

SHAKESPEARE AS A MINER.

Evidence of His Familiarity with the Industry.

In a remote camp in California an honest miner was recently discovered who solaced himself with Shakespeare under all vicissitudes of fortune, says the American Mining News. He had the divine William at his fingers' ends and could quote him by the yard. Newspapers of the west wrote him up as a prodigy of learning and philosophy, but several of the east, where wisdom and wealth run cheek by jowl, twitted him for neglecting the pick and drill to prospect in the sterile regions of blank verse. Shakespeare, said those wiseacres, never did anything for legitimate mining, and why in thunderation could not horny-handed miners leave Shakespeare alone?

Now, if those carpers had known a little more about both ends of this grand subject, they would have instinctively recognized the practical as well as the ethical side of the California miners' favorite study. Everybody knows that Shakespeare was a profound lawyer, an oratorical butcher, a dainty glove-maker, a clever deer stealer, a skillful mariner, an able physician, a soaring astrologist, a distinguished courier, a temperance advocate, a roysterer, mountebank and highwayman, also a bit of a poet. It would be strange indeed, then; if a man with all these qualities should lack knowledge of mining and metallurgy, which, in combination, as all readers of the American Mining News are aware, form the only real wealth-producing industry of the world. But he was not wanting in this regard any more than in any other field of human endeavor.

We do not claim that Shakespeare was up to all the modern tricks of cyaniding, chlorination, concentration, etc., or that he could distinguish between a diamond drill hole and three compartment shaft; but we do assert that William was a good judge of ores and their treatment, and knew a mine when he saw one. And there were mines in his day as there are now in the advertising columns of the Sunday papers of New York. If you overhaul your Hamlet you will find a great deal of mining and undermining from start to finish, some of it bearing a remarkable resemblance to the curious operations to the mining promoters and schemers who infest the east today. After the Melancholy Dane kills Polonius behind the arras, that lecherous, treacherous, remorseless, kindless villain, the King wants to know where his nephew has gone. The Queen tells him:

"To draw apart the body that he hath kill'd;
O'er whom his very madness, like some ore

Among a mineral of metals base,
Shows itself pure: he weeps for what is done."

This is probably the only straight reference to a mine perhaps in the whole range of the dramas, but it possesses that one touch of nature that makes the whole mining world kin, and shows that William was well up in the business, even if he did not write M. E. after his name.

It is in the lighter touches, however, the persiflage of medieval mineralogy, as it were, that Shakespeare displays his insight into the true inwardness of the industry. No practical miner and few experienced promoters, can read the casket scenes of the Merchant of Venice without feeling mingling chills of fear and thrills of hope. It appeals with equal force to the gold diggers of Alaska, the silver producer of Utah and Colorado, and the lead delvers of Missouri and Kansas. You

can see their eyes bulging as each of Portia's suitors makes assay of the boxes of gold and silver and lead, one of which contains the glorious gift of her precious self. The gold box bears the inscription, "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire;" the silver one, "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves;" the lead, "who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath."

Nearly the whole genesis of speculative as well as practical mining is embodied in these fruitful mottoes. You can find them indelibly carved in thousands of shafts and prospect holes in all the mining states. Their echoes curdle the noisome air of millions of drifts and tunnels. Their tenacity is as strong as the hope that springs eternal in the miner's breast. They are the Alpha and Omega of the great mining industry, from prospector to promoter. Their virtue is as immortal as Shakespeare himself.

And the three suitors to Portia's fair hand are typical also of the fate of mining promoters. First comes the bald booster who can pluck sucking-cubs from she-bears and mock the lion when he roars for prey. We know the fellow well in New York. Sometimes he gets there, but more often he doesn't. Morocco despised the dull lead and turned scornfully away from the silver box. He was after gold, and lo! he got his reward—a carrion death's head; with a cutting scroll that tells him all that glitters is not gold.

The Prince of Arragon—and his dainty form is often seen on the street—chooseth silver, and is presented with the picture of a blinking idiot, which cooks his goose effectively. Honest Bassanio, the grub-staker, who borrows freely but pays back ten fold when he strikes it, is out for pay ore of any kind. He examines carefully the merits of the gold, silver and lead prospects. He rejects the free milling gold quartz, which Midas found hard to stomach; he hesitates between the white metal, the pale and common drudge between man and man, and the dull, meagre lead, but finally goes in for that noted product of Missouri, and wins Portia and her appurtenances. There is no doubt in the minds of many miners who indulge in Shakespeare that he hailed from Joplin.

Flagstaff was not so enamored with lead, however. On the battlefield he felt as hot and as heavy as that metal in a molten state. Yet prays Sir John: "God keep lead out of me; I need no more weight than my own bowels". Perhaps the fat knight had a presentiment of Dr. Lyman, of international Zinc notoriety, who dosed his stockholders with base metal to their serious discomfiture and his own undoing.

American Mining News would like to continue this congenial theme at greater length, but sufficient has been adduced to prove conclusively that Shakespeare was a miner and mineralogist of no mean capacity, and that all miners are justified in making themselves familiar with his grand pages as part and parcel of their training, both mental and practical.

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