

XVI.

SOME have insisted that Shakespeare must have been a physician, for the reason that he shows such knowledge of medicine—of the symptoms of disease and death—was so familiar with the brain, and with insanity in all its forms.

I do not think he was a physician. He knew too much—his generalizations were too splendid. He had none of the prejudices of that profession in his time. We might as well say that he was a musician, a composer, because we find in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" nearly every musical term known in Shakespeare's time.

Others maintain that he was a lawyer, perfectly acquainted with the forms, with the expressions familiar to that profession; yet there is nothing to show that he was a lawyer, or that he knew more about law than any intelligent man should know. He was not a lawyer. His sense of justice was never dulled by reading English law.

Some think that he was a botanist, because he named nearly all known plants. Others, that he was an astronomer, a naturalist, because he gave hints and suggestions of nearly all discoveries.

Some have thought that he must have been a sailor, for the reason that the orders given in the opening of "The Tempest" were the best that could, under the circumstances, have been given to save the ship.

For my part, I think there is nothing in the plays to show that he was a lawyer, a doctor, a botanist, or a scientist. He had the observant eye that really sees, the ear that really hears, the brain that retains all pictures, all thoughts, logic as unerring as light, the imagination that supplies defects and builds the perfect from a fragment. And these faculties, these aptitudes, working together, account for what he did.

He exceeded all the sons of men in the splendor of his imagination. To him the whole world paid tribute, and nature poured her treasures at his feet. In him all races lived again, and even those to be were pictured in his brain.

He was a man of imagination—that is to say, of genius, and having seen a leaf and a drop of water, he could construct the forests, the rivers and the seas; and in his presence all the cataracts would fall and foam, the mists rise, the clouds form and float.

If Shakespeare knew one fact, he knew its kindred and its neighbors. Looking at a coat of mail, he instantly imagined the society, the conditions, that produced it, and what it, in turn, produced. He saw the castle, the moat, the draw-bridge, the lady in the tower, and the knightly