

"If people were capable of approaching Shakespeare impartially, they would lose their unreasonable reverence for this writer. He is crude, immoral, a toady to the great, an arrogant despiser of the small, a slanderer of the common people. He lacks good taste in his jests, is unjust in his sympathies, ignoble, intoxicated with the acquaintance with which a few aristocrats honoured him. Even his art is over-estimated, for in every case the best comes from his predecessors or his sources. But people are quite blind. They are under the spell of the consensus of opinion of multitudes handed down for centuries. It is truly incredible what ideas can be awakened in the human mind by consecutive treatments of one and the same theme."

I believe that one will not go astray in finding in the above-mentioned book against Shakespeare a prosecution at the same time of Tolstoi's campaign against the æsthetic-artistic view of life in general. His purpose is to overthrow one of the chief idols of the æsthetic cult. As far as the arguments on the moral side are concerned, he will certainly have a following. The son of a tavern-keeper, himself an actor, Shakespeare was certainly not the ideal of a gentleman. Tolstoi will, however, have difficulty in abolishing wonder at the artistic power of this most lavish of all geniuses.

Tolstoi dealt with the influence of general opinion again in another connection. He was speaking of the mischief that the newspapers do in the world.