

CHAPTER II

SHAKESPEARE

THE humanistic school of English drama was firmly established by a group of university students, headed by the famous Marlowe. Very suddenly after the appreciation of this group comes forward the most colossal figure in English literature,—and perhaps in all modern literature. This was not a student. He was not even a well educated man; he did not belong to the higher classes. He was a professional actor, which means that he had embraced a calling which in that time, and for many generations after, was considered ignoble. Yet this man did what no one else in any other country, since the highest period of Greek civilization, had ever been able to do; and in more ways than one he probably surpassed the Greeks. So immensely superior to his age was this genius that as a genius he could not obtain recognition for hundreds of years after his death. It has well been said that no man can understand Shakespeare until he becomes old; and the English nation could not understand Shakespeare until it became old. In the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries Shakespeare was read and enjoyed only as schoolboys of twelve or fourteen years old now read and enjoy him—that is to say, he was read for the story only, without any suspicion of what an intellectual giant had appeared in the world. Nevertheless the sixteenth century was a great intellectual age, and it understood much more of Shakespeare than later generations proved themselves able to do. In the most degenerate period of English Literature, the period of the Restoration, Shakespeare was so little understood that people imagined they could improve his plays by rewriting them! No greater proof of intellectual degeneracy could have been given. To-day the position of Shakespeare is that of the greatest

figure in all human literature. He has been translated into nearly every civilized language; his plays are acted constantly upon all the stages of Europe; he has been commented upon and studied by the greatest scholars of Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Russia; and the volume of literature produced about him has become so great that no man could hope to read it all in a lifetime. Not thousands but tens of thousands of books have been written about his characters, about the meaning of his plays, about the relation of his life to his art, about his subjectivity, about his objectivity, about the chronology of his dramas, about the source of his inspiration, about his verse-endings, about everything imaginable in connection with his work. Shakespeare has become much more than a classic, a world-classic; he is a science. To become a "Shakespearean scholar" in these days is to obtain a very great distinction in the world of letters; and nevertheless one of the greatest of scholars declared only two years ago, when invited to deliver a few lectures upon Shakespeare, that he approached the subject with fear and trembling, because it was too large for him. And like all large subjects, the subject of Shakespeare has its danger. Hundreds of persons pass their whole lives in studying Shakespeare, in theorizing about Shakespeare, in illustrating Shakespeare. Some persons have even become insane through the study of Shakespeare. And the overshadowing intellect that has produced these extraordinary effects—effects which continually increase and multiply instead of diminishing with time—was enclosed in the skull of a poor uneducated actor, who began life under the most unfavourable and unhappy conditions.

The first thing which I should like to be able to impress upon the mind of the student is that Shakespeare must be regarded, not as a common man or author, but as a phenomenon, as something in literature corresponding to the more modern phenomenon of Napoleon as a political, military and economic force. Because, if the student can not do this, he can never hope to understand anything at all about

Shakespeare. You must remember that Shakespeare is not only the greatest, but also the most difficult of authors to understand. This does not mean that his language is difficult, or that his thoughts are difficult; the difficulty lies in the comprehension of the depths of his characters — that is to say, the depth of his knowledge of human nature. The great Shakespearean riddle, in other words, is this: “How did Shakespeare know?” Here is a man who has created hundreds of living figures or characters, every one of which is essentially and totally different from every other, and all of which are perfectly real, perfectly alive, perfectly interesting, never under any circumstances unnatural. To create one such character in common literature is to make a classic, is to achieve a reputation for hundreds of years, is to perform a feat almost divine; like the work of a god, it is a creation of life. But Shakespeare created hundreds of characters. I can not repeat this too often; because you will not observe the whole meaning of it until I have assured you that the other great English dramatists did not *create* any characters at all. They gave us moving and speaking figures which resemble living persons only as ghosts or dreams resemble living persons. The more you become acquainted with them, the less real do you find them. Sometimes they actually melt into each other like clouds, like vapours. They are phantoms. After having read all the plays of Ben Jonson, all the plays of Webster, all the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, all the plays of any other dramatist, you will find that they do not remain distinct in your memory. Not only do you forget them, but you confuse them one with another. Never does this happen in the case of Shakespeare. Every figure in Shakespeare can be touched, heard, and made familiar like an old acquaintance; put your hand upon its breast, and you will feel the heart beat. I will even say one thing stronger than this—it is more easy to forget living persons whom you have really known than it is to forget one of Shakespeare’s great characters.

Let me say here that I shall have to ask your patience,

as some of what I am going to say may seem to you a little tiresome; but I think it is necessary in order that you may get a general idea of the meaning of the difference between Shakespeare and other men. I do not wish to tell you what you can find in books, but only what you will not find in books about Shakespeare.

This said, let us try to understand the secret of the force of Shakespeare's characters. Every one of you have seen a cat. You have seen it not once, but perhaps a thousand times; and as children you have certainly played with kittens, so that you had a good opportunity to study every part of the animal's body. Now how many of you, in spite of that experience, can draw a correct picture of a cat from memory? Perhaps one or two of you can. But can you draw the cat in more than one position? Perhaps one of you can draw it in two or even three positions. There, I imagine, your power stops. It is very doubtful whether you have ever known a man who could draw a cat from memory in any position. I might have said a horse, just as well; but a horse would really be much more difficult.

Now some of you can certainly draw very much better than others. You recognize among yourselves this superior ability on the part of one or two individuals, and you call it talent, or cleverness, or something of that kind. But have you ever stopped to think what this talent or cleverness means? Why should one of you be able to draw from memory better than any of the rest? It is because he has superior faculties; but what are the faculties? One is memory,—memory of that special form which we call the representative faculty. To put the matter very shortly and in very simple language, one of you can draw a cat from memory better than the rest, not so much because of manual dexterity, as because, when *he* thinks of a cat, there immediately shapes itself in his brain a much more vivid and correct image of the animal than that which the memories of the rest of you are capable of forming. But we are not yet more than half-way toward the explanation of this

extremely simple fact. Why should the brain of one student be capable of forming mental images much more exact than any of which other brains are capable? It must mean that there is some physiological difference. This physiological difference is like a difference in what is called the "sensitivity" of photographic plates. Some plates, you know, will photograph anything in one-fiftieth, one-seventy-fifth or one-hundredth of a second, while other plates work very slowly, requiring three or four seconds to define an image,—and the chances always are that during long exposure the images may become blurred or spoiled by accident. I do not wish to carry this comparison as far as it might be carried; the illustration is sufficient. Now this superior "sensitivity" of brain is found to be always coincident with a very high development of what is called in physiology nervous-tissue. I do not mean that this high development necessarily extends to all parts of the brain of the man distinguished by a special talent. The more the talent is special, the more certain it is that the nervous sensitivity is also special—that is, confined to some particular part of the cerebral structure. We can not go much farther than this. If you should ask the reason of such differences between individual and individual, I should answer hereditary accumulation; but when we trace the thing back as far as human knowledge permits us, we are stopped by the infinite mystery which lies beyond all life and which it is quite useless for us to try to understand.

I need scarcely tell you that it would be incomparably more difficult to draw from memory the correct picture of a human face in six or seven different moods than it would be to draw the head of an animal in several different attitudes. Still this is no very great feat. But to draw a character, the play of moral feeling which makes a character, and to do this in four or five different moods, is not a little feat but a very great feat indeed. Very few men are able even to express one of their own moods truthfully and impressively—much less to objectify it. Imagine, then, the

gigantic power of the brain that could create thousands of different moods as expressed by hundreds of different characters of every age and sex.

The problem of Shakespeare is therefore a psychological problem; and if it took the world some hundreds of years to understand Shakespeare, this was only because Shakespeare was himself in advance of humanity several hundred years by virtue of intellectual superiority. A human brain, immensely developed beyond the average, can not be imagined by the average. The existence of such a brain may constitute a danger to the human race. Very much depends upon the direction given to its faculties. One such brain came into existence shortly before the beginning of the present century; and in the short space of eleven years—from 1804 to 1815—the working of that brain resulted in the destruction of 3,700,000 human lives (H. Taine. *Les origines de la France contemporaine*: 3^e partie, *le Régime moderne*. Vol. 1, p. 115). For a long time after the accession of Napoleon to power the world attributed his ascendancy to good fortune; there was no suspicion of the enormous range of the faculties of that mind—the mind that complained of the smallness of the population of Europe, and that dreamed of a conquest of the Orient, where it could use five or six hundred millions of lives for its operations. But when the suspicion did come at last, the existence of that individual was felt to be a danger to the human race, and by a desperate coalition against him, the nations of Europe succeeded in isolating him until the time of his death. The faculties of Napoleon were bent in the direction of war, economics, finance, and all forms of administration. Unfortunately the destructive tendencies dominated the constructive. Now I would compare the brain of Shakespeare to Napoleon's; but the development of his faculties was altogether in a constructive and creative direction. In more than one respect we find points of resemblance, nevertheless, between the two minds. The most noticeable of the prodigious qualities of both was memory; and in both cases the faculties were hereditary, not developed

by education. In Shakespeare as in Napoleon, the language faculty, although immense, was in a comparatively low state of cultivation. The compositions of both were marked by extraordinary faults—faults of form, faults of all kinds; yet the faculties in either case were almost incomparable. We know, for example, that Shakespeare's composition was not made like the compositions of other men. He never re-wrote or changed his manuscript, if we are to believe the actors who played with him; and yet, thus flung down upon paper, his thoughts now fill the world.

I have compared the mnemonic faculty of Shakespeare with that of Napoleon; but only by way of general illustration. Really the memory power was very different in either case. In Shakespeare it takes a form so extraordinary that it is still a psychological puzzle. Attributing his knowledge of character to purely personal experience, we should have to say that he had the power of representing with absolute accuracy every feeling that he had ever known in any situation. No doubt a very considerable amount of personal feeling has been reproduced in his unapproachable dramas. But the experience of fifty lifetimes could not account for everything in them. Beyond experience, what could have given him the knowledge of his hundreds of characters? There is only one name commonly given to the power which enabled him to be so unrivalled a creator; and that faculty is intuition. But what is intuition? You may say that you believe that it is imagination in the form of instinct. And what is instinct? Instinct, the man of science will tell you, is inherited knowledge—is, in a certain sense, the non-personal knowledge obtained not from the experience of one life, but from the experiences of hundreds of thousands of lives. Religious persons in western countries do not like these suggestions of science; and I do not think that I should be allowed to say in many western universities what now I wish to say about Shakespeare's genius. You need not accept my opinions if you do not like them; I offer them only suggestively. I shall say therefore that the faculty

of Shakespeare represents something very much resembling the memory of thousands of experiences in hundreds of anterior lives, as man and woman, in different conditions of civilization, and different parts of the earth. Remember, however, that I am speaking symbolically. I am trying to explain the nature of a faculty which can only be suggested by symbolism, because no science can yet furnish a detailed explanation of it.

This is what differentiates Shakespeare from all other dramatists; and, without attempting illustration, let us now turn to the subject of the man himself. One thing we know, through the help of modern psychology, which previous generations did not know about Shakespeare. This is that he was certainly a man of a most extraordinary and exceptional physical organization. From his work we can discover that his nervous organization must have been superior to almost any now existing; and, as I said before, unless this development is in one direction only, it presupposes a magnificent physical constitution. In the case of Shakespeare, we have proof absolute that his faculties were not one-sided; and that a more perfectly balanced character is not possible even to imagine. The first chapters of his life give us, indeed, the contrary impression; but the higher faculties of a man are not developed in early youth. When we study Shakespeare's life in the years of his maturity, we discover the unusual phenomenon of a supreme artist who is also a supremely good man of business, who achieved almost without effort a position and a respectability that no actor could have obtained before him.

I need scarcely say to you that all the stories and theories about Shakespeare's plays having been written by Bacon or by somebody else are silly nonsense, and that no sensible man now pays any attention to them. I shall not refer to them again. On the other hand, although we know very little about Shakespeare's life, the little that we do know is very important, and the documents concerning it are very exact. I shall speak about the facts of his career, however,

only in relation to the study of his personality. He was born at Stratford-on-Avon in April, 1564. He was the son of a merchant named John Shakespeare, who appears to have been a man of some influence in the little town, and who held the office of high bailiff—an office corresponding to that of mayor—in 1568. When a boy, Shakespeare was apparently distinguished from other boys chiefly by his greater activity and mischievousness, but we can judge of this only from the general tone of a number of anecdotes and traditions. He was sent to a grammar school at Stratford, and there may have obtained the rudiments of an education, but nothing more. At the age of eighteen Shakespeare was married to a girl of twenty-six. It would seem that the marriage was forced upon him by his own fault, and also by a sentiment which every honourable man must respect. At the early age of twenty-one he had already three children, and no occupation—a very heavy burden for a young man to start through life with. About 1586 his father appears to have lost all his money and all his possessions. The family was utterly ruined. A more unfortunate position for the young man of twenty-one with a family of three children, as well as his own father's family to take care of, could scarcely be imagined. The next year he probably went to London. We hear nothing about him of importance for about five years. Then, in 1592, we suddenly hear the complaints from dramatists and actors that a new-comer is beginning to crowd them out, to dominate them, to do as he pleases with their dramas, and to monopolize public attention. In 1594 we find him playing before Queen Elizabeth at Christmas time. Thereafter his success begins. It is quite evident that from the time he entered London, Shakespeare, although a stranger, very soon obtained the mastery in the career which he had chosen, and that his domination over smaller minds and characters was founded not only upon some dim recognition of his intellectual superiority, but also upon the recognition of a character of immense force. No weak man, nobody not of a very masterful disposition,

could have accomplished so much in so short a time. Very soon the murmurs against him were hushed. They were hushed simply because they had become useless. He had dominated not only those jealous of him, but also the English public. The great mass of the people who support the theatres were carried away by him; never before had such an actor been seen. The higher-class people, the gentry, the nobility, even the great lords about Queen Elizabeth, recognized Shakespeare, and gave him their friendship. Shakespeare did not appeal to them merely as an actor; he appealed to them as a poet. In the age of poetry, the age of new culture, the age of the Renaissance, this country boy without education presumed to enter the lists as a poet, and produced immediately the finest poetry of the period. Before that astonishing talent all opposition naturally broke down. In 1593 appeared his "Venus and Adonis," a poem in the richest and most voluptuous tone of the Renaissance; and even in that time it went rapidly through a number of editions, and was to be found in almost every lady's chamber. He thus achieved at once what ordinary poets must work for half a lifetime to obtain,—literary recognition. This was followed the next year by the poem, also successful, on the rape of Lucretia. But the finest parts of Shakespeare's poetical work, those matchless sonnets which place him in the first rank of English poets, were not so quickly composed. They were written during a period of about sixteen years, portions only appearing at a time. The truth is that Shakespeare had very little time to write poetry, and wrote it chiefly for amusement or relaxation; his real business was the writing of plays by day and the acting of plays by night. He was doing, and doing easily, the work of ten or twelve men, but doing it infinitely better than twelve men could have done it.

No less than thirty-seven plays constitute his known work; besides which we have reason to suppose that he had some share in the writing or shaping of other plays. But of these thirty-seven, each is a masterpiece which still

excites the world's admiration, and must continue so to do for hundreds of years to come. Sometimes we find him producing plays at the rate of three in one year. I do not know that this rate of production could be considered a very high one in the case of an ordinary playwright. Dryden, for example, afterwards willingly undertook to produce three plays a year, and did it for a short time; while, in our own day, the productivity of some eminent French playwrights has certainly been astonishing. But no playwright ever produced in one year three plays of really classic merit, much less anything approaching to a play of Shakespeare. What makes it particularly difficult to understand Shakespeare's productivity in this line, as I have suggested before, is the fact that Shakespeare was acting and teaching actors at the same time that he was writing; and this dramatic activity is the severest of possible strains upon the nervous nature of any man. Shakespeare does not seem to have felt it in the time of his youth and strength; he even seems to have found plenty of leisure to talk with various noblemen, to visit numerous friends, to attend banquets and parties, and to have sharply attended also to business. As early as 1597 he had made enough money to purchase land in his native town of Stratford, with the purpose of retrieving the family fortunes, and of making a comfortable home for his family. Besides this he was soon able to make himself absolutely independent in London; he bought a theatre, became its manager, and employed those who had previously been his employers or comrades on the stage. In 1609 he had built himself a comfortable home at Stratford, and made an independent fortune and retired from the theatre, except as a writer of plays.

Now this means a very extraordinary life and still more extraordinary force of character. You can imagine for yourselves the obstacles which this man had to encounter, and you can appreciate the wonderful way in which he almost immediately broke them down, and rapidly made himself rich. But you must not forget another very impor-

tant revelation which the story of this life makes for us—I mean the moral revelation. The difficulties in the way of success are not so much those which men are accustomed to think about, as they are those which men are not accustomed to think about until it is too late—as in the case of Marlowe and his companions. The first obstacle which a man really encounters in the world is the most dangerous and least perceived,—I mean Pleasure. Everywhere about a man of handsome presence and kindly character temptations swarm. Women favour him; drinking and gambling companions debauch him. In this respect the world is not at all different now from what it was in the time of Shakespeare. Pleasure is the real danger, and nowhere is this danger so extreme as in the world of the drama, where the conventions have always been more or less relaxed. Now there are two ways in which a young man can face this danger successfully. One is to impose upon himself habits of absolute austerity, to deny himself everything, to pursue one purpose only and never to swerve from a single rule of settled conduct. Such a man must, of course, expect to become unpopular—in other words, to get himself disliked, and to bear a good deal of suffering in consequence. The other way is much more difficult, but also much more creditable. It is simply to take one's share of pleasure whenever offered, without at any time losing the power of self-command, and without ever doing anything of a disgraceful kind. Now the man who can drink with drinking companions and never lose his head; the man who can mix with characters of all kinds, men and women, and never commit a folly, must be a strong man and a wise man,—especially if he can do all this and yet keep the friendship of all classes. Now this is exactly what Shakespeare did. We have seen that in his youth he was not quite so wise; but he learned wisdom quickly. He was generous and at the same time economical; he was fond of pleasure, but never allowed pleasure to master him after he began the struggle for life; he was intensely imaginative and sensitive, yet he

never allowed his feelings to drive him into any extremes; and in middle age he was able to retire to private life with a comfortable fortune. Only a wonderful man could have done this.

Yet it must have cost terribly. The volume of work which Shakespeare wrote, the character of that work, the circumstances under which it was completed, alone signify such a nervous strain as scarcely any man could undergo and live. In addition there was the strain of family troubles—troubles which to an affectionate and sensitive nature must have been extremely trying. And finally we know this fact—through modern psychology—that Shakespeare must have been naturally predisposed to great unhappiness simply because of his astounding power for abstract thinking. Any man having not only a very powerful imagination, but the capacity to make the shapes of his imagination living and real, must be in a very unhappy condition when put face to face with the harsh realities of existence.

You may have noticed the power of abstraction in imaginative children. They dream awake; they dream while you are talking to them; they dream while you are trying to teach them. Stupid teachers are likely to be very cruel to such children. They mistake this tendency to dream—which means really that the imagination is powerful enough to dominate all reality except pain—for dulness, and they attempt to enforce attention by blows and harsh words. Clever teachers know that the only way to teach such children is to sympathize with them, to win their confidence, and to teach them altogether by appealing to this imagination, by directing it, and by cultivating it. Mechanical education means great suffering to children of this kind. But what I wish to remind you of is the effect upon the child of being roughly awakened from his little dream,—probably you have noticed the sudden expression of pain; and you will also, I think, have observed that a child, after having been three or four times in succession harshly upbraided for thinking about something else than what you

want him to think about, will burst into tears. Now it would be a great mistake to think that this is the result of a wilful disposition; it is the result of a very real and very severe pain—mental pain. For the whole machinery of the delicate little brain, with its network of nerves and its network of blood vessels, is directed in one absolutely natural direction, invariably pleasurable; and the sudden interruption of its operation means more than a checking of pleasure—it means also a violent shock to the still tender cerebral mechanism. In grown persons of strong imaginative power, the pain of such a shock is probably greater; but the machinery is under excellent control, and the capacity to bear pain has been well developed. For the child, such experiences are not only cruel but dangerous.

Now, by his capacity to dream, the great poet in more ways than one very much resembles the child, and the practical world with which he has to contend treats him very much like a cruel master. His pleasure, emotional and intellectual, infinitely exceeding any pleasure possible to common minds, is being incessantly and pitilessly interrupted and mocked by the hard facts of everyday life. If he be wealthy, and therefore able to isolate himself at will, he is very fortunate, and may be able to do great things. If he be poor and in a painful subordinate position, he is likely to suffer much more than can be even imagined; he will be able, in most cases, to do good work only at rare intervals; and the result of his struggle may be a total breakdown, physical as well as moral. Sometimes he becomes insane. Often he incurs the world's condemnation by extraordinary excesses. Remember that there can be no more foolish and wicked error than to suppose that the pain and pleasure of all human beings is the same, that one man can bear just as much suffering or enjoy just as much delight as another. In no two human beings can the capacity for pain and pleasure be exactly the same, for there are no two nervous systems exactly alike. The pain which a poet, a genius, a man of powerful imagination may feel, is much greater than

the pain which other men have to bear, simply because of his more complex and incomparably more delicate nervous system.

Therefore modern psychology, studying the work of Shakespeare, perceiving its enormous physical cost, is immediately struck by the mystery of the man's power to endure what the world must have inflicted upon him. The great question is, "How did this man live?" No ordinary man could bear one-tenth of what Shakespeare must have borne; and yet he passed through life smoothly, triumphantly, and calmly. No doubt we have here a phenomenon very much like that which the psychology of Napoleon gives us. In both these men of genius there appears to have been developed, in a prodigious way, what is physiologically called inhibitory power. I mean this: Just as a very powerful engine requires a very complicated and powerful apparatus to check and change its movements, so a very powerful mind can be protected only from serious injury by something corresponding to those parts of the engine which can instantly stop or reverse the motion. Napoleon compared his own mind, not to a steam engine, but to a chest of drawers; still his illustration was admirable. He said, "If you call one drawer or compartment of my mind Finance, another War, another Geography, you will understand my meaning when I say that I can always open one drawer at will and keep all the other drawers firmly locked." Shakespeare must have had the same extraordinary faculty. It is given to very few men, and it alone can explain Shakespeare's ability to endure the experiences of his career. I need scarcely tell you that control of the imagination and intellectual operations is an infinitely more difficult thing than what we commonly call self-control — which really signifies little more than the regulation of outer action.

But, as I have said, this must have cost enormously. After all, the mind depends for its support upon the body, and a very powerful mind is likely to exhaust and consume the body very rapidly. When genius has the emotional

character, its possessor seldom lives long. Shakespeare must have been a very strong man, but he died in 1616 (some say on his own birthday) at the age of fifty-two. For such a constitution, we may say that this was dying young. But there must have been many extraordinary physical strains, also, upon the life of an actor in those days. We must remember the difficulties of night-life, the unhealthy character of London in the Elizabethan age, the non-sanitary nature of the early theatre—foul as an out-house. Besides we must remember that Shakespeare had plenty of domestic trouble, and domestic trouble wears out a man more quickly than almost any other kind of trouble. There is yet one other matter to consider—whether love for some other woman than his wife was or was not a cause of great suffering to Shakespeare. On this subject opinion is much divided. The evidence for the affirmative is chiefly, if not entirely, drawn from the poems of Shakespeare, especially the “Sonnets.” But I imagine that we can never obtain really sufficient evidence for the belief. When we consider how much of human life has been reflected by Shakespeare with startling reality, though foreign to his own personal experience, how dare we say that his marvellous intuition may not have enabled him to paint and to animate all the sorrows of a passion never indulged in by him except in imagination? Of course, while we think it likely that such verses as those beginning “The Passionate Pilgrim,”

When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her, though I know she lies,

were inscribed to a real person, I must remind you that it is equally possible the person existed only in Shakespeare’s dream. About no other great genius is it so difficult to draw conclusions from published writings as in the case of Shakespeare. As a rule he never shows us his own personality throughout the multitude of his plays, but always other personalities. Why then should we suppose that he chose to be less impersonal in his poems?

Many different Shakespearean scholars have grouped the plays of Shakespeare in different ways. Some have made three classes, some four, others five and more. Some authorities would put the English historical plays in a group by themselves. But the general opinion until recently seems to have been that the plays should be arranged as Comedies, Tragedies, Historical Plays and Dramas or Melodramas. Now what I want to observe is that the student can escape all this trouble and confusion by accepting the opinion of the greatest modern lecturer upon Shakespeare, Professor Ten Brink, and by recognizing that all the plays can be divided very simply into two classes only,—Comedies and Tragedies.

Real scholarship is not shown by the capacity to put forth an enormous amount of detail; it is shown by the capacity for synthesis. Synthesis means the co-ordination of detail. It is just in this capacity that Ten Brink has shown himself especially great, and I should advise you to accept his opinion. I shall assume therefore that Shakespeare wrote only Tragedies and Comedies.

But if we were to divide his thirty-seven plays into these two classes, it is very necessary that you should know exactly what is meant by tragedy, and what is meant by comedy. Ten Brink uses these terms, just as our best English critics use them, in the classical sense only. Most people have an idea that a comedy is a play written to make people laugh—a funny play, in short; and that a tragedy is a play in which there is some killing or a good deal of grief or passion. Put into the briefest form, the popular notion is that a comedy makes you laugh, and a tragedy makes you cry. But this is all wrong, or nearly all wrong. Remember that the great and terrible poem of Dante is called, and very correctly called, the *Divine Comedy*. Now in the classic sense the difference between a tragedy and a comedy lies not so much in the incidents of the plays, but in the order of the incidents. A tragedy should begin with a calm and peaceful opening, or even a pleasant, merry

opening is possible—and then should gradually become more sombre and terrible till the climax is reached. On the other hand, a comedy may begin even in a tragical manner; but the progress of the play must be a steady brightening of tone until a grateful conclusion is arrived at. It is not at all necessary that a comedy should make you laugh, in order to be a comedy. Some of the greatest comedies do not make us laugh at all. And now you will understand why Dante called his poem the *Divine Comedy*. It begins in Hell; but it ends in Heaven. The whole progress of the poem represents a brightening of conditions until the highest of all conditions is reached at the sight of the *Mystical Rose*.

Taking the classical meaning of the words, therefore, we can save all trouble by dividing the whole of Shakespeare's plays into tragedies and comedies. Yet the distinction can not always be made a very sharp one. The reason is that Shakespeare's genius sometimes invented a new form of drama which it is almost impossible to class. "*Measure for Measure*" must be classed as a comedy; the ending of it is according to the rules of comedy. But, as has well been said, "it oversteps the bounds of comedy." There is no play more sombre and more psychologically terrible than "*Measure for Measure*." From first to last the nerves of the spectator or the reader are kept in a state of extreme tension, which sometimes accentuates into real pain—I may almost say agony. Few tragedies could be more tragical without bloodshed; yet we have classed the play as a comedy.

I think this is all that is necessary to say about grouping. You will see that there are no difficulties in your way according to the judgment of the best scholars. We may now turn to another subject about which an enormous amount of stuff has been written to very little purpose,—the origin of Shakespeare's plays. I believe that we can treat this topic just as simply, though not perhaps as tersely, as the question of grouping.

The first general fact which you should know is that Shakespeare did not invent any of his plays,—with perhaps

one exception, the "Love's Labour's Lost." When he wanted to write a play he simply took a play that had been written before, and wrote it over again; or else he took some famous story which he had read in a book, and made a play out of it; in not a few cases, he used two or three different stories as the material for one of his own dramas. This is the general fact; and it is very significant. Only a great genius can do this. Shakespeare felt so conscious of his own power that the question of a new subject never even occurred to him. No matter how old the subject was, he could make it new; no matter how beautifully a story had been told, he could tell it infinitely better. Nearly all great genius in literature has acted in the same way. Genius does not need to invent, because it re-creates anything which it touches. The greatest of French dramatists, Molière, did just as Shakespeare did; he took his material wherever he could find it.

In a general way, a knowledge of the sources of Shakespeare's plays is of no use to you at all, except in one particular,—the sources show you, better than anything else could, the enormousness of Shakespeare's genius. For when you hear it said that such and such a poet got his inspiration from such and such a story, and look at the story, and find in it almost nothing in the least resembling the poem, then you can understand what inspiration means. It does not mean that a man borrows ideas and expressions from somebody else—literary theft, vulgar plagiarism; it means only that the ideas or expressions of somebody else have excited in the poet's mind a new and completely original train of fancies. Of course Shakespeare sometimes took a whole plot from some other dramatist, as he did in the case of Greene, without the least compunction. But the plot was for Shakespeare nothing more than the frame of a picture. We must suppose that his judgments were made something after this fashion: "I have read Chaucer's poem; it is not badly written, but it is not true to human nature. Cressida was not, could not be, what Chaucer represented her; she was quite

another kind of woman,—weak, selfish, and totally immoral. Now *I* will show you what kind of woman she really was, and what she said.” Then he wrote, we may suppose, “Troilus and Cressida,” and of course the power of his creation makes us see at once that Chaucer’s conception was not natural. Shakespeare must have done this in many cases. Studying the history of Anthony and Cleopatra in Plutarch, he was led to form an idea of Cleopatra probably nearer the truth than that of any historian and certainly nearer to truth than that of Chaucer or any other poet. He said to himself, “This woman was a courtesan; but she loved. She could not be vulgar, because she was a queen and a Greek, but she was certainly a courtesan. I must represent her therefore as ruling her lover entirely by the arts of the courtesan, although at the same time sincerely devoted to him, so far as the weakness and selfishness of her nature allowed her to be. At a pinch, she would sacrifice him, or anybody else; but so long as the pinch does not come, she loves him.” Such is his conception,—incomparably difficult to carry out, yet supremely well carried out. Or take another case—the story of Hamlet. It was not a new story in Shakespeare’s day, but Shakespeare saw possibilities in it that nobody else had ever dreamed of. So keen was his perception here, that it was not until Goethe had studied the piece that he was really able to understand the greatness of Shakespeare’s knowledge. Hamlet is a victim of circumstances, but not of the circumstances suggested by Belleforest’s narrative. He is a victim of circumstances simply and solely because his character is not strong enough for the situation in which he finds himself placed. A powerful man—a man of the stamp of William the Conqueror, for example—would have mastered such a situation in a moment; but Hamlet is too scrupulous, too affectionate, too sensitive, and too weak. Therefore he lives like a man in hell until the frightful tragedy ends. In every case we may say that Shakespeare’s conception of a character was different from that of any writers who had studied such a character be-

fore him. Consequently he never could feel any scruple about taking an old story for his subject. The story might be good or bad; that made no difference. It could not be bad for Shakespeare, because with his genius he could always see possibilities in a story infinitely beyond the capacity of the man who had written it. And it is because of all this that I tell you, or rather advise you, not to give yourselves any trouble about the sources of Shakespeare's plays. The important thing to do is to study one or two of the plays or as many as you can, and find out for yourselves something of the wonderful beauty in them. If a really great translation of Shakespeare's plays should ever be made into your language, it will probably be made by university students; and I can imagine no possibility of making it, except by a perfectly natural study of the work in itself, without giving any attention to commentaries, theories, chronology, or anything of what is called Shakespeareanism.

Will it not surprise you to think that Shakespeare was able to delight the common public during the age of Elizabeth with plays which only our own great scholars perfectly understand to-day? The explanation is very simple. The audience of that time enjoyed the plays exactly as a boy enjoys reading them now—just as very clever stories well dramatized. Questions of psychology and all that sort of thing never enter into the boy's head,—and never entered into Shakespeare's head. His art was unconscious, he never knew how wonderful his own work was; he only felt that it was true. And he was speaking not to scholars or men of science, but to thousands of people who could neither read nor write. The poorest little village in Japan has a more comfortable theatre of a temporary kind than Shakespeare's permanent theatre could have been; and the development of dramatic accessories in Japan long before the *Meiji* era, was incomparably greater than anything which Shakespeare could avail himself of. I told you, during our talk about religious plays, that scenery, fine dresses, or costumes, and

other attractions were used in these dramas during the latter part of the Middle Ages. But those religious dramas had been supported by public subscription and by wealthy municipalities; they could afford to pay for all this. It was quite otherwise in the case of Elizabethan drama, especially in Shakespeare's day. No theatre in London could then afford scenery or fine costumes or any other attraction except that of spirited acting and fine composition. Only rich people could even afford to watch the plays of Shakespeare under a roof. In the Globe theatre, for example, which looked something like a panorama building in Japan to-day, a great part of the theatre was uncovered; and it used to rain upon the heads of those who could not afford to pay for what we call now private boxes. All this, and many other interesting facts, ought to be remembered as proof that Shakespeare had no idea of appealing to a cultured or to a special class, but to the people only. And nothing will be so important for the future Japanese translator of Shakespeare to bear in mind, as the necessity of perfect naturalness in reading the text.

Another thing against which I think it is the duty of the lecturer to warn the student is the psychological theory—the theory of a fundamental idea in each and all of Shakespeare's plays. A great deal of rubbish, very learned rubbish, has been written upon this subject; and it has all ended in exactly nothing. Shakespeare never had a "fundamental idea"; he had no other plan in writing his plays than to make them as close to truth as he possibly could. He never had even a theory of dramatic composition. He broke through all rules, not only because he did not care about rules, but because he had too large a mind to be confined by theory. There was but one limit which he obeyed, and obeyed magnificently—the limit imposed by the dramatic necessities of the stage. And in conclusion I should say that the sources of Shakespeare's plays exist only nominally in other books and dramas; their real place was in his heart and brain.

The subject of Shakespeare is so large that it would be easy to lecture upon it for at least ten years; but we have only a few days in the month to study it. Therefore I can not attempt anything like a systematic analysis of the plays — nor would such analysis, under present circumstances, be of much value to you. In treating of Shakespeare's characters, I can only attempt to show you in what respect they differ from the characters of other dramatists, not only English dramatists, but dramatists of almost every other country. The great difference to be remembered in a general way is their intense vitality, as I have said before.

Probably no two of us perceive and think about any inanimate object exactly in the same way; nevertheless the impressions that inanimate objects make upon healthy minds differ much less than do the impressions made by living persons. For an object, even an artistic object, appeals rather to what we might call the reflecting surface of the mind than to its depth. In the case of persons, the exterior man as object affects us much less than the interior man as subject. We are forced to think about people whom we meet according to their words and acts. Observing what they do and hearing what they say, we imagine the state of their minds, basing our judgment chiefly upon analogy. The reason, we think, a man feels glad or sad when he says or does certain things, is that in our own experience we have found such words and acts associated with gladness or sadness. And in a loose general way we are often right. Nevertheless, no two of us can be impressed in exactly the same way by the same person,—which shows that our several experiences and our several characters differ very considerably. Personally we have the converse experience. You and I have each three friends, let us suppose. To each of your three friends you must have found you are a different person. No doubt the three may be said to love you equally well; but you will find that their opinions of something you do are very different. And you will notice that while one of the three understands you better than the other two in some respects, he

understands you less in other respects. No man can be exactly the same for two other individuals; and the more cultivated the class in which he moves, the wider is the range of difference in the impressions which he makes.

Now a perfect character in drama retains this living power of affecting different persons in totally different ways while remaining to each and all a very real and natural existence. An artificial character in drama does not. The artificial character seems to everybody nearly the same thing; and the opinions of different persons about such a character will be pretty much the same. In other words, the impression made by the puppet-character is nearly the same as the impression made by an inanimate object—I do not mean to say there is absolutely no difference, but the difference is so slight that we need not talk about it. We feel indifferent to the artificial character; but to the natural character we feel as toward a living person. According to our several dispositions we like, love, dislike, hate, or despise the creation of the dramatist, just as in the case of a person to whom we have been introduced by chance or by request.

There are very few characters in all dramatic literature having the vitality of which I speak; but nearly all Shakespeare's characters have it. No two great critics have ever been affected in exactly the same way by one of Shakespeare's characters; and no two great actors have ever rendered one in exactly the same way. Every distinguished artist who has taken the part of Hamlet, Othello, Lear, for example, has given us an entirely unique rendering, without departing in the least from the play, and without adding an invention of his own. In short, to each great actor Othello or Lear seems as the real person would seem; and the difference of the various actors' conception is explicable solely by the absolute truth of Shakespeare's conception. A proper interpretation of one of Shakespeare's characters is enough to establish for the actor a great and lasting reputation; and with the progress of dramatic art in Europe, we find that the interpretations improve generation after

generation. In our own time, the finest interpretation of Othello has been given not by an Englishman but by an Italian, the great actor Salvini.

The observation which I have just made leads naturally to the subject of the second characteristic of Shakespeare's creations to which I wish to call your attention—I mean their comparative immortality. The humanity of Shakespeare's characters is eternal, if we can use the word eternal at all in relation to earthly things. I shall try to explain what I mean a little more clearly. Humanity, in spite of all theories, is a thing that does not change through the centuries. Civilization is, after all, merely a garment for humanity; different civilizations are but different fashions. Of course I do not mean to imply that civilization, in the sense of ordered living, communal living, is not a moulding force; that it does not develop the moral and intellectual capacities of men to their highest possible degree. But social living is incalculably old; and the changes it has made in human nature have been made slowly. A few years ago, the historian Froude, while visiting Norway, wrote an essay, inspired by his travels, in which he said that if an Englishman of to-day could be placed side by side with one of the old Norsemen, the difference in character would prove to be very small indeed. Religious codes of morals, manners and customs all change more or less in the course of time; but the nature of man changes but very slightly. What we are apt to call civilization means for us fashions of life and thought—to few minds does it signify anything really permanent. Therefore I say that civilization itself represents for the philosopher little more than the outer garment of humanity. The heart of man in the sixteenth century was not different from that of the man of to-day. And a true picture of human character drawn in the eighteenth century should therefore be just as interesting to us as if it were a study of contemporary life. The greater number of dramatic writers, however, never get much below the surface of the thing; very seldom have they been able to touch the kernel,

the real human heart whose beat is not changed by all the changes of time. Therefore their plays and their books become neglected and forgotten. Therefore we do not act the plays of Ben Jonson, or of Fletcher, or of Ford, or of other sixteenth century dramatists; their characters are all dead as themselves. But we do continue to act the plays of Shakespeare, because their humanity is of the kind that can not die. We only get a larger and a truer conception of Shakespeare's humanity as the centuries pass. If the work of Molière enjoys something of the same immortality in France, it is chiefly for the same reason—not at all for the same reason that the plays of Racine are still acted. But Molière is incomparably inferior in vital creation to Shakespeare. Indeed, to find any parallel to him, we have to go back to the Greek writers—I should say especially to Euripides, who can never cease to charm us because of the real humanity which he expressed. But the art of Euripides was fettered by artistic laws which did not exist for Shakespeare; and because the Greek could not enjoy the artistic freedom of the Englishman, he could equal the Englishman only in occasional moments.

There is yet a third fact to remember in connection with Shakespeare's characters: the extraordinary fact that they can not be grouped. I know that you will tell me that you have seen some attempt at grouping them; but I can assure you that no really great critic in these days would attempt any grouping of the kind to which I refer. There are of course several ways of grouping; I mean grouping by classes or types—classes of which the individual members all bear to each other a certain resemblance. In the case of every other dramatist, you will find that his characters can be readily grouped by types; all his villains, for example, represent nearly the same conception; all his virtuous women likewise seem to be more or less identical. But this can never be done with Shakespeare's characters by any one who really understands them; and the fact itself is the most triumphant proof of the incomparable truth of his concep-

tions. For in life, only the superficial observer and the superficial thinker can really class human characters by groups or types. Certainly we do find points of interresemblance between lovable persons, and again between hateful persons. Yet close observation must convince us that every human being is essentially different from every other human being; and that their differences are even greater than their resemblances. We can make only a few very loose and general rules about types of character. For example, it is at least true that individual differentiation increases according to intellectual development, and diminishes as we descend lower in the scale of moral life. Shakespeare has given proof of his instinctive knowledge of both these truths. Each one of his personages is essentially different from every other, but the differences appear greatest in those representatives of the higher classes whom he brings upon the stage, and less in the characters that are lower socially and morally.

Nevertheless, he seems to us — though falsely — greatest in his treatment of humble or of ignoble characters; I say “seems,” because the delusion is altogether due to our unfamiliarity with this kind of art. We have been accustomed, for example, to conceive in our own minds a certain vague general idea of what a bad man is; we have been helped to do this partly through religious teaching and partly through personal experience. But our conception is almost certain to be wrong while we are young, and, if still founded upon personal experience, wrong even when we are old. Judging good or bad actions chiefly in their relation to our own pleasure or displeasure, is the very worst way of judging them; yet it is the way in which they have been judged by nearly every other dramatist except Shakespeare. Shakespeare presents us with the natural man always; and, with few exceptions, the natural man is not entirely bad. The ordinary villain is simply a person in whom the feelings antagonistic to civilized existence dominate the opposite class of feelings. In most cases Shakespeare shows us, what

no other dramatist shows us, mainly the secret working of a bad mind,—the reason of the wickedness done. Thus we can not only understand Macbeth, we can almost sympathize with him. He is not a man incapable of good; he is a man entirely dominated by one furious passion of ambition which urges him to commit crimes otherwise contrary to his nature, as his remorse proves them to be. Or take the case of Cloten. Cloten is one of the most cleverly drawn of Shakespeare's bad characters—a spoiled child developed by over-indulgence into a selfish and brutal man, who is capable of any wickedness when his self-esteem has been wounded.

But these are not the most powerful villains drawn by Shakespeare—quite the contrary. The most powerful is unquestionably Iago. It is of Iago that I particularly wish to speak to you. There is a very peculiar fact about the tragedy of "Othello"—that from the beginning of the play until the end we have no real explanation as to why Iago hates Othello and ruins him. Of course Iago says in one passage that he suspects Othello of having committed adultery with his wife. But it is quite evident at the same time that Iago does not believe anything of the sort. He merely offers a suspicion of this sort as a kind of self-justification. At the end of the tragedy when Iago finds himself in the hands of the law—when he is about to be tortured in order to make him tell the truth—he says that he will never speak again; and we know that the tortures will not make him speak. He will die in silence, and the secret of his hate will die with him. Now it seems to me that this mystery of Iago's hatred is Shakespeare's greatest triumph in the portraiture of this scoundrel. This is reality itself. The really bad man, devoid of natural affection and of any generous feeling, is a character extremely difficult to understand. A good man is very easily deceived by a being of this kind, and can not comprehend either how or why he is deceived. Probably all of you will have occasion to meet at least once during your lives a really malevolent character; and if you do, you will discover that you can not

comprehend such a character. You can defend yourself from his malevolence only through a kind of intuition; if you try to cope with him, cunning against cunning, you will find yourself easily overmatched. But the great puzzle for a frank honest person in such cases is to find out why he is hated. This he will try to do, of course; but he will never succeed. Consequently he is apt at a later time to imagine his mysterious enemy more formidable than he really is—more intelligent. The plain truth is that the very bad persons are difficult to understand not because they are more clever than the rest of mankind, but because they are less human, less emotionally developed. The difficulty of understanding them is very like the difficulty of understanding the feelings and thoughts of an animal. Wherever there is an Othello, there is always likely to be an Iago; and Othello will always be the victim of Iago because he can not understand the existence of a nature so inferior to his own.

But now let us take a glance at the working of the malevolent mind in its turn. Does Iago understand Othello? He understands him well enough to play with him as a cat plays with a mouse, to make him ridiculous, to ruin him, to drive him to murder, and then to suicide. That seems as if he understands something about Othello. But really Iago's cunning is only the cunning of the primitive man, the pure savage. He understands nothing of Othello except the finer emotions of the man in regard to love and friendship, and he understands these only as weaknesses. He sincerely believes them to be weaknesses. Such feelings, he thinks, are a dangerous form of pleasure; a man who has affections and sentiments can at any moment be deceived and destroyed. And he sets to work with a sort of amused curiosity to deceive Othello. We must imagine him thinking to himself somewhat like this: "They have made this man General-in-Chief. They think he is a great soldier and a very wise person. I am only a common soldier, but see what I can do with this man. I can lead him by the nose; I can make him believe any lie—even the most absurd; I can turn him

against his friends; I can make him murder his wife! I can make him kill himself, and disgrace his name for all time. Yet this man whom I can thus play with, as I should play with a doll, they have made General-in-Chief! What fools they must be. Surely *I* could serve the government better than this foolish baby whom I can do as I please with." Without any question, Iago believes himself to be incomparably superior to Othello; and it is probable that this feeling has something to do with his hatred. But not all of it can be thus explained; we must recognize here also the same sort of natural cruelty which prompts the wild monkey to pluck a bird alive, or the cat to torture her prey before killing it. Now my theory is simply this, that Iago could not, even if he had wished, have told us why he hated Othello. The really malevolent being can never tell the reason for his malevolence when that malevolence is merely instinctive, any more than a cat could tell, were she able to speak, why she finds it so pleasurable to tease a mouse before killing it. The normally balanced mind is too apt to imagine that there must be some relative cause for a revengeful or malicious act. It is almost impossible for a good man to imagine that a cruel thing can be done without provocation. But it is just for that reason that a good man is so easily deceived. He does not know that there is such a thing as hatred which is inborn, instinctive, intuitive; and that in every thousand men we should probably find at least one in whom this savage form of malice survives. Shakespeare's dramas, when closely analyzed, present us with all these facts; and his Iago is the most absolutely natural of his painful creations. I should like to call your attention also to another of Shakespeare's villains, popularly considered the most atrocious of all — Aaron in "Titus Andronicus." I can not agree with this popular judgment. I do not think that Aaron is nearly so great a villain as Iago. In Aaron, Shakespeare gives us a picture of primitive man, the real savage, without any sense of morals, and scarcely any sense of pity. He is cruel, he is lustful, he is

immensely cunning,—but he has affection. This is a very important difference. He loves his black child, and he is ready to fight the whole world to save it; otherwise he is an absolute barbarian. But Iago is the civilized man, the polished Italian villain, entirely ruled by interest and malice, and totally insensible to affection of any possible kind.

Even when Shakespeare brings upon the stage such characters as courtesans, every person is distinctively individual. From Cleopatra to Doll Tearsheet the distance is not greater than the distance which Shakespeare always established between any two types of this sort. Notice the quiet courteous woman-of-the-town in "The Comedy of Errors," and the character of the woman in "Pericles"; they are miles apart. But it is rather in the most charming types of good women that his power to individualize seems most astonishing, as far as female characters are concerned. I shall call your attention to only one group—of course I mean "group" simply in my own purely arbitrary sense. Shakespeare gives us three different studies of women disguised as boys in three different plays: "As You Like It," "Twelfth Night" and "Cymbeline."

Nothing could be more difficult than to make three perfectly natural and yet essentially distinct conceptions under these circumstances. But this has been supremely well accomplished. Rosalind, the charming, saucy, mischievous, playful, shrewd but withal very tender, and in the best sense, innocent girl, is a type that any Englishman can recognize as being quite possible to-day. She is a girl of courage and daring, able to master the most difficult situation by goodness of heart and firm resolve combined. She can do very dangerous things; but she is strong enough to do them, and you may be sure that she will never make a moral mistake. Viola in "Twelfth Night" is a much slighter being. She is sweet but timid, and we are kept uneasy about her until the end of the play. This is the kind of girl that fortune has to help; she is not strong enough to master a difficult situation, as Rosalind would; but she is clever, and

her gentleness saves her under circumstances where force would be less successful. Imogen in "Cymbeline" is the child-woman—totally unfit to bear hardship, and still less able to bear unkindness. Under no circumstances could you imagine any two out of these three to be sisters. Each is as different from the rest as if she belonged to a different nation, or rather, a different race. Perhaps Rosalind is the most English type of the three. It will be interesting for the student to remember that in Shakespeare's time these characters were to be acted by boys; and the boys employed for the purpose must certainly have been very extraordinary boys. For the boy had to pretend to be a girl dressed as a boy and pretending to be a boy. The difficulty of taking such a part with success can only be understood by those who can appreciate the psychological play required.