

subject of democracy than this: "The success of democracy fortunately does not depend upon a high degree of intellectual education, limited to the few, so much as upon a constant appeal to the sense of justice." The book, so charmingly written that every intelligent reader will enjoy it, is best adapted to minds accustomed to undemocratic channels of thought. To such minds, unless they love the wallows of despotism, it will open up new worlds of intellectual life.

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TOLSTOY ON SHAKESPEARE.

Tolstoy on Shakespeare. A critical essay on Shakespeare by Leo Tolstoy. Translated by F. Tchertkoff and I. F. M. Followed by "Shakespeare's Attitude Toward the Working Classes," by Ernest Crosby, and a letter from G. Bernard Shaw. New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company. Sold by The Public Publishing Company, Chicago. Price 75 cents net.

In this small, well-printed volume, an excellent example of book-making, the foremost literary figure in the world of to-day reviews the dramatic work of the one who has been considered the greatest literary figure of modern times. Shakespeare, so long secure upon his pedestal, never before received such a severe jolt as Tolstoy here gives him. Bernard Shaw tilted a lance against the great dramatist, but Shaw finds Shakespeare "enormously entertaining," and admires his "extraordinary literary power, his fun, his mimicry, and the endearing qualities" and his "word-music," while despising him as a thinker and artist in dramatic construction. Tolstoy, however, can find nothing admirable in Shakespeare except at times a certain skill in portraying human emotions. Tolstoy tells us that during fifty years he has read Shakespeare in every possible form, in Russian, in English, in German, and that invariably his feelings have been "repulsion, weariness and bewilderment;" and that before writing the present essay he, an old man of seventy-five, has again read the whole of Shakespeare, experiencing the same feelings, but with greater force, except that instead of bewilderment he has come to a firm conviction that the glory of a great genius which Shakespeare enjoys distorts the esthetic and ethical understanding of men and is a great evil. The great Russian, in this final review of Shakespeare, concludes that he is an "insignificant, inartistic writer—not only not moral, but directly immoral." Tolstoy challenges any of Shakespeare's admirers to open his pages anywhere, at random or by choice, and "find ten consecutive lines which are comprehensible, unartificial, natural to the character that says them, and which produce an artistic impression."

The explanation in Tolstoy's mind, of the wonderful fame of Shakespeare, is that it is "one of those epidemic 'suggestions' to which men constantly have been and are subject." He compares it to the mediaeval crusades, the witchcraft delusion, the agitation against Dreyfus, etc. He discusses the external and internal reasons for the Shakespearian fame, finding its historical beginnings in the authoritative dicta of Goethe. Tolstoy also classes the dramatic works of Goethe, Schiller and Hugo as "empty pieces."

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To illustrate his point of view and method of criticism, Tolstoy makes a detailed and merciless analysis of the tragedy of King Lear, which he selects as the "most extolled" of Shakespeare's dramas. To Tolstoy this drama is a series of unnatural events by unnatural characters, expressed in language which is pompous, characterless and absurd; and he thinks this drama is greatly inferior to the old play of King Lear from which it was taken. Similar criticisms are given concerning the other Shakespearian dramas usually considered the greatest.

In his forceful and sweeping criticism, Tolstoy gives always his reasons. He is in revolt against the very spirit of authority, and appeals to the individual judgment and conscience. He judges Shakespeare according to an intense and positive conviction as to what constitutes the merit of any poetic work. Such merit, he maintains, depends on three things: (1) the subject of the work; (2) the external beauty achieved by technical methods proper to the particular kind of art; (3) sincerity, i. e., that the author should himself keenly feel what he expresses. In these three essentials Shakespeare fails. The subject of his plays is "the lowest, most vulgar view of life, which regards the external elevation of the lords of the world as a genuine distinction." As to the second essential, Shakespeare "does not grasp the natural character of the positions of his personages, nor the language of the persons represented, nor the feeling of measure without which no work can be artistic." "The third and most important condition, sincerity, is completely absent in all Shakespeare's works. In all of them one sees intentional artifice; one sees that he is not in earnest, but that he is playing with words."

Tolstoy holds the drama to be the most important department of art, and will not tolerate a conception of art without a religious essence. And by the religious essence of true art he means "the exhibition of a definite view of life corresponding to the highest religious understanding of a given time."

This essay on Shakespeare owes its origin to Tolstoy's desire to contribute a preface to Ernest Crosby's article, "Shakespeare's Attitude Toward the Working Classes," which follows Tolstoy's essay in the same volume. This is an enlightening review, enriched by abundant quotations, of Shakespeare's conception of the place of the workingman in society, showing Shakespeare's contempt for democracy, and his worship of authority and the ruling classes. It is an exposition of Shakespeare that well deserves to be read in comparison with Crosby's "Tolstoy and His Message" and "Tolstoy as a Schoolmaster."

J. G. P.

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CONVERSATION.

Conversation and Effectual Ready Utterance. By William E. Watt. Published by The School Weekly, Chicago. Price, \$1.00, postpaid.

For an unassuming little book on a hackneyed topic, this volume by Dr. Watt, principal of a grammar school in Chicago,—holds many pleasant surprises. It is straightforwardly frank and personal.

ROOSEVELT WINS

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We announced in our issue of November 17, and each week thereafter, that, as an acknowledgement to our readers who are sending in new subscriptions, we would celebrate the coming Christmas by sending, to the person or institution they should choose, a complete set of the new Library Edition of the Complete Works of Henry George and Life of Henry George by Henry George, Jr.

The choice was made by votes cast by new and paid subscriptions to THE PUBLIC, every new subscription for three months (price 25 cents) casting one vote, every one for six months (price 50 cents) two votes, every subscription for one year (price one dollar) four votes, and so on.

At the close of the voting on December 22, Theodore Roosevelt has a small plurality over William R. Hearst, his leading competitor. We have, therefore, at once sent to Mr. Roosevelt, at the White House, a complete set of these great books by Henry George, with a letter to Mr. Roosevelt advising him that he has been elected by the readers of THE PUBLIC to receive them and that they hope he will very soon read them, knowing that when he does so he will be thereby strengthened and inspired and better equipped for the duties of his high office.

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