

III. SHAKESPEARE THE INTERPRETER.

§ 1. *His Visions not only Described but Interpreted.*

But again : in a region lower perhaps, it may be thought ; amidst things less ethereal, less impalpable, our great Poet has a function, not less wonderfully, not less perfectly executed, than is that which he fulfils in regard to the Imagination. He not only sees, and depicts his visions, so that we may also see them as in a glass, and examine them ; but he goes minutely into the actions, little as well as great, of the numerous persons, notable and secondary, whom he brings before us. In doing this, he has proved himself the Interpreter of the every-day life of men—of all men.

§ 2. *The Relations of Things and Natural Sympathies Interpreted by him.*

Kings, Statesmen, Historians, Philosophers, Divines, learn from him what they themselves are,—learn what are their own veritable relations to their fellow-men—better and more definitely than, in many an instance, they would perhaps ever have done without his aid. Into the inmost consciousness of all sorts and conditions, in an infinite variety of situations, he passed, and translated it for them into words, brief, easy, luminous,—acknowledged at once as true. Womanhood in all its phases he divined by a marvellous intuition, and transmuted his ideal conceptions with a tender reverence, a just exactness, a consistent veri-similitude, into a group of concrete forms that have approached nearer than any other emanations from men to personal living creations.

All natural sympathies with youth, with boyhood, with childhood, with old age,—all the human feelings stirred by the names, father, mother, brother, comrade, friend—have in him perfect and plenteous expression. All trades, crafts, mysteries and callings, find through him a voice. Through the coarse or quaint wrappings of his rustics, his boors, his supposed incapables, his half-wits,—his trivial folk of the street in burgh or village—there gleam forth shrewd evidences of heart and material sense. Who ever entered the penetralia of so-called madness, mastering and disclosing its arcana, as he has done? His poor idiots all teach their lesson, and shew the human soul pent up within them. There is a moral purpose in his semi-brutish monster—that symbol of lowest human savagery brought, as in the history of colonization we so often see it brought, into immediate contact with highest and finest intellect, awed by it, hating it, yet insensibly, irresistibly drawn to it, though finding in the meantime more congenial fellowship in nature's immensely lower, but still raised, however slightly, above itself.

And to descend to the brute creation itself—to the irrational creatures of earth and air, associated, oftentimes domesticated with us, exposed to misery frequently and destruction by our caprice and inconsiderateness—in regard to these, the references in his works, are ever such as to betoken how humanly, how sympa-