

causation that Shakespeare introduced, established, and illustrated. His Titanic mind rested on the nature of things. Nothing less was adequate to support it. And there, to use his own sublime phrase, he laid great bases for eternity.

II.

Let us now turn to the criteria which Mr. Goldwin Smith uses for "finding Shakespeare"—if we may so express it—in his writings:

"In the work even of the most dramatic of dramatists the man can hardly fail sometimes to appear. There are things which strike us as said for their own sake more than because they fit the particular character; things which seem said with special feeling and emphasis; things which connect themselves naturally with the writer's personal history. There are things which could not be written, even dramatically, by one to whose beliefs and sentiments they were repugnant. Any knowledge which is displayed must, of course, be the writer's own; so must any proofs of insight, social or of other kinds. Inferences as to the writer's character from such passages are precarious, no doubt; yet they may not be altogether futile."

These criteria are not displayed in any logical order; indeed, they are rather haphazard; nevertheless, they are to a large extent sound, only they require to be applied with very great skill and delicacy. We cheerfully concede that even a dramatist can "hardly fail sometimes to appear" in his works; in fact, we have argued that he appears in them all the time. This appearance, however, is not direct and obvious, but indirect and suggestive. Just as a Pantheist like Goethe calls nature the garment of God, by which alone he is visible; so we may say that such a supreme artist as Shakespeare is behind all his creations, and is always perceptible there to those who have sufficient insight or intuition. He does not say "I am here," after the fashion of an inferior dramatist like Byron, whose principal heroes are the projections of his own selfhood. The revelation is not by body or voice, but by an electric presence. The living genius pulses forth its power, and we feel that it excels all its achievements. Not that we invariably feel this truth. We are all too prone to ignore it. We are apt to look upon the vast gallery of Shakespeare's creations as something exterior to him, whereas they were all conceived by his genius, and lived within him before they existed beyond him. Dr. Johnson was once annoyed by a dream, in which an adversary had defeated him in argument; but he recovered his serenity of mind on recollecting that he himself had supplied both sides of the discussion. A similar recollection must aid us in our appreciation of Shakespeare. He created all the vital, individual characters of his dramas; he gave them their virtues and their vices, their qualities and their defects; he endowed them with their appropriate language; he furnished them with all their wisdom, wit, strength, beauty, grace, valor and heroism. From his own mind he drew the restless, far-glancing philosophy of Hamlet; from his own nature the subtle and exquisite witcheries of Cleopatra. All the characters of all his plays are partial incarnations of himself. They are but representations of him; splendid symbols thrown off by the incessant activity of his amazing genius. He was more than they—infinately more. They were samples and specimens, and he was the freighted store. His creative force was as full, and rich as ever when he set his final seal upon the majestic "Tempest;" his wealth of thought, his opulence of imagination, his imperial command of language, were just as magnificent. His treasury was too vast to be impoverished by any expenditure. It could only be rifled by the supreme despoiler of mortality.

"O proud death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell!"

We will now look at the application of Mr. Goldwin Smith's criteria. As an instance of things said for their own sake, he cites that lovely passage from the last act of the "Merchant of Venice," beginning with the line—

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!"

"Sleeps" is one of those magical, audacious expressions of which only the highest genius is capable. Tom Moore, we believe, and even Byron, misquoted it as "falls," which is commonplace in comparison. Mr. Goldwin Smith calls it a "poetic voluntary." He points out, what should never be forgotten, that Shakespeare was a poet before he became a playwright, and that it is the profound poetical element of his masterpieces which renders them in a large degree unactable; a point, by the way, that was inimitably argued and illustrated by Charles Lamb. Incidentally, it is noticed that Ben Jonson's reference to Shakespeare's "small Latin and less Greek" simply meant that he was "not classically cultured." Ben Jonson spoke as a deep scholar, one of the best in England, who was even consulted by the thrice-learned Selden. Shakespeare in all probability knew nothing of Greek. Latin he learnt, like every other pupil, at the common grammar school. That he knew French is certain. "It can hardly be doubted," Mr. Goldwin Smith says, "that he understood Italian."

With regard to Polonius's advice to Laertes, Mr. Goldwin Smith remarks that it must be set down to the credit of Shakespeare himself, because it "really does not well suit the character of Polonius, who is generally represented as a pompous old fool." Yes, he is generally so represented, but this is a great mistake. Hamlet does cry "these tedious old fools!" when Polonius is trying with his worldly plummet to sound the mysterious depths of a greater nature. But in the common sense of the word Polonius is not a fool. He is wise as the world goes; that is to say, shrewd. And he is moral as the world goes; that is to say, prudent and decorous. We think, therefore, that his famous advice to Laertes is quite characteristic of the man; and he would naturally express his best, not his worst thoughts on such an occasion.

Mr. Goldwin Smith asserts that "the mystery of Shakespeare's Sonnets will never be solved." But is not the "mystery" an invention? Is it not like the "mystery of evil," a manufacture of intellectual busy-bodies? We also regret to hear Mr. Goldwin Smith echoing the usual old talk about Shakespeare's estrangement from his wife. Where is the proof that he saw little of her and the children for eleven years? Is there any real evidence that she was not with him in London? That he led anything like a disorderly life is absolutely disproved by the rapidity as well as the quality of his dramatic work, to say nothing of his business labors at the theatre. Critics began very early to make up their minds on a plentiful lack of evidence, and the tradition was religiously handed down from generation to generation. And as there is nothing like a prepossession to play the devil with the simplest facts, they presently found a ridiculous corroboration in Shakespeare's will, by which he left his wife only the legacy of his "second best bed"—having, as one fool commentator sneered, worn out the best one with her rival. Whereas the truth is that Shakespeare's wife, according to the custom of the age, was already provided for; and in all probability the second best bed was *their* bed, perhaps their marriage-bed; the best bed being in the guest-chamber—or, as we now say, the spare bedroom. Really, if the method of so many critics and commentators were applied in courts of justice, no man's liberty, honor, or life would be worth a moment's purchase; accusation