

largest work, this volume of sketches will be welcome and useful. It is made up of articles which the author contributed to the magazines and some fresh matter on Shakespeare Glossaries and Lexicons. The book has a melancholy interest because the preparation of it was the last work of its author. He revised the essays for this volume, and they therefore present his matured opinions upon Shakespearean subjects. The matter of the volume is divided into four parts: I., on reading Shakespeare; II., narrative analysis; III., miscellaneous; IV., expositors. The prominent characteristics of the book are brightness and animation. The author was never dull or uncandid or obscure. In a long life of Shakespearean criticism he had acquired some very strong opinions, and he always had the art of expressing them strongly and even vehemently; and yet in the volume before us we are surprised to find a matured belief in his capacity for critical animosity seriously weakened. For though there is much strong expression it is always remarkably reasonable. He has to write of very unreasonable opinions and very gross errors; but it would be difficult for any one to be faithful to his own convictions with less of aspersivity and with such an entire absence of vindictiveness. Few books of the size contain so much instruction, and one must search long to find one in which wisdom has so attractive a dress.

On reading Shakespeare, Mr. White wrote as a master who knew all about his subject and yet could make it attractive to those who knew little or nothing about it. He expresses the opinion that "most boys who are Shakespeare-lovers have the love strongly upon them before they are sixteen"; and adds that such was his own case. He tells us that "the young reader may begin Shakespeare reading at the first temptation to do so. A one-volume edition of Shakespeare's plays is a good book to leave in the way of young people. It may do them a great deal of good; it can do no one of them any harm."

A few of Mr. White's matured convictions with regard to Shakespeare's work are set forth in these essays with considerable breadth. For example, the fact that Shakespeare invented nothing but characters, that he drew his material and his plots from other sources, that he had absolutely no dramatic invention, is maintained with the stoutness which we expect in Mr. White. On page 22, he says that "the pretence which has been made for Shakespeare, that none of his work at any period of his life resembles that of any other poet or playwright, and can always be separated from that of his co-workers, is entirely irreconcilable with the facts and probabilities of the case, and with the history of all arts, poetry included. True, Shakespeare's mind was, in

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Probably no one will deny that in the death of Richard Grant White we have lost our best Shakespeare scholar. Mr. White traversed a large area of English scholarship, and as a critic of the modern uses and abuses of the language he rendered his countrymen no small service; but his most thorough work was done in the field of Shakespearean literature. To readers who cannot avail themselves of his

* **STUDIES IN SHAKESPEARE.** By Richard Grant White, editor of the Riverside edition of Shakespeare's works. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

the highest and largest sense of the terms, original and creative. But such minds, no less than others of narrower and inferior power, are imitative in their first essays." He repeats over and over again in various forms that Shakespeare invented nothing in his plots. On page 230 he says: "What Shakespeare did not do as well as what he did do as a playwright has no better proof or illustration than in his Fools. He did not invent the personage; he found it on the stage. Indeed, he invented nothing; he added nothing to the drama as he found it; he made nothing, not even the story of one of his own plays; he created nothing, save men and women, and Ariels and Calabans." He then proceeds to point out how Shakespeare transformed the fool of the stage and gave him in each play a personality. Along with this negative Mr. White's positive is stated with equal strength. It is in human character and motive that Shakespeare is supreme, sublime, unapproachable. He is so little a master of dramatic workmanship that he accepts and makes use of plots and incidents which are thoroughly unreasonable. The story of Lear, for example, is profoundly unreasonable; but Shakespeare did not make the story; "in the construction of the tragedy all that is his is the uniting of two stories—that of Lear and that of Gloucester—which he wrought into one by mighty strength and subtle art, welding them together white-heated in the glowing fire of his imagination."

Another of the pronounced convictions of our author is that the attempts to make out a philosophy of Shakespeare's dramas, and to find psychological purpose in incidents, is an absurd business. Shakespeare was engaged in interesting audiences in the Globe Theatre and in making money. His purpose was to entertain his hearers profitably to himself. He himself disappeared in this work. His characters are not himself under various masks: they are creations. He did not in them express his own personality; he gave them being, personality, and independent life, out of a creative faculty which is unparalleled in its power. One may find abundant faults in Shakespeare, but they almost always attach to that part of his plays which is not his. Sometimes he tones down an incident; he always relieves it, as far as it is possible to do so, by fidelity to the character which he has first accepted from other writers and then wrought out into flesh-and-blood reality. Mr. White is very severe with the actors of Shakespeare. His remarks on the acting of Iago are not flattering to any of the distinguished tragedians of our time. Of the average Iago he says: "Most of the Iagos that I have had

the opportunity of observing * * * would not have deceived a school-girl. Desdemona would have been far beyond their shallow scheming, and Othello would have brushed them out of the way with a back blow of his mailed hand." The worst Iago was that of Salvini, a sort of noisome venomous reptile—"an insect, for he had not the dignity of a vertebrate animal." Edwin Booth's conception of the character is commended as fine, delicate, and complex; but even Edwin Booth's Iago "is not the Iago that Shakespeare drew."

Mr. White had a profound contempt for the theory that Bacon wrote the Shakespeare plays. He begins his essay on this subject with: "Would to Heaven there were unquestionable evidence that Bacon did write the plays contained in the famous folio volume of 1623." And his reason is that he has not the smallest concern for the personal fame of either. He examines in this essay the work of Mrs. Henry Pott on the *Promus* of Bacon, and the poor lady is made very ridiculous by the examination. This Baconian theory is now nearly thirty years old, having been invented by a Miss Bacon, who, very naturally, died in an insane asylum. The whole subject has just had a very broad treatment in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Of course the theory is rejected by all persons having some comprehensive knowledge of the Elizabethan period and of Francis Bacon. Some of Mr. White's remarks in summing up the discussion ought to be corrective of the tendency to this delusion. "Bacon, a logician; Shakespeare, one who set logic at naught." "Shakespeare, the most heedless, the most inconsistent, the most inexact, of all writers who have risen to fame; Bacon, the most cautious and painstaking, the most consistent and exact of writers." "Bacon, without humor; Shakespeare's smiling lips, the mouthpiece of humor for all human kind." "Bacon, shrinking from a generalization even in morals; Shakespeare, ever moralizing and dealing even with individual men, and particular things in their general relations." "Bacon, a highly-trained mind; Shakespeare, wholly untrained." "Bacon, utterly without the poetic faculty, even in a secondary degree; Shakespeare, rising with unconscious effort to the highest heaven of poetry ever reached by the human mind." "To suppose that one of these men did his own work and also the work of the other, is to assume two miracles for the sake of proving one absurdity." And Mr. White concludes that the theory "is not worth five minutes' serious consideration by any reasonable creature."

DAVID H. WHEELER.