

VICTOR HUGO



WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE

ENGLISH

William Shakespeare

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PREFACE

The true title of this work should be, "Apropos to Shakespeare." The desire of introducing, as they say in England, before the public, the new translation of Shakespeare, has been the first motive of the author. The feeling which interests him so profoundly in the translator should not deprive him of the right to recommend the translation. However, his conscience has been solicited on the other part, and in a more binding way still, by the subject itself. In reference to Shakespeare all questions which touch art are presented to his mind. To treat these questions, is to explain the mission of art; to treat these questions, is to explain the duty of human thought toward man. Such an occasion for speaking truths imposes a duty, and he is not permitted, above all at such an epoch as ours, to evade it. The author has comprehended this. He has not hesitated to turn the complex questions of art and civilization on their several faces, multiplying the horizons every time that the perspective has displaced itself, and accepting every indication that the subject, in its rigorous necessity, has offered to him. This expansion of the point of view has given rise to this book.

Hauteville House, 1864.

PART I.

BOOK I. HIS LIFE.

CHAPTER I

Twelve years ago, in an island adjoining the coast of France, a house, with a melancholy aspect in every season, became particularly sombre because winter had commenced. The west wind, blowing then in full liberty, made thicker yet round this abode those coats of fog that November places between earthly life and the sun. Evening comes quickly in autumn; the smallness of the windows added to the shortness of the days, and deepened the sad twilight in which the house was wrapped.

The house, which had a terrace for a roof, was rectilinear, correct, square, newly whitewashed,—a true Methodist structure. Nothing is so glacial as that English whiteness; it seems to offer you the hospitality of snow. One dreams with a seared heart of the old huts of the French peasants, built of wood, cheerful and dark, surrounded with vines.

To the house was attached a garden of a quarter of an acre, on an inclined plane, surrounded with walls, cut in steps of granite, and with parapets, without trees, naked, where one could see more stones than leaves. This little uncultivated domain abounded in tufts of marigold, which flourish in autumn, and which the poor people of the country eat baked with the eel. The neighbouring seashore was hid from this garden by a rise in the ground; on this rise there was a field of short grass, where some nettles and a big hemlock flourished.

From the house you might perceive, on the right, in the horizon, on an elevation, and in a little wood, a tower, which passed for haunted; on the left you might see the dyke. The dyke was a row of big trunks of trees, leaning against a wall, planted upright in the sand, dried up, gaunt,

with knots, ankylosès, and patellas, which looked like a row of tibias. Revery, which readily accepts dreams for the sake of proposing enigmas, might ask to what men these tibias of three fathoms in height had belonged.

The south façade of the house looked on the garden, the north façade on a deserted road.

A corridor at the entrance to the ground-floor, a kitchen, a greenhouse, and a courtyard, with a little parlour, having a view of the lonely road, and a pretty large study, scarcely lighted; on the first and second floors, chambers, neat, cold, scantily furnished, newly repainted, with white blinds to the window,—such was this lodging, with the noise of the sea ever resounding.

This house, a heavy, right-angled white cube, chosen by those who inhabited it apparently by chance, perhaps by intentional destiny, had the form of a tomb.

Those who inhabited this abode were a group,—to speak more properly, a family; they were proscribed ones. The most aged was one of those men who, at a given moment, are *de trop* in their own country. He had come from an assembly; the others, who were young, had come from a prison. To have written, that is sufficient motive for bars. Where shall thought conduct except to a dungeon?

The prison had set them free into banishment.

The oldest, the father, had in that place all his own except his eldest daughter, who could not follow him. His son-in-law was with her. Often were they leaning round a table or seated on a bench, silent, grave, thinking, all of them, and without saying it, of those two absent ones.

Why was this group installed in this lodging, so little suitable? For reasons of haste, and from a desire to be as soon as possible anywhere but at the inn. Doubtless, also, because it was the first house to let that they had met with, and because proscribed people are not lucky.

This house,—which it is time to rehabilitate a little and console, for who knows if in its loneliness it is not sad at

what we have just said about it; a home has a soul,—this house was called Marine Terrace. The arrival was mournful; but after all, we declare, the stay in it was agreeable, and Marine Terrace has not left to those who then inhabited it anything but affectionate and dear remembrances. And what we say of that house, Marine Terrace, we say also of that island of Jersey. Places of suffering and trial end by having a kind of bitter sweetness which, later on, causes them to be regretted. They have a stern hospitality which pleases the conscience.

There had been, before them, other exiles in that island. This is not the time to speak of them. We mention only that the most ancient of whom tradition, a legend, perhaps, has kept the remembrance, was a Roman, Vipsanius Minator, who employed his exile in augmenting, for the benefit of his country's dominion, the Roman wall of which you may still see some parts, like bits of hillock, near a bay named, I think, St. Catherine's Bay. This Vipsanius Minator was a consular personage,—an old Roman so infatuated with Rome that he stood in the way of the Empire. Tiberius exiled him into this Cimmerian island, Cæsarea; according to others, to one of the Orkneys. Tiberius did more; not content with exile, he ordained oblivion. It was forbidden to the orators of the senate and the forum to pronounce the name of Vipsanius Minator. The orators of the forum and the senate, and history, have obeyed; about which Tiberius, of course, did not have a doubt. That arrogance in commanding, which proceeded so far as to give orders to men's thoughts, characterized certain ancient governments newly arrived at one of those firm situations where the greatest amount of crime produces the greatest amount of security.

Let us return to Marine Terrace.

One morning at the end of November, two of the inhabitants of the place, the father and the youngest of the sons, were seated in the lower parlour. They were silent,

like shipwrecked ones who meditate. Without, it rained; the wind blew. The house was as if deafened by the outer roaring. Both went on thinking, absorbed perhaps by this coincidence between a beginning of winter and a beginning of exile.

All at once the son raised his voice and asked the father,

—
"What thinkest thou of this exile?"

"That it will be long."

"How dost thou reckon to fill it up?"

The father answered,—

"I shall look on the ocean."

There was a silence. The father resumed the conversation:—

"And you?"

"I," said the son,— "I shall translate Shakespeare."

CHAPTER II.

There are men, oceans in reality.

These waves; this ebb and flow; this terrible go-and-come; this noise of every gust; these lights and shadows; these vegetations belonging to the gulf; this democracy of clouds in full hurricane; these eagles in the foam; these wonderful gatherings of stars reflected in one knows not what mysterious crowd by millions of luminous specks, heads confused with the innumerable; those grand errant lightnings which seem to watch; these huge sobs; these monsters glimpsed at; this roaring, disturbing these nights of darkness; these furies, these frenzies, these tempests, these rocks, these shipwrecks, these fleets crushing each other, these human thunders mixed with divine thunders, this blood in the abyss; then these graces, these sweetnesses, these *fêtes* these gay white veils, these fishing-boats, these songs in the uproar, these splendid

ports, this smoke of the earth, these towns in the horizon, this deep blue of water and sky, this useful sharpness, this bitterness which renders the universe wholesome, this rough salt without which all would putrefy, these angers and assuagings, this whole in one, this unexpected in the immutable, this vast marvel of monotony inexhaustibly varied, this level after that earthquake, these hells and these paradises of immensity eternally agitated, this infinite, this unfathomable,—all this can exist in one spirit; and then this spirit is called genius, and you have Æschylus, you have Isaiah, you have Juvenal, you have Dante, you have Michael Angelo, you have Shakespeare; and looking at these minds is the same thing as to look at the ocean.

CHAPTER III

William Shakespeare was born at Stratford-on-Avon, in a house under the tiles of which was concealed a profession of the Catholic faith beginning with these words, "I, John Shakespeare." John was the father of William. The house, situate in Henley Street, was humble; the chamber in which Shakespeare came into the world, wretched,—the walls whitewashed, the black rafters laid crosswise; at the farther end a tolerably large window with two small panes, where you may read to-day, among other names, that of Walter Scott. This poor lodging sheltered a decayed family. The father of William Shakespeare had been alderman; his grand-father had been bailiff. Shakespeare signifies "shake-lance;" the family had for coat-of-arms an arm holding a lance,—allusive arms, which were confirmed, they say, by Queen Elizabeth in 1595, and apparent, at the time we write, on Shakespeare's tomb in the church of Stratford-on-Avon. There is little agreement on the orthography of the word Shake-speare, as a family name; it is written variously,—Shakspere, Shakespere, Shakespeare, Shakspeare. In the eighteenth century it was habitually written Shakespear; the actual translator has adopted the spelling Shakespeare, as the only true method, and gives for it unanswerable reasons. The only objection that can be made is that Shakspeare is more easily pronounced than Shakespeare, that cutting off the *e* mute is perhaps useful, and that for their own sake, and in the interests of literary currency, posterity has, as regards surnames, a claim to euphony. It is evident, for example, that in French poetry the orthography Shakspeare is necessary. However, in

prose, and convinced by the translator, we write Shakespeare.

2. The Shakespeare family had some original draw-back, probably its Catholicism, which caused it to fall. A little after the birth of William, Alderman Shakespeare was no more than "butcher John." William Shakespeare made his *début* in a slaughter-house. At fifteen years of age, with sleeves tucked up, in his father's shambles, he killed the sheep and calves "pompously," says Aubrey. At eighteen he married. Between the days of the slaughter-house and the marriage he composed a quatrain. This quatrain, directed against the neighbouring villages, is his *début* in poetry. He there says that Hillbrough is illustrious for its ghosts and Bidford for its drunken fellows. He made this quatrain (being tipsy himself), in the open air, under an apple-tree still celebrated in the country in consequence of this Midsummer Night's Dream. In this night and in this dream where there were lads and lasses, in this drunken fit, and under this apple-tree, he discovered that Anne Hathaway was a pretty girl. The wedding followed. He espoused this Anne Hathaway, older than himself by eight years, had a daughter by her, then twins, boy and girl, and left her; and this wife, vanished from Shakespeare's life, appears again only in his will, where he leaves her the worst of his two beds, "having probably," says a biographer, "employed the best with others." Shakespeare, like La Fontaine, did but sip at a married life. His wife put aside, he was a schoolmaster, then clerk to an attorney, then a poacher. This poaching has been made use of since then to justify the statement that Shakespeare had been a thief. One day he was caught poaching in Sir Thomas Lucy's park. They threw him in prison; they commenced proceedings. These being spitefully followed up, he saved himself by flight to London. In order to gain a livelihood, he sought to take care of horses at the doors of the theatres. Plautus had turned a millstone. This business of taking care of horses at

the doors existed in London in the last century, and it formed then a kind of small band or corps that they called "Shakespeare's boys."

3. You may call London the black Babylon,—gloomy the day, magnificent the night To see London is a sensation; it is uproar under smoke. Mysterious analogy! The uproar is the smoke of noise. Paris is the capital of one side of humanity. London is the capital of the opposite side,—splendid and melancholy town! Life there is a tumult; the people there are an ant-hill; they are free, and yet dove-tailed. London is an orderly chaos. The London of the sixteenth century did not resemble the London of our day; but it was already a town without bounds. Cheapside was the high-street; St Paul's, which is a dome, was a spire. The plague was nearly as much at home in London as at Constantinople. It is true that there was not much difference between Henry VIII. and a sultan. Fires, also, as at Constantinople, were frequent in London, on account of the populous parts of the town being built entirely of wood. In the streets there was but one carriage,—the carriage of her Majesty. Not a cross-road where they did not cudgel some pickpocket with that drotsch-block which is still retained at Groningen for thrashing the wheat. Manners were rough, almost ferocious; a fine lady rose at six, and went to bed at nine. Lady Geraldine Kildare, to whom Lord Surrey inscribed verses, breakfasted off a pound of bacon and a pot of beer. Queens, the wives of Henry VIII., knitted mittens, and did not even object to their being of coarse red wool. In this London, the Duchess of Suffolk took care of her hen-house, and with her dress tucked up to her knees, threw corn to the ducks in the court below. To dine at midday was a late dinner. The pleasures of the upper classes were to go and play at "hot cockles" with my Lord Leicester. Anne Boleyn played there; she knelt down, with eyes bandaged, rehearsing this game, without knowing it, in the posture of the scaffold. This same Anne Boleyn,

destined to the throne, from whence she was to go farther, was perfectly dazzled when her mother bought her three linen chemises at sixpence the ell, and promised her for the Duke of Norfolk's ball a pair of new shoes worth five shillings.

4. Under Elizabeth, in spite of the anger of the Puritans, there were in London eight companies of comedians, those of Newington Butts, Earl Pembroke's company. Lord Strange's retainers, the Lord-Chamberlain's troop, the Lord High-Admiral's troop, the company of Blackfriars, the children of St. Paul's, and, in the first rank, the Showmen of Bears. Lord Southampton went to the play every evening. Nearly all the theatres were situate on the banks of the Thames, which increased the number of water-men. The play-rooms were of two kinds: some merely open tavern-yards, a trestle leaning against a wall, no ceiling, rows of benches placed on the ground, for boxes the windows of the tavern. The performance took place in the broad daylight and in the open air. The principal of those theatres was the Globe; the others, which were mostly closed play-rooms, lighted with lamps, were used at night. The most frequented was Blackfriars. The best actor of Lord Pembroke's troop was called Henslowe; the best actor at Blackfriars was Burbage. The Globe was situate on Bank Side. This is known by a document at Stationers' Hall, dated 26th November, 1607:—

"His Majesty's servants playing usually at the Globe on the Bank Side."

The scenery was simple. Two swords laid crosswise, sometimes two laths, signified a battle; a shirt over the coat signified a knight; the petticoat of one of the comedians' wives on a broom-handle, signified a palfrey caparisoned. A rich theatre, which made its inventory in 1598, possessed "the limbs of Moors, a dragon, a big horse with his legs, a cage, a rock, four Turks' heads, and that of the ancient Mahomet, a wheel for the siege of London, and a *bouche*

d'enfer." Another had "a sun, a target, the three feathers of the Prince of Wales, with the device *Ich Dien*, besides six devils, and the Pope on his mule." An actor besmeared with plaster and immovable, signified a wall; if he spread his fingers, it meant that the wall had crevices. A man laden with a fagot, followed by a dog, and carrying a lantern, meant the moon; his lantern represented the moonshine. People may laugh at this *mise en scène* of moonlight, become famous by the "Midsummer Night's Dream," without imagining that there is in it a gloomy anticipation of Dante.[1] The robing-room of these theatres, where the comedians dressed themselves pell-mell, was a corner separated from the stage by a rag of some kind stretched on a cord. The robing-room at Blackfriars was shut off by an ancient piece of tapestry which had belonged to one of the guilds, and represented a blacksmith's workshop; through the holes in this partition, flying in rags and tatters, the public saw the actors redden their cheeks with brick-dust, or make their mustaches with a cork burned at a tallow-candle. From time to time, through an occasional opening of the curtain, you might see a face grinning in a mask, peeping to see if the time for going on the stage had arrived, or the smooth chin of a comedian, who was to play the part of a woman. "Glabri histriones," said Plautus. These theatres were frequented by noblemen, scholars, soldiers, and sailors. They acted there the tragedy of "Lord Buckhurst," "Gorbuduc," or "Ferrex and Porrex," "Mother Bombic," by Lilly, in which the phip-hip of sparrows was heard; "The Libertine," an imitation of the "Convivado de Piedra," which had a European fame; "Felix and Philomena," a fashionable comedy, performed for the first time at Greenwich, before "Queen Bess;" "Promos and Cassandra," a comedy dedicated by the author, George Whetstone, to William Fleetwood, recorder of London; "Tamerlane," and the "Jew of Malta," by Christopher Marlowe; farces and pieces by Robert Greene, George

Peele, Thomas Lodge, and Thomas Kid; and lastly, mediæval comedies. For just as France has her "L'Avocat Pathelin," so England has her "Gossip Gurton's Needle." While the actors gesticulated and ranted, the noblemen and officers, with their plumes and band of gold lace, standing or squatting on the stage, turning their backs, haughty and easy in the midst of the constrained comedians, laughed, shouted, played at cards, threw them at each other's heads, or played at post and pair; and below in the shade, on the pavement, among pots of beer and pipes, you might see the "stinkards" (the mob). It was by that very theatre that Shakespeare entered on the drama. From being the guardian of horses, he became the shepherd of men.

5. Such was the theatre in London about the year 1580, under "the great queen." It was not much less wretched, a century later, at Paris, under "the great king;" and Molière, at his debut, had, like Shakespeare, to make shift with rather miserable playhouses. There is in the archives of the Comédie Française an unpublished manuscript of four hundred pages, bound in parchment and tied with a band of white leather. It is the diary of Lagrange, a comrade of Molière. Lagrange describes also the theatre where Molière's company played by order of Mr. Rateban, superintendent of the king's buildings: "Three beams, the frames rotten and shored up, and half the room roofless and in ruins." In another place, by date Sunday, 15th March, 1671, he says, "The company have resolved to make a large ceiling over the whole room, which, up to the said date (15th) has not been covered, save by a large blue cloth suspended by cords." As for lighting and heating this room, particularly on the occasion of the extraordinary expenses necessary for the performance of "Psyche," which was by Molière and Corneille, we read: "Candles, thirty livres; door-keeper, for wood, three livres." This was the style of playhouse which "the great king" placed at the disposal of Molière. These bounties to literature did not impoverish

Louis XIV. so much as to deprive him of the pleasure of giving, for example, at one and the same time, two hundred thousand livres to Lavardin, and the same to D'Epernon; two hundred thousand livres, besides the regiment of France, to the Count de Médauid; four hundred thousand livres to the Bishop of Noyon, because this bishop was Clermont-Tonnerre, a family that had two patents of count and peer of France,—one for Clermont and one for Tonnerre; five hundred thousand livres to the Duke of Vivonne; and seven hundred thousand livres to the Duke of Quintin-Lorges, besides eight hundred thousand livres to Monseigneur Clement de Bavière, Prince-Bishop of Liége. Let us add that he gave a thousand livres pension to Molière. We find in Lagrange's journal in the month of April, 1663, this remark:—

"About the same time, M. de Molière received, as a great wit, a pension from the king, and has been placed on the civil list for the sum of a thousand livres."

Later, when Molière was dead and interred at St. Joseph, "Chapel of ease to the parish of St. Eustache," the king pushed patronage so far as to permit his tomb to be "raised a foot out of the ground."

6. Shakespeare, as we see, remained as an outsider a long time on the threshold of theatrical life. At length he entered. He passed the door and got behind the scenes. He succeeded in becoming call-boy, vulgarly, a "barker." About 1586 Shakespeare was barking with Greene at Blackfriars. In 1587 he gained a step. In the piece called "The Giant Agrapardo, King of Nubia, worse than his late brother, Angulafer," Shakespeare was intrusted with carrying the turban to the giant. Then from a supernumerary he became actor, thanks to Burbage, to whom, by an interlineation in his will, he left thirty-six shillings, to buy a gold ring. He was the friend of Condell and Hemynge,—his comrades whilst alive, his publishers after his death. He was handsome; he had a high forehead, a brown beard, a mild

countenance, a sweet mouth, a deep look. He took delight in reading Montaigne, translated by Florio. He frequented the Apollo tavern, where he would see and keep company with two *habitués* of his theatre,—Decker, author of the "Gull's Hornbook," in which a chapter is specially devoted to "the way a man of fashion ought to behave at the play," and Dr. Symon Forman, who has left a manuscript journal, containing reports of the first representations of the "Merchant of Venice," and "A Winter's Tale." He used to meet Sir Walter Raleigh at the Siren Club. Somewhere about that time, Maturin Régnier met Philippe de Béthune at la Pomme de Pin. The great lords and fine gentlemen of the day were rather prone to lend their names in order to start new taverns. At Paris the Viscount de Montauban, who was a Créqui, founded Le Tripot des Onze Mille Diabes. At Madrid, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, the unfortunate admiral of the "Invincible," founded the Puño-en-rostro, and in London Sir Walter Raleigh founded the Siren. There you found drunkenness and wit.

7. In 1589, when James VI. of Scotland, looking to the throne of England, paid his respects to Elizabeth, who, two years before, on the 8th February, 1587, had beheaded Mary Stuart, mother of this James, Shakespeare composed his first drama, "Pericles." In 1591, while the Catholic king was dreaming, after a scheme of the Marquis d'Astorga, of a second Armada, more lucky than the first, inasmuch as it never put to sea, he composed "Henry VI." In 1593, when the Jesuits obtained from the Pope express permission to paint "the pains and torments of hell," on the walls of "the chamber of meditation" of Clermont College, where they often shut up a poor youth, who the year after, became famous under the name of Jean Châtel, he composed "Taming the Shrew." In 1594, when, looking daggers at each other and ready for battle, the King of Spain, the Queen of England, and even the King of France, all three said "my good city of Paris," he continued and completed

"Henry VI." In 1595, while Clement VIII. at Rome was solemnly aiming a blow at Henry IV. by laying his crosier on the backs of Cardinals du Perron and d'Ossat, he wrote "Timon of Athens." In 1596, the year when Elizabeth published an edict against the long points of bucklers, and when Philip II. drove from his presence a woman who laughed when blowing her nose, he composed "Macbeth." In 1597, when this same Philip II. said to the Duke of Alba, "You deserve the axe," not because the Duke of Alba had put the Low Countries to fire and sword, but because he had entered into the king's presence without being announced, he composed "Cymbeline" and "Richard III." In 1598, when the Earl of Essex ravaged Ireland, bearing on his headdress the glove of the virgin Queen Elizabeth, he composed the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," "King John," "Love's Labour's Lost," "The Comedy of Errors," "All's Well that Ends Well," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and "The Merchant of Venice." In 1599, when the Privy Council, at her Majesty's request, deliberated on the proposal to put Dr. Hayward to the rack for having stolen some of the ideas of Tacitus, he composed "Romeo and Juliet." In 1600, while the Emperor Rudolph was waging war against his rebel brother and sentencing his son, murderer of a woman, to be bled to death, he composed "As You Like It," "Henry IV.," "Henry V.," and "Much Ado about Nothing." In 1601, when Bacon published the eulogy on the execution of the Earl of Essex, just as Leibnitz, eighty years afterward, was to find out good reasons for the murder of Monaldeschi, with this difference however, that Monaldeschi was nothing to Leibnitz, and that Essex had been the benefactor of Bacon, he composed "Twelfth Night; or, What you Will." In 1602, while in obedience to the Pope, the King of France, styled "Renard de Béarn" by Cardinal Aldobrandini, was counting his beads every day, reciting the litanies on Wednesday, and the rosary of the Virgin Mary on Saturday, while fifteen cardinals, assisted by the heads of the chapter, opened the

discussion on Molinism at Rome, and while the Holy See, at the request of the crown of Spain, "was saving Christianity and the world" by the institution of the congregation "de Auxiliis," he composed "Othello." In 1603, when the death of Elizabeth made Henry IV. say, "She was a virgin just as I am a Catholic," he composed "Hamlet." In 1604, while Philip III. was losing his last footing in the Low Countries, he wrote "Julius Cæsar" and "Measure for Measure." In 1606, at the time when James I. of England, the former James VI. of Scotland, wrote against Bellarmine the "Tortura Forti" and faithless to Carr began to look sweetly on Villiers, who was afterward to honour him with the title of "Your Filthiness," he composed "Coriolanus." In 1607, when the University of York received the little Prince of Wales as doctor, according to the account of Father St. Romuald "with all the ceremonies and the usual fur gowns," he wrote "King Lear." In 1609, when the magistracy of France, placing the scaffold at the disposition of the king, gave upon trust a *carte blanche* for the sentence of the Prince de Condé "to such punishment as it might please his Majesty to order," Shakespeare composed "Troilus and Cressida." In 1610, when Ravallac assassinated Henry IV. by the dagger, and the French parliament assassinated Ravallac by the process of quartering his body, Shakespeare composed "Antony and Cleopatra." In 1611, while the Moors, driven out by Philip III., and in the pangs of death, were crawling out of Spain, he wrote the "Winter's Tale," "Henry VIII.," and "The Tempest."

8. He used to write on flying sheets, like nearly all poets. Malherbe and Boileau are almost the only ones who have written on quires of paper. Racan said to Mlle. de Gournay:

—
"I have seen this morning M. de Malherbe sewing with coarse gray thread a bundle of white papers, on which will soon appear some sonnets."

Each of Shakespeare's dramas, composed according to the wants of his company, was in all probability learned and rehearsed in haste by the actors from the original itself, as they had not time to copy it; hence, in his case as in Molière's, the mislaying of manuscripts which were cut into parts. Few or no entry-books in those almost itinerant theatres; no coincidence between the time of representation and the publication of the plays; sometimes not even a printed copy,—the stage the sole publication. When the pieces by chance are printed, they bear titles which bewilder us. The second part of Henry VI. is entitled "The First Part of the War between York and Lancaster." The third part is called "The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York." All this enables us to understand why so much obscurity rests on the dates when Shakespeare composed his dramas, and why it is difficult to fix them with precision. The dates that we have just given, and which are here brought together for the first time, are pretty nearly certain; notwithstanding, some doubt still exists as to the years when the following were written, or indeed played,—"Timon of Athens," "Cymbeline," "Julius Cæsar," "Antony and Cleopatra," "Coriolanus," and "Macbeth." Here and there we meet with barren years; others there are of which the fertility seems excessive. It is, for instance, on a simple note by Meres, author of the "Treasure of Wit," that we are compelled to attribute to the year 1598 the creation of six pieces,—"The Two Gentlemen of Verona," the "Comedy of Errors," "King John," "Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Merchant of Venice," and "All's Well that Ends Well," which Meres calls "Love's Labour Gained." The date of "Henry VI." is fixed, for the first part at least, by an allusion which Nash makes to this play in "Pierce Penniless." The year 1604 is given as that of "Measure for Measure," inasmuch as this piece had been represented on Stephen's Day of that year, of which Hemynge makes a special note; and the year 1611 for "Henry VIII." inasmuch as "Henry VIII." was

played at the time of the fire of the Globe Theatre. Various circumstances—a disagreement with his company, a whim of the lord-chamberlain—sometimes compelled Shakespeare to change from one theatre to another. "Taming the Shrew" was played for the first time in 1593, at Henslowe's theatre; "Twelfth Night" in 1601, at Middle Temple Hall; "Othello" in 1602, at Harefield Castle. "King Lear" was played at Whitehall during Christmas (1607) before James I. Burbage created the part of Lear. Lord Southampton, recently set free from the Tower of London, was present at this performance. This Lord Southampton was an old *habitué* of Blackfriars; and Shakespeare, in 1589, had dedicated the poem of "Adonis" to him. Adonis was the fashion at that time; twenty-five years after Shakespeare, the Chevalier Marini wrote a poem on Adonis which he dedicated to Louis XIII.

9. In 1597 Shakespeare lost his son, who has left as his only trace on earth one line in the death-register of the parish of Stratford-on-Avon: "1597. August 17. Hamnet. Filius William Shakespeare." On the 6th September, 1601, his father, John Shakespeare, died. He was now the head of his company of comedians. James I. had given him, in 1607, the lease of Blackfriars, and afterward that of the Globe. In 1613 Madame Elizabeth, daughter of James, and the Elector-palatine, King of Bohemia, whose statue may be seen in the ivy at the angle of a big tower at Heidelberg, came to the Globe to see the "Tempest" performed. These royal attendances did not save him from the censure of the lord-chamberlain. A certain interdict weighed on his pieces, the representation of which was tolerated, and the printing now and then forbidden. On the second volume of the register at Stationers' Hall you may read to-day on the margin of the title of three pieces, "As You Like It," "Henry V.," "Much Ado about Nothing," the words "4 Augt. to suspend." The motives for these interdictions escape us. Shakespeare was able, for instance without raising

objection, to place on the stage his former poaching adventure and make Sir Thomas Lucy a buffoon (Judge Shallow), show the public Falstaff killing the buck and belabouring Shallow's people, and push the likeness so far as to give to Shallow the arms of Sir Thomas Lucy,—an outrageous piece of Aristophanism by a man who did not know Aristophanes. Falstaff, in Shakespeare's manuscripts, was written Falstaffe. In the mean time his circumstances had improved, as later they did with Molière. Toward the end of the century he was rich enough for a certain Ryc-Quiney to ask, on the 8th October, 1598, his assistance in a letter which bears the inscription: "To my amiable friend and countryman William Shakespeare." He refused the assistance, as it appears, and returned the letter, found since among Fletcher's papers, and on the reverse of which this same Ryc-Quiney had written: "*Histrion! Mima!*" He loved Stratford-on-Avon, where he was born, where his father had died, where his son was buried. He there purchased or built a house, which he christened "New Place." We say, bought or built a house, for he bought it, according to Whiterill, and he built it according to Forbes, and on this point Forbes disputes with Whiterill. These cavils of the learned about trifles are not worth being searched into, particularly when we see Father Hardouin, for instance, completely upset a whole passage of Pliny by replacing *nos pridem* by *non pridem*.

10. Shakespeare went from time to time to pass some days at New Place. In these short journeys he met half-way Oxford, and at Oxford the Crown Hotel, and in the hotel the hostess, a beautiful, intelligent creature, wife of the worthy innkeeper, Davenant. In 1606 Mrs. Davenant was brought to bed of a son whom they named William, and in 1644 Sir William Davenant, created knight by Charles I., wrote to Lord Rochester: "Know this, which does honour to my mother, I am the son of Shakespeare," thus allying himself to Shakespeare in the same way that in our days M. Lucas

Montigny claimed relationship with Mirabeau. Shakespeare had married off his two daughters,—Susan to a doctor, Judith to a merchant; Susan had wit, Judith knew not how to read or write, and signed her name with a cross. In 1613 it happened that Shakespeare, having come to Stratford-on-Avon, had no further desire to return to London. Perhaps he was in difficulties. He had just been compelled to mortgage his house. The contract deed of this mortgage, dated 11th March, 1613, and indorsed with Shakespeare's signature, was up to the last century in the hands of an attorney, who gave it to Garrick, who lost it. Garrick lost likewise (it is Miss Violetti, his wife, who tells the story), Forbes's manuscript, with his letters in Latin. From 1613 Shakespeare remained at his house at New Place, occupied with his garden, forgetting his plays, wrapped up in his flowers. He planted in this garden of New Place the first mulberry-tree that was grown at Stratford, just as Queen Elizabeth wore, in 1561, the first silk stockings seen in England. On the 25th March, 1616, feeling ill, he made his will. His will, dictated by him, is written on three pages; he signed each of them; his hand trembled. On the first page he signed only his Christian name, "William;" on the second, "Willm. Shaspr.;" on the third, "William Shasp." On the 23d April, he died. He had reached that day exactly fifty-two years, being born on the 23d April, 1564. On that same day, 23d April, 1616, died Cervantes, a genius of like growth. When Shakespeare died, Milton was eight years, Corneille ten years of age; Charles I. and Cromwell were two youths, the one sixteen, the other seventeen years old.

[1] See *L'Inferno*, Chant xx.

CHAPTER IV.

Shakespeare's life was greatly embittered. He lived perpetually slighted; he states it himself. Posterity may read this to-day in his own verses:—

"Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdu'd.
Pity me, then,
Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink
Potions of eysel."[1]

"Your love and pity doth th' impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamp'd upon my brow."[2]

"Nor thou with public kindness honour me,
Unless thou take that honour from thy name."[3]

"Or on my frailty why are frailer spies."[4]

Shakespeare had permanently near him one envious person, Ben Jonson,—an indifferent comic poet, whose *début* he assisted. Shakespeare was thirty-nine when Elizabeth died. This queen had not paid attention to him; she managed to reign forty-four years without seeing that Shakespeare was there. She is not the least qualified, historically, to be called the "protectress of arts and letters," etc. The historians of the old school gave these certificates to all princes, whether they knew how to read or not.

Shakespeare, persecuted like Molière at a later date, sought, as Molière, to lean on the master. Shakespeare and Molière would in our days have had a loftier spirit. The master, it was Elizabeth,—"King Elizabeth," as the English called her. Shakespeare glorified Elizabeth: he called her the "Virgin Star," "Star of the West," and "Diana,"—a name of a goddess which pleased the queen,—but in vain. The queen took no notice of it; less sensitive to the praises in which Shakespeare called her Diana than to the insults of Scipio Gentilis, who, taking the pretensions of Elizabeth on

the bad side, called her "Hecate," and applied to her the ancient triple curse, "Mormo! Bombo! Gorgo!" As for James I., whom Henry IV. called Master James, he gave, as we have seen, the lease of the Globe to Shakespeare, but he willingly forbade the publication of his pieces. Some contemporaries, Dr. Symon Forman among others, so far took notice of Shakespeare as to make a note of the occupation of an evening passed at the performance of the "Merchant of Venice!" That was all which he knew of glory. Shakespeare, once dead, entered into oblivion.

From 1640 to 1660 the Puritans abolished art, and shut up the playhouses. All theatricals were under a funeral shroud. With Charles II. the drama revived without Shakespeare. The false taste of Louis XIV. had invaded England. Charles II. belonged rather to Versailles than London. He had as mistress a French girl, the Duchess of Portsmouth, and as an intimate friend the privy purse of the King of France. Clifford, his favourite, who never entered the parliament-house without spitting, said: "It is better for my master to be viceroy under a great monarch like Louis XIV. than the slave of five hundred insolent English subjects." These were not the days of the republic, —the time when Cromwell took the title of "Protector of England and France," and forced this same Louis XIV. to accept the title of "King of the French."

Under this restoration of the Stuarts, Shakespeare completed his eclipse. He was so thoroughly dead that Davenant, possibly his son, re-composed his pieces. There was no longer any "Macbeth" but the "Macbeth" of Davenant. Dryden speaks of Shakespeare on one occasion in order to say that he is "out of date." Lord Shaftesbury calls him "a wit out of fashion." Dryden and Shaftesbury were two oracles. Dryden, a converted Catholic, had two sons, ushers in the Chamber of Clément XI., made tragedies worth putting into Latin verse, as Atterbury's hexameters prove; and he was the servant of that James II.

who, before being king on his own account, had asked of his brother, Charles II., "Why don't you hang Milton?" The Earl of Shaftesbury, a friend of Locke, was the man who wrote an "Essay on Sprightliness in Important Conversations," and who, by the manner in which Chancellor Hyde helped his daughter to the wing of a chicken, divined that she was secretly married to the Duke of York.

These two men having condemned Shakespeare, the oracle had spoken. England, a country more obedient to conventional opinion than is generally believed, forgot Shakespeare. Some purchaser pulled down his house, New Place. A Rev. Dr. Cartrell cut down and burned his mulberry-tree. At the commencement of the eighteenth century the eclipse was total. In 1707, one called Nahum Tate published a "King Lear," warning his readers "that he had borrowed the idea of it from a play which he had read by chance,—the work of some nameless author." This "nameless author" was Shakespeare.

[1] Sonnet 111.

[2] Sonnet 112.

[3] Sonnet 36.

[4] Sonnet 121.

CHAPTER V.

In 1728 Voltaire imported from England to France the name of Will Shakespeare. Only in place of Will, he pronounced it *Gilles*.

Jeering began in France, and oblivion continued in England. What the Irishman Nahum Tate had done for "King Lear," others did for other pieces. "All's Well that Ends Well" had successively two arrangers,—Pilon for the

Haymarket, and Kemble for Drury Lane. Shakespeare existed no more, and counted no more. "Much Ado about Nothing" served likewise as a rough draft twice,—for Davenant in 1673, for James Miller in 1737. "Cymbeline" was recast four times: under James II., at the Theatre Royal, by Thomas Dursey; in 1695 by Charles Marsh; in 1759 by W. Hawkins; in 1761 by Garrick. "Coriolanus" was recast four times: in 1682, for the Theatre Royal, by Tate; in 1720, for Drury Lane, by John Dennis; in 1755, for Covent Garden, by Thomas Sheridan; in 1801, for Drury Lane, by Kemble. "Timon of Athens" was recast four times: at the Duke's Theatre, in 1678, by Shadwell; in 1768, at the Theatre of Richmond Green, by James Love; in 1771, at Drury Lane, by Cumberland; in 1786, at Covent Garden, by Hull.

In the eighteenth century the persistent raillery of Voltaire ended in producing in England a certain waking up. Garrick, while correcting Shakespeare, played him, and acknowledged that it was Shakespeare that he played. They reprinted him at Glasgow. An imbecile, Malone, made commentaries on his plays, and as a logical sequence, whitewashed his tomb. There was on this tomb a little bust, of a doubtful resemblance, and moderate as a work of art; but, what made it a subject of reverence, contemporaneous with Shakespeare. It is after this bust that all the portraits of Shakespeare have been made that we now see. The bust was whitewashed. Malone, critic and whitewasher of Shakespeare, spread a coat of plaster on his face, of idiotic nonsense on his work.