

the angels. Chivalry was the result—that strange phase of mediæval civilization during which iron-clad knights devoted their lives to scouring the country in search of distressed damsels in need of their aid—a phase betokening indeed a noble spirit and in many respects worthy of great admiration; but one, notwithstanding, to a great degree, anomalous, not to say ludicrous. These gayly plumed knights who stickled so much for their honor seem to have forgotten, or not to have known that it is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. It must be stated to their credit, however, that the love which then prevailed was pure and noble, and had nothing in common with the erratic and debased sentiment by which writers of the “realistic” school have desecrated it in modern days. For the former, women were ethereal beings of a nature almost too refined to exist in this work-a-day world; for the latter, they are mere toys for man’s amusement to be cast aside at pleasure. Such then are the two extreme conceptions of the *grande passion* as presented by the history of art in the past and present.

But the mind may be compared to a pendulum inasmuch as, having oscillated for a time between two extremes, it finally reaches a position of rest midway between them. A superficial introspection into the works of our own intellect will prove this statement. And so it happened with regard to love in art. After the amorous Tasso, the ablest exponent of chivalry, came the judicious Shakespeare who was the first to assign to love its proper position in art, and at the same time pointed out its necessary limits. In all his great tragedies it finds a place, but is ever overshadowed by some nobler passion, or if it please you better, by one more indicative of virile strength. In Hamlet, for instance, that master work of a master mind, he who can read between the lines at once perceives love to have been the mainspring of the prince’s life previous to the time when he was made aware that his father had been done to death by his wicked uncle. Once he has gained this knowledge, however, love disappears almost completely, only looming up now and then in the lurid light of his madness to show thoroughly it had previously impregnated his being. In his sane moments he knows but one passion—the desire of revenge.

In Shakespeare’s comedies love is given a larger scope, as in fact it should, this being of an altogether lighter nature and not intended to portray the more visible elements of the human heart. Yet how vast a difference exists between the love to be found in them and that which at present constitutes almost the entire stock-in-trade of the dramatist! “The Merchant of Venice” has been pronounced by competent authorities to be an ideal comedy. In it love is paramount, yet what a perfect woman is Portia! No maudlin sentimentalism does she display; her head is as clear as her heart is warm, and we love her for it. Upon learning that her lover is in danger, she immediately taxes her woman’s wit to devise a means for his deliverance. Nor is she long in finding one as striking in originality as it is successful in execution. Shakespeare then has conceived love’s place in art more truly than has any other artist before or since.

If this be true, the question naturally presents itself: “Having once found the talisman by which true art was produced, how came the human mind to lose it once again?” The reply is simple. Shortly before Shakespeare’s time a great upheaval had convulsed the religious world. Man had cast aside the old forms of belief and had boldly struck out on a new path. The event was too recent to greatly effect the art of the peerless dramatist. But as time wore on and as the novel ideas spread, the logical consequences of the new departure began to make themselves felt in all the fields of the mind and in none more so than in art. Until then Christian art was regarded as nature idealized through the agency of religion. It was held that this spiritual element should be entirely dominant if art was to reach its ideal. Thus we find that most of the paintings of the great masters are on religious subjects. The only epic of which the English language can boast is, both in plot and incidents, entirely founded on the supernatural. But “the old order changeth yielding place to new,” and so it proved with art. The new standard entirely excluded the supernatural as something essentially foreign to the true nature of art. Yet all agreed that art must have a dominant principle. The ancients had reared a noble edifice by using such affections of the heart as