

## THE STUDY OF LIFE IN THE STUDY OF SHAKSPEARE.

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Shakspeare is, in the most comprehensive meaning of the phrase, the poet of human life; and I propose to speak on the study of his works as a study. The lecturer then proceeded to speak of the study of life as a whole in Shakspeare. Direct observation is to any man extremely limited, even when a man's opportunities are the widest. The man who has travelled most and thought most, will yet have seen life in a very partial manner. If he has had a purpose, his purpose must have controlled the order of his enquiry—so that men and men's relations will appear differently, as seen by the naturalist, the trader, the moralist and the statesman. Nor will the writings of philosophers afford us the completeness for which we seek. It is the business of philosophers to take men to pieces. I blame them not for their method—it is a necessity of philosophy—for philosophy depends upon analysis. The lecturer then proceeded to speak of the different views of life taken by the theologian, moralist, legislator, jurist and poetical economist. Man, thus, as the object of either speculative or practical contemplation, is infinitely divided. So studied he is studied in abstract and separate relations, never as a living united whole.

The greatest advantage of all true poetry is, that it has its root in the intuitive elements of men's nature. In spite of time or change the states of conscience which poetry unfolds are those which belong to the inward and essential life. Poetry utters the Catholic spirit of humanity, but much even of the best poetry is, and must be fragmentary. Hebrew songs and Greek tragedies have living meaning

in them now as they had centuries ago. Homer had as vast a genius as Shakspeare—it must, on the other hand, be granted that Shakspeare had the superiority of experience. Shakspeare lived later in time. By so much as man he lived since Homer. Shakspeare had the inheritance of a mightier life. He had the huge capacity which could receive and hold that mighty life.

In the Shaksperian drama we have a condensation, an epitome of man's nature. We also study life distributively in Shakspeare; presented collectively in its unity, Shakspeare brings every reader into communion with a boundless society. There we have kings, courtiers, great rulers, great captains, great thinkers, great speakers, great doers; all the glory and pomp of station; all the might of action, all the majesty of mind. These we have in every order of character, both as to principle and aim.

But Shakspeare gives us no mere drama. He gives us a real world in this ideal world of his; a world as real—in some sense—as Livy or Gibbon, Robertson or Hume gives us. Not many of us can behold even the outside of a Palace; but by means of Shakspeare, I can go into the awful Roman Senate; I can behold the imperial Julius cover his face and bleed away his life; I can enter into the midnight solitude of Macbeth and his wife; I can hear out from the secrecies of human passion the whisperings of murder; I can look on Lear in his folly, watch him in his madness, see him as he signs away his Royalty to his daughters, and I can linger over him with pity as he dies in despair. I am thus intro-