

That the unfoldings of his genius took form in the drama was an accident in his history; one of those accidents, however, which, as in so many other cases, contribute—so we do well to believe—to the fulfilment of divine plans. For in what other way in *his age*, could he have executed so effectively—with such spirit, such life, such fulness—his multifarious ministry to his fellow-men?

§ 10. *The Significance of the Drama in Past Times.*

At eras long anterior to his, we know, when other means of literary influence were even fewer and more scant, large masses of human beings used to be reached through this channel, intellectually—religiously. In the centre of the most ancient orchestras there was, in the conspicuous object called by the Greeks the *thymele*, or altar,—by the Latins the *fulpitum* or pulpit, a standing remembrancer to the assembled multitudes, of what was once the didactic significance of the drama.

May it not have been then, that in the case of one who was destined in the latter day to be so widely a teacher of truth, a preacher of righteousness, it was provided that, through the same old instrumentality, in the first instance, at least,—however circumstances in after-times should do away with its convenience—he should win the ear, and through that, the heart, of the greatest number.

§ 11. *Shakespeare here Regarded in the Abstract as Seer and Interpreter; and as Mature.*

We have regarded him rather in the abstract as the seer who has seen the things of life, inner and outer, with a vision more subtle—as the interpreter who has read what he saw with a skill more perfect—moulded them into words with a clearness and briefness more acceptable—with adjuncts of instruction more full of wisdom—more far-reaching, more universal—than was ever conceived of before, or has ever been matched since. (Note IX.) We have regarded him too, not as in that process of gradual growth—intuitional, spiritual, intellectual—through which all human souls, even the most highly-endowed, must pass, but as in the meridian of his strength—as mature.

§ 12. *Not Here Regarded in his Personal Capacity.*

We have not regarded him in his personal capacity. Of his personal life, there is no man who knows anything which he can avouch with certitude—beyond what may be gleaned from a few very casual records. We have regarded him as a voice of wisdom uttering itself in our midst, through such channels as were granted to it—as one to be understood only from his words, like so many more of the great seers and interpreters, who have from time to time appeared on the earth; who have come and gone and left no other sign but the message with which they were charged. That they were men not essentially different from ourselves, is a trivial fact which does not so much concern us, as the message. On that, and not on them—it was hinted—our curiosity should most beneficially exhaust itself.