

their language. In them, to again borrow from Hazlitt, we find "all the prodigality of youth, the confidence inspired by success, an enthusiasm bordering on extravagance, richness running riot, beauty dissolving in its own sweetness." All subjects are touched upon by them. Though, perhaps, inferior to Jonson in comedy, certainly to Marlowe and Webster in tragedy, they on the whole make the nearest approach to Shakespeare.

Then comes "noble-minded" John Webster, of whose life little is known. The cast of his genius is gloomy and weird. Of his extant dramas, *Vittoria Corambona* or *The White Devil*, and the *Duchess of Malfi* are the best. Webster, to borrow the words of an English writer, delights "to suggest horrible imaginings, to adorn his sentiments with some image of tender and awful beauty." No better illustration can be given of the dark and morbid bent, the gloomy power of Webster's genius that in the words of Charles Lamb, speaking of the *Duchess of Malfi*, "who," he says, "has lived among horrors till she has become native and endowed into that element. She speaks the dialect of despair; her tongue has a snatch of Tartarus and the souls of Hell. To move a horror skilfully, to touch a soul to the quick, to lay upon fear as much as it can bear, to wear and weary a life till it is ready to drop, and then to step in with mortal instruments to take its last forfeits, this only a Webster can do."

I have given a sketch, brief and imperfect, a skeleton though it be, of this epoch, but, ere passing to the next, I wish, for a moment, to draw attention to a peculiarity of the English dramatists of this age. It is this. The dramatists of the Elizabethan period are the only writers of England, or of any other country, who habitually represent the various forms of mental disease. There is something awful about distempers of the mind which possessed wonderful attractions for their tragic muse. Not only do