FIVE LECTURES ON
SHAKESPEARE.

THE POET AND THE MAN.

My intention to speak of Shakespeare in a series of five lectures, to an audience until now unfamiliar to me, is so bold a one that now, when I am about to put it into execution, it really astonishes me. Everyone who has given more than a superficial study to the mighty poet will be able to sympathize with me in this feeling. The greatness of the subject, the wealth of material, the multitude of problems arising, and the innumerable variety of attempts to solve them—how can I dare hope to do justice to all this, to master such wealth and variety, at least to so master them in five short
hours that you may receive an approximate idea of my conception of the subject? Greatly do I need your forbearance and that sympathetic response, that fine and subtle accord, which, perhaps, I could expect from a promiscuous audience only in the city of Goethe.

My plan in these lectures is to touch, in their order, upon the important problems to which the phenomenon of Shakespeare gives rise. We will attempt to force our way right into the heart of the subject—the development of the poet, and the many sides which his developed thought, will, and power open to our observation.

First in order we have to discuss a question which has now for a number of years been a burning one: "the relation between the poet and the man," or, as we might also formulate the question, the possibility of the identity of the poet and the man Shakespeare.

It is not merely since yesterday that a
Shakespeare myth has been spoken of; but whoever uses this expression to-day has an entirely different thing in his mind from what was meant by it thirty or forty years ago. When that worthy German Shakespeare scholar, my honoured teacher, Nicolas Delius, issued a publication in 1851 under the title "The Myth of Shakespeare," the thought of ventilating the problem which shall engage us to-day was far from his mind. His object was simply to examine the mass of reports and stories which had found their way into the traditional biographies of Shakespeare, with regard to the testimony brought to bear upon them and their inner worth; to separate the true from the false, the established from the doubtful, in order to obtain a reliable, if meagre, sketch of Shakespeare's life.

Such was the case then. And how is it to-day? Were Delius in a position to publish his work anew, he would perhaps begin it with a chapter entitled: "Shakes-
peare no Myth." You are no doubt well aware that at present not one, but a great number of authors, chiefly in England and America, maintain that the great poet whom we study and revere falsely bears the name of Shakespeare—that Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear, and the other creations that bear the stamp of this unique genius, and have been handed down to us as Shakespeare’s work, are the creations of an entirely different being from the William Shakespeare of whom the parish register and other documents tell us. The Shakespeare who was born in the year 1564 in Stratford-on-Avon, married there at an early age and begot children; who afterward went to London and made a success as actor and theatrical manager, and who died in his native place in the year 1616—that personality, sufficiently authenticated historically, cannot be regarded as the creator of those glorious dramas which form the delight of both the learned and unlearned. He
may, at most, have somewhat rearranged these plays for the stage, but he gave his name only to conceal their true author.

The view of which I speak is not an entirely new one. Karl Müller-Mylius reports that as early as 1843 the well-known Catholic historian Professor Gförrer, then librarian in Stuttgart, privately expressed the opinion that it was impossible that the historical Shakespeare should have composed the Shakespeare dramas. In the fifties there arose nearly simultaneously in America and England the notion that the famous statesman and philosopher Lord Bacon, Shakespeare's contemporary, was the real author of these plays. The publications of Miss Délia Bacon and of Judge Nathaniel Holmes in America, as well as those of the Englishman William Henry Smith, then began to represent and defend this view in wider circles. But it was still possible to dismiss the whole affair as a mere freak not worthy of serious refutation.
At the present day the matter stands somewhat differently. The number of followers of this strange view has of late increased very considerably; the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy has developed a whole literature, which at the beginning of the year 1882 counted 255 books and dissertations (of which 161 belong to America, and 69 to England), and can now no longer be so easily overlooked. But, beyond this, the American-English theory has by this time found advocates even in Germany. We are not at liberty, therefore, simply to ignore it, but must attempt briefly to explain our position in regard to it.

The theory is made up of two elements: Shakespeare's right to the works which bear his name is contested; the authorship of those works is attributed to Lord Bacon. He who maintains the first of these propositions is not by any means bound to uphold the second; and there are those who content themselves for the
present with the simple negation, leaving open the question of the real authorship of the Shakespeare productions. Among these there are some who entertain the idea of a multiplicity of authors, and are disposed to consider the Shakespeare question as analogous to the Homeric one. By far the most important and the fundamental question, the solution of which might render the investigation of the other superfluous, is evidently that which can be condensed into the words: Shakespeare or not Shakespeare? Therefore we shall consider that first and foremost.

When we maintain that the historical William Shakespeare is the author of the works which bear his name, we do so in accordance with a tradition of nearly three hundred years—a tradition based upon a wealth of authentic contemporary testimony such as but few facts in early literary history can produce. The new Shakespeare mythologists find, of course,
an easy means of disposing of this testimony. The contemporaries of the poet, they say, concerned themselves but little about the authorship of the plays. They could, therefore, easily fall prey to a deception in which a number of them were accomplices. As to the motives of that deception, opinions are greatly divided. Enough that in Shakespeare's time a grand conspiracy was organized with the object of bringing him forward as the writer of a series of masterpieces which originated from an entirely different author or authors. The most remarkable thing is that no one should have been found, either at that time or after Shakespeare's death, to let out the secret, notwithstanding the numerous anecdotes otherwise connected with the personality of William Shakespeare. On the contrary, not a particle of evidence can be produced, either from Shakespeare's time or that succeeding, to sustain the opinion that Shakespeare did not write these
works. You see that it is impossible to argue this matter seriously, and we will, therefore, just briefly touch upon the second element of the theory, the supposition of Bacon's authorship. And here I must say plainly: he who thinks it 'even conceivable that Bacon could have written the works which appear under Shakespeare's name can know neither Bacon nor Shakespeare. One who has a thorough knowledge of Shakespeare needs but a slight acquaintance with Bacon to become convinced that in Shakespeare is manifest a different spirit, a different heart, a different character. And the student of Bacon need but read a page of Shakespeare to reach the conclusion that the statesman-philosopher, though his life had been at stake, could not have produced that page.

The whole agitation, much ado as is made over it, strikes me as nothing more than a mere curiosity, a morbid phenomenon of the time. It is no doubt very
interesting to study such a phenomenon, but it is not the problem which I propose to discuss in this lecture. Do not, therefore, expect to hear from me anything like a direct refutation of the theory referred to. But, although it is not my aim, these lectures will serve as an indirect refutation should I be successful in attaining my object. To explain myself:

He who studies the creations of a poet, not merely considering each one as an isolated work of art, but seeking in those works the man who created them, sets himself no easy task—the task, namely, of discovering the spiritual unity of those works. This unity is not a fixed, rigid thing; it is unstable, mobile. The different works of the same poet reveal him to us from different sides, upon different stages of intellectual and moral development, filled with different ideas, subject to different moods. If to the picture of the poet which his works reveal we add
what we know of the outward circumstances of his life,—of the conditions, the influences, which shaped his development,—then the problem becomes more complicated, but at the same time more satisfactory: it is to find the accord between his life and his works. The solution, in so far as it can be reached, consists in an intuitive insight into the development of a definite intellectual personality.

This undertaking, when applied to Shakespeare, is complicated with extraordinary difficulties, chiefly for two reasons: first, on account of the greatness of his genius, and secondly, because we know so little of his life, and that which we do know is of a character which seems to bear no sort of proportion to the overwhelming spiritual importance of the man. To a coarse perception, to one who can conceive of spiritual greatness only in the powerful of the earth, this circumstance is doubly em-
barrassing. Shakespeare's outward life had none of that splendour and distinction which we should like to associate with the originator of his works; but one forgets that innumerable passages in these works themselves teach the lesson that the most unseemly covering often hides the richest treasure: think, for instance, of the choosing of the casket, in "The Merchant of Venice." And it is overlooked, too, that the most powerful impression left upon the discriminating reader of these masterpieces is that they give us far more than they promise, and that their author, too, can only be conceived as a man in whose appearance, bearing, position in life, his true greatness found a very imperfect expression.

Yet it is owing mainly to this fact, to this difficulty of reconciling Shakespeare's life and his works, that, I will not say the Bacon theory had its origin, but that it could become so widespread. And now we shall offer some reflections upon this
point. We will attempt to find a path which shall lead us to see that this unity of the poet and his creations is at least a possible, a conceivable one. We dare never hope to lift the veil which envelops the mystery of genius. The miracle presented to us by the phenomenon of Shakespeare will never be cleared up. But is it not so in all cases of a similar nature? Does not the real miracle, after all efforts at explanation, remain an unsolved mystery? Let us take Goethe, so near to us in time, concerning whose life we have such a wealth of knowledge—Goethe, who has himself deigned to give us an account of his development, and who in Dichtung und Wahrheit has presented a work which William Scherer once characterized as the "causal explanation of genius." "Causal explanation of genius"! If one could but speak of the causal explanation of even this one particular genius! But do we find this in Dichtung und Wahrheit?
Do we learn from it anywhere how Goethe's genius arose? No; at most we learn of certain conditions under which his genius developed in a particular direction. This is all; the real, the fundamental secret remains unrevealed. And likewise in regard to Shakespeare we must not raise our expectations too high. All that we can hope to attain is this: the knowledge that the inner development of the poet, as disclosed to us through his works, harmonizes with what we know of the historical Shakespeare; that, indeed, many of the circumstances of his life decidedly advanced his development. In my attempt to demonstrate this I shall not, of course, repeat in detail the biography of the poet; I will bring into prominence only those elements in it which are of significance for our purpose.

William Shakespeare was the eldest son and the first surviving child of his parents; he was, therefore, no doubt reared with
special love and solicitude. He grew up in a family which, upon a foundation of honest toil, had attained a comfortable prosperity, and must have enjoyed high esteem in Stratford. His father, John Shakespeare, both farmer and merchant,—not an unusual combination in such provincial towns,—was high bailiff in Stratford from Michaelmas, 1568, to Michaelmas, 1569. Again, in September, 1571, he was chosen first alderman. His mother, Mary Arden, was a member of one of the most highly respected families of the county of Warwick, one which distinctly belonged to the gentry.

Shakespeare grew up amid simple, rather primitive, surroundings; he could not look for the higher spiritual training to his parents. At the grammar school of his native city, which, according to the thoroughly credible testimony of one of his first biographers, he attended, he is said to have been initiated into the knowledge of Latin, the elements
of logic and rhetoric, and various other branches.

Most of his knowledge of such things was probably self-taught later on. And we may assume that during his school life he learned more from his communion with nature and with the little world of Stratford than he did upon the school bench.

Was this a misfortune? Can we assume that it would have been conducive to his development to have received a scholarly education, to have associated at an early age with men of wide culture, and to have had his attention turned to literature in his tender youth? In order to enable us to answer these questions we must try to present before us the spiritual physiognomy of Shakespeare as it is revealed to us by his writings.

There has rarely been a man at once so finely and so powerfully organized, so healthy, as Shakespeare. I speak of fineness of organization in the widest
possible sense: delicacy of the inward and outward sense, the highest susceptibility materially and spiritually, ethically and æsthetically. He was open to outward influences on every side of his nature, and every impression woke an echo within him. Nothing escaped his eye, his ear, and nothing was indifferent to him; he sought to comprehend everything; everything aroused in him pleasure or aversion, and, when more deeply stirred, joy or sorrow. He had a universal sympathy for all created things, above all, for man—a sympathy not stopping at the surface of things, but penetrating to their innermost being; a sympathy which animates the inanimate in nature, and which in human life enables him completely to put himself into another's place, and to judge humanly of his motives and actions. All that is beautiful in art or in nature finds in him a joyous, an ardent response; no noble action, no spark, however feeble, of noble
human endeavour, leaves him unmoved. The forms of social intercourse in their relation to the feelings and to character—who has ever so keenly felt their infinitely delicate shades? Nothing that offends good taste or shocks the æsthetic sense remains unnoticed by him. He has comprehension for every individual peculiarity, every idiosyncrasy, every mannerism, and can trace them to their source. In no poet, therefore, is the sense of the ludicrous so highly developed. But he does not content himself with a mere surface picture of even his most irresistibly laughable characters; not even they are too insignificant for him to sympathize with them, to enter into their nature, into their life. Toward them, too, he shows the good will he bears all creatures; in them, too, he honours humanity. No ring of scorn or mockery is heard in his laughter.

The influences for good that a youth spent in ever-renewed and intimate con-
tact with nature must have exerted upon a being so organized, seem evident. Country life, with its refreshing, invigorating air, could maintain the health and develop the strength, which, with a more artificial system of education, might have degenerated at an early age. The quiet content of what might be called a patriarchal life guarded this all too fine-strung spirit, this all too sensitive being, from a premature development of his instincts and talents—a development which in all probability would have led to a feverish exaltation, and have been his ruin, as it was of so many others of that time, particularly those dramatically gifted.

And, furthermore, that intimate intercourse with nature to which life in Stratford was so conducive was the best school for his mind, for his yet slumbering genius. Not only did it sharpen his senses, his powers of observation: he owes to it infinitely more. To a contemplative mind, one capable of high development, nature
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presents wonders on every hand—wonders of a primitive kind, and therefore more in consonance with a child's spirit than those that are achieved by the intellect. Questions are suggested at every step; even the minutest, the most insignificant object reveals itself to the loving observer as a complete creation, one perfect within its limitations; and, again, in the contemplation of nature one recognizes more easily the connection between all beings, their dependence upon each other.

Shakespeare penetrated deep into the book of nature in his native place. Not only was his æsthetic sense captivated by the beauties of the surrounding landscape; not only did he retain all that presented itself before him as a harmonious whole, so that we find repeatedly in his works recollections of his home, of the Avon, gently winding its way through green meadows, dark woodland, pretty orchards: he also learned to observe every detail of the picture; every flower,
every plant, every animal, aroused his interest; he grew intimately acquainted with everything about him. Here was developed and brought into active play the poet's all-embracing sympathy; here, also, was laid the foundation of that extensive knowledge of nature of which his works bear proof, and which command the wonder and admiration of the botanist, the zoologist, the physiologist, and leads them to the conjecture that Shakespeare must have devoted himself to a special study of each of these branches of science. He would hardly have gained that deep understanding of the life of nature had he grown up in a noisy, contracted town, in an atmosphere of high literary culture.

For Shakespeare looks upon nature as a poet, a child, as every nation in its infancy looks upon it. The change of the seasons, which influences even our moods, making us sad or gay, is regarded by the child of nature as the withdrawal or return of a great blessing: it is the propi-
ious gods who part from us and die away, to be reawakened in the spring. Every child’s mind conceives myths of this nature, but above all a child who is destined to become a Shakespeare or a Goethe. For the historical significance and national importance of men of the highest order of genius consists in this: that, while developing the spirit peculiar to a people, they are, at the same time, its most perfect representatives; so that their life appears a miniature of that of their people—its past, its present, and its future are mirrored in them. We cannot doubt, then, that Shakespeare, too, in his childhood, revelled in myths. He sought to give a human significance to every manifestation of nature; everything was to him a picture, a symbol. And when, later, he had learned to distinguish the differences between similar things more sharply, the impressions received in childhood still clung to him; the habit, nay, the necessity, of thinking in pictures, of
expressing himself in pictures, still remained. And from the habit of comparing was developed the faculty of deducing a general truth from the observation of a single phenomenon by rapid analysis and combination. Thus his deep insight of later years into the relations of things should be taken in connection with the myth-making of his childhood.

The great advantage of a simple, primitive mode of life is that it guards a person from developing one side of his talents at the expense of the others. The division of labour, the chief factor in the progress of culture for humanity at large, has the necessary consequence that the individual perfects himself in one direction, and remains undeveloped in many others; that he is a giant in his own field, while in other fields he is infinitely more helpless than the child of nature. The unpractical scholar, the professor so childishly inexperienced in matters of everyday life, is a familiar figure to
everyone, if only from the pages of the comic newspapers. But how inexperienced do we often find the scholar even in domains of knowledge only slightly removed from his own! Shakespeare was preserved from such one-sidedness both by his nature and his education. He lived in a little town where rural work was combined with town occupations. His father was a farmer and merchant. Already in early youth he was brought into close contact with various forms of human activity. He accustomed himself to observe them all, to inquire into the aims, the methods, the implements, of each. And this habit he retained in later life. Thus it is that he knows the technical name of every object in every field of activity, that he can represent with such exactness every detail of work, complicated though it may be, in any trade. Hence the traditions or the hypotheses according to which Shakespeare is now a butcher, now a wool merchant, or,
again, a typesetter, a physician, or a soldier.

His powers of observation and combination thus exercised were, no doubt, turned by Shakespeare at an early age upon his own proper domain, the study of man. The little world which surrounded him, and the world within his own breast, offered him perfectly ample material for this study, and as his needs grew greater so also did the circle of his experiences widen.

The saying of Goethe is familiar: "Einen Blick ins Buch hinein und zwei ins Leben, das muss die rechte Form dem Geiste geben."

If there be any great poet or thinker in modern ages who was formed on this principle, it is Shakespeare. We have attempted to indicate how he may have gained his knowledge of life in Stratford. Of what significance books were to him we shall have occasion to learn in the course of our investigations.
The intellectual possessions of an age, of a people, are not limited to what is found in their literature. There is, and was particularly at that time, a fund of tradition transmitted through the customs and manners of the people, through their songs and their sayings, having the same underlying character, but assuming a multiplicity of different forms in different parts of the land. These things, too, form a prominent, an essential feature of the intellectual atmosphere surrounding man.

In the sixteenth century England still fully deserved the name of merry England. Puritan austerity of manners had not yet begun to scorn the gay, light-hearted festivals of the people, nor silence their merry songs. Old customs and ceremonies were observed with particular faithfulness in the country; at stated times of the year processions, games, dances, were organized, many of which had their origin in the dim, hoary
past, some echoing the spirit of the Teutonic myths. Among these belongs the May festival, and the morris dance which formed a part of it. Among them also belongs St. George's Day, the sheep-shearing festival, and many other feasts and games of which Shakespeare delighted to make mention in his dramas. Warwickshire must have been one of those English counties in which old usages, old traditions, maintained their strongest hold. It was a region where from the dawn of English history different races or different nationalities were brought into contact: first the West Saxons and the Celts, then the West Saxons and the Angles, the latter of whom conquered the former. Under Alfred the Great, after the decisive victory over the Danes, the boundary line between the West-Saxon-Mercian and the Danish dominion passed through Warwickshire. Old English records establish the fact that paganism here main-
tained a long life; the neighbourhood of the Danes, the comparatively great distance from the great centres of culture, must later have been favourable to the preservation of vestiges of heathen traditions.

Warwickshire was, also, according to all appearances, one of those districts where the old English national epic received its most powerful development. In the literary ages, on the contrary, we hear little or nothing of Warwickshire up to the second half of the sixteenth century. Scarcely one poet of eminence of the Old or Middle English period can be claimed with certainty for the heart of England, as Michael Drayton, a contemporary of Shakespeare, himself a native of Warwickshire, calls it. All the more vigorous was the growth of popular poetry. Here arose, as a consequence of the mingling of Danes and Saxons, the legend of Guy of Warwick, which, in the beginning of the thirteenth century, received a literary
form in the Norman tongue. Old charms, ballads, and such other forms of poetry as fall within the domain of folk-songs, may well have survived longer in Warwickshire than in many other counties, and had a relatively richer development. Poetry of this kind that found its way to Warwickshire from other regions, particularly such as came from northern England, was eagerly welcomed. The beautiful songs and legends of Robin Hood, in which the Old German storm god Woden assumes the national heroic form of an outlaw, of an archer and poacher, making the woods his home, and the kindred ballads of Adam Bell, William of Cloudesly, Clym o' the Clough—all filled with a fresh, woody odour, a primitive, light-hearted way of looking at life—found congenial soil in Warwickshire. Shakespeare's dramas are full of allusions to these ballads, as, indeed, no other poet of his time has drawn so deep as he from the well of national songs and legends.
Neither was there a lack of historical reminiscences in Warwickshire. Mighty remains of the Roman period, which in the sixteenth century were looked upon as the work of the Britons; cities and places associated with the names of famous races of men, with the history of great events, of terrible battles, were here found in abundance. Particularly did the sad time when the houses of Lancaster and York, engaged in a bloody feud, decimated the English aristocracy and desolated the land,—the time of the Wars of the Roses,—still live most vividly in the memory of the inhabitants of that county. The great hero of the Wars of the Roses, whom history and poetry have made familiar to us as the king-maker, was Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick.

Is it astonishing that Shakespeare should at the very outset of his dramatic career have been drawn to represent and artistically master that period of history of which he heard above all others in his
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home? We must remember, too, that this was the period treated by Edward Hall in his chronicle.

It is not a matter of indifference where a man, especially a genius, is born—whether he is descended from a vigorous or a degenerate stock, what air he breathed in his childhood, what songs were sung to him in his cradle.

And so it may be no mere chance that Shakespeare was born in Warwickshire; there may be a connection between his origin and the particular direction taken by his genius. Shakespeare is the first among the great English poets since the Old English period in whom the Teutonic spirit again overpoweringly asserts itself, and presses into its service all those elements of foreign culture which were assimilated by the national character. In him we find again that soul-stirring note of deep feeling, that simple boldness of poetic expression, which plunges us, without preparation or mediation,—
apparently without any effort at artistic effect,—into the very heart of the subject; in short, he has that genuineness of sentiment which is a chief characteristic of Germanic poesy.

Shakespeare's boyhood seems to have been a very happy one. Later in life he looked back as to a lost paradise upon those days of innocence, of youthful joys and youthful friendships, upon the time when he looked no deeper into the future than to think "to-morrow will be another day like to-day, and 'I shall always be a boy,'" when he and his playfellows "gave innocence for innocence," and when it entered not their dreams that "men do evil" in the world.

About the time when Shakespeare, a boy of fourteen, may be supposed to have left school the horizon of his life began gradually to darken. In the first place, the hitherto prosperous circumstances of his family grew straitened, and then sank to lower and still lower depths. We
can follow clearly enough, in Stratford
documents of the years 1578 to 1587, the
sad development of affairs which plunged
the Shakespeare family into poverty, led
to the loss of their position, deprived its
head, John Shakespeare, of the dignified
office of alderman, and finally robbed him
of his liberty, until, in the latter year,
their misfortunes had reached a climax,
but not yet their end.

The crisis in Shakespeare’s life, the
time which marks the transition from
boyhood to youth, falls just within this
period: the awakening of youthful long-
ings and passions; first love, with its
dreams, its rapture—here, alas! with its
errors also, with its consequences that
were to determine his whole life.

In November, 1582, we find William
Shakespeare on the point of getting
married—he, a lad of eighteen, to a girl
eight years older than himself; on the
point of getting married, as it appears,
without the consent of his parents; en-
deavouring to obtain permission for his union from the Bishop of Worcester after a single proclamation of the banns. The marriage must have taken place soon after this. Already under the date of the 26th of May, 1583, the Stratford parish register records the baptism of Susanna, daughter of William Shakespeare.

And now picture to yourself this youthful head of a family in the first years succeeding his union: how the incompatibility between him and his wife, the difference in age itself forming a barrier, gradually dawns upon him; how he sees clearly the many prospects life and the world would have held out to him, feels the chains which render the struggle for existence so hard, and which he himself has forged; how, from day to day, the difficulty of satisfying the needs of his little family grows greater, and how the increasing disorder of his father’s financial affairs at length makes his position
intolerable. It may well be that the young husband, overwhelmed by repentance, mortification, and despair,—a despair which rendered him utterly reckless,—may have attempted to shake off now and then the heavy burdens weighing upon him, and have taken part, in the company of wild fellows, in the maddest pranks. The tradition according to which Shakespeare led a dissolute life in Stratford with gay companions, and committed all kinds of mischief, particularly poaching, exaggerated and inexact as it is in some particulars, may contain a kernel of truth. The essential thing for us is this: if we seek to bring Shakespeare’s condition during the years in question vividly before our minds, we come to the conclusion that it has in a comparatively short space of time passed through the whole compass of moods and feelings, from the most glowing ecstasy of passion to the chilling grief of blank disappointment, from the highest bliss to deepest
woe; and that we must date from this period the epoch when his knowledge of the world and of the human heart, and likewise his sympathy with human joys and sorrows, began to deepen.

And now followed Shakespeare's departure, or, if you will, his flight, to London. At the beginning of 1585 his family had been increased by a pair of twins, Hamnet and Judith, who were baptized on the 2d of February. It may be presumed that Shakespeare left his home soon after this to try his fortunes in the capital. We have no more precise knowledge of the time of that hegira, for in this part of the poet's biography there is a great gap. Up to the year 1592 we have no account of him whatever, and the first thing we then hear of him is that he has secured a perfectly firm footing in London and in his new sphere of action. The period between Shakespeare's arrival in the English capital and the year 1592, which we are
enabled to fill out only by conjecture and imagination, must have been of the highest import and greatest consequence in the poet's life. This is the time of his real struggle with the world, with destiny; the time, too, doubtless, of new and hard struggles with himself—all of them crises out of which he came forth not unscathed, it is true, but with a spirit matured and strengthened. It was at this period that the poet's spiritual horizon was so vastly widened, a consequence of being transplanted from the narrow, quiet life of Stratford to the busy mart of London.

And here we must try to realize the great historical era when England became conscious of her mission in Europe, and when, at the same time, she began to stretch out her arms toward the new transatlantic world; the time when the tide of English national life rose so high, and the spirit of nationality received so powerful an impulse; the time when
England, too, began to conquer a place for herself in the new domains of science, opened up by the intellectual awakening of Europe, and when English poesy ventured upon more daring flights than it had ever attempted before, and soared to heights which it has never, indeed, again attained. We must picture to ourselves the young provincial transferred at such an epoch to the streets of the great capital, with his unsophisticated ways, his fresh, alert mind, his keen powers of observation, rich, too, in a wealth of inner experiences, with his ardour for learning, his powers of assimilation and capacity for enthusiasm—above all, with that unconquerable strength, that versatility and perseverance, which in life's conflict never allowed him to succumb, stumble though he might. His interest in history and politics was then first really awakened; it was then that the gaps in his literary education were filled up, that he made the acquaintance of writers not only
of his own country, but of some of the great spirits of the ancient world and of foreign countries, notably of Italy, though in great part only at second-hand, through translations and adaptations. It was then that Shakespeare became conscious of his true vocation, and was introduced to that institution whose future was to be inseparably bound up with his own. Shakespeare did, no doubt, as tradition teaches us, begin at the very bottom of the ladder, and only gradually raised himself, as actor and dramatist, to a higher position. As early as 1592 he figures as the factotum of the company to which he belonged.

Of the many follies of which the Baconians are guilty the greatest is that they find it incongruous in a man of Shakespeare's position—an actor and dramatic manager—to have written works of such depth and grandeur. As if we could conceive of the greatest dramatist of all times without the most intimate
knowledge of the stage, such as can only be acquired by years of experience. And how inseparably united with the stage does Shakespeare show himself to be! how he loves to look at life through the scenes of the play, and, again, to see a play in the shifting scenes of life! How well he knows the capabilities of the actor and the requirements of the spectator! Why do we not find any thankless rôles in Shakespeare? Why do even his luxuriant diction and the intricate course of profound thought produce dramatic effect? Because he knows the stage; because, while writing his scenes, he not only beholds his personages living and breathing before him, hears their voices, sees their changing expressions, but also because these figures often appear before his mental vision with the familiar lineaments of particular actors.

That which stamps the works of Shakespeare as unique, that combination of deep and imperishable matter with the
most intense immediate effect, finds an explanation in the very fact that he belonged to the stage heart and soul, that he began his life’s calling by connecting himself with the theatre, while his thoughts and reflections soared far beyond the narrow horizon of the flimsy boards. And here, again, we find characteristic features in his biography which offer us a glimpse into his inner life. We see the poet rising between the year 1592 and the year 1599 to the pinnacle of his art, and, at the same time, conquering for himself an assured and generally acknowledged position in the world of art and of society. Then in the first decade of the seventeenth century he produced his most profound, his grandest works. But before he had reached this highest point we see him taking the first steps toward securing a peaceful home for his future years in his native town. Shakespeare had never while in London lost sight of his home; as soon as he was able he had made
his people share in the dawn of his good fortunes; doubtless, too, he paid them frequent visits of longer or shorter duration. But already in the year 1597 he began to buy land in Stratford, to prepare the plan which he never afterward abandoned. And about the year 1609,—it may be somewhat sooner or later,—the long-cherished idea was at length realized. The poet left the stage and the capital and returned to his quiet home, to wood and meadow, to wife and child and grandchild, to pass his remaining days in noble leisure and the enjoyment of tranquil contemplation. Thus was the close of his life joined to its beginning, the circuit made beautifully complete.

The difference between the life of Shakespeare and that of his dramatic contemporaries is as great as that between their works.

He was the only one among them who did not receive an academic education, who was reared in modest circumstances,
in intimate intercourse with nature, being indebted more to life than to school for his education. At an earlier age than any of the others Shakespeare had, apparently, shaped his future in a way that warranted no hopes of greatness. But that which would have dragged another to his ruin acted upon him only as a spur to turn a new leaf in life with undiminished courage. Shakespeare entered into closer relations with the life of the theatre in London than any of his rivals. But, far from ruining himself body and soul in this dissolute whirl, as did so many others, he grew to be a man, an artist and poet, spiritually and materially self-sufficient and independent. Prosperous, honoured, famous, he then abandoned the stage and the capital, to end his life as a country gentleman in his native home.
SECOND LECTURE

THE CHRONOLOGY
OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS
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OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS.

The very natural and justifiable desire to learn something of the real qualities and habits of a poet, to observe him in négligé, as it were, after having become acquainted with the ideal side of his nature—this desire can, in the case of Shakespeare, as we have already intimated in our previous lecture, be but very imperfectly satisfied. Of the outward life of Shakespeare we know very little; but we know so much the more of his inner life. Though the sources of what is generally termed the biography of a poet flow but in a very scanty stream, we find in his works ample pages of his spiritual life unrolled before us. We see in them not only how the poet cultivated and perfected himself in his art, not only how his
view of man and the world grew more and more profound: we see in them what problems occupied him at different periods, what ideas filled his mind, by what moods he was swayed; and we are enabled to infer, to a certain degree, the experiences which preceded and gave direction to his successive creations.

Here, of course, one enters upon a field in which it is difficult to avoid a certain exaggeration. One generally sways too much to one side or the other of the golden mean. A most remarkable conception of what was termed Shakespeare's objectivity was formerly very widespread in Germany, and is perhaps not yet quite extinct. This objectivity was said to consist in this: that the poet in his creations always pictured certain definite personalities—Ophelia, Brutus, Othello, Falstaff—never his own struggles and strivings. Some, indeed, went so far as to think that even Shakespeare's sonnets threw no certain light upon his experiences. This
opinion rests upon an obscured perception of the process of poetic creation. Does not the poet himself enter into the work, as he lives and has his being, with all the feelings that agitate or oppress his heart? And the greater the poet the more earnestly he regards his work, the more clearly does he reveal himself in his productions: the more perfectly, therefore, will his individuality be stamped upon them. Where, indeed, shall the poet seek the stuff wherewith to furnish forth his characters if not in his own breast? Can it, then, be a matter of indifference what feelings agitate him at any given time? Is it possible to suppose, for instance, that Falstaff, as he appears in the first part of "Henry IV.", and Thersites, in "Troilus and Cressida," were conceived at the same time, born under the same auspices?

Let us not be deceived by words: the most objective poet is at the same time the most subjective. For his objectiveness consists only in his own inner wealth
and in his complete abandonment to every effort he undertakes. This sacred earnestness is the pre-eminent characteristic of Shakespeare's art. He enters so deeply into the problem before him, and into the objects which are to make that problem clear to himself, that he becomes merged in his own characters, and it is only then that his characters grow tangible and instinct with life. Shakespeare puts his own feelings into harmony with the dispositions, the circumstances, the moods, of his creations, so that he is able to speak in their name—in their name, and with their feelings, but in his own speech, from his own experience, and from the inmost depths of his own heart.

From this standpoint we can more readily avoid the other extreme to which one may be led in interpreting the poet's works. There have been commentators who have proceeded upon the theory that Shakespeare must himself have lived through all the things which he depicts
with such matchless reality, or that, at least, they came under his immediate observation. We need not dwell upon this very singular view. To us it seems self-evident that the real relationship existing between Shakespeare's own experiences and his creations lies much less in the events or subjects of either than in the kind of emotions aroused by them. And it is further evident that we can gather far more valuable revelations regarding the spiritual life of the poet by a connected study of all his works than by a microscopic analysis of a single one of his dramas. The essential thing, therefore, is not to restrict ourselves and consider each one of Shakespeare's productions as an isolated organism, but to regard them all as members of a greater organism. Only in this way shall we be able to force even a particular creation to disclose its individuality.

Such an inquiry naturally presupposes a general knowledge of the order in
which Shakespeare produced his works. Without chronology history is a chaos; and how could Shakespeare’s writings appear to us as a great organism did we not know what place to assign to each?

But neither the poet himself nor any of his earlier editors has given us any intimation of the chronological sequence of his works. The determination of this sequence has long been and still remains a task for research. The learned Englishman Malone achieved some very meritorious work in this field about a hundred years ago. Since then the Germans have, on the whole, devoted more attention to the chronological inquiry than the English; and it is only in the last fifteen years, since the founding of the New English Shakespeare Society, that this study has, so to say, become the fashion in England.

Not upon all points do the scholars agree. In what matter, indeed, have they ever done so? Upon fundamental
points, however, competent scholars are in essential accord; and this should inspire in the layman a certain confidence in the method by which the results have been obtained. Allow me to initiate you to some extent into this method by briefly answering the following question: What materials have we at our command to enable us to determine the chronology of Shakespeare's plays? It is usual to begin with the distinction between internal and external evidence. I prefer to draw the distinction between relative and absolute chronology.

If I can prove that a certain work must be assigned to a certain year, or at least to a certain definite period of time, as, for instance, "Julius Cæsar" to the year 1601, then I have determined an absolute time. I have determined a relative time when I have established that a certain work must have been produced sooner or later than a certain other, or at about the same time. For example, "The Winter's
Tale” considerably later than “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”; “Hamlet” not long before “Othello.” To ascertain the relative time is the more important for us—it is what we are really seeking; but it is clear that the absolute time fully ascertained would include the relative. If we knew the exact year when each one of Shakespeare’s works was produced, there would naturally be nothing left to investigate regarding their sequence.

But, in reality, we are compelled to deal in a combination of both elements—absolute and relative time—in order to obtain a comprehensive view. Let me give an example: Suppose we know the years which limit Shakespeare’s productive period—let us assume from 1586 to 1613. If I know also that “Julius Cæsar” was written in 1601, I know, at the same time, that this piece belongs to the middle of Shakespeare’s creative period, when his art reached its climax. On the other hand, if the whole struc-
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ture of "The Comedy of Errors" shows me that this work must belong among the first creations of Shakespeare's muse, I am justified in concluding that it was written somewhere between 1580 and 1590.

It can be readily perceived that the means employed to determine absolute time are, as a rule, of a different kind from those which we use to ascertain relative time.

Here we have, first in order, the so-called external evidence.

A number of Shakespeare's works appeared separately during the poet's lifetime. We possess most of these old editions, which are variously dated.

More exact data are afforded us by the register of the "Company of Stationers," in which books that were to be printed had to be recorded, to protect the property rights of the publisher. Thus we have, in many cases at least, a very definite time limit before which a given work must have
been written. But sometimes circumstances are added which make it probable that the publication of a particular work occurred not long after its completion.

We gather similar information from the eulogistic or other reference to Shakespeare's writings by contemporary authors. Sometimes we have a distinct mention of the poet or his work, at other times an allusion more or less clear.

Particularly welcome are occasional dated accounts or even bare mentions of the representation of Shakespeare's plays, and the commonplace books and diaries of amateurs of the theatre or of a theatre director like Henslowe.

Precisely of the same service to us as an allusion to any of Shakespeare's works by his contemporaries is the use they made of them, in so far as it can be proved beyond doubt. It is, of course, here presumed that the contemporaneous mention or imitation is itself correctly dated.
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In the opposite direction, but producing the same effect as the instances just cited, is the perception that Shakespeare on his side has made use of the work of a contemporary, praises it, ridicules it, makes allusions to it. In certain cases this may occur in such a way as to create a positive impression that the contemporary work in question must have just become known when it gave rise to Shakespeare's words. This applies above all in the case of political or other events of the time, to which the poet now and then makes reference; as a rule, such an allusion was only comprehensible and effective while the impression created by the event in question was still a general and powerful one.

As to determining the relative chronology, that is, the sequence in which Shakespeare's works were produced, we have criteria at our command which, on the whole, are of a more subtle nature. somewhat less tangible, than those just indicated, but the investigation of which
will, for that very reason, be of greater interest to you.

Let us begin with a remark which sounds somewhat paradoxical: the poet makes use not only of others, but more particularly of himself, his own writings, and he likewise makes allusions in his later works to his earlier ones. This is not always done so palpably as to be at once apparent to a dull perception. When we see “The Merry Wives,” the Falstaff who appears in that piece necessarily reminds us of the character of the same name in “Henry IV.” and no one can doubt that the comedy of “The Merry Wives” presupposes “Henry IV.,” and that, therefore, it must have been produced later, but yet not much later. The matter is, however, not always so clear; indeed, the poet himself may be unconscious that one of his former creations is exercising a subtle influence upon his mind. The following appears to me to exemplify what I have in my mind:
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In one of those fateful monologues spoken by Macbeth before his awful deed—the one which begins with the words:

"If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly” —

he weighs the consequences of his intended crime:

"But in these cases
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips."

"He who for others lays a snare is caught in it himself,” is a familiar proverb. But why was it just the poisoned chalice that occurred to Shakespeare? The case, surely, is not a usual one that a person with the intention of killing another should poison a cup and then in some way be put in a position to drink it himself. It is hardly to be doubted that a scene of one of his own dramas passed before his mind. You remember the highly symbol-
ical concluding scene in "Hamlet" where the crime contrived by the king in conjunction with Laertes recoils upon its originators, and where Hamlet finally forces the king to drink the cup which the latter had prepared for him, and of which the queen through some mistake had already drunk. "Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, drink off this potion"; whereupon the dying Laertes says: "He is justly served; it is a poison tempered by himself." It is not probable that in making Macbeth speak those lines it was Shakespeare's object to allude to the catastrophe in "Hamlet." Involuntarily, however, justice presented itself to him in the image of that scene.

This example may serve for many. An event, a scene, becomes condensed, in course of time, into a single idea, an image. And it is this very factor, allow me to remark in passing, upon which the intellectual progress of mankind essentially depends. The thought toward.
which one generation has painfully struggled becomes the assured possession of the next—expressed without effort in a single word, and used as a basis for the discovery of new truths.

Another but kindred case is where the poet having made use of a certain motive in a former creation, recurs to it in a later work, conceiving it from a new point of view, presenting it under new circumstances. Call to mind, for instance, jealousy as portrayed in "Othello," "The Winter's Tale," and "Cymbeline," regicide pictured in "Julius Cæsar," "Hamlet," "Macbeth." In very many cases it will be possible to determine where a given motive was first employed, where it is repeated.

What has been said in regard to motives is applicable in its widest sense to situations, passions, problems, types of character. The infinite wealth and variety of Shakespeare's characters may be divided into groups, within which a
certain kinship is perceptible. We can find forerunners to nearly all the important figures of Shakespeare's maturest dramas in some sketch or preparatory study in a former work.

Everything, finally, points to the conclusion that we are enabled to show in Shakespeare's works more clearly than in the productions of many other great poets a twofold development. It is the growth, the perfection, of two things, which Goethe expresses when he says:

"Der Gehalt in deinem Busen
Und die Form in deinem Geist"

"the substance in thy heart, the form in thy mind."

If we look upon Shakespeare's creations as a whole, we see clearly how, on the one hand, his experience, his knowledge of men and the world, grow always richer, his intuition keener, and, on the other hand, how his style is constantly being perfected. Let us linger a moment over this second point. In studying a
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poet or an artist one must, of course, give some attention to his style; indeed without this it is difficult and often impossible to comprehend the true significance of his works.

When I speak of Shakespeare's style, I mean, in the broadest possible sense of the words, the form in which he expresses what he has to say,—the composition of his works, the structure of his scenes, no less than his expressions considered individually, his language sensuous and figurative, his verse with its melodious flow and its dramatic motion. If we attempted to characterize Shakespeare's style in a word, we should have to say: Abundance, directness, reality. Shakespeare's spiritual vision is at once most comprehensive and exceedingly keen. He distinguishes the details of a group, sees things never flat, but always plastic; he penetrates into their inmost depths. He has the most wonderful faculty of seeing at once the essential
thing and its attendant circumstances, and of reproducing the whole in his mind. And what he sees he will and must express, saying too much rather than too little. To this must be added that, although Shakespeare lays out the great groundwork of his creations with a firm hand, and after mature deliberation, he relies for the details absolutely upon the inspiration of the moment. He may not at once find the right word; often must he wrestle with the genius of language, wrestle as Jacob did with the Lord, saying: "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Now what is peculiar to Shakespeare is that if he has used a word or a figure which does not satisfy him, and then employs another, he does not efface the first, but leaves it undisturbed in its place, and allows himself to drift on upon the swelling current of his thoughts. We know from the collected edition of his plays, and learn also from Ben Jonson, that it was a fact
known to the actors who played with Shakespeare that he never used to cross out anything in his manuscripts; and we can readily believe this: his whole diction bears this stamp of natural growth. If he wants to say: Your father is no more, we have in “Macbeth”:

“The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood Is stopp’d; the very source of it is stopped.”

We see Shakespeare’s style constantly developing in all the directions we have indicated; yet this development is not a constant and unqualified advance toward a greater perfection in art. On the contrary, the case may be stated somewhat as follows:

From the style of his youthful productions, which are often more remarkable for their richness and beauty than for their spiritual significance, he rises to the crowning point of his power, where form and matter are most perfectly balanced. The spiritual substance then grows ever richer and mightier, and finally threatens
the sacrifice of form. More and more do the thoughts and strivings of the poet concentrate themselves upon the very heart of things, going far beyond the horizon of the stage. His thoughts flow in an ever-swifter stream, his expressions growing always more pithy, always harder to interpret; his verse loses the even flow, the harmonious sound, which formerly characterized it, but it becomes always more expressive, more stirring, more dramatic. While before the rhythm appeared upon the surface, it now lies deep below. The verses in themselves are often broken and disjointed. But through them all we seem to hear the magnificent rhythm, the sublime music, of Shakespeare's thought, almost the very pulse-beats of his heart.

A familiar example will illustrate my remarks concerning his increasing terseness of expression. I select two representations of the same subject, between which there is not even a long interval—probably only about six years; they are
not, therefore, characteristic either of his youthful or of his latest work. In the second part of "Henry IV." we hear the sick and weary king thus bewail his inability to sleep:

"How many thousand of my poorest subjects
Are at this hour asleep! O sleep, O gentle sleep,
Nature's soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down,
And steep my senses in forgetfulness?
Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,
And hush'd with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber,
Than in the perfumed chambers of the great,
Under the canopies of costly state,
And lull'd with sound of sweetest melody?
O thou dull god, why liest thou with the vile
In loathsome beds, and leav'st the kingly couch
A watch-case or a common 'larum-bell?
Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
In cradle of the rude imperious surge
And in the visitation of the winds,
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,
Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them
With deafening clamour in the slippery clouds,
That, with the hurly, death itself awakes?
Canst thou, O partial sleep, give thy repose
To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude,
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And in the calmest and most stillest night,
With all appliances and means to boot,
Deny it to a king? Then, happy low, lie down!
Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

And in “Macbeth” we hear the regicide
immediately after the deed:

“Methought I heard a voice cry ‘Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep,’ the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell’d sleave of care,
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,
Chief nourisher in life’s feast.”

No fewer images in the second extract
than the first; but there what picturesque
delineation! and here what compactness
and cogency! What experience of life
lies in this expression alone: “Sleep that
knits up the ravell’d sleave of care”!

We shall now endeavour to sketch in
outline the principal epochs in Shakes-
peare’s development, especially as regards
the spiritual life of the poet.

The first epoch extends from the year
1586 or 1587 to the year 1593, or
somewhat beyond that time. Its close
about coincides with the death of Marlowe, Shakespeare's great predecessor in tragedy. In the domain of tragedy—in all his grave dramas—Shakespeare's productions, particularly at the beginning, are strongly under Marlowe's influence; while in the domain of comedy, where he likewise had his predecessors, he appears to us thoroughly original from the first. It is at this period that Shakespeare gradually grows conscious of his own powers, while testing them in the various branches of his art. At the head of his series of works stands a tragedy, "Titus Andronicus," a drama bloody and full of horrors, which one would gladly miss from his Shakespeare, and whose authorship English criticism would, therefore, gladly deny the poet. But, nevertheless, it proves to be his creation. When the poet wrote "Titus Andronicus," he was evidently but dimly conscious of his own strength, and allowed himself to be influenced in his production more by outward
impulses, by the tendency to imitation, than by the powers and the needs of his own inner nature. It was, in its way, a premature effort. The young poet had, indeed, a correct foreshadowing of the development and expression of tragic passion; but tragedy seemed still to him a thing entirely strange and unfamiliar; he thought it demanded altogether peculiar characters, abnormal conditions, things of horror. His strong young nature had, it is true, tasted much of the earnestness and bitterness of life, but experience had not yet forced its tragic impress upon this burgher's son of Stratford.

He who wants to know what Shakespeare really was in the beginning of his dramatic career must study him in his earliest comedies. In them we have indeed the spontaneous utterances of his genius and his moods. In them is revealed a fresh and vigorously hopeful view of the world, a clear and already delicate conception of life; but the merry
scene is never without its serious background, such as experience, reflection, or presentiment trace upon the poet’s soul. At first sad recollections seem to cast their shadows like spring clouds about him. They are dissipated, and all is again bright. Yet new shadows appear upon the horizon. New experiences, new passions, await the poet, and in battling with them he grows conscious of his strength, and from ever-deeper sources of his spirit does he draw the treasures with which he invests the children of his fancy.

In the "Comedy of Errors" the interest centres more in the complication of the action than in the characters, just as the irresistibly comic elements in the play are evolved almost entirely from the situations. The poet’s sympathies seem most warmly enlisted in the doubtful fortunes of the family torn asunder by such strange circumstances, and finally reunited. In the presentation of the brother who seeks his brother and
mother, and who feels the danger of being himself lost in the strange, great city, lonely and forsaken in the wide world, we seem to hear an echo of the emotions Shakespeare himself must have experienced after his arrival in London: a drop in the ocean, in danger of losing himself in its depths. Admirably has the poet succeeded in depicting the somewhat faded, suspicious wife, who torments her husband with her jealousy. He ventures forward but timidly in his descriptions of love, yet the few love passages are delicately interpreted.

In "Love's Labour's Lost" the plot is reduced to a minimum; he unrolls before us a picture of character and manners in which the culture and the false culture of the time are represented with a great deal of gaiety, certain excrescences of humanistic learning and of puritanic overzeal are effectually ridiculed, and in which the inalienable rights of nature are defended against arbitrary precepts. The
situations are here produced essentially by the characters themselves, and it is from them in great part that the comic effects spring. The poet's wit and his humour, too, begin here powerfully to unfold. A youthful, joyous love of life forms the keynote of the comedy, a decided pleasure and interest in the things of this world, a naïve, kindly enjoyment of sport and jest; but all these upborne by lofty sentiments and a striving for the beautiful. We here find the first of Shakespeare's ideal female characters, and as the whole play teaches the omnipotence of love, so does the poet himself betray the secret of his youthfully vigorous, aspiring art when he puts this into the mouth of his favourite character:

"And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods
Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.
Never durst poet touch a pen to write
Until his ink were temper'd with Love's sighs;
O, then his lines would ravish savage ears,
And plant in tyrants mild humility."
A more serious note is struck in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," the first one of the really romantic comedies. Shakespeare here ventures to treat a deeper moral problem: faith and inconstancy in love and friendship; and he succeeds in producing the vacillating Proteus, the noble, manly, self-sacrificing Valentine, the queenly Sylvia, and, above all, Julia, the touching image of womanly grace and devotion. Yet there is an impression of immaturity left upon the mind, arising from the disproportion between the plot and its dénouement. The betrayer of friend and lover does not expiate his guilt; the faithful friend develops an unreasonable generosity, the consequences of which are frustrated only by a lucky accident. We feel in Shakespeare's "Sonnets" how this may be explained. He could himself be as unselfish, as passionately devoted in friendship, as Valentine. The last scene in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" gives us a glimpse
into Shakespeare's state of feelings at a time when his character was not yet perfectly formed, while his great heart overflowed with feelings of romantic, self-sacrificing devotion.

And then a notable theme offered itself to him—one which had already attracted many poets, and which came to his hands in quite a perfected shape. In the pathetic tale of Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare found tragedy without having to seek it; and he wrote his tragedy of youth, the lofty song of love, a consummate work of art. The transporting fire of youthful passion which it breathes, the glow of the springtide of life which irradiates the whole, lend it an undying charm. "I know but one tragedy which Love itself has helped to create," says our own Lessing, "and that is 'Romeo and Juliet.'" Love coming into a world filled with hate, inspiring and perfecting two noble young beings, but at the same time leading them to a tragic doom—such
is the old yet ever new burden of this tragedy.

Soon after, a marriage celebration incited the poet to present in the most daring symbols the mysterious power of love, in his play of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Here he gave his fancy the reins, and showed, as he created Titania and Oberon, and then, again, a Bottom, that nothing in the broad domain of poesy was to him impossible or unattainable. The moral maturity of the poet appears, however, most strikingly in the figure of Theseus, with his manly character, his delicacy of feeling, and his broad humanity.

In the meantime the dramatist had already turned his attention to the national domain of art—the dramas of the English kings.

In "Henry VI." he had presented the bloody Wars of the Roses—presented them in a patriotic spirit, with a strong intuitive grasp of history, with an art
which, though still imperfect, rises, as the work progresses, to a higher level. And now, at the end of this first epoch, he created his "Richard III.,” that demoniacal figure of a king who forms the close of the English Middle Ages: half hero, half demon, heir of the horrible civil wars between the houses of York and Lancaster, armed, like an embodied Fate, with the flaming sword of Justice, to avenge long heaped-up wrongs, and to make the innocent suffer for the sins of their fathers. Even this monstrous being has the poet made us understand, brought him nearer to us on the common ground of humanity. 

On the confines between his first and second periods Shakespeare rested from his dramatic labours in order to devote himself to epic-lyric poetry of the style of the court. The poems "Venus and Adonis” and "Lucrece," the first published in 1593, the second in 1594, belong to this category—both studies in a field in which he does not feel at home, but in
which he displays, nevertheless, a great deal of skill: "Venus and Adonis" breathing a glowing sensuality, "Lucrece" revealing the greatest moral and spiritual depth.

The second period of Shakespeare's activity extends to the beginning of the seventeenth century, and one of the characteristics which at once distinguishes it from the first is concentration. The poet here limits his dramatic productions to two kinds, comedy and historical plays, and he carries both of these forms of art to the highest point of their development.

The two works which stand at the head of this period—"The Taming of the Shrew" and "King John"—owe their elaboration only to Shakespeare, and not their rougher outlines—a proof of his growing appreciation of art, as well as of his increased estimation in the world of letters. Both works show in a striking manner how the poet, now in the plenitude of his youthful strength and manhood,