

success to the virtuous and defeat and misery to the wicked. He makes a chaste Marina stand unshaken against all solicitation. He suggests by inference and implication that it is better to do well even through evil fortune than, doing evil, to be crowned with apparent success.

A further consideration is, that a dramatist is not like an essayist who speaks face to face, as it were, with its readers, for all his utterances are in character, masked for the time, but making each character act his own proper part. Hence Shakespeare never interferes with his characters—never himself interpolates stage whispers, but lets them speak out as they are supposed to think and feel. He sketches with an impartial hand a debauched Falstaff, and a pure Volumnia; a lustful Lucio, and a chaste Isabella. If in almost every drama he has put a villain, he has put in also some character distinguished for goodness—matching an Iago with a Desdemona, and an Iachimo with a “divine Imogen.” But in this impartial treatment of opposite qualities and conflicting forces, Shakespeare ever witnesses to the influence of good over bad people. He makes Iago say of Cassio:

“He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly.”

And Malcolm, looking upon Macduff’s grief, exclaims:

“Macduff, this noble passion,
Child of integrity, hath from my soul
Wiped the black scruples, reconciled my thoughts
To thy good truth and honour.”

Add to these considerations this final one—the moral effect of Shakespeare’s dramas upon personal character—and the verdict is decisive. “An author is,” says one, “what he causes us to love.” Now Shakespeare, as Coleridge justly observes, is the author of all others calculated to make his readers better as well as wiser. If, as he himself frankly confesses:

“Most true it is, that I have looked on truth
Askance and strangely,”

at least, at times, he has nevertheless made the path of virtue and even piety “plain as way to parish church;” withal begetting in the mind of his readers a preference for “the rough and thorny road to heaven,” in comparison with “the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire.”

Shakespeare as a moral and intellectual stimulus is generally recognized. To read his works, however superficially, is a pleasure,