

Midsummer Night's Dream—Shakespeare.

It is widely conceded that nowhere in the field of dramatic art do the works of any one man afford a vaster or more enticing study than do those of William Shakespeare. This is doubtless due to the fact that his writings offer a greater diversity of character, a firmer mental grasp of the individual subject, a clearer insight to the motives actuating his *Dramatis Personæ*, and a vividness, ease and naturalness unequalled by other writers of the comedy or drama. To such a degree does he possess this latter quality of naturalness that he has caused the comedy to appear the product of growth rather than of artistic invention. Thus to Shakespeare and his skill is the drama indebted for its high place in English writings. Just as the stereoscopist, concealed in the gloomy rear, may throw upon the canvas his attractive views, so has Shakespeare, standing in the gloom of the sixteenth century, fastened upon the canvas of the world's dramatic literature, his enchanting views before which the busiest must pause enraptured by their realness. The art is visible, but the artist unseen.

None of his views has Shakespeare more successfully manipulated than that of the "Midsummer Night's Dream." In this he has undertaken a theme shunned by other writers. And so beautifully has he effected his end, that to all it must appear that without "Midsummer Night's Dream" his works would be most incomplete. There would remain one phase of unstable life untouched by artist's pen. Dream-land would be yet unexplored.

As the dream of the night appears to be unconnected with the busy rush of the preceding or following days, so Shakespeare's "Dream" appears to stand separate from his other plays. In this we find not the logician of the "Merchant of Venice," nor the philosopher of "Hamlet." But here the scene is gloomy, the characters fleeting, the arguments light and the language very simple.

To paint a dream! To most of us a dream is but a fleeting intoxication, very vaguely remembered and utterly uninteresting of review. How often have we endeavored to present this fervid hallucination to another, only to find that its nature is too visionary, its texture too aerial to admit of vocal touch. Shakespeare alone has been able to capture one of these buoyant bubbles and in this comedy he holds it up to our view. Here we see all the imagery of the wildest and most fantastic dream actually embodied before our eyes. The writer thus depicts the moving agencies as fairies, the elements as moon-beams and the sweet fragrance of flowers; even the human agents are of the same visionary character, being subjects of illusion and enchantment, love and amusement bring their sole occupation. We do not of course believe this to be a psychological explanation of dreams, nor do we assume that even in dream-land our minds are subject to the caprice of fairies. Yet the "Dream" shows the skill of its writer who endures