

But our chief and most reliable source of information on this point is the tenor of Shakespeare's writings. Considering that these were published in times when the most bitter spirit of intolerance was prevalent, when a disrespectful or calumnious sneer at the ancient faith was received with acclamations, they are remarkably free from the venomous anti-Catholic sentiment, the infamous caricatures of ecclesiastical personages which are to be found in contemporary works. But besides refraining from aspersions of the Church, Shakespeare's works are adorned with many passages which reveal their author's tender regard for Catholic doctrines and customs. The reverent care with which he ever treats of sacred subjects bespeaks his sincere respect for the virtues and offices of the Church. Whether referring to a question of ritual or ethics, the same tone is apparent, and moreover he never makes a mistake. The Catholic spirit of his plays is emphasized by the prominence given ideas of repentance and remorse for sin, such as he could only have obtained from one source. But above all is it manifest, remarks Dr. Barry, in "the exquisite purity of Shakespeare's women, divine at once in their grace and their strength, showing how entirely the mind of the poet was penetrated by the ethical spirit of Catholicism." These considerations are of far more importance than the mere question of Shakespeare's religious belief. Whatever it was, probably one of indifference, that none had such influence upon him as the forsaken faith of his fathers we can clearly see. The strong, pure light which shines through all his writings cannot be mistaken. The life and feeling which pervades them, their very air and colour are certainly and truly Catholic.

Another writer who, like Shakespeare, if not within the pale was at least upon the border land of Catholicism, is his friend and contemporary, "rare Ben Jonson." We know that Jonson passed twelve years within the bosom of the Church, and this no doubt had much to do with the Catholic feeling we find throughout his productions. What we have said of Shakespeare in this regard will apply equally well to him. Catholicism left a visible imprint on his writings, repeated allusions being made to doctrines and customs of the Church, while there are very few offensive passages. Of his dramas, inferior only to Shakespeare's, Angus says that they