

It was foreseen that it would be better that they should become abstractions, shades of mighty name, than that their message should lose any of its power with men, through the reports of "a thousand peering littlenesses,"—who—(to use the words of the modern poet, who has so well caught the tone of the great seer and interpreter himself)—

"If they find
Some stain or blemish in a name of note,
Not grieving that their greatest are so small,
Inflate themselves with some insane delight,
And judge all nature from her feet of clay,
Without the will to lift their eyes, and see
Her godlike head crowned with spiritual fire,
And touching other worlds."

Tennyson, "Idyll," p. 121.

Like order seems to have been taken in regard to the great modern seer and interpreter of life. With a self-depreciation that was real, which commands on that account our reverence rather than our acquiescence, he, of his own accord, appears to have rendered a biography impossible: with a scorn of the "virtuous lies," so often vended in relation to the dead, he would have no friend hang upon him, when departed, "more praise than niggard Truth would willingly 'e. voluntarily impart!"

Even in regard to his works—those of them in particular on which the studies of posterity have been concentrated, he, with a modesty which is characteristic often of greatness, and compatible with a high ambition, the result of an unquenchable thirst after perfectness in the expression of beauty and truth, seems never to have collected them: like the ostrich-egg in the desert they were abandoned to their fate, one here, another there, as he advanced onwards to the maturity of his genius, stretching forth ever to those things which are before. So that they have come down to us in some respects not so sifted, not so pruned, not so homogeneous, as we can conceive they would have been, had they, at the close of his career, undergone the re-touchings of his own hand.

Hence we have in them, not only a mine of wisdom and thought, but also (as in the case of so many other bequests from the seers and thinkers of old time) legitimate subject-matter for the exercise of our discernment—for the testing of the critical faculty within us. (Note X.)

§ 13. *The Religious Convictions of Shakespeare as Gathered from his Recorded Words.*

Independently, however, of the casual records referred to,—of him personally, notwithstanding his self-depreciative reticence—we may gather from his own words, with certainty *this*:—which it is due to his memory to declare here with all clearness, for the admonition of a mixed assembly of his fellow-mortals,—that he was a man who knew as well as any, before him or since, that "all the souls that ever were, were forfeit once; and that He that might the vantage best have took, found out the remedy":—he knew and realized as well as any, that "in the