*effective* audience, as by the unanimous “ all hail !” of in­tellectual Christendom ; finally, not by the hasty partisan­ship of his own generation, nor by the biassed judgment of an age trained in the same modes of feeling and of think­ing with himself, but by the solemn award of generation succeeding to generation, of one age correcting the obli­quities or peculiarities of another; by the verdict of two hundred and thirty years, which have now elapsed since the very *latest* of his creations, or of two hundred and for­ty-seven years if we date from the earliest : a verdict which has been continually revived and re-opened, probed, search­ed, vexed, by criticism in every spirit, from the most genial and intelligent, down to the most malignant and scurri- lously hostile which feeble heads and great ignorance could suggest when co-operating with impure hearts and narrow sensibilities ; a verdict, in short, sustained and countersign­ed by a longer series of writers, many of them eminent for wit or learning, than were ever before congregated upon any inquest relating to any author, be he who he might, ancient@@1 or modern, Pagan or Christian. It was a most witty say­ing with respect to a piratical and knavish publisher, who made a trade of insulting the memories of deceased authors by forged writings, that he was “ among the new terrors of death.” But in the gravest sense it may be affirmed of Shakspeare, that he is among the modern luxuries of life; that life, in fact, is a new thing, and one more to be coveted, since Shakspeare has extended the domains of human con­sciousness, and pushed its dark frontiers into regions not so much as dimly descried or even suspected before his timc, far less illuminated (as now they are) by beauty and tropi­cal luxuriance of life. For instance,—a single instance, in­deed one which in itself is a world of new revelation,—the possible beauty of the female character had not been seen as in a dream before Shakspeare called into perfect life the radiant shapes of Desdemona, of Imogene, of Hermione, of Perdita, of Ophelia, of Miranda, and many others. The Una of Spenser, earlier by ten or fifteen years than most of these, was an idealized portrait of female innocence and virgin purity, but too shadowy and unreal for a dramatic reality. And as to the Grecian classics, let not the reader imagine for an instant that any prototype in this field of Shakspearian power can be looked for there. The *Antigone* and the *Electra* of the tragic poets are the two leading female characters that classical antiquity offers to our re­spect, but assuredly not to our impassioned love, as disci­plined and exalted in the school of Shakspeare. They chal­lenge our admiration, severe, and even stern, as impersona­tions of filial duty, cleaving to the steps of a desolate and afflicted old man ; or of sisterly affection, maintaining the rights of a brother under circumstances of peril, of deser­tion, and consequently of perfect self-reliance. lphigenia, again, though not dramatically coming before us in her own person, but according to the beautiful report of a spectator, presents us with a fine statuesque model of heroic fortitude, and of one whose young heart, even in the very agonies of

her cruel immolation, refused to forget, by a single indeco­rous gesture, or so much as a moment’s neglect of her own princely descent, and that she herself was “ a lady in the land.” These are fine marble groups, but they are not the warm breathing realities of Shakspeare ; there is “ no spe­culation” in their cold marble eyes ; the breath of life is not in their nostrils ; the fine pulses of womanly sensibili­ties are not throbbing in their bosoms. And besides this immeasurable difference between the cold moony reflexes of life, as exhibited by the power of Grecian art, and the true sunny life of Shakspeare, it must be observed that the Antigones, &c. of the antique put forward but one single trait of character, like the aloe with its single blossom : this solitary feature is presented to us as an abstraction, and as an insulated quality ; whereas in Shakspeare all is presented in the *concrete ;* that is to say, not brought forward in re­lief, as by some effort of an anatomical artist ; but embo­died and imbedded, so to speak, as by the force of a creative nature, in the complex system of a human life ; a life in which all the elements move and play simultaneously, and with something more than mere simultaneity or co-existence, acting and re-acting each upon the other, nay, even acting by each other and through each other. In Shakspeare’s characters is felt for ever a real *organic* life, where each is for the whole and in the whole, and where the whole is for each and in each. They only are real incarnations.

The Greek poets could not exhibit any approximations to *female* character, without violating the truth of Grecian life, and shocking the feelings of the audience. The drama with the Greeks, as with us, though much less than with us, was a picture of human life ; and that which could not occur in life could not wisely be exhibited on the stage. Now, in ancient Greece, women were secluded from the society of men. The conventual sequestration of the γυvαιχωvίτις, or female apartment@@' of the house, and the Mahommedan con­secration of its threshold against the ingress of males, had been transplanted from Asia into Greece thousands of years perhaps before either convents or Mahommed existed. Thus barred from all open social intercourse, women could not develope or express any character by word or action. Even to *have* a character, violated, to a Grecian mind, the ideal portrait of feminine excellence ; whence, perhaps, partly the too generic, too little individualized, style of Grecian beauty. But prominently to *express* a character was im­possible under the common tenor of Grecian life, unless when high tragical catastrophes transcended the decorums of that tenor, or for a brief interval raised the curtain which veiled it. Hence the subordinate part which women play upon the Greek stage in all but some half dozen cases. In the paramount tragedy on that stage, the model tragedy, the *Œdipus Tgrannus* of Sophocles, there is virtually no woman at all ; for Jocasta is a party to the story merely as the dead Laius or the self-murdered Sphinx was a party, viz. by her contributions to the fatalities of the event, not by any thing she does or says spontaneously. In fact, the

@@@1 It will occur to many readers, that perhaps Homer may furnish the sole exception to this sweeping assertion : any *but* Homer is clearly and ludicrously below the level of the competition ; but even Homer, “ with his tail on" (as the Scottish Highlanders say of their chieftains when belted by their ceremonial retinues), musters nothing like the force which *already* follows Shakspeare ; and be it remembered, that Homer sleeps and has long slept as a subject of criticism or commentary, while in Germany as well as Eng­land, and new *even* in *France,* the gathering of wits to the vast equipage of Shakspeare is advancing in an accelerated ratio. There is, in fact, a great delusion current upon this subject. Innumerable references to Homer, and brief critical remarks on this or that pre­tension of Homer, this or that scene, this or that passage, lie scattered over literature ancient and modern ; but the express works dedicated to the separate service of Homer are, after all, not many. In Greek we have only the large Commentary of Eustathius, and the Scholia of Didymus, &c. ; in French little or nothing before the prose translation of the seventeenth century, which Pope es­teemed “ elegant,” and the skirmishings of Madame Dacier, La Motte, &c. ; in English, besides the various translations and their pre- faces(which, by the way, began as early as 1556), nothing of much importance until the elaborate preface of Pope to the Iliad, and his elaborate postscript to the Odyssey—nothing certainly before that, and very little indeed since that, except Wood’s Essay on the Life and Genius of Homer. On the other hand, of the books written in illustration or investigation of Shakspeare, a very con­siderable library might be formed in England, and another in Germany.

@@@\* Apartment is here used, as the reader will observe, in its true and continental acceptation, as a division or *compartment* of a bouse including many rooms; a suite of chambers, but a suite which is partitioned off (as in palaces), not a single chamber ; a sense so commonly and so erroneously given to this word in England.