

under the circumstances it was the easiest thing for him to do. But had he been ignorant of them he could neither have recognized the rudimentary form of them nor have developed them into his own exceedingly complicated adaptation. As early as *The Comedy of Errors* Shakspeare knew the unities, and so far as I know, handled them at least as skilfully as any of his contemporaries.

Nor had Shakspeare forgotten his skill when he came to write his last complete play, *The Tempest*. There again, for some reason, he chose to use and to emphasize the unities in such a way as to show that he is fully conscious of what he is doing. And we approve whole-heartedly of what he has done as right. But in the intervening years between *The Comedy* and *The Tempest* he has only occasionally approached the unities. Whatever his reason for using the unities or not using them, certainly ignorance is not that reason.

And the unities are merely one illustration. The reader will remember other instances, covering perhaps all the other fundamental neo-classical positions in so far as they had been attained in Shakspeare's day. Shakspeare's failure to make more use of these is not due to ignorance of the law, but to wilful disobedience. Nor was he unadmonished as to his sins. Robert Greene had in 1592 called the public attention to some of the wilful misdeeds of this scene-shaking Johannes Factotum. And the chief result was that Shakescene boasted of his unrepentance. He appealed to Nature wholly, not to Art at all. For this apposition, Shakspeare was himself chiefly responsible; Jonson and his predecessors and followers merely accepted and emphasized it. Had Shakspeare really wanted greater classical scholarship, he was not too old in 1592 at twenty-eight to have improved his technical knowledge greatly. At least, there were the translations into English which by diligent search he might have found and purchased. But we have no absolutely conclusive external proof, so far as I know, that he ever owned a book of any kind.⁶ It is easy enough to find books once owned by Ben Jonson. Had Shakspeare purchased books as ardently as he did certain other forms of real property, we should certainly have more trace of his activities in that way.

But we do not need to put the case on externalities. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. And scholars have been unanimous, I believe, that Shakspeare used his classics more in early years, but

⁶ The British Museum Montaigne was probably his. The Bodleian Ovid has probably the next best claim, but is exceedingly doubtful. The Folger *Archaionomia* has just proffered a respectable claim to attention. But "after that the dark."