having read attentively the lines of Ben Jonson to the me­mory of Shakspeare, those generous lines which have so absurdly been taxed with faint praise. Jonson could make no mistake on this point : he, as one of Shakspeare’s fami­liar companions, must have witnessed at the very time, and accompanied with friendly sympathy, every motion of royal favour towards Shakspeare. Now he, in words which leave no room for doubt, exclaims

Sweet swan of Avon, what a sight it were To see thee in our waters yet appear ;

And make those flights upon the banks of Thames *That to did take Eliza and our James.*

These princes, then, *were* taken, were fascinated, with some of Shakspeare’s dramas. In Elizabeth the approba­tion would probably be sincere. In James we can readily suppose it to have been assumed ; for he was a pedant in a different sense from Lord Shaftesbury ; not from under­valuing modern poetry, but from caring little or nothing for any poetry, although he wrote about its mechanic rules. Still the royal *imprimatur* would be influential and serviceable no less when offered hypocritically than in full sincerity. Next let us consider, at the very moment of Shakspeare’s death, who were the leaders of the British youth, the *principes ju­ventutis,* in the two fields, equally important to a great poet’s fame, of rank and of genius? The Prince of Wales and John Milton ; the first being then about sixteen years old, the other about eight. Now these two great powers, as we may call them, these presiding stars over all that was English in thought and action, were both impassioned admirers of Shakspeare. Each of them counts for many thousands. The Prince of Wales@@' had learned to appreciate Shakspeare, not originally from reading him, but from witnessing the court represen­tations of his plays at Whitehall. Afterwards we know that he made Shakspeare his closet companion, for he was re­proached with doing so by Milton. And we know also, from the just criticism pronounced upon the character and diction of Caliban by one of Charles’s confidential counsellors, Lord Falkland, that the king’s admiration of Shakspeare had im­pressed a determination upon the court reading. As to Milton, by double prejudices, puritanical and classical, his mind had been preoccupied against the full impressions of Shakspeare. And we know that there is such a thing as keeping the sym­pathies of love and admiration in a dormant state, or state of abeyance ; an effort of self-conquest realized in more cases than one by the ancient fathers, both Greek and Latin, with regard to the profane classics. Intellectually they admired, and would not belie their admiration ; but they did not give their hearts cordially, they did not abandon themselves to their natural impulses. They averted their eyes and wean­ed their attention from the dazzling object. Such, proba­bly, was Milton’s state of feeling towards Shakspeare after 1642, when the theatres were suppressed, and the fanati­cal fervour in its noontide heat. Yet even then he did not belie his reverence intellectually for Shakspeare ; and in his younger days we know that he had spoken more enthusias­tically of Shakspeare than he ever did again of any unin­spired author. Not only did he address a sonnet to his me­mory, in which he declares that kings would wish to die, if by dying they could obtain such a monument in the hearts of men ; but he also speaks of him in his *Il Penseroso* as the tutelary genius of the English stage. In this transmis­sion of the torch (λαμπαδoφoϑια) Dryden succeeds to Milton ; he was born nearly thirty years later ; about thirty

years they were contemporaries ; and by thirty years, or nearly, Dryden survived his great leader. Dryden, in fact, lived out the seventeenth century. And we have now ar­rived within nine years of the era when the critical editions started in hot succession to one another. The names we have mentioned were the great influential names of the century. But of inferior homage there was no end. How came Bet­terton the actor, how came Devenant, how came Rowe, or Pope, by their intense (if not always sound) admiration for Shakspeare, unless they had found it fuming upwards like incense to the Pagan deities in ancient times from altars erected at every turning upon all the paths of men ?

But it is objected that inferior dramatists were sometimes preferred to Shakspeare ; and again, that vile travesties of Shakspeare were preferred to the authentic dramas. As to the first argument, let it be remembered, that if the saints of the chapel are always in the same honour, because *there* men are simply discharging a duty, which once due will be due for ever ; the saints of the theatre, on the other hand, must bend to the local genius, and to the very reasons for having a theatre at all. Men go thither for amusement : this is the paramount purpose ; and even acknowledged merit or absolute superiority must give way to it. Does a man at Paris expect to see Molière reproduced in pro­portion to his admitted precedency in the French drama? On the contrary, that very precedency argues such a fami­liarization with his works, that those who are in quest of re­laxation will reasonably prefer any recent drama to that which, having lost all its novelty, has lost much of its ex­citement. We speak of ordinary minds ; but in cases of *public* entertainments, deriving part of their power from scenery and stage pomp, novelty is for all minds an essen­tial condition of attraction. Moreover, in some departments of the comic, Beaumont and Fletcher, when writing in com­bination, really had a freedom and breadth of manner which excels the comedy of Shakspeare. As to the altered Shak­speare as taking precedency of the genuine Shakspeare, no argument can be so frivolous. The public were never allow­ed a choice ; the great majority of an audience even now cannot be expected to carry the real Shakspeare in their mind, so as to pursue a comparison between that and the alteration. Their comparisons must be exclusively amongst what they have opportunities of seeing ; that is, between the various pieces presented to them by the managers of theatres. Further than this it is impossible for them to ex­tend their office of judging and collating ; and the degene­rate taste which substituted the caprices of Davenant, the rants of Dryden, or the filth of Tate, for the jewellery of Shakspeare, cannot with any justice be charged upon the public, not one in a thousand of whom was furnished with any means of comparing, but exclusively upon those (viz. theatrical managers) who had the very amplest. Yet even in excuse for *them* much may be said. The very length of some plays compelled them to make alterations. The best of Shakspeare’s dramas, King Lear, is the least fitted for representation ; and, even for the vilest alteration, it ought in candour to be considered that possession is nine points of the law. He who would not have introduced, was often obliged to retain.

Finally, it is urged, that the small number of editions through which Shakspeare passed in the seventeenth cen­tury, furnishes a separate argument, and a conclusive one, against his popularity. We answer, that, considering the

@@@, Perhaps the most bitter political enemy of Charles I. will have the candour to allow that, for a prince of those times, he was truly and eminently accomplished. His knowledge of the arts was considerable ; and, as a patron of art, he stands foremost amongst all British sovereigns to this hour. He said truly of himself, and wisely as to the principle, that he understood English law as well as a gentleman ought to understand it ; meaning that an attorney's minute knowledge of forms and technical niceties was illiberal. Speaking of him as an author, we must remember that the *Eikon Basiliké* is still unappropriated ; that question is still open. But supposing the king’s claim negatived, still, in his controversy with Henderson, in his negotiations at the Isle of Wight and elsewhere, he discovered a power of argument, a learning, and a strength of memory, which are truly admirable ; whilst the whole of his accom­plishments are recommended by a modesty and a humility as rare as they are unaffected."