the beginning as at the end of the series; and the fact that two, not of the latest, sonnets are in *The Passionate Pilgrim* of 1599 is equally inconclusive.

The only reference to an external event in the sonnets them- selves, which might at first sight seem useful, is in the following lines (cvii.) :—

“ The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured,

And the sad augurs mock their own presage; Incertainties now crown themselves assured,

And peace proclaims olives of endless age.”

This has been variously interpreted as referring to the death of Elizabeth and accession of James in 1603, to the relief caused by the death of Philip II. of Spain in 1598, and to the illness of Elizabeth and threatened Spanish invasion in 1596. Obviously the “ mortal moon ” is Elizabeth, but although “eclipse” may well mean “ death,” it is not quite so clear that “ endure an eclipse ” can mean “ die.”

Nor do the allusions to the rival poet help much. “ The proud full sail of his great verse ” would fit, on critical grounds, with Spenser, Marlowe, Chapman, and possibly Peele, Daniel or Drayton; and the “ affable familiar ghost,” from whom the rival is said to obtain assistance by night, might conceivably be an echo of a passage in one of Chapman’s dedications. Daniel inscribed a poem to Southampton in 1603, but with this exception none of the poets named are known to have written either for Southampton or for Pembroke, or for any other W. H. or H. W., during any year which can possibly be covered by the sonnets. Two very minor poets, Barnabe Barnes and Gervase Markham, addressed sonnets to Southampton in 1593 and 1595 respectively, and Thomas Nash composed improper verses for his delectation.

But even if external guidance fails, the internal evidence for 1593-1598 as approximately the sonnet period in Shakespeare’s life is very strong indeed. It has been worked out in detail by two German scholars, Hermann Isaac (now Conrad) in the *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch* for 1884, and Gregor Sarrazin in *William Shakespeares Lehrjahre* (1897) and *Aus Shakespeares Meister­werkstatt* (1906). Isaac’s work, in particular, has hardly received enough attention even from recent English scholars, probably because he makes the mistakes of taking the sonnets in Boden- stedt’s order instead of Shakespeare’s, and of beginning his whole chronology several years too early in order to gratify a fantastic identification of W. H. with the earl of Essex. This, however, does not affect the main force of an argument by which the affinities of the great bulk of the sonnets are shown, on the ground of stylistic similarities, parallelisms of expression, and parallelisms of theme, to be far more close with the poems and with the range of plays from *Love’s Labour’s Lost* to *Henry IV.* than with any earlier or later section of Shakespeare’s work. This dating has the further advantage of putting Shakespeare’s sonnets in the full tide of Elizabethan sonnet-production, which began with the publication of Sidney’s *Astrophel and Stella* in 1591 and Daniel’s *Delia* and Constable’s *Diana* in 1592, rather than during years for which this particular kind of poetry had already ceased to be modish. It is to the three volumes named that the influence upon Shakespeare of his predecessors can most clearly be traced; while he seems in his turn to have served as a model for Drayton, whose sonnets to Idea were published in a series of volumes in 1594, 1599, 1602, 1605 and 1619. It does not of course follow that because the sonnets belong to 1593-1598 W.H. is to be identified with Southampton. On general grounds he is likely, even if above Shakespeare’s own rank, to have been somewhat nearer that rank than a great earl, some young gentleman, for example, of such a family as the Sidneys, or as the Walsinghams of Chislehurst.

It is possible that there is an allusion to Shakespeare’s romance in a poem called “ Willobie his Avisa,” published in 1594 as from the pen of one Henry Willoughby, apparently of West Knoyle in Wiltshire. In this Willoughby is introduced as taking counsel when in love with “ his familiar friend W. S. who not long before had tryed the curtesy of the like passion, and was now newly recovered of the like infection.” But there is nothing outside

the poem to connect Shakespeare with a family of Willoughbys or with the neighbourhood of West Knoyle. Various other identifications of W. H. have been suggested, which rarely rest upon anything except a similarity of initials. There is little plausibility in a theory broached by Mr Sidney Lee, that W. H. was not the friend of the sonnets at all, but a certain William Hall, who was himself a printer, and might, it is conjectured, have obtained the “ copy ” of the sonnets for Thorpe. It is, of course, just possible that the “ begetter ” of the title-page might mean, not the “ inspirer,” but the “ procurer for the press ” of the sonnets ; but the interpretation is shipwrecked on the obvious identity of the person to whom Thorpe “ wishes ” eternity with the person to whom the poet. “ promised ” that eternity. The external history of the *Sonnets* must still be regarded as an unsolved problem; the most that can be said is that their subject may just possibly be Southampton, and cannot possibly be Pembroke.

In order to obtain a glimmering of the man that was Shake- speare, it is necessary to consult all the records and to read the evidence of his life-work in the plays, alike in the light of the simple facts of his external career and in that of the sudden vision of his passionate and dissatisfied soul preserved in the sonnets. By exclusive attention to any one of these sources of information it is easy to build up a consistent and wholly false conception of a Shake­speare; of a Shakespeare struggling between his senses and his conscience in the artistic Bohemianism of the London taverns; of a sleek, bourgeois Shakespeare to whom his art was no more than a ready way to a position of respected and influential competence in his native town; of a great objective artist whose personal life was passed in detached contemplation of the puppets of his imagination. Any one of these pictures has the advantage of being more vivid, and the disadvantage of being less real, than the somewhat elusive and enigmatic Shakespeare who glances at us for a perplexing moment, now behind this, now behind that, of his diverse masks. It is necessary also to lay aside Shakespeareolatry, the spirit that could wish with Hallam that Shakespeare had never written the *Sonnets,* or can refuse to accept *Titus Andronicus* on the ground that “ the play declares as plainly as play can speak, 'I am not Shakespeare’s; my repulsive subject, my blood and horrors, are not, and never were his.’ ” The literary historian has no greater enemy than the sentimentalist. In Shakespeare we have to do with one who is neither beyond criticism as a man nor impeccable as an artist. He was for all time, no doubt; but also very much of an age, the age of the later Renaissance, with its instinct for impetuous life, and its vigorous rather than discriminating appetite for literature. When Ben Jonson said that Shakespeare lacked “ art,” and when Milton wrote of his “ native wood-notes wild,” they judged truly. The Shakespearian drama is magnificent and incoherent ; it belongs to the adolescence of literature, to a period before the instrument had been sharpened and polished, and made unerring in its touch upon the sources of laughter and of tears. Obviously nobody has such power over, our laughter and our tears as Shakespeare. But it is the power of temperament rather than of art; or rather it is the power of a capricious and unsystematic artist, with a perfect dramatic instinct for the exposition of the ideas, the characters, the situations, which for the moment command his interest, and a perfect disregard for the laws of dramatic psychology which require the patient pruning and subordination of all material that does not make for the main exposition. This want of finish, this imperfect fusing of the literary ore, is essentially characteristic of the Renaissance, as compared with ages in which the creative impulse is weaker and leaves room for a finer concentration of the means upon the end. There is nearly always unity of purpose in a Shakespearian play, but it often requires an intellectual effort to grasp it and does not result in a unity of effect. The issues are obscured by a careless generosity which would extend to art the boundless freedom of life itself. Hence the intrusive and jarring elements which stand in such curious incongruity with the utmost reaches of