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SHAKESPEARE AS A MOUNTAINEER.

By the PRESIDENT.

SINCE at the last annual dinner I raised the question of Shakespeare's familiarity with Wales in general, and Pen-y-gwryd in particular, one of our contributors has proved in a highly ingenious dramatic *cento* that a typical climb in that vicinity may be completely described in the very words of the immortal bard. But the object of the remarks which are subjoined is somewhat different, being, in fact, to cast a sidelight upon the life and character of Shakespeare himself.

The modern science of inferential biography is based upon the sufficiently obvious fact that all art is necessarily a reflection of the experience of the artist. His imagination may add embroidery to it, his learning, and occasionally his ignorance may modify it, the fire of his genius may transmute it, but his own personal experience is the only solid basis upon which any artist can erect a permanent monument of his art.

It follows, therefore, that when a painter gives us a horse, or a sailing-craft painted in such a manner as to satisfy all riders or all sailors, we decide, without a moment's hesitation, that he must himself have been in the one case, something of a horseman, and in the other, something of a sailor.

On the other hand, we occasionally see paintings of mountain scenery, which make it certain that the artist has at sometime or other seen a row of sugar cones in a grocer's shop, or representations of animals which prove conclusively that the designer's early years were enlivened by a Noah's Ark made in Germany.

And what is true of the painter is true also of the poet, and especially of the dramatic poet. A phrase, or in some

This was his first introduction to climbing, and perhaps also to the law. Some years later he must have come under the influence of a hill-loving friend, who made the usual pretence of mere walks, which delighted the beginner—

Lord, who would live turmoiled in a court,
And may enjoy such quiet walks as these. (*Hen. VI., Pt. II.*)

We do not know whether it was in the capacity of a poacher or in that of a lawyer's clerk that the poet endured this experience, but only those who have been "turmoiled in a court" can appreciate an escape to walks more rural than that of the King's Bench. The friend seems to have led him somewhat abruptly from his "quiet walks"—

Unto a ragged fearful hanging rock. (*T. G. of V.*)
and before the future poet could protest sent him at it; as he says—

And made me climb with danger of my life. (*Hen. VI., Pt. II.*)
The gymnastic devices of his friend were at first a puzzle to him; on seeing him prepare to back up a chimney, the novice could not understand a creature—

That by a pace goes backward in a purpose
It hath to climb. (*Troilus and Cr.*)

But he soon catches the idea, and exclaims—

I'll creep up into the chimney! (*M. Wives.*)

It is dirty work, but he sticks to it manfully, and soon we hear him say—

I am toiling in a pitch, pitch that defiles. (*Love's Lab. Lost.*)
Like all beginners he found the descent more trying than the ascent, and was astonished at the ease with which his more experienced companion negotiated the drops—

No drop, but as a coach doth carry thee. (*Love's Lab. Lost.*)

But, encouraged by a little moral assistance—

He holds you well. (*Much Ado.*)

our poet reaches the bottom ejaculating—

O, the charity of a penny cord! (*Cymbeline.*)

a remark which makes us sigh for the days when the price of hemp stood at so reasonable a figure. Many of us have learned, as he then did, how hard it is in descending—

To turn our stern upon a dreadful rock. (*Hen. VI., Pt. II.*)

and the effect upon his garments was very marked, necessitating repairs, which must have been something like those done on a celebrated occasion for Tom Hughes, by Mrs. Owen, for he utters the somewhat naive reflection—

Patches set upon a little breach,
Discredit more in hiding of the fault,
Than did the fault before it was so patched. (*King John.*)

Thenceforward, so strenuously did he climb that no patching could keep pace with the wear and tear, and when the expedition ended, and the party returned

Bootless home and weather-beaten back. (*Hen. IV., Pt. I.*)

he used only a pardonable exaggeration in saying :

No eye hath seen such scarecrows ; there's
But a shirt and a half in all my company.—(*Hen. IV., Pt. I.*)

To a man who has fairly caught the climber's fever, cobblers' bills and tailors' bills matter little, and there can be no doubt that our young poet had now taken it in an aggravated form. Climbing filled his every thought. He saw everything from a climber's point of view. It has been finely said that the mountains are Nature's cathedrals. At that period of his life he reversed the proposition, and regarded the church spire solely as a substitute for Nature's pinnacles.

Should I go to church,
And see the holy edifice of stone,
And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks ?

(*Merch. of Venice.*)

It was perhaps the scarcity of such spirelike pinnacles in England that made our enthusiast begin to cast his eyes elsewhere, with what result we hope to shew in our next number.

(*To be continued.*)