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SHAKESPEARE'S VALUE TO THE MINISTER OF TODAY.

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The three hundredth anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare has called forth a universal revival of interest in the personality and writings of the world's greatest poet.

By slow degrees, and not without opposition, he has climbed the heights of Parnassus, where now his throne is established above those of any of the glorious company of the Immortals.

This supremacy is not due to perfection of attainment in any or in all the standards of literary art. The noble three of Ancient Greece surpassed him in the perfection of dramatic form; Dante soared far beyond him in the realm of imagination; Goethe and Browning were greater masters in the sphere of philosophy; Ibsen and Balzac gave a more realistic representation of the social problems of their age. But Shakespeare combined all these elements more completely and in addition revealed more perfectly the souls of real men and women and the beautiful world—God-made and man-made—in which they lived and moved and had their being. He delineates the reality of humanity, but sets down nought in malice. Man's passion and pride; his fraud and deceit; his nobility and baseness; his achievement and failure, are interpreted in

the spirit of the true optimist. Like the prophets of The Book, he sees clearly the curse of the race, but ever beyond and above, the eternal purpose of the redeeming God towards His fallen but not hopeless spiritual creatures—that their destiny is good.

The world is full of infinite human variety. The poet's boundless laughter and tears; the smiles and the sighs; the hopes and despair; the triumph and defeat, are expressed with equal felicity, whether in comedy, tragedy, romance, drama or sonnet.

Whether, therefore, it be for evil or for good, Shakespeare has a message of ever increasing importance that is being read in all the languages of earth. The man appointed to be the teacher and admonisher of the people—to guide them in the ways of moral and spiritual truth, cannot ignore that message. To know that message is an imperative element, therefore, of the minister's equipment for efficient service next to knowledge of the Bible and the literature that has grown up around it. The dramas of this prince of human interpreters should become the familiar acquaintance of the preacher's study.

READING SHAKESPEARE FOR PLEASURE.

The Twentieth Century minister is a busy man. He must be a student first of all. He must know books as well as men. Morning, noon and night he must be alert in his search for homiletical material. It is little wonder, therefore, that eventually he ceases to give his mind and heart a chance to find delight in the world of nature and of art. Now poetry, like music and painting, is an art intended primarily to give pleasure. It is time well-spent just to read Shakespeare for the pure pleasure of reading. Thus the poems and dramas should be read from beginning to end without regard to study of any kind. All attempt to consider them as a source of illustration or a means of culture may be ignored. Let the poet speak as friend

speaks to friend. Let him have his chance. This is the only way to enjoy truth and beauty without prejudice. Alas, that the age has become so scholastic that even the book of books is rarely ever read in this way by its interpreters!

And what a world of delightful experiences is to be found in this master musician of the glorious English language! How marvelous is the melody of his verse, from the lilting rhyme and rippling rythm of "A Mid-Summer Night's Dream" to the sonorous organ tones of Hamlet and Othello! What beautiful imagery in simile and metaphor! How the felicitous expressions of wit delight, and the profound pathos of suffering move the heart to pity! How the bugle call of conflict rouses the soul to desire a share in all the high challenge of heroic endeavor! Then, too, Shakespeare's world of men and women is so well worth knowing. To be introduced into the society of such delightful wits as Petruchio, Benedict, Faulconbridge, Mercutio, Beatrice and Rosalind is to share a higher privilege than that offered by the Parisian salons at their best. The broader humor of Bottom, Sly, Touchstone, Autolycus, Falstaff, Maria and the Merry Wives will do much to drive away the melancholy of many a discouraged hour, while to be merely a door-keeper of the hall where walk such noble creatures as Hamlet, Othello, Henry V, Antonio, Portia, Hermione and Imogen is to be indeed one of fortune's favorites.

STUDYING SHAKESPEARE FOR SELF-CULTURE.

The minister must be a man of culture in order to become a fruitful preacher. As soils are enriched and made productive by the introduction of certain outside elements before they become capable of yielding large returns from the implanted seed, so the preacher's efficiency is enhanced by the processes of intellectual culture due to the assimilation of the finer thoughts of the masters of the

representative arts. These can never take the place of that divinely "implanted word which is able to save men's souls"; they do aid, however, in making the heavenly seed more fruitful, else why read books at all, or set up schools?

The study of Shakespeare from the stage is of doubtful value. There the story of the play is unduly prominent. With the single exception of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" he invented no plots. He was the prince of borrowers, but by an amazing alchemy he transformed the baser metal of the original story into the pure gold of wisdom and beauty. Then, too, the personality and art of the actor overshadows the real charm of the poet's genius. One goes away from a performance of Hamlet or Othello saying what a great actor is Booth or Salvini and not what a great poet is Shakespeare.

First as a means of culture is the study of the schools—that of investigation, analysis, comparison, etc.—which has to do with grammatical and rhetorical laws, sources, versification, imagery, description and dramatic structure. This is difficult and for the best results requires a trained instructor. Nevertheless, much can be accomplished with only a judicious use of good books as guides and the help obtainable by means of study clubs like the Shakespeare Seven of the Seminary, to which the writer owes an inexpressible debt of gratitude. In the very beginning of such a study one must beware of that cheap criticism of the mechanical school of poetry that condemns Shakespeare's dramatic art for lack of conformity to certain arbitrary laws of form. There are defects to be sure. Not one of the plays was edited or published by him, many of the earlier and a few of the later were not altogether his own work, but apart from this fact he was a law unto himself. He created his own standards. As Ibsen said of Peer Gynt, only more justly, could he say of *The Tempest*, "If it is not poetry by the rule of the pedant then it will be by a higher rule because I make it so."

Matter is always more to him than form; a living clown than a marble god. It is folly to shut one's eyes to the lovely gardens of fragrant flowers; the cool, deep forests; the fair cities glowing with the pageantry of the eternally human, because, forsooth, the magic mirror through which the august magician bids us gaze is not framed in exact accord with some fictitious standard of proportion.

Another method of study as a means of culture deals with the growth of the poet's mind and art. This concerns itself with such historical and biographical material as can be found by internal and external evidence. It used to be said that Shakespeare's personality was so lost in his writings that all effort to find the author in his works was unavailing. This is far from true, however. Under the guidance of such writers as Sidney Lee, Dowden, Swinburne and others, much will be found of great interest concerning his family, birthplace, education, early marriage, life in London, return to Stratford, etc., beside the wealth of historical information relating to the glorious world of literature, science, discovery and chivalry of which he was so potently a part, and how these all influenced the development of his character and the progress and expansion of his art. Of course there is danger of going to the opposite extreme and of finding more than is really there. It seems quite clear, however, that the productive cycle of his writings can be divided into three distinct periods each marked by clearly defined characteristics, and the entire cycle demonstrating the fact that the greatest literary genius of our race achieved greatness only through patient toil and heroic wrestlings against the inner and outer forces of evil.

The first period begins in 1591, with *Love's Labor Lost* and closes with *Twelfth Night* in 1600. Twenty-two plays were produced during these nine years. Five years before, Shakespeare, then, a youth unknown to fortune and to fame, had entered London. Those were the days when knighthood was in full flower and the Court of

Elizabeth was the center not only of all that was noble in arms, but also of the more enduring arts of culture and progress. There was hard work to be done by the young lad from the country—menial service at first, and afterward the hack-work of a beginner in dramatic art. What matter, he was young and patient and brave; there was a wife and child back home; the song of beauty and achievement was ever singing in his soul and bubbling from his lips, for life to him was one long, beautiful springtime of joy and gladness and laughter. All this is reflected in the delightful comedies of the time.

The middle period is that of the great tragedies. It begins with *Julius Caesar* in 1601 and ends with *Coriolanus* in 1609, and includes, besides these two, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, *Measure for Measure* and the *Sonnets*.

The poet has now reached the maturity of life and genius. He has mastered his art but not himself. He has become famous and prosperous financially. He has made many friends, but something sinister seems to have come upon him. He dwells in the thick darkness of lurid storm clouds. He grapples with the ugly passions of envy, jealousy, hatred and greed. The strong men and lovely women about him harbor treachery and lust of the basest sort. His passion-swept soul is almost overwhelmed by resentment and despair. He does not yield to discouragement, however. He seeks no juniper bush, but meets the wilderness tempter and at last conquers doubt and despair by hard work and loyal faith. Some inner force holds him true amid the tumult of doubt. Again and again he strikes the harp of his genius with mighty crash sending forth those terrible chords of passion which today still vibrate in the hearts of men.

Then comes the closing period of *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest* and *Henry VIII*. Now his soul is serene, but stronger because of the experience of affliction. He has conquered himself and is in harmony

with himself, with man and with God. He leaves the glitter of courts, the clash of camps, the sordid ambitions of cities, and from the sweet content of a reunited family in Stratford, he gives the world his final message of wisdom. I verily believe that in the three noble romance dramas that close his poetic career, we have the most precious trilogy of Faith, Home and Love the old world will ever find outside the Bible.

Such a study is rich in human interest and offers opportunities for the noblest self-culture.

THE ETHICAL VALUE OF SHAKESPEARE.

The minister will find in the dramas of Shakespeare a wealth of ethical teaching. The poet is a great moral teacher. He never sermonizes save now and then in jest. Perhaps he never deliberately purposes to present a moral truth but the very fact that he is unconscious of any such purpose adds value to the result. It is remarkable that in an age of license dangerously near to licentiousness, a writer, himself so susceptible to environment and who covers the whole field of social life; who borrows so largely from French and Italian literature dominated by men like Montaigne and Boccaccio, should give the world a message that needs so little expurgation. It must be admitted that his characters discourse too freely at times of those things polite society now does not introduce into public conversation. That was an Elizabethan failing. Gather up under one moral head all he has written, however, and it will readily appear that vice is never condoned, evil never triumphs ultimately and virtue, kindness, mercy, goodness, industry, justice, prudence, temperance, etc., are always held in honor and made commendable. ...

One would not expect to find the ethical purpose conspicuous in the comedies, especially those of the earlier years. At that time Shakespeare was concerned with the

mere joy of living, which he expresses in every phase of mirth and gladness. The comedies, however, do serve the cause of virtue by exposing and holding up to ridicule the follies of men and women as well as their vices. While he laughs at these with good natured raillery, he also gives the lash. Like a wise-hearted, smiling-eyed showman, he calls up a whole troop of jolly, happy-hearted people, showing how lovable they are and yet how many faults and follies they possess. While we laugh with him, we are presently aware that we are looking at ourselves in his magic mirror and resolve to amend our faults. It is good, wholesome treatment to have an ass's head set upon conceited ignorance; to outrail a shrewish tongue, to laugh forced melancholy out of court; to make lechery and drunkenness breathe the foulness of dirty linen, feel the blows of the irate husband, the pinch and fire of innocence, and land at last in the filthy ditch that represents its own nastiness. It is the wisdom of Shakespeare, however, not merely to punish, but to reform. While we exclaim, "What fools these mortals be!" we are not made pessimists, but are left to hope that all will end well; therefore, all is well.

The tragedies are powerful homilies on the moral code embodied in the second table of the law. They present individual problems but are all developed along lines common to each. Here is seen the inevitable, ever present conflict between good and evil that marks Jacob's road to Bethel, Joseph's to the throne, David's path through the wilderness, Elijah's vision of the earthquake and fire, Job's titantic wrestlings and which reddened the Master's pathway through the mount of temptation and Gethsemane with the blood drops of His divine agony until at last was wrought the eternal tragedy of Golgotha.

With Shakespeare the struggle is not in the realm of romance as in the stories of Siegfried and Arthur. It is our own struggle in the sphere of everyday life he represents. It is real to the men and women who daily wait

upon our ministry. The greater the character the greater the conflict. The assaults of evil are never felt in full power by weaklings. Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Iago, Goneril and Regan represent tempters too great to bring about a tragedy in lesser men than Anthony, Macbeth, Othello or Lear.

In Shakespeare's tragedies the downfall of a great soul is a sacrifice that vindicates the cause of truth, and establishes some abiding principle of righteousness—becoming almost vicarious in its sufferings. In Lear and Othello love triumphs over slander and hypocrisy. Cordelia and Desdemona are vindicated before the tribunal that had judged them as unworthy. The lofty idealism of Hamlet prevails in death over the sordid materialism of the Danish Court. The task he was unable to perform in life he accomplishes in death—bequeathing to the man of deeds the care of a nation he himself was incapable of ruling. Along these lines the other tragedies also illustrate the principle inwrought in the eternal purposes of God through the ages—that evil can never ultimately triumph over good.

Another great ethical law is exemplified in the tragedies. Satan finds something in fallen man he can claim as his own to which he appeals and thereby gains entrance into the human heart. This is the fearful secret of the tragic havoc wrought by sin. In the tragedies the catastrophe is inevitable through an inherent weakness to which the tempter appeals. This is the supreme agony of the fall, hence these dramas furnish thrilling illustrations of the preacher's most vital message. Only one could ever say "the prince of this world cometh; and he hath nothing in me."

Lear is the tragedy of the will. The will to rule his people as a kingly father is made helpless through the inherent passion of self-indulgence and vanity of self-love to which in the person of his vile daughters the tempter makes his appeal.

Macbeth is the tragedy of Ambition, and illustrates the career of Saul, Israel's first king. Unlike the conscienceless Richard, Macbeth can hear the voice of conscience, but ambition, self-centered offers the key to the tempter in the person of Lady Macbeth.

Hamlet is the tragedy of the intellect. He is not a dreamer but a rationalist. The facts of life call for men of deeds. The need for action is plain to the prince of Denmark, but the student of metaphysics fresh from the speculative atmosphere of Wittenberg must first analyze, weigh and compare duties and in the meantime the evil doers have their way.

Othello is the world's great tragedy of love. The Moor of Venice and not Romeo is Shakespeare's true lover. There is less of inherent weakness in his character than in any other of Shakespeare's men and it takes the most terrible artist in temptation to accomplish his overthrow. Yet he falls through an exaggerated sense of personal honor to which the seducer appeals.

Still another great ethical principle is embodied in the tragedies, namely, that the catastrophe which is potential through inherent weakness becomes dynamic through the submission of the masculine energy of initiative to the feminine law of receptivity. When the oak tries to bend itself to the will of the vine that embraces it, both are shattered. The reverse of this law is just as true though Shakespeare does not deal with that side of the subject except incidentally. His heroines are either strong to save their men by influencing them to firmness in the path of duty or else they destroy them by misdirecting them from that path. Coriolanus yields the conqueror's right to the soft appeals of a mother, though he knows it means his doom. Anthony flings away victory to follow the silken sails of the siren Cleopatra. Macbeth stifles the voice of conscience in deference to the will of his wife. Lear stoops his kingly head to the poisonous flattery of his serpent daughters. Othello is ensnared in

the net of Iago's villainy—and Iago represents a type of wickedness that is essentially feminine. In Hamlet, the most subtle of all dramas, the two natures are present in one person and are at war. The king by inheritance and the soldier by training are at war with the male intuitions that are feminine in quality, and the noblest mind in all literature is shattered. How these tragedies illustrate the great themes of the Bible! Adam, the man, yields himself to the will of Eve, the woman, and Eden is lost and ever since, when Samson dallies in the lap of Delilah; when Jezebel sways the scepter of Ahab, heroes are changed to blinded slaves and kingdoms become the habitations of tyranny and corruption. In nothing is the integrity of Job more apparent than in his refusal to yield to the demands of the unworthy woman by his side.

Two other principles are obviously manifest in the tragedies and need no amplification—one, that the harvest of evil is always greater than the sowing; the other, that the most terrible consequence of tragic evil falls upon the innocent. It is the Cordelias and Desdemonas who feel the most fearful pangs of suffering, not the Othellos and Lears.

The strongest ethical message of Shakespeare to my mind is found in the plays of the last period. Cymbeline, Winter's Tale, Tempest and Henry VIII. Here the moral problems are lifted into the realm of the spiritual. The poet's genius rings true to life's highest ideals. The subject is too large for detailed discussion here, but let a man read these plays carefully, with a view to finding their moral significance and he will find them illustrating many of the great doctrines of the Word of God. "The Divinity that shapes our ends" directs our own way as well. Affliction is only the threshing flail that separates the chaff from the wheat. Imogen and Hermione are lovelier than Portia and Rosalind because they have been purified in the furnace of trial.

The nobility of forgiveness and reconciliation is displayed in the characters of Imogen, Hermione and Prospero. Not palliation, however, but forgiveness, for wrongs that have been shown to be culpable is granted only after true repentance has been displayed.

The dignity of labor and its value in discipline are set forth. Imogen's brothers under the guidance of their wise tutor are taught to earn their daily bread in the sweat of their faces. Perdita is reared in the sweet simplicity of the shepherd's life. Miranda, the unspoiled daughter of Nature, is reared with the sense of being a real helpmeet and instead of wanting her lover cut up into stars, she craves the privilege of sharing with him the heavy task which is to test his manhood.

The problem of good and evil may be worked out here in this life. One need not die like Othello to vindicate true love. It is better to live and suffer in order to learn like Posthumus and Leontes, that love never faileth. If the world is out of joint it is better, like Prospero, to grapple with its lameness and attempt to set it right than, like Hamlet, to bemoan the task. Then the wickedness of an Iago will be seen in its essential nature and like Caliban be bound in slavery to one, who having mastered self, becomes himself a law of providence to those who are weak. Then at last it will appear that "God's in His heaven and all's right with the world" and that the future is radiant with the rainbow of promise for "the best is yet to be."