

great genius. There have been writers even who would not permit him to have the one or the other—Protestants, Catholics, and Rationalists, have seen in his works all that was required for making him belong to their respective camps; all, thus, at the same time, bringing to him the greatest homage which it is possible to render to his genius. This strange spectacle is nowhere more striking than in France, at the moment when I address you. While the Protestant Guizot has published an excellent translation of his works, preceded by an essay as learned as any which has been written upon him in English; while Victor Hugo has himself written the commentaries which accompany the translation of his *sonnets*, and at this moment is putting forth a volume in honour of the English bard, the eminent and profound author of *l'Art Chretien*, M. Rio, is publishing a work in which he claims for Catholicism both his person and his writings. It has often been asked—what was the secret of this universality? I am inclined to look for it, neither in the local colour of his several pieces, in which indeed it often happens that there is something for adverse criticism; nor in the profound philosophy of his thoughts; nor in the grand variety of the situations, which he has so ably strung one upon the other; nor in the complete union on his stage of all phases of life, of all classes of society; nor even in his learned study of the innermost folds of the human conscience. I see it chiefly in that genius which works, with no other love than that of art; in the Poet who sings like a bird almost without cessation, because he cannot do otherwise; in the enthusiastic observer of humanity who himself penetrates into everything which he wishes to paint; in the perfect good faith of the narrator who believes all that he narrates; in the absolute absorption of the man in the artist; of the workman in his work. And let it be remarked, that not the writings of Shakespeare alone, but the ignorance in which we are on a crowd of subjects which concern him again support this opinion. He did not stop in the midst of his work to analyse himself and draw his own portrait for posterity. He never thought that he could sleep upon his laurels. He always pursued the ideal of a new *chef-d'œuvre* looking through nature and humanity. Lastly, we may well suppose that he has never had a complete appreciation of his own superiority. Such, also may have been Racine, Corneille, Molière and Lafontaine. They have not been demigods in their life times, and it is that which has maintained them on the pedestal where posterity has placed them. Like him they have found in the naturalness of their literary and artistic faith, the great secret of art and nature; like him they have given all their souls to that jealous muse which will have no distracted worshippers; no timid nor interested lovers. But Shakespeare, ignorant of the rules of symmetry which for a long time tyrannized over the World of letters and from which his example and that of his imitators have perhaps only too completely emancipated us, Shakespeare who had at the same time the intuition of the great principles of art on which all rules must be more or less based, had by that very fact an immense advantage over all the poets of the age of Louis XIV. Nothing was interdicted to him by the usages of Parnassus; but in default of this legislation he had genius for his guide in the choice of means and resources. It is not exactly because he neglected these rules; but because he knew how to divine their object, and achieve it without following them, that he triumphed in a field, where so many since have done nothing but corrupt the public taste. His own country, seduced by his success, could not long remain submissive to his examples. The Shakespeare of Dryden and Davenant resemble the true Shakespeare no more than the adaptations of Ducis, and less than that of Alfred de Vigny. There, as in France, they set to dress him whom Voltaire called a barbarian. It was only at a later day that people found courage to turn to the old text, and to do that there were required certain social transformations which have stamped a remarkable vigor on all the literatures of Europe.

What was once called the descriptive, then the romantic style, and what is to-day called the realistic, are so many protestations—some exaggerated, some legitimate, against the weariness which, according to Voltaire, was born of uniformity. They are so many manifestations of that literary selecticism of which Shakespeare made a play rather than a principle, a nature rather than a system. The cause of these reactions, so natural to English curiosity and French vivacity, is to be found complete in the verse of Clément, the enemy of Voltaire:

“ Qui nous délivrera des Grecs et des Romains ? ”

But does it follow that they are to carry with them all principles, justly all extravagances, and sink art and ideal in all that is most ignoble in realism? If Shakespeare lived, he would be the first to repudiate and oppose the perversion of our moral sense, the cor-

ruption of that glorious trinity of the true, the fine and the good, whose theory was long after him enunciated by Cousin. The majesty of the good, and the splendour of the true, hold each other by the hand in his productions. The moral tie is always at the base of his thought, and burst forth from the midst of the plays where evil triumphs by a reprobation as vivacious as it is unexpected. Claudius, who wishes to pray, but cannot, Claudius expresses in two words the question of repentance and pardon:

“ May one be pardoned and retain the offence ? ”

Then the great culprit exclaims :

“ My words fly up ; my thoughts remain below ;
“ Words without thought never to Heaven go ”

That is the most terrible remorse preying on the mind of the criminal, that remorse which exhibits to him spectres less frightful than himself. Shylock is the only one of his culprits who feels no remorse, and he is punished by the tears which he sheds like a crocodile for the evil he cannot do. Thus you have good reason to call this poet the poet of the world, and of all time, and to place under his protection the more intimate union of the different sections of the Canadian family, which you are desirous of establishing; and for your success in which I offer up my wishes, while I salute with enthusiasm the memory of the man, whose name and image, and still more, whose mind and words, fill this hall to-day.

HON. MR. MCGEE'S ADDRESS.

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—While all the world has given up this day to the memory of the greatest genius that ever used our speech as his vehicle of thought, it would be strange indeed if this city were silent. Our celebration may not be all we hoped, or all we proposed to make it, but at least we can say that portion of Shakespeare's dominions situated in British North America, will not find Montreal left out of the map. (Cheers) You have pressed into this grateful public service both the languages of Canada—the elegant language of which my friend near me [Hon. Mr. Chauveau] is an acknowledged master, and the language which Shakespeare himself used—the only language of which, probably, he was a master—if we except the language of universal Nature, whose beloved and faithful interpreter he was. [Cheers.] You have summoned me to bear my part in this festival, and I come as a debtor to acknowledge his accounts to his creditor—as a pupil to render tribute to his master—as a poor relation, to celebrate the birthday of the head of the house—as a good citizen, to confess his indebtedness to a great public benefactor—as an heir-at-law, or in language, to repay, in ever so imperfect a manner, his obligations to the wealthy testator, who has left him riches he could never hope to acquire by any labor or exertions of his own. (Cheers.) Of his family, very conflicting accounts are given. His mother, Mary Arden, was of the gentry of Warwickshire; his father, John Shakespeare, is spoken of, in early life, as a butcher and glover; in later life, as an Alderman of Stratford, yeoman and gentleman,—which would seem to imply a successful struggling upwards in the social scale. The celebrated Shakespeare coat-of-arms, obtained by the ambition of the son, for the gratification of the father, shows that there was in this house, whether derived from Mary Arden, or created by her son's genius—which created so many other marvels—a determined desire to assert and establish the rank of a gentleman. Shakespeare, who flung his own immortal works upon the world, without guide or guardian to his fame; Shakespeare, who could be content with a misprinted *Hamlet*, and an interpolated *Othello*, was yet so anxious about a coat-of-arms, and a parchment pedigree! Must we blame him for this? I hope not. The finest thing the English language has ever given expression to—finer far than *Hamlet*, or of any other of our Poet's creations—is the grand word *Gentleman*; and it is not to be at all wondered at, as it seems to me, that, from Shakespeare to Scott, every man of genius, born within the sphere of our speech, has been through life ambitious of this glorious designation. [Cheers.] Shakespeare himself, educated, so far as he was educated, at the Stratford Grammar School, married at 18 a mature maiden of 26—for boys usually fall in love with mature maidens, and mature maidens, in return, fall in love with mere boys. [Laughter.] We do not find, fortunately, “ the skeleton in the closet,” of this married pair. His true first love—Anne Hathaway—seems to have remained his “ *all the world* ” to the very last; and every fact of his scanty biography goes to show that in the turmoil of London literary life, in the full blaze of Elizabeth's court, in the congenial society of Ben Jonson and Drayton, and Burbage, the actor, his heart always yearned for the quiet fields and walks of Stratford,