

## Shakespeare.

## II. ENGLAND'S AWAKENING. V

After the *coup d'état* of 1851, Victor Hugo and his son were expelled from France and went to live in Jersey. It is recorded by the former writer that the following conversation took place between them soon after they had settled there. Suddenly the son raised his voice and questioned the father:

"What do you think of this exile?"

"That it will be a long one."

"How do you expect to occupy the time?"

The father replied, "I shall watch the ocean."

After a pause, the father asked, "And you?"

"I," said the son, "I shall translate Shakespeare."

The ocean of nature and the ocean of mind have many parallels, and the breadth and depth of Shakespeare's thought is as restless and romantic, as terrible and entrancing as the sea itself when compared to the lake-like shimmering of still beauty, and the river-flowing fancies of lesser men.

Though lives of study and volumes of reflection on the part of scholarly critics, and the unabated admiration of the world at large have placed Shakespeare in the very highest niche of fame's valhalla, far above all other heroes of human literature whomsoever, until custom has forced men to regard him as the king of thinking animals and a demi-god of mind, let us look a little into the real circumstances that affected his life and moulded his genius and learn something, if possible, of the outward associations and the true inner character and quality of this man Shakespeare, whom some believed to have been possessed by a familiar spirit—whom Jonson styled "the prince of poets"—whom Carlyle called "an unparalleled mortal," and whom Coleridge most happily christened "the myriad-minded man." Firstly, let us consider the period of English growth to which he belonged.

The first great storm of the reformation had nearly subsided; the black clouds of dark ages were being rapidly chased away by the bright dawn of the revival. A final reaction from the cold and formal rules of theocracies and hierarchies took place and a reversion was made to the manners and ideas of the ancients. An incubus was lifted from the breast of England and she breathed freely.

The spirit of man, which for long centuries had been subjected to the dominance of the Romish church, suddenly refused to be dictated to any longer. The human mind, which had not been allowed to think for itself or to perform any inherent desire of its own; but was governed and goaded by a priesthood, partly carnal gross and inexperienced and partly mystical, ascetic and crafty of purpose,—this mind awoke at length from the torpor of imposed inaction, and asserted itself in its main strength. England recovered from the stupor into which she had been thrown and kept by a continuous administration of the religious drug—Romanism.

Even the physical man, hitherto used merely as a fighting or serving machine by the nobles or a praying and tithing machine by the priests, suddenly rose from the apathy of servitude, and regained the full vigour of natural health and the proper enjoyment of liberty.

The spiritual effect of the emancipation of conscience was due to the Reformation and the result of the mental and physical reaction has been well named the Renaissance.

Shakespeare was the culmination of these great influences. He dropped the curtain over the Dark Ages and opened the scene of modern enlightenment. The rushing out of human thought and the desire for heroic action, which were the two great characteristics of the age, found their universal expression in the individual utterances of a man, specially ordained to be the exponent of humanism. Look at the events preceding the advent of Shakespeare. A century before Queen Elizabeth commenced her reign, the art of printing had been discovered, soon after copper engraving had taken the place of wood engraving. Oil painting was started not long before by John Van Eyck. The Vatican

library, had been commenced and the Spanish and Portuguese were already colonizing and slave trading. About 1455 the first printed book known was issued from a primitive press, and it is significant to notice that it was the Bible. In 1458 Magdalen College, Oxford, was founded and during the next hundred years Christ's and Magdalen at Cambridge and Trinity at Oxford, were started, whilst abroad universities were established at Basel, Bourges, Bordeaux, Upsala, Tübingen, Wittenburg, Alcalá, Marburg, Königsberg and Jena. In 1476 Caxton established his English printing press at Westminster. In 1522 the first polyglot Bible was published and the Scriptures were issued during the next 30 years in the Swedish, Italian, French, Spanish and Polish languages; whilst in England appeared Tyndale's New Testament, Coverdale's Bible and the great Bible during the same period. In 1525 religious liberty had been proclaimed in Denmark, where Lutheranism soon prevailed. In 1538 the English Bible was permitted in English churches, and a few years later the first Book of Common Prayer was used. In the world of science Columbus had noted the variation of the mariner's compass in 1492; gunpowder had been invented long before; and the Copernican Theory of astronomy was given to the world in 1543. It is very noteworthy that St Peter's had not long been built in Rome; though the death-blow had already been given to her temporal power. In commerce the first exchange had been opened at Antwerp, in 1532, whilst the discoveries of Cape Verde, Cape of Good Hope, America, Jamaica, Brazil, Madagascar, Pacific Ocean, Bermudas, New Guinea, Mississippi Valley, and the Potosi silver mines followed one another rapidly and opened up new channels for trade, war and colonization. In 1522 Magellan made the first voyage round the world and thirty years before Martin Behaim had constructed at Nuremberg his "world apple" or Terrestrial globe. The Trinity House was established in 1512. During the century before the birth of Shakespeare the fruits of the Renaissance in the different European Schools of painting were seen in the masterpieces of Botticelli, Michael Angelo, Andrea Del Sarto, (of Florence); Beccafumi, (of Siena); Perugino and Raphael, (of Umbria); Tintoretto, Titian and Veronese, (of Venice); Caracci, (of Bologna); Corregio and Parmigiano, (of Parma); Leonardo Da Vinci, (of Milan) and other notable Italian painters, whilst in Germany the Holbeins, the Behams and Albert Durer reigned. The Flemish school produced Susterman, Quintin Matsys and Antonio Moro, Gerard of Haarlem was one of the few Dutch painters of the age. In England art was in its infancy and only about the year of Elizabeth's accession miniature painting was practised by such men as Nicholas Hilliard, George Jameson and the Olivers. But a galaxy of learned men and religious enthusiasts prevailed among scientific explorers and literary giants;—such names as Erasmus, Savanarola, Ariosto, Luther, Paracelsus, Knox, Vasari, Palestrina, Calvin, Tycho Brahe, Carvantes, Spenser, Raleigh, Rabelais, Sydney, Beza and Coke, serve to illustrate the powerful forces of thought then at work. And after all this planting of European seed in the soil of freedom, there suddenly sprang into blossom the flower of England's greatness! The nation had fallen asleep in its boyhood about Chancer's time and woke up in Shakespeare's day to find it had grown into manhood, in full possession of physical strength, mental vigour and a pure and powerful imagination.

This was the only time when the sweet smile of the sunny south of Europe ever rested on the cold, grave face of England. This was the one period when the little northern isle was lighted up, as it were, by an enchanter's wand, until the scene became brilliant and bedazzling.

The beautiful flowers of Italy, the bright skies of Spain, and the joyous gayety of France, all seemed transported until they rested upon the land and people of England, as sometimes over the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean the golden minarets of some far-off oriental city are pictured on the surface of the clouds not far away; and, just as the