

call "Fortune's dearest spite?" Was there no place but Stratford where the prosperous poet could buy himself lands, and write himself gentleman? Had London and "The Mermaid," with Raleigh, and Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, and all the rest of them, no attractions? As to the story of his flight from Stratford a disgraced man, there is not a tittle of evidence in its support; unless you think Walter Savage Landor, and his inimitable trial scene, good contemporary authority. Critics have been deceived with less excuse.

HARDEN.—Well! Well! I'll grant you, he never sneered at the Shallows, or made sport of "the dozen white louses" which so became the Knight of Charlecote's old coat! There are no Dogberrys in his plays! It is all a much-ado-about-nothing, this talk of youthful escapades. He loved a Justice, as Falstaff would have certified, better than "a Windsor stag, the fattest in the Forest."

DELINA.—Nay, but let us consider it seriously. Can you produce nothing more to the point than what you have yet advanced? If you are to credit Shakespeare with all the sentiments of his dramatic characters, you will indeed make him "not one, but all mankind's epitome." What say you to his Katherine, in Henry VIII.? If she and the bluff Tudor were "misgraffed in respect of years," the poet went out of his way—as a courtier at least,—when he made of her a model wife.

HARDEN.—You go wide afield, indeed, if Harry the Eighth is your model husband. But I still venture to think I have already advanced some pretty apt passages. Can you match them with one in support of your view—from Henry VIII., or that other pattern husband, Othello, or Crookback Richard, or Hamlet's uncle, or Benedict himself? Let us have it, no matter where you cull it from.

DELINA.—I grant you, the demand is a hard one. Gladly would we recover, if we

could, some clue to the personal history of this, the greatest of poets, and as I believe, the greatest of men. But his very dramatic power arises from the objective character of his mind. His was, moreover, too healthy and masculine a nature for morbid introversions of the Byronic type. But if anywhere an autobiographic glimpse is to be looked for, it is in his "sugared sonnets,"—as Meres calls them,—some of which were doubtless among the earliest productions of his muse.

HARDEN.—When you can make any sense out of that incomprehensible riddle with which some wiseacre introduced his sonnets to the world; and tell us who "*The onlie Begetter of these insuing Sonnets, Mr. W. H.*" is, to whom "*The well-wishing Adventurer in setting forth, T. T., wisheth that eternitie promised by our ever-living poet.*" it will be time enough to solve the remainder of the mystical puzzle. But what of the Sonnets? I thought the critics were pretty well agreed that the "*Laura*" of our Petrarchian sonneteer was one of the rougher sex. I have looked into them sufficiently carefully, myself, to know that Anne Hathaway's name is not to be found in the whole hundred and fifty-four.

DELINA.—Perhaps not. Yet Anne Hathaway may be. Wordsworth says of the Sonnet:—

"With this key  
Shakespeare unlocked his heart."

HARDEN.—And you still persuade yourself Anne had a place there?

DELINA.—I am more certain she had a place in Shakespeare's heart than in his Sonnets; for they resemble in their general character, other well-known collections of the time, by Daniel, Constable, Spenser and Drayton; and were, as Meres tells us, first circulated in manuscript among his private friends. Too much has been attempted to be made out of them. Some undoubtedly express the poet's own feelings. Others deal with fanciful loves and jealousies; or