

fresh presentation of experience, I have unfailingly discovered a proportionate increase of wisdom and intuition in Shakespeare; when I know this, and know too, that by a conceivable and possible, though hardly to be expected, arrangement of the British theatres, not all indeed, but a large, a very large, proportion of this indefinite all— * * * might be sent into the heads and hearts—into the very souls of the mass of mankind, to whom, except by this living comment and interpretation, it must remain for ever a sealed volume, a deep well without a wheel or a windlass;—it seems to me a pardonable enthusiasm to steal away from sober likelihood, and share in so rich a feast in the fairy world of possibility!" *Vide Works*, vol. iv. 45. Harpers' Ed. Again: p. 185, "There are three powers:—Wit, which discovers partial likeness hidden in general diversity; subtlety, which discovers the diversity concealed in general apparent sameness; and profundity, which discovers an essential unity under all the semblances of difference. Give to a subtle man fancy, and he is a wit; to a deep man imagination, and he is a philosopher. Add again, pleasurable sensibility in the three-fold form of sympathy with the interesting in morals, the impressive in form, and the harmonious in sound, and you have the poet. But combine all,—wit, subtlety and fancy, with profundity, imagination, and moral and physical susceptibility of the pleasurable, and let the object of action be man universal; and we shall have—O rash prophecy! say rather, we have—a SHAKESPEARE!"

X.

The Sonnets of Shakespeare.

The Sonnets of Shakespeare have been in too many points unfairly taken as illustrative of his own private history. Very many of them were probably written with no reference whatever to himself, but wholly as personating, for the occasion, one or other of his many friends,—the earl of Southampton, for example, or the earl of Pembroke. A few of them may even, without much difficulty, be imagined to have been sportively feigned as missives from the inamoratas of these friends in reply to verses previously supplied by himself. Some of them may be regarded as sketches in his art—as *parerga* thrown off while working at particular characters placed in particular situations in his dramas. Some of them, if not direct translations, may be close imitations of now forgotten or not yet detected Italian originals. Whilst amongst them are without doubt some which may be taken as expressive of his own personal natural feelings in relation to his wife, from whom, while establishing his fortune by literary labour and business ventures in London, he was absent during portions of every year. But in regard even to these, we cannot bring ourselves to imagine that they were ever intended by him to be laid at her feet,—however fully the pith and substance of them may have been, from time to time, transmitted in homely prose, by post or carrier, to Stratford.

Of this miscellaneous *Liber Studiorum*, possession appears to have been obtained surreptitiously; and a printer was found to give it, without authority, to the world. Though consisting partly of groups, and partly of independent pieces, the whole came forth as a continuous poem, the sonnets following one another as stanzas in haphazard order, just as they had chanced to be entered on the pages of the manuscript book. Misprints and misplaced words abounded, to the great obscurity and detriment of the poet's meaning.

Sonnet cxii., supposed by some critics to have been addressed to his wife, but not improbably written for, and in the character of, one of his friends, as before suggested, is here given at length, for the purpose of offering a conjectural emendation in a line, which appears to have been given up in despair, by the commentators.