

II.

It has been said that Shakespeare was hardly mentioned by his contemporaries, and that he was substantially unknown. This is a mistake. In 1600 a book was published called "England's Parnassus," and it contained ninety extracts from Shakespeare. In the same year was published the "Garden of the Muses," containing several pieces from Shakespeare, Chapman, Marston and Ben Jonson. "England's Helicon" was printed in the same year and contained poems from Spenser, Greene, Harvey and Shakespeare.

In 1600 a play was acted at Cambridge, in which Shakespeare was alluded to as follows: "Why, here's our fellow Shakespere who puts them all down." John Weaver published a book of poems in 1595, in which there was a sonnet to Shakespeare. In 1598 Richard Bamfield wrote a poem to Shakespeare. Francis Meres, "clergyman, master of arts in both universities, compiler of school books," was the author of the "Wits' Treasury." In this he compares the ancient and modern tragic poets, and mentions Marlowe, Peel, Kyd, and Shakespeare. So he compares the writers of comedies, and mentions Lilly, Lodge, Greene and Shakespeare. He speaks of elegiac poets, and names Surrey, Wyatt, Sidney, Raleigh and Shakespeare. He compares the lyric poets, and names Spencer, Drayton, Shakespeare and others. This same writer, speaking of Horace, says that England has Sidney, Shakespeare and others, and that "as the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweet-wittie soul of Ovid lives in the mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare." He also says: "If the Muses could speak English, they would speak in Shakespeare's phrase." This was in 1598. In 1607, John Davies alludes in a poem to Shakespeare.

Of course, we are all familiar with what rare Ben Jonson wrote. Henry Chettle took Shakespeare to task because he wrote nothing on the death of Queen Elizabeth.

It may be wonderful that he was not better known. But is it not wonderful that he gained the reputation that he did in so short a time, and that twelve years after he began to write he stood at least with the first?

III.

BUT there is a wonderful fact connected with the writings of Shakespeare: In the Plays there is no direct mention of any of his contemporaries. We do not know of any poet, author, soldier, sailor, statesman, priest, nobleman, king, or queen, that Shakespeare directly mentioned.