

tian virtue, and what this unchristian art has still retained of it is but the echo of Christian traditions and Christian education. That the picture is not an exaggerated one, may be easily gleaned by a passing glance at the heroes and heroines who, in that art, appeal to our sympathy. What are the Don Juans, the Fausts, but grinning fiends, who with ribald cynicism rail at the moral squeamishness of a hypocritical age; or weep solemn tears at the inevitable ruin wrought by their selfish, heartless deeds, only to mock at their repentance in the next hour? And the heroines, the Fannies, the Marguerites, the Mignons, Haydee's—poor, fallen, abandoned victims of man's brutality. Of course, we are told that these so called realistic pictures of life, decked with all the allurements that the poetic fancy can devise, are not to allure us,—oh, no!—they are to chasten our passions, and to heighten our moral sensibility. And is *this* Art's true mission? If it is, then Shakespeare has misjudged its craft; and yet he is by common consent the most faithful interpreter of the human heart since Homer sang his immortal song of Troy. Shakespeare, likewise, has fixed life's fleeting images upon his canvas with a startling reality, but in those pictures the elements of life are adjusted on a different plan, all that is humane here finds its proper place, the low, the base, as well as the elevated, the pure. But the order which they hold in the nature of things is not inverted. Vice, also, is there, vice as dark and forbidding as the human heart is able to endure, but it is never arrayed in virtue's garb, and even when it stalks the stage in kingly robes it is branded with such infamy that the heart recoils from it in natural abhorrence.

And woman? There is not in the whole range of art, ancient or modern anything so absolutely perfect as Shakespeare's portraits of women. Not that in their characters they exhibit that insipid faultlessness which the tyro in Art bestows upon his puppet figures. Shakespeare's women are animated with the true instincts of nature, the warm blood of life pulsates through their veins, they exhibit all the foibles and weaknesses that so much endear them to their stronger brethren; but their white robe of purity, heaven's choicest gift, remains immaculate under the poet's hands. Not a sus-

picion is raised against it, and where slander is levelled at it, it comes from such vile things as an Iago and an Iachimo. That immortal love song, "Romeo and Juliet" is full of situations that would have furnished the modern romancer with ample opportunities for venting his grovelling instincts, but in Shakespeare's lovers, though their passion runs high, though it rends the very links of life asunder, not an evil breath is uttered, not a thought is conceived until their love shall be hallowed at the altar of the Most High. And so it is with his Portia, his Jessica, with his Ophelia and Rosalind, with his Imogen and Desdemona; and so through the whole list of his full-sized portraits of noble womanhood. And what has been said here of Shakespeare may be said with equal correctness of the greatest writers of all nations and times:—of Homer and Sophocles, of Dante and Tasso, of Corneille, Racine and Schiller, and of our own immortal Milton. To Shakespeare it applies even in a less degree than to the others, for Shakespeare's purity of art sprang less from any deep moral or religious sentiments than from an innate and true artistic instinct, by means of which he clearly perceived that only that art will be immortal, which presents to us in the fairest form that which is most noble and sacred in our being: and that the vile, the low, must never directly and for its own sake be made the subject of artistic treatment, but may, indirectly, be used, when it will serve as a foil for the noble and the great.

And how does modern art compare with this standard? Especially when we take into its compass those lower forms of prose fiction and drama that in our days infest the reading-room and the stage. As has already been pointed out, instead of presenting us with noble ideals of life, it panders to, and directly excites the passions,—passions which have their higher purposes correctly assigned to them in the classic art of the past, but which now are degraded to ignoble ends. It should here, however, be stated that in England where Fennyson in his trembling hand is "wearing the white flower of a blameless life," the literary art in its ablest representatives, is less deserving of these censures than that of continental Europe. The sturdy sons of Britain, and their American descendants love their hearth-