played itself in the heroic age of our drama, amongst the Ti­tans of 1590-1630, they confounded and overwhelmed him.

In particular, with regard to Shakspeare, we shall now proclaim a discovery which we made some twenty years ago. We, like others, from seeing frequent references to Shakspeare in the Spectator, had acquiesced in the com­mon belief, that, although Addison was no doubt pro­foundly unlearned in Shakspeare’« language, and thorough­ly unable to do him justice (and this we might well assume, since his great rival Pope, who had expressly studied Shak­speare, was, after all, so memorably deficient in the appro­priate knowledge),—yet, that of course he had a vague popular knowledge of the mighty poet’s cardinal dramas. Accident only led us into a discovery of our mistake. Twice or thrice we had observed, that if Shakspeare were quoted, that paper turned out not to be Addison’s ; and at length, by express examination, we ascertained the curious fact, that Addison has never in one instance quoted or made any reference to Shakspeare. But was this, as Steevens most disingenuously pretends, to be taken as an exponent of the public feeling towards Shakspeare? Was Addison’s ne­glect representative of a general neglect ? If so, whence came Rowe’s edition. Pope’s, Theobald’s, Sir Thomas Hanmer’s, Bishop Warburton’s, all upon the heels of one another? With such facts staring him in the face, how shameless must be that critic who could, in support of such a thesis, refer to *“ the author of the Tatler,”* contemporary with all these edi­tors. The truth is, Addison was well aware of Shakspeare’s hold on the popular mind ; too well aware of it. The fee­ble constitution of the poetic faculty, as existing in himself, forbade his sympathising with Shakspeare ; the proportions were too colossal for his delicate vision ; and yet, as one who sought popularity himself, he durst not shock what per­haps he viewed as a national prejudice. Those who have happened, like ourselves, to see the effect of passionate mu­sic and “ deep-inwoven harmonics” upon the feeling of an idiot,@@1 may conceive what we mean. Such music does not utterly revolt the idiot ; on the contrary, it has a strange but a horrid fascination for him : it alarms, irritates, dis­turbs, makes him profoundly unhappy ; and chiefly by un­locking imperfect glimpses of thoughts and slumbering in­stincts, which it is for his peace to have entirely obscured, because for him they can be revealed only partially, and with the sad effect of throwing a baleful gleam upon his blighted condition. Do we mean, then, to compare Addi­son with an idiot ? Not generally, by any means. Nobody can more sincerely admire him where he was a man of real genius, viz. in his delineations of character and manners, or in the exquisite delicacies of his humour. But assuredly Addison, as a poet, was amongst the sons of the feeble ; and between the authors of Cato and of King Lear there was a gulf never to be bridged over.@@2

But Dryden, we are told, pronounced Shakspeare already in *his* day “ *a little obsolete.”* Here now we have wilful, deliberate falsehood. *Obsolete,* in Dryden’s meaning, docs not imply that he was so with regard to his popularity (the question then at issue), but with regard to his diction and choice of words. To cite Dryden as a witness for any pur­pose against Shakspeare,—Dryden, who of all men had the most ransacked wit and exhausted language in celebrating the supremacy of Shakspeare’s genius, does indeed require as much shamelessness in feeling as mendacity in principle.

But then Lord Shaftesbury, who may be taken as half way between Dryden and Pope (Dryden died in 1700, Pope was then twelve years old, and Lord S. wrote chiefly, we believe, between 1700 and 1710), “ complains,” it seems, “ of his rude unpolished style, and his antiquated phrase and wit.” What if he does ? Let the whole truth be told, and then we shall see how much stress is to be laid upon such a judgment. The second Lord Shaftesbury, the author of the Characteristics was the grandson of that famous politi­cal agitator, the Chancellor Shaftesbury, who passed his whole life in storms of his own creation. The second Lord Shaftesbury was a man of crazy constitution, querulous from ill health, and had received an eccentric education from his eccentric grandfather. He was practised daily in *talking* Latin, to which afterwards he added a competent study of the Greek ; and finally he became unusually learned for his rank, but the most absolute and undistinguishing pedant that perhaps literature has to show. He sneers continually at the regular built academic pedant ; but he himself, though no academic, was essentially the very impersonation of pe­dantry. No thought however beautiful, no image however magnificent, could conciliate his praise as long as it was clothed in English ; but present him with the most trivial common-places in Greek, and he unaffectedly fancied them divine ; mistaking the pleasurable sense of his own power in a difficult and rare accomplishment for some peculiar force or beauty in the passage. Such was the outline of his literary taste. And was it upon Shakspeare only, or up­on him chiefly, that he lavished his pedantry ? Far from it. He attacked Milton with no less fervour ; he attacked Dry­den with a thousand times more. Jeremy Taylor he quoted only to ridicule ; and even Locke, the confidential friend of his grandfather, he never alludes to without a sneer. As to Shakspeare, so far from Lord Shaftesbury’s censures arguing his deficient reputation, the very fact of his noticing him at all proves his enormous popularity ; for upon system he no­ticed those only who ruled the public taste. The insipidity of his objections to Shakspeare may be judged from this, that he comments in a spirit of absolute puerility upon the name *Desdemona,* as though intentionally formed from the Greek word for *superstition.* In fact, he had evidently read little beyond the list of names in Shakspeare ; yet there is proof enough that the irresistible beauty of what little he *had* read was too much for all his pedantry, and startled him exceedingly ; for ever afterwards he speaks of Shakspeare as one who, with a little aid from Grecian sources, really had something great and promising about him. As to modem authors, neither this Lord Shaftes­bury nor Addison read anything for the latter years of their life but Bayle’s Dictionary. And most of the little scin­tillations of erudition which may be found in the notes to the Characteristics, and in the Essays of Addison, are de­rived, almost without exception, and uniformly without ac­knowledgment, from Bayle.@@3

Finally, with regard to the sweeping assertion, that “ for nearly a hundred years after his death Shakspeare was al­most entirely neglected,” we shall meet this scandalous false­hood by a rapid view of his fortunes during the century in question. The tradition has always been, that Shakspeare was honoured by the especial notice of Queen Elizabeth, as well as by that of James I. At one time we were disposed to question the truth of this tradition ; but that was for want of

@@@, A great modem poet refers to this very ease of music entering “ the mouldy chambers of the dull idiot’s brain but in support of what seems to us a baseless hypothesis.

@@@• Probably Addison’s fear of the national feeling was a good deal strengthened by his awe of Milton and of Dryden, both of whom had expressed a homage towards Shakspeare which language cannot transcend. Amongst his political friends also were many intense admirers of Shakspeare.

@@@’ He who is weak enough to kick and spurn his own native literature, even if it were done with more knowledge than is shown by Lord Shaftesbury, will usually be kicked and spurned in his turn ; and accordingly it has been often remarked, that the Characteris­tics are unjustly neglected in our days. For Lord Shaftesbury, with all his pedantry, was a man of great talents. Leibnitz had the sagacityto see this through the mists of a translation.