Chapter IV

SHAKESPEARE
In chapter III we have tried to give a critical general survey of Kālidāsa's works. Now, we take up the works of Shakespeare. The number of works ascribed to Shakespeare is about 35 to 40. His authorship or sole authorship of a number of works, has been doubted by many scholars and critics, that is to say, according to them some of them might not have been Shakespeare's at all and some might have been, in part only, Shakespeare's. We shall, however, follow mainly the catalogue of works as furnished by Dowden, Bradely, etc. ignoring their mutual difference but trying to adhere to their common list. No more detailed study is considered necessary for our present purpose. As it is well-known, Shakespeare's works have been generally divided into four classes or categories, viz., Poems, Comedies, Histories and Tragedies, the minor works of his adolescent period and after being called as Poems and his dramas, which are the main bulk of his works, being divided, following the classification in the first Folio, into Comedies, Histories and Tragedies. The dramas have, again, been divided into four periods and they have been placed in a certain order within those periods, this naturally being merely tentative and useful for a more or less chronological study of the poet and his works. We do not, however, propose to follow any strict chronology but we intend to dispose of the Poems (including the Sonnets) first and then take up the earlier Comedies and early Tragedy followed by the Histories and the Middle and Later Tragedies and wound up with the
later Comedies, thus completing the circle in a broad chronological order ignoring a precise chronology regarding each individual work within a certain period. This will give, we trust, the substance of a chronological study which has been profitably and elaborately followed by Dowden in his 'Shakespeare—His Mind and Art'. As we have already observed at the beginning of chapter III, the proposed critical general survey of Shakespeare's works will be made more or less with special reference to their themes, characters and emotional effects (vastu', netā' and rasa') of Sanskrit critical literature), although characters are, or rather characterization is, the one thing that may be said to have been mostly emphasised in Western dramas in general and in Shakespearean dramas in particular. In Sanskrit critical literature, rasa' is the chief aim to which vastu' and netā' are subservient; but in Shakespearian dramas almost all critics have acclaimed the supreme quality of his characterization - perhaps rivalled only by the quality of his poetry - while Aristotle emphasised plot as the soul of drama. We have already touched upon this before, and more of this in our conclusions. Hence, we shall put special emphasise on characterization with regard to the dramas of Shakespeare in view of the consensus of critics on this point and with regard to his tragedies, in particular, following the great tradition of Shakespearian critics. As the number of Shakespeare's works far exceeds that of Kālidāsa, we have to devote, unwillingly though, less space to each of Shakespeare's works in our survey relative to that of
Kalidāsa, in order to avoid an unnecessary increase in volume. Our survey will be based, more or less, on the studies of celebrated Shakespearian critics, in particular, on the works of Dowden who was probably the first to study Shakespeare’s works as a whole and in their proper order and setting, and was certainly one of the finest of Shakespearian critics.

To begin with the poems, first, 'Venus and Adonis' which is supposed to be his first book — 'the first heir of my invention' in the author's own words — along with his other poems, occupies a position similar to that of the 'Rūggamāhā' of Kalidāsa. They are adolescent attempts of the poet to express himself in a poetic form — that form, naturally, being related to love and nature, and rather love of love and love of nature. In his 'Venus and Adonis', the poet has sought to make a thorough and detailed artistic studies of this general theme limited to a particular sphere i.e. of womanly lust and boyish coldness. In his 'The Rape of Lucrece' which is grouped with his 'Venus and Adonis', he has an almost opposite theme i.e., the male lust and womanly chastity. So, in these two he has made a poetical and artistic study of man's and woman's lust and chastity — a theme very much to his heart as seen in his later great dramas. It is not known whether the poet's pre-occupation at this time with the theme of lust and love has anything to do with his personal love affair with the widowed lady, some years older than
himself, who became his wife and who might or might not have taken an active part in that affair. In 'The Passionate Pilgrim' also Shakespeare has tried the same theme. 'A Lover's Complaint' and 'The Phoenix and Turtle' also fall in line with the rest of the poems in this and other respects, though in a small measure. For a renaissance poet — and for Shakespeare in particular — this pursuit of Beauty, Lust and Death, which is to be a great theme in later dramas — is characteristic. Sensuous imagination and brooding on death are both characteristics of the age — and in a much fuller measure in our poet. These early works do not lack occasional flashes of good poetry thus preparing the ground for eventual great poetry. In these works and in 'Lucrece', in particular, his treatment of the various themes is detailed and exhaustive. But in these Coleridge has noticed 'the utter aloofness of the poet's own feelings from those of which he is at once the painter and the analyst'. This aloofness is not, however, due to a dramatic abandonment of self or objectivity of vision as in his great dramas. This is, rather, due to a coldness on the part of the poet i.e. though careful and elaborate in his art, he is not yet animated with it or is yet one with it. So, here his art is more analytical than synthetic and as Coleridge has remarked he is here more of a painter than a poet — a composer of 'citrakāvya', as the Sanskrit critics would call it. In later works, quite the opposite is true — more and more as he advanced in maturity and perfection. However, these
early studies have furnished us with good materials for his later dramatic creations, and to that extent, should be profitably studied. And as Dowden has shown, Shakespeare's progress in his art has been rather slow, laborious and steady. Compared to his extraordinary greatness his preparation for this greatness has also been extraordinary. It is interesting to study this fact along with another fact that he was an 'inspired poet', whatever that phrase may mean.

The Sonnets of Shakespeare, though possibly belonging to his Second Period, may be discussed here. There are many theories regarding these Sonnets numbering about 150 or so. Some think they are about an imaginary friendship, some partly imaginary and partly autobiographical, some allegorical, some wholly autobiographical, some partly addressed to Southampton, partly in his name to Elizabeth Vernon, partly vice-versa or in the name of Earl of Pembroke to the dark woman, Lady Rich (supposed by some to be an Indian), etc. Whatever it is, they certainly reveal to a considerable extent the heart of the poet himself, and to that extent, are lyrical as opposed to the great bulk of his writings which are dramatic. So it is very essential that the Sonnets should be studied carefully to know the poet's own mind which can be done only in a relatively limited way from his dramas. He wrote these when he was not yet master of his own passions and emotions and when he yielded to them with a tender, grievous heart - possibly when he was writing his Histories. At
this time he was strongly devoted to love and the object of his love, was tenderly sensitive, and above all, to any loss suffered in that love which his heart so eagerly craved and then he suffered anguish of his soul and yet he could transcend this anguish and learned to bear love and to forgive. This seems to be the interpretation, in a gist, of the Sonnets passing, it may be said, through three stages. First, his love was an absolute ideal and his love was so overwhelming that he could hardly bear the burden of that love. He thought it was infinite and perfect and could never cease to be. Next, he found with a rude shock that it had many flaws - it was cold, halting and distrustful, and so he was sorely aggrieved. Finally, he saw through pain and forbearance that love was ever-lasting, pure and serene and at last serene through pain and separation and stronger and greater than ever before. All this may be regarded as commonplace but the intensity of feeling accompanying this and the fine artistic garb in which this has been expressed are characteristic of Shakespeare. His sensuality, imagination, strength, vitality, maturity, wisdom have all been clearly revealed in this, and these are all characteristic of him and his creations. Some critics, however, think that this takes away from our picture of the poet as 'gentle Shakespeare' or 'noble Shakespeare'. But, we think, if we are to show the same 'fidelity to fact' as the poet himself has shown, this is the natural and true interpretation of his Sonnets.

After these poems, the poet began some tentative dramatic
efforts in which some include 'Titus Andronicus'. This, however, being a drama of the pre-Shakespearian bloody type, either is not his, or if any part is his, in it he has not yet developed his original dramatic style. We leave some other small pieces out of consideration as hardly any critic of distinction admits them as his. His early dramas bore marks of his bright and tender play of fancy and feeling and lacked that storm and stress which were to be the characteristic of his mature years. These form roots in life saved him from being carried away by the storm and stress of later life. So 'Titus Andronicus' probably is not his - if at all, it is un-Shakespearian. His tragedy is the tragedy of Terror, not the tragedy of Horror. The difference between the two should be noted and remembered in our later discussion. We can similarly leave out of consideration 'Pericles', a portion of which might or might not have been written by Shakespeare. In the same manner, we leave aside 'Henry VIII', which if it was begun by Shakespeare was possibly completed by a different writer and, therefore, is not very noteworthy, and so also the somewhat slight sketch of 'Edward IV,' etc. We believe we can safely leave these works of doubted authorship out of consideration without prejudice to our critical general study of Shakespeare.

'Love's Labour's Lost' is laid in Navarre, an ancient kingdom in Spain, but there is nothing Spanish about the play. It is, in reality, an English play, where the loving young lords and ladies are of the types that could be seen around the English
court and the country people belong really to the English countryside. The plot is light, but the characters are fascinating types. It is, in fact, a comedy of dialogue, in love, and a light satire with a serious intention. It is possibly the first independent, wholly original work of the poet. It has been called the Comedy of Affectation. It is a satire upon contemporary fashion and foibles in speech, in manners, and in literature. Besides, it is a serious protest against fanciful schemes of shaping life divorced from facts of life. Here the poet has first put his ideas of self-culture and shows how the idealist attempt of the king of Navarre and his young lords at attaining ascetic culture by erecting an artificial Academy, as it were, subject to rigid rules and restrictions where none should see women for three years, inevitably crumbles to pieces. This reminds us of Tagore's 'Cirakumārsabhā' and may be the latter got his inspiration from this. Shakespeare's own ideas of self-culture were based on the practical realities of life where nature and nurture should combine, where blood and judgment should mingle together. Though Shakespeare is famous for his complete dramatic aloofness and objectivity, in 'Love's Labour's Lost' Berowne is the exponent of his own thought. We shall see later how Hamlet is the one character where he revealed himself most.

'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is a delightful magical dream play. It is a story of flowers and of young lovers and of
dreams, and of the fairies who lived in an enchanted wood near Athens. Most of it is played by moonlight and everyone is a little moonstruck in it, a little touched by magic. Potent as the fairies' magic is, Shakespeare's magic and power over words are more potent than this. In his 'Comedy of Errors' he wrote of fairy-land. 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is the fruit of his dream of fairy-land. As the name indicates, it is a dream play, the fantastic adventure of a night in midsummer, possibly in early May - written possibly to celebrate the marriage of his patron Earl of Essex with Lady Sidney. Similarly, 'The Twelfth Night' was written to celebrate a festive occasion and was so alternatively called 'Or What You Will'. The central figure in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Theseus, is the poet's ideal — noble and heroic man of action, just and happy, lord of men and of the worldly affairs of life, of which Henry V is the perfect model. For him, art is a mere pastime and recreation and nothing more. He may not be the poet's spiritual ideal like Romeo, Hamlet, etc. but he is his material ideal. Besides the delightful story and the character of Theseus, the drama contains something of the dramatist himself, some basic ideas of Shakespeare regarding his art. In the drama within the drama scene he states through Theseus that imagination is the one quality that counts most in a spectator as with the poet himself. Without this one quality even the most elaborate stage-representation is useless. And with this one quality in the spectator even the worst flaw in
stage-representation is no flaw. Previously we have discussed those famous lines in this drama where the poet has described the process of poetic creation. Unfortunately, this all-important imagination is often lost sight of even by able interpreters and critics. Shakespeare, however, has not given his whole self to Theseus who has bracketted the lover, the lunatic and the poet in imagination all compact. No doubt, the poet has given us the truth in some way and yet has mocked at himself in a good-humoured fashion.

So far we have dealt with the poems and Comedies of the early period. Now, we propose to deal with the Histories. Shakespeare's Histories occupy an important position in his whole works, in particular, in relation to his Tragedies. In his Comedies, he has dealt with the lighter, sunny side of life, and in his Tragedies, with the graver and darker side. In his Histories, he has dealt with the stern practical side of life with reference to the English Kings - how they met with success or failure in the limited practical ends of their life through virtue and strength or through weakness, sin and crime. In this there is certainly a reference to their soul, otherwise characterization would not be possible or complete. These Histories have been called by Schlegel as a 'mirror for kings', for in this they can learn the lesson of their life; as, we may add, they are also a mirror of kings or, in the words of Daṇḍin, 'Ādirājayaś.ovimbamā-darsām prāpya varṇayam'. 
'King John', though it is not Shakespeare's first attempt at history, we shall consider first. In it the poet has studied the utmost ebb in the national life of England. The king reigns not by warrant of a just title, nor by warrant of the right of the strongest. He has no justice of God and no virtue of man on which to rely. He is inwardly weak and empty and so outwardly assumes an air of authority and grandeur. He is rotten to the core and is the shame of a king. He has no perception of the facts of life as of the wretchedness and cowardice of his soul. When threatened by France with war he seeks to fortify his heart with a false hope. John would inspire another with his murderous purpose like some vague influence than like a personal will. He trembles and totters as death proceeds. He is not even strong enough to pursue crime, while virtue to him is unknown. Only he abounds in pathetic weakness and all the more pathetic pretence. He has no physical strength either or capacity for physical suffering. He is no master of events or master of himself. The country is in a rot. He submits to forced degradation but is base to be pleased that he has done so of his own free will. When he abdicates, he does so cowardly as one incapable of accepting his responsibilities. There is little in the play to strengthen or gladden the heart. In the selfish struggle for kingly power and in pride, greed, etc. there is a pathetic beauty in the gracious boyish figure of Arthur and in the maternal, important figure of a woman and in the hearty patriotism of Faulconbridge. The rest is all a
degenerate world and the end miserable. The king lies poisoned overmastered by mere physical agony without the least touch of any pangs of conscience which might speak of a noble suffering.

'The first part of Henry VI' may or may not be Shakespeare's, but the second and the third parts certainly are, where the Shakespearian dramatic study of history with impartiality and irony is evident. Henry VI is another study in kingly weakness — this time a sort of timid, self-righteous saintliness which refuses to act lest it should incur blame or sin. The heroic days of Henry V are over, but they linger in the memory of all except in the king. He is insensible to his responsibilities, is cold in great affairs and is incapable of action. Free from all greeds and ambitions, he is yet possessed by egoism, the egoism of timid saintliness. His virtue is negative, and has no positive basis of doing. For fear of what is wrong, he shrinks from what is right. He is passive in the presence of evil and merely weeps. He is not one of those true God's soldier-saints who do not fear to fight and gleam with a higher, intensor purity. His charity has no zeal, it is a mere sentiment, a mere wish which knows no action that alone can establish it among men and so bring down the kingdom of God on earth. Henry suffers in this powerless virtue and the whole country and people suffer with him. His impotent godliness is, in its effect, no less fatal than positive crime, and Shakespeare draws this picture with unmistakable touch of pathos and irony. Henry, like a boy, is afraid of his
queen and submits to her will. He is afraid of displeasing anybody, tries to make peace with his enemy for he thinks blessed are the peacemakers, but he proves a false judge of men as his peace proves false. His feeble heart faints even at a piece of vulgar knavery. He trusts all, but mistrusts himself lest he should mistrust anybody. In his constant drift, he allows things to take their course. At length, the wretched reign approaches its end. In the great battle before his death he withdraws and meditates on the happy life of shepherd-saints. When a prisoner in the jail, he is at last happy for he is now free from all responsibility. Now he is a bird who sings in his case. His peace is not the peace of a higher or vivid kind - the peace which passeth understanding. It is a peace of the poor kind and poor Henry VI, in his saintly garb, is but a pity of kings.

'King Richard II', an important Shakespearian character-study, has a delicate cunning in it rather than the titanic stormy force of king Richard III. Both Richard II, the king who fell, and Bolingbroke, the king who will rise, gradually and not forcibly, possess our imagination. Richard II, with his boyish intellect which indulges in cheap sentimentalism, cannot see things as they are. He leaves in a dream-world of his own, like an artist. But not being an artist in life who exerts his will upon his circumstances and shapes them according to his necessity, Richard II is merely an amateur in living. He has no comprehension of reality, hence no consistency and continuity. He is only
rich in the luxury of feelings for their own sake. He has, however, a fine feeling for situations, whether they are graceful, beautiful, tender or pathetic. He derives an aesthetic satisfaction from the situation of his life. But, once a King, Richard, that sweet, lovely rose, being confronted with the rigorous duties of a King, must wither. With his weak self-indulgence and his showy dignity he is no match for the manly Bolingbroke. While Richard slowly but surely sinks, his great rival rises in potential power and authority. Bolingbroke, though exiled, accepts his exile and leaves the land with a gracious air, but Richard, though yet the king, totters and will fall. Being rebuked by the John of Gaunt in a prophetic fashion, Richard turns pale, but brushes it aside with his superficial dignity and insensibility. He then seizes upon the possessions of John of Gaunt and thinks not of the consequences. But now Bolingbroke determinedly returns with a force. Richard hastily returns from Ireland and on setting foot on his native land gracefully and zealously sentimentalizes on the situation which is a poor substitute for those great words of John of Gaunt which have become Shakespeare's own. Bolingbroke has gained the support of the Welsh. Richard has upon his side higher powers than men - the army of God in heaven - who will come down to the rescue of him that is the devout son and deputy of God. He has wish against his enemy's will and fanciful dreams against the enemy's action. Now Richard alternates between sub-abject despondency and an airy, unreal confidence. His feelings are but the shadows of true feeling. Ultimately he has to yield
to Bolingbroke's demands. His pride and piety, cowardice and courage are all the passion of a dream. Yet he has some charms, some wistfulness about him very much like the substance of a dream. Most of us have something of a Richard in ourselves - that dream-like quality which makes us unable to cope with facts as they are. Richard, this graceful phantom, not only yields his authority but his personality and will to the overpowering Bolingbroke. He now makes a luxury of his woe, does not understand his misdoings and does not yet lament and resolve henceforward to undo the wrong. His self-pity is pathetic and shameful and is the opposite of the semblance of a manly thought. The love of a wife and the faithfulness of a servant were his; but he fell, through his sheer vice of inaction except the last hectic act which ends his shadowy existence.

'King Richard III', a play of the ideal Marlowe type, portrays kingly strength, but strength of evil of an intensely demonic kind. Richard is one dominant figure in the play marked by a few strongly marked qualities. There is no mystery in the characterisation as in 'Hamlet'. It is clear and strong and at once arresting. Some passages in the play are lyrical-dramatic where a number of characters are gripped by a grave, common woe and in turn give expression to their feeling in the same vein. The demonic intensity of the play proceeds from the one character, Richard. He does not possess our imagination gradually but in a single sweep from the very beginning. We are fascinated by his
power, though this power be malign. His pride of intellect and still more his energy of will grip all persons and events in the play as well as our souls by their sheer power which is nothing short of being fiercely elemental. Though he has a distorted and withered body he is yet a sublime figure with this relentless power. All obstacles give way before him - the courage of men and the bitter animosity of women. With this malignant power Richard has a passionate scorn of men. He practises hypocrisy not merely for the sake of success but as a cynical zest or gross insult to men. So he treats the Mayor of London and so he treats his fool Buckingham with contempt. The latter falls behind and is scant of breath before the headlong career of Richard. Richard does not spare his mother either from his scorn and brutality. In his mockery of human love, he plays his ironical part with his future wife and wins her in a loveless wedlock. He brooks no obstacles and finishes off the plotter, Lord Hastings instantaneously. His fiery energy is at its simplest and grandest, unmingled with irony, in great days of military movement and of battle. Then all the might of his opposeless will and all the force of his energy, yet controlled by his intellect, had their fullest play. Then he is upon the wing of fiery expedition. True, Richard, like Edmund and Iago, is solitary. But he is not entirely self-seeking or ambitious. There is a grandeur about him - the grandeur of the self-expression of the energy of will and intellect in action. He had one human tie—admirations for his father.
Shakespeare's Richard is less dark, green and bloody than the Richard of history. Essentially, however, he is of the diabolical kind. He has a single-minded devotion to evil. He has a fierce joy and intense belief in the creed of hell. But, Shakespeare emphatically shows, this loveless and unnatural life must in the end fail. The female characters in the play, like all others in the historical plays, are unhappy - they lose their dear ones, those who are men of action, and they lament. Queen Margaret is something more - she personifies in her the Greek Nêmesis; she is the classical Fate, the avenging Fury. Edward IV does not inspire the imagination of the poet. He is the self-indulgent, luxurious king who seeks to make peace on mere soft words without any substantial foundation of deed.

Great Bolingbroke utters few words in 'Richard II', but he is the chief force there. He, now 'Henry IV', possesses every element of power except those which are spontaneous or unconscious. He is dauntless; but his courage is under the control of his judgment; never becomes a glorious martial rage like that of his son, Henry V. He is ambitious, but his ambition does not wreck his will upon the world like that of Richard III, it aims at definite ends and can hold itself in check. He is patient and studious, strong and formidable. But he is wholly lacking in genius of the heart, and so he is loved by none. All his faculties are well-organised, he has no conflicting desires or sympathies. So his single-minded energy suffers no waste. As he is strong, he is not
cruel. He decides when to augment his power by clemency and when by severity. Once his ambition has been fulfilled, his ambition is now to hold firmly to what he has achieved. There is nothing infinite in his character, it is only a strong, finite character with limited ends and limited achievements. As he is strong, he is sure of his means and can provide for the exigencies. He does never unpack his heart with words. In moments of crisis he is patient and tolerant towards others, though he has some contempt for his weak rivals. Yet his success was not complete. He is never happy and secure, the worries of his responsibilities hang heavily on him and he knows no peace. He does not understand his great son Henry V who will be Shakespeare's ideal of noble king.

'King Henry V' is undoubtedly Shakespeare's ideal of manhood - his finite ideal. Henry of history has a wild youth, but is miraculously transformed. Shakespeare makes it a natural transition from youth to manhood - something like Shakespeare's own. Henry grew to be a character of majestic force and large practical wisdom. He became an artist of life. Like the all-embracing sun he could afford to mix with evil company in his care-free youth, but once he assumes the responsibilities of a king he is at once transformed. The central element in his character is the noble realisation of fact. While Henry IV dealt with the world with courage and tact, Henry V, with the genius of an artist, entered into life as it is with a glorious enthusiasm of existence and a
full command over its vital forces. So an easy mastery of man and events and a sweet conquest were naturally his. If Henry V is Shakespeare's ideal of manhood - perhaps an idealisation of his patron and friend, the Earl of Southampton - Falstaff, as depicted in the last two parts of Henry IV, is certainly one of the greatest characters created by the poet and in mystery and awe nearly ranks with Hamlet himself. He is not an ordinary fool. He may be called a sublime fool, a genius among braggarts. He is manifold things in one. Whether he is a coward or not, a liar or no, an honourable fellow or no, a gentleman or no, etc, or to what extent he is one or the other, let the critics decide. But he remains the monarch of the inn where he resides and of our hearts which feel uniquely delighted at his inexhaustible, infinite wit. With this wit he seeks to deny the facts of life. Upto a point he succeeds and then comes the reverse. Fact even he cannot deny for all time. King Henry refuses to recognise him. Falstaff is crushed. But Henry has still a soft corner for him in his heart whose company once he so heartily enjoyed. He provides allowance for the fallen knight. Underlying this comedy there is a stern, grim irony of Shakespeare. Henry, with his noble realism must conquer; Falstaff, with his infinite wit and fascination, must fall before the facts of life which he dares to defy. Henry is a man of deeds, not of words or emotion. With his lank frame and vigorous muscle, he is a practical suitor - yet with a truly loving heart. As in love so in piety there is a substantial homliness and heartiness of Henry. His integrity and honesty of nature are unimpeachable. With his vital
strength and enthusiasm Henry becomes one of the world's most glorious and beneficent forces. When in battle, he rises into the genius of an impassioned fighter. He treats the traitors with cool self-mastery and stern, holy justice. He is an ideal fighter, ideal conquerer and ideal ruler — a noble and sweet majesty of king.

'The Comedy of Errors', regarded by some as Shakespeare's first attempt at a comedy, is more a farce than a comedy proper. Though the place and character are Greek names they are, in fact, more Roman than Greek, and undoubtedly Shakespeare took the story from Italian Romances he had read. It is, however, an excellent, even boisterous, farce which, when played, would carry any audience along with it with the sheer force of its plot, that is to say, with the twist and turn in the incidents and its many battling yet highly funny situations. Here there is no particular attention, nor there needs to be any, to character and style of poetry. It is enough if the plot alone is sufficient to make a popular hit, as we call it today. Such plays were once popular among the Romans, and even today some variations of the same theme are found to have the same appeal among the common audience. This farce is based on a mistaken identity and the consequent intriguing situation. The knot is unravelled at the end and all ends happily for all. It is, therefore, more a melo-drama than a drama, as it is more a farce than a comedy. In this Shakespeare does not strive for realism but amusement and fun. Aristotle defined plot as the soul of drama.
Whether it is true or not, and to what extent true, is altogether a different matter. But in 'The Comedy of Errors' the plot is certainly its soul and all else is subservient to it. Besides, while in the sources there was only one pair of twins, Shakespeare invented two to make the resulting confusion more effective. In this, his handling of the plot, besides this invention, is really admirable. 'The Comedy of Errors' was freely rendered in Bengali by late Pandit Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar and aptly named 'Banta-vilas'.

'The Taming of the Shrew', regarded by some as belonging to Shakespeare's first period and by some others to his second period, is a still greater popular hit than 'The Comedy of Errors'. It is also a farce, but, rather, a farcical comedy with considerable attention being paid to the different characters and having a distinct moral being uttered by the shrew herself at the end. As the name indicates, it is the story of a shrew, Katharina, the elder daughter of a rich Italian merchant with her madly bad temper and of a robust young lord Petruchio, who tames her with an assumed bad temper of far greater madness through the variously contrived incidents and situations. He does all this in the name of love of her, but, in fact, for the rich dowry that would be his were she his wife. And at the end, he not only wins her wealth but also her love and obedience, as she not only wins a husband but also his love. There is a subsidiary plot, the love affair of Katharina's younger sister, sweet Bianca and her various suitors. The boisterous comedy
affords abundant fun and merriment to the audience and more so because of the underlying distinct moral which has been clearly stated in the end. That the wife should always love and obey her husband, he being her lord, king and governor, is the obvious lesson. But there is another lesson suggested by the comedy — that the shrew can be tamed by a still greater shrewish personality or behaviour, real or assumed. And to witness this taming is a good fun. It is still more attractive if the tamer has a secretly loving heart for the shrew and if the taming ends in mutual love and concord. The shrew once tamed turns an angel and utters words of wifely wisdom and love. In fact, there hardly can be more boisterous comedy and at the same time a more wholesome and goodly fun than 'The Taming of the Shrew' which is a distinct achievement of the poet.

'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' is one of the very first attempts at comedy by Shakespeare, and is the first attempt at a romantic comedy. Like many first attempts it is not altogether successful. But it shows a Shakespearian pattern of many scenes and situations, popular in his day, such as the rope ladder, the helpful friar, the girl in love dressing like a boy and so on, which he improved upon in his later dramas. But in this first attempt at such contrivances they are not very interesting chiefly because the people are not very real. The story is a tangled one, and if handled properly with proper characterization and style of poetry could be turned into an interesting comedy. But it lacks
both compared to the well-known player of Shakespeare. It seems all the stuff of a good comedy is there, but the master's characteristic magic touch has not infused life into it and has not turned it into a play of considerable merit. The characters move about here more in obedience to the plot than to themselves and do not, therefore, leave a lively impression upon us. The two fools, Speed and Lance, however, are noteworthy. In particular, Lance is a characteristically Shakespearian fool heading the long line of his fools which culminated in great Falstaff and the Fool in 'King Lear'. In short, it is rather an example of Shakespeare's relative failure and to that extent should make an interesting study of one of the might-have-beens of his dramatic genius.

'Much Ado About Nothing' is a fine, delightful comedy of courtship and marriage. There is a double set of characters who are involved in courtship and consequent marriage. But the two types are different. The first pair, Beatrice and Benedick, are infinitely more delightful. They are, at first, slow and reluctant to woo each other. They even try to outsmart each other in their biting speech, but love grows in their hearts for each other almost imperceptibly. Their apparent frigidity in their love may perhaps be due to the fact that they want to testify each other's love thoroughly before he or she would fall in love with the other. And the fun is that when each hears the
other's supposed love-sickness through the sweet conspirators each falls madly in love with the other. Whether it is frigidity or caution or mere playfulness, it is swept away by a single stroke of the match-makers. From the beginning to the end they are two of the most delightful people in the history of comedy. As long as they are on the stage they brighten the air with their tongue, wit and mere presence and with their young hearts which brim with secret love. They not only brighten their own courtship but also the other one. The other famous characters in the play are the two local constables, Dogberry and Verges. They have much dignity but little sense. They move with the meditative calm of two well-intentioned tortoises, and in their earnest stupidity they do everything wrong. But it is clear in the end that they have done everything right. For while the high-born characters, with their false sense of humour, commit mistake after mistake, it is the efforts of Dogberry and Verges that bring the play to its happy ending. It is hard to forget the savoury delight that one experiences when witnessing or reading this play. And no one can ever forget Beatrice and Benedict - one of the most loveable couples. 'Much Ado About Nothing' is about love, of man and woman, rather of boy and girl, which is the thing.

'Twelfth Night' is perhaps the loveliest of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. It takes place in Illyria, on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, a land of sunlight and laughter and the most
beguiling poetry, where no real harm can come to any one and nothing is damaged except conceit. The world of the play is very much like the festival for which it was named, 'The Twelfth Night', that comes as a climax to the Christmas holidays when the practical world is forgotten in the delight of make-believe. It is one of the most light-hearted of the plays and the only character who disapproves of laughter — Malvolio — becomes a joke himself. All the rest of the characters, men and women, are either loving or loved or both and are glad souls that make our hearts glad. In this gayest of comedies the characters of Viola and Olivia are the most charming and loveable. The predicament of Viola in disguise and in love is touching and speaks of a sad sweetness in the gay fulfilment of her dream. Soft Olivia's predicament is no less interesting and her sweet end no less captivating. These are two of the sweetest and tenderest women in Shakespeare. Of the two, again, the lady Viola is one of the loveliest and most charming of Shakespearian heroines. Sir Toby, the fat and cheery old reveler, is another interesting typical character. Sir Andrew Aguecheak is another and this limp and well-intentioned knight knows he is a fool but he keeps hoping in a vague way that perhaps he is not. But certainly the most interesting comic character is Malvolio who, unlike the great Falstaff who befools others, is befooled himself and thus excites our laughter and sympathy for him. And, to that extent, he is no less loveable than others. So the play is all loveliness, gaiety and tenderness tinged with sweet
sadness and sweet folly. The end brings happiness for all and sorrow for none. The play closes in joyfulness and a final song.

'Measure For Measure' is one of the most brilliant of Shakespeare's comedies but its laughter is bitter. When Shakespeare was bidding farewell to mirth he wrote this play whose significance is grave and earnest. It portrays the boiling and bubbling corruption of Vienna above which rise the virginal strength and severity and beauty of Isabella, who is distinguished by some single element of peculiar womanly power. She is an embodiment of conscience, whose whole being is fixed upon an impersonal, abstract ideal. Her saintliness is not of the passive or meditative kind. It is an active pursuit of holiness through exercise and discipline. She has no ascetic hatred of the body; life runs strongly and gladly in her veins. Simply her soul is set upon things belonging to the soul and uses the body for its own purposes. Her severity proceeds from no real turning away on her part from the joys and hopes of womanhood; her brother, the memory of her father, her school fellow - Julia are precious to her. Living actively she must live purely. Bodily suffering is bodily suffering to her, but it is swallowed up in the joy of quickened spiritual existence. As she has strength to accept pain and death for herself rather than dishonour, she can resolutely accept pain and death for those who are dearest to her. She has love and pity for her weak and sinful brother Claudio but when he faintly invites her to yield herself to shame for his
sake she is stern upon him and wishes for him death like a man rather than a life of shame. Having accomplished her object, Isabella does not return to the sisterhood, but accepts her place as Duchess of Vienna. In this there is no dropping away from her high ideal, it is entirely meet and right. She has learned that in the world may be found a discipline more strict than that of the convent. The world has need of her and her life is still a consecrated life. The vital energy of her heart can exert itself through glad and faithful wifehood and through noble station more fully than in seclusion. To preside over this polluted Vienna is the office and charge of Isabella, 'a thing ensky'd and sainted'. She is a wonderful creation of Shakespeare and it might have influenced Bankimchandra in his concept of the character of 'Devi Gaudhurānī'. Isabella is an angel on earth moulding life with her strong and virgin conscience radiating hope with her loving and womanly heart.

'All's Well That Ends Well' has a rather difficult plot for a comedy. A woman, Helena, who seeks her husband and gains him against his will; who by a fraud - a fraud however pious - defeats his intention of estranging her and becomes the mother of his child - is the pivot of this play. Yet she has been named by Coleridge 'the loveliest of Shakespeare's Characters'. For sake of this one thing Shakespeare took the story and made beautiful and noble the entire character and action of Helena. This one thing is the will of Helena towards the
right and efficient deed. She does not display herself through words, her entire force of character is concentrated in what she does. So we see her through the effect she has produced upon other persons as through self confession or immediate presentation of her character. A motto for the play may be found in the words of the clown,-- 'That man should be at woman's command and yet no hurt done'. Helena is the providence of the play; she heals the body of the French king as the soul of the man she loves. Bertram, her beloved and later her husband, though endowed with beauty and bravery, is, in character, in heart, in will, a crude, ungracious boy. Helena loves him but does not like him. Yet she sees in Bertram a potential nobleness, waiting to be evoked. And her will leaps forward to help him. With a sacred boldness she assumes a command over his fate and her own. She does not believe in the piety of resignation or passiveness; but finds in love a providential power to transform, to redeem. In this she is encouraged by her mistress, the mother of the man she seeks to win. She loves openly and with courage, and through suffering and near heartbreak ultimately conquers her man and her fate. In her there is so much solidity and strength of character that she impresses us by her plain womanhood rather than by any boyish garb as in the case of some of Shakespeare's other women. The trick that she employs to win him seems, indeed, hardly to possess any moral force, any validity for the heart or the conscience. Nevertheless she achieves her end. Bertram now learns self-distrust, perhaps also true modesty.
He now forsakes his false friends. Helena, in her virtue of will, does him wrong for his own sake. Even at the last Bertram's attainment may be small, but he is now safe in the hands of Helena who is his guiding star.

'The Merry Wives Of Windsor' is Shakespeare's only domestic comedy, his only play about middle class people. It was written upon compulsion, by order of queen Elizabeth, who in her lust for gross mirth required the poet to expose his famous Falstaff to ridicule, by showing him, the most delightful of egoists, in love. Shakespeare yielded to the necessity. His genius could, by its art, please every kind of audience, the good folk of London as well as the noble and the royalty. The play was composed very quickly, as the tradition says, in a fortnight and it is mostly in prose, the poet's imagination taking, in the main, a well-earned rest from its inspiring task of weaving poetry. It is a delightful story of the two merry wives of Windsor who outwit Sir John Falstaff who want to marry them for their money. The town of Windsor lies next to Windsor Castle, and Shakespeare describes the town-life he has seen with his own eyes with a vivid realism which is seldom to be found in his other plays where both realism and imagination have their equal play. But the most important point about the play is that Falstaff of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' is not definitely the Falstaff of 'Henry IV'. He is only his namesake. Shakespeare was not prepared to recall his great Falstaff from heaven or from hell. He dressed up
a fat rogue, brought forward for the occasion from the back premises of his imagination, in Falstaff's clothes. If the queen and the noble must have fun - and fun of their own choice - let them have it to the full. Let them take the second Flas-taff as the original one if that would please their fancy. But their creator knows the difference between the two. The original Falstaff was a genius among fools, this imposter is but a dull fool. But his folly contributes to the mirth of his audience. The merry wives are a delightful pair of middle-aged middle class women thoroughly outwitting the assumed wit of the foolish rogue. And who would not love sweet Anne and her epi-sode with the three suitors? The situations are extremely funny - in particular, the last one where Falstaff, the ghost of a fool, is conclusively exposed. The good-humoured, gracious ending is no less delightful than the play itself.

'As You Like It' is a romantic comedy with a pastoral setting. This idyllic play is probably the sweetest and happiest of all Shakespeare's comedies. Here no one suffers, no one lives an eager intense life. There is no tragic interest in it as in 'The Merchant of Venice' or 'Much Ado About Nothing'. It is mirthful, but the mirth is sprightly, graceful, exquisite. Shakespeare, when he wrote this, was himself in his Forest of Arden. He had completed his historical plays and not yet commenced his great tragedies. He wanted a resting place and so he sends his imagination into the woods to find repose. Instead of
the courts and camps of England and the embattled camps of France here was the woodland scene, where the palm tree, the lioness and the serpent are to be found; possessed of a flora, and fauna that flourish inspite of physical geographers. Here was the Forest of Arden - an idealized land full of happy shepherd and perpetual innocence, of a sun-lit air of sweet fragrance, of a sunlight tempered by forest boughs, of a breeze upon the forehead and of a stream murmuring in the ears. It is an earthly paradise. But the people are very much real in it, as in almost all Shakespeare's creations. And the poetry is some of his loveliest. The play is full of songs, and there are so many of them that the Forest of Arden is set to music. Shakespeare wrote his other pastoral play 'The Winter's Tale' after his 'Timon of Athens' almost in the same spirit of resting his over-strained imagination. However, in 'As You Like It' not only the setting and the tone are unique, but the characters are very interesting and memorable. The banished Duke, Orlando, Rosalind are all cheerful and loving characters, their cheerfulness being, however, of various degrees. And Jacques has been placed over against them in designed contrast. Jacques may be said to be of a sort of a melancholy fool. But his melancholy is not grave and earnest, it is of a sentimental, self-indulgent kind. It is, as he himself says, 'a most humourous sadness'. His whole life -- and for him all life — is unsubstantial and unreal, a curiosity of dainty mockery. It is he who utters the famous Shakespearian
203

words - 'All the world's a stage,/And all the men and women merely players.' To him a sentiment stands in place of passion, an aesthetic, amateurish experience stands in place of practical wisdom, and words in place of deeds. For him the world, not as it is, but as it mirrors itself in his own mind, which gives to each object a humourous distinction, is what interests him. Touchstone is another fool; but his wit is not mere clownage, nor has it any indirect serious significances, it is a dainty kind of absurdity worthy of comparison with the melancholy of Jacques. But, above all, Orlando in the beauty and strength of early manhood, and Rosalind, in her boyish garb, but with her bright, tender, loyal womanhood within, are figures which quicken and restore our spirits, as soft music does, knowing little of the deep passion and sorrow of the world. Adam, that faithful old servant, is a good character with worldly wisdom, which used to be played in his time by Shakespeare himself. The only other character played by Shakespeare was the ghost of 'Hamlet'. However, 'As you Like It' is one of the finest comedies of Shakespeare and may be studied in comparison and contrast with the poet's final comedy 'The Tempest'.

'The Merchant of Venice' is a romantic comedy, but of a most unusual kind. It could almost turn into a tragedy, had the poet's Muse wished it. But as it is, it moves, for a certain period, along the borders of tragedy and comedy and then it suddenly turns into a comedy - a delightful comedy, the tragic
interest notwithstanding. The theme of the play is rather difficult for a comedy, but Shakespeare, with his complete mastery, over his material and his art, had no difficulty in carrying out his scheme. Some critics say he was a little carried away by his subject and the tragic episode of Shylock is a little overdrawn for a comedy. Whether it is so or otherwise, it is certainly an extraordinary play with its able marshalling of dramatic events, its lovely poetry and not the least, the memorable and fascinating characters of Portia and Shylock. The play opens with a sad tone, which reaches its dark climax in the trial scene, but then suddenly hope breaks through the clouds of despair and gloom and thereafter it is all a gay and bright comedy. Between the said beginning and the dark climax there is a lovely and tender interlude, the casket scene, where all other suitors being rejected, Bassanio chooses the right casket and gains rich Portia as his wife. This interlude of comedy with tragedy, or, rather with tragic interest, is fascinating. It is an unforgettable play on any account. Portia is one of the loveliest women of Shakespeare. Perhaps she is Shakespeare's ideal woman. She is lovely, tender, witty, wise and immensely practical. It is her extraordinary virtue and ability that lifted the play out of the morass of the impending tragedy to its happy ends. She is an angel among women (and Bassanio is the most fortunate of men). Her speech on mercy has no parallel, it is the voice of an angel. Set over against this angel is the dark spirit - Shylock.
the Jew. So far as characterization is concerned, the Jew is a
greater creation of the dramatist and is one of his greatest.
Shylock is all for hatred and revenge and his biting words and
his obstinate insistence on his pound of flesh are all aimed at
that. But it is not all hatred that we feel for him, it is
tinged with some sympathy for this despised man and his tribe.
Shakespeare's humanity is clearly discernible in this, his objec-
tivity as a dramatist notwithstanding. Shylock's memorable speech
on the hate-theme reveals his black heart as well as his genuine
grievances. His silent exist, when he is crushed, is exhilara-
ting as well as touching. The characters of the protagonist
Antonio and of Bassanio, Gratiano, etc. are no less interesting.
The end is sweet and sublime. The superb poetry in describing
the star-studded, moon-lit night including the music of the
sphere itself, is simply captivating. This overwhelming poetry
and music ultimately drown the tragic memory of Shylock and his
inevitable doom. The ring episode is no less interesting. It
has the definite effect of adding to the gaiety and fun of the
comedy. All this taken together outweighs the effects of the
tragedy within the comedy. Or, if it still leaves a bitter
memory in the mind, that memory is subdued and merged in the
triumphant love of peerless Portia and her gallant lord.

'Julius Caesar' is a Roman play, a political drama and,
above all, a tragic masterpiece, though not one of Shakespeare's
greatest. Now, the poet's concern with the individual soul is
pronounced. 'Julius Caesar' is different in spirit than two other Roman plays, 'Antony and Cleopatra' and 'Coriolanus'.

It is a tragedy of idealism divorced from practical wisdom. Brutus who typifies this is predestined to failure, but he adheres to his moral integrity to the very end. He is not a man of action but ideal contemplation which impels him to act and act wrongly and thus to meet his inevitable doom. But though he fails, he fails nobly and wins our heart by the pure ardour of his noble idealism. This dreamer lives among his books and is nourished by his philosophy. Cassius, however, who is shrewd and practical, is primarily a man of action. He hates Caesar and the conspiracy he raises is born of his hatred and not any idealism. But he is not ignoble. He is ambitious, brave and a true friend of Brutus, in success or in failure. It is he who draws noble Brutus to his fold, who alone could give a moral support to his plan. The quarrel and reconciliation of these two friends before their end are beautifully and touchingly portrayed. The characters of other conspirators are no less important; each having his distinct individuality. But, above all, Caesar himself is the hero of the play - and not Brutus as some think - who, either in person or in spirit, moves all action. When the play begins, he is old and infirm, but his majestic pride is swelling and not on the wane. He speaks of himself in the third person, ignores the soothsayer's plea, the heavenly portents and even his dear wife's pleadings and marches straight to the Capitol to be stabbed to death. But though he dies, his spirit never dies;
it continues to haunt the conspirators, especially Brutus, to the end, and it is his spirit that triumphs over the conspirators in the end. So, Shakespeare has rightly framed the title of the drama. Brutus himself confesses the might of Caesar's spirit which is irresistible. Antony is the rival of Cassius. His cunning and masterly piece of ovation gradually inflames the Roman mob who are easily carried away by emotion and bluff. This is the character of the mob everywhere and always. Antony is a man of practical genius without a moral fibre - a nature of a rich, sensitive, pleasure-loving kind. In 'Julius Caesar,' he is successful by his virtues and more by the faults of Brutus. In 'Antony and Cleopatra,' where his story is carried on, he meets his limitations and is ruined at the altar of his pleasure-seeking at the cost of noble virtues. Brutus' wife Portia is an ideal woman devoted to the cause of her husband. Her silent love and attachment to her husband are almost without parallel. But she is a woman and when her heart breaks she commits suicide unable to bear her burden any longer. The love of Brutus to his wife is no less deep and profound. His love to her is equal to his idealism and sustains him all throughout. Antony could appreciate the greatness of Brutus. His sure description of this noble idealist when he was dead as one of whom all nature could stand and say he was a man is profoundly true and is Shakespeare's as well as his own.

'Troilus and Cressida' is rather a most difficult play...
and its true nature is hard to be determined. Critics have widely differed as to the exact nature of this tragedy with all the materials of a comedy. Though it has an unhappy ending, most of the time it is a comedy, if a rather savage one. It has, in fact, been called a comedy of disillusion. The theme deals with the most famous conflict in classical antiquity, the Trojan War, centering round the most hallowed ancient beauty of the 'Halen of Troy'. All the Greek heroes who fought against Troy are piteously exposed to ridicule. Helen and Cressida are light, sensual, heartless, for whose sake it seems infatuated folly to strike a blow. Troilus is an enthusiastic young fool and even Hector, though valiant and generous, spends his life for nothing. All this is seen and said by Thersites who sees the foulness of human life. But what is Shakespeare's intention in the play? The central theme, the young love and faith of Troilus given to Cressida who is false and fickle and his discovery of his error, lends its colour to the whole play. Shakespeare now has learnt to see the seamy and dark side of life which vision he displays in his tragedies as well as in some dark comedies of the period or so. The play has some resemblance in its spirit and structure to 'Timon of Athens' which may be called a tragedy of disillusion. Ulysses - the antithesis of Troilus, is the experienced man of the world, possessed of its highest and broadest wisdom which never rises into the spiritual contemplation of a Prospero. Cressida he reads at a glance, seeing to the bottom of her sensual, shallow nature and he assists at the
disillusioning of the young prince. Thersites also sees through the illusion of the world, but his very incapacity to have even been deceived is a sign of the ignoble nature of the wretch. The other characters, the brave warrior Ajax, the insolvent self-worshipper Achilles and Hector, heroic but not wise, are of minor importance. The blindness of youthful love in Troilus is set over against the sensuality of icy desire of Pandar. The love-story and the war-story are skillfully interwoven and are created as counterparts of each other. And while the love-story is a comedy, the war-story is a tragedy. On the whole, it is a mixed drama and in it it has been displayed the manifold genius of Shakespeare to create comedy and tragedy in one.

Now, we take up 'Romeo & Juliet', Shakespeare's first full-fledged tragedy after many years of apprenticeship as a dramatist in writing comedies and histories. His inward soul was eagerly longing for writing, above all, a tragedy. Like 'Hamlet' his second tragedy 'Romeo and Juliet' was revised and enlarged by the poet himself. This shows his earnestness about creating a tragedy of his own conception which will neither follow Marlowe nor the Greek tragedy but will open up a world of its own. He has so far written comedies of accident, of farce, of dialogue, and of tender and graceful sentiment, and in his histories he has shown how kings may succeed or fail in their limited practical ends. Now, in his first tragedy, he depicts the soul and life of a boy and a girl, Romeo and Juliet. If 'Hamlet' is a tragedy
of thought, 'Romeo and Juliet' is a tragedy of passion - rather an overflow of passion. Romeo is, in many respects, the opposite of Hamlet. But they have one thing in common - the will of both is sapped. Romeo's tragedy is a tragedy of unwilled passion. Shakespeare has introduced fine, characteristic changes into his original Italian story. Nevertheless, the tragedy retains its Italian colour and warmth as a proper setting to the luxuriant, lyrical passion of Romeo and the vehement, pure passion of Juliet. The season is mid-summer. Romeo is already in love with Rosaline. But once he meets Juliet, he is her slave. He now indulges in the luxury of passionate love. But Juliet, in her single-minded devotion, senses danger to him for he is now in alien grounds and she proposes immediate marriage. She is impatient for complete self-surrender. When Romeo is banished, he again indulges in the luxury of sorrow. Juliet, deserted by her parents and even by her dear nurse and urged by them to marry Paris, feels utterly dejected. But she at once rises into her full freedom and in her dire solitude drinks the poison, not in fright as in the original, but in love of Romeo. Mercutio is a good contrast to Romeo - who is all wit and intellect and vivacity. Mercutio and the nurse are the two fine creations in the play. Mercutio to the last maintains his freedom and with the words 'A plague O' both your houses!' meaning the Capulets and the Montagues, as it were, in his lips he braves death with a defiant jest. With the death of Mercutio the only shaft of light is gone, now darkness sets in. As soon as Romeo receives the news of Juliet's death he rises into full
manhood and catches something of Juliet in him. He resolves to defy the stars, is the master of events and begins to act for himself for the first time in his life. He will now lie with Juliet in her tomb. He kills Paris most unwillingly for the latter will not cease to provoke him. Friar Lawrence, who is not a Greek chorus, but a character in his own right, seeks to guide two young passionate lives by the aid of his pious wisdom, prudence and moderation. But the result is the clasping together of the bodies of Romeo and Juliet in cold death and the corpse of young Paris in the tomb. But Shakespeare did not intend that the tragedy should evoke, finally, a feeling of hopeless sorrow or despair in presence of failure, ruin and miserable collapse. Romeo and Juliet loved perfectly though not wisely. In their death they fulfilled their love which was truly boundless and infinite and thus attained to full manhood and womanhood respectively. They have saved their soul and have stepped into the waking life of truth. They, through their tragic-failure in finite life, became one with the infinite. What more was needed? Besides, the enmity of the houses appeased, they come together. And Romeo and Juliet, their loves and lives being accomplished, together rise into the everlasting history of man where the life of soul alone triumphs. 'Romeo and Juliet' may not be a tragic masterpiece, but it certainly is a fascinating creation — Shakespeare's first tragic model to be perfected upon later in his four great masterpieces, 'Hamlet', 'Macbeth', 'Othello' and 'King Lear'. Its frenzy of passion, its fine lyrical poetry, the purity and
vehemence of love portrayed in it, and not the least its under­
lying grim irony are among some of the essential characteristics of a Shakespearian tragedy.

'Othello' is one of the four great tragic masterpieces of Shakespeare. Its story is simple, but the brilliance of characterisation and the magnificence of poetry have raised it to its position of glory. Technically, it is regarded as a perfect drama. From that point of view, only 'Macbeth' approaches it, 'Hamlet' and 'King Lear' are regarded as, more or less, defective in construction. Like his other tragic masterpieces, Shakespeare's 'Othello' is also a study of evil, of course, as contrasted with good. For both good and evil exist side by side in the drama as in life - perhaps more glaringly than in most of his other tragedies. Here, evil seems to be supreme and the embodiment of this evil i.e. Iago is one of the greatest characters created by Shakespeare. Othello, his victim, is no less charming as a character. He is of a free and open nature, like Hamlet; but unlike Hamlet he is of a romantic and imaginative frame of mind. He is a heroic soul with its essential exotic grandeur. His mighty strength is his weakness. His large, generous simplicity forbids him to see evil, baseness and cunning in others. All these virtues win for him sweet, tender, Desdemona, the accomplished Venetian lady who falls in love with her unlike, the black moor. Othello is not of a jealous disposition, but, being wrought, perplexed in the extreme. Desdemona is tender, shy; but for once she asserts herself
in the purity of her love and leaves her father's house with the man of her choice. Unfortunately, she again sinks to her docile nature and in the greatest crisis of her life she is unable to take positive steps, by words or by deeds, to allay the suspicion of her overwrought husband. It is ironical that she loses her handkerchief at the precise moment of her crisis, and she being overpowered with amazement and shock, rather strengthens her husband's suspicion with her words and mortal fear. Thus she, the purest of innocent love, is sacrificed at the alter of evil. But evil only seems to triumph for the moment, ultimately it has to admit defeat before the redeeming ardour of good. Iago, the evil genius, is a wonderful creation of Shakespeare. He is a purely intellectual being without the least moral fibre. He is a cold, deadly serpent among men. He instinctively hates love and life and those who represent them in the highest degree among men. Of course, Othello has wronged him, so he thinks, in superseding him in service and rank. Iago considers himself no less competent than Othello. He is, of course, an accomplished soldier and is ambitious. But he has not the magnificence and heroic virtue of Othello. His is a cold, deadly efficiency of a heartless brain. And he is a genius in scheming conspiracy and carrying it to a perfect finish. He mocks mankind and its poor morals which have no use for him. He thinks he can toy with them as he pleases. In short, he is the satanic spirit possessing a man's soul spelling ruin for men around him as well as for himself in the end.
He has not the least concern for Desdemona, Cassio or Roderigo — not even for his wife who loves him. The happy and glorious union of Othello and Desdemona has, rather, inflamed Iago to the extreme. He has no mercy for anyone. Inspite of the tragic loading of the bed brought about by the cunning hatred of Iago, it is Othello and Desdemona who win our hearts by their noble sacrifice and it is they, who after all, fulfil their love and life in their souls and thereby prove that evil cannot ultimately overpower good. Some of the finest imaginative and romantic poetry is to be found in 'Othello' and its atmosphere also takes to this quality in a considerable measure. Pure poetry, pure drama and poetical drama cannot perhaps attain a higher climax of magnificence and pathetic grandeur than this great masterpiece of Shakespeare.

'Macbeth' is another of the four great tragic masterpieces of Shakespeare. It is a tragedy of ambition which seeks to fulfil itself through evil. It is the tragedy of the twilight and the setting-in of thick darkness upon a human soul. This evil — this darkness — is both subjective and objective. Macbeth has this evil in him and so has Lady Macbeth perhaps in a greater measure and with a stronger will. But it is also objective the embodiments of which are the three witches — the weird sisters. They carry with them the genius of evil, as it were, and Macbeth who is already prone to them is easily infected. But Banque, that normal good soul, is unaffected. Some critics think the weird sisters are nothing but the embodiments of Macbeth's own
temptation - the projection of his own soul, they have no external reality. But this is a misconception, rather, a modern psychological interpretation. Shakespeare, in his intuitive comprehension of the fables and myths of the people of his time, surely drew upon them and created his art out of this common stuff. The witches are real witches, but at one with the criminal spirit of Macbeth. Besides, Shakespeare had, as it seems, implicit faith in such popular beliefs and notions. The witches may be vulgar, but they are also sublime. They embody the evil forces operating in this world. And Shakespeare, like a few other great artists of the world, could combine the vulgar and the sublime and create a piece of art of inexplicable beauty. The first appearance of the witches strikes, as Coleridge says, the key-note of the character of the whole drama, where fair is foul and foul is fair and we have to hover through the fog and filthy air. Macbeth is a valiant warrior, victor of wars and worthy friend of Duncan. But he is also ambitious. So long his ambition was secretly lurking in his breast; but now, being wrought upon by the witches, it raises its ugly head and possesses his entire heart and imagination. He is caught in its mighty flood and is powerless to extricate himself. He struggles hard, but each effort leaves him weaker and he has no way but to succumb to it. Lady Macbeth has an intense and vehement will. She is also ambitious, but she has also the will to fulfil her ambition, which her husband lacks. Macbeth falters and hesitates to do the dreadful deed, because he has still
some good left in his soul which makes him weaker. But little Lady Macbeth in her tender frail body, is fiend-like in her soul. Her evil will is steadfast and relentless. It is she who goads her husband by her potent words to commit the murder. If Macbeth is too full of the milk of human kindness, Lady Macbeth is, after all, a woman, and as Duncan seems in his sleep to resemble her father, she fails to do the act herself. Macbeth, in his fearful imagining, first sees the dagger in the air and hears strange sounds; but he has to do the murder. Once the act is done, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are in dark hell for the rest of their lives and they have no way out. Macbeth commits more and more murders to make himself secure, but he is more and more entangled. His agony knows no bound and finds no escape. Lady Macbeth, once her energy of will is spent, retreats into silent agony. They hardly meet each other. Each is held in his or her own shell. They know no sleep, no repose. Their souls bleed. Macbeth is deserted by his men and surrounded by his enemies. The witches fail him. He is desperate and eager to die. Lady Macbeth, unable to bear it any longer, ends her life. Macbeth is about to fall at the hands of his mortal foes. He bursts in a profound world-weariness and detestation of life expressing themselves in immortal poetry. At long last, he meets his inevitable and deserving doom. But he has touched our hearts; he has valiantly fought against sins, and his failure and suffering are the measure of his greatness. After him, normal life resumes in the country and in the minds of its people.
'King Lear', one of the four great tragedies, is an extraordinary play of huge dimension, intricate complexity and grand significance. Its apparent shapelessness is charged with a subtle unity beyond comprehension. It has, in fact, been regarded as the greatest creation of art by man, greater than Gothic architecture or even Michael Angelo. It has a penetrating, inexplicable beauty and significance. As a drama, it may be faulty in construction, but its very fault is the fault of its unique virtue. It is not so much fit for the stage as for the study, as its hugeness and poignancy transcend the limits of the stage. That is why for a long time it was not represented on the stage, and when at last it was represented it was transformed into a comedy of popular comprehension. Ultimately, worthy critics and actors restored it to its former glory of a tragedy with an unsurpassable quality and meaning. It is not a huge creation fixed to a specific time and place. Like a tempest, it is in perpetual motion, whirling and heaving, away from us into the distance-horizon. But there is a secret law in the motion; though we know not what it is, we feel it there. Here the instincts, the passions, and the reason of man are in mutiny and conspire with convulsive nature to shake the very roots of existence. And as we are made to look through it and upon it at the same time, here the grotesque, the pathetic and the sublime are one, each merging in the other and the whole signifying a dark beauteous mystery of being. The device of a double plot employed by the poet has caused the
feeling of the giganticness of a natural commotion. In this and many others Shakespeare has infinitely improved his original model. Passions, pathos, irony and grandeur all go hand in hand and lift this poem of an epic play to a superhuman level. Here the characters are individuals as well as types, and the universal significance of this poem has its nearest approaches in the 'Prometheus Bound' of Aeschylus and Goethe's 'Faust'. Ethical principles radiate through the play. But its chief aim is to 'free, arouse, dilate' through pleasure, as the ninth symphony of Beethoven. It is a focus where a number of vital forces unite in their purest energy. In this play Shakespeare was fairly caught, as Hazlitt says, in the web of his own imagination. Here abnormal good and abnormal evil contend for supremacy and while evil triumphs in the physical level, the power of good holds supreme on the spiritual plane. King Lear is a self-willed tyrannical, foolish, fond old man. His senility borders on insanity, and his whimsical division of his Kingdom and inability to accept the love of his truest daughter cause the ensuing calamity. Goneril and Regan are monsters of crime and debasement; they, in their pride and lust for power, ungratefully forsake their father, and they even betray each other and their husbands. But Cordelia, the soul of purest and tenderest love and of strong redeeming ardour, forbears all and comes to her father's aid. And though wronged by him, she willingly gives her own life for his sake. Kent instinctively serves the cause of his master in power and out of power. He is a faithful friend and a pure good soul. Edmund the bastard believes
in nothing save in his intellectual egoism. He is a selfish 
monster, almost an Iago - the male version of Lear's two daughters. Edgar is a good fellow and kind. He tries to do good to others. Gloucester suffers for his own sin, but suffers not wisely. Lear is, however, more sinned against than sinning. Deserted by his two bestial daughters he takes to the lone heath in the surging storm and in the tearing lightning, thunder and rains. He seeks for a shelter. The fool comforts him, and yet rebukes him. Lear's kingly dignity is shattered, but his understanding grows. He sees his own folly and the purity of Cordelia's love. But it is too late. Cordelia cannot be saved. She dies a martyr's death. Lear, with Cordelia sprangled across his breast, cries in mortal agony. Then he dies and finds peace at last. The fool of 'King Lear' is Shakespeare's greatest fool, where folly and laughter and pathos are all sublimed and made divine. The great redeeming ardour of Cordelia dispells all despair and reminds us for ever where love is life is.

'Timon of Athens' is a drama of hate and indignation. Its authorship by Shakespeare has been doubted; but, according to scholars, it is substantially Shakespeare's, though it might have been changed later by others. It may not be a masterpiece, but it certainly is a great play with a great and profound theme. As in other tragedies of Shakespeare, it deals with evil and the way evil may be combated, rather as it has been combated by a particular noble character fallen from sanity and grace. Timon of Athens is a young, noble Lord, a fortune's favourite. His nobility - rather
unwise and lax nobility — consists in freely giving away money and gold to his 'friends' and Athenians. He is not as yet aware of the selfishness, greed and baseness of man. He thinks his lax benevolence will be returned when he will need it. But he is shocked to find that it is not so. Now, his indignation and hatred are boundless — not only for his false friends, but for all mankind. His ideal dream-world is lost, and the self-centered, crude, vulgar, world of reality is all before him. Now, he has no need of it. In sheer moral rage, he, like Lear, turns mad and curses mankind with all the vehemence and venom he can command. He retreats to the forest near the sea. By a cruel irony, there he finds a huge mass of gold, but now he hates it. Shakespeare, with his dramatic contrivance of a parallel splot as in 'Lear', 'Hamlet', 'The Tempest', creates Alcibiades whose misanthropy is a contrast to that of Timon. Alcibiades is turned out of Athens by his ungrateful fellowmen. But he is not an ideal dreamer, or vain hater of man. He is a practical person and knows how to take revenge. He raises an army and marches at its head towards Athens. He will punish as well as pardon his enemies. Timon hands over his mass of gold to him who will teach the Athenians a good lesson. He scornfully rejects the offer of his repentant fellowmen for justice. He curses and hates and finds everlasting peace in death, in his cave, upon the sands which the salt waves wash perenially.

'Antony and Cleopatra', though not one of the four great masterpieces, is a magnificent tragedy, a glittering golden piece
of work. This and 'The Tempest' are the two great plays of Shakespeare's latest period. According to Eliot, 'Antony and Cleopatra' is the most modern play of Shakespeare. Both in tone and technique and this is the only Shakespearian play that Eliot understands. This is a mature creation of Shakespeare. This is also a Roman play, like 'Julius Caesar' and 'Coriolanus'. But from 'Julius Caesar' to 'Antony and Cleopatra' is a vast distance as from a gallery of antique sculpture to a room splendid with the colours of Titian and Paul Veronese. Antony, the master of his tongue and of his situation in 'Julius Caesar', is a slave to passion, to lust in 'Antony and Cleopatra'. His high Roman virtues are almost gone; his valour, heroic might and wise state policy are no more his. He has fallen prey to the charms of an enchantress - the famous Egyptian queen, Cleopatra. He constantly dotes on her, full of joy and mirth, and has little else to do. He has forgotten Rome and the Roman empire and the call of duty that beckons him from afar. He dreams of a new heaven, new earth which may not yet contain his love for Cleopatra. Cleopatra also, in her turn, is fondly attached to Antony who is capable of no less charms. Both of them are past the prime of their youth. But their ardour for love is greater than ever before. In fact, however, it is a fleshly love rather than a pure love of heart. But the whole of their passionate imaginations goes with it. And it is a noble passion, a splendid lust. If Antony is the noble victim, Cleopatra is the noble enchantress, she having already enchanted two other monarchs, Pompey and Caesar. Both Antony and Cleopatra are haunted by fear, Antony because
she might betray him and Cleopatra because he might escape. So it is that he all the more clings to her, and she weaves for him more and more snares. Running through all this voluptuousness there is an underlying severity, a grim irony that all this can only be for a while and must end before long. So they end in mortal grief and noble pathos. They had joy, power, beauty and pomp; but now all are fled. Their sensuous paradise is not infinite. They must leave it and plunge into the dark. Cleopatra, in particular, is a wonderful creation of Shakespeare, who has made this historical woman sublime. She is a brilliant antithesis, a compound of contradictions - all that we most love and others we most hate. She is a liar, a thief, a coward, an adulteress; but a noble queen, a passionate lover, a glorious enchantress, a splendid lover of pomp. Before his death, Antony for once rises to his former glory - his heroic self - and then sinks for ever. Cleopatra's end is more magnificent and complete. She, though timid at heart, is but heroic in imagination. She is fire and air, her other elements she gives to baser life. She ends her charmed life as in a dream, a reverie and out-reaches herself in her death. There are many passages of gilded poetry in this play, of which the description of Cleopatra's barge and the dying of Cleopatra are masterpieces within the masterpiece which the play unquestionably is.

'Coriolanus' is a play of the ruin of a noble life
through the sin of pride. It is a tragedy of pride and passion, of an ideal of self-centred power and audacious self-will. It is a political drama, but without any political theory or dogma. The theme is political, no doubt, but Shakespeare's interest lies in depicting individual character and soul as also the character of the masses. As everywhere in his drama, characterization is his chief aim and forte. He is interested in the life of man. He is a human artist, not a political propagandist. He takes neither the side of the nobility, nor of gentry, nor of the masses, as some or other critics maintain. He is neither a monarchist, nor a republican, nor a democrat. His only subject is mankind. And he can draw the life of man with an extraordinary objectivity. He is, of course, all for the noble virtues -- whether they are in the nobility or in the masses. The pride of Coriolanus is unprincipled; it is two-fold, a passionate self-esteem which is essentially egoistic and then a passionate class prejudice. He has deep, warm, generous sympathies - but for his own class, not for the general public. He loves his family - his mother, wife, son and it is their love which redeems him from the darkness of hell. Mighty as he is, he cannot resist their love. He has to yield to nature. But this cannot prevent his ruin. As his noble virtues had raised him, so now his extreme pride and egoism lead to his fall. But it is a noble ruin for which even his enemies have a just sympathy. He has a profound lack of self-control and goaded by sheer pride he goes beyond the bounds of reason. He is a victim of his own
violent egoism and uncontrollable self-will. This magnificence of pride is what fascinates us in 'Coriolanus'. Stung by it, he is even out to wreck vengeance upon his native land, but is mercifully prevented by his tenderness towards his bond of flesh. And that brings his fall, and yet he rises with his fall. Thus Coriolanus becomes a memory in which pride and pity are blended.

'Cymbeline', though full of many misfortunes and much bloodshed, is a tragi-comedy of the last period of Shakespeare. The happy ending of this play and of the other two plays of this period, 'The Winter's Tale' and 'The Tempest', is not merely a denouement, but, as Dowden says, a moral and spiritual necessity for Shakespeare. So long Shakespeare through his comedies, histories and tragedies, has seen the sunny, the practical and the dark aspects of life. Now, when he has attained a grave serenity, he wishes to strike a note of harmony - a reconciliation - in his last plays. 'Cymbeline' is a beautiful play of its kind; though its world is not rather that of real men and women but the land of fairy tales. Its plot is too complicated. But it has some of the most lyrical of Shakespeare's poetry and one of the loveliest of his heroines. Imogen is this lovely heroine, yet hard enough to withstand all misfortunes imposed by man including her misguided husband who wins her love in the end. She is equally steadfast in her love and steadfast in her fortitude for the sake of love. Posthumus, her husband, loves
her no less than she loves him; but, being misled by the knave Iachimo, he flies into rage and intends to end her life. Ultimately, however, the power of their mutual love, Imogen's infinite fortitude and, above all, destiny itself so conspire as to cause the two lovers to be happily reunited ever after. The sin of Posthumus has been half a sin, half an error and their restoration is joyful. He has learnt his own unworthiness and the measureless worth of Imogen. And it is not with silent forgiveness that Imogen receives back her husband; they are words of quick and exquisite mockery of joy. Posthumus had struck her to the ground, in her guise as the page, because she had seemed to make light of his love and of his anguish. Imogen, with one word of playful reproach for the last error of her husband, and a happy mocking challenge to him to be cruel again, puts her arms round his neck, making their union perfect in a moment, rendering for ever needless all explanation and penitential sorrow.

'The Winter's Tale' also, like 'Cymbeline', is set in the land of fairy stories. The story is popular and some of the people are enchanting and so is the poetry - harsh and strong as winter in the first part and then as lovely and flower-like as spring. Leontes is intensely jealous without a cause; his jealousy is more fierce and unjust than that of Othello. There is no Iago to poison his ears. His wife is not untried, nor docile and helpless as Desdemona. Hermione, his wife, is suspected of sudden and shameless dishonour, she who is a matron and mother of
his children, a woman of serious and sweet dignity of character. The passion of Leontes is not, like that of Othello, a terrible chaos of soul; there is a gross personal resentment in the heart of Leontes. His passion is hideously grotesque, while that of Othello is pathetic. But the consequences of this jealous madness are less calamitous than the ruin wrought by Othello's jealousy, because Hermione is courageous and collected and possessed of a great fortitude of heart. Nevertheless, the near tragedy commits ravage enough to make it remembered. Upon the queen comes a lifetime of solitude and pain. Their hopeful son is done to death, and the infant Perdita is estranged from her kindred and her friends. But at length the heart of Leontes is instructed and purified by anguish and remorse. And Leontes is received back without reproach into the arms of his wife Hermione who embraces him in silent joy. Perdita is another lovely woman of Shakespeare. While the play, as a whole, can be compared to the earlier play, 'As You Like It', Perdita can be compared to Rosalind. Both are pastoral plays; and Perdita, the sweet princess in disguise among her shepherd friends, is lovely as a spring-flower. Florizel, her lover, also a prince in disguise, is no less lovely. And the poetry of Shakespeare, in describing the feast at the shepherd's cottage where Perdita offers flowers to all and would offer one to Florizel if she had a spring-flowered and where Florizel dances as a sea-wave, is lovely and enchanting. So, 'The Winter's Tale' ends in a spring-time of rejoicing and merriment.
Lastly, 'The Tempest', which is possibly Shakespeare's last play, at least the best play of his last period, is a unique creation of Shakespeare. The story is set on an enchanted island, where the power of magic rules over the forces of nature enslaving spirits and monsters for its own use. And the person who wields this magic power is a banished duke, who is out for a sweet and beneficent revenge for crimes committed upon him and his little daughter. So all ends happily for all and as the wronged yet wise and merciful duke commands. To read or to see this play is at once to enter into a wonderful world which is not quite like any other that Shakespeare ever made. It is a new kind of drama, is only one of its kind by Shakespeare. All the characters in it are as real as those of any other of his other plays, but they are placed in a thoroughly unreal setting — a dream world. And it seems all their actions and reactions are not their own, but are of that magic power, who is their destiny and arbiter. They all flow from him and end in him. In fact, he is like the dramatist himself who had created so many dramas out of his magic power — his extraordinary imagination. This magician, Prospero, is a grave and yet a glad soul, for he has thoroughly mastered his art as also almost all his passions. He is a wise, spiritual genius. He has a full command over the island and the forces of nature on it. Ariel, the spirit of air, and Caliban, the gross earthly monster, serve his order; and while the former has been promised freedom by his master and so is content to serve his term, the latter bitterly pines for freedom and
would harm, if he could, his master and his daughter. But un-
able to do either, he openly curses him with the language he
has learnt from him. These three characters, Prospero, Ariel
and Caliban, are beautiful creations of Shakespeare and are
unique. Miranda, the tender beauty, sweet daughter of Prospero
and Ferdinand, the wonderful prince, are the romantic pair. They
are infected with each other's love and Prospero, in his serene
wisdom and large-hearted gladness, tenderly bends over their
little love. Prospero would test the love of the prince by se-
tting for him a hard task, and Miranda melts in sympathy for the
hapless prince. There is a double set of conspirators on the
island; but both meet their just and inglorious ends, as nothing
is out of bounds of Prospero's all-seeing and all-powerful magic.
Caliban, whom even Prospero could not mend, at last finds he has
been but a dull fool. At last, Prospero brings, by his magic, all
persons together before his cave, pardons them all, released the
spirit Ariel and monster Caliban from their bondage and returns
to his rightful dukedom in the real world, his usurper brother
being repented and all ending graciously for all. The description
of the tempest, Ariel's songs, Gonzalo's idea of commonwealth and
Prospero's magnificent dissolving of the visions are superb pieces
of poetry. This play has been interpreted allegorically in various
ways. Undoubtedly, Prospero is Shakespeare himself, his magic
wand is his magic art, the visions are his plays and the spirits
are his immortal characters.