

"substance good," are the objects of his villiany. His vanity makes him believe that they have given him "good eyes," and he resolves, "they shall be exchequers to me; they shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade to them both." The old knight accordingly, writes to the two ladies, they compare notes, and determine to punish their insulter. They pretend acquiescence and several meetings are arranged, at each of which Sir John gets ill-used. At the first he is frightened, and hides himself in a large clothes basket; he is carried in it out of the House, crammed amid the foul clothes, and when he is "half stewed in his own grease, like a Dutch dish," is thrown into the Thames and cooled, "glowing hot, in that surge, like a horse shoe; think of that—hissing hot." He is induced to believe all this to be the effect of accident, and he goes to Ford's House a second time. A second alarm makes him shelter himself in the dress of a reputed witch, under which character he leaves the House unknown, but is mortally beaten, and narrowly escapes the stocks. A deeper scheme follows, and he is a third time decoyed. The place of rendezvous is Windsor Forest, and as he congratulates himself on his security and triumph, he is surrounded by persons who were lying in ambush, is well beaten, and fully exposed. This is the main plot, and making allowance for difference of customs and manners, it will appear simple if not meagre; but it is delightfully worked out, studded with philosophy and poetry, and with master pieces of dramatic painting, which indeed stand out, and step down, from the canvass.

The under plots, or episodes, are comprised in some excellent scenes, occasioned by Ford's jealousy; Falstaff's humour and roguery; disputes between Sir Hugh, "my parson, my priest, he who gives me the proverbs and the noverbs," and Doctor Caius, of "potions and motions" celebrity;—also, the wooing and marrying of "sweet Ann Page," the daughter of one of the "merry wives,"—and some intriguing of Falstaff's men and "mine host of the Garter." The whole, as we intimated before, seems like a spirited recital of the occurrences of a few days in a country town, rather than the artfully contrived story of a play-wright. This apparent simplicity and almost want of design, may be the perfection of art, or it may be a mere embellished transcript from scenes of common occurrence, observed by a close reader of human nature, who gave them a literary existence, because they pleased in real life. Whether schemes are the result of consummate art or nature, the end is the same; and critics often imagine the first, where the latter alone is the creating power. The voluble child or clown, will sketch a scene with admirable truth and vivacity; the man of