SHAKESPEARE’S COMEDIES: THE CONSUMMATION.¹

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This is the eighth successive year in which I have ventured to make Shakespearian comedy the subject of a Rylands’ lecture. So, on this occasion, I will omit all apology, and will merely give you an assurance that if in the future I continue to be honoured by an invitation to lecture to you, the subject will be something other than Shakespeare.

My object to-night is first of all to pull certain loose ends in the series together, and then to try to assess Shakespeare’s comic achievement in the group of plays consisting of Much Ado about Nothing, Twelfth Night, and As You Like It, which, with most of those who have written about Shakespeare, I regard as his greatest triumphs in comedy. They are the consummation of a process of growth in the art of comedy the main stages of which it has been our endeavour to indicate to you in the earlier lectures of this series. With them, Shakespearian comedy realises its most perfect form, and therefore in them Shakespeare’s comic idea, his vision of the reach of human happiness in this world of men and women, is richer, deeper, more sustained, and more satisfying than in any other of his plays. They embody his surest clue to the secret of man’s common and abiding welfare.

Being that, they are also, technically speaking, his happiest examples of the characteristically Elizabethan kind of romantic comedy, the plays in which he most fully satisfies the curiously Elizabethan aesthetic demand for a drama which would gratify both the romantic and the comic instincts of its audience.

In claiming so much for this group of plays, I do not forget

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that towards the end of his days, in the benevolence of his older age, Shakespeare averted his eyes from the abyss of universal tragedy they had pierced, and, fixing them once more on the springs of human joy, he—or rather the poet in him—saw those benign idylls of human charity, the so-called romances, which we know as his Cymbeline, his Winter's Tale and his Tempest.

These romances have obvious affinities with Shakespeare's earlier comedies; they are comedies even more than tragicothemes. Nor could one wish any other valediction to Shakespeare's life's work than is uttered in these. But their benignity must not sentimentalise our judgment into a false appraisement of their dramatic worth. Poetically, they are of great price. As glimpses, too, of the ingrained charitableness, the temperamental gentleness, the serene and benevolent tolerance of Shakespeare the mortal, they are even beyond all aesthetic price. It is easy then to value them wrongly; and Dowden, having grouped the preceding tragedies under the rubric "In the Depths," allures one to the delusive slope by labelling these "On the Heights." But in no sense are they an answer nor even a substantial make-weight to the great tragedies. Shakespeare's vision of the depths of man's suffering, of the essential tragedy of his lot, remains as his deepest insight into human destiny. Yet, though the tragedies abide as Shakespeare's firmest grasp of ultimate truth, unaltered and unanswered by these last romances, there is nevertheless a pleasant recompense, if but a very partial mitigation, in these romances. They are an old man's consolation for the inescapable harshness of man's portion, a compensation which pleases the more because with the coming of age, something of the terror of the things the dramatist in his strength has hitherto seen has been blunted by the weakening in him of his power of imaginative vision. It is touching to the rest of mankind, and even to its philosophers, to find that Shakespeare, having peered more deeply than any other man into the depths of human misery, can yet find some sure promise of joy in the freshness, the innocence, the simplicity of girlhood's unspoilt nature. Miranda, however, and Perdita, and even Imogen are but an old man's consolation. They are a touching hope for the world rather than a certain
pledge of its welfare to be. One remembers how another great dramatist, perhaps the one who alone is comparable with Shakespeare in grasp of mortal misery, Euripides, also found that when all else failed, when mankind in its power and its maturity seemed but to frustrate its own happiness and to will its own woe, there were still children, untainted by custom and experience, who at the mere prompting of native innocence would offer themselves as did Iphigenia to be saviours of their world and so give promise of a not impossible happiness for humanity. It is much that two such seers of mortal tragedy should utter their final faith in the native goodness of mere human nature. But it is literally true that, as its presentation in the motive of the plays runs without complete dramatic conviction, this belief is nothing more than a faith; it is a faith, too, which seems to imply a heavy bias towards evil in the world of men. Its trust is especially in those who are apart from it rather than in those who by the extent and the variety of their living have inured themselves to human weakness and have thereby become more representative of human life.

To this extent, even the benignity of these last plays is diminished. But the essential truth is that their view of life is less profound and less compelling than the view of it presented either in the tragedies or in the earlier and mature comedies. Though the romances are Shakespeare the man's last words on humanity and on destiny, they are not therefore his profoundest words. The finding of Shakespeare in Prospero, true as it may be, has deluded criticism. There can scarcely be a shadow of doubt that, in the romances, Shakespeare the dramatist is declining in dramatic power. The hand still retains its cunning, the stage-carpenter is still master of his craft, and the poet is still the consummate magician of words. But the dramatist is losing his intuitive sense of the essential stuff of drama, of the impact of man on men and on the things which in the mass make that experience which we call life. The Winter's Tale, and most of all in its Leontes, plays with figures who are markedly lacking in the positive identity of personality which would stamp them as recognisably and consistently human. The Tempest and Cymbeline rely too often on the
depiction of a mood or on the use of a convention as a substitute for the fundamental art of characterisation. These plays have, of course, their own virtue. But there could be no clearer evidence of the weakening of Shakespeare’s dramatic genius. For our own particular argument, its most manifest symptom is seen by comparing the heroines of the romances with those of the mature comedies. To set a Perdita or a Miranda by the side of a Rosalind or a Viola is to put a slip of girlhood by the side of women who have grown into the world, become a part of its fabric and enriched their personality by traffic with affairs and with other men and women. For the purposes of comedy, which by its nature seeks to envisage the way to happiness in a material world, the experience of a Viola or of a Rosalind is worth infinitely more than the charming innocence and ignorance of the world which are the peculiar virtue of a Perdita and a Miranda. Let there be no mistake. Shakespeare’s last plays, the romances, are rich in such pleasure as none but Shakespeare could provide. But, as comedies, they are of little account. They can and will be omitted from our survey of Shakespearian comedy. For our enquiry, the peak is reached by Much Ado, Twelfth Night, and As You Like It.

Though these lectures have been separated from each other by a year’s interval, they have been planned as steps in a consecutive argument. In the course of that argument, all Shakespeare’s comedies have been the subject of more or less lengthy treatment, except Love’s Labour’s Lost, which we take to be Shakespeare’s first trial of comedy. The omission was deliberate. Not that Love’s Labour’s Lost can be neglected by the student of Shakespearian comedy. But if our sense of comic values, and of the conditions under which those values came artistically to be revealed and realised, is not very wide of the mark, Love’s Labour’s Lost has small importance in establishing the line along which Shakespeare’s comic genius grew. Its value is rather biographical. It lies mainly in what is revealed of Shakespeare’s gifts, of his interests and of his aptitudes when he first thrust himself onto the London stage.

But as a last prelude to the assessment of Shakespeare’s comedies at their best, it may not be inappropriate—and it will
certainly make for the completeness of our survey—to set down in some detail the qualities and the shortcomings of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Its demonstrable imperfections of form and the measurement of their effect on the dramatic and philosophic worth of the play will illustrate the underlying principles on which our appraisement of the excellence of the mature comedies is based.

*Love's Labour's Lost* is more like a modern revue, or a musical comedy without music, than a play. It is deficient in plot and in characterisation. There is little story in it. Its situations do not present successive incidents in an ordered plot. Holofernes and Nathaniel could drop out, and yet leave intact the story of the aristocratic lovers. So, too, Armado, although he is allowed to purchase a specious entry at the price of his moral character: his liaison with Jaquenetta brings him into the plot. Even Costard could disappear, for his employment as a bungling postman is a convenient rather than a necessary way of exposing Biron's misdemeanours; equally easily, a supernumerary with a staff could replace Constable Dull. There remain as essential persons for the conduct of the story only the king and his associates and the princess and her ladies. Four men take an oath to segregate themselves from the society of woman for a term of years: circumstance at once compels them to a formal interview with four women: they break their oath. That is the whole story. Complications are avoided. For instance, the tale of four pairs of lovers runs its course without the slightest hint of possible rivalries and jealousies: a theme of such sort would have added intrigue to the story, but would have detracted from the interest in manners. Instead of the variety which the introduction of rivalry would have brought, there is a minor complication arising out of mistakes in identifying the disguised ladies. Clearly a story as simple as is this permits of little elaboration in the dramatic plotting of it. The oath is patently absurd. Even private individuals, retiring to a temporary hermitage, make some provision for such emergencies as may befall in their absence: but here is a king who runs away from public life on a hare-brain scheme without even so much foresight as to appoint a deputy who might
inform enquirers that his present address is unknown. The
taking of such an oath as the king propounds is refractory
dramatic material. In the play, it is managed with as much skill
as is possible. Biron is allowed to make fun of its absurdity,
and to be first moved to bind himself by it only as a joke, whilst,
more seriously, he assures himself of a safe means to come out
of it by a verbal quibble. But the vow promises little com-
pensation in the way of dramatic suspense. Clearly it must be
broken, and the only interest aroused is in the manner of the
breach. All four men might foreswear themselves in chorus,
and have done with it: but by letting each lover try to hide his
lapse from his fellows, a way is made for progressive revelations
in the one scene of the play which is really diverting as a dramatic
situation. It is the only scene strictly belonging to the story
which is really dramatic, that is, a scene in which what the actors
are doing is as engrossing as what they are saying, and where
the situation in which they act and speak gives definite point
to the whole. There are other scenes in which the actions and
the words contribute equally to the theatrical interest; for
example, that in which the men are led to a wrong identification
of the masqued ladies; but they are accidental to the working
out of the story, not really different in kind from the pageants,
the masques, and the dances which make the padding of the play.

But the worst consequences of the poverty of the story
appear in the persons who perform it. The four courtiers could
not but resemble each other in a wooden conformity; for they
have all to do the same sort of thing, and have all to be guilty
of an act of almost incredible stupidity. To have attempted
human differentiations would have been to explore a world of
the spirit where deep-rooted passions, conflicting instincts, and
complex promptings mould distinctive personalities: and thereby
to have made the oath-taking humanly impossible. Hence the
courtiers in the play lack personality, and are equally without
typical character of the human sort. They have manners, and
beyond that, nothing but wit. Hence when an older Shakespeare,
revising the play of his youth, came again to its end, he despatched
his Biron to a suffering world that thereby he might attain a
tincture of humanity. Whilst, in the earlier version, the King
is relegated for a twelvemonth to a hermitage, and Biron to a hospital merely as a penance, the later sentence converts the penance to an act of social service, from day to day visiting the speechless sick, conversing with groaning wretches for the specific object of forcing the pained impotent to smile. Only so may wit acquire sympathy and count itself human.

To the eye, at all events, the ladies of Love's Labour's Lost are a little more individualised than are the men; for, being ladies, the colour of the hair and the texture of the skin are indispensable items in the inventory. A whitely wanton with a velvet skin will not be confused with another of a dark complexion, nor with one so auburn-haired that she stands apart like the red dominical letter on a calendar. Yet under the skin, these ladies are, as empty and as uniform as are their wooers. So when Katharine says that she had a sister who died of love, she is accused by all the commentators of speaking out of her part, for no one in this play was ever related so closely as that to the world of real grief. Biron and Rosaline are frequently said to have something of essential individuality. But in effect, it is only that more of them is seen than of their associates. Biron has indeed more wit and perspicuity than have his fellows. But it is a possession which is dramatically more of an encumbrance than an asset. To save his reputation for wit, he is allowed to expound the absurdity of the oath before it is sworn; thus his subscription to it is doubly fantastic; it is entirely without reasonable motive. Moreover, his scoffs at love and his rhapsodies on its virtues are apparently at haphazard, and he passes from the one condition to the other without a trace of conflict in his nature. Rosaline, dramatically, is in equal plight. To justify her supremacy in wit, she has no time to be anything but witty. There is apparently neither sentiment nor passion in her nature, and without these she will scarcely be taken as a human creature. Like the rest of the courtiers, she is a figure sporting in a world of fantasy where words are meat and drink, and where wit alone is law and conscience.

Of course, in dress and gait and feature, these lords and ladies are as much like man or woman as is any he or she who
passes in the street. Armado, on the other hand, will never be encountered in the walks of daily life. Yet there is in him more truth to human nature than in all the court society. He has no more claim to personality than have they, but he has more dramatic substance. He belongs to a race long established in the tradition of comedy. He is at first a type of all vainglorious claimants to gentility, whose title-deeds are but excessive adoration of the tricks of fashion’s choicest etiquette. No single member of his species was ever so extravagant as he; but he is a caricature and not a portrait. His features are strained to comprehend the limits of his type. Unfortunately, however, the singularity of fashion he affects tends to obscure the family traits he exhibits. He dwindles eventually from the stock-type of the pretender to gentility into a sheer oddity whose idiosyncrasy is merely that of minting fire-new words. In a play like Love’s Labour’s Lost, fashion’s own knight has little chance of showing his chivalry and his new-devised courtesies except in lexicographical exploits.

Holofernes, Nathaniel, and Dull are smaller figures and are less involved in the stream of the play, and hence there is nothing to distort their features from the type. They give the play its footing on the earth, for here at last are men as Warwickshire has known them. Dull is twice-sod simplicity to the life. Holofernes has all the attributes of his profession. He seizes each mellowing occasion to patronise his fellows by a display of learning, disgorging from the ventricle of memory ill-digested grammatical scraps of his diet of ink and paper. He has a genius for making his little learning go a long way: a Latin phrase and a professionally dogmatic manner have made him in his own locality the undisputed arbiter of poetry, wit, and invention.

Nathaniel is a masterpiece in miniature. Every line expresses both his native quality and his professional habit. He improves every occasion by a thanksgiving in which the voice of the curate appropriately phrases his pennyworth of gratitude for a full stomach and a void mind. He has the art of accepting benefits of patronage from his superiors in status or in learning in such a way that the patron is gratified and the recipient suffers no loss of prestige. He snaps up a fine phrase for next week’s
sermon. The man, and his calling, and his place both in his congregation and amongst his associates, are all revealed in his praise for Holofernes' "reasons at dinner". He is grateful to Holofernes for the dinner; he is impressed by the schoolmaster's superior intellect, and he pays his tribute in terms which have just enough of admiring deference to please Holofernes, but not so much as to deprive them of authoritative impressiveness to the vulgar, and which yet have nothing at all in them more substantial than platitudinous common-place.

But the most considerable character of them all is Costard, the unlettered, small-knowing, blundering hind. By sheer lack of every rational gift, he is immune from diseases which are epidemic in the play. Wit and words are not for him, unless, like spades and poles, they make for his immediate and material welfare. If "remuneration" is three farthings, it is well to have it, and its worth is just elevenpence farthing less than that of "guerdon." The wit which knocks a rival down is a ponderable possession equivalent at least to a pennyworth of gingerbread, but for the rest, it may be cast to the almsbasket. Horse-sense and mother-wit are sufficient for Costard. His horse-sense smells out his advantage, and his mother-wit secures it. When he fasts it is on a full stomach. No occasion overcomes his imperturbability. His stupidity is proof against all shocks. Neither king nor courtier daunts him, and, airily misunderstanding, he dismisses himself with credit from the court. More consummate is his complacent patronage of Nathaniel when the curate fails in the show of the Worthies:

    a conqueror, and afeard to speak! run away for shame, Alisaunder.  
    There, an't shall please you; a foolish mild man; an honest man, look  
    you, and soon dashed. He is a marvellous good neighbour, faith, and a  
    very good bowler: but, for Alisaunder,—alas, you see how 'tis,—a little  
    o'erparted.

This is not mere brag, for Costard justifies his superiority by proving the best Worthy of them all. He will decline to be pushed aside when the intellectual substance of the play is being sought.

No profound apprehension of life will be expected from Love's Labour's Lost. That a flagrantly absurd vow will be
broken is a proposition too self-evident to call for substantiation. Its reason is as patent as is Moth’s deduction that when a man grows melancholy it is a sign that he will look sad. The story of the making and the breaking of the vow needs but to be shown to the eye. For anything deeper than mere observation of the surface of life, there is neither room nor need. The imagination is not called upon to reveal powers working in the deeps, silently controlling the currents on the face of the waters. Moreover, the surface here displayed is that of so remote a backwater that to reveal in it the operation of the great ocean-tides of life would be well-nigh impossible. Of apprehension of life in the dramatic way, therefore, there can be very little; but of opinion prompted by the dramatists’ observation of living men there may be much. The course of an action which shows that foolish men are guilty of folly, that the best way to the back-gate is not over the house-top, that we cannot cross the cause why we were born, will hardly excite its author’s passions to flashes of inspired insight.

So much and so little was Shakespeare when he began. Superficially, there are resemblances between Love’s Labour’s Lost and the three plays to which we now finally turn. The interest in all of them is in lovers, and especially in their wooing. The main characters are aristocrats, young, witty, and often either poetic or sentimental. There is also in all of these plays another stratum of dramatis personae, lower in the social scale, and cast mainly to play the part of ‘low’ comedians. But whilst Love’s Labour’s Lost is merely a verbal display and a stage spectacle, the later comedies have been forged into a vital organism which embodies a distinctive and coherent apprehension of life. They are dramatic representations of the comic idea. They are an artist’s creation, original and distinctive. Formally, they are the full realisation of a novel dramatic kind; substantially, they are the projection of an artist’s ripest wisdom.

It is easy to make this claim; but far less easy to substantiate it. When an artist reaches the consummation of his achievement, there is left for most of us, who have seen and heard, little but to consider and bow the head. Especially does a mere scholar find his critical acumen inadequate to the task of expressing precisely what is the supreme virtue of these comic
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masterpieces. At most, he can hope that the tracing, as in our previous lectures, of the course along which Shakespeare was heading for his triumph, may have prompted a manner of thinking which listeners can complete in their own way. Yet, though he knows the impossibility of the task, he must make some attempt to put his sense of Shakespeare's final comic achievement into words.

On a purely and superficially formal consideration, it is remarkable that these mature plays seem to exhibit little progress in such external things as plotcraft and dramatic illusiveness when set beside Shakespeare's earlier experiments in comedy. *Much Ado* is so informal that it makes its sub-plot much more significant than its nominally main plot. *Twelfth Night* builds itself formally on circumstances like those of *A Comedy of Errors*, and even increases the theatrical improbability of all plays of mistaken identity by adding sex-disguise to make stage-illusion still more difficult. *As You Like It* gratuitously imports lions into the forest of Arden; it trades as extensively as *Twelfth Night* in sex-disguise, and it rounds off its action with a hastier and even less suitable marriage than is that of Olivia and Sebastian. But the appearance of casualness in plotcraft is delusory. These plays are held together, not by the nexus of external circumstance, but by the coherence of their spiritual substance. Their apparent diversity is moulded into unity by what Coleridge would have called an esemplastic power. They are the unified shape of an embodied idea, the representation of a created world which has become an organic universe because its every operation manifests the universality of its own proper laws.

To see these plays as a form of comedy, it is perhaps easiest to begin by realising that in kind they are essentially and obviously different from traditional classical comedy. Their main characters arouse admiration; they excite neither scorn nor contempt. They inspire us to be happy with them; they do not merely cajole us into laughing at them. Therein lies the fundamental difference between classical and Shakespearian comedy. Classical comedy is conservative. It implies a world which has reached stability sufficient for itself. Its members are assumed to be fully aware of the habits and the morals which
preserve an already attained state of general well-being. The main interest is the exposure of offenders against common practice and against unquestioned propriety in the established fitness of things. Hence, its manner is satire, and its standpoint is public common sense. But Shakespearian comedy is a more venturesome and a more imaginative undertaking. It does not assume that the conditions and the requisites of man's welfare have been certainly established, and are therefore a sanctity only to be safeguarded. It speculates imaginatively on modes, not of preserving a good already reached, but of enlarging and extending the possibilities of this and other kinds of good. Its heroes (or heroines, to give them the dues of their sex) are voyagers in pursuit of a happiness not yet attained, a brave new world wherein man's life may be fuller, his sensations more exquisite and his joys more widespread, more lasting, and so more humane. But as the discoverer reaches this higher bliss, he (or rather she) is making his conquests in these realms of the spirit accessible not only to himself but to all others in whom he has inspired the same way of apprehending existence. He has not merely preserved the good which was; he has refined, varied, and widely extended it. Hence Shakespearian comedy is not finally satiric; it is poetic. It is not conservative; it is creative. The way of it is that of the imagination rather than that of pure reason. It is an artist's vision, not a critic's exposition.

But though the ultimate world of Shakespeare's comedy is romantic, poetic, and imaginative, it is by no means unsubstantial and fantastic. The forest of Arden is no conventional Arcadia. Its inhabitants are not exempt from the penalty of Adam. Winter, rough weather, the season's differences, the icy fang and churlish chiding of the winter's wind invade Arden as often as they invade this hemisphere of ours. Nor does manna fall to it from heaven. One may come by a sufficient sustenance of flesh, if one has the weapons and the impulse to make a breach in the conventionality of idyllic Nature by killing its own creatures, the deer, to whom the forest is the assigned and native dwelling-place. Arden, too, is not ignorant of the earthly landlordism which cramps the labourers' life with harshness:
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My master is of churlish disposition
And little recks to find the way to heaven
By doing deeds of hospitality.

And, after all, pastoral life in Arden is merely episodic in the round of man's fuller existence: "when I was at home, I was in a better place." Rosalind and Orlando will return to live their adult life in the society of man and in a civilisation which will impose on them the duties of extended social responsibilities. Only by hearsay is life in Arden reputed to be a fleeting the time carelessly as they did in the golden age; even young Orlando knows that it may be a losing and a neglecting of the creeping hours. Arden, indeed, may properly excite the witticisms of Touchstone by its rusticities; it may arouse the twisted sentimentalism of Jaques by its Darwinian illustrations of the cruel struggle for survival.

But Arden survives. It survives as an immeasurable enlargement of the universe of comedy. No longer is the comic spirit confined to the city and to the market-place. And not only is there Arden. There is Illyria. There are the vast expanses of a less known world; romantic countries on whose coasts all the strange and stirring episodes that man has dreamed may come true: shipwreck, piracy, warfare, marvellous escapes from imminent death, hazards boldly and even recklessly encountered. Or, may be, lands of dolce far niente, where music is the food of love, where corporeal and material exigencies offer no impediment to man's grasp at the opulence of a merely sentimental existence. In such a climate, a duke may wallow orientally in the luxuriance of sheer sensuous excitement: but, in the same air, the witchcraft of adventure will strike from a simple ship's captain a nobility of benevolence which will sacrifice all for another's good.

"This is the air, this is the glorious sun." But it is not only in its geographical atmosphere that the world of these comedies is so vastly larger than that of classical comedy, so much more radiant than that of Shakespeare's earlier romantic comedies, and so much more rich than that of Falstaff's Eastcheap. In its own turn, the world of the spirit has been equally extended. As one obvious sign of it, man has become more
exquisitely conscious of music. Of course, there has always been a human impulse for caterwauling; and, in their cups, men have commonly felt themselves to be such dogs at a catch that they could rouse the night-owl and make the welkin dance. But it is in these great plays that men are suddenly brought up against the stupendous and apparently incredibly foolish circumstance that sheep’s guts are potent to hale the souls out of their bodies.

There had, of course, always been music in Elizabethan plays. It was hallowed by their earliest tradition. In daily life, too, an Elizabethan, whether nobleman or peasant, had found music as much an habitual part of his occupation as was eating or drinking or working.

O, fellow, come, the song we had last night.
Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain;
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones
Do use to chant it.

It is not only that song and music irradiate these plays—the very clown of one of them has almost lost his clownage to qualify as a singer—the important point is that the men and women of the play, and Shakespeare and his audience, are becoming conscious of what the spell of music implies. ‘That strain again’; these old and antique songs were apt to arouse amorousness in Orsino and yet “to relieve him of his passion much”. To recognise the palpable effect of music was the first step: to become aware of its implications was another. In men’s secular lives, music ministered most powerfully to their passion of love. “If music be the food of love, play on.” And so they found themselves at the very heart of the mystery, the recognition that, however strange, sheep’s guts did in fact hale their souls out of their bodies. They were feelingly aware that the soul is susceptible to strange and unaccountable impulses, and that, responding to them, it enters a rich and novel spiritual kingdom.

What this means for the purposes of Shakespearian comedy is this. Man had discovered that he was a much less rational and a much more complex creature than he had taken himself to be. His instincts and his intuitions, his emotions and his
moods were as real and as distinctive a part of him as his reason and his plain common sense. There were, in fact, a much more incalculable yet often a much more exciting and satisfying part of his nature than was his sober intellect. Man was rediscovering the validity of his intuitions and of his emotions; he was, in particular, and for the express purposes of comedy, becoming intellectually aware that the tumultuous condition of his being which followed his falling in love and urged him on to woo, was in fact no mean and mainly physical manifestation of his personality; it was, in fact, the awakening in him of the fuller capacities of his spirit.

So, amongst the themes of Elizabethan comedy, love had now justified its primacy. It had willy nilly always been the major interest. But, as the earlier comedies have shown, its usurpations had been hazardous for the spirit of comedy. It had hitherto forced itself into a Pyrrhic triumph as an alien invader backed only by the forces of popular preference. It could now rightly take its place in Elizabethan comedy as the recognised presiding genius. It was the touchstone by which fine spirits were struck to their finest issues. It was also, of course, a test by which weaker mortals revealed their weakness, grosser ones their grossness, and foolish ones their folly. It is noteworthy, however, that though these three great comedies are even more exclusively the plays of lovers and their wooing than are the earlier ones, seldom does Shakespeare allow their wooing to express itself in the full gamut of its lyric modulations. Its utterance is adapted to a dramatic, and, indeed, to a comic scene: depth of affection is displayed rather by hints and by deeds than by the conventional phrase of the love poet. The homily of love from its gentle pulpiters is felt to be tedious, and is seldom allowed to weary its hearers. Often, indeed, when the wooing itself is an extended episode of the story, it is camouflaged in circumstances shaped by the wooers to cover their real passion. Beatrice and Benedick deliberately adopt a kind of inverted technique of love-making; and for them, the normal idiom of lovers is feigned by others so as to be overheard by the two who are to be the victims of the device. Rosalind, disguised as Ganymede, pretends to be herself in order to teach Orlando
Viola expresses her own love only by innuendo, and finds a sort of outlet for her inhibition, as well as a gratification for her own sense of restraint, in unfolding to Olivia the passion of the Duke's love, as if hallooing her name to the reverberate hills to make the babbling gossip of the air cry out "Olivia". But having done this, Viola will find it easier to be her natural self. "I took great pains to study it, and 'tis poetical." In the throes of her own love, she will revert to sanity.

Indeed, deeply as these heroines fall in love, no person in the plays is more aware of the follies into which love may delude its victims. It is Rosalind who reproves the foolish shepherd Silvius for following Phoebe like foggy south puffing with wind and rain:

'tis such fools as you
That make the world full of ill-favoured children.

But she will advise silly giddy-brained Phebe to go down on her knees and thank heaven fasting for a good man's love. Lunacy and love are yet not entirely different diseases. "Love is merely a madness, and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do: and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is, that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too." Madness, but inevitable madness: and a madness in which the visions are a mingling of revelation and of hallucination. Who shall know which is which? Who better than the one who knows most of the frequency of hallucination? Rosalind is well aware of what may be falsely claimed for love, so well aware that she can make hock of the possibilities: "the poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died in his own person, videlicet, in a love cause. Troilus had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club; yet he did what he could to die before, and he is one of the patterns of love. Leander, he would have lived many a fair year, though Hero had turned nun, if it had not been for a hot midsummer night; for, good youth, he went but forth to wash him in the Hellespont and being taken with the cramp was drowned: and the foolish chroniclers of that age found it was 'Hero of Sestos'. But these are all lies: men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but
not for love." Yet there is no wrestling with Rosalind's affections, when they take the part of the man with whom she has fallen desperately and suddenly in love.

Rosalind, Viola, and, to a less extent, Beatrice, are Shakespeare's images of the best way of love. They, and the men in whom they inspire love, are Shakespeare's representation of the office of love to lift mankind to a richer life. So, by the entry into it of love, not only has the world of these comedies become a bigger world: the men and women who inhabit it have become finer and richer representatives of human nature. They have entered into the possession of spiritual endowments which, if hitherto suspected to exist at all, had either been distrusted as dangerous or had become moribund through desuetude. They have claimed the intuitive, the sub-conscious, and the emotional as instruments by which personality may bring itself into a fuller consciousness of and a completer harmony with the realities of existence. They have left Theseus far behind; they have also outgrown Falstaff.

But if the new world of these mature comedies is one of which Falstaff could never have attained the mastery, there is yet room in it for much even of the corporeal and for all of the immortal parts of him. He is relegated, however, to his proper place therein. Perhaps Sir Toby is as much of him as will survive a final approbation. To both Toby and Falstaff, care is the chief enemy of life; its main sustenance is capons and canary. Their values are much the same: Falstaff's deepest contempt is for a brewer's horse; Sir Toby's symbol of a world without life is an unfilled can. Both live by their wits, deluding the gullible into disbursing. "Let's to bed, knight; thou hadst need send for money." But if Toby never attains the plenitude of Falstaff's dominion, at least he escapes rejection, and achieves ultimately a more settled survival. He lives on under the leading or misleading strings of Maria: and, characteristically, this is a kindly fate into which he was inveigled by his admiration for the devilry of Maria's wit. It is Toby, too, who puts into words the most pertinent principle which can be propounded in defence of the Falstaffian life, a principle which goes beyond the mere assertion of high spirits and acclaims the
cordial law of tolerance: "because thou art virtuous, shall there be no more cakes and ale?"

But the acceptance of Toby as an integral part of the ideal world of romantic comedy does not fully indicate how much of the essential virtue of Falstaff Shakespeare, after the antipathy of his dark comedies, endeavoured to find permanently serviceable to humanity. For Toby has not the full measure of Falstaff’s wit. Perhaps Beatrice of Much Ado is Shakespeare’s completest picture of the way in which sheer wit may serve the cause of human sanity in human society and thereby extend the scope of its possible happiness. But whereas it is only Falstaff’s wit which prompts him sportingly to plead instinct as a final protection, it is the complete surrender of wit and the actual resort to instinct which makes Beatrice the instrument of happiness in the crucial moment of the plot of Much Ado. Still, it may well be that in the make-up of Beatrice, allying the exercise of wit with the innate geniality of a disposition born under a star which laughed, Shakespeare was giving such intellectual agility as was Falstaff’s its opportunity to display how much of real human good it was capable of effecting. But even Beatrice—and we take her to have been grafted by Shakespeare on to an earlier play of his own which thus became Much Ado—even Beatrice has not grown into the full liberality of Rosalind’s and Viola’s humanity, close as her birth must have been to theirs. She is the direct counterpart of Helena, and perhaps her next successor: and she in turn was followed almost at once by Rosalind and Viola.

Technically, the most remarkable achievement of Beatrice is that, with hardly anything at all to do in what is nominally the main plot, she nevertheless becomes the chief figure of the piece, and the primary instigator of the sentiment which leads to the happy solution of the story. She is a lively symbol of the new state of affairs in the domain of comedy. The hero has been dethroned, losing not only his rank but something also of personality; he has been replaced by the heroine. It is a commonplace that the main men of these comedies are but pygmies compared in stature with the heroines. Moreover, these ladies are not only the heroines in the material and formal
sense that they have most of the scenes of the play. They are heroines in the sense that they provide the efficient force which resolves the dilemma of the play into happiness. That happiness is palpably a state of affairs which, in so far as it springs from human effort, is specifically an outcome of their making.

Nor is it difficult to see the virtue by which they are the bringers of so much joy. Shakespeare's enthronement of woman as queen of comedy is no mere accident, and no mere gesture of conventional gallantry. Because they are women, these heroines have attributes of personality fitting them more certainly than men to shape the world towards happiness. His menfolk, a Hamlet or a Macbeth or an Othello, may have a subtler intellect, a more penetrating imagination, or a more irresistible passion. But what they have more largely in one kind of personal endowment, they own only at the expense of other properties no less essential to the encountering of such varied circumstances as are presented by the act of living. These heroes, in effect, are out of harmony with themselves, and so are fraught with the certainty of tragic doom. Their personality is a mass of mighty forces out of equipoise: they lack the balance of a durable spiritual organism. It was in women that Shakespeare found this equipoise, this balance which makes personality in action a sort of ordered interplay of the major components of human nature. In his women, hand and heart and brain were fused in a vital and practicable union, each contributing to the other, no one of them permanently pressing demands to the detriment of the other, yet each asserting itself periodically to exercise its vitality, even if the immediate effect be a temporary disturbance of equilibrium, for not otherwise would they be potent to exercise their proper function when the whole of their owner's spiritual nature is struck into activity. Perhaps it was primarily because Shakespeare found women more sensitive to intuition and more responsive to emotion that he first promoted them to dominion in the realm of comedy. He found, moreover, in their instincts a kind of finely developed mother-wit, a variety of humanised common sense which, because it was impregnated with humane feeling, was more apt to lay hold of the essential realities of existence than was the more rarified and isolated intellect of
man. But, though it was what to this extent may be called their essential femininity which gave his heroines their first claims to rulership in comedy, Shakespeare insisted in his maturest comedies that all the qualities which his heroines owed to the promptings of intuition and instinct were only certainly beneficent in human affairs when instinct and intuition were guided by a mind in which a sublimated common sense had established itself as the habitual director of action and behaviour.

It is unnecessary here to attempt to describe these heroines one by one, or even to name in detail all their generic traits. It will be enough to indicate one or two of their characteristic virtues. They have all the gift of inspiring and of returning affection. They have the good will of all who know them. They are simply human and patently natural in their response to emotional crises like that of falling in love. Rosalind's excitement when she first meets Orlando is as palpable as are her transparent endeavours to hide it. Their own passion still further sharpens the affection through which they seek the good of others. Once they are conscious of their own desire they are master-hands in reaching it. Rosalind is the main plotter of the flight to Arden; it is she who devises the means of ensuring Orlando's frequent company. Viola resolves at once to remedy her lot by taking service with the Duke; and immediately becomes his confidant and his private minister. She overcomes all the ceremonial obstacles which bar access to Olivia, using, when need be, the bluster and the rudeness which she learns from her opponents. She seizes a situation on the instant; and even when the outcome is not clearly to be foreseen, she acts in a manner which will save unnecessary suffering to others: "she took the ring of me," is her lie to Malvolio, guessing at once how the distraught Olivia had tried to hide her device from her steward and messenger. In crises, all of them, Rosalind, Viola, and Beatrice, are guided by intuitive insight. Beatrice acclaims Hero's innocence in the face of damning evidence. Viola judges her ship's captain by the same inner vision, and she confides in him implicitly. Yet the instinct and the intuition are always open-eyed and cautiously safeguarded against mere casual vagary or whimsical sentimentality. When Viola judges
the captain's worth by his fair and outward character, she re-
members that nature with a beauteous wall doth oft close in 
pollution. Rosalind and Celia are equally immune from this 
wide-spread romantic fallacy. They know that there is no 
certain and predictable relation between beauty and honesty 
in mankind: they would have laughingly recommended all 
the Tennysonian moralists of their day, who thought beauty 
to be either truth or virtue, to stroll through the equivalent of 
their West End after the theatres were shut and when the 
restaurants were coming to the end of their cabarets. Yet, with 
all the efficiency and savoir faire of which these heroines prove 
themselves to be possessed, they are amazingly modest. It is 
this modesty which prevents them from endeavouring to compass 
what is beyond mortal reach. Fortune, they know, is but a 
blind worker; and she doth most mistake in her gifts to woman. 
Viola undoubtedly is confident, but not over-confident: she 
will do what she can, but

O time! thou must entangle this, not I;
It is too hard a knot for me to untie.

And Rosalind never forgets how full of briers is this work-a-day 
world. But in the end, they triumph; and they triumph 
because they are just what they are, the peculiar embodiment 
in personality of those traits of human nature which render 
human beings most loveable, most loving, and most serviceable 
to the the general good.

But these ladies are not only doers and inspirers of action. 
Merely by their presence in the play, they serve as standards 
whereby degrees of worth and worthlessness in other char-
acters are made manifest. Hence the rich variety of theme, 
of episode, and of person in these plays is knit together and holds 
as a coherent structure. The beneficence of emotion and of 
intuition is no wise belittled by the revelation of the follies which 
spring from feeling in less stable creatures than are the heroines. 
So, Twelfth Night is largely occupied with the disclosure of 
unbalanced sentiment. There is the ennervating sentimentality 
of Orsino, there is the unrestrained emotionalism of Olivia. 
As You Like It handles an allied theme by its exposure of 
merely conventional pastoralism. Indeed, once the positive
construction of their larger world has been effected by the heroines, there is now place, not only for their own safeguards for it, such as this perpetual alertness to expose the dangers of unbalanced sentiment, there is also place for the sort of direct satire and the forthright comicality which were the manner of the older classical tradition. Just as Sir Toby finds his station in *Twelfth Night*, so do Andrew and even Malvolio; there, in Andrew’s case, simply to display his own foolish inanity as do the witless in all sorts of comedy; and in Malvolio’s, to enter almost as Jonson gave his characters entry, for a more subtle but still classical kind of discomfiture. As Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, so Jaques in *As You Like It*, another of the few attempts of Shakespeare to project malcontentism for comic purposes. Besides these, traditional clowns may now also play their part, whether the English Shakespearian ones of the tribe of Bottom, such as Dogberry and Verges, or the more technical ones, Feste and Touchstone, grown now by contact with natural Costards into something more substantial and more homely than the mere traditional corrupters of words, and therefore playing not the part of an added funny interlude, but an essential rôle in the orientation of the idea of comedy. “Since the little wit that fools have was silenced, the little foolery that wise men have makes a great show.” The true fool’s return is restorative. A fool of his sort will use his folly like a stalking-horse, and under the presentation of that, will shoot his wit. Yet his range will necessarily be limited now. Only the crassest folly falls to such arrows, for those who have become expert in human traffickings can assume an easy indifference to simple and direct hits:

He that a fool doth very wisely hit
Doth very foolishly, although he smart,
Not to seem senseless of the bob; if not,
The wise man’s folly is anatomized
Even by the squandering glances of the fool.

Thus the motley of romantic comedies is subtler than the slapdash skittle-knocking of the satire in classical comedy. Their reformatory way, too, is fundamentally different from the simple exposure of ludicrous abnormality which had been the approved
manner of older comedy. They entice to a richer wisdom by alluring the imagination into desire for larger delights. They are not mainly concerned to whip offenders into conventional propriety by scorn and by mockery. They persuade one to the better state by presenting it in all its attractiveness: they depict a land of heart’s desire, and, doing that, reveal the way of human and natural magic by which it is to be attained.

Hence, in the last resort, the greatness of these greatest of Shakespeare’s comedies will be measured by the profundity and the persuasiveness of the apprehension of life which they embody, by the worth, that is, of their underlying worldly wisdom. What then is this comic idea of which these plays are the dramatic revelation?

Something of the answer has already been given in estimating the characteristics of the heroines. But the conclusions may be made more general: in the first place, however, it must be noted that though these romantic comedies break through the traditional scope of classical comedy, their sphere is still rigorously confined within the proper orbit of comedy. They limit themselves to acquaintance with life here and now; the world, and not eternity, is their stage. It is, of course, a world presenting many more woeful pageants than comedy is capable of transmuting to happiness: and comedy must confine itself to those threats of fate and those rubs of circumstance which can be reconciled with man’s reach for assured joy in living. In these ripest of Shakespeare’s comedies, comedy is seeking in its own artistic way to elucidate the moral art of securing happiness by translating the stubbornness of fortune into a quiet and a sweet existence.

It finds that this art comes most easily to those who by nature are generous, guiltless, and of a free disposition, just, indeed, as are Shakespeare’s heroines. It finds the art crippled, if not destroyed, in those who lack the genial sense of fellowship with mankind. A Malvolio, sick of self-love, thanking God that he is not of the element of his associates, sees the rest of men merely as specimens of the genus ‘homo,’—“why, of mankind.” The springs of sympathy are dried up within him. He becomes merely a time-server, planning only for his own selfish gain. The aptitude to do this successfully had been a positive asset
to the earlier, even to the Falstaffian, kind of comic hero. But now, in the radiance of these maturer plays, it is seen in truer light. Malvolio has lost the art of life; his very genius is infected.

The corruption of man by the coldness of his blood and the stifling of his sense of brotherhood is seen even more clearly in Oliver and in Don John: it is the source of their villainy. Don John lives only to gratify his own antipathies. Not only is he without desire to do good to others; he prefers the delight of increasing their woes. "I wonder that thou, being, as thou sayest thou art, born under Saturn, goest about to apply a moral medicine to a mortifying mischief." His spirit toils in nothing but in frame of villainies. Even Jaques has been corrupted into superciliousness by cultivating superiority and habituating himself to contemplative mockery and polite persiflage. He patronises humanity; but there is no love. He thinks he knows himself and the world; but, perhaps because he fled from both to purge himself of his earlier sensuality and his libertinage, his knowledge is superficial, impressive no doubt to the hearers by its philosophic seeming, but inadequate in its findings and distorted in its values. His psycho-analytic formula of his own melancholy is nothing but the covering up of moral deficiency by a pseudo-scientific explanation of it, an excellent prototype of a habit which has increased vastly in popularity. His compendious summary of the seven ages of man is seen to be grossly inaccurate when its heartlessness is immediately followed by the breaking into the scene of Orlando and Adam: for there is no place for either of these in Jaques's catalogue. Charity and gratitude are beyond his comprehension: "well then, if ever I thank any man, I'll thank you; but that they call compliment is like the encounter of two dog-apes, and when a man thanks me heartily, methinks I have given him a penny and he renders me the beggarly thanks." Here, indeed, is the deepest root of human evil: the most outstanding feature of the moral valuation of human worth in these comedies is its departure from almost all accredited codes of conduct in its relative lenience towards crime and even vice in comparison with its condemnation of ingratitude:
I hate ingratitude more in a man
Than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness,
Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption
Inhabits our frail blood.

This, indeed, is the very heart of Shakespeare’s humanism. So, with all his vaunt of wisdom, Jaques is less aware of the things which really are than is the simple-minded Corin. Corin is, in fact, a profounder philosopher than is Jaques: “hast any philosophy in thee, shepherd?” “No more but that I know the more one sickens the worse at ease he is; and that he that wants money, means and content, is without three good friends; that the property of rain is to wet and fire to burn; that good pasture makes fat sheep, and that a great cause of the night is lack of the sun; that he that hath learned no wit by nature nor art may complain of good breeding or comes of a very dull kindred."

Such a natural philosophy is adequate to more than the forest of Arden. A Touchstone may be only partly pleased with what he gets there, even with Audrey. A native born in its woods may find that trouble enters not so much with the encounter of winter and rough weather and other such natural enemies, but rather with the complications of its human relationships: but perhaps even Silvius is no more a real denizen of Arden than is Phebe. Living is, indeed, not a colloquising with oneself on the top of Helvellyn, nor an exploring of the ultimate nature of matter in a laboratory. It is the setting up of harmonious and beneficent relationships with human beings. It is an active membership in the society of man. That, at all events, is what life is taken to be in Shakespeare’s comedies. Of all virtues, that which best promotes its well-being is the passion for serving the world, the instinct for sacrifice in the cause of the general good, or, rather, for the good of Tom and Dick and Harry, of Maud, Bridget, Marian, Cicely, Gillian and Ginn. Shakespeare’s heroines seek what they want for themselves, but, securing it, they give joy to others. They are not deliberate philanthropists; they are only being their spontaneous selves when they instinctively proffer kindness to others. Paper-policies of virtue, theories of right and wrong, play no part
in the active goodness of Shakespeare's nobler figures. Abstract propositions formulated in mere words are a false moral coinage: their currency is not even valid in their own home country. "Every one can master grief but he that has it." Purely intellectual convictions do not avail even their professors: men

Can counsel and speak comfort to that grief
Which they themselves not feel; but, tasting it,
Their counsel turns to passion, which before
Would give preceptial medicine to rage,
Fetter strong madness in a silken thread,
Charm ache with air and agony with words:
No, no; 'tis all men's office to speak patience
To those that wring under the load of sorrow,
But no man's virtue nor sufficiency
To be so moral when he shall endure
The like himself.

For there was never yet philosopher
That could endure the toothache patiently,
However they have writ the style of gods
And made a push at chance and sufferance.

For men are flesh and blood: we are all mortal; and man is a giddy thing. Yet he is much more the matter through which our happiness is to be earned than are the natural or the material objects in our environment. Hence the foundation of all lasting pleasure is the gift of intuitive sympathy, and the habit of forbearance and of tolerance. In the finest spirits, those who create more happiness than they receive, these instincts will be consecrated to the constant service of the world, where service sweats for duty, not for meed, or where the meed is but the unsought spontaneous joy of well-doing.

But a caveat must here be entered. Shakespeare's heroes and heroines are not sworn crusaders for universal regeneration. They are not idealists swept along in a surge of philanthropic sentiment. They are, in the last resort, as unswervingly conscious of the obligations of common sense as ever hero of comedy was. But in them it is a faculty which is nourished by so much more of their personality than was Falstaff's. It still requires them, as it required him, and as it requires all comic heroes, to know exactly what the world is and what
man is, rather than what one might dream they ought to be. These heroines know the world as unerringly as did Falstaff. The fundamental sanity of Beatrice is that she can see a church by daylight. All of them recognise the immutable conditions of human existence: an hour after nine o'clock, it is ten o'clock, and after one hour more 'twill be eleven.

But knowing the world no less securely than did Falstaff, they know the more important phases of its experience so much better. They have discovered the mystery of man. Their knowledge gives them a truer estimate of the extent to which there is fixity in the conditions of existence; they discover a freedom within its limits hitherto undreamed of. An hour after nine o'clock it undubitably is ten o'clock, and sixty minutes are an unalterable and unvarying measure of time. But "time travels in divers paces with divers persons". One man's hour is another man's minute. There are even moments, sure though seldom, worth the whole course of a lifetime.

To recognise this is not to defy the authority of common sense. It is to account its findings more comprehensively and more truly. Time is measured by the clock; it is valued by man. Both assessments are part of truth; but it is a larger sanity which comprehends both of them. This is the sanity of Shakespeare's heroines. It endows them with the advantages of a truly realistic apprehension and it safeguards them against the narrowness of exclusive rationalism. It releases them from the bondage of wit and convention, freeing them to grasp the undreamed-of promises of each new moment. "I did never think to marry . . . I may chance to have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have railed so long against marriage: but doth not the appetite alter? When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married." Here, surely, is a higher and a more effective notion of reason. Man has learnt life more deeply. He knows what prudence and general preference want in a wife: "rich she shall be, that's certain; wise, or I'll none; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen her; fair, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not near me; noble, or not I for an angel; of good discourse, an excellent musician." It is, of course, a catalogue
which commands general assent: and granted its requirements are fulfilled, “her hair shall be of what colour it please God”. It is all so satisfactory. Indeed, all it leaves out is the most vital factor of all. Loving goes by haps. It is a thousand to one that fancy will first be caught in the frail net of golden, or auburn, or brown, or black, or any other colour of hair for precisely the reason that it is of that colour. That is what life is. The circumstances with which it confronts humanity are incalculable, and especially so are those through which men and women shape their highest happiness. To achieve this, an aptitude for mastery, an unerring eye for the major chance, a gift for seizing opportunity are even more necessary than they were in Falstaff’s world. And Shakespeare’s heroines have these endowments. But they have something more. They have the genius not only for seizing opportunity, but, having seized it, for making its worth of widest human service. They have that because they are the choicest patterns which mere human nature can bring forth. They are human nature; and first by temperament, then by habit, and then by will, they make joy, and service, and love the guiding motives of their life. They have grown to a trust in nature and a confidence in man. This earth has become their heaven, a heaven unknown to classical comedians, undreamed of by theologians, a heaven to be realised by the natural goodness of human nature before it or heaven is contaminated by theorist or politician, by sentimentalist or puritan, by precisian or visionary. “But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

That, in a phrase, appears to be the summary conclusion of Shakespeare’s worldly wisdom. Our attempt to track it through the plays and then to set it out in words will doubtless seem to have been a characteristically academic mishandling of comedy. Comedy, it will be felt, is a thing of joy, all for our delight, and not an original document for a moral treatise. The radiance of it is sullied by such insensitive analysis, and the broad laughter of it is stifled in a sigh. Moreover, what has emerged from such tedious mishandling? “The greatest of these is love”: nothing but a moral commonplace, something which sounds like a mere
truisms. It may well be that our long course in reaching this conclusion has been like climbing the house-top to unlock the little gate, or like any other instance of love's labour's lost. Besides, what is new in this alleged discovery of Shakespeare's? It is a proposition which was set forth once for all well nigh two thousand years ago, and worthy men have been echoing it ever since. Moreover, is it not flagrantly retrograde at this late day to degrade Shakespeare, the world's artist, into a merely trite moralist, a very tedious pulpiteer?

If the hearer of these lectures feels like that, then they have failed in their main object, and their underlying principles are false. It is surely not a dramatist's business to preach. Still less is it his office to propound a systematic body of moral doctrine. It is his primary business to see, to see the world and man and life. Then, as a poet, he projects his vision. He puts what he has seen into the shape which presents it in the precisely proportionate modulations which display the elements of it performing what it is in life their nature to perform. His presentation fails or succeeds by the power of it to impress us with its actuality, its comprehensiveness, its truth. And it impresses not only one faculty of our perceptual and cognitive organism. To secure artistic conviction, it must impress all at once. Shakespeare in these comedies is not in fact telling us that he thinks that charity ought to be man's way of dealing with his fellows: he is not persuading us on ethical and religious grounds that we should cultivate sympathy and nourish love. On the contrary, he is exercising a purely artistic gift. He is revealing to us that, whether we like it or not, whether we ought or ought not to do it, it is clear to the eye of the seer that love is the one way to supreme happiness on this earth. He saw this as a fact by the sensitiveness of his poetic apprehension. And his creative genius so translated it as the guiding principle of the world it bodied forth that we weaker mortals are permitted to see it too. And seeing is believing.