and almost savage hardihood and simplicity of the Spartan disposition, and perpetuated it and regulated it by his harsh and unfeeling system, of which, notwithstanding which, the Lacedæmonian was proud. And so Numa Pompilius comprehended the readiness of the infant Republic, sprung from so doubtful and discreditable a parentage, to discover a noble descent, and connect its birth and education with gods and heroes, took hold of this weakness for the sanction of his legislation, and feigned his conferences with the nymph Egeria as the sources of his

wisdom. No ; whatever may become of kings, legislators are never dethroned.

And so is Shakespeare the unquestioned legislator of modern literary art. No one will contend that, without certain detriment, it would be possible for a modern writer, especially of dramatic fiction, to go back beyond him and endeavour to establish a pre-Shakesperian School of English literature, as we have the pre-Raphaelite in art. Struggle and writhe as any genius may—even if endowed with giant strength—it will be but as the battle of the Titans against Jove. Huge rocks will be rolled down upon him, and the lightning from Shakespeare's hand will assuredly tear his laurels, if it do not strike his head. Byron could not appreciate the dramatic genius of Shakespeare ; perhaps his sympathies ranged more freely among Corsairs and Suliotes than among purer and nobler spirits. Certainly he speaks of him with a superciliousness which betrays his inability fully to comprehend him.* And yet would "Manfred" have existed if

* Lord Byron thus writes to Mr. Murray, July 14th, 1821 :— "I trust that Sardanapalus will not be mistaken for a political play. . . . You will find all this very unlike Shakespeare ; and so much the better, in one sense, for I look upon him to be the worst of models, though the most extraordinary of writers."—MOORE'S *Life of Lord Byron*.

the romantic drama and the spirit-agency of Shakespeare had not given it life and rule? So in other nations. I shall probably quote to you the sentiments of foreign writers of highest eminence concerning Shakespeare, not as authorities, but as illustrations of what I may say.

Singularly enough, the greatest of German modern writers has nowhere recorded a full and deliberate opinion on our poet. But who can doubt that "Götz von Berlichingen with the Iron Hand," and even the grand and tender "Faust," and no less Schiller's "Wallenstein," belong to the family of Shakespeare, are remotely offsprings of his genius, and have to be placed as tributary garlands round his pedestal. To imagine Shakespeare even in intention removed from his sovereignty, would be a treachery parallel only to that of *Lear* dethroned by his own daughters.

But still more may we say that, in all such positions as that which we have assigned to Shakespeare, there has always been a culminating point to which succeeds decline—if not downfall. It is so in art. Immediately after the death of Raphael, and the dispersion of his school, art took a downward direction, and has never risen again to the same height. And while he marks the highest

elevation ever reached in the arts of Europe, a similar observation will apply to their particular schools. Leonardo and Luini in Lombardy; the Carracci in Bologna; Fra Angelico in Umbria; Garofalo in Ferrara, not only take the place of chiefs in their respective districts, but mark the period from which degeneracy has to date. And so surely is it in our case, whatever may have been the course of literature which led up to Shakespeare, without pronouncing judgment on Spenser, or "rare Ben Jonson," it is certain that after him, although England has possessed great poets, there stands not one forward among them as Shakespeare's competitor. Milton, and Dryden, and Addison, and Rowe have given us specimens of high dramatic writing of no mean quality; others as well, and even these have written much and nobly, in lofty as in familiar verse; yet not one has the public judgment of the nation placed on a level with him. The intermediate space from them to our own times has left only the traces of a weak and enervated school. It would be unbecoming to speak disparagingly of the poets of the present age; but no one, I believe, has ventured to consider them as superior to the noble spirits of our Augus-

tan age. The easy descent from the loftiest eminence is not easily reclinbed.

Surely, then, we may consider Shakespeare, as an ancient mythologist would have done, as "enskied" among "the invulnerable clouds," where no shaft, even of envy, can assail him. From this elevation we may safely predict that he never can be plucked.

III.

The next point which seems to claim attention is the very root of all that I have said, or shall have still to say. To what does Shakespeare owe this supremacy, or whence flow all the extraordinary qualities which we attribute to him? You are all prepared with the answer in one single word—his GENIUS.

The genius of Shakespeare is our familiar thought and ready expression when we study him, and when we characterise him. Nevertheless, simple and intelligible as is the word, it is extremely difficult to analyse or to define it. Yet everything that is great and beautiful in his writings seems to require an explanation of the cause to which it owes its origin.

One great characteristic of genius easily and universally admitted is, that it is a gift, and not an acquisition. It belongs inherently to the person possessing it; it cannot be transmitted by heritage; it cannot be infused by parental affection; it cannot be bestowed by earliest care; neither can it be communicated by the most finished culture or the most studied education. It must be congenital, or rather inborn to its possessor. It is as much a living, a natural power, as is reason to every man. As surely as the very first germ of the plant contains in itself the faculty of one day evolving from itself leaves, flowers, and fruit, so does genius hold, however hidden, however unseen, the power to open, to bring forth, and to mature what other men cannot do, but what to it is instinctive and almost spontaneous. It may begin to manifest itself with the very dawn of reason; it may remain asleep for years, till a spark, perhaps accidentally, kindles up into a sudden and irrepressible splendour, that unseen intellectual fuel which has been almost unknown to its unambitious owner.

In our own minds we easily distinguish between the highest abilities or the most rare attainments, when the fruit of education and of application, and

what we habitually distinguish as the manifestation of genius. But still we do not find it so easy to reduce to words this mental distinction; the one, after all, however gracefully and however brightly, walks upon the earth, adorning it by the good or fair things which it scatters on its way; the other has wings, and flies above the surface—it is like the aurora of Homer or of Thorwaldsen, which, as it flies above the plane of mortal actions, sheds down its flowers along its brilliant path, upon those worthy to gaze upwards towards it. We connect in our minds with genius the ideas of flashing splendour and eccentric movement. It is an intellectual meteor, the laws of which cannot be defined or reduced to any given theory. We regard it with a certain awe, and leave it to soar or to droop, to shine or disappear, to dash irregularly first in one direction and then in another; no one dare curb it or direct it; but all feel sure that its course, however inexplicable, is subject to higher and controlling rule. But in order to define more closely what we in reality understand by genius, it may be well to consider its action in divided and more restricted spheres of activity. For although we habitually attribute this singular quality to many, and often but on light grounds,

it is seldom that we do so seriously and deliberately without some qualifying epithet. We speak of a military genius, of a mechanical genius, of a poetical genius, of a musical genius, or of an artistic genius. All these expressions contain a restrictive clause. We do not understand when we use them that the person to whom they were attributed possessed any power beyond the limits of a particular sphere. We do not mean by the use of the word genius that the soldier knew anything of poetry, or the printer of mechanism. We understand that each in his own profession or stage of excellence possessed a complete elevation over the bulk of those who followed the same pursuits; a superiority so visible, so acknowledged, and so clearly individual, that no one else considered it inferiority, still less felt shame at not being able to rise to the same level. They gather round them acknowledged disciples and admirers, who rather glory to have been guided by their teaching, and formed on their example.

And in what consisted that complete though limited excellence? If I might venture to express a judgment, I would say that genius in these different courses of science or art may be defined a natural sympathy

with all that relates to each of them, with the power of giving full and certain execution to the mental conception. The military genius is one who, either untrained by studious preparation, or else starting out of the lines in which many were ranged level with himself, seizes the staff of command, and receives the homage of comrades and superiors. While others have been plodding through the long drill of theory and of practice, he is found to have discovered a new system of the science, bold, irregular, but successful. But to possess this genius, there must be a universal sympathy with all that relates to its own peculiar province. The military genius of which we are speaking must embrace or acquire that which relates to the soldier's life and duty, from the *dress* of the single soldier, from his duties in the sentry-box, or on the picquet, to the practice of the regiment and the evolutions of a field-day; from the complete command of tens of thousands on the battle-field, with an eagle's eye and a lion's heart, to the scientific planning, on the chessboard of an empire, of the campaign, which he meditates move by move and check by check, till the final victory is crowned in the capital city. He who has not given proof of his being equal to all this, has not made good his claim to military

genius. But such a one will find, wherever he puts his hand, generals and marshals, each able to command a host, or to take his place in his roughest of enterprises.

I need not pass through other forms of genius to reach similar results ; Stephenson, from the labour of the mine, creating that system of mechanical motion, which may be said to have subdued the world, and bound the earth in iron links ; Mozart, giving concerts at the age of seven, that astonished grey-headed musicians ; Raphael, before the ordinary age of finished pupilage, master of every known detail in art of oil or fresco, drawing, expression, and grand composition ; Giotto, caught in the field as a young shepherd by Cimabue, drawing his sheep upon a stone, and soon becoming the master of modern art.* These and many others repeat to us what I have said of the military genius—an inborn capacity, comprehensive and complete, with the power

* The early manifestation of artistic power is so frequent and well known, that it would be superfluous to enumerate other instances. The expression "*anch' io son pittore*" is become proverbial. One of the Carracci, on being translated from an inferior profession to the family studio, was found at once to possess the pictorial skill of his race. At the present, Mintropf at Düsseldorf, and Ackermann at Berlin, are both instances of very high artists, the one in drawing the other in sculpture, both originally shepherds.

of fully carrying out the suggestions of mind. Had there been a single portion of their pursuits in which they did not excel, if the result of their work had not exhibited the happy union and concord of the many qualities requisite for its perfection, they never would have attained the attribution of genius.

If this sympathy with one branch of higher pursuits passes beyond it and associates with it a similar facility of acquisition and execution in some other and distinct art or science, it is clear that the claim to genius is higher and more extensive. Raphael was before the world a painter, but he could scarcely have been so without embracing every other department of art. Before the science of perspective was matured or popularly known, when, in consequence, defects are to be found in the disposition of figures, and in the adjustment of aerial distances,* his architecture shows an instinctive familiarity with its rules and proportions; a proof that he possessed an architectural eye. And consequently the one statue which he is supposed to have carved, and the one palace which he is

* See Mr. Lloyd's article on "Raphael's School of Athens," in Mr. Woodward's *Fine Art Quarterly Review*, January 1864, p. 67.

said to have built, show how easily he could have undertaken and executed beautiful works in either of those two classes of art. In Orcagna and Michelangelo we have the three branches of art supremely united; and the second of these adds poetry and literature to his artistic excellence. In like manner, Leonardo has left proof of most varied and accurate mechanical as well as literary genius.

It is evident, however, that while a genius has its point of concentration, every remove from this, though wider, will be fainter and less complete. We may describe it as Shakespeare himself describes glory, and say :

“ *Genius* is like a circle in the water,
Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself,
Till, by broad spreading, it disperse to naught.”
(“ Henry VI.,” act i., scene 3.)

The sympathies with more remote subjects and pursuits will be rather the means of illustration, adornment, and pleasing variety, than for the essential requirements of the principal aim. But though less minute in their application, in the hand of genius they will be wonderfully accurate and apt.

IV.

All that I have been saying is applicable in the most complete and marvellous way to Shakespeare's genius. His sympathies are universal, perfect in their own immediate use, infinitely varied, and strikingly beautiful, when they reach remoter objects. And hence, though at first sight he might be classified among those who have displayed a literary genius, he stretches his mind and his feelings so beyond them on every side, that to him, almost, perhaps, beyond any other man, the simple distinctive, without any qualification, belongs. No one need fear to call Shakespeare simply a grand, a sublime genius.

The centre-point of his sympathies is clearly his dramatic art. From this they expand, for many degrees, with scarce perceptible diminution, till they lose themselves in far distant, and, to him, unexplored space. This nucleus of his genius has certainly never been equalled before or since. Its essence consists in what is the very soul of the dramatic idea, the power to throw himself into the situation, the circumstances, the nature, the acquired habits, the feelings, true or fictitious,

of every character which he introduces. This forms, in fact, the most perfect of sympathies. We do not, of course, use the word in that more usual sense of harmony of affection, or consent of feeling. Shakespeare has sympathy as complete for *Shylock* or *Iago*, as he has for *Arthur*, or *King Lear*. For a time he lives in the astute villain as in the innocent child ; he works his entire power of thought into intricacies of the traitor's brain ; he makes his heart beat in concord with the usurer's sanguinary spite, and then, like some beautiful creature in the animal world, draws himself out of the hateful evil, and is himself again ; and able, even, often to hold his own noble and gentle qualities as a mirror, or exhibit the loftiest, the most generous, and amiable examples of our nature. And this is all done without study, and apparently without effort. His infinitely varied characters come naturally into their places, never for a moment lose their proprieties, their personality, and the exact flexibility which results from the necessary combination in every man of many qualities. From the beginning to the end each one is the same, yet reflecting in himself the lights and shadows which flit around him.

This extraordinary versatility stands in striking

contrast with the dramatic productions of other countries. The Greek tragedian is Greek throughout—his subjects, his mythology, his sentences, play wonderfully indeed, but yet restrictedly, within a given sphere. And Rome is but the imitator in all its literature of its great mistress and model.

“Graius eloquium, Graius dedit ore rotundo,
Musa loqui.”

Even through the French school, with the strict adherence to the ancient rule of the unities, seems to have descended the partiality for what may be called the chastely classical subjects. Not so with Shakespeare.

Who, a stranger might ask, is the man, and where was he born, and where did he live, that not only his acts and scenes are placed in any age, or in any land, but that he can fill his stage with the very living men of the time and place represented, make them move as easily as if he held them in strings ; and make them speak not only with general conformity to their common position, but with individual and distinctive propriety, so that each is different from the rest ? Did he live in ancient Rome, strolling the Forum, or climbing the Capitol ; hear ancient matrons converse with modest dignity ;

listen to conspirators among the columns of its porticos ; mingle among senators round Pompey's statue ; or with plebeians crowding to hear Brutus or Antony harangue ? Was he one accustomed to idle in the Piazza of St. Mark, or shoot his gondola under the Rialto ? Or was he a knight or even archer in the fields of France or England during the period of the Plantagenets or Tudors, and witnessed and wrote down the great deeds of those times, and knew intimately and personally each puissant lord who distinguished himself by his valour, by his wisdom, or even by his crimes ? Did he live in the courts of princes, perchance holding some office which enabled him to listen to the grave utterances of kings and their counsellors, or to the witty sayings of court jesters ? Did he consort with banished princes, and partake of their sports or their sufferings ? In fine, did he live in great cities, or in shepherds' cottages, or in fields and woods ; and does he date from John and live on to the eighth Henry—a thread connecting in himself the different epochs of mediæval England ? One would almost say so ; or multiply one man into many, whose works have been united under one man.

This ubiquity, if we may so call it, of Shake-

spere's sympathies, constitutes the unlimited extent and might of his dramatic genius. It would be difficult to imagine where a boundary line could at length have been drawn, beyond which nothing original, nothing new, and nothing beautiful, could be supposed to have come forth from his mind. We are compelled to say that his genius was inexhaustible.

V.

This rare and wonderful faculty becomes more interesting if we follow it into further details.

I remember an anecdote of Garrick, who, in company with another performer of some eminence, was walking in the country, and about to enter a village. "Let us pass off," said the younger comedian to his more distinguished companion, "as two intoxicated fellows." They did so, apparently with perfect success, being saluted by the jeers and abuse of the inhabitants. When they came forth at the other end of the village, the younger performer asked Garrick how he had fulfilled his part. "Very well," was the reply, "except that you were not perfectly tipsy in your legs."

Now, in Shakespeare there is no danger of a similar defect. Whatever his character is intended to be, it is carried out to its very extremities. Nothing is forgotten, nothing overlooked. Many of you, no doubt, are aware that a controversy has long existed, whether the madness of *Hamlet* is intended by Shakespeare to be real or simulated. If a dramatist wished to represent one of his persons as feigning madness, that assumed condition would be naturally desired by the writer to be as like as possible to the real affliction. If the other persons associated with him could at once discover that the madness was put on, of course the entire action would be marred, and the object for which the pretended madness was designed would be defeated by the discovery. How consummate must be the poet's art, who can have so skilfully described, to the minutest symptoms, the mental malady of a great mind, as to leave it uncertain to the present day, even among learned physicians versed in such maladies, whether *Hamlet's* madness was real or assumed.

This controversy may be said to have been brought to a close by one of the ablest among those in England who have every opportunity of studying the almost innumerable shades through which aliena-

tion of mind can pass.* And so delicate are the changeful characteristics which Shakespeare describes, that Dr. Conolly considers that a twofold form of disease is placed before us in the Danish prince. He concludes that he was labouring under real madness, yet able to put on a fictitious and artificial derangement for the purposes which he kept in view. Passing through act by act and scene by scene, analysing, with experienced eye, each new symptom as it occurs, dividing and anatomatising, with the finest scalpel, every fibre of his brain. He exhibits, step by step, the transitional characters of the natural disease in a mind naturally, and by education, great and noble, but thrown off his pivot by the anguish of his sufferings and the strain of aroused passion. And to this is superadded another and not genuine affection, which serves its turn with that estranged mind when it suits it to act, more especially that part which the natural ailment did not suffice for.

* "A Study of Hamlet," by John Conolly, M.D., London, 1863. In p. 52 the author quotes Mr. Coleridge and M. Killemain as holding the opinion that Shakespeare has "contrived to blend both (feigned and real madness) in the extraordinary character of *Hamlet*; and to join together the light of reason, the cunning of intentional error, and the involuntary disorder of a soul."

Now, Dr. Conolly considers these symptoms so accurately as well as minutely described, that he throws out the conjecture that Shakespeare may have borrowed the account of them from some unknown papers by his son-in-law, Dr. Hall.

But let it be remembered that in those days mental phenomena were by no means accurately examined or generally known. There was but little attention paid to the peculiar forms of monomania, or to its treatment, beyond restraint and often cruelty. The poor idiot was allowed, if harmless, to wander about the village or the country to drivel or gibber amidst the teasing or ill-natured treatment of boys or rustics. The poor maniac was chained or tied in some wretched out-house, at the mercy of some heartless guardian, with no protector but the constable. Shakespeare could not be supposed, in the little town of Stratford, nor indeed in London itself, to have had opportunities of studying the influence and the appearance of mental derangement of a high-minded and finely-cultivated prince. How then did Shakespeare contrive to paint so highly-finished and yet so complex an image? Simply by the exercise of that strong sympathetic will which enabled him to transport, or rather to transmute, himself into

another personality. While this character was strongly before him he changed himself into a maniac; he felt intuitively what would be his own thought, what his feelings, were he in that situation; he played with himself the part of the madman, with his own grand mind as the basis of its action; he grasped on every side the imagery which he felt would have come into his mind, beautiful even when disordered, sublime even when it was groveling, brilliant even when dulled, and clothed it in words of fire and of tenderness, with a varied rapidity which partakes of wildness and of sense. He needed not to look for a model out of himself, for it cost him no effort to change the angle of his mirror and sketch his own countenance awry. It was but little for him to pluck away the crown from reason and contemplate it dethroned.

Before taking leave of Dr. Conolly's most interesting monography, I will allow myself to make only one remark. Having determined to represent *Hamlet* in this anomalous and perplexing condition, it was of the utmost importance to the course and end of this sublime drama, that one principal incident should be most decisively separated from *Hamlet's* reverse of mind. Had it been possible to attribute the appearance of the *Ghost*, as the *Queen*,

his mother, does attribute it in the fifth act, to the delusion of his bewildered phantasy, the whole groundwork of the drama would have crumbled beneath its superincumbent weight. Had the spectre been seen by *Hamlet*, or by him first, we should have been perpetually troubled with the doubt whether or not it was the hallucination of a distracted, or the invention of a deceitful brain. But Shakespeare felt the necessity of making this apparition be held for a reality, and therefore he makes it the very first incident in his tragedy, antecedent to the slightest symptom of either natural or affected derangement, and makes it first be seen by two witnesses together, and then conjointly by a third unbelieving and fearless witness. It is the testimony of these three which first brings to the knowledge of the incredulous prince this extraordinary occurrence. One may doubt whether any other writer has ever made a ghost appear successively to those whom we may call the wrong persons, before showing himself to the one whom alone he cared to visit. The extraordinary exigencies of Shakespeare's plot rendered necessary this unusual fiction. And it serves, moreover, to give the only colour of justice to acts which

otherwise must have appeared unqualified as mad freaks or frightful crimes.

What Dr. Conolly has done for *Hamlet* and *Ophelia*, Dr. Bucknill had previously performed on a more extensive scale. In his "Psychology of Shakespeare,"* he has minutely investigated the mental condition of *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Timon*, and other characters. On *Hamlet* he seems inclined to take a different view from Dr. Conolly; inasmuch as he considers the simulated madness the principal feature, and the natural unsoundness which it is impossible to overlook as secondary. But this eminent physician, well known for his extensive studies of insanity, bears similar testimony to the extraordinary accuracy of Shakespeare's delineations of mental diseases; the nicety with which he traces their various steps in one individual, the accuracy with which he distinguishes these morbid affections in different persons. He seems unable to account for the exact minuteness in any other way than by external observation. He acknowledges that "indefinable possession of genius, call it spiritual tact or insight, or whatever term may suggest itself, by which the great lords of mind estimate all phases of mind with little

* Page 58 and 100.

aid from reflected light," as the mental instrument through which Shakespeare looked upon others at a distance, or within reach of minute observation. Still he seems to think that Shakespeare must have had many opportunities of observing mental phenomena. I own I am more inclined to think that the process by which the genius of Shakespeare reached this painful yet strange accuracy was rather that of introversion than of external observation. At any rate, it is most interesting to see eminent physicians maintaining by some means or other that Shakespeare arrived by some sort of intuition at the possession of a psychological or even medical knowledge, fully verified and proved to be exact by the researches two centuries later of distinguished men in a science only recently developed. Mrs. Jameson has well distinguished the different forms of mental aberration in Shakespeare's characters, when she says that "*Constance* is frantic, *Lear* is mad, *Ophelia* is insane."*

VI.

This last quotation may serve to introduce a

* *Characteristics of Women*. New York, 1833, p. 142.

further and a more delicate test of Shakespeare's insight into character. That a man should be able to throw himself into a variety of mind and characters among his fellow-men, may be not unreasonably expected. He has naturally a community of feelings, of passions, of temptations, and of motives with them. He can understand what is courage, what ambition, what strength or feebleness of mind. Inward observation and matured experience help much to guide him to a conception and a delineation of the character of his fellow-men. But of the stronger emotions, the wilder passions, the subdued gentleness and tenderness, the heroic endurance, the meek bearing, and the saintly patience of the woman, he can have had no experience. Looking into himself for a reflection, he will probably find a blank.

It has often been said that in his female characters Shakespeare is not equal to himself. The work to which I have just alluded meets, I think, completely, this objection, which, I believe, even Schlegel raises. It required a lady, with mind highly cultivated, with the nicest powers of discrimination, and with happiness of expression, to vindicate at once Shakespeare and her sex. The difficulty of this task can hardly be appreciated

without the study of its performance. Its great difficulty consists in the almost family resemblance of the different portraits which make up Shakespeare's female gallery. There is scarcely any room for events, even for incident, still less for actions, say for bold and unfeminine deeds. Several of the heroines of Shakespeare are subjected to similar persecutions, and almost the same trials. In almost every one the affections and their expression have alone to interest us. From *Miranda*, the desert-nurtured child in the simplicity of untempted innocence, to *Isabella*, in her cloistered virtue, or *Hermione*, in her unyielding fortitude—there are such shades, such varying yet delicate tints, that not two of these numerous conceptions can be said to resemble another. And whence did Shakespeare derive his models? Some are lofty queens, others most noble ladies, some foreigners, some native; different types in mind and heart, as in the lineament or complexion. Where did he find them? Where did he meet them? In the cottages of Stratford, or in the purlieu of Blackfriars? Among the ladies of the Court, or in the audience in his pit? No one can say—no one need say. They were the formations of his own quickened and fertile brain, which required

but one stroke, one line, to sketch him a portrait to which he would give immortality. Far more difficult was this success, and not less completely was it achieved, in that character which medical writers seem hardly to believe could be but a conception. We may compare the mind of Shakespeare to a diamond pellucid, bright, and untinted, cut into countless polished facets, which, in constant movement, at every smallest change of direction or of angle, caught a new reflection, so that not one of its brilliant mirrors could be for a moment idle, but by a power beyond its control was ever busy with the reflection of innumerable images, either distinct or running into one another, or repeated each so clearly as to allow him, when he chose, to fix it in his memory.

VII.

We may safely conclude that, in whatever constitutes the dramatic art in its strictest sense, Shakespeare possessed matchless sympathies with all its attributes. The next and most essential quality required for true genius is the power to give outward life to the inward conception. With-

out this the poet is dumb. He may be a "mute inglorious Milton"; he cannot be a speaking, noble Shakespeare. I should think that I was almost insulting such an audience, were I to descant upon Shakespeare's position among the bards and writers of England, and of the modern world. Upon this point there can scarcely be a dissentient opinion. His language is the purest and best, his verses the most flowing and rich; and as for his sentiments, it would be difficult without the command of his own language to characterise them. No other writer has ever given such periods of sententious wisdom.

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I have spoken of genius as a gift to an individual man. I will conclude by the reflection that that man becomes himself a gift; a gift to his nation; a gift to his age; a gift to the world of all times. That same Providence which bestows greatness, majesty, abundance, and grace, no less presents, from time to time, to a people or a race, these few transcendent men who mark for it periods no less decisively, though more nobly, than victories or conquests. On England that supreme power has lavished the choicest blessings of this worldly life;

it has made it vast in dominion, matchless in strength; it has made it the arbiter of the earth, and mistress of the sea; it has made it able to stretch its arm for war to the savage antipodes, and, if it chose, its hand for peace to the utter civilised West; it has brought the produce of North and South to its feet with skill and power, to transform and to refashion in forms graceful or useful, to send them back, almost as new creations, to its very source. Industry has clothed its most barren plains with luxuriant crops; and with Titan boldness hollowed its sternest rocks, to plunder them of their ever-hidden treasures. Its gigantic strength seems but to play with every work of venturesome enterprise, till its cities seem to the stranger to overflow with riches, and its country to be overspread with exuberant prosperity.

Well, these are great and magnificent favours of an overruling, most benignant Power; and yet there is a boast which belongs to our country that may seem to be overlooked. Yet it is a double gift that that same creating and directing rule has made this country the birthplace and the seat of the two men who, within a short period, were made the rulers each of a great and separate intellectual dominion, never to be deposed, never to be rivalled,

never to be envied. To Newton was given the sway over the science of the civilised world ; to Shakespeare the sovereignty over its literature.

The one stands before us passionless and grave, embracing in his intellectual grandeur every portion of the universe, from the stars, to him invisible, to the rippling of the tiny waves which the tide brought to his feet. The host of heaven, that seemed in causeless dispersion, he marshalled into order, and bound in safest discipline. He made known to his fellow-men the secret laws of heaven, the springs of movement, and the chains of connection, which invariably and unchangeably impel and guide the course of its many worlds.

In this aspect one's imagination figures him as truly the director of what he only describes—as the leader of a complicated army, who, with his staff, seems to draw or to send forward the wheeling battalions, intent on their own errands, combining or resolving movements far remote ; or, under a more benign and pleasing form, we may contemplate him, like a great master in musical science, standing in the midst of a throng, in which are mingled together the elements of sublimest harmonies, confused to the eye, but sweetly attuned to the ear, mingling into orderly combination and flowing

sequence, as they float through the air, which, though he elicit not nor produce, he seems by his outstretched hand to direct, or, at least, he proves himself fully to understand. For what each one separately does, unconscious of what even his companion is doing, he from afar knows, and almost beholds, understanding from his centre the concerted and sure results of their united action. And so Newton, from his chamber on this little earth, without being able more than the most helpless insect to add power or give guidance to one single element in the composition of this universe, could trace the orbits of planet or satellite, and calculate the oscillations and the reciprocal influences of celestial spheres.

Then his directing wand seems to contract itself to a space within his grasp. It becomes that magic prism with which he intercepts a ray from the sun on his passage to earth; and as a bird seizes in its flight the bee laden with its honey, and robs it of its sweet treasure—even so he compels the messenger of light to unfold itself before us, and lay bare to our sight the rich colours which the rainbow had exhibited to man since the deluge, and which had lain concealed since creation, in every sunbeam that had passed through our atmosphere. And

further still, he bequeathes that wonderful alembic of light to succeeding generations, till, in the hand of new discoverers, it has become the key of Nature's laboratory, in which she has been surprised melting and compounding, in crucibles huge as ocean, the rich hues with which she overlays the surfaces of suns and stars, yet, at the same time, breathes its delicate blush upon the tenderest petals of the opening rose.

And all the laws and all the rules which form his code of nature seem engraved, as with a diamond point, upon a granite surface of the primitive rocks—inflexible, immoveable, unchangeable as the system which they represent.

Beside him stands the Ruler of that world, which, though even sublimely intellectual, is governed by him with laws in which the affections, even the passions, the moralities, and the anxieties of life have their share; in which there is no severity but for vice, no slavery but for baseness, no unforgivingness but for calculating wickedness. In his hand is not the staff of authority; whether it take the form of a royal sceptre or of a knightly lance, whether it be the shepherdess's crook or the fool's bauble, it is still the same, the magician's wand. Whether it be the divining rod with which

he draws up to light the most hidden streams of nature's emotions, or the potential instrument of *Prospero's* spells, which raises storms in the deep or works spirit-music in the air, or the wicked implement with which the witches mingle their unholy charm, its cunning and its might have no limit among created things. But it is not a world of stately order which he rules, nor are the laws of unvarying rigour by which it is commanded. The wildest paroxysms of passion, the softest delicacy of emotions ; the most extravagant accident of fortune, the tenderest incidents of home ; the king and the beggar, the sage and the jester, the tyrant and his victim ; the maiden from the cloister and the peasant from the mountains ; the Italian school-child and the Roman matron ; the princes of Denmark and the lords of Troy—all these and much more are comprised in the vast embrace of his dominions. Scarcely a rule can be drawn from them, yet each forms a model separately, a finished group in combination. Unconsciously as he weaves his work, apparently without pattern or design, he interlaces and combines in its surface and its depth images of the most charming variety and beauty ; now the stern mosaic, without colouring, of an an-

cient pavement, now the flowing and intertwining arabesque of the fanciful east; now the rude scenes of ancient mediæval tapestry like that of Beauvais, and then the finished and richly tinted production of the Gobelins loom.

And yet through this seeming chaos the light permeates, and that so clear and so brilliant as equally to define and to dazzle. Every portion, every fragment, every particle, stands forth separate and particular, so as to be handled, measured, and weighed in the balance of critic and poet. Each has its own exact form and accurate place, so that, while separately they are beautiful, united they are perfect. Hence their combinations have become sacred rules, and have given inviolable maxims not only to English but to universal literature. Germany, as we have seen, studies with love and almost veneration every page of Shakespeare; national sympathies and kindred speech make it not merely easy but natural to all people of the Teutonic family to assimilate their literature to that its highest standard. France has departed, or is fast departing, from its favourite classical type, and adopting, though with unequal power, the broader and more natural lines of the Shakespearian model.

His practice is an example, his declarations are oracles.

Still, as I have said, the wide region of intellectual enjoyment over which our great bard exerts dominion, is not one parcelled out or divided into formal and state-like provinces. While the student of science is reading in his chamber the great "Principia" of Newton, he must keep before him the solution of only one problem. On that his mind must undistractedly rest, on that his power of thought be intensely concentrated. Woe to him if imagination leads his reason into truant wanderings; woe if he drop the thread of finely-drawn deductions! He will find his wearied intelligence drowsily floundering in a sea of swimming figures and evanescent quantities, or floating amidst the fragments of a shipwrecked diagram. But over Shakespeare one may dream no less than pore; we may drop the book from our hand and the contents remain equally before us. Stretched in the shade by a brook in summer, or sunk in the reading chair by the hearth in winter, in the imaginative vigour of health, in the drooping spirits of indisposition, one may read, and allow the trains of fancy which spring up in any scene to pursue their own way,

and minister their own varied pleasure or relief ; and when by degrees we have become familiar with the inexhaustible resources of his genius, there is scarcely a want in mind or the affections that needs no higher than human succour, which will not find in one or other of his works that which will soothe suffering, comfort grief, strengthen good desires, and present some majestic example to copy, or some fearful phantom. But when we endeavour to contemplate all his infinitely varied conceptions as blended together in one picture, so as to take in, if possible, at one glance the prodigious extent of his prolific genius, we thereby build up what he himself so beautifully called the "fabric of a vision," matchless in its architecture, as in the airiness of its materials. There are forms fantastically sketched in cloud-shapes, such as *Hamlet* showed to *Polonius*, in the midst of others rounded and full, which open and unfold ever-changing varieties, now gloomy and threatening, then tipped with gold and tinted with azure, ever-rolling, ever-moving, melting the one into the other, or extricating each itself from the general mass. Dwelling upon this maze of things and imaginations, the most incongruous combinations

come before the dreamy thought, fascinated, spell-bound, and entranced. The wild Ardennes and Windsor Park seem to run into one another, their firs and their oaks mingle together; the boisterous ocean boiling round "the still vexed Bermoothes" runs smoothly into the lagoons of Venice; the old grey porticos of republican Rome, like the transition in a dissolving view, are confused and entangled with the slim and fluted pillars of a Gothic hall; here the golden orb, dropped from the hand of a captive king, rolls on the ground side by side with a jester's mouldy skull—both emblems of a common fate in human things. Then the grave chief justice seems incorporated in the bloated *Falstaff*; *King John* and his barons are wassailing with *Poins* and *Bardolph* at an inn door; *Coriolanus* and *Shylock* are contending for the right of human sensibilities; *Macbeth* and *Jacques* are moralising together on tenderness even to the brute. And so of other more delicate creations of the poet's mind—*Isabella* and *Ophelia*, *Desdemona* and the Scotch Thane's wife produce respectively composite figures of inextricable confusion. And around and above is that filmy world, *Ariel* and *Titania* and *Peasblossom* and *Cobweb* and *Moth*, who weave us a

gossamer cloud around the vision, dimming it gradually before our eyes, in the last drooping of weariness, or the last hour of wakefulness.

* * * * *



APPENDIX.

PROPOSAL FOR A TERCENTENARY MEMORIAL OF SHAKESPEARE.

NEARLY one quarter of the year especially dedicated to the commemoration of our greatest Poet has passed away, without anything approaching to a practical determination on the mode of permanently celebrating it having been reached. London and Stratford-upon-Avon still hold contending claims, and it will be difficult to adjust them.

Nor can we consider passing and unenduring tributes to his memory and fame sufficient for marking so important an epoch. Speeches, oratorios, theatrical representations, and such other demonstrations of admiration, will end with the breath that utters them, leaving not a wrack behind, nor any vestige by which posterity may

be able to judge of our age's appreciation of Shakespeare, or of our power to give it any lasting expression.

Hence it seems agreed on all sides that a monument must be erected to him worthy of our time and of his country ; such that, should art advance or decline, it will at least show forth our love and reverence for the Bard by proving that we did our very best to honour him.

In our momentary or apparent embarrassment, it can hardly be presumptuous to put forward a new suggestion, not intended to interfere with this idea, but designed to make it more complete.

And first let us assume that no monument, of whatever form, that may be proposed and accepted, can possibly be completed within the Shakespearian year. If it have to be a mere statue, and no competition be permitted, no artist of any reputation would undertake to prepare first his *bozzetto* to be approved, then his model, and, lastly, his perennial statue in marble or bronze, with its becoming pedestal, rich in relief, so that it could be set up within the twelvemonth. Still less could this haste, inconsistent with perfection, be used in a memorial of a more complicated character, and involving the concurrence of various arts. If fresco, for instance,

have to be employed, the architect must have finished his work thoroughly before the painter can commence.

These preliminary remarks are here introduced to anticipate and disarm any objections, on the score of required time, to the proposal about to be submitted to public judgment.

We will now ask leave to make some observations on the characteristics which a monument worthy of its proposed object should present.

First, if possible, it should not be altogether local. A monument fixed and permanent in one only place necessarily offers limited enjoyment and improvement only to a few. Stratford does not lie in the line of general circulation; and if the house and tomb of the great Poet attract comparatively but few pilgrims, we can hardly expect a greater confluence of them to visit a modern memorial. London, on the other hand, is too vast for any one centre to collect its inhabitants; while the many who travel to it from afar have generally occupations or engagements of a different character from the curiosity or devotion that would lead them to any point of the metropolis for the purpose of seeing Shakespeare's Tercentenary Monument. And, seen once, it would be scarcely

ever revisited. It may, therefore, be worth while to consider whether such a memorial, connected most specially with the present year, could not be devised as would be within the reach of many, which the merchant of Liverpool and Manchester, or the educated country gentleman who seldom brings his family to London, could enjoy, and transmit to his children as a valuable demonstration of what England could do, and did, for the greatest of her authors in 1864.

Further, it may be observed that a mere statue or other sculptured monument will employ not only few men who give lustre to the period, but will necessarily present to futurity only an inadequate means of ascertaining what many would be willing to do in order to hand down their names as tributaries to that genius who can better inspire them than any other native writer, if scope were given them to bring the immense resources of art possessed by the age and country to converge on one point—the leaving a memorial of him worthy both of the commemorators and of the commemorated.

In other words, the monument should not be partial or limited, but embrace and transmit to after-ages a fair exhibition of many combined

powers, never before united to honour any one else.

But still more, we must not forget that Shakespeare's character and merits belong essentially to our literature. A *literary* monument seems therefore naturally called for ; or at any rate literature should be the groundwork of anything done to celebrate the name highest in its ranks.

Now, who will venture to do for Shakespeare what he has done for himself? He may indeed say, what Horace did, that he has erected "a monument more enduring than brass," that in his day "he accomplished a work which neither the elements in their fury, nor fire, nor hostile steel, nor consuming time will ever destroy." Yet, whatever is so far proposed to be done cannot be more lasting than bronze, nor exempt from these destructive agencies. Let our monument partake of the imperishableness which the poet has gained ; and let all our puny efforts go no further than to add grace and give increased honour to him and his works.

The simple and obvious way of meeting these requisites and conditions seems to be—

The publication of such an edition of Shake-

speare's complete works as in its text, its typography, and its illustration should be unrivalled.

Let us offer a few more detailed remarks on this proposal.

I. THE TEXT. The selection of the purest text must be entrusted to a small committee or sub-committee of Shakespearian scholars of acknowledged pre-eminence; and this should be so chosen and edited as to form, for ever, the admitted standard of the Poet's works.

It should be printed without notes, beyond any various reading of real consequence and weight, at the foot of the page. A short "argument" may be prefixed to each drama; though, as the edition would not be intended for learners, this might be dispensed with.

An entire volume might contain a glossary in alphabetical order for the whole of Shakespeare's works; and an "apparatus," as it used to be called, comprising a carefully prepared catalogue of editions, and of every work, book, pamphlet, or paper, that has ever appeared, at home or abroad, on his writings. Whatever is known of his life, and all remaining memorials of him, would find a place in this supplementary volume.

We need hardly add that this edition would include the sonnets, and any other compositions connected with Shakespeare's name.

II. THE TYPOGRAPHY. It would be presumptuous in us to suggest anything on this head, further than to express a hope, or rather an assurance, that this great requisite for carrying out our proposal would be undertaken by one or more of those great masters in the art of printing who abound in England, and have already produced works which place the press of this country on a level, at least, with that of any other. In type, in paper, in perfection of press-work, it would go hard with us indeed if we could not bring forward in honour of Shakespeare such a specimen of typographical skill and taste as has never yet been witnessed. We feel sure that it would be accepted by the present generation, and treasured by ages to come, as the unrivalled production of the press, rising as superior to every previous effort as the author whom it perpetuates is to all other writers in our language.

And that it will probably never be reached in times to come may be secured by the union, in this publication, of abilities not easily brought together,

except by such a grand national undertaking. To this great point we proceed.

III. THE ILLUSTRATIONS. These we will classify under four distinct heads.

1. To each play should be prefixed an engraving of an appropriate sketch, expressly drawn by some artist of the highest class and of acknowledged reputation. Thirty-two or thirty-four will be required; and we may hope that, without requiring duplicates from any one, the United Kingdom can furnish artists equal to their production. It need not be said that these drawings should be of exquisite finish, works of love, worthy of their intention, and of the place they are destined to hold in connection with the greatest name in our literature.

Naturally a scene would be chosen for each subject which would suggest a perfect and characteristic composition; and which of Shakespeare's dramas contains not one such at least, in a true artist's estimation? Indeed, much has already been done in preparation for such an application of British art. Our annual exhibitions seldom fail to present to us subjects taken from our national Bard. We have seen "Hamlet with the Players," "Wolsey

at the Abbey-Gate," "Ophelia floating on the Stream," "Malvolio," "Puck," and fifty other characters have given subjects to smaller paintings. Nor must we forget "King Lear and his Daughters" among the frescoes of our greatest public building.

But these greater illustrations need not be necessarily historical; every branch of art may find its place. Will not the "beeches and ferns" of England be characteristic of Windsor Forest, better than a mere scene in its play? And have we not an artist from whom "The Tempest" would receive a pictorial description worthy to stand side by side with Shakespeare's text?

Perhaps the great difficulty to be here encountered is in the engraving of such works. For they must not be entrusted to xylography; and, before evanescent photography has driven the immortalizing graver from the field of art, let us in this work leave to posterity a specimen of our prowess on copper or steel.

From the purest line-engraving to the more popular and more complicated, though less artistic, processes by which so much effect is produced in modern calchography, let us put on record for ever what the art of Marc Antonio could do in

England in 1864. The style of each artist will naturally suggest that of its engraving.

2. Each act, if possible, should have in the middle of the page one polychrome picture, such as adorn so admirably Mr. James Doyle's "Annals," in which the costumes, arms, furniture, dwellings, architecture of the piece, with the arts and customs of its place and time, may be accurately represented. From these smaller illustrations the play ought to be able to be acted by any persons wishing to be exact in scenery and costume in any country.

3. The perfection to which art has arrived in colour-printing would enable us to complete our illustrations by borders such as have never before been produced. It would enable many artists who represent amongst us decorative art, illumination, and arabesque, once so highly prized, to contribute their share towards this intended work, and add to its singular beauty.

Each play would have its own border, decorating two pages, or an open leaf, in colour.

Now, it is one of the great gifts and glories of Shakespeare to have touched with his wand of light every period of civilized art, from the early dawn of literature to his own time. To record this

universality of connection between his writings and art, it is proposed that the borders should commemorate the character of art flourishing in the country and period to which the drama belongs.— We will make a rough outline of the connections which would result.

Artistic periods.	Plays.
ARCHAIC GREEK AND ASIATIC (<i>Ægina and Lycian Marbles</i>),	Troilus and Cressida.
CLASSICAL GREEK,	Comedy of Errors—Timon.
ETRUSCAN (<i>Corioli and ancient Rome</i>),	Coriolanus.
CLASSICAL ROMAN (<i>Baths of Titus, &c.</i>),	Julius Cæsar.
EGYPTIAN,	Antony and Cleopatra.
CELTIC (<i>interlacing, as in Irish</i>),	King Lear—Cymbeline.
SCANDINAVIAN,	Hamlet.
MEDLEVAL ENGLISH (<i>MSS.</i>),	John to Richard III.
SCOTCH,	Macbeth.
FRENCH,	All's Well that Ends Well.
SPANISH,	Love's Labour Lost.
RENAISSANCE (<i>Loggie, Giulio Clovio, &c.</i>),	Henry VIII.
ITALIAN CINQUECENTO,	Two Gentlemen of Verona, Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet.
VENETIAN,	Othello—Merchant of Venice.

The whole history of decorative art, which may

be called the history of taste, would thus be associated from its dawn to the commencement of its decay with our great Bard. He will be shown to have sung of whatever in time or place was worthy of his genius. Sometimes solid monuments, like "the Stones of Venice," will have to guide the artist's pencil; but often, as in the matchless series of English historical plays, our own manuscripts, with their splendid illuminations, will give a complete course of our decorative art.

And after historical decoration shall have been thus exhausted, there will still remain six or seven plays, unattached, so to speak, in which would be room for the Flora, the Fauna, and the Fairydom of Shakespeare to disport round the margins of his ample page under the luxurious but judicious guidance of poetical artists.

4. There would still remain occupation for wood-engraving, in titles, initial letters, and tail-pieces, analogous to the subjects of the plays.

Naturally the binding will be made to recall the periods when the taste and beauty of the outward covering gave earnest of the splendour which it protected.

IV. THE MANAGEMENT OF THIS PROPOSAL. There

is not the slightest idea of proposing any interference with the existing Centenary Committee, which includes in itself probably all, at any rate most, of the persons best capable of carrying this scheme into successful execution.

All that would be required from it would be a delegation of some of its functions to sub-committees, which would work harmoniously together, settle the details of what is here presented only in block, obtain co-operation, distribute the work, and set it a-going. But the groundwork of such sub-committees exists, and may easily be built on. Probably, in any other country, no small part would have been allotted, in what the country wished to do, to such societies as have a national character and representation for such undertakings. In England too, had science been in question—had it been proposed to erect a memorial to Newton, still more, had it been suggested to combine with it a perfect edition of his works, no one can doubt that the leaders in such a movement would have been the great scientific Societies, such as the Royal and the Astronomical.

And here, why should not the established, and now recognized, Committee for the Shakespeare Memorial call in the assistance of such Societies as

that of Literature, or the Philological, for the text, and of the Royal Academy for the illustration, of the work that has been described? These bodies could not, indeed, act corporately, but they could depute a certain number of persons to represent them, active and able, as well as willing, to devote themselves to the undertaking; and either belonging to them already, or easily created honorary members.

Such a compound, not over-numerous, committee once formed, would suggest, without jealousy, the addition of other representative members; for example, from the Universities, from the British Museum, and from other learned associations in London and in other cities.*

V. We will throw into our concluding section a few miscellaneous observations.

1. It might seem selfish to confine our tribute to Shakespeare to the efforts and contributions of our own country. We should not refuse advice or offers of assistance from abroad. Should we find an insufficiency of artists willing to give a helping hand at home, we feel sure that the land of Schlegel and of Schiller, of the critics and poets who have

* As the Arundel, the Surtees, &c.

so thoroughly appreciated our Bard, would be as ready to illustrate his beauties with the pencil as it has been with the pen. The schools of Munich and of Berlin, of Vienna and Düsseldorf, could furnish men who would not refuse to assist us if necessary.

But, though we feel sure on this point, would it not be a gracious offer to make to any of these great schools, that it would undertake the entire illustration, on the plan adopted, of some one play, congenial to German taste and character?

2. The proposed plan will, no doubt, be expensive, for though, doubtless, the noble and patriotic feelings of many artists will impel them to work for the national glory and their admiration of Shakespeare, much must be adequately remunerated; and the mechanical labour cannot be obtained free-cost. But the scheme ought to be remunerative. No one, who is able, will grudge a subscription, which, being spread over several years, will give a return, in the shape of an unequalled Memorial of the Tercentenary Commemoration of our Poet, one portable, personal, and at all times accessible. Let due calculations be made for something magnificent, if you please; then add margin enough to help or originate other purposes.

3. For instance, we cannot but fear that the

attempt to provide a monument out of the common line of such memorials may fail from many causes. A statue of Shakespeare must represent Shakespeare, and nothing more. He is too familiar to us as himself to be idealized, attitudinized, or thrown into raptures. The noble, well-known face must be before us; and there must be no startling, or allegorical, still less mythological, accompaniments. All this reduces a sculptured monument to a small compass. If erected in a vast open space, you must either make it colossal, or it will dwindle down to disproportion. Let the Achilles, in the Park, be a warning to us not to attempt the gigantic.

It has struck us that the most suitable site for a statue of Shakespeare should combine several conditions easily attainable. It should be in a central position, among his people, and daily visible without effort, especially by those whose very occupation is to honour him and recognize his merits. It should be amidst buildings that can give it right proportions even to unpractised eyes, which have no scale of dimensions without the familiar measures of ordinary objects. It should be placed where these objects would be in natural correlation with him whom it represents.

Such a site, it appears to us, is to be found in the area in front of the British Museum, our only and noble temple of our literature and of ancient art. A statue in bronze, of large proportions, placed on a noble pedestal, adorned with two inscriptions in English and in Latin, and two relievos representing in some way the character of his unrivalled genius, would, if placed there, be visible all day and every day, to every passer-by, without jealous guardianship; would be saluted by every student as he passed on to pursue his own studies, and by the tens of thousands who yearly visit the Galleries, and would be, where it should be, at the very gate of that realm over which the memory of Shakespeare reigns supreme.

4. Indeed, it would show the way to that real Memorial of himself, which the Poet has raised, and which, in its most perfect and precious form, would be preserved within.

For we would finally suggest that two copies of the proposed edition of Shakespeare's works should be printed on vellum.

One should have incorporated in it all the original drawings, plain or coloured, furnished by the artists of every class for its embellishment. Thus posterity would be able to see, not in trans-

cripts, however accurate, but in the very pencil-strokes of the artist, the character and perfection of his work.

The second copy the committee would naturally offer as a worthy tribute to the Sovereign whose reign has been especially graced by the occurrence in, we may hope, its yet long duration, of the Tercentenary Commemoration of England's first literary Son.

N. CARD. WISEMAN.

London, March 22nd, 1864.

THE END.

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