

SHAKESPEARE
THROUGH EASTERN EYES

By the same Author—

TOWARDS THE STARS

(Being an appreciation of *The Phoenix and the Turtle*)

SHAKESPEARE THROUGH
EASTERN EYES

BY

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With an Introduction by
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and an Appreciation by
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TO MY KINDLY CRITIC

EDWARD GARNETT

to whom I owe the original suggestion of the following studies, as well as more encouragement than I can adequately acknowledge, I dedicate this effort.

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“Tout est étroit dans l’Occident. La Grèce est petite: j’ étouffe. La Judée est sèche: je halette. Laissez-moi un peu regarder du côté de la haute Asie, vers le profond Orient.”

MICHELET.

APPRECIATION

It is well, and high time, that the West should know how the East regards it. How few of us realise it and even take the trouble to inquire about it! What notion of our great European writers has this mysterious India, the mother of wisdom and philosophy, the cradle of an immemorial civilization?

The fault, indeed, is not entirely our own if we have been ignorant of it up to now. For more than a century India has been the facile disciple of Europe. She has been echoing mechanically the teachings of England about English writers whose works have been prescribed in her schools and universities. Her own instincts she surrendered. Her personal and deeper impressions she did not express.

It is only during the last few years that she has ventured—once again—to think independently, to recapture her faith in her own national genius and to read the literature of Europe in the light of her own feelings.

For example, what does she think of Shakespeare, who naturally has been presented to her as the supreme genius of the western world? A partial response to this question had already been made in the striking studies

of "Macbeth," "Othello," and "Hamlet" by Mr. Samarajit Dutt who, daring and hostile, had passed a severe judgment on these masterpieces.

Dr. Shahani takes up the theme with a wider horizon. He gives us a "Shakespeare as seen by Orientals" where he seeks impartially to estimate Shakespeare's reputation in India. Let us thank him for coming forward as an historian rather than as partisan or pamphleteer. His study reflects perhaps just a little the agitations of our time. But it is difficult for a reaction to be entirely free from bias.

The cult of Shakespeare had for a long time been imposed upon his country. How could he escape insisting on the parrot-cry in this glorification?

To exhibit this to us, Dr. Shahani invites us to penetrate into the colleges of India. He there shows us school boys and college students mouthing empty praises, mechanical and insincere. He contrasts the dramatic art of Shakespeare, exclusively concerned with the world of the moment, entirely earthly, with the essentially religious and spiritual character of the great Hindu literature. The Indian fails to find in Shakespeare any sustenance for his deep-seated idealism. He cannot take him to heart as he takes his own poets.

Reading Dr. Shahani, one feels that there is a fundamental antagonism between the edifying literature of India and the realism of the dramatist who was content, to use his own words, "to hold the mirror up to nature."

Is this antagonism ineluctable? Possibly. In this case Shakespeare would not be the universal poet, the poet of the whole world, which he has seemed to his English and many of his European admirers.

But we must needs wait before we pronounce judgment one way or the other. Dr. Shahani neither ignores nor seeks to hide the features of his genius that are manifest to the Indians themselves. No doubt when the present period of national reconstruction has completed its work, they may pronounce a judgment that is more calm, more akin to ours, on the Elizabethan poet who now bears the blame for having been during such a long period held up for their unwilling admiration.

EMILE LEGOUIS.

Translation by the author.

INTRODUCTION

THERE is little of this book with which I agree; yet it has interested me curiously. Being totally ignorant of educated Indian opinion concerning Shakespeare, I assume that it is very much as Dr. Shahani depicts it. It does not surprise me that it should be so. I think that the fundamental ethos of a tropical people must necessarily be different from the ethos of a Northern people like ourselves; and I should be disappointed, rather than gratified, to discover that an Indian finds in Shakespeare the same spiritual satisfaction that I find. For I have a dislike of uniformity. That truth on one side of the Alps is falsehood on the other comforts me greatly.

Universal truth has no attraction for me. Not that I do not believe there is a universal truth, and that of a more human order than the truths of mathematics; but I also believe it happens, very beneficently, to be ineffable. When uttered, it becomes local by the fact of utterance.

I am not saying that this ineffable truth receives direct, but local utterance in the works of Shakespeare. But when the author of this book ranges himself with his countrymen in declaring that there is no mysticism

and no religion in Shakespeare I feel that he does not mean by those words the same thing that I mean. True poetry cannot help being religious and mystical; and the supreme form of true poetry, which is tragic drama, is to my sense religious and mystical in a supreme degree. I am interested to find that, to the Indian mind, Tragedy and Religion are contradictory. Again, I am not surprised. After all, Tragedy and orthodox Christianity are in the same state of conflict; and it is only because Christians have abandoned the habit of coherent thinking (or it may be, of really believing in their own doctrines) that the opposition is forgotten. A great Catholic like Bossuet was quite clear on the matter: for him, Tragedy was manifestly non-Christian. The one perfect tragedy was played in Galilee and Jerusalem and ended on Golgotha; and turned out to be not a tragedy at all. That it was not a tragedy is the foundation-stone of Christianity. And, afterwards, for the believing Christian no tragedy was possible among men.

For the orthodox Christian, the tragic view of life is impossible. The attitude of the religious and educated Indian appears to be essentially the same. And the attitude is justified if we can accept the fundamental premiss common to both,—that the world of existence is, in some sense or other, finally unreal. This I cannot believe; and I am sorry for my inability, because it denies me access to a precious source of comfort of which I have felt the need as much as most men. But

to compensate, I find that the tragic contemplation of human destiny, if maintained to the end, does bring a liberation of the spirit from the world of existence. I would not say that it is entirely the same as the release into Nirvana which the Buddha taught; but I will say that it is not entirely different from that blessed condition.

To one the process of this liberation is from first to last religious, at any rate in the finest meaning I can attach to that much- and ill-used word. And I think that Shakespeare, more than any other writer of the West, has the power to lead us towards this end.

JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

HAVING completed for the present my studies of Shakespeare from the Eastern point of view, I should like to add a few words to avoid any possible misunderstanding of my aim and attitude.

First and foremost I have tried to be purely objective, simply expressing, as far as I am able, the appeal that the national poet of England makes to the Eastern consciousness.¹ I have striven to avoid any mere personal judgment of my own.

I am assured by competent critics, both in England and in France, that such an undertaking as this fills a long-felt gap. The Eastern attitude seems to be a sealed book to Western students. If this hiatus is in any measure supplied by these chapters, my object will have been attained.

It may be said that in the same manner we might—indeed we should—present Shakespeare as he appears to an indefinite number of other peoples. For myself I think that such an arraying of ethnic reactions would not only be informative but also exceedingly interesting.

¹This is not the place to enter into the vexed question of *The Shakespeare Canon*, for it is a problem that the Indian mind has not yet contemplated. It is a matter of personal scholarship, not of racial attitude. The writer may return to this topic at some future time.

I would submit that the preferences even of the despised shopkeeper might be worthy of a whole volume in themselves. After all, the quarrel between highbrow and lowbrow may be unending. *De gustibus non est disputandum*. Each of these is more or less a school of thought and feeling. And it is open to a student of human nature to hold a brief even for the unsophisticated Philistine.

Every nation can see with its own eyes only, however sympathetic it may be with the vision of others. A great Continental critic suggests to me that our call is, not to see Shakespeare through the deforming spectacles of various nations but as he was in himself. Surely, this is a hard saying. I suggest that it is utterly incapable of fulfilment. We are reminded of an authentic portrait of the Absolute once presented to the readers of *Mind*. The page containing it was carefully protected by a sheet of tissue paper which, when lifted, revealed nothing but the pristine whiteness of the blank page. Such, it may be feared, is the outcome of our quest for "Absolutes," whether in the domain of knowledge or æsthetics. After all, we do but march amid the phantoms of our own hearts.

I might describe my effort as an essay in anthropology. It is intended as a frank exhibition of the conflicting views of East and West concerning things that matter. It seems that Truth is not one.

A word might be said about religion and poetry. It is the fashion to dissociate the two. But it seems to me

that the severance is unwarranted. In essence they are one. It is this that the Indian feels so intensely, and that underlies his attitude towards Shakespeare. All the spontaneous excursions of the human spirit that we call poetry, philosophy, religion, music, and many another, spring from the same emotions and are but variant responses to the same questionings.

According to the Hindus, any differences are but superficial. "Art," said Vivekananda, "is Brahma."

As this is a pioneer effort, I have been reduced to quoting from private letters received from cultured Indians, as well as from numerous conversations, to substantiate my presentation of the attitude in question. This was inevitable.

A serious student of this or any other subject must realise the difficulty—nay the impossibility—of identifying his obligations to previous writers and to his colleagues. A single word may suffice to deflect the current of his thoughts into totally different channels. I feel that my debts will be more visible to my readers than they are to myself. And if any reader feels justified in claiming as his own any thought I present, he is probably quite correct. As to the quotations, I have been collecting these since my early boyhood, frequently without taking count of the source and the publishers. I must beg the courteous indulgence of any publisher to whom I may seem remiss in my acknowledgments. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner.*

Some of the views I have indicated will doubtless

arouse opposition. This is hardly to be regretted. . . .
Pour nous l'uniformité est la mort. . . .

I take this opportunity of recording my personal obligations to the following, among others, for encouragement and assistance: Mr. Edward Garnett, Mr. John Galsworthy, Mr. Havelock Ellis, Mr. J. M. Robertson, Mr. Middleton Murry, Mr. E. M. Forster, Dr. G. G. Coulton, Professor Emile Legouis, Professor Silvain Lévi, Professor N. S. Takakhav, Professor S. Maulik, M. André Maurois, M. Roland Dorgelès, and last but not least, Mr. W. H. Littleton (a friend of India).

A further pleasant duty remains—my thanks to the great Italian thinker Benedetto Croce. He has most kindly read the entire manuscript and favoured me not only with encouragement that I deeply appreciate, but also with his valued opinions and suggestions on many points. I am profoundly grateful to him for his illuminating consideration of the problem that confronted me.

I also find myself indebted to a free spirit of modern France—Romain Rolland. This great and good man has not only carefully read my essay, but has taken the trouble to give me invaluable critical comments and suggestions. I thank him deeply for his patience and fine courtesy to an unknown writer. It is to him that I owe a deeper comprehension of the European genius.

London, May 1932.

A RETROSPECT

To the Teutonic and Anglo-Saxon people Shakespeare seems alone, scarcely even approachable. Like the beacon of a lighthouse, aloft and aloof, he stands revealed to the lower levels of mortality—a fitting object for adoration. But is this adoration shared by other peoples and races? Is Shakespeare a beacon to them also?

At once, India gives us pause. It may seem strange that, although for an entire century Shakespeare has been familiar to educated Indians, no considered estimate of the poet from their standpoint is to be found in literature. Yet India represents perhaps the oldest civilization that the world has seen. This at least entitles Indians to a respectful hearing. It is conceivable that their outlook may be not without profit as well as interest to European students. The net of the Shakespearean scholar is a wide one, and is fine-meshed.

* * * *

This much is certain, that Shakespeare was in complete harmony with his age and with the type of humanity that surrounded him. So it is that we may

obtain a better knowledge of the man himself by noting what his admirers single out for praise.

It is sometimes supposed that Shakespeare lived and died in comparative obscurity, and that his greatness was only proclaimed in the 19th century by the Romantics. This is merely a popular fallacy. Shakespeare, we find, was lauded even more by those of his generation than by the later enthusiasts. This is immediately seen when we refer to the literature of the Elizabethan period.

Francis Meres (1556-1647) thinks that "the sweet witty soul of Ovid lived in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare: witness his 'Venus and Adonis,' his 'Lucrece,' his sugared 'Sonnets,' among his private friends, etc."—and that "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage"; and then he gives a list of both kinds of plays. He concludes by saying: "As Stolo said that the Muses would speak with Plautus' tongue, if they would speak Latin, so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine-filled phrase if they would speak English."¹

Richard Barnfield (1574-1627) in a poem entitled "A Remembrance of some English Poets," praises whole-heartedly Shakespeare's "honey-flowing vein,"²

¹ *Palladis Tamia. Wits Treasury, Being the Second Part of Wits Commonwealth.* 1598.

² *Poems in Divers Humors.* 1598.

and John Weaver (1576–1632) in his “Ad Gulielmum Shakespeare” eulogises the “honey-tongued poet”¹ in no faltering voice.

Thomas Freeman, in his lines “To Master William Shakespeare,” is the first to strike a dissident note :

Who loves chaste life, there’s Lucrece for a teacher:
 Who but read lust there’s Venus and Adonis,
 True model of a most lascivious lecher.
 Besides in plays thy wit winds like Menander:
 Whence needy new composers borrow more
 Than Terence doth from Plautus or Menander.²

Ben Jonson’s lines “To the memory of my beloved, the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare : and what he hath left us,” are too well known to need citation, but the following passage will reveal his attitude:—

Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show,
 To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
 He was not of an age, but for all time!
 And all the Muses still were in their prime,
 When like Apollo he came forth to warm
 Our ears, or like a Mercury to charm!
 Nature herself was proud of his designs,
 And joy’d to wear the dressing of his lines!
 Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,
 As, since, she will vouchsafe no other wit.
 The merry Greek, tart Aristophanes,
 Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please;

¹ *Epigrammes in the Oldest Cut, and Newest Fashion*, 1599, Epig. 22.

² *Runne, and a Great Caste. The Second Bowle. (Being the second part of a Rubbe, and a Great Caste*, 1614), Epig. 92.

But antiquated and deserted lie
 As they were not of Nature's family.
 Yet must I not give Nature all: thy Art,
 My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.¹

Michael Drayton (1563-1631) in the verses "To my most dearly-loved friend Henry Reynolds, Esquire, of Poets and Poesie" thus praises our poet:

Shakespeare, thou hadst as smooth a comic vein,
 Fitting the sock, and in thy natural brain,
 As strong conception, and as clear a rage
 As any that trafficks with the stage.²

John Milton, in the poem entitled "An Epitaph on the Admirable Dramatic Poet, W. Shakespeare," pays the poet a noble tribute:—

Thou, in our wonder and astonishment,
 Hast built thyself a life-long monument,
 For whilst, to the shame of slow-endeavouring art,
 Thy easy numbers flow; and that each heart
 Hath, from the leaves of thy unvalued book,
 Those Delphic lines with deep impression took;
 Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,
 Doth make us marble with too much conceiving;
 And, so sepulchr'd in such pomp dost lie,
 That Kings, for such a tomb would wish to die.³

Thomas Fuller (1608-1661) after maintaining that a poet is *born* not *made*, and that Shakespeare was of the former kind, draws a contrast between him and Ben

¹ Prefixed to the First Folio Edition of Shakespeare's Works.

² Elegies at the end of *The Battaile of Agincourt*, 1627, p. 206.

³ Prefixed to the Second Folio Edition of Shakespeare's Works. 1632.

Jonson. "Many," he says, "were the wit-combats between him and Ben Jonson; which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war: Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning: solid, but slow in performances. Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention."¹

John Dryden (1631-1700) is the last appreciator of this period that we will cite. He thinks that "of all modern and perhaps ancient poets" Shakespeare "had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read Nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him; no man can say he ever has a fit subject for his wit, and did not raise himself above the rest of poets,

¹ *The History of the Worthies of England: Warwickshire*, 1662, p. 126.

Quantum lenta solent inter viberara Cupressi."¹

Large additions could be made to the foregoing appreciations of Shakespeare were we to quote writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. All appreciations (whether quoted or not) have this in common that they are expressions of spontaneous admiration. We find no conspiracy of laudation. Moreover, we meet with no complaints of obscurity in the author. To themselves it seemed that each was able to enter into the mind of Shakespeare. All was clear to those who had eyes to see. They praise Shakespeare for his naturalness, his wit, his "sugared-tongue," his knowledge of the human heart, his "wild and native elegance," and for consistent development of the characters depicted.

Such, then, are the qualities that the poet's contemporaries and immediate successors recognised in him, and their zest in praising them is the best evidence of the deep harmony that existed between Shakespeare's creations and the critics' expectations. Indeed, we feel that the author and his public saw eye to eye.

II

Turning to the eighteenth century, we find that our poet is still a living force. He receives no direct homage, but the sincerer flattery of constant study. During this

¹ *Of Dramatic Poesy, an Essay*, 1668, p. 47.

period a great deal of really scholarly work is done: the plays are edited and re-edited by numerous men of note.

The critics are no longer mere praisers. They see beauties but also faults. For instance, Elijah Fenton (1683-1730), even in his opening lines, strikes a characteristic note :—

Shakespeare, the genius of our isle, whose mind
(The universal mirror of mankind)
Express'd all images, enriched the stage,
But sometimes stooped to please a barbarous age.¹

John Dennis (1657-1734), after calling Shakespeare the greatest tragic genius the world ever saw, admits that his beauties were his own, "whereas his faults were owing to his education, and to the age that he lived in."²

James Thomson (1700-1748), whom we may liken to a white-winged butterfly in a hot-house, expresses his opinion thus :—

For lofty sense,
Creative fancy, and inspection keen
Through the deep windings of the human heart,
Is not wild Shakespeare thine and Nature's boast?³

David Hume (1711-1776) has left a very strange indictment of Shakespeare. "In his compositions," he

¹ *An Epistle to Mr. Southerne from Kent.* January 28, 1710-11.

² *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare: with some Letters of Criticism to the SPECTATOR*, 1712, pp. 1, 2.

³ See *The Seasons: Summer.* 1727.

says, "we regret, that many irregularities, and even absurdities, should so frequently disfigure the animated and passionate scenes intermixed with them; and at the same time, we perhaps admire the more these beauties, on account of their being surrounded with such deformities. A striking peculiarity of sentiment, adapted to a single character, he frequently hits, as it were, by inspiration; but a reasonable propriety of thought he cannot for any time uphold. Nervous and picturesque expressions as well as descriptions abound in him; but it is in vain we look either for purity or simplicity of diction. His total ignorance of all theatrical art and conduct, however material a defect, yet, as it affects the spectator rather than the reader, we can more easily excuse, than that want of taste which often prevails in his productions, and which gives way only by intervals to the irradiations of genius. A great and fertile genius he certainly possessed, and one enriched equally with a tragic and comic vein; but he ought to be cited as a proof, how dangerous it is to rely on these advantages alone for attaining an excellence in the finer arts. And there may remain a suspicion, that we overrate, if possible, the greatness of his genius; in the same manner as bodies often appear more gigantic, on account of their being disproportioned and misshapen. . . ."¹

Pope and Johnson, the high priests of culture in the

¹ *Appendix to the Reign of James I. History of England from the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Revolution of 1688.* 1734.

eighteenth century, display a wavering attitude. They accept more or less the greatness of Shakespeare, but with serious reservations. They exalt and abase the poet at the same time.

We find that the critics of the eighteenth century tried to see Shakespeare with an unbiased mind, and found him excellent in some respects only. There is little doubt that the eighteenth century criticism of Shakespeare is the most balanced that we have. Here there is no mere adulation, either naïve or sophisticated. At no period was the poet more assiduously studied. What especially concerns us here is that the lamp of Shakespeare's fame burned with a steady flame despite all winds of disparagement.

III

The nineteenth century opened with a revolt against the canons of the century that preceded it. And as revolts are apt to be due to misunderstandings, the eighteenth century was unduly misprized.

One result of this deliberate belittling of the Augustan age was the sudden rehabilitation of Shakespeare. He was discovered afresh by Coleridge; and henceforth stood higher and higher.

We need not linger over the appreciations of this period: they are all pitched in the same key. But it is interesting as well as instructive for the impartial

inquirer to know what the critics of this age found most worthy of admiration in our poet.

Coleridge tends to find everything in Shakespeare. The poet is "no mere child of nature; no automaton of genius; no passive vehicle of inspiration possessed by the spirits not possessing it; first studied patiently, meditated deeply, understood minutely, till knowledge became habitual and intuitive, wedded itself to his habitual feelings, and at length gave birth to that stupendous power, by which he stands alone, with no equal or second in his own class; to that power, which seated him on one of the two glory-smitten summits of the poetic mountain, with Milton as his compeer, not his rival. . . ."¹

Hazlitt is no whit behind Coleridge in his laudation. "Shakespeare had 'a mind reflecting ages past,' and present:—All the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him. His genius alone shone equally on the evil and the good, on the wise and the foolish, the monarch and the beggar: 'All corners of the earth, Kings, Queens and States, maids, matrons, nay the secrets of the grave,' are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing place with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. . . ."²

Hartley Coleridge expresses his opinion in exquisite lines—

¹ *Biographia Literaria*, 1817, chapter xv.

² "On Shakespeare and Milton," *Lectures on the English Poets*, 1818, pp. 91-3.

Great Poet, 'twas thy art
 To know thyself, and in thyself to be
 Whate'er love, hate, ambition, destiny,
 Or the firm, fatal purpose of the heart
 Can make of Man. Yet thou wert still the same,
 Serene of thought, unhurt by thy own flame."¹

Thomas De Quincey has left a passage that seems to have inspired the writings of many latter-day critics. For that reason, if not for its impassioned character, it is worth citing. "O, mighty poet! Thy works are not as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art; but are also like the phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers—like frost and snow, rain and dew, hailstorm and thunder, which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert—but that, the further we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident."²

Frederick William Robertson expresses his homage as follows:—"I believe this to be one of Shakespeare's most wondrous qualities—the humanity of his nature and heart. There is a spirit of sunny endeavour about him, and acquiescence in things as they are—not in-

¹ "To Shakespeare"—*Poems*. Sonnet xxviii.

² See the essay "On the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*." This passage occurs towards the end.

compatible with a cheerful resolve to make them better."¹

James Anthony Froude is one of the few critics of this period who breaks new ground. "The men whom he (Shakespeare) draws are such men as he saw and knew; the words they utter were such as he heard in the ordinary conversations in which he joined. At the Mermaid with Raleigh and with Sidney, and at a thousand unnamed English firesides he found the living originals for his Hals, his Orlandos, his Antonios, his Portias, his Isabellas. The closer the personal acquaintance which we can form with the English of the age of Elizabeth, the more we are satisfied that Shakespeare's poetry is no more than a rhythmic echo of the life which it depicts."²

Further quotation is unnecessary. All subsequent writers of the nineteenth century exhibit an attitude of unreserved admiration. In our time this note is fully maintained—even deepened. Professor Saintsbury sees nobody with whom to compare Shakespeare. Mr. Middleton Murry cannot turn to the plays without finding

Magic casements opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn.

We encounter one or two dissentient critics in Britain

¹ *Life and Letters of Frederick W. Robertson, M.A.* Edited by Stopford Brooke, M.A., 1886, Vol. I, p. 289.

² *Short Studies on Great Subjects*. First Series. "England's Forgotten Worthies," 1878, i, 445-6.

to-day—notably Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. T. S. Eliot. But neither of them seems to outweigh the general consensus.

On the whole, Shakespeare belongs to the category of accepted phenomena, admired by all, most fervently by those who know him least, for their adulation is frequently factitious.

IV

The criticism of the three or more preceding centuries reveals two significant facts: (1) that Shakespeare has always been read, and (2) that his greatness has at no time been seriously questioned.

When we leave the shores of Albion, we find that only in Germany does Shakespeare receive the same homage as in England. We are inclined to say that there he is held even in greater reverence. Dr. Gervinus' view is typical: "Shakespeare is not only a poet and a dramatist but also a moralist and a master of human nature . . . in whatever branch of knowledge it might be, no age or nation could easily exhibit a second, in whom the richness of genius, natural endowments, original talent and versatility of power, were so great as in him."¹

Coming to France we hear a different tale. Here Shakespeare has never aroused the same enthusiasm as

¹ See the Introduction to his study of Shakespeare, vol. I.

among the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic peoples. Indeed it was as late as 1677 that Shakespeare was first mentioned by Saint Evremond.¹ Louis XIV possessed a copy of Shakespeare's works, à propos of which the librarian Nicolas Clément wrote: "Ce poète a l'imagination assez belle, il peut écrire naturellement, il s'exprime avec finesse, mais ces belles qualités sont obscurcies par les ordures qu'il mêle dans ses comédies." Then in the eighteenth century came the *Lettres Philosophiques* of Voltaire, which are too well known to need citation. Voltaire's opinion, however, is best revealed in the dissertation upon tragedy before Semiramis. Nature, he says, had compounded in Shakespeare all that is great with all that is rude. Hamlet is a crude play—it was the work of an inspired and intoxicated savage.

It seems that subsequent study has made Shakespeare better known in France, but it has failed to win for him complete acceptance. I learn from literary colleagues that he is little read in France. But the French do not deny the greatness of Shakespeare: their master-spirits acknowledge his supremacy.² Romain Rolland frankly admits his predilection for the poet—"qui m'est et m'a toujours été le *summus artifex*."³ The general quarrel of the French with Shakespeare relates solely to points of technique, leaving all deeper issues untouched. It is a matter of minor interest.

¹ See "L'Essai sur la Comédie."

² Victor Hugo, Anatole France, Romain Rolland.

³ A personal letter.

Elsewhere in Europe Shakespeare's influence came much later than in the nearer lands. He was admired by Turgenev, who seems to have been greatly attracted by the English poet. In fact, Turgenev's work bears a strong impress of Shakespeare's influence.¹ Tolstoy, however, rejected and even condemned the poet, not so much on æsthetic as on ethical grounds. Shakespeare, he says, failed to satisfy his spiritual demands.² We know that Tolstoy quitted the tradition of his time and place, and sought a type of satisfaction that we may perhaps call mystical. His criticism of Shakespeare seems to be the first we can find from a totally independent point of view. It deserves, therefore, to be carefully pondered.

Benedetto Croce is another critic who has approached the study of Shakespeare armed with new weapons. And for more reasons than one, his study is the most significant contribution to modern Shakespearian literature.³ But the Italian philosopher's critical views are in no way subversive of current European opinion.

Thus, with a few exceptions, the rest of Europe has echoed the sentiments of Britain and Germany with regard to the poet. This is significant—significant, may we ask, of what?

¹ See the lecture on "Hamlet and Don Quixote."

² See "What is Art?"

³ See "Shakespeare and Ariosto."

V

Whatever differences there may be among the various nations of Europe, they are from the present point of view relatively insignificant. Europe has a psychic unity, such as befits one single great country. All its parts have been moulded by the same historic influences. Men think and feel alike, and this is what we mean when we speak of psychic unity.

Now, can we single out one dominant feature? I suggest self-assertion—the joyous struggle with difficulties and the overcoming of these. It is the heroic spirit *par excellence*—the spirit of doing and achieving.

Shakespeare's work manifests this spirit in every one of his plays. Little wonder is it then that Europe acclaim him as spokesmen for all.

But if Shakespeare is an adequate expression of the European mind, still more is he representative of the British mentality, which strives ever to unite the two kingdoms of *vision* and *performance*. These two qualities, in combination are well-nigh irresistible. They have made the English people great as poets and great as men of action. A great critic, Mr. Edward Garnett, confirms my view. He writes:

Colonel Lawrence said that in the Great War the French were limited to what was possible; but the English view was *experimental* and was not bounded by the possible: and he himself with the Arabs

achieved impossible things, "impossible" in the French view. That is to say, our men of action have often something of the poet in them, for good or ill.¹

True, most true. Practical and poetical is the British Genius at its best, ever eager to unite the world of experience with the world of vision. Shakespeare is penetrated through and through with this spirit. There is no cause for surprise that he is held in such veneration by his fellow-countrymen.

Nevertheless, neither Great Britain nor the whole of Europe exhausts the compass of the human spirit. There are other manifestations of the mind of man. Is the European experiment in any sense complete? Let it be noted that we are here thinking of men in the mass, and not of isolated workers in the mental field. Whatever type of mind we choose to consider, it is perhaps not too much to say that we can find here and there cases of its embodiment under all conditions of social environment. Now when we contemplate the East, we are arrested at once by a feature that is far more sparsely distributed in Europe than in Asia. We have ample authority for referring to this feature under the title of "Mysticism."

However we may define the term, among its attributes is a noetic quality—that is, it is akin to knowledge. It appears as what we may call an extrasensuous knowledge.

Certain schools of thought maintain, or have main-

¹ A personal letter.

ained, that all our acquaintance with circumambient Reality is by the avenue of the senses, supplemented, of course, by reflection on these experiences. "Whence comes the mind," asks Locke, "by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer in one word, from experience; in that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself."¹ Now this answers very closely to the creed of most cultivators of the physical sciences to-day. Knowledge is sensuous knowledge, or nothing. But to the mystic the avenues of the senses, however trustworthy as far as they go, are amazingly partial and incomplete. The soul of man is capable of far closer and wider contact with Reality under proper development. It is in no captious spirit that the mystic disputes the overweening claims of the scientist. He is impelled thereto by a profound dissatisfaction with the achievements of sensuous experience. We smile nowadays at the fable of Condillac, who imagined a statue endowed with the sense of smell, and then attempted to show how all the mental faculties could be evolved out of this. To the mystic, the claims and presuppositions of those who look for light to the senses only are nothing less than absurd. If his positive and emphatic testimony can be accepted, he is equipped with other and completer means of envisaging Reality.

¹ See Locke's *Philosophical Works*, vol. I, p. 204.

This psychical experience is claimed by mystics all the world over, and characteristically by those of the East. So the "make-up" of the Oriental mind differs fundamentally from that of the West. The two look at experience with different eyes.

It should be illuminating, as Mr. Havelock Ellis has said,¹ to know what the people of the East think of Shakespeare. If, as we have supposed, the presence or absence of these mystical gifts is the key to the situation, the different receptions of Shakespeare assume an importance of a specially high order. We see them as no mere conflicts of surface features—we may almost say of costume—but as things impressively momentous.

The reactions of the Eastern mind when confronted with Shakespeare form our thesis. But the story must be told from the beginning.

¹ In a letter to the present writer.

THE SOWING OF THE SEED

A CLASS-ROOM. There are about thirty-two students seated on narrow wooden benches, four together on one bench. In front, on a raised platform, are a table and a capacious chair. On the right stands a blackboard, over one end of it hangs a soiled duster. It is a February morning. A cold wind rushes through a broken window-pane. The students are shivering. Now the clock chimes the hour of ten. The Principal of the School, a reverend gentleman, advanced in years, dressed in a white gown and a black velvet cap, takes his seat at the table. Stroking his white beard, he says to the assembled pupils: "Sit down." We all take our seats.

His address commences. To-day he is speaking of Shakespeare. . . .

"You are . . . about to read Shakespeare," his words crack like two pistol-shots. The Reverend Father, for he is Catholic priest, stares at the class. We all sit hushed. "You are . . . going to read Shakespeare," he repeats in a louder tone. He removes his velvet cap, and plays with the silken tassel.

Suddenly I receive a dig in the ribs, and a voice asks: "Who is this guy Shakespeare?" Not looking at

the questioner, I reply: "A very great writer—so my father said."

The Principal hears this "aside" and collars as usual the wrong man. "Stand up, Thomas," he says. "Yes, father," replies Thomas, pale with fear. "What did I say, Thomas?" "Please, father," begins Thomas, "you said, please father, that we are going to read a fellow—no, beg pardon, I mean a writer, called Shake—Spear." "Did I say Shake—Spear?" and the Principal looks at Thomas with eyes that had frightened even the rascal Babu, the old School peon. Thomas shivers. "What did I say, Roderick?" Hearing his death-knell, Roderick stands up, and, looking at the ceiling, says very quickly, "Shake—the—spear." The whole class bursts out laughing, and poor Roderick looks a picture of misery. "Stop that noise of the farmyard," commands the Principal. "You two," he says to Thomas and Roderick, "you two will go to the Penance Study this evening and write out the name of this great writer a hundred times." Then he goes up to the blackboard and writes in large letters: SHAKESPEARE.

After this the Principal continues in the following manner: "Shakespeare is—the world's greatest—writer. There is nothing that he does not know." "Excuse me, father," I say as I stand up, "but I think Shakespeare does not know what children are like." The whole class looks at me with utter astonishment. "Who said that?" growls the Principal. I timidly put up my hand. I may perhaps explain here that I had

read several plays of Shakespeare, especially the "Histories," and so was not altogether unqualified to form an opinion. "You say," begins the Principal after a short pause, "that Shakespeare does not know what children are like—you dare to say that!" I refer him to Prince Arthur in "King John." "You don't know anything," he replies. "Sit down and listen quietly—I don't want silly disturbances in my class." Then turning to the class he says as though reflectively: "I always thought this fellow was a fool; the fellow really is a fool." All the students gaze at me with pity.

This, indeed, is the method of the reverend gentleman to silence an inquiring student. His lectures are supposed to be as sacrosanct as his Sunday sermons in the Catholic Church. I do not recall a single occasion when any other student asked him a question or contradicted a statement of his. The thing was unthinkable. All he says is gospel truth.

However, the Principal speaks. He calls Shakespeare "the wonder of the world," and "a star of indefinable magnitude." He thinks "there never has been, is, or will be another writer as great as Shakespeare." We all listen in tense silence. I can see my fellow students are fairly amazed. "You cannot," I hear the reverend gentleman say at the top of his feeble voice, "you cannot understand Shakespeare—no one can! But listen to what I say, otherwise you will all fail miserably in the examination."

The recess-bell rings, and we all cluster round in a

group and discuss the grave situation. "What do the University authorities mean by prescribing this awful writer for our confusion?" the monitor complains. "We must send a petition to the Registrar at Bombay." "Yes." "Yes." "Yes." Several voices shout in approval. "But," suggests a wise student, "why worry? We are expected to know the meanings of frightful words and to translate rotten passages. Mr. So-and-So (a commentator) has done that. Spend twelve annas and be easy."

On the following day almost every student has a small paper-covered pamphlet, which is carefully concealed from the lynx-eyed Principal. The methods adopted are ingenious. Some less prudent have the pamphlet sewn on to the text; others have torn out particular pages and inserted them between the pages they are supposed to know; one or two have spread the Commentary on the bench, making a pile of books in front of it. In the end, this bold method proved the best.

"Page 30, line 14," says the Principal. "Isn't that where I left off yesterday?"

Everybody is ready, repeating the meaning of the first few difficult words in his mind.

"Thomas," says the Principal, "what's the meaning of boggle?"

"Swerve or shy."

"Roderick, what's a bodkin?"

"Please, father, a small dagger."

"What do you mean by fardel, Balaram?"

"Burden, father."

"What is 'puzzles the will,' Sher Ali?"

"Produces doubt or uncertainty."

"Where did you get that, Sher Ali?"

"From my uncle, father."

"That's very good. Excellent!" comments the Principal. "Now then, Roderick, explain the lines:

"There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune."

We had been asked to study these two lines on the previous day. Our Commentary explained them thus:

"Sometimes the water rises very high; then if you are clever you can get on its top, and you will be great."

Roderick, with a few mistakes, repeats the above explanation, and we all think that he has acquitted himself creditably.

"In the name of thunder and lightning!" shouts the reverend father, "what nonsense is this?"

Roderick turns pale.

"Thomas, explain the lines."

Fear makes Thomas commit more mistakes, and he repeats the explanation in a form which would make even the Commentator shudder.

The reverend teacher looks very angry, for his whole face is red, red as a tomato. All of us shiver.

"The whole class goes to the Penance Study!" pronounces the Principal. "And until a better explanation

—I mean a real one—is forthcoming, you will all remain there till further orders.”

Ding—dong! ding—dong! rings the bell. Prayers are hurriedly gone through by the Catholic students, and soon we disperse for the mid-day meal, which, however, none of us has the heart to enjoy. “Bother this Shakespeare!” and Thomas brings down his huge fist on the lunch-table. All the knives and forks agree with him, and the students, too.

II

The scene now shifts to loftier heights, so at least we had imagined them. Twenty of us have passed from the School to the College.

The first year we hear nothing of Shakespeare. To the majority of students this is a welcome relief. And now far from the “danger zone” some of us actually want to hear more about him.

But this is difficult to contrive. The senior students who are “doing” Shakespeare, pass us freshmen by with jaunty aloofness. I meditate. At last I hit upon a device. I send one of my sonnets, “Tired of Life,” to the Editor of the College Magazine. It is admitted. The Editor takes me under his wing. Now I have the privilege of attending his classes.

I recall the day—it was pouring outside, and the thunder growled furiously—when the Principal of the College, a noted Shakespearian scholar, gave his final

lecture on Henry IV. All the students, about eighty in number, are scribbling furiously, while he speaks. My friend, however, as befits the best student of the year, sits with folded arms. Now and then he says to me in a whisper: "This sentence is from Dowden." "This is from Coleridge." "Oh, this one is pure Bradley."

I don't quite understand, for my acquaintance with critical literature is practically nil.

But I remember the Principal saying: "Shakespeare is myriad-minded, eagle-eyed, divine, delicious, a great Englishman" (I repeat the epithets in the order he used them). "If you want to score in the examination, read Coleridge, Hazlitt, Dowden, and Bradley. This play," he concludes, "is a wonderful work of art. It is marvellous. Every character is drawn with understanding and power. But, remember, Falstaff is not the central figure, but Prince Hal."

"That's nonsense," says my friend to me. "Falstaff is the hero of the play—our Principal ought to read Bradley with more care." But he lacks the courage to say this to the Principal.

The following year we have "A Midsummer Night's Dream" prescribed for us. I am thrilled. I read the play six times before I enter the College. I look forward hopefully to light in all dark places.

This play is to be "taught" by the Principal. He begins like this: "Shakespeare is the world's supremest genius. He is the beautifullest of souls. God seems to

have made him with loving care. But, he is not easy to understand. He is a very difficult writer. Therefore you must be careful!"

"That doesn't frighten me," says Thomas in an undertone. "I have heard that gammon before."

"This play," proceeds the Principal, "is the loveliest that Shakespeare ever wrote. It is a wonderful work of art. The characterisation is superb, marvellous, magical . . .!" The words sound very familiar. Ah! I remember. Last year he made use of them while teaching "Henry IV" to the B.A. students.

On looking at my fellow-students here and there I can see that they are profoundly impressed. To them Shakespeare seems a thing of dread. How miserable they look!

"Any questions?" asks our Professor.

Silence.

"Any questions?" he repeats.

More silence. Suddenly a voice is heard saying: "Yes, sir."

"Go ahead," orders the Principal.

The boy is nervous, for nearly a hundred and fifty pairs of eyes are mockingly turned upon him. "Sir," he says at last, "I think there is no characterisation in this play."

"What! No characterisation!" says the Principal. "Who told you that?"

"No one, sir. That is my opinion."

"Your opinion! Who are you?"

The student sits down, and everybody laughs at him. All of a sudden I find myself saying: "Sir, I agree with Mr. Gehani."

"Who are you?" asks the Principal. "What do you know of Shakespeare? Have you read a single play as yet?" The tone is mocking and has just a hint of doubt in it.

"Sir," I reply firmly, "I've read thirty-six plays."

"What! Thirty-six plays!" His face expresses more surprise than if I had said that I was the Grand Lama. "How old are you?" he asks me.

"Seventeen years and one month, sir."

"Only that much! And you have read thirty-six plays! I don't believe it."

"How many plays have you read yourself?" I ask him.

"That has nothing to do with you. Don't ask impertinent questions. Shut up and sit down, or you will be fined."

I cease attending his classes. But he completely thwarts my intentions. I am informed that for every day I am absent I shall be fined two rupees. There is nothing for me to do but to submit, willy-nilly. From day to day, I have to listen to his unending gush on Shakespeare, in the course of which his cotton fields, his apples, his peaches, and his unique roses somehow find place.

Next year, in the B.A. class, he is again "teaching" us Shakespeare. Now we are supposed to read the

plays from a higher point of view. But his opening lecture on "Othello" does not much differ from his previous lectures on "A Midsummer Night's Dream." There is one change, however; Shakespeare is now called "a Hindu." "Desdemona is a typical Indian wife," he concludes.

But as we have to do two plays this year, the other is to be taught by a different professor. A few friends and I breathe a sigh of relief. But, alas! we have cause to groan again. This professor, it must be admitted, is a very industrious man; his text-book reveals that abundantly, for it is full of notes in pencil. He dilates upon the greatness of Shakespeare, but he dilates still more upon the greatness of Coleridge and Hazlitt and Dowden and a few others. "If you want to cut a figure in the examination," he says in a hushed tone, "read and re-read these superb critics. Learn the following passages (he indicates several) and quote them by heart at the least opportunity. And as you are expected to know the social history of the period, don't bother about Shakespeare, but read Green's 'History of England,' and remember to look up Professor Dowden's article on the Elizabethan age in the Literature of the World Series. You are sure to be asked one or two questions on the text. If I were you, I should get 'The Tempest' by heart, then you can't miss the references to the context." Now he keeps saying: "The following passage may be asked for location; mark it in red."

While he is lecturing, several students are almost asleep. A few are busy scribbling. Some, the clever ones, are reading "The Mysteries of the Court of London." But no one is interested in Shakespeare. The students find it very irritating and irksome to have to pull out the manners and customs of the age from lines which are supposed to contain topical allusions. Such are the new instructions of the University authorities. They hold that the social history of the period can be constructed from the plays of Shakespeare. This emphasis shifts the interest, already so meagre, from Shakespeare to History. And even those students who are taking Honours in English feel their patience exhausted. I can vouch for this myself, for such is my own sad fate. It happens that I have acquired some reputation for knowledge of Shakespeare, so I am pestered with questions by my fellow students.

"How do you think it is possible to score highly in this paper?"

"Did Shakespeare prefer tavern-life or home-life?"

"What games did the Elizabethan enjoy most, as revealed in 'The Tempest' and 'Othello'?"

"Is it true that the Elizabethans had cruel pastimes?"

"Did Shakespeare visit the Bermudas?"

"Can Shakespeare be called the poet of War and Peace?"

"Did Shakespeare anticipate the World War?"

"What do you think was Shakespeare's attitude towards the problem of drink?"

"Which critics of Shakespeare have names that would frighten the examiner?"

"Was Shakespeare really the favourite of God?"

These are some of the many baffling questions my comrades want me to answer. When I ask them whether they like Shakespeare, I receive not one reply in the affirmative. "Shakespeare is worse than my wife," says one student. "How?" I question him. "Why, I can make nothing of either!"

Yet all of these students, when asked about Shakespeare, grow very eloquent. They call him "myriad-minded," "marvellous," "magical," "divine." Yes, divine is the word most often made use of by these secret haters of Shakespeare.

I ask one such student why he lavishes such praises on Shakespeare when he really does not like him. "What else can I do?" he wails. "To say that I don't like him would be to expose myself to ridicule. For this reason, and to appear learned (isn't that person supposed to be learned who admires Shakespeare?) I employ the nicest and juiciest adjectives I can. Do you know," he suddenly grows confidential, "who taught me this trick? My father. He obtained a very high second class in his final examination without so much as opening his Shakespeare. How do you think he managed that? Simply by learning by heart a hundred sweet-sounding adjectives that the famous critics had

made use of in connection with Shakespeare, and spreading them on his examination paper. I shall do the same. After all, what do I care for Shakespeare? It is the examination that worries me."

III

Now we can understand how the University requirements and the methods of teaching combine to give the Indian student a distaste for Shakespeare. Both need immediate and drastic reform.

The University authorities transfer to India what is originally meant for British students. No attempt is made to take notice of the Indian temperament and its wants. This is at once seen when we examine the editions prepared by Verity and Deighton and Dr. Scott, which are said to be specially edited for Indian students. What the learned Editors have done is to supply a bulky glossary and copious notes. These only serve to encourage the cram tendency. The Introductions are couched in the traditional spirit, and never win the heart of the student. This is not what is wanted. The efforts of the Indian Editors are more pitiable. They have produced nothing but pale shadows of English editions—badly printed, badly written, and utterly unoriginal. After looking through most of them, I really do not know which one is worse than the other.

To the Indian student, the technical, the social, the

source-hunting and the temporal aspect of Shakespeare's work can never be of any deep interest. Those who emphasise these elements in the Curriculum, little realise the mischief they cause. College memories are never forgotten, and to most Indian students they are pleasant, but our poet is the one jarring note. Shakespeare should be studied in India *only* from the literary and human points of view, and, unless I err greatly, these are the qualities in which he is really supreme. By showing the surprising beauty of his language, and his deep knowledge of certain aspects of life, the heart of the Indian student can be easily and genuinely captured. This is what the competent Editor must seek to achieve.

A conscientious teacher has to deal with the interests of three classes of students: first, those who desire only a popular acquaintance with their topic; secondly, those who want to make a technical and commercial use of their knowledge; and finally, those whom we may designate potential research students. To treat a large body of students as if they had the same needs, capacities and abilities is to court utter failure. It can result in nothing but fiasco. Surely it implies an utter ignorance of the very meaning of education. The consequences are disastrous. They could not possibly be otherwise.

Education is in part a negative process, consisting in inhibitions and restraints. These may be acquired either consciously or unconsciously. They are necessary

for social purposes. But when it is realised that these checks are no more than mere checks, then the first step towards education has been taken. Real education is an ideal, aiming at freedom of soul. This, the majority of Indian teachers never seem to perceive. They are always saying not what they think of Shakespeare, but what some reputed person has said of him. In other words, their reverence for inked paper is most abject.

What freedom can the student possibly attain? Like Bunyan's Pilgrim he carries away only a load, but unlike Christian, he probably carries it to his journey's end. . . . Unhappy man!

INTERVAL

The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them.

SHAKESPEARE.

AN alley in Bombay. Crowds of the populace in gay turbans push and jostle each other in front of a ticket-office. A great placard in front of a theatre announces that a performance of "Hamlet" is to be given. An eager mass of humanity, chewing *pan*¹ and smoking *birees*,² awaits the opening of the doors.

We may note in passing that Shakespeare is far more often performed in Bombay than in England. The theatres are run exclusively as commercial concerns, and bring the proprietor an ample return of rupees and annas. They are patronised chiefly by the unlettered crowd, who desire something strange with plenty of what the English call "blood and thunder."

The play is, of course, presented in Eastern garb. The scenery and stage properties are all Oriental. In front of the stage are divans for the wealthier patrons, and behind these are tiers of chairs and benches. Aloft

¹ Green leaf chewed with betel.

² Cheap native cigarettes.

is a semi-circular gallery, ending at each side in screened enclosures for purdah-women and beauties of the bazaar.

Music is supplied by a harmonium accompanied by *tablas*.¹ Coloured electric footlights illuminate the stage, and the auditorium is visible in the light of scattered electric lamps.

Let us imagine ourselves among the audience at such a theatre in Bombay.

Hamlet appears. He is dressed after the fashion of a maharaja of to-day. His hands glitter with costly rings; a long sword hangs at his side; necklaces of pearl adorn the front of his silken robe; and in his turban blazes a diamond like unto the Mountain of Light. He speaks in Marahti; his gestures are violently expressive; his voice is loud. We have before us an Oriental avatar of the gentle Prince of Shakespeare.

The drama has undergone a strange transformation. Is this the tragedy that we looked forward to? No. What we are seeing seems more like comedy. And such indeed is the intention of the producer.

Before the curtain falls, we see Hamlet majestically strutting towards the vacant throne, wreathed in smiles, with the fair Ophelia—or, rather, Kamlata, on his arm. The audience clap and shout, and leave the theatre, well-satisfied with the programme.

We must not omit to mention the comic interlude that half-way through the play regales the spectators.

¹ Small hand-drums.

It has no particular connection with the play, or anything else, but is introduced to relieve the auditor's intensive studies of the immortal bard. The topic of the interlude may be the improvement in taste and behaviour of a young Indian gentleman freshly returned from England. Shall he not have his *chota peg*, while he sits cross-legged before his parents? Shall he not enjoy his havana while talking to his mother in monosyllables? Shall he not read "La vie Parisienne" or "Candide" at the dinner table, while he struggles to eat *dal* and *chapati* with knife and fork? Shall he not hector his poor little wife in the most approved English fashion? Must he not leave the house in high dudgeon because his spouse cannot distinguish between a tango and a valse? "To think of her not having heard of Pavlova and Paderewski!" he mutters, as he disappears. The spectators are left wondering why such a pretentious nuisance was spared by the greedy waves. . . .

Such is the manner in which Shakespeare's plays are usually presented to an average audience in India.

II

Let us now turn to statistics. Shakespeare, as we have remarked before, is exceedingly popular in Bombay, while in Bengal he is very seldom put on the stage. Educated Bengalis prefer to read him, and those unacquainted with English turn to translations and adaptations. Dr. Gupta, who has done special research

in this connection, testifies to the same effect. "As far as Bengal is concerned," he says, "Shakespearian translations and adaptations have very rarely been put on the stage. It seems they are more intended for the study and less for representation on the stage. It is more or less true of all versions in the different Indian tongues, for the stage is yet undeveloped."¹ Dr. Gupta's remarks, however, are too sweeping, for they seem to ignore the form of Shakespeare's popularity in Bombay. Professor C. J. Sisson speaks as I have done,² but there are one or two points on which I should desire to supplement his excellent account.

"I have always noted a strong desire," writes Professor N. S. Takakhav in a letter, "to change Shakespeare's tragedies into comedies." The tendency is certainly there: it was strikingly shown on the Gujrati stage in Bombay in a very popular musical version of "Othello." The play then bore the title "Kamlata," where Kamlata stands for Desdemona under happier fates. Curiously enough, this play was not intended for the populace, but for the cultured classes. It enjoyed a long run. After the first two nights it was difficult to secure seats for the performance. Towards the end of the play, all the characters muster on the stage, along with the crestfallen and piteous-looking Iago. The spectators thoroughly enjoyed the happy ending.

¹ "Shakespeare in India," a Thesis by Dr. S. Gupta for his Ph.D. degree at London, 1924.

² See his lecture to the Shakespeare Association on "Shakespeare in India."

Midst song and joyous revelry Othello quitted the stage with his protective arm round Desdemona. The villain was left deserted by all, and heartily hissed by the audience.

We now see that the Indian prefers romance to tragedy. The tradition of his drama has given him this bias. But the Marahtha even likes his Shakespeare turned *sangit*—made musical.

“The Merchant of Venice” has been a great favourite on the amateur stage, especially on account of its two characters, Shylock and Portia. It appears that Bassanio does not please the Indian audience: he strikes them as a cad who is trying to feather his nest. The same impression was created on my mind when I visited a performance of the play at the Old Vic.

The part of Shylock was once very brilliantly assumed by a college student in Sind. Clad in a Jewish gaberdine, and leaning on a staff, he kept the audience spellbound. The scene in which Shylock meets Tubal was first-rate. In fact, the only scenes chosen for this performance were those in which Shylock appears. We had great hopes for this young man, especially for his interpretation of elderly parts, but he did not live to realise them.

In Hyderabad Sind, excellent histrionic work is being done by one Mr. Hiranand. A schoolmaster by profession, and an excellent actor himself, he has trained generations of Sindhi students for the amateur stage. The present writer, when a mere child, witnessed a

performance in Hyderabad Sind of a play entitled "*Ek Awrat Ki Chalaki*"—"A Woman's Cleverness." It was really a version of "The Merchant of Venice." The emphasis was laid on the part of Portia. The Court-room scene was thrilling. And I remember well how enthusiastically my father and his friends praised the acting, particularly of the Shylock. At that time I was unaware of the identity of the Shylock, but later discovered him to be "Master Hiranand," as the students affectionately called him. But, *eheu fugaces labuntur anni!* "Master Hiranand" no longer has the vigour for strenuous stage representations. Yet still he is always at hand for the inspiration of his adoring disciples. To him it is a labour of love.

Before the rise of the Separatist Movement, Shakespeare was fairly regularly performed by college students, on festal occasions, but now preference is given to Rabindranath Tagore. I remember attending a rehearsal of "Hamlet." Somewhere, Hamlet mentions "rased tablets." The actor, when he came to those words, suddenly stopped short and then asked timidly of the producer of the show, "Sir, where are the tables?" Tagore offers no such difficulties. I yield to none in my admiration for this great poet, yet I must confess that to me his dramas seem too Maeterlinckish and as presented on the stage, *très ennuyants*.

"The Winter's Tale" has figured on the Urdu stage in a strange metamorphosis. "I have a dim recollection," says Professor Takakhav, "of having seen it

acted in Urdu." Personally, I regret that I am unable to supplement this information.

"Hamlet" has been the great success on the Marathi stage. Neither the title, names nor characters have been changed. This was a prose rendering. The play was staged by a theatrical company which was very popular between 1895-1905. The role of Hamlet was well supported by the late Mr. Ganpatrao Joshi, the star of the company. The same company (The Shahunagar-wasi Natak Mandali) also successfully staged "The Taming of the Shrew" under the title "Tratika," a Marathi rendering with names and actions Indianised by the late Professor Kelkar of the Ferguson College, Bombay.

"The Winter's Tale" was turned into Marathi by one Mahajani, under the name of "Vitor Vilsit." This play had a long run and drew crowded houses. As usual, the names and situations were Indianised. The hero appeared in a tall Parsi cap, and the heroine in a white silk saree bordered with velvet. She flourished her handkerchief just as a coquettish Indian lady would do.

Between 1909-1912, prose translations of some four plays appeared. They claimed to be closer renderings of the original. They seem, alas! to have disappeared. I learn that Dr. Parker and Professor Shah (both of the Elphinstone College, Bombay) were engaged some time ago upon the subject of "Shakespeare in the Indian Vernaculars." I have not heard whether their book has yet appeared. If the book, when it comes out, should

contain any information concerning these vanished versions, I, for one, would be exceedingly pleased. Possibly enough, they may be mouldering in some back-bazaar at the present moment.

“The Taming of the Shrew” has enjoyed great popularity in Bombay, and has several times been put on the stage. It seems to have found special favour with the Marahtas. Dare one suggest that there may be shrews even among the Marahtas? Then, again, a speech like the following is flattering to Indian prejudices:—

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
 Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,
 And for thy maintenance commits his body
 To painful labour both by sea and land,
 To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
 Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;
 And craves no other tribute at thy hands
 But love, fair looks and obedience;
 Too little payment for so great a debt.
 Such duty as the subject owes the prince
 Even such a woman oweth her husband;
 And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
 And not obedient to his honest will,
 What is she but a foul contending rebel,
 And graceless traitor to her loving lord?—

(“The Taming of the Shrew,” Act V, Sc. II).

This speech has almost passed into history. From the traditional Indian point of view, the play could have found no fitter ending. Is it too much to say that the Elizabethan playgoer regarded it in the same light?

One of the secrets of Hamlet's popularity on the Indian stage is that the fate of his mother satisfies the Indian's sense of justice and fitness.

"Macbeth" never seems to have appeared on the Gujarati or Marathi stage, and I am not aware that it has been translated into these vernaculars. Lady Macbeth is utterly unacceptable to an Indian audience. Whether or not such a character can be found in real life, it should at least be barred from the stage. Here the Indian tendency to idealisation makes itself felt. Then, again, the witches are ineffective and repugnant to Indian taste, despite their apparatus and magic incantation. Further, the killing of the guest is altogether abhorrent to the Indian conscience. Such an abuse of hospitality is unheard of.

For such reasons, perhaps, "Macbeth" has never been put on the stage, and the vernacular renderings are limited to two.

"The Tempest" does not seem to have appeared on the stage in Bombay. It has been popular only as a chamber drama, for which it is well fitted by its meditative qualities.

In view of the Indian's enjoyment of humour, it is a matter of surprise that "The Merry Wives of Windsor" has not been shown as a stage play. There is a very good adaptation of it in Marathi. The play is full of the kind of humour that the Indian particularly relishes. The hero or villain of the piece, the fat knight, Jack Falstaff, is neatly outwitted, and we enjoy his discom-

future. His defeat is final. The Indian likes his humour linked with a moral.

In this wise is Shakespeare acted in India.

Is it permissible to imagine that Shakespeare, re-visiting the glimpses of the moon, has looked in upon us as one of the audience? What will be his impressions?

At least, we can be sure that he will enjoy the music, the scenery, and the applause. But what will he think of the play itself? It will seem to him that he had seen something of the kind before. Then it would dawn upon him that it is his own play. But how changed!

THE REAPING

For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes.

(St. Luke vi, 44).

I

It is more than three generations since Shakespeare appeared in India in his native English garb. We owe his advent indirectly to Lord Macaulay. Years passed, and in 1853 appeared the first vernacular version. This was "Bhanumati-Chittavilasa," i.e., Portia and Bassanio, a rendering of "The Merchant of Venice."

The Universities of Bengal, Bombay and Madras were established in 1857—the year of the Mutiny. From that time until the present, Shakespeare has been studied by all educated Indians. He has been a compulsory subject for all students at the Universities: the Matriculation candidates are examined in a number of passages selected from the plays; Intermediate candidates in a single play; B.A. candidates in two plays; and the M.A. candidates in four plays. Varia-

tions occur here and there, but the foregoing is the usual arrangement.

Now, let us ask, what report the Indian students, leaving College, give of Shakespeare?

Let us be perfectly frank. Probably very few students leave college with anything but a distaste and dislike for the very name of Shakespeare. Some are able, of course, to recite lengthy passages, memorised "according to plan." Lip homage, cheap and abundant, is at ready command, and they are well trained to offer "pooja" at the shrine of the inspired Bard of Avon. No one before the present writer has been moved to fare forth in a literary punt for the demolition of ducks, swans (of Avon or elsewhere) or even geese.

Now, why this strange distaste for a poet whom the Western world esteems so highly?

I answer without hesitation—it is due to the manner in which the curriculum is planned, and to uninspired teaching. Of course, one special function of the teacher is to inoculate the student with Shakespearitis. This complaint may be unrecognised in the vocabulary of diagnosis, but the thing itself is a thing of everyday observation. Shakespeare "pooja" has been made inevitable.

Until very recently, practically all Indian contributions to the literature of the subject uniformly took this tone. A few exhibits in this intention will doubtless be welcome.

In 1853, Pundit Muktarana Vidyagisa in his transla-

tion of Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare" made the following remarks in his Preface:—

All persons versed in English literature unreservedly praise the poetical dramas in English of the great poet Shakespeare because they are full of varied and wonderful poetic sentiments. A mere acquaintance with the stories which form the themes of these great poems fills the mind with the highest delight; and leading to an increase of thinking power, it produces the unspeakable but very tangible result of creating a sense of duty, inspiration of virtuous deeds, inclination towards such qualities of character as humility, generosity, fortitude, and aversion to selfishness and other forms of immoral conduct. In fact, in many places in his works, he fits such instructions into his text. It is for this reason that a German savant made the following remark, "How fortunate is England! The great poet, Shakespeare, departed from this world long ago, yet his works remain to this day and like experienced teachers dispense various instructions and multifarious knowledge about multifarious subjects."

In the Preface to his translation of "Othello," Mr. Nanilal Bandopadhyaya says:—

Like all his other tragedies "Othello" is a world-poem; it is not written for a particular nation or for a particular country. The gradual unfolding of character, the various currents and cross-currents of human lives produced by clashing events, the very faithful pictures of the lights and shadows of our existence—which we meet within this drama—are all true of our country as well as of all other countries.

Mr. R. Saupin, in a pamphlet entitled "Shakespeare and Outlines of Homer," gives expression to the following criticism:—

We can believe, for instance, that Pope was helped by Bolingbroke in his "Essay on Man"; but we cannot believe that Shakespeare was helped by Bacon. It is certainly true that the latter was a very clever gentleman, and especially a great philosopher. But Shakespeare's wisdom is not a wisdom obtained from books; it is natural wisdom, and comes off in his writings naturally. Bacon studied and then knew; Shakespeare knew before he studied: he was a born genius. The knowledge exhibited in his works is not dragged in in a learned fashion, but generally extends to all branches of learning.

The tribute of Monmohan Roy is well known:—

Rest in peace in thy grave, O mighty bard!
 Immortal shalt thou remain through ages and ages;
 As long as the dramatic art will last on earth
 Thy genius will shine in full splendour.
 Sleep on, thou golden swan of Avon,
 Let the wide world be filled with thy melody.

Dr. S. Gupta closes his Thesis with the above lines. He himself avoids critical remarks, but whenever they escape him they take the following tone:—

As far as we know, the only two well-known types of ancient drama (the Greek and the Indian) now both lie as broken idols before the supreme dramatic

genius of Shakespeare—an unequivocal testimony to the fact that as dramatist he has no rival and that he is to be marked as the first among his fellow craftsmen. . . . Shakespeare's dramatic genius has now proved itself unrivalled in the East as it did in the West. East or West, he is now the undisputed monarch in the realm of drama and the homage of the whole world he claims and wins in his own right divine. . . . His claim as the greatest dramatist in the world there is none to dispute. . . . It is a well-known fact that the large humanity of Shakespeare's mind transcends all limitations of time and place, and that the secret of his universal appeal lies in his myriad-mindedness.¹

There are two volumes from the pen of Mr. R. V. Subbarau, dealing respectively with "Hamlet" and "Othello." The author begins by saying that three centuries of criticism have failed to fathom "the mysteries of Hamlet and Othello." Two questions naturally arise:—

- (1) What has prevented critics from understanding them?
- (2) What are his own solutions?

Neither of the questions is answered. But it is interesting to remark that the critic in his Preface displays the classic trait of invoking the spirit of the master. This is meant to create an emotional environment of sympathy, nay, of adoration, in which to approach the

¹ See "Shakespeare in India," a Thesis presented to the University of London.

study. Such a procedure has its use—the attitude of sympathy vivifies and clarifies the intellectual action. How far he has succeeded by making use of this method in throwing fresh light on the problems, should be my standard by which to appraise his effort. After careful study, I find that Mr. Subbarau has contributed nothing original. I admit his stupendous industry—there is a page of commentary for every two lines. Mr. Subbarau might have recollected that Hamlet is under an impulse, and under the stress of that impulse a certain behaviour results. And this behaviour is quite consistent with what happens in human nature. There is no mysticism about it. The question is how far this fact of human nature is artistically treated by Shakespeare. The series of events that has taken place in the play, as a result of Hamlet's behaviour, is one of many sets of events that might have taken place under the same conditions. To ask, then, why Hamlet did this or that is beside the point. The only question which is relevant is, how far these events have been knitted into a coherent and perfect whole. Why Shakespeare chose these events and not others may be debated, but will reveal no conclusive result. To answer the question would be to study the psychology of Shakespeare, but not his artistic presentation. Had our critic known this, he would have profitably economised time and money and paper. Now, when we turn to note his attitude towards the poet, we find what we had anticipated:—

It requires no small power of perception to discover, and no little stretch of imagination to follow and appreciate the subtle lines of a superb psychological portraiture pencilled by an artist of surpassing skill and omniscience.¹

Shall we now turn to celebrities? Mr. Ananda Coomaraswamy writes in the following vein:—

For no one has been more distinguished than William Shakespeare in his profound appreciation of the common humanity of an infinite variety of men. . . . In honouring the genius of Shakespeare, then, we do not merely offer homage to the memory of an individual, but are witnesses to the intellectual fraternity of mankind: and it is that fraternity which assures us of the possibility of Co-operation in a common task, the creation of a social order founded upon union.²

The Urdu poet, Mohammed Iqbal, in a volume of poems entitled "Bang-i-Dara" (The Pealing of Bells) pays the following tribute to Shakespeare:—

Under the flashing sunbeams of thy thought,
Nature herself has found herself revealed
In perfect glory in thy golden song;
The conscious mistress of her treasured wealth!
The eager eye in search of thy image
Found thee enshrined within a veil of light,

¹ See "Othello Unveiled."

² Intellectual Fraternity, an article contributed to The Book of Homage prepared on the Tercentenary of Shakespeare by Sir Israel Gollancz.

Like mighty monarch of night and day,
That bathed in glory, seeing is not seen.
Hid from the world's eye thou hast beheld
The intricate workings of her inmost soul!
The jealous mistress of deep mysteries
Never again will suffer herself to bear
A seer like thee who took her by surprise,
Unveiled in starlight and mellow moon.¹

Rabindranath Tagore contributed the following poem to *The Book of Homage*:—

When by the far-way sea your fiery disc appeared
from behind the
Unseen, O poet, O sun, England's horizon felt you
near her breast, and took you to be her own.
She kissed your forehead, caught you in the arms
of her forest branches, hid you behind the mist-
mantle and watched you in the greensward where
the fairies love to play among meadow flowers.

A few early birds sang your hymn of praise while
the rest of the woodland choir were asleep.

Then at the silent breaking of the Eternal you
rose higher and higher till you reached the mid-
sky, making all quarters of heaven your own.

Therefore at this moment, after the end of centuries,
the palm groves by the Indian sea raise their
tremulous branches to the sky murmuring your
praise.

¹ This excellent translation was undertaken by Sardar Jogendra Singh for *The Book of Homage*.

Justices Ranade and Telang and Chandarvarkar have gone further than the critics and the poets. They have found in Shakespeare the ultimate realities of life, its responsibilities, its very destiny. They have visualised Shakespeare standing on an elevated moral plane and reaching out his hand to frail mortals to lift them to his higher pedestal. They have, however, ignored the Shakespeare of the Sonnets, or have deliberately taken Browning's view of the Sonnets. They have also read theistic ideals in harmony with Indian monism or pantheism in the works of the poet. This has been due to the Vedanta and to the natural tendencies of the human mind to derive support for one's traditional ideas from foreign thought. Passages like the following have always impressed these thinkers—theistic tendencies are detected in them:—

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer—

To die, to sleep,
To sleep; perchance to dream; ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil;
Must give us pause: etc., etc.

(“Hamlet,” Act III, Sc. I).

There is a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.

(“Hamlet,” Act V, Sc. II).

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.
(“The Tempest,” Act IV, Sc. I).

Pantheistic tendencies are discovered in the following passage:—

And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.
(“The Tempest,” Act IV, Sc. I).

The above passage has always appealed to Indians of the old school. It produces reverberations of Indian ideas of the dissolution of this world—according to some a periodic occurrence—and the Vedantic idea of Maya or illusion of phenomena, hiding the one reality of the Eternal Spirit.

I may note in passing that this idea is not unscientific, though Shakespeare was scarcely conscious of its scientific implications. In the evolution of the earth, an Ice Age has followed another Ice Age, and may follow again, due to the rotation of the axis of the earth, and an Ice Age, in a sense, does mean dissolution of things.

In the following passages ethical doctrines are suspected:—

O, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.

("Measure for Measure," Act II, Sc. II).

That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once;
how the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were
Cain's jaw-bone, that did the first murder! It might
be the pate of a politician, which this ass now o'er-
reaches; one that would circumvent God, might it
not?

("Hamlet," Act V, Sc. I).

I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin,
And let him find it. Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ.

("Othello," Act III, Sc. III).

O, now for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troop and the big wars
That make ambition virtue! O, farewell,
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner and all quality,
Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war!

("Othello," Act III, Sc. III).

(These lines fit in naturally with Indian asceticism. The reverses of fortune in "King Lear" and "As You Like It" strike a similar chord. The madness of Lear and the retirement of the Duke in the woods are said to approximate to an ascetic ideal).

No ceremony that to great ones 'longs,
 Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
 The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,
 Become them with one half so good a grace
 As mercy does.

(“Measure for Measure,” Act II, Sc. II).

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
 Upon the place beneath: it is twice blessed;
 It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes:

It is an attribute to God himself;
 An earthly power doth then show likest God's
 When mercy seasons justice. . . .

(“The Merchant of Venice,” Act IV, Sc. I).

Many other passages could be cited into which the Victorian Indian reads ethical tendencies, but the above will suffice.

Philosophical subtleties are squeezed out of the following passages:—

Look here, upon this picture, and on this,
 The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
 See what a grace was seated on this brow;

This was your husband. Look you now, what
 follows:

Here is your husband; like a mildew'd ear,
 Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?—

(“Hamlet,” Act III, Sc. IV).

There's nothing serious in mortality:
 All is but toys; renown and grace is dead;
 The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
 Is left this vault to brag of.

(“Macbeth,” Act II, Sc. I).

To-morrow, and to-morrow and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
 And then is heard no more; it is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing.

(“Macbeth,” Act V, Sc. IV).

Look how the floor of heaven
 Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
 There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
 But in his motion like an angel sings,
 Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims:
 Such harmony is in immortal souls;
 But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay
 Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

(“The Merchant of Venice,” Act V, Sc. I).

The Sanskrit drama was generally of the stuff of romantic tragedy-comedy. Even the comedies of manners partook of a tragic strain. But the tragic conclusion of a play like “King Lear” is not really in harmony with

Indian sentiment, which rather favours the romances of Shakespeare's last period.

Then, again, the Sanskrit drama has never cared for the three unities. So plays like "A Winter's Tale" would not be absurd on the Indian stage. All that is cared for in India is a unity of plot, but even this not to the exclusion of under-plot. Indeed, under-plots are most favoured in India.

Bearing these facts in mind, we can now proceed to summarise what the old-fashioned Indian most welcomes in Shakespeare. He admires the poet for

1. His art;
2. His poetry and lyric genius;
3. His love of romance and the fairy world;
4. His tragi-comedies, and his avoidance of pure comedies of manners, as such, like those of Ben Jonson, Massinger and the Restoration dramatists. A play such as "A New Way to Pay Old Debts" would not appeal to cultivated Indians of the old school;
5. His monism and pantheism;
6. His ethical teachings;
7. His moral loftiness;
8. His solutions of the riddles of existence;
9. His ascetic tendencies that led him to renounce the world and its fleeting joys.

The Burmans seem to admire Shakespeare solely for the religious, moral and ascetic tendencies of his work! "To the Burmans," we read in *The Book of Homage*, "Shakespeare appeals most from the religious point of

view. . . . Shakespearian literature manages to teach the same high standard of ethics as the Buddhist, without a distinct ethical tendency. In spite of his vigorous appreciation of the world, Shakespeare shakes hands with the Buddha, in his utter renunciation of the world." Again: "When I carefully studied the poems of the illustrious dramatic poet Shakespeare, whose widespread fame is known all the world over, it was the Buddhistic sentiments in them that appealed to me most, and I was greatly rejoiced in the study of our deep philosophy, inasmuch as they added to the profound interest I felt in the subject. . . ."

These so-called criticisms are nothing of the kind. Most of them are affected, mechanical and insincere. We cannot help feeling that they are based on a misinterpretation of the poet, and are mere concessions to the fashion of expectation. English critics laud Shakespeare to the skies: is it not the bounden duty of the Indian to place him still higher, among the stars? When he is caught on the other horn of the dilemma, he becomes a victim to what Herbert Spencer calls "automorphism." Everything that he has learnt to admire in the Upanishads and the Vedas is seen again in Shakespeare. It is surprising how much he can discover! Indeed, all these encomia serve only to darken counsel.

A reaction is clearly inevitable, and will engage our attention in the sequel.

THE AFTERMATH

If an offence come out of truth, better is it that the offence come than that the truth be concealed.

ST. JEROME.

CULTURED Indians of the present generation are beginning to feel that Shakespeare has been misinterpreted and misunderstood in India. A transvaluation of values is imperatively demanded. I take upon myself to speak on behalf of the younger generation and to voice this claim.

In view of his great heritage and high aspiration, the Indian true to his call would wish to separate the wheat from the chaff—to give honour where honour is due, but to abjure all lip worship. In his appreciation, he is fully prepared to join with the saner critics of Europe, but he refuses to take part in any indiscriminating chorus of idolatry. If differences in appraisal manifest themselves, what else could be expected? Thousands of years have passed since the dispersal of the Aryans, the severance of traditions, and the emergence of new modes of thought and feeling. Present day uniformity in these respects is inconceivable. Shall we not agree to differ?

In order to make the present attitude comprehensible there is a clear call to refer to the literature and theories of life on which the Indian has been nurtured from birth upwards. That is, all that is signified by the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and much else. Without this background and setting the Indian attitude is unintelligible to other races.

Let us remember that the outstanding feature of Indian consciousness is the belief—in fact the basic belief—in reincarnation. It is his fundamental striving to free himself from this necessity. This desire to attain the escape (Mukti) is his perpetual obsession, and colours his whole life. Of course all this is entirely foreign to the Western consciousness.

So it comes about that when the Indian turns to Western literature he looks in vain for any belief in Mukti. This to him is the final condemnation of any literary presentation. All Maya! he is apt to say.

Only second to this is the belief in Karma—the doctrine that

Our deeds follow us from afar;
And what we have been makes us what we are.

This leads to a certain passivity or attitude of resignation. Everything that happens to a man is the *outcome* of his past. Therefore every calamity that befalls a man has been brought about by his own action. He reaps as he has sown.

The attitude of defiance so characteristic of the Western world appears to the Indian irrational.

The third factor of importance is the repudiation of the distinction "I" and "thou."

This entails, among other consequences, the disappearance of the superiority complex.

Lastly, the omnipresent search for God and the desire to become united with him. "God," says Plotinus, "is not external to anyone, but is present with all things, though they are ignorant that He is so."¹ In the language of St. Paul, "In Him we live and move and have our being."² Such is also the belief of the Indian.

Thus it happens that when he makes acquaintance with an alien literature he looks how that literature stands in regard to these deepest questions. The purely æsthetic detachment of a Western critic is impossible for him.

Turning now from these general considerations to weighty points of detail, let us note the salient characteristics of Indian literature.

The dominant feature of this literature is the intimate alliance—in fact, the perfect fusion—of poetry and religion. All the greatest poetry of India is religious. Take, as examples, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavad Gita. But when we say 'religious' we do not mean sectarian. It never loses sight of the

¹ Ennéad, vi, 9.

² Acts, chap. xvii, verse 28.

question of questions—the question of the ultimate nature of Reality. “While fixed intellectual beliefs mark off one religion from another,” says Professor Radhakrishnan, “Hinduism sets itself no such limits. Intellect is subordinated to intuition, dogma to experience. Religion is not the acceptance of academic abstractions or the celebration of ceremonies, but a kind of life or experience. It is insight into the nature of reality (darsana) or experience of reality (anubhava).”¹

Thus the literature of India is religious in the deepest sense. We cannot say the same of English literature. The greatest English poetry is non-religious.² The sparse exceptions do not invalidate the general rule. The motive has not appealed to English writers.

Conspicuous by its absence in English literature, the religious motive is omnipresent in the literature of India. Let us listen to the wonderful Hymn of Creation in the Rigveda:

Now first arose Desire, the primeval seed of
mind,
(The sages have seen all this in their hearts,
Separating existence from non-existence.)
Its rays spread above, around and below.
The glory became creative,
The Self, sustained as Cause below,

¹ See “The Hindu view of life.”

² I am not forgetful of the quasi-religious character of much Old English Poetry. But the inspiration is no deep one.

Projected, as Effect, above,
Whence arose this projected, and whether sustained
or not,
He alone, O beloved, who is the ruler in the highest
heaven knows,
Nay, it may be that even He knoweth it not.¹

What magic! Can there be a finer fusion of poetry and religion?

Since literature and religion are so intimately linked in Indian thought, each seeks enrichment from the other. In India alone is religion presented through the medium of poetry. We see this tendency even in modern religious movements. The Jap Sahib, that series of immortal poems, dear to the heart of every Sikh, begun by Guru Nanak and continued by his spiritual successors, may be cited as an example. He who reads these poems, apart from the depth of meaning enshrined in them, is carried away by their exquisite melody.

This leads us to a further characteristic of Indian poetry—its intimate connection with music. This is seen at its finest in the poems of Kabir—the musical mystic of India:—

The middle region of the sky, wherein
the spirit dwelleth, is radiant with
the music of Light;

¹ The Hymn of Creation (Rigveda, x, 129).

There, where the pure and white
music blossoms, my Lord takes
His delight.

In the wondrous effulgence of each
hair of His body, the brightness
of millions of suns and of moons
is lost.

On that shore there is a city where
the rain of nectar pours and pours
and never ceases.

Kabir says: "Come, O Dharmdas!
and see my great Lord'd Durbar."¹

These poems are translated by Asia's greatest bard, yet they necessarily suffer by transplanting into an alien tongue. In the original, however, their music is delightful. Indeed, in India all songs are worthy to be called poems.

Again, Indian literature is saturated with the love element. Human love has been treated in all its aspects. We have only to think of the love-literature that centres round Radha and Krishna! Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* is, of course, well-known. But human love, though forming a great part of Indian literature, is not the only kind of love known and voiced. From the earthly plane it has soared to the Divine. Listen to the inspired Kabir:—

¹ See Kabir's Poems, translated by Rabindranath Tagore.

My body and my mind are grieved for
the want of Thee;
O my Beloved! Come to my house.

When people say I am Thy bride, I
am ashamed; for I have not
touched Thy heart with my heart.

Then what is this love of mine? I
have no taste for food, I have no
sleep, my heart is ever restless
within doors and without.

As water is to the thirsty, so is the
lover to the bride. Who is there
that will carry my news to my
Beloved?

Kabir is restless: He is dying for sight of
Him."¹

Finally, there is no tragedy in Indian literature. Sometimes it is thought by European scholars that this absence is due to the Indian's repugnance to face harsh facts, and they smile at "the happy solutions" in the Indian plays. But this explanation is incorrect. The reason lies deeper. It is held in India that tragedy is *not a fundamental element in human destiny*—it belongs to the accidents of life. It has been felt that tragedy contains *no constructive element* in its vision of reality. And this is a fatal objection from the philosophic point of

¹ See Kabir's Poems, translated by Rabindranath Tagore, Poem xxxv.

view. This accounts for its conspicuous absence from Indian literature.¹ Tragi-comedy is accepted and is popular.

To the Indian it is hardly a matter of surprise that Shakespeare in the maturity of his art abandoned tragedy in favour of Romance.

¹ This is the Indian's justification for his avoidance of tragedy. Notice the antithesis between this attitude and that of the Greek dramatists and the philosophers of the pessimistic school. These accept tragedy as a radical fact in the universe. The difference is fundamental.

TAKING STOCK

Do not see yourself in running water, for what is itself still can instil stillness into others.

TCHAUNG TZU.

OUR study in the foregoing chapter will have prepared us to anticipate the attitude of the modern Indian towards Shakespeare. His critical apprehension cannot but move in the direction that it has taken. It cannot escape the Νόμος (Nomos) of his race.

Let us first review what has been done to introduce Shakespeare to the Indian public.

There are in all fourteen vernacular languages in which the plays have appeared, and the following list is significant:—

Hindustani:	38	translations and adaptations.
Telegu:	25	” ” ”
Marahti:	24	” ” ”
Tamil:	21	” ” ”
Hindi:	20	” ” ”
Bengali:	19	” ” ”
Gujarati:	10	” ” ”
Kannada:	9	” ” ”
Singhalese:	7	” ” ”
Sindhi:	5	” ” ”

Assamese:	1	translation	and	adaptation.
Origa:	1	”	”	”
Punjabi:	1	”	”	”
Sanskrit:	1	”	”	”
TOTAL:	<hr/> 182 translations and adaptations.			

In contemplating this list we are struck by the following facts.

First, we remark the plays that are translated and adapted out of the thirty-seven that are officially attributed to Shakespeare. Secondly, we find that certain plays are handled more frequently than others. Thirdly, there are some plays that have been completely ignored. And lastly, there seems to be a method most in vogue in dealing with the plays.

The plays that are translated or adapted are twenty-seven in number. They are:

1. "King John."
2. "King Lear."
3. "Othello."
4. "Anthony and Cleopatra."
5. "Pericles."
6. "Cymbeline."
7. "Macbeth."
8. "Julius Cæsar."
9. "Hamlet."
10. "Romeo and Juliet."
11. "Henry VIII."
12. "Richard III."
13. "A Winter's Tale."
14. "Twelfth Night."

15. "All's Well that Ends Well."
16. "The Taming of the Shrew."
17. "As You Like It."
18. "The Merchant of Venice."
19. "A Midsummer Night's Dream."
20. "Love's Labour Lost."
21. "Much Ado About Nothing."
22. "The Comedy of Errors."
23. "Measure for Measure."
24. "The Merry Wives of Windsor."
25. "The Tempest."
26. "The Two Gentlemen of Verona."
27. "Troilus and Cressida."

Out of these twenty-seven renderings those that appear most frequently are the following nine:—

1. "Romeo and Juliet."
2. "The Tempest."
3. "As You Like It."
4. "King Lear."
5. "Cymbeline."
6. "Othello."
7. "The Merchant of Venice."
8. "The Comedy of Errors."
9. "Hamlet."

This order by no means indicates the relative popularity of the plays named; about that in its proper context.

The plays that do not seem to find favour with the translators and adaptors are the Chronicle and Roman plays generally.

The favourite method in dealing with the plays is that of adaptation. Shakespeare as he is, is never given in the Indian versions. He is always accommodated to the tastes of the new public. For this reason there are practically no translations in the proper sense of the word. Mr. D. C. Mitra, who has tried his hand at translation, thinks: "If a translation is literal it may serve the purpose of an expository key to students of that foreign language, and as such may be valued, but from it can never be derived in full measure that pleasure combined with instruction which is the chief and real aim of all literary studies."¹ Most adaptors seem to hold this view. In fact the point is authoritatively expressed by the Bengali poet, H. C. Bandopadhyaya. In the Preface to his rendering he remarks as follows: "This drama is an imitation and not a translation of 'Romeo and Juliet.' A mere translation of an English work loses all poetic and other charms for the simple reason that, owing to the native differences of English and Bengali tongues, which are considerable, and also owing to the divergences of local customs and manners, religious ideas, etc., such a translation becomes unpleasing both to the ear and the eye and hardly pleases the taste of Bengali readers."

Thus many changes of a drastic kind, which might perplex the European critic, are found essential in rendering Shakespeare into the Indian vernaculars.

¹ See the interesting Preface to "A Winter's Tale" by the above-mentioned author.

Not only the names of persons and situations are Indianised, often entailing the creation of several characters, but everything that is likely to offend the Indian mind is scrupulously avoided. In a way, several of these efforts are noteworthy and interesting. And if they could be rendered back into English they would impress the European critic as ingeniously catering to the public taste.

For instance, indelicacies, which one finds in "The Tempest," in "Hamlet," in "Romeo and Juliet," and in several other plays, and which were perhaps a part of the healthy comedy of the Elizabethan age, are mercilessly excised. Such a passage as the following would not be tolerated by the Indian public:—

Mrs. Ov. Well: what has he done?

Pom. A woman.

Mrs. Ov. But what is his offence?

Pom. Groping for trouts in a peculiar river.

Mrs. Ov. What! is there a maid with child by him?

Pom. No, but there's a woman with maid by him. You have not heard of the proclamation, have you?

Mrs. Ov. What proclamation, man?

Pom. All houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be plucked down.

Mrs. Ov. And what shall become of those in the city?

Pom. They shall stand for seed: they had gone down too, but that wise burgher put in for them.

Mrs. Ov. But shall all our houses of resort in the suburbs be pulled down?

Pom. To the ground, mistress.

(“Measure for Measure,” Act I, Sc. II).

The classical Indian plays, for instance, those of Kalidasa, are singularly poetical and free from distasteful elements. Therefore, the coarseness of Shakespeare as it appears in not a few plays, would produce a bad impression on the Indian mind. For this reason Shakespeare is expurgated in India. All indelicate jokes, ribald jests and immodest suggestions are excised. Thus, then, is Shakespeare presented to Indians unacquainted with English.

II

With the above information before us, we can proceed to an analysis of the vogue of Shakespeare in India. We shall find ourselves led to divide the plays into four orders, which we will entitle “great,” “interesting,” “popular,” and “neglected.”

If the mere number of versions is any criterion of the popularity of particular plays, then we obtain the following order:—

1. “Othello.”
2. “The Merchant of Venice.”
3. “Romeo and Juliet.”
4. “The Comedy of Errors.”

5. "As You Like It."
6. "The Tempest."
7. "Hamlet."

If we seek some other index of relative popularity of these plays we shall arrive at the same order of preference. "Othello" is the most popular of all the plays because, firstly, he is an Oriental figure, secondly his heroic demeanour awakens a ready response in the Indian mind, and lastly, there is the love interest in the play. "The Merchant of Venice," too, is very popular, because Shylock is almost an Eastern type in his combination of craft and naïveté. He reminds the Indian reader of a similar figure: the much-maligned Marwari. Then, the outwitting of Shylock by a woman in disguise is greatly relished by the Indian: in fact he always loves a masterful woman from a respectful distance. Finally, there is the romantic element in the play. Indeed, some Indians enjoy the play mostly for this last quality. The late Dr. Scott seems to have noticed this peculiarity. He says: "Indians find the key-note of the play in Nerissa's phrase, 'rightly love.'"¹ "Romeo and Juliet," because of its intensity of passion, exercises a witchery over the Indian mind. "As You Like It," apart from its love interest, is touched with a pensive philosophy which appeals to the average man. The character of the hermit-like Duke is indeed reminiscent of Vikramaditya and several other Indian kings. "The Tempest"

¹ See "The Merchant of Venice," edited with notes and commentary by Dr. R. Scott, M.A., D.D.

has a heroine who is almost the prototype of Shakuntala. The other plays of this section more or less breathe the same spirit. There is the same aloofness from the world of mere commonplace; there is the same idyllic atmosphere; finally, there is the same benign influence of the fairies. We need not, however, linger over this point, as Rabindranath Tagore has beautifully compared and contrasted Miranda and Sakuntala.¹ "Cymbeline," too, is prized for its idealistic qualities. One Indian critic is of the opinion that but for the figure of Imogen, "Shakespeare had no business to write his 'Cymbeline.'"² Now whether Shakespeare had any business to write this play or not, this much is certain that Imogen is both "Whiter than the sheets" and "Chaste as unsunned snow." To the Indian this union of qualities is most pleasing. The great constancy of Imogen makes a special appeal to the Oriental lover. "The Comedy of Errors" reflects the Indian's sense of mystification. "King Lear" is liked because Cordelia's fidelity is of the kind that is almost revered in India. "Hamlet," in his indecision and verbosity, is hardly different in some ways from the typical procrastinating Indian. "What are we Indians," said a compatriot to me, "but pale Hamlets, sick with too much thinking and chattering?"

¹ See the Literary Essays of Rabindranath Tagore.

² See the article: "The Peerless Heroine of an Imperfect Play," in the D. J. Sind Collegiate Miscellany, February, 1929, by Mr. M. U. Malkani.

Turning now to the "neglected" plays, we have the following:—

1. "Richard II."
2. "Henry V."
3. "Henry VI."
4. "Coriolanus."
5. "Timon of Athens."
6. "Titus Andronicus."

The translators and adaptors have shunned these plays for a practical reason. The characters and incidents are historical, and so to Indianise the one and to depart grossly from the other would give the plays an air of extreme unreality. Further, these plays—especially the historical—in their noise and fury, bombast and bloodshed, are alien to the Indian spirit. We may note, in passing, that it is precisely these plays that are least popular in France. This is perhaps due to the fact that they are too exclusively national, and therefore lacking in interest to other peoples. Thus, except in their purely human parts, these plays are of only local interest. The Jew-hatred, Pope-hatred and France-hatred that one finds in them reveals an aspect of Shakespeare that one would wish to forget. Of course, to the lovers of jingoism and spread-eagleism these plays are dear. Shakespeare knew how to play on the strings of national sentimentalism—his Henry V is sheer Chauvinism. But these things do not interest Indians in the least. They find them only "sound and fury signifying nothing." "In India," writes my friend,

Professor N. S. Takakhav, "these plays are most unpopular." Perhaps one portion alone may be excepted, viz., Antony's speech in "Julius Cæsar."

"Coriolanus," "Titus Andronicus" and "Timon of Athens," lacking as they are in the light and sweetness that one finds even in the great tragedies, make no appeal to the Indian. The qualities that are emphasised in these plays appear to the Indian almost inhuman. Because the world has been unkind to Timon, shall Timon indict the world? His words betray a readiness to erase mankind from the scheme of being. Consider only the following lines:—

Come not to me again: but say to Athens,
Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
Upon the beached verge of the salt flood;
Who once a day with his embossed froth
The turbulent surge shall cover: thither come,
And let my grave-stone be your oracle.
Lips, let sour words go by and language end:
What is amiss, plague and infection mend!
Graves only be men's works, and death their gain!
Sun, hide thy beams! Timon hath done his reign.
("Timon of Athens," Act V, Sc. I).

To the Indian the attitude of Timon seems unintelligible. Misery has not taught him humility: it has only roused him to impotent fury. This is so because Timon is a temperamentally arrogant spirit. His misanthropy seems factitious. The Indian reader feels while reading "Timon of Athens," as also some of the novels of

Dostoevsky, that he must open his window or he will choke.

In the class of "neglected" works we must place also the poems. None of these, excepting the Sonnets, awakens much interest. There are one or two translations of "Venus and Adonis," and "The Rape of Lucrece," but these translations are little esteemed. On the whole, little notice is taken of the poems. As a rule, they are regarded as mere "asides" of Shakespeare.

When we turn to that group of plays that can be called "interesting" from the Indian point of view, we meet with some strange facts. In Indian thought and feeling, beauty and pathos are identified; accordingly the more sombre plays of Shakespeare usually awaken interest. This goes to explain why the tragedies, which conflict with the traditional philosophy of India, escape neglect. The fate that overtakes Hamlet, Othello, Romeo, Lear and Anthony may not satisfy the Indian philosophic outlook, but the sadness of their lot has its appealing beauty. Then, as the connection between poetry and music is intimate in India, those plays of Shakespeare which show this unity arouse especial interest. There are few Indians who would not feel the charm of Lorenzo's words:—

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven

Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
 There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
 But in his motion like an angel sings
 Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims;
 Such harmony is in immortal souls;
 But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay
 Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
 ("The Merchant of Venice," Act V, Sc. I).

Or again, in more reflective vein:—

We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage;
 When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
 And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
 Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
 Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
 And take upon's the mystery of things,
 As if we were God's spies; and we will wear out,
 In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones
 That ebb and flow by the moon.
 ("King Lear," Act V, Sc. III).

To a lover of Kalidasa, or Kabir, or Tagore, such musical poetry is highly acceptable. The present writer had a friend who, possessing a musical talent of the first order, set the songs of Shakespeare to Indian music. The gaiety of the poet's songs, conveyed through the Indian medium, was hauntingly beautiful. But these attempts never came to the notice of the public. Thus all the plays that are bejewelled with songs appeal to cultivated Indian taste. The plays in which disguise

occurs, find great favour with some Indians, especially because of the dramatic irony that results from them.

All the comedies of Shakespeare have been translated or adapted; some again and again. This sufficiently indicates their popularity in India. Nevertheless, several features in these comedies make no appeal to the Indian, and, if the truth be told, even repel him.

Shakespeare's wit has often a reference to time and place, and can only be enjoyed by those who are versed in the social conditions of the Elizabethan age. Frenchmen often miss the point, and so do Indians. Even when, after laborious searching of unwieldy commentaries, they have at last perceived the joke, they fail to find it amusing. "Love's Labour Lost" is full of this out-of-date wit. "King John," too, is disfigured by the same fault. But this wit crops up everywhere. Let us take some examples of it in Shakespeare's very last play:—

Stephano. This is a devil and no monster, I will
leave him;
I have no long spoon.
(*"The Tempest,"* Act II, Sc. I).

Few readers will laugh at Stephano's joke. But when we have consulted Furness's Variorum Edition, or some such bulky work, we learn that this is an allusion to an old proverb: "He who eats with the devil hath need of a long spoon." "The Devil," continues the note, "as also the Vice (or Clown) were stock characters in the

Morality plays, and it was part of the comic business to make them feed of the same custard or some such dish; the Devil on one side and the Vice on the other, with a spoon of vast length." After this learned and lengthy explanation, how many of us will be moved to laughter?

Trinculo. Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver: there would this monster make a man; any strange beast there, makes a man: when they would not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they would lay out ten to see a dead Indian.

("The Tempest," Act II, Sc. 2).

The above discourse of Trinculo is less cryptic, but still not very provocative of laughter. The note, however, tells us that this is a satirical allusion to the curiosity-mongers of Shakespeare's day. Exhibitions, where all sorts of wonderful things were shown, were very common, especially at fairs. . . . "Indian"—here probably some contemporary reference is to be assumed, e.g. (as Stevens suggested) to the Indians brought home by the great explorer, Sir Martin Frobisher, in 1577.

One finds it difficult to be amused by a verbal jingle like this. It is questionable whether many Englishmen, other than learned Professors, would derive entertainment from it. An old Indian professor of mine once said to me: "If it is necessary to enjoy the jokes of

Shakespeare after all this trouble, better leave them alone. Personally, I am bored to death by them. I wish Shakespeare had more sense!"

Here, then, is the local and temporal in the works of Shakespeare. His wit was meant for the times in which he lived, and with their passing, it has lost all point. Shakespeare's topical allusions, such as the following, will only interest curious students:—

Nerissa. What say you then, to Falconbridge, the young baron of England?

Portia. How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere.

(“The Merchant of Venice”).

Of the same perishable quality are his puns, conceits and sugar-plums of learning.

The Fools of Shakespeare now and then give the impression of being dreadful bores. For instance, some of the tags spouted by the Fool in “King Lear” are merely directed at the audience, and are thus not only irrelevant and worthless, but also distressingly dull. The Clown in “Othello” is surely a miserable figure. Such characters only serve to disappoint cultivated Indians. But it is easy to see that the trivial elements in Shakespeare's work extend further than we have indicated.

Shakespeare has put our selves on the stage, but not our situations. Our uncles do not as a rule murder our

fathers, and it is impossible for them to marry our mothers (at least in India); we never meet witches, and are not likely to be influenced by them; our kings when they are driven to meditate in solitude do not use their magic to get back their thrones; and when we borrow money we do not offer as security pounds of our flesh. These are things which do not happen—at least nowadays—and they are only relics of the past—if even that.

Such are some of the factors which fail to awaken interest in India. The comedies of Shakespeare make only a partial appeal to the cultured reader.

The plays that can be called "great" by the Indian are very limited in number. They are:—

1. "Othello."
2. "King Lear."
3. "Hamlet."
4. "The Tempest."
5. "Cymbeline."
6. "Measure for Measure."
7. "Romeo and Juliet."

Although in India tragedy is considered an inferior type of art, yet the above plays are classed as "great" because of the superb portrayal of the great passions that is found in them, and because of Shakespeare's underlying confession that they are nothing but signs of waste. Artistically, however, these tragedies are not considered impeccable. Shakespeare's opening scenes are a postulate which the spectator is asked to take for

granted. And thus the improbable is insensibly admitted. Each play is as it were precipitated. There is no sense of the inevitable. But for such arbitrary sequences the educated Indian has no tolerance. "Othello" is a tragedy of accident.¹ No other word describes what we find. "King Lear" is a tragedy of inconceivable blindness.² But for these blemishes, the admiration that these plays evoke is justified.) The scene in which Othello is asked by Iago whether Cassio knew Desdemona before her marriage, is much admired by the present writer's father:—

Iago. Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady, know of your love?

Oth. He did from first to last; why dost thou ask?

Iago. But for a satisfaction of my thought; no further harm.

Oth. Why of thy thought, Iago?

Iago. I did not think he had been acquainted with her.

Oth. O, yes, and went between us very oft.

Iago. Indeed!

Oth. Indeed! ay, indeed: discern'st thou aught in that? Is he not honest?

Iago. Honest, my lord!

Oth. Honest! ay, honest.

Iago. My lord, for aught I know.

Oth. What dost thou think?

Iago. Think, my lord!

Oth. Think, my lord! By heaven, he echoes me,

¹ See the Essay on Othello, by Mr. Bernard Shaw, in "Dramatic Opinions."

² For a more harmonious handling of the same theme see "A Lear of the Steppes."

As if there was some monster in his thought too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something. I heard thee say even now, thou lik'dst not that, When Cassio left my wife, what didst not like?
 ("Othello," Act III, Sc. III).

"This scene," the present writer's father has often said, "is the most powerful in all Shakespeare for revealing, as it were, the technique of creative villainy."

("King Lear" is placed by the side of "Othello," if not on a higher level, because its theme is universal. Many a fond old father finds himself deserted by the children he had trusted most. All this Shakespeare has enshrined in matchless verse. Only two things mar the interest of the play) for the Indian reader: (the first act, which is not convincing enough to launch the tragedy properly, and the death of Cordelia which seems wantonly painful. But Cordelia has always seemed to the Indian the very personification of loyalty, a thing "ensky'd and sainted.")

The appeal that "Hamlet" makes is irresistible. He stands as a symbol for all time of atheistic nihilism. Questioning everything, believing nothing, he is "der Geist der stets vermeint." He tosses on tempestuous waves, and shipwreck is inevitable. Nothing removes the vacuity of existence that confronts him. He is dead long before death comes to him. It is his spiritual dissolution that draws the Indian to him. His physical death is only a concession to the incult mob, avid of

blood and thunder. Hamlet, the questioner, the sceptic, afraid of himself, is doomed already long before we meet him. It would seem that after his encounter with the phantom on the battlements, he became a man possessed. Henceforth naught but weird imaginings.

Hamlet is found true to life, and admired by all Indians, cultured and uncultured alike. But one or two things in this play are found inconsistent. For instance, in the third soliloquy of Hamlet we find:—

The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns—

Yet immediately before, Hamlet had seen the shade of his father on the battlements! How to explain this? "Shakespeare," says Goethe, "makes his persons say on every occasion just what is proper, without much anxious care or calculation whether these words might possibly contradict some other passage."¹ This is true in the main, but here at least there is obvious contradiction. Much of our difficulty in understanding the play comes from such dramatic gaucheries. The other contradiction in this play is of a deeper nature. It is in the character of Hamlet. He sways between two worlds—the world of belief and the world of unbelief. He is anxious to believe, but is totally unable to achieve this belief. He is half Christian and half Greek of the old type. On seeing Ophelia he exclaims:—

¹ See the Letters of Goethe to Eckermann.

Soft you now!
 The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
 Be all my sins remember'd.
 ("Hamlet," Act III, Sc. I).

But the moment she begins to talk to him all his doubts of womanhood crowd upon his mind, and he cannot help telling her:—

Get thee to a nunnery, go: farewell.
 Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool;
 For wise men know well enough what monsters
 You make of them. To a nunnery, go; and
 Quickly too. Farewell.
 ("Hamlet," Act III, Sc. I).

Thus Hamlet is an odd mixture. At heart he is a Christian, but by culture a Pagan. Does he represent a period in the spiritual development of Shakespeare?

We have already noticed that "Romeo and Juliet" is much admired in India because of its theme. The bright, beautiful love of a youthful couple who come to distress, is a subject of which neither the Oriental poet nor the public are ever tired. . . . "Measure for Measure" is read in India as a tragedy. Some scenes in it, especially those in which Angelo and Isabella come together, are considered the finest Shakespeare ever wrote.

"Cymbeline" is ranked among the "great" plays by reason of the marvellous creation of Imogen. Ophelia is thought a mere puppet; Desdemona over-loyal.

Cordelia impulsively quixotic; Lady Macbeth ruthless and pitiless; Miranda a pretty child; Portia a trifle masculine; but Imogen is as sweet and brave as she is chaste. Her personality greatly attracts the Indian, who classes her with Sita and Radha and Draupadi.

There are those in India to whom tragedy makes no appeal. To them it seems no fundamental thing in life, but merely a symptom of feebleness and misdirected effort. ("Tragedy," writes Mr. Singh, "is a surface phenomenon, there is no hell save that we create for ourselves. Life is an infinite Paradise! They who write tragedies are not yet enlightened. The function of poetry is to help us win our own paradise, but after reading Shakespeare, all that survives is a mental hell in which we may pass our days in unnecessary, artificial, yet terrible agony.") To produce sadness in the human mind may be wise, but it does not belong to the higher art of life which imparts bliss and banishes all sorrow. Let me look at the glory of Heaven, I am ashamed at the revelations of my nature that Shakespeare makes. Open the door, let me fly out, seeking God's mercy."¹ To one who understands himself and the external world it is held in India, there can be no tragedy. "In writing these plays," says an Indian friend to me, referring to the tragedies, "Shakespeare only saw and emphasised the weaknesses of man. But what have I to do with weakness? Give me their real and hidden strengths."

¹ See "The Spirit of Eastern Poetry," page 21.

For such reasons the Indian turns from the tragedies to the romances of Shakespeare.

"The Tempest," which lies beyond the confines of tragedy and comedy, is esteemed in India the grandest of Shakespeare's works.

Such, in brief summary, is the estimate of Shakespeare. Now what, we may ask, is the secret of this estimate?

Any attempt to answer this question will throw some light on the Indian mind—to Europeans so strange, enigmatic and even bizarre an entity. "Tell me what you admire, and I will tell you what you are." A wise dictum this!

The Indian admires Shakespeare because of

1. His truth to nature.
2. His love of idealistic, rather than obtrusively realistic, literature.
3. His hero-worshipping spirit betrays a love for the heroic in Shakespeare, though he does not like tragedy generally.
4. His identification of beauty with pathos draws him to the graver side of the poet's work.
5. His sensibility to the mystical affinities of sex leads him to a full appreciation of Shakespeare's delicate handling of this theme.
6. His strong craving is to see the final triumph of the elemental domestic affections; with this satisfaction, Shakespeare is able to supply him.
7. The Indian is prepared to identify himself with great and noble characters in affliction, and this explains his love of tragi-comedy.

8. The Indian is musical by temperament, and the lovely songs that begem the plays never fail to charm him.

9. Finally, the Indian seeks something more abiding than tragedy or comedy, and this attracts him to the romances where, apparently, Shakespeare is allured by larger issues than the tears and laughter of men.

“As a nation,” writes Professor N. S. Takakhav, “we do not appreciate realism of the ruthless kind.” Perfectly true. The Indian cares only for the kind of literature that seems to raise him above himself. Maybe, this is all that matters in the end.

Now, if Shakespeare is admired in India for the reasons and qualities we have noted, yet even at his best he fails to satisfy the cultured Indian of to-day. With the grounds of this dissatisfaction we shall be concerned in the chapters that follow.

THE FIRST DISAPPOINTMENT

What then? Think you not that a sympathy exists between heavenly and earthly things?

EPICETETUS.

I

FOR good or ill, religion is a dominant factor in the "make-up" of the best representatives of our race. To be blind to the fact argues some defect in the observer. Shakespeare, however we may estimate him as dramatist or poet, will necessarily give us his report. By further study we may be able to discover what his own attitude towards religion was. We are all the more sympathetically inclined towards this inquiry because of the paramount part religion plays in Indian life and literature.

Religion is an exceedingly elastic term, capable of a great diversity of interpretations. This is obvious when we turn to definitions essayed by scholars and men of letters. According to Sir James Frazer, religion means "a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and human life."¹ Professor William James,

¹ "The Golden Bough," abridged edition, p. 50.

with a more restricted purview, defines religion as "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, in so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever we may consider the divine."¹

Turning from the philosophers to the poets, shall we hear a word from Tennyson, a man with a stereoscopic vision?—

We have but faith: we cannot know;
For knowledge is of things we see;
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow.²

And again:

. . . but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.³

We find that among serious students of the phenomenon of religion there are apparently discrepant reports. But it can be confidently asserted that among the believers themselves there is not the dissentience that logic would seem to require. Among the educated classes at least, intolerance is almost unknown. The devotional writers and mystics are all possessed of a common religious sympathy.

We are now led to observe that religion in England, and perhaps to a lesser extent in Europe, is mainly a

¹ "The Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 31.

² In *Memoriam*, Proem, stanza 5.

³ *Ibid.* liv.

matter of family tradition and personal predilection. Even such a minor matter as musical taste may detach a person from Protestantism in favour of Catholicism. It is, in fact, a matter of taste, and every member of a family might belong to a different religious persuasion without the fact attracting any general comment. The cultured classes may accept it in all sincerity, but it is not the mainspring of their lives. In Europe, religion is more or less a kind of working hypothesis, though never admitted to be such. But this does not apply, of course, to the mystics and thinkers.

Far other is it in India. Here in every grade of society religion is a thing of profound and momentous concern. Pooja is no mere formality, but is fraught with infinite implications. The educated classes view religion as a matter of life and death. Contemplatives regard it, as no doubt in Europe also, as the direct insight into the nature of ultimate Reality. "Each soul," the great Indian thinker, Vivekananda, has said, "is divine in essence. The aim of aims is to manifest this divinity, which is within us, by conquering nature, both external and internal. Do this, either by works, or by adoration, or by soul-power, or by philosophy—by one of these channels, or by several, or by all. . . . Be free! This is all that is Religion. Doctrines and dogmas, rituals and books, temples and conventions are nothing but trivial details."¹

¹ Quoted by Romain Rolland in "La vie de Vivekananda," Vol. II, p. 115.

A great difference shows itself between the European and Asiatic attitudes towards religion. Here we refer to the *popular* attitudes. As regards the larger spirits, there is doubtless an equal earnestness as well as (what each party would be surprised to know) a fundamental identity of belief.

As religion is so vital a matter with the Oriental, so vital indeed that it becomes the very basis of his literary criticism,¹ he is naturally interested in Shakespeare's attitude towards it, and any indications of his personal belief. We have, of course, to consider both the European and the Asiatic outlooks. We must give some attention to each.

II

Shakespeare lived and wrote in an age which took more interest and was more engaged in religious controversy than any other age of English history. It was not only and simply the dispute between Protestants and Catholics which interested the Elizabethan and Jacobean public: the latter was even more interested in the growing controversy between the Established Church of England, governed by Bishops, and practising most of the ceremonies of the Church of Rome, and the extreme Protestantism associated with the name of Calvin by the Puritans. It was this dispute that drove

¹ According to Vivekananda, "every aspect of human knowledge is but a part of religion." (Practical Vedanta, ii, 333).

the Pilgrim Fathers to the shores of Cape Cod, and which ultimately did quite as much to produce the Great Rebellion of 1642 as any political cause.

In the works of Shakespeare this topic is strangely conspicuous by its absence. I cannot recall a single passage in which he alludes to it. The nearest thing to such an allusion is the broad caricature of a pedantic village priest (Sir Nathaniel) in "Love's Labour Lost." There is also an echo of this prejudice against Puritans which prevailed at least at Court, in a line from "Henry IV," Part I, Act II, Sc. IV:

I would I were a weaver: I could sing psalms or
anything.

A plague of all cowards, I say still.

The psalm-singing weaver whom Jack Falstaff sneered at, was, I am inclined to think, none other than the Dutch immigrant who helped to introduce Puritanism into England. We must not, of course, count the quarrel in "Twelfth Night" between Malvolio, the Puritan, and Sir Toby Belch, the plain man bent on enjoying life, in considering this matter, for their quarrel does not in any way turn upon religious issues. What Malvolio objects to is not Sir Toby Belch's lack of religion, nor any difference in Christian doctrine, but the knight's want of decorum.

We are thus entitled to conclude that Shakespeare took little or no interest in the religious controversy between the Established Church and the Puritans which

was the burning topic of his day. We can almost hear him say: "A plague on both your houses!" But if the poet took no part in the dispute, does this imply that religion meant nothing to him?

Surely not.

Much vain controversy has raged over the question of Shakespeare's creed. Some have found him a good Catholic; others maintain that he was a Protestant; a few even contend that he was a follower of Seneca. An Indian pundit, formerly a Professor of English in the town of K——, declared in my own hearing, quite solemnly, that Shakespeare was a votary of Hinduism! Nevertheless, the really cultured Oriental is able to say something worthy of our notice. An Indian scholar, steeped in the spirit of his country's masterpieces and equally at home in the literature of the West, writes to me as follows:

"Religion did not form an aspect in the plays of Shakespeare, and yet Coleridge calls him myriad-minded! Supposing the poet thought the religion of his day conventional and hence not worth troubling about, then he misjudged; for the greatness of a writer consists not in ignoring the religion of his day, however puerile, but in giving a universalizing touch to its very conventional features. In the only play in which Shakespeare attempted this, he failed disastrously. From the religious point of view, "Measure for Measure" might have come from the pen of a country curate. It lacks the true religious thrill—indeed, all the plays lack it. It is therefore

that I cannot think of putting the plays by the side of our *chefs-d'œuvre*. This may seem a heresy, and some of your English friends may smile at my naïveté, but, believe me, the finest literature is the most truly religious. So in my opinion (take it for what it is worth) the plays of Shakespeare are on a distinctly lower plane—lacking in consecration. I should say that the noblest experiences of the human spirit (the religious) remain unvoiced in them. . . .”¹

The view of my friend is by no means curious: it represents the feeling of cultivated Indians. Professor N. S. Takakhav, a well-known scholar, also wrote to say that in his opinion “religious fervour is lacking in Shakespeare.”

Mr. George Santayana goes further. He describes the poetry of Shakespeare as that of a pagan. “Homer is the chief repository of the Greek religion, and Dante the faithful interpreter of the Catholic . . .” but Shakespeare of none. This poet’s world “is not a cosmos but a chaos. Indeed, the silence of Shakespeare and his philosophical incoherence have something in them that is still heathen; something that makes us wonder whether the northern mind, even in him, did not remain morose and barbarous at its inmost core.”²

Mr. Bernard Shaw in his Preface to “The Dark Lady of the Sonnets,” makes light of Shakespeare’s interest in religion. But for a passage in Hamlet, he says, “we

¹ The writer of this letter prefers to remain anonymous.

² See the Essay: “Absence of Religion in Shakespeare,” in the volume entitled “Little Essays,” pp. 188–190.

might almost suppose that the feeling of Sunday morning in the country which Orlando describes so perfectly in 'As You Like It' was the beginning and end of Shakespeare's notion of religion. . . ."¹

Shakespeare's views, however, are perhaps best obtained at first hand. Let us search.

III

According to Kant there are three topics that lie at the basis of most religions: the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the freedom of the will. It would perhaps be best to begin this inquiry by examining what Shakespeare has to say on each.

To the poet the existence of God is the surest of all verities. Argumentation only serves to dull the mirror that reflects reality. The truth is its own witness.

All things lie within the will of God.
("Henry V.")

Heaven hath its countless eyes to view men's acts.
("Pericles.")

There's a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough hew them as we will. ("Hamlet.")

But mercy is above the sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;

¹ "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets," Preface, p. 116.

And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.
(“The Merchant of Venice.”)

The immortality of the soul is affirmed in many places:

Marry, the immortal parts needs a physician; but
that
Moves him not; though that it be sick, it dies not.
(“Henry IV,” Part II.)

Then she is well, and nothing can be ill:
Her body sleeps in Capet's monument,
And her immortal part with angels lives.
(“Romeo and Juliet.”)

Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore;
Be sure of it; give me the ocular proof;
Or by the worth of a man's eternal soul,
Thou hadst been better have been born a dog
Than answer my waked wrath!
(“Othello.”)

I hold you a thing ensky'd and sainted;
By your renouncement, an immortal spirit.
(“Measure for Measure.”)

'Tis now dead midnight, and by eight to-morrow
Thou must be made immortal.
(“Measure for Measure.”)

Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
(“The Merchant of Venice.”)

The following passages, among others, might be cited as expressing a belief in freedom of will:

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves that we are underlings.
(“Julius Cæsar.”)

'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus.
(“Othello.”)

In reality, these quotations have nothing to do with the *problem* of free will: they are mere *negations of fate*. Shakespeare wrote before the difficulties of the problem were more properly realised. And we must not claim for him definite views on a question that he never contemplated. If the above passages are cited as bearing on the subject of free will, they are misapplied, and have no value in the intention.

These are no doubt the dominant postulates of most religions: Shakespeare accepts them all, but with a *thoroughgoing Christian bias*. There is ample material for proof:

I pardon him as God shall pardon me. . . .
(“Richard II.”)

I as free forgive as I would be forgiven.
(“Henry V.”)

Use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape
whipping.
(“Hamlet.”)

Those holy fields,
 Over whose acres walked the blessed feet,
 Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed
 For our advantage on the bitter cross. . . .
 ("Henry V.")

I charge you, as you hope to have redemption
 By Christ's dear blood shed for our grievous sins.
 ("Richard II.")

Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
 Who twice a day their wither'd hands hold up
 Toward heaven, to pardon blood; and I have built
 Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
 Sing still for Richard's soul.
 ("King Henry V.")

Go to your bosom;
 Knock there. . . . ("Measure for Measure.")

Words without thoughts—
 I'm past all comforts here by prayers.
 ("Henry VIII.")

If you bethink yourself of any crime
 Unreconciled to heaven and grace,
 Solicit for it straight. ("Hamlet.")

Do not all these passages breathe the spirit of
 Christian doctrine and experience?

It is manifestly impossible to condense into a few
 citations the theological and ethical creed of Shake-
 speare. I disclaim the intention. But it is abundantly
 clear that Mr. Bernard Shaw's charge of ineptitude is
 destitute of any foundation. Shakespeare was as well

equipped in all that is relevant as any man of his age. We must not suppose, however, that whatever the poet puts into the mouths of his dramatis personæ represents his own convictions. Nevertheless, does not the respectful tone of his adductions argue a sympathetic participation of his own?

IV

Personally, I am driven to believe that Shakespeare was a deeply religious man. Every fresh reading only serves to confirm my opinion. No one destitute of true religious feeling could have given us the charming gallery of female portraits that we have in Shakespeare. Nearly all of them are *intrinsically devout* women, inspired with Christian altruism and capacity for self-sacrifice. There are, of course, a few bad women in these plays, otherwise it would be no complete picture of life. Lady Macbeth, for instance, is thoroughly evil; but the playwright deliberately alienates the sympathy of the audience. Goneril and Regan interest us after the fashion of museum specimens. Depraved women occasionally appear, such as Doll Teasheet, Mistress Overdone, and Bianca, but we do not find them attractive. The only portrait that endows the evil genius with majesty is Shakespeare's Cleopatra. But we see Antony in the net of a siren dragging him to his doom. I remember hearing a grey-haired Englishman murmur at the

Old Vic: "O, poor Antony!"¹ But to Antony, Cleopatra seems the queen of women, for whom the world were well lost.

It is to Plutarch that Shakespeare owes the seductive witchery of the Egyptian queen. It would seem that in her the poet saw the East, not the East as it is, but East seen through a Greek window. No wonder she is bathed in the light of dreams. That this is no empty conjecture, is manifest in the heartrending words of Antony: "I'm dying, Egypt, dying. . . ." The great Roman was not in love with a woman, or a queen, but with the spirit of Egypt.

Now be this as it may, the poet does not confuse grandeur with moral rectitude. In the end Cleopatra more than redeems herself by her crowning act: she dies in the fashion of a Roman heroine.

Thus Shakespeare is always on the side of the angels: he must, in the nature of things, depict vice also, or his plays would not be true to life; but he never makes vice alluring like the decadent novelists of the present age of progress. The scene in the brothel in "Pericles" not only avoids the obscenity which one would anticipate as inseparable from such a situation, but is rendered into a splendid lesson in purity, chastity and honour. Such teaching is essentially religious even though it

¹ "My old professor," said Henry Heine, "did not like Cleopatra; he impressed on us that in yielding to this woman, Antony ruined all his public career, roused personal animosities and ended by falling into disaster. . . ." And Anatole France adds: "Nothing is more true." (*La vie Littéraire*, Vol. II, p. 116).

omits all reference to the Deity. It is not for the dramatist to usurp the office of the priest, yet many a splendid sermon has been preached in the theatre, and of such the foremost and finest are Shakespeare's.

However, Shakespeare does not confine himself entirely to such broad teaching. There is one play in which the principles of Christian dogma and the articles of the faith are embodied almost in so many words. That play is "Measure for Measure." The particular passages in question are Act II, Sc. II, and Act II, Sc. IV. The nun Isabella is pleading for her brother's life, and she bases her plea upon such arguments as these: that Christ died to save sinners, that if God can forgive Angelo his sins the more should Angelo forgive another man's, and that all human beings are responsible for their sins to their Maker.

Had I deeper knowledge of the Christian creed, I could no doubt detect other religious doctrines here. But these must suffice. . . .

Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once;
 And he that might the vantage best have took
 Found out the remedy. How would you be,
 If He, which is the top of judgment, should
 But judge you as you are? O, think on that . . .

This is no longer a broad conformity with Christian morality and inculcation of its principles by example. This is *definite* and *explicit* enunciation of the primary articles of the Christian faith.

I am, therefore, led to conclude that Shakespeare was a religious man of the best type, at least in mature life. I advisedly say "mature life," because his earlier writings display a sensual tendency. For instance, "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece" are poems of light and colour: the outpourings of a youthful heart, who is at the same time trying to play the sedulous ape to Spenser. It is sheer Bardolatry to call them masterpieces. They are merely interesting as documents.

So that, putting aside the earlier work of Shakespeare, we find in the later a man who, standing aside from the warfare of sects, and probably disgusted by the violence of sectaries, was always ready with his support where the basic principles of Christianity were at stake, ready like St. Paul to be "all things to all men," but with the same reservation which St. Paul would have made that upright, decent men alone are men.

I see Shakespeare as a man who could not have sympathised with Archbishop Bancroft in persecuting the Puritans, nor with the Puritans in their wholesale condemnation of Archbishop Laud. I see him as a man unwilling to take sides in a dispute based upon differences of usage which he regarded as immaterial. But I see him as a good latitudinarian, sound on the broad principles of Christianity, and ready to regard as fellow-Christians all those who were so far in agreement, ignoring petty differences of sect and ceremonial.

V

It is beyond dispute that in Shakespeare's plays we find the unmistakable *fragrance of Christianity*. But it is of interest to ponder whether he had passively accepted the doctrines he expresses, or whether he had arrived at them after a period of doubt and independent deliberation. Then, again, did he ever, apart from Christianity, undertake any exploration of the field of speculation that the word "religion" connotes?

In regard to the first question, it may be held that it was a case of passive acceptance; for wherever the doctrines are introduced, it is *without any tincture of the poet's own personality*. Turning now to the second question, let us refer to Paul Deussen. This German savant holds that the whole of religion has its root in the idea that the universe is only appearance and not reality. "That is, the sum-total of external and internal experience always and only tells us how things are constituted for us and for our intellectual capacities, not how they are in themselves and apart from intelligences such as ours."¹

This idea is by no means a novel one: it is as old as the birth of thought. It first finds expression in India: it is known there as *Maya*. The Greeks were acquainted with it, too, especially that most wonderful of European thinkers, Plato. He calls our world of change "a world

¹ "The Philosophy of the Upanishads," Preface.

of shadows." Kant and Schopenhauer give further force and currency to the thought in modern Europe. They say that the "empirical reality" is not the "essence" but merely the "appearance" of things. When we turn to Shakespeare, we find that he toys with the idea in his own way. We find a distinct suggestion of it in "Macbeth":

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.

Mark the words "Life's but a walking shadow" and "Signifying nothing." It seems the older Shakespeare grew, the more this thought haunted him. In "The Tempest," the last child of his invention, at least presumably so, he could not suppress his feeling that the world is a mere shadow-show. The speech of Prospero, if not dramatically inappropriate, is certainly a lyrical outburst. Prospero and Shakespeare for the moment become one. Both rise to the height of cosmic reverie—

And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And like an unsubstantial pageant faded
Leave not a wrack behind. We are such stuff

As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. . . .

Apart from the Vedic poets, Empedocles, Spenser, and Lamartine, nowhere in the world, so far as I am aware, has this thought been more musically uttered. And if Paul Deussen is right in his belief that the whole of religion has its root in this idea, then Shakespeare is assuredly religious. But, let us not forget, this is not a Christian view of life. There is not the least hint in the lines of another world after death. On the contrary, there is an undertone of denial:¹

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

It is evident that Shakespeare outgrew Christianity. Some other influences, of a more potent and sterner kind, were at work within him. To realise the change of outlook on life, one has only to compare "Measure for Measure" with "King Lear" or "The Tempest." What a transvaluation of values!

Before long, doubts assailed Shakespeare. Several of the accepted dogmas ceased to satisfy him. The question of death troubled him. All his great plays put forward some sort of answer to the question whether there is a finality in death or not. And Shakespeare's invariable response is: "Our little life is rounded with a sleep."

¹ Mr. John Galsworthy thinks that the poet "did not believe in an after-life." (Personal letter).

All the major plays suggest this attitude. When King Lear hears that his poor Fool is hanged, he cries out:

No, no, no life!
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!

There is in the words of Lear a desperate certainty of finality in death. And Shakespeare's own conclusion seems to be—

There's nothing serious in mortality.

Thus Shakespeare betrays no faith in an after-life. But if he became more and more convinced of this truth, then how did he make terms with life?

In answering this question, we shall be at the same time probing into the real nature of Shakespeare's religion. At first the poet had been influenced by Christianity; then by Stoicism; at last there came a time when both were abandoned. Some inner necessity drove him to create for himself a sterner creed of his own. What, then, is this creed of Shakespeare's?

It is a combination of *profound humility* and *superb heroism*. We may call it *wise passivity*. According to Havelock Ellis, precisely here lies the depth of Shakespeare's religion. "I should have thought," he writes to me, "that Shakespeare's serene acceptance of the contradictions of life, of the impermanence of things, of the existence of evil, was the strongest evidence of the depth

of his religion. It is only the irreligious man who cannot find joy in face of what seems to him the emptiness of existence. . . .”

Shakespeare’s seemingly indifferent acceptance of life does not necessarily imply that he had never meditated upon it. It may be that after long agonising over the enigmas of life, his ship of discovery, tossed to and fro by contrary winds, remained becalmed, as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean. . . .

Subdued by such an experience, he abandoned what now seemed to him a fruitless quest, and found ample satisfaction in the *arresting pageant of life*. The longer he lived, the more satisfied he became with what Aristotle calls the “theoretic attitude”—the attitude of contemplation. The *Moi-Spectateur* watching the *Dance of Life*. This, perhaps just this, was his religion.

VI

Let us now inquire what the cultivated Indian must needs think of the religion of Shakespeare. We have stated in the opening pages of this chapter that in India religion, in all but its lowest manifestations, means *darsana* or insight into the ultimate nature of Reality. The Oriental is profoundly disconcerted to find no such insight in the poet. We are not suggesting that he believes that any complete or final insight is attainable. He is ready to admit that the finite cannot comprehend

the Infinite. But surely even a partial insight is better than none. Has not the modern metaphysics of the West familiarised us with the conception of "degrees of truth?"

The poet Sir Mohammed Iqbal once said to the present writer: "Truth is in the process of formation; we can only obtain transitory aspects: it is for the poet to place these before us." To the Indian, Shakespeare's reticence in this matter is apt to seem a confession of ignorance—even of incapacity. "Compared with Shakespeare," says Mr. Puran Singh, "the genius of Dante is *Dhyani*. Unlike Shakespeare, there moves in the centre of the spheres of light in his mind, the figure of his Beloved Beatrice. Beatrice or God—what is in a name? Beatrice is the God-personality that Dante worships. The whole universe with all its gods and angels grows dark as the figure of Beatrice fades in his eyes. We can understand this, but we fail to realise the sanity of Shakespeare. Shakespeare gives us portraits of ourselves in different stages and poses of 'self,' our 'selves' of yesterday and to-morrow; but we want to see the face of God to burn in our breath so that we may be 'live' and whole to-day. We want to see in ourselves reflections of the faces of angels. Of what meaning is the whole world, if it be not kindled by the 'light of his face?' We consider Shakespeare as grand as The Maya of this created world. So far as we are concerned, his writings do not take us nearer our goal! Shakespeare multiplies our ignorance by all the knowledge he pours

on us. What can be gained by constantly seeing the plays? Once in a while, it may be a good training in worldly wisdom, which, dealing with matter, is material and has no power to receive Higher inspiration. Shakespeare represents to us the man on the earth, a thing we see moving in its varied character all about us; and we hold that this knowledge of the Near is of little use to the Soul that is already flapping its wings to fly above all such things. In no instance does Shakespeare come near to the spirit of Goethe's Faust."¹ Nor does Mr. Singh stand alone. Professor N. S. Takakhav, whom I have had occasion to quote before, holds "that the religious aspect of life, in its deepest sense, is absent in Shakespeare."² By this he means not the zealous upholding of this or that creed, but the consuming passion to apprehend Reality. Indeed, the Indian is inclined to think that Shakespeare had no *darsana*, no *anubhava*—neither insight nor experience of Reality. "He remained," as Professor S. Maulik has often said to me, "in the dark."

Then, again, the Indian would say, there is no attempt made in the plays of Shakespeare to enter into the depths of the self. Hamlet no doubt is the most introspective of Shakespeare's characters: he analyses himself ruthlessly, but he never gets to the core of his

¹ "The Spirit of Oriental Poetry," p. 125. (Needless to say, the present writer does not necessarily identify himself with any of the opinions expressed in quotations from others. These are only adduced to illustrate Indian opinion).

² Personal letter.

personality. Had he done so, he would have realised that great flash of insight: "Tat twam asi"—"That art thou." In other words, he would have perceived that "each soul is one with the universal soul." Indeed, as the Brihad-āranyaka Upanishad puts it, "They that know the real breathing of the breath, the real seeing of the eye, the real hearing of the ear, the real thinking of the thought, they truly have seen the self. He goes from death to death who looks on the soul as manifold."¹ Had Hamlet known this, it may be said, by probing into the core of self, his course of action would have been utterly different. He would have seen the futility of revenge: not because he would have said like Prospero that the rarer action is in virtue, not in vengeance, but because he would have perceived something far deeper:

If he that slayeth thinks "I slay"; if he
Whom he doth slay thinks "I am slain," then
Both know not aright! That which is life in each
Cannot be slain, nor slay!

What is amiss with Hamlet, says the Indian, is his lack of depth. It follows that his deductions must needs be erroneous. Like most superficially clever people he is irreligious. He has no faith in the ghost; no faith in his mother; no faith in Ophelia; no faith in his friends; and no faith even in himself. "How should such a man," Turgenev rightly asks, "live?"²

¹ Brith. Ar. Upanishad, IV, iv, 19.

² See the illuminating lecture on "Hamlet and Don Quixote."

As created by Shakespeare he was foredoomed to perish. It is the tragedy of a young man thinking, it is true, but not thinking deeply enough. The sense of proportion is lost. Everything appears topsy-turvy. . . .

An Indian would say that Shakespeare had not probed far enough into the human soul and the Over-Soul we call God. Now the Oriental thinker is profoundly concerned not only in understanding these principles but in finding a relation between them. The fundamental thought of the Upanishads—writings containing the most occult and mystical ideas of the Hindus—consists in the recognition of the oneness of the Brahman and Atman, of God and the Soul. This is also the quintessential principle of the Vedanta System. “Who could breathe, who could exist,” declares the Kena Upanishad, “if there were not the bliss of Brahma within the ether of his heart?” Sir Edwin Arnold rightly gauges the Indian spirit when he says that though “inconceivable to the mind, this all comprehensive Being is still a necessity of true thought, and veritable beyond every other conception of reality.”¹

The Hindu *dharma* declares that man does not live by his appetites alone: he must live by his life of spirit also. Moksha is the goal indicated. Moksha is freedom from the perpetuity of incarnation. It is in the end the union of the finite with the Infinite—the merging of the

¹ “East and West,” p. 156.

individual soul with the illimitable ocean. In other words, this is the *nirvana* of the Buddha.¹

To no character in Shakespeare, urges the Indian, is this desire a burning need. Even Prospero, while admitting the shadowy character of life, does not wish for Moksha. He will return to his Dukedom while he can.² To the Indian this appears inexplicable, even childish. Surely, Prospero should have known better. He should have resigned everything to the lovers, and remained on the Enchanted Isle to seek his salvation. It might have seemed more fitting if the great enchanter, after bidding farewell to all, had vanished from the earthly scene. But Prospero's actual course is frankly disturbing to the Indian mind—it seems a terrible anticlimax.³ Despite his lofty discourses, Prospero appears but an earthling.

¹ One of the first Indianists, Frederic Schlegel, has emphasised this point in his brilliant book on the language, the literature and the philosophy of India. "The divine origin of man," he says, "is always stressed . . . and union with the divinity is the final end of all action and all effort. . ." (*Manahsukharâma Sûryarâma Vikârasâgara*, p. 5).

² Here lies the radical difference between East and West. Let us hear Anatole France. "The wisdom of Buddha," he says, "is not adapted for the active races of Europe, for these human groups so strong in the possession of things of the earth. And the sovereign remedy which he brings for universal evil does not suit our temperament. He calls for renunciation and we wish to act; he teaches us to desire nothing and the desire is in us stronger than life. Finally, for the recompense of our efforts, he promises us Nirvana, absolute repose, and the very idea of this repose is a thing we shrink from. Çakya-Mouni is not come for us; he will not save us. . ." (*La vie Littéraire*, Vol. III, p. 386).

³ Although Mr. Havelock Ellis is a European, yet he shares the Indian view. "Prospero's return to his Dukedom," he says, "was a weak concession to a stage convention. One knows that in his heart Shakespeare also knew that Prospero would never return. For an earthly dukedom can mean nothing to the man who has finally grasped

VII

To the Oriental mind, religious mysticism is a sheer joy. The entire literature of India is steeped in this element. But when the Indian turns to Shakespeare he finds that this mystic quality is utterly absent.

Now mysticism, when not confounded with mistiness,¹ is found at all times and in all places. "Le premier résultat d'une étude objective de la Métaphisique et de la Mystique comparées," writes Romain Rolland, "serait précisément de rendre évidentes à tous l'universalité et la pérennité des grands faits d'expérience religieuse, leur étroite parenté qui atteste, sous les costumes divers des races et des temps, l'unité persistante de l'esprit humain—ou mieux, car c'est plus profond que l'esprit qu'il faut creuser—l'identité des matériaux constitutifs de l'être humain."² Thus we find mysticism as much among primitive races as among the people of the old world.

Mysticism to the Indian means knowledge or experience of God and the spiritual world, achieved not through the logical faculties but by way of direct

the whole universe in his vision, as an evanescent mist, and stands serenely on the last foothold and ultimate outlook of the world." ("Impressions and Comments," Vol. III, p. 22).

¹ See "Max Muller: Introduction to Vedantic Philosophy," p. 83.

² Romain Rolland: "La vie de Vivekananda," Vol. II, Note II, p. 215.

intuition.¹ Indeed, mysticism may be described as Experience purged of the categories. . . .

But—and this is a vital query—is not all religion mysticism? The Indian is very, very sure of this. The same attitude is to be found among several Western thinkers. "Religion," says Havelock Ellis, "is a large word, of good import and of evil import, and with the general discussion of religion we are not in this place concerned. Its quintessential core—which is the art of finding our emotional relationship to the world conceived as a whole—is all that here matters, and is best termed 'Mysticism.'" And again: "Mysticism is . . . the relationship of the self to the Not-Self, of the individual to a whole, when, going beyond his own personal ends he discovers his adjustment to larger ends, in harmony or devotion or love."²

There is no such adjustment in Shakespeare, nor any attempt at it. Hence the disappointment of the Indian is no mere protest against the baulking of personal and parochial expectations. Devotees of East and West declare that no joy transcends that which is derived

¹ "Intuition exists," says Aurobindo Ghose, "hidden behind our mental operations. Intuition gives man these brilliant messages from the Unknown, which are nothing but the prelude to a superior knowledge. . . ." (Quoted by Romain Rolland in "La vie de Vivekananda, Vol. II, p. 88).

"It might be," Plotinus affirms, "that the soul possesses a thing without being conscious of it; it possesses it all the more truly in so far as the possession is unconscious; in fact, when it is conscious of it, it possesses it like a thing which is strange to it, and from which it distinguishes itself; when, on the contrary, it is not conscious of it, it is that which it possesses." ("Ennéades, IV, iv).

² "The Dance of Life," p. 193.

from mystical experience. Rumi, Kabir, Meister Eckhart, Swedenborg, St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross, and many others—all bear witness to the same effect.¹ Surely, there is nothing finer or higher for man than to know what, “in the last analysis, holds the universe together.” This is the question that Faust asks himself, and so does every mystic. For Vivekananda, as for Ramakrishna, his master, “the knowledge of Brahma is the ultimate end, the highest destiny of man.”²

But it may be said that Shakespeare was a pure poet, and had nothing to do with mysticism. This is, according to the Oriental, to misunderstand the function of poetry. The function of poetry! Critics have quarrelled about it since the time of Aristotle. Mrs. Browning, however, spoke of the poets as “God’s prophets of the Beautiful.” Mr. Middleton Murry, in harmony with the ancients, considers the poet as a *vates sacer*, bearing a direct message from God. He dismisses the notion that the bard is a mere provider of some thrill called an “æsthetic emotion.” “Art ought to suppress violence,” said Tolstoy, “and it alone can do it. Its mission is to spread the kingdom of God, that is, the kingdom of Love.”³ The same view is held in the East. “In truth,” said Vivekananda, “Art is Brahma.”⁴ The Prophet of Islam also maintained the same opinion. According to

¹ See William James: “The Varieties of Religious Experience.”

² The Works of Vivekananda, Vol. VII, p. 193.

³ “What must we do?” (1886).

⁴ “Raja-Yoga,” p. 114.

him, God has his treasures in Heaven, the keys whereof are the tongues of the poets.¹ This, says the Indian, is the true function of poetry. What is it worth if it fails to communicate the incommunicable and reveal the infinite? The poet is the most ethereal interpreter of the heavenly mysteries. This will explain the impatience of Mr. Puran Singh with much of Western poetry. "Perhaps we of the East," says this writer, "can never catch the tunes of the Western poets, but viewed broadly, from our standpoint, they are strange, very strange, inasmuch as they strike us as the voices of mighty geniuses who forget themselves, and find so much childish joy in playing with coloured toys! It were better to go on repeating the Bible, rather than keep writing our so-called poetry. Only when the songs of the Western poets resemble the poetry of the Bible, are they in any degree truly poetic."² *Mere Culte du Moi* means nothing to the Oriental.

Viewed in this light, the poetry of Shakespeare seems to the Indian meagre and barren.

Mr. Middleton Murry, however, in a lecture bordering almost on lyrical enthusiasm, argues that "The Phoenix and the Turtle" is both "platonian and mystical." I entirely agree with him in the high place that he assigns to this "moment's monument." It reminds one of some aspects of the dawn. It does credit to Mr. Murry's critical acumen that he has done this justice to

¹ See the famed "Table-Talk."

² "The Spirit of Oriental Poetry," p. 21.

the poem.¹ But he admits that he does not know what the poem is "about," and assigns it to Shakespeare. But as I have attempted to show elsewhere, this poem is by another hand; and, moreover, after an earnest and laborious search, I have failed to find in the poet any trace of mysticism. But is this not what we should have expected?

Mysticism is a passive quality, a special receptivity. But Shakespeare's genius was of a different cast, active, dominating, vibrantly compelling. "Shakespeare was too full of creative energy," says Mr. John Galsworthy, "to be in any sense a mystic."²

It will perhaps be fitting at this stage if we enter upon some discussion of mysticism and mystic poetry.

VIII

"The poetry of mysticism," says Miss Evelyn Underhill, "might be defined on the one hand as a temperamental reaction to the vision of Reality; on the other, as a form of prophecy. As it is the special vocation of the mystical consciousness to mediate between two orders, going out in loving adoration towards God and coming home to tell the secrets of Eternity to other men; so the artistic self-expression of this consciousness has also a double character. It is love-poetry, but love-poetry

¹ See "The Nature of Poetry" in "Discoveries."

² Personal letter.

which is often written with a missionary intention.”¹

The Indian fails to find anything of this kind in Shakespeare. His poetry is not an outburst of ecstasy and exaltation. We discover this combination in the Persian mystics, in the Sufi poets, in a few Western bards, and in the Christian saints. We also detect this fusion in Kabir. Let us listen:—

Tell me, O swan, your ancient tale.
From what land do you come, O
swan, to what shore will you fly?
Where would you take your rest, O
swan, and what do you seek?
Even this morning, O swan, awake,
arise and follow me!

There is a land where no doubt nor
sorrow have rule: where the terror
of death is no more.

There the woods of spring are a-bloom,
and the fragrant scent “He is I”
is borne on the Wind:
There the bee of the heart is deeply
immersed, and desires no other joy.²

Where can we recognise this note in Shakespeare? Neither does he go out in loving adoration to God, nor does he tell us the secrets of Eternity. His function, according to the Indian, is a humbler one: “To hold the mirror up to nature.”

¹ Introduction to Kabir's poems, translated by Rabindranath Tagore and Miss Evelyn Underhill.

² The Poems of Kabir, No. XII.

Mystics, taking the Hindu view, may be divided into three classes:

1. The intuitional mystics.
2. The devotional mystics.
3. The practical mystics.

Intuitional mystics are those who, knowing full well the impotence of intellect, yet strive for perfect command of it, and focus it in one single intention. They believe that by being one they can perceive oneness.¹ Intense concentration is the marked characteristic of their method. Beyond all doubt the greatest intuitional mystic of Asia was the Buddha.

Love or devotion is the distinguishing mark of the second type. Love may bind them to God directly, or through external nature, or through human love. To this class belong Dante, Wordsworth, Emerson, Browning, Rabindranath Tagore, to name only a few among the many.

The third group includes those who do their appointed duty with singleness of heart. Jeanne d'Arc, Mazzini, Oliver Cromwell, Napoleon, Gandhi, may be called practical mystics.

In none of these classes can we find place for Shakespeare. Consequently, according to Eastern estimate, he lacks the central and quintessential principle of true poetry and religion.

For this reason Shakespeare fails to touch the soul of

¹ In similar fashion thought the Greeks.

the cultured Indian. Indeed, in the opinion of Professor S. Maulik, certain emotions, dear to men of the East generally, are unvoiced in the plays. "Religion," he says, "is nothing but that system of thought which seeks to satisfy the very human emotions of sacredness, holiness, adoration, exaltation, and the like." Every emotion, he argues, is worked up round a certain object or idea, and that object or idea may vary, as it must, according to the temperament, environment and social system of each people. Shakespeare has not given expression to these emotions in any marked degree. "Therefore," concludes Professor Maulik, "the plays are lop-sided, and to me deficient in the element I cherish most in literature. I regret that I cannot think very highly of the plays."¹

To one steeped in the spirit of the literature of the East, the plays of Shakespeare appear no more than a gorgeous depiction of the visible world, and, in particular, a marvellously successful attempt to reveal man's social reactions. Western Art demands no more: but in the East much more is asked of Art. To the true Oriental, this Western idol seems "careless about great facts and ideas; limited, restrictive, deficient in enthusiasm and imagination."²

The quarrel of the Oriental with Shakespeare admits of no compromise or accommodation. It is fundamental.

¹ In many pleasant talks to the present writer.

² These are Dr. Dowden's words: I have adapted them to my purpose.

THE GREAT DISILLUSIONMENT

La pensée n'est qu'un souffle, mais ce souffle remue le monde.

VICTOR HUGO.

I

THE first quarrel of the Oriental with Shakespeare is on the mystical and religious ground; the second and perhaps more pervasive may be termed as intellectualist. Briefly we may sum it up in the query: "Was Shakespeare a thinker?"

Before we attempt to answer the question, we have to face an initial difficulty. Where the significance of the momentous term "thinker" might be anticipated, we find a general silence. Dictionaries and encyclopædias exhibit the same defect. It helps us little to be told that a thinker is "someone who thinks"—and this is about the limit of the information.

It seems therefore that we are forced back on some definition of thought having especial relevancy to our present purpose.¹

¹ This was the course recommended to the present writer by Mr. Havelock Ellis. "In case of all such ambiguous terms ('thinker,' etc.), he wrote, "it is best to frame one's own definitions. Then there can be no mistake. . . ."

I am indebted to Mr. Edward Garnett for some illuminating suggestions in the writing of this chapter.

The "thought" that we intend has certain characteristics that we have in mind when we call a man a "thinker." Thus—

1. *It must be original. . . .*

Here we might take Einstein as a type. He seems to have come like Athene full-armed from the head of Zeus. A friend, a mathematician, tells me that Zeno's race-problem had baffled both mathematicians and philosophers for over 2,000 years, but a simple application of Einstein's four-dimensional universe affords relief from our perplexities. This in itself proves Einstein's quality as a thinker.

2. *It must be profound. . . .*

That is to say, it should transcend the limits of customary thought even as recognised among professional pundits.

It is the Buddha who has said: "Do not believe what you have heard; do not believe in traditions because they are holy with the dust of ages; do not believe in a thing because it has been said and repeated by many people; do not believe in conjectures; do not believe as truth that to which you are attached by habit; do not believe solely on the authority of your teachers and elders;—after observation and analysis, when a principle accords with reason and tends to the good and advan-

tage of one and all, then accept it and make it the guiding principle of your life. . . .”¹

Dostoievsky furnishes a good example of this type. As a thinker he was not only original but also profound. Before him, criminals had been looked upon as social pariahs, to be treated with contempt by the aristocrats and with pity by the sentimental. It was he who discerned in many of these outcasts “deep, strong, beautiful souls,” and it was he again who made the astounding revelation that these criminals at heart had far more genuine contempt and commiseration for the so-called good and high members of our society than for their fellow-criminals.

3. *It must be fertile. . . .*

In other words, it should afford solutions not only of existing problems but even be able to suggest such problems as have not yet emerged.

One of the characteristics of the primitive mind is its inability to formulate its own difficulties for solution. When men advance towards the path of awareness they face their problems. The more we study Leonardo da Vinci, the more we are struck by the grandeur of his genius. There is hardly an aspect of knowledge which was hidden from him.² He was the super-man of whom Nietzsche dreamed.

¹ See the “Anguttara Nikaya,” quoted in the accounts of the “Parliament of Religions,” Vol. II, p. 86g.

² See the appreciation of Havelock Ellis in “The Dance of Life.”

4. *It must be universal. . . .*

That is to say, it should appeal to the entire human race, so far as that race uses its faculties unhampered by ingrained or acquired prejudices. "Thought," Mr. J. M. Robertson wrote to the present writer, "is neither Eastern nor Western. It stands on the grounds of universal reason." Quite so. Einstein on the one hand, and the Buddha on the other, privileged seers in the senses here intended, have come to command the allegiance of all who wrestle with Reality.

These, then, are the marks that distinguish the thinker. To sum up, he should be characterised by originality, profundity, fertility, universality of outlook.

Now the word "thinker" is strictly relative to a particular field of thought. It is very seldom that we find a thinker in more directions than one; and when we do, he is a man whom we acclaim as among the very greatest of the earth.

When our province is selected, we can apply the tests indicated above, but not until then.

Shakespeare's function was not the construction of original mathematical treatises, such as the *Mécanique Céleste*—in fact, he had no concern with *biblia abiblia*, with books that are no books. . . .

His province is clearly literature—the literature of poem and drama. In other words, we are regarding him as artist. In what sense can artist be called a

thinker? It would seem, in two directions: first, in his technique, and secondly, in his creative vision of life.

But, what, the reader may ask, has technique to do with thought?¹ Perhaps everything. No one can express ideas except through some chosen medium. If he accepts with servile acquiescence the conventional forms of his time and place without adaptation, then he is thinking in chains, and originality is impossible. When a child learns its mother-tongue, it is absorbing an entire system of thought. If it were not so, the child would be a mere parrot. Similarly, an artist who is enslaved by his medium has also his thought in bondage. We may recall here the words of the Apostle John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We may evoke the meditation of Faust concerning "das Wort." We may even go back for a moment to the Greek word Logos, over which many have brooded. Referring back to Faust's soliloquy, we may note that the Greek word Logos can mean both "Word" and "thought." This is perhaps of all thoughts the most utterly comprehensive. Indeed, thought is creation, and creation is thought. From this point of view let us look at our poet.

¹ "The theory that thought and language are inseparable, which we see independently born both in India and in Greece, and which was developed in all its richness by the Fathers of the Christian School of Alexandria, has at last been recognised by modern philosophers." (Max Muller: "Introduction to Vedantic Philosophy," p. 163).

II

It is a commonplace of criticism that Shakespeare originated no art-form, invented no new style, and introduced no fresh vogue. In this respect he is not an initiator. He utilized the types that custom had sanctified. This acquiescence in established modes is a salient characteristic of his mental "make-up." This poet's own poet is

... of imagination all compact:
his

... eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to
heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.¹

But Shakespeare's most enthusiastic admirer would not identify him with the personality here depicted. We see this very clearly in the matter of technique or form. His early ambition was to emulate Spenser as a pure poet. Does he not call the "Venus and Adonis" "the first heire of my invention"? But the drama enticed him away from his first allegiance. The Zeit-Geist was too imperious. But this surrender to the occasion seems to have caused him regret, and very possibly meant a loss to literature. Listen to the dolorous cry!—

¹ "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Act V, Sc. I.

O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means which public manners breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand . . .¹

And so, it would seem, the dramatist was fostered at the cost of the poet.

Nor is this true only when we consider him as a literary craftsman; his thought too is adopted *aliunde*. In fact, he took from others on so lavish a scale that it appears impossible to track all his sources. He seems to have anticipated Molière: "Je prends mon bien où je le trouve."

That Shakespeare does make use of other men's wit and wisdom is very true. Greene is not the only one who calls him "an upstart crow beautified with our feathers." When we turn to the plays we find that almost every fine sentiment of Shakespeare can be traced to his predecessors or contemporaries. We are not alluding to parallel passages, which might very well be a matter of coincidence, and should be treated as such. Else it would be quite easy to show that the poet was familiar with the utterances of Confucius, Chaung Tzu, Valmiki Kalidasa, Rumi, Shah Abdul Latif, Cervantes, and of countless others. This is clearly absurd. But when we

¹ Sonnet 111.

come to *absolute identity of utterance and sentiment*, that is quite a different matter. A few examples in this intention will throw a vivid light on Shakespeare's art. Compare:

At lover's perjuries,
They say Jove laughs.
(*"Romeo and Juliet,"* Act II, Sc. II.)

with:

Jupiter, ut dicunt, perjuria ridet amantum.
(*"Ovid, Ars amatoria,"* I, 633.)

The verbal coincidence is too great for us to ascribe to accident. The Latin line shows that Shakespeare had more knowledge of the classics than he is generally credited with, for this book did not exist in English version at the time.

Compare now the famous line:

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased?
(*"Macbeth,"* IV, III.)

with:

Nemo polluto queat animo mederi.
(*"Seneca, Hercules Furens,"* 1261.)

Or the lines:

Lock up my doors; and when you hear the drum,
And the vile squeaking of the wry-neck'd fife
Clamber not you up the casements then . . .
(*"The Merchant of Venice,"* II, V.)

with

Prima nocte domum claude; neque in vias
Sub cantu querulæ despice tibiæ.
(“Horace, Odes,” III, VII, 29-30.)

Now take the famed words in “Macbeth”:

To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.
(“Macbeth,” V, V.)

Most readers have admired these lines, but how many have noticed their striking similarity to the following?—

‘Cras hoc fiet.’ Idem cras fiet. ‘Quid? quasi magnum;
Nempe diem donas.’ Sed quum lux altera venit,
Jam cras hesternum consumpsimus. Ecce aliud
cras
Egerit hos annos et semper paulum erit ultra.
(“Persius, Sat.” V, 66-69.)

Countless other examples can be given to show Shakespeare’s adoptions from Latin and Greek classics,¹ as well as from the Bible.² Mr. J. M. Robertson has

¹ There is much in common between Shakespeare and the Greek dramatists: so much so that one is inclined to say “he had more Greek than Latin.” See Paul Stapfer: “Shakespeare et les Tragiques Grecs.”

² See “Shakespeare’s Knowledge and Use of the Bible,” by Bishop Charles Wordsworth. Dr. Carter tells me that, in his opinion, Shakespeare has borrowed not a little from the Bible. See his book on the subject.

emphasised the poet's debt to Montaigne.¹ Some would assume that such a procedure argues lack of originality. Mr. Bernard Shaw seems to hold this opinion.² Mr. T. S. Eliot even goes so far as to say: "In truth neither Shakespeare nor Dante did any real thinking."³ Such would seem to be the Indian verdict, too. "Any originality Shakespeare possessed," says Professor N. S. Takakhav, "seems to have lain in the masterly use of language. . . ."⁴

But were I to allow myself the luxury of a reflection, I should say that Shakespeare's adoptions satisfied his sense of fitness. Wherever he found a thought adequately expressed he annexed it as his own by right divine: for creation and appreciation are the same thing at bottom. It is said of Turner the painter that when he saw on a friend's palette a colour for which fitting employment could be found in some picture of his own, he would take a portion for his own use. Turner's reckless annexations of alien pigments militates in no degree against the innocence of his eye for form and colour. Such is Shakespeare's method. He was intent on the vision and not on the materials of his craft.

It is by his creative vision that we must, if at all we will, judge the stature and significance of Shakespeare.

¹ See "Shakespeare, Montaigne, and other Essays."

² See "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets."

³ See the Introduction to "Seneca."

⁴ Personal letter.

III

We have seen that Shakespeare made habitual use of Molière's maxim. Several sources are discernible in his plays: Christian, Stoic, and still other. Do these sincerely represent the poet's own theory of life, or are they merely as colours for his palette? In other words, what is the philosophic status of his thought?

What, some will ask, has poetry to do with theories of life? Much, very much. A poet who has nothing to say about life is a mere babbler. "The real value of both poetry and philosophy," wrote Sir Leslie Wilson to Lord Morley, "is not the pretended reasoning, but the exposition in one form or another of a certain view of life."¹

Suppose we now turn to Hamlet. He finds his uncle praying, and stays his hand lest he should send his victim (a murderer!) straight to heaven. His own father, "a virtuous man," as Hamlet calls him, becomes a "troubled spirit" after his death, because he had had the misfortune to go to bed "gorged with wine and food." What a strange interpretation of the Catholic doctrine!

Elsewhere, we find Hamlet balancing probabilities as to the life after death with the zeal of a disciple of Socrates or Plato. Thus Hamlet's allegiance is divided. Paganism and Christianity cast dice for the possession of

¹ Quoted by Havelock Ellis in "The Dance of Life."

his soul. He is, as we see him, moved by contrary winds. He is between two worlds, loath to leave or accept either. Are we not justified in believing that all this reflects division and vacillation in the author's own mind? It may be that Hamlet is nothing but a picture of Shakespeare's own wavering moods.¹ The poet was conscious of the dilemma that might exist for serious minds, but his sense of humour saved him from overbrooding. . . . He who has no sense of humour is either beyond the limits of the human plummet or nowhere. . . .

"Measure for Measure" is another play that specially claims our attention. Christian sentiment pervades it. We have referred to this already, but further illustration is called for. Isabella in her supplication to Angelo for the life of her brother, again and again voices Christian teachings. Nor is she alone in this. Listen to the words of Claudio to her:

Aye, but to die and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod, and the delighted spirit

¹ This is further confirmed by the sentimental autobiography of the poet. Many of the Sonnets reiterate the thoughts that appear in the soliloquies of Hamlet. For example, the "gentle prince," who had led a student-life, refers to "the law's delays" and the "poor man's humiliations"! This sounds very unnatural, for where could Hamlet have experienced these things? He is talking of something that he has witnessed but not actually gone through. It is possible that here Shakespeare has forgotten to assume his habitual mask and speaks in his own person. In that case, the words are not only intelligible but poignantly true.

To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
 In thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice;
 To be imprisoned in the viewless winds
 And blown with restless violence round about
 The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
 Of those that lawless and incertain thoughts
 Imagine howling:—'Tis too horrible.

(Act III, Sc. I.)

This is a clear and unequivocal expression of the Christian view of death, in its popular form, though one can detect streaks of Scandinavian mythology in the pattern. But Isabella furnishes a better example for our analysis. With her superficial religiosity she does but echo the orthodoxy of her day. This is well seen in her answer to Angelo who tells her that her brother "must die to-morrow"—

To-morrow! O, that's too sudden! Spare him,
 spare him!
 He is not prepared for death. Even for our kitchens
 We kill the fowl of season: shall we serve heaven
 With less respect than we do minister
 To our gross selves?

(Act II, Sc. II.)

It hardly needs saying that Catholic sentiment colours the utterance of Isabella, Catholic sentiment of the cheapest kind. This pseudo-nun is hardly human—seemingly a sexless automaton. This is one reason why this play is so seldom acted: actresses will not take a part which gives no scope either for love or for

spiritual ecstasy. The play is full of conventional religiosity. . . .

The influence of Stoicism upon Shakespeare is best exhibited in "King Lear." We feel that the poet was considerably influenced by the philosophy of Seneca. Whether he derived the ideas through literary studies or at second hand, or through elegant gossip at the Mermaid Tavern, I leave an open question for the reader. However, the stoicism of the poet appears in the following lines:

We must endure
Our going hence, even as our coming hither,
Ripeness is all.

These lines appear more than dramatic: they have a personal note about them. We are tempted to believe that they voice the poet's deep appreciation of stoicism.¹

There is much in common between Shakespeare and the Greek dramatists. Like them our poet has an awed reverence for custom and established institutions. Like them he has nothing to say about the riddles of existence. Like them he concludes that life is but a "ludus in theatrum." Now whether Shakespeare actually borrowed from Sophocles and Euripides, or not, may be a

¹ Mr. Middleton Murry, in a discussion with Mr. T. S. Eliot, in the columns of "The Adelphi," has quoted the above lines, saying that the words: "Ripeness is all" are far beyond the spiritual ambit of Seneca. However that may be, we find them in Marcus Aurelius, the high priest of Stoicism. . . . "One must quit life with resignation, just as falls a ripe olive. . . ." ("Meditations," iv, 48).

moot point, but the fact remains that in no case is his thought an advance upon the Greek. It might even be said that it is less daring than theirs; for—and this is an important point to remember—the idea of Progress which is clearly enunciated in the Attic philosophy, notably in the *Protagoras* of Plato, is unknown to Shakespeare. William Archer recognised this deficiency in the English bard, but he certainly went too far in saying that the idea was unfamiliar to the ancients and was a modern monopoly.¹

We now see that Shakespeare used Christianity, Stoicism, and the philosophy of the Greek dramatists as suited his dramatic purposes, but always with respect. In the last plays, the romances as they are called, he sought escape from the torture of thought in the realms of phantasy.

In fact nothing is more characteristic and revelatory of Shakespeare's method than his attitude towards death. For some considerable time he is deeply interested in it. He ransacks every school of thought for enlightenment. At first, as in the words of Claudio, he is looking for a compromise between the Norse mythic and the conventional Catholic conceptions. In "King Lear" he looks upon it stoically. In "Hamlet" he regards it as a bad dream:—

. . . To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay there's the rub;

¹ See "The Old Drama and the New," p. 125.

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause. . . .

Suddenly, in "Antony and Cleopatra," there is a new outlook. Death now seems a pleasant thing—"a lover's bed," "a lover's pinch, which hurts and is desired." Is this not a curiously Greek notion?

In the last plays Shakespeare appears to lose sight of death. It is a psychological fact that with advancing years the interest in death (in the case of some minds) is less and less pronounced. With Shakespeare, a man of years, life itself is at the focus of attention. He delights in the life of children, and in their play-fellows, the elves and fairies. Children, fairies, and moonlight belong together in the same charmed world. It is delightful to see how the poet lingers over these children of his fancy—Miranda and Perdita. Life is a beautiful fact—this is all that concerns him.¹

Indeed a pretty picture! But let us allow ourselves a sterner mood. Plato, in his *Phaedo*, speaks with the voice of Socrates. He asks: "Is not philosophy the practice of death?" And he answers: "That soul, I say, itself invisible, departs to a world invisible like itself—to the divine and immortal and rational. Arriving

¹ One may contrast this attitude with that of Empedocles, one of the profoundest spirits of Greece. For him, as for the Indian thinkers, earthly life is death. . . . "l'odieux séjour, où le Massacre et la Haine et les autres espèces de Maux, les fièvres arides, les peurritures, les œuvres de dissolution, errent à travers l'ombre dans le pré du Malheur." (Fr. 121).

there, its lot is to be happy; released from human error and unwisdom, from fears, and wild passions, and all other human ills, it dwells for all future time, as they of the initiated, in the society of the gods."

The words of Plato appear to the Indian strangely familiar.¹ He finds in them the same solace that he finds in his country's masterpieces. "There does not exist in the whole world," said Schopenhauer, "a study as profitable and as fit to elevate the spirit as that of the Upanishads. It has been the consolation of my life; it will be the consolation of my death."² "If one considers philosophy as a preparation for death, or euthanasie," says Max Muller, "I do not know a better preparation to this effect than the Vedantic philosophy."³ It is easy to understand now that, compared with Shakespeare's vacillations and doubts, the words of Plato give to the Indian infinitely greater satisfaction. "The more we concentrate our life on earthly possessions," said Vivekananda, "the more we hasten to death. Our only moments of real life are those when we live in others, in the universe. To reduce ourselves to this fraction of existence, this is death, without circumlocution. And this is why the fear of death grips us. It

¹ Sir William Jones thinks "that it is impossible to read the Vedas or the numerous and admirable works that have elucidated them, without concluding that Pythagoras and Plato have taken their sublime theories from the same source as the sages of India." (Works, edition of Calcutta, t. I, p. 20).

² Quoted by Max Muller in his "Introduction to Vedantic Philosophy," p. 30.

³ Op. cit. p. 10.

cannot be vanquished until man has realised that as long as there is one life in this universe he is living. . . . The visible man is nothing but a fight to manifest this individuality which is within us. . . ."¹

Vaihinger, however, might smilingly say: "Taken literally, our most valuable conceptions are worthless."² Perhaps. But as Havelock Ellis truly points out, they are "useful fictions."³ It is Marshal Foch who has said: "A lost battle is a battle one thinks one has lost; the battle is won by the fiction that it is won."⁴ It is the same in the adventure of life—in the adventure of thought. . . .

The "Que sais-je?" of Shakespeare is simply annoying to the Indian. Mr. Puran Singh has frankly confessed that the plays of the English bard have no value for the Oriental: they take him nowhere near his goal.⁵ Compared with Christ, Shakespeare is sadly superficial. He lacks the depth and deadly earnestness of the young Galilean. And yet, the prophet of Nazareth died with half the music in him!

Seemingly, as measured by Eastern standards, Shakespeare lacks both originality and profundity. Moreover, his vision of Life as a "sport of the gods" is not only no advance upon the Greek thought, but also

¹ Quoted by Romain Rolland in "La vie de Vivekananda," Vol. II, p. 96.

² See "Philosophie des Als Ob," by Professor Hans Vaihinger.

³ See "The Dance of Life," p. 93.

⁴ Principes de Guerre.

⁵ See "The Spirit of Oriental Poetry," p. 181.

utterly repugnant to the Oriental, for whom Life is a divine hymn of which only the first couplet is being chanted. Perhaps these facts were known to William Archer. It was he who had the boldness to say: "Not that I think Shakespeare is to be reckoned a colossal intellect. He was a totally different thing, namely a stupendous genius. No more than any of his contemporaries was he alive to the great idea which differentiates the present age from all that have gone before—the idea of progress. He was content to live in a stationary world. Neither in politics nor in philosophy was he in advance of his time."¹

In further illustration of this, compare Hamlet with Arjuna, the hero of the Mahabharata. Arjuna, like Hamlet, is placed in a set of difficult circumstances. He is sorely puzzled; he does not see his way clear to any definite action; but in the end he does not fail. Why?

Because at the psychological moment, when Arjuna wavers, and his heart and mind are torn by conflicting thoughts and he feels the burthen and mystery of the world, and knows not whither to turn or what to do, his guru (spiritual teacher) comes to his rescue. . . .

In the opening chapters, Arjuna is found, like Hamlet, in doubt and despair. He is willing to renounce life itself, if need be. The cry that goes forth from his anguished heart is symbolical of the travail of man who is forced to act, yet cannot justify his action to himself. Perhaps it is right to kill the wicked, but how can he

¹ "The Old Drama and the New," p. 125.

kill them when they are his relatives? These and similar questions haunt Arjuna, the great warrior.

His is not the sadness of disappointed ambition, nor the fleeting mood of a luxurious dreamer toying deliciously with melancholy thoughts—no: his is the sadness that springs from divided duties. But, we repeat, at the crucial moment the wise words of Krishna bring light to Arjuna's troubled spirit:

“Activity is better than inaction. . . . He alone triumphs who, dominating his senses by the force of spirit, utterly detached, imposes on them disciplined effort. . . . There is not in all the three worlds, O son of Pritha, anything that I lack, anything that I wish to acquire, and yet I remain in action.—The worlds will cease to exist if I did not accomplish my work: I shall be the cause of universal confusion and the destruction of all creatures.—The ignorant act by attachment to the act; the sage acts also, but without any attachment and only for the good of the world! . . .”¹

These words have inspired Gandhi, as they have inspired Vivekananda and Tagore. They are the “Open Sesame” to their souls.

The second and third chapters are philosophy in the vital sense of the word. The sounds of the battlefield die away in the distance, and Arjuna finds himself nearer the burning heart of Reality. Indeed, “philosophy in one of its functions, is the critic of cosmologies. Its function is to harmonise, refashion and justify diver-

¹ “Le Bhagavad Gita,” by Emile Senart.

gent intuitions as to the nature of things. It has to insist on the scrutiny of ultimate ideas, on the retention of the whole of the evidence in shaping our cosmological scheme.¹ Its business is to render explicit, and—so far as may be—efficient a process which otherwise is unconsciously performed without rational tests.”² The Bhagavad Gita, say the Hindus, is philosophy in this sense,³ while Hamlet is not.

Indians think that “Hamlet” is praised for reasons that are entirely wrong. It is the simplest of all Shakespeare’s plays, and for that very reason so mysterious. It is, however, a play of Defeat: on the other hand, the story of Arjuna in the Mahabharata is a symbol of real Triumph. They believe that Shakespeare was fully conscious that his picture of life was incomplete. So he attempted a type of presentation that seemed to him of a higher degree of truth. He sought for a harmony; but his sombre northern genius failed to penetrate the veil to the eternal ethos. The plays of his last period are nothing but elaborations of forced harmonies: they are not born of the abiding verities. The optimism that

¹ “Behind every particular idea,” said Vivekananda, “is a general idea, an abstract principle; understand it and you have understood everything. It is thus that the Vedas have generalised the entire universe in one absolute existence. And he who has understood this existence, has understood the whole universe.” (“Raja-Yoga,” p. 42).

² “Science and the Modern World,” by A. N. Whitehead, Preface, p. 10.

³ “It is one of the features of the Hindu spirit,” said Vivekananda, “that it always searches the most complete generalisation before embarking on the examination of details. The Vedas pose this question: ‘What is it the knowledge whereof is commensurate with universal science?’” (“Raja-Yoga,” p. 41).

exudes from them is, as Professor N. S. Takakhav says, "the optimism of a man who has succeeded well in life." To such an one it is easy to say

God's in his heaven;
All's right with the world.

Or, as Shakespeare puts it:

O brave new world!
That has such creatures in it!

Tolstoy's "War and Peace" often strikes the Oriental as more profound than anything Shakespeare wrote.¹ The wars have raged, but peace has come; the woman has loved, but after thirty years her feelings have changed. Somehow things have adjusted themselves. Life is beyond Tragedy and Comedy²: it is in the final analysis a Harmony.³ Indeed, the highest works of literature must transcend these two artificial types.⁴ Things may culminate in infinite sorrow, but to the clearer and wider vision the jarring tones blend into

¹ "Beside the words of Tolstoy, all the Christian books I know sink into insignificance." Gandhi: "My Experiments with Truth."

² André Maurois agrees. He, too, places Tolstoy's "War and Peace" above anything Shakespeare wrote.

³ "Be in harmony with the cosmos," said the Roman sage, and the author of "l'Ethique": "Le sage est celui qui participe par sa pensée à l'éternelle nécessité de la nature. Celui-là, en un certain sens, ne cesse jamais d'être, et seul il possède le véritable repos de tout le coeur. . . ." And Goethe himself: "Try to understand yourself and to understand all things." This is also the thought of Leibniz: "Existere nihil aliud esse quam harmonicum esse."

⁴ See "The Spirit of Oriental Poetry," by Mr. Puran Singh.

beauty. And when the seer's eyes are opened to the truth, he must suggest to those of dimmer vision some aspect of the miracle. Shakespeare's last plays, which are endeavours in this direction, are clear examples of spurious conciliation. They might fittingly be called Pseudo-Harmonies. . . .

Yes, surely, this ideal harmony is the goal of every true artist—in Europe as in Asia. Romain Rolland suggests the following names from the European galaxy: Raphael, Racine, Mozart, Goethe, Sophocles, Shakespeare. And, I would add, Romain Rolland himself. It is, of course, a grave error to make it the monopoly of a race or epoch. I dare to say that Shakespeare has not less realised this than Sophocles, and if this harmony is not perceptible to some, it is that their ears are not attuned to this kind of music, richer and more daring, which, in the words of Heraclitus of old, achieves "out of discords the most lovely harmony." I find this harmony in the tragedies of Shakespeare, and not in the so-called serene plays of his last period. But this is an entirely personal view, and few, if any, Indians will agree with me. For, let us remember, the tragic contemplation of life is not the same thing as the peace of Nirvana.

Much might be said concerning the other marks, which, according to the Indian, characterise the thinker. But a little reflection convinces us that the task would be unprofitable. The Oriental would argue that Shakespeare was neither original nor profound as a

thinker, nor, so he maintains, was the poet fertile. He failed to furnish answers even to the problems that he actually raised, much less then could he be expected to throw light on problems that he never contemplated. As for universality, Shakespeare's thought seldom receives praise on this score. No cultured Indian, and probably not all Europeans,¹ will accept the ideas of Shakespeare on the problems of life and death and the other world, as either deep or satisfying.

It is held by cultivated Indians that Shakespeare was no thinker. He chose his colours and used them as he pleased. They do not represent a systematic theory of life. It is believed that he had none. He was an eclectic in his art:

Alas! 'tis true that I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view,
Made old offences of affections new;
Most true it is that I have look'd on truth
Askance and strangely. . . .²

Such, says the Indian, is not the utterance of a thinker or philosopher.³

If we come now to the traditional view of the matter, what do we find?

¹ André Maurois tells me that he is dissatisfied with Shakespeare in larger matters.

² Sonnet 110.

³ Some of the Sonnets, especially No. LIX, and a few speeches in *Troilus and Cressida*, Act I, Sc. iii, and Act III, Sc. iii, have been mentioned to me by an English scholar of eminence as throwing light on Shakespeare's philosophy. In my opinion the illumination gathered from these sources is negligible. Are these passages anything more than a versification of mere commonplaces?

In India a man must satisfy four preliminary conditions before he can be called a thinker. The four requirements are enumerated by Samkara in his well-known Commentary on the first of the Vedanta Sutras.

First, the thinker must be able to distinguish between the eternal and the fleeting. That is to say, he must not accept for truth whatever is current, without passing it through the sieve of his own mind. He must be an enquiring spirit, able to detect the universal in the particular, and the essential among a mass of in-essentials.

Secondly, he must be non-worldly. In other words, he should not hanker after rewards, either here or in the world to come. Truth must be to him an end in itself. He should view life with detachment. Neither the present nor the future should be able to disturb his equanimity. Standing outside life, he should see all things impartially.

Thirdly, renunciation, meditateness, peace and faith should characterise him. Only he who is strong in spirit, can so curb his passions as to be able to ponder the mysteries without succumbing to the deceptive lures of the world. Ready to forsake everything in the search for truth, he must not be perturbed by sorrow and suffering and the scorn of men. Withdrawing into the inner sanctuary of his soul he will hear already the music of Eternity. Such a man has his feet on the head of Time and has attained the peace beyond the reach of mortals of a day.

Lastly, he must seek Moksha, or freedom from the perpetuity of incarnation.

These are the foremost qualities demanded of a philosopher. Indeed, men who forsake everything in order to probe into the nature of Reality, spending laborious days and sleepless nights, living far from the comforts and caresses of life, asking no reward, demanding no distinction, these, these, declares the Indian, are thinkers and philosophers in the true sense.

It is obvious, then, that as judged by India, Shakespeare cannot be called a thinker. Professor N. S. Takakhav expressed the national feeling when he said: "In my opinion, there is little or no philosophy in Shakespeare."¹

IV

But, it seems to me, there is another way of regarding the whole matter. When we ask whether a writer is a thinker or not, it appears desirable in the first place to furnish answers to the following two questions:

1. Whether he is a constructive or creative thinker?
2. What has he created?

Much confusion has arisen through the entanglement of these two kinds of effort. Is this because the distinction has never been felt?

¹ A personal letter.

Shakespeare, as we have seen, evolved no new system of thought. In no way did he enlarge the boundaries of our knowledge. Plato constructed a new philosophy of the universe; Einstein the novel conception that we designate Space-Time; Napoleon a new code of Civil Government; Ruskin an Economics embracing æsthetic, moral and human values; Carlyle a new manner of enforcing truths already admitted. To the class thus marked out, Shakespeare emphatically does not belong, and we express our meaning by saying that he is not a constructive thinker.

But he is a creative thinker. His creations are not *ideas* but *characters*—real men and women, fellow-humans with ourselves. We can follow their feelings and thoughts like those of our most intimate acquaintances. In this grand objectivity, Shakespeare reaches the summit of his powers. In this sense, and only in this, can we claim for him the lordly title of thinker:

O brave new world
That has such creatures in it!

Shakespeare created a world of many types, and his philosophy of life embraces them all. So he is in a way a larger man, compared with any of the constructive thinkers enumerated above. *While the others give us only their own thoughts, Shakespeare gives those of his creations as well.*

Perhaps this alone was Shakespeare's mission—to be God's great spy. I could not define this idea in terms

of logical precision. It is a matter of spirit, the spirit of Shakespeare surveying the universe, recognising every fresh manifestation of life as a form or aspect containing its own principle, and relating each to the creative whole of existence.

Is this not curiously akin to the religious function of the great pioneers of the human spirit?

Yet, says the Indian, no character in Shakespeare contemplates transcendental problems, and essays to give a satisfactory answer to them. All these characters are *earth-bound*. The larger questions and dreams do not haunt them. This clearly indicates that Shakespeare's own mind was similarly bounded.

Nevertheless, no author has created so many and such diverse characters as Shakespeare. Within strict limits, and especially in the domain of the passions, every reader will find in the plays that which stirs some chord within him. André Maurois tells me of an incident in this connection that is highly significant. A friend of his, a well-known general, who had performed prodigies in Morocco, finding himself in disagreement with the Government in power, was forced to resign. One day, Maurois calling upon him found him reading "Coriolanus." "That," said the great soldier, "that is me! No other books describes my feelings better!"

This incident is noteworthy as showing the strength of Shakespeare's appeal to certain minds. But, let us not forget that there are others to whom the poet means

nothing. These are they who seek something else. Such a man once said to the present writer, in the course of friendly converse, after turning to Shakespeare in vain for guidance in the logic of life:—

This poet is empty, empty! He only maddens me.
The dumbness of the man is cruel—away with him
and his mere noise!

So it comes about that this greatest of all creative thinkers fails to satisfy the needs of those who go to him for deeper counsel.

To which kind of thinker, creative or constructive, shall we give the higher place?

In the East the former type will be more esteemed. In the West there are those who would not mention Shakespeare in the same breath with Christ, Gautama, Plato, Leonardo da Vinci, and Goethe. But there are others who would uphold an esteemed critic's opinion. "In my view," says Mr. Edward Garnett, "Shakespeare is the greatest thinker that ever lived, because as the greatest of all poets he thought all the thoughts of his characters. Napoleon was an earth-bounded man, Shakespeare a universal-minded spirit. . . ."¹

Nor is Mr. Garnett alone in his admiration. Shakespeare has always appealed to the finest and freest spirits of Europe. He was the beloved companion of Beethoven; Strindberg was a staunch Shakespearian; Benedetto Croce loves him to the point of idolatry;² and

¹ A personal letter.

² A personal letter.

Romain Rolland confesses that he is his preferred spiritual friend.¹

What Romain Rolland admires in Shakespeare is "his intrepidity of vision in an epoch of spiritual servitude. All epochs," he says, "agree in being subject to some tyrannical idol: sometimes to religion—sometimes to social order, to blind patriotism, to a conventional morality—very few spirits are free enough to be courageous; very few courageous enough to be free. Shakespeare was one such free spirit."

Indeed, to be privileged to penetrate into the soul of a free spirit in Europe is a revelation. We find him listening to the magic harp of Ariel in "The Tempest."

¹ A personal letter.

REVULSIONS

*Let us be reverent, but only where reverence is due, even
in Milton and in Shakespeare.*

LANDOR.

WE have seen that the Indian thinker of to-day is dissatisfied with the religion of Shakespeare. He finds it morose, negative, and surprisingly passive. It offers to him neither the beauty of holiness nor the light of knowledge. The poet made terms with life by surrendering to life—not through profounder comprehension but through a strange compromising evasion. All this points to a mentality either earth-bound or primitive.

Again, the Indian failed to find in Shakespeare a profound thinker. Any originality he possessed seems to have lain in the creation of character, and in his masterly use of language. "To the advanced Indian," says Professor Takakhav, "Shakespeare has presented no new problem."

What else does the Indian find disappointing in Shakespeare?

It is noticed that all ideals in Shakespeare are personal; they are never sociological. Unlike Ibsen, he is open to the charge of incivism. His patriotism is a kind of Chauvinism—witness "Henry V."

There is a thrilling kind of idealism, which, soaring above the low levels of earthly things, attains to spiritual heights, and dreams celestial dreams, such dreams as came to the poet Valmiki. This vision is totally wanting in Shakespeare, and seems alien to the spirit of the poet.

Moreover, Shakespeare is everywhere bound down by the spirit—even the fashion—of his time, and the tradition of his race. For instance,

1. In his feudal outlook.

2. In his exaltation of personal monarchy, sometimes suggesting an acceptance of the Divine Right of Kings. Listen to this outburst of Lear:

Ay, every inch a king:
 When I do stare, see how the subject quakes!
 I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause?
 Adultery?
 Thou shalt not die: die for adultery! No:
 The wren goes to 't: and the small gilded fly
 Does lecher in my sight.

(“King Lear,” IV, vi.)

3. In his constant depreciation of the aspirations of the mob. It would seem he was enthralled by the pageant show, and the spectacle of worldly greatness and pride of place. Do not the following lines, uncalled for by the occasion, betray a mere prejudice?—

What says the golden chest? Ha! let me see:
 "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men
 desire."

What many men desire! that "many" may be
 meant

By the fool multitude, that choose by show,
 Not learning more than the fond eye doth teach;
 Which pries not to the interior, but, like the martlet
 Builds in the weather on the outward wall,
 And in the force and road of casualty.

I will not choose what many men desire,
 Because I will not jump with common spirits,
 And rank me with the barbarous multitude.

("The Merchant of Venice," II, ix.)

4. In his portrayal of women. Shakespeare seems to have no conception of the freedom and equality of the female sex. Are not his women, says the Indian, drawn to a model long antiquated? "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." (Ephesians, vi, 22.) Such was the apostolic injunction, which Shakespeare in the main accepted without demur. No such acceptance do we find in Kalidasa, Ibsen, Turgenev, Dostoievsky, Strindberg, Anatole France, Thomas Hardy, and the Indian reformers of to-day. (Perhaps this is one reason why Indians of a more conservative type in this respect tend to give Shakespeare their approval).

5. In his attitude towards the Church the poet is quite conventional. He concedes all that is claimed by authority. The cultured Indian of a more protestant

type (if we can use such a phrase) feels surprised at Shakespeare's acquiescence.

6. Through his desire to please every class, Shakespeare's plays include much that we may call mere padding. All the plays are like the curate's egg, good in part only.

7. Further, while Shakespeare's psychology of madness really surpasses that of Euripides (in the "Orestes"), the question still remains whether his study of abnormal states of mind and problematic uses in the society of the modern world can ever approach Dostoievsky's studies in the "Idiot" and in "Crime and Punishment."

In short, says the Indian, Shakespeare, a poet of the Elizabethan age, with a conservative temperament that leads him to look more sympathetically to the feudal past and to the Roman Catholic traditions of England, is limited in his thought by the restrictions of his time and the predilections of his own mind. This very fact however—(a) his conservatism—especially (1) the superiority of the aristocracy over the masses, (2) his ideal of absolute personal monarchy, (3) his assertion of the dependance of woman upon man, while he eulogises female purity and fortitude—(b) his poetry, (c) his romance, (d) his love of tragi-comedy, (e) his abstinence from mere comedy of manners with a more aggressive "criticism of life," makes him popular with the majority of Indian readers. They love romance, and not satire, nor do they relish a criticism or a new

synthesis of life. But for the more thoughtful Indian, in the midst of more modern conditions, Ibsen and Dostoevsky provide a keener stimulus.

It is anticipated that Shakespeare in India will remain more and more the monopoly of conservatives in society, politics and philosophy. The aristocrats, the dogmatic and orthodox men of all systems of religion, the plutocrats of modern times, men of leisure and luxury, whose life "is rounded with a sleep" of oblivion of the stress and conflicts of existence, these will ever cling to Shakespeare and never cease to burn incense at his altar.

THE LAST WORD

*Truth may seem, but cannot be;
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she;
Truth and beauty buried be.*

“The Phoenix and the Turtle.”

It is evening. The sun is fast sinking behind the distant hills, touching with strange beauty the waving ears of golden corn. Overhead the white birds wing their way to the silent pools in which they will presently plunge and slake their thirst. As they pass they stab the blue of heaven with shafts of elfin light.

Now night falls, and myriads of stars like fireflies swim into our ken. The far-off villages seem as patterns of filmy gossamer—creatures of a dream. Silence shrouds the landscape.

Yet voices come to us, like voices of our own souls. Some kind of dispute is in progress, and we can but listen.

First Voice. Listen to the wisdom I bring. Receive with fitting reverence a message from civilization. Remember that you are but a child in all things that matter to humanity—

Second Voice (breaking in). But I am much older than you; and I ought to know better. My history

goes back to stately kingdoms of a time when your ancestors were only savages!

First Voice (derisively). And what have you done with it all?

Second Voice. Devoted all to something that *you* can't understand!

First Voice. Tush! Tush! Tell me of your hidden treasure, if you have one.

Second Voice. Gladly. My treasure is not of the world but of the spirit. You took from me worldly treasure in abundance—it only corrupted you. Oh, had you taken from me the treasure of the spirit, I should have been no poorer, and you would have been immensely a gainer!

First Voice (laughing). But who could live on that? I may as well tell you that we are not fond of Upanishads—

Second Voice (sadly). Who could live on that? Why, all real men, men like your prophet of Nazareth.

First Voice. Ah, but the world has moved on: we need something better, something solid. Look at my achievements! I have circled the globe; I am the master of all I survey.

Second Voice. You have forged your own chains. Could you rive them at your need?

First Voice. Chains! Not chains, but armour!

Second Voice. Armour only for the body, but what of the spirit?

First Voice. Spirit? You talk of phantoms. Our philosophers have made short work of these.

Second Voice. Are they so very sure? Rumours have reached me of intense discordance among them. You are appealing to a divided court.

First Voice. But are your own philosophers at one?

Second Voice. They are.

First Voice. What, then, are these schools of thought we hear of?

Second Voice. Mere differences of dialect, standing for thoughts that are identical.

First Voice. Wherein lies the identity? Tell me this, and at the same time what is the rift that divides us?

Second Voice. We feel that you are playing with toys—dangerous toys, toys that threaten your annihilation. You have made of life a hectic fever, and of the world an arena of strife. Is it not possible that your boasted civilization is a Frankenstein monster? That spells your doom. Is there no writing on the wall?

First Voice (smiling). We have no fear. We have been proved, and not found wanting. But what of you? Some think that your mystic methods have proved abortive, and have left you just where they found you. Throw all that rubbish away and learn of me. *I* will show you what *progress* means.

Second Voice. Progress, such as yours, I will have none of it.

First Voice. You leave me no option. In the cause of humanity I must force it upon you—

Second Voice. Never!

First Voice. Then the issue must be fought out—

(*There is a sudden clap of thunder, and the figure of Time appears.*)

Time. Cease your puny quarrels. Watch those mists rising from the river, only to fade again into clear air. Such are the dreams of men—their philosophies, their aspirations, their triumphs, their joys and

sorrows. Children of Eternity, with lives of the day-fly, weave your idle patterns, for such is your lot. But, remember, you humans are the eyes through which the Universe contemplates itself.

Such was the dream I dreamt. And I awoke to a jarring world.

FINIS