

by-play of the rings, which had been woven into the grander device of the trial, works its way, through an amusing mock-quarrel of the newly-wedded couples, to a good-humored explanation, while the grander device is by the same means unravelled in a manner that adds to the exultant feelings of the triumph.

It is a very stale criticism on the students of poetry, that they often find in the works of a poet a great deal more than he himself ever dreamt. The criticism may be just in some cases, but it is equally meaningless in others. A great work of poetic art cannot, in general, be less significant for the progress of thought than a new discovery in science or a fresh system of philosophy. Every step in the scientific or philosophic progress of the human mind brings into clearer view the organic connection of all truth, and must, therefore, as a rule, involve implications which could scarcely be surmised at the time. In like manner the artistic perfection of a poem depends on the completeness of its harmony with the best thought and sentiment of humanity, so that it must be directly or indirectly expressive of truth far beyond all that the author consciously intended. How far Shakespeare was aware of the teaching with which any of his dramas is charged, it is truly futile to inquire at this time of day. The task of the critic is rather to unfold the full significance of the ideas involved in the poet's plan and its execution. And if, in the case of "The Merchant of Venice," it be urged that Shakespeare did not, or could not, discern clearly the bearing of his splendid creation upon industrial morality, it does not seem irreverent to reply, that this spake he not of himself, but, being a great high-priest of humanity at the time, he prophesied for the guidance of that industrial era upon which the world was entering.