

DELINA.—Well: Kate became a model wife.

HARDEN.—And so must we fancy did Anne Hathaway; but I rather fancy both Petruchio and "our pleasant Willy,"—as Spenser calls him,—found themselves most comfortable when their charmers were a hundred miles off. Shakespeare at least put the road to London between them, and once there, it is not hard to find what he thought of young men marrying old wives.

DELINA.—Where, I pray you, does he ever allude to his marriage? The very marvel of Shakespeare's dramas is that, with perhaps the solitary exception of "the dozen white lutes" in Justice Shallow's coat-armour, and the Welshman's blundering travesty of it for the benefit of the "old coat" of the Lucys of Charlecote, there is not a personality noticeable in his whole writings.

HARDEN.—I said nothing about personalities. But what say you to the allusion in "Midsummer Night's Dream"? That is one of his earliest comedies, you must be aware; and contains interesting traces of the goings on in his own Warwickshire neighbourhood when he was a boy.

DELINA.—What allusion?

HARDEN.—No better known passage is to be found in all Shakespeare's plays,—Ly-sander's melancholy inventory of the course of true love:—

"Either it was different in blood,
Or else misgrafted in respect of years."

Do you fancy the poet was thinking very lovingly of his absent wife when he penned that line?

DELINA.—I don't believe he was thinking of her at all. In the original, Hermia has her running comment on one after another of the reputed impediments: regarding each but as—

"A customary cross,

As due to love as thoughts and dreams and sighs,
Wishes and tears, poor fancy's followers;"

and to this special one she responds:—

"O spite! Too old to be engag'd to young!"

It seems to me that Shakespeare has the best of it even according to your interpretation of his allusion.

HARDEN.—What say you then to the Duke's advice to Viola in "Twelfth Night"? You can scarcely get over that, I think.

DELINA.—Repeat it.

HARDEN.—Let us have the book. Here it is:—

"Let still the woman take

An elder than herself; so wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband's heart;
For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,
Than women's are."

There surely spoke the poet's own personal experience. You don't fancy he jumped to his knowledge of human character and motives by intuition, and with his eyes shut.

DELINA.—By intuition, I do verily believe; though certainly not with his eyes shut.

HARDEN.—Well, but listen again. The Duke goes on thus:—

"Then let thy love be younger than thyself,
Or thy affection cannot hold the bent;
For women are as roses, whose fair flower
Being once display'd, doth fall that very hour."

If you can get over that there is no use reasoning with you.

DELINA.—Nay; let us hear Viola's reply; remembering that she is a youth, a "boy," as the Duke calls her,—young Shakespeare, let us suppose.

"And so they are," she says,

"Alas that they are so;

To die, even when they to perfection grow!"

I don't think that chimes in very aptly with your theory of Shakespeare as the repentant Benedict, pillorying his own folly "for daws to peck at."

HARDEN.—You will never persuade me that Shakespeare is not there putting his own experience to use, as one who had committed the very folly he warns against.