Shakespeare
Ben Jonson
Beaumont
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By
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SHAKESPEARE, BEN JONSON, BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

Shakespeare's English Historical Plays.

The first form of poetry is the epic, the essence of which may be stated as the successive in events and characters. This must be distinguished from narration, in which there must always be a narrator, from whom the objects represented receive a colouring and a manner;whereas in the epic, as in the so-called poems of Homer, the whole is completely objective, and the representation is a pure reflection. The next form into which poetry passed was the dramatic;both forms having a common basis with a certain difference, and that difference not consisting in the dialogue alone. Both are founded on the relation of providence to the human will; and this relation is the universal element, expressed under different points of view according to the difference of religion, and the moral and intellectual cultivation of different nations. In the epic poem fate is represented as overruling the will, and making it instrumental to the accomplishment of its designs:

In the drama, the will is exhibited as struggling with fate, a great and beautiful instance and illustration of which is the Prometheus of Æschylus; and the deepest effect is produced when the fate is represented as a higher and intelligent will, and the opposition of the individual as springing from a defect.

In order that a drama may be properly historical, it is necessary that it should be the history of the people to whom it is addressed. In the composition, care must be taken that there appear no dramatic improbability, as the reality is taken for granted. It must, likewise, be poetical;that only, I mean, must be taken which is the permanent in our nature, which is common, and therefore deeply interesting to all ages. The events themselves are immaterial, otherwise than as the clothing and manifestation of the spirit that is working within. In this mode, the unity resulting from succession is destroyed, but is supplied by a unity of a higher order, which connects the events by reference to the workers, gives a reason for them in the motives, and presents men in their causative character. It takes, therefore, that part of real history which is the least known, and infuses a principle of life and organisation into the naked facts, and makes them all the framework of an animated whole.

In my happier days, while I had yet hope and onward-looking thoughts, I planned an historical drama of King Stephen, in the manner of Shakespeare. Indeed, it would be desirable that some man of dramatic genius should dramatise all those omitted by Shakespeare, as far down as Henry VII. Perkin Warbeck would make a most interesting drama. A few scenes of Marlow's Edward II. might be preserved. After Henry VIII., the

events are too well and distinctly known, to be, without plump inverisimilitude, crowded together in one night's exhibition. Whereas, the history of our ancient kingsthe events of the reigns, I meanare like stars in the sky;whatever the real interspaces may be, and however great, they seem close to each other. The starsthe eventsstrike us and remain in our eye, little modified by the difference of dates. An historic drama is, therefore, a collection of events borrowed from history, but connected together in respect of cause and time, poetically and by dramatic fiction. It would be a fine national custom to act such a series of dramatic histories in orderly succession, in the yearly Christmas holidays, and could not but tend to counteract that mock cosmopolitism, which under a positive term really implies nothing but a negation of, or indifference to, the particular love of our country. By its nationality must every nation retain its independence;I mean a nationality quoad the nation. Better thus;nationality in each individual, quoad his country, is equal to the sense of individuality quoad himself; but himself as sub-sensuous and central. Patriotism is equal to the sense of individuality reflected from every other individual. There may come a higher virtue in bothjust cosmopolitism. But this latter is not possible but by antecedence of the former.

Shakespeare has included the most important part of nine reigns in his historical dramas;namelyKing John, Richard II.Henry IV. (two)Henry V.Henry VI. (three) including Edward V. and Henry VIII., in all ten plays. There remain, therefore, to be done, with the exception of a single scene or two that should be adopted from Marloweleven reignsof which the first two appear the only unpromising subjects;and those two dramas must be formed wholly or mainly of invented private stories, which, however, could not have happened except in consequence of the events and measures of these reigns, and which should furnish opportunity both of exhibiting the manners and oppressions of the times, and of narrating dramatically the great events;if possible, the death of the two sovereigns, at least of the latter, should be made to have some influence on the finale of the story. All the rest are glorious subjects; especially Henry I. (being the struggle between the men of arms and of letters, in the persons of Henry and Becket), Stephen, Richard I., Edward II., and Henry VII.

“King John.”

Act i. sc. .

“Bast. James Gurney, wilt thou give us leave awhile?
Gur. Good leave, good Philip.
Bast. Philip? sparrow! James,” &c.
Theobald adopts Warburton's conjecture of “spare me.”

O true Warburton! and the sancta simplicitas of honest dull Theobald's faith in him! Nothing can be more lively or characteristic than “Philip? Sparrow!” Had Warburton read old Skelton's Philip Sparrow, an exquisite and original poem, and, no doubt, popular in Shakespeare's time, even Warburton would scarcely have made so deep a plunge into the bathetic as to have deathified “sparrow” into “spare me!”

Act iii. sc. . Speech of Faulconbridge:

“Now, by my life, this day grows wondrous hot;
Some airy devil hovers in the sky,” &c.
Theobald adopts Warburton's conjecture of “fiery.”

I prefer the old text: the word “devil” implies “fiery.” You need only read the line, laying a full and strong emphasis on “devil,” to perceive the uselessness and tastelessness of Warburton's alteration.

“Richard II.”

I have stated that the transitional link between the epic poem and the drama is the historic drama; that in the epic poem a pre-announced fate gradually adjusts and employs the will and the events as its instruments, whilst the drama, on the other hand, places fate and will in opposition to each other, and is then most perfect, when the victory of fate is obtained in consequence of imperfections in the opposing will, so as to leave a final impression that the fate itself is but a higher and a more intelligent will.

From the length of the speeches, and the circumstance that, with one exception, the events are all historical, and presented in their results, not produced by acts seen by, or taking place before, the audience, this tragedy is ill suited to our present large theatres. But in itself, and for the closet, I feel no hesitation in placing it as the first and most admirable of all Shakespeare's purely historical plays. For the two parts of Henry IV. form a species of themselves, which may be named the mixed drama. The distinction does not depend on the mere quantity of historical events in the play compared with the fictions; for there is as much history in Macbeth as in Richard, but in the relation of the history to the plot. In the purely historical plays, the history forms the plot; in the mixed, it directs it; in the rest, as Macbeth, Hamlet, Cymbeline, Lear, it subserves it. But, however unsuited to the stage this drama may be, God forbid that even there it should fall dead on the hearts of jacobinised Englishmen! Then, indeed, we might saypræteriit gloria mundi! For the spirit of patriotic reminiscence is the all-permeating soul of this noble work. It is, perhaps, the most purely historical of Shakespeare's dramas. There are not in it, as in the others, characters introduced merely for the

purpose of giving a greater individuality and realness, as in the comic parts of Henry IV., by presenting as it were our very selves. Shakespeare avails himself of every opportunity to effect the great object of the historic drama,that, namely, of familiarising the people to the great names of their country, and thereby of exciting a steady patriotism, a love of just liberty, and a respect for all those fundamental institutions of social life, which bind men together:

“This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise;
This fortress, built by nature for herself,
Against infection, and the hand of war;
This happy breed of men, this little world;
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a home,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear'd by their breed, and famous by their birth,” &c.
Add the famous passage in King John:

“This England never did nor ever shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them: nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true.”

And it certainly seems that Shakespeare's historic dramas produced a very deep effect on the minds of the English people, and in earlier times they were familiar even to the least informed of all ranks, according to the relation of Bishop Corbett. Marlborough, we know, was not ashamed to confess that his principal acquaintance with English history was derived from them; and I believe that a large part of the information as to our old names and achievements even now abroad is due, directly or indirectly, to Shakespeare.

Admirable is the judgment with which Shakespeare always in the first scenes prepares, yet how naturally, and with what concealment of art, for the catastrophe. Observe how he here presents the germ of all the after events in Richard's insincerity, partiality, arbitrariness, and favouritism, and in the proud, tempestuous, temperament of his

barons. In the very beginning, also, is displayed that feature in Richard's character, which is never forgotten throughout the playhis attention to decorum, and high feeling of the kingly dignity. These anticipations show with what judgment Shakespeare wrote, and illustrate his care to connect the past and the future, and unify them with the present by forecast and reminiscence.

It is interesting to a critical ear to compare the six opening lines of the play

“Old John of Gaunt, time-honour'd Lancaster,
Hast thou, according to thy oath and band,” &c.
each closing at the tenth syllable, with the rhythmless metre of the verse in Henry VI. and Titus Andronicus, in order that the difference, indeed, the heterogeneity, of the two may be felt etiam in simillimis prima superficie. Here the weight of the single words supplies all the relief afforded by intercurrent verse, while the whole represents the mood. And compare the apparently defective metre of Bolingbroke's first line

“Many years of happy days befal”
with Prospero's

“Twelve years since, Miranda! twelve years since.”
The actor should supply the time by emphasis, and pause on the first syllable of each of these verses.

Act i. sc. . Bolingbroke's speech:

“First (heaven be the record to my speech!),
In the devotion of a subject's love,” &c.
I remember in the Sophoclean drama no more striking example of the τὸ πρέπον καὶ σεμνὸν than this speech; and the rhymes in the last six lines well express the preconcertedness of Bolingbroke's scheme so beautifully contrasted with the vehemence and sincere irritation of Mowbray.

Ib. Bolingbroke's speech:

“Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries,
Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth,
To me, for justice and rough chastisement.”
Note the δεινὸν of this “to me,” which is evidently felt by Richard:

“How high a pitch his resolution soars!”
and the affected depreciation afterwards;

“As he is but my father's brother's son.”
Ib. Mowbray's speech:

“In haste whereof, most heartily I pray
Your highness to assign our trial day.”

The occasional interspersion of rhymes, and the more frequent winding up of a speech therewithwhat purpose was this designed to answer? In the earnest drama, I mean. Deliberateness? An attempt, as in Mowbray, to collect himself and be cool at the close?I can see that in the following speeches the rhyme answers the end of the Greek chorus, and distinguishes the general truths from the passions of the dialogue; but this does not exactly justify the practice, which is unfrequent in proportion to the excellence of Shakespeare's plays. One thing, however, is to be observed,that the speakers are historical, known, and so far formal characters, and their reality is already a fact. This should be borne in mind. The whole of this scene of the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke seems introduced for the purpose of showing by anticipation the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke. In the latter there is observable a decorous and courtly checking of his anger in subservience to a predetermined plan, especially in his calm speech after receiving sentence of banishment compared with Mowbray's unaffected lamentation. In the one, all is ambitious hope of something yet to come; in the other it is desolation and a looking backward of the heart,

Ib. sc. .

“Gaunt. God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in his right,
Hath caus'd his death: the which, if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift
An angry arm against his minister.”
Without the hollow extravagance of Beaumont and Fletcher's ultra-royalism, how carefully does Shakespeare acknowledge and reverence the eternal distinction between the mere individual, and the symbolic or representative, on which all genial law, no less than patriotism, depends. The whole of this second scene commences, and is anticipative of, the tone and character of the play at large.

Ib. sc. . In none of Shakespeare's fictitious dramas, or in those founded on a history as unknown to his auditors generally as fiction, is this violent rupture of the succession of time found:a proof, I think, that the pure historic drama, like Richard II. and King John, had its own laws.

Ib. Mowbray's speech:

“A dearer merit
Have I deserved at your highness' hand.”
O, the instinctive propriety of Shakespeare in the choice of words!

Ib. Richard's speech:

“Nor never by advised purpose meet,
To plot, contrive, or complot any ill,
'Gainst us, our state, our subjects, or our land.”
Already the selfish weakness of Richard's character opens. Nothing will such minds so readily embrace, as indirect ways softened down to their quasi-consciences by policy, expedience, &c.

Ib. Mowbray's speech:

... “All the world's my way.”
“The world was all before him.”Milt.
Ib.

“Boling. How long a time lies in one little word!
Four lagging winters, and four wanton springs,
End in a word: such is the breath of kings.”
Admirable anticipation!

Ib. sc. . This is a striking conclusion of a first act,letting the reader into the secret;having before impressed us with the dignified and kingly manners of Richard, yet by well managed anticipations leading us on to the full gratification of pleasure in our own penetration. In this scene a new light is thrown on Richard's character. Until now he has appeared in all the beauty of royalty; but here, as soon as he is left to himself, the inherent weakness of his character is immediately shown. It is a weakness, however, of a peculiar kind, not arising from want of personal courage, or any specific defect of faculty, but rather an intellectual femininenes, which feels a necessity of ever leaning on the breasts of others, and of reclining on those who are all the while known to be inferiors. To this must be attributed as its consequences all Richard's vices, his tendency to concealment, and his cunning, the whole operation of which is directed to the getting rid of present difficulties. Richard is not meant to be a debauchee; but we see in him that sophistry which is common to man, by which we can deceive our own hearts, and at one and the same time apologize for, and yet commit, the error. Shakespeare has represented this character in a very peculiar manner. He has not made him amiable with

counterbalancing faults; but has openly and broadly drawn those faults without reserve, relying on Richard's disproportionate sufferings and gradually emergent good qualities for our sympathy; and this was possible, because his faults are not positive vices, but spring entirely from defect of character.

Act ii. sc. .

“K. Rich. Can sick men play so nicely with their names?”
Yes! on a death-bed there is a feeling which may make all things appear but as puns and equivocations. And a passion there is that carries off its own excess by plays on words as naturally, and, therefore, as appropriately to drama, as by gesticulations, looks, or tones. This belongs to human nature as such, independently of associations and habits from any particular rank of life or mode of employment; and in this consists Shakespeare's vulgarisms, as in Macbeth's

“The devil damn thee black, thou cream-fac'd loon!” &c.
This is (to equivocate on Dante's words) in truth the nobile volgare eloquenza. Indeed it is profoundly true that there is a natural, an almost irresistible, tendency in the mind, when immersed in one strong feeling, to connect that feeling with every sight and object around it; especially if there be opposition, and the words addressed to it are in any way repugnant to the feeling itself, as here in the instance of Richard's unkind language:

“Misery makes sport to mock itself.”
No doubt, something of Shakespeare's punning must be attributed to his age, in which direct and formal combats of wit were a favourite pastime of the courtly and accomplished. It was an age more favourable, upon the whole, to vigour of intellect than the present, in which a dread of being thought pedantic dispirits and flattens the energies of original minds. But independently of this, I have no hesitation in saying that a pun, if it be congruous with the feeling of the scene, is not only allowable in the dramatic dialogue, but oftentimes one of the most effectual intensives of passion.

Ib.

“K. Rich. Right; you say true, as Hereford's love, so his;
As theirs, so mine; and all be as it is.”
The depth of this compared with the first scene:

“How high a pitch,” &c.

There is scarcely anything in Shakespeare in its degree, more admirably drawn than York's character; his religious loyalty struggling with a deep grief and indignation at the

king's follies; his adherence to his word and faith, once given in spite of all, even the most natural, feelings. You see in him the weakness of old age, and the overwhelmingness of circumstances, for a time surmounting his sense of duty,the junction of both exhibited in his boldness in words and feebleness in immediate act; and then again his effort to retrieve himself in abstract loyalty, even at the heavy price of the loss of his son. This species of accidental and adventitious weakness is brought into parallel with Richard's continually increasing energy of thought, and as constantly diminishing power of acting;and thus it is Richard that breathes a harmony and a relation into all the characters of the play.

Ib. sc. .

"Queen. To please the king I did; to please myself
I cannot do it; yet I know no cause
Why I should welcome such a guest as grief,
Save bidding farewell to so sweet a guest
As my sweet Richard: yet again, methinks,
Some unborn sorrow, ripe in sorrow's womb,
Is coming toward me; and my inward soul
With nothing trembles: at something it grieves,
More than with parting from my lord the king."

It is clear that Shakespeare never meant to represent Richard as a vulgar debauchee, but a man with a wantonness of spirit in external show, a feminine friendism, an intensity of woman-like love of those immediately about him, and a mistaking of the delight of being loved by him for a love of him. And mark in this scene Shakespeare's gentleness in touching the tender superstitions, the terræ incognitæ of presentiments, in the human mind; and how sharp a line of distinction he commonly draws between these obscure forecastings of general experience in each individual, and the vulgar errors of mere tradition. Indeed, it may be taken once for all as the truth, that Shakespeare, in the absolute universality of his genius, always reverences whatever arises out of our moral nature; he never profanes his muse with a contemptuous reasoning away of the genuine and general, however unaccountable, feelings of mankind.

The amiable part of Richard's character is brought full upon us by his queen's few words

... "So sweet a guest
As my sweet Richard:"

and Shakespeare has carefully shown in him an intense love of his country, well-knowing how that feeling would, in a pure historic drama, redeem him in the hearts of the audience. Yet even in this love there is something feminine and personal:

“Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,
As a long parted mother with her child
Plays fondly with her tears, and smiles in meeting;
So weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth,
And do thee favour with my royal hands.”

With this is combined a constant overflow of emotions from a total incapability of controlling them, and thence a waste of that energy, which should have been reserved for actions, in the passion and effort of mere resolves and menaces. The consequence is moral exhaustion, and rapid alternations of unmanly despair and ungrounded hope,every feeling being abandoned for its direct opposite upon the pressure of external accident. And yet when Richard's inward weakness appears to seek refuge in his despair, and his exhaustion counterfeits repose, the old habit of kingliness, the effect of flatterers from his infancy, is ever and anon producing in him a sort of wordy courage which only serves to betray more clearly his internal impotence. The second and third scenes of the third act combine and illustrate all this:

“Aumerle. He means, my lord, that we are too remiss;
Whilst Bolingbroke, through our security,
Grows strong and great, in substance, and in friends.
K. Rich. Discomfortable cousin! know'st thou not,
That when the searching eye of heaven is hid
Behind the globe, that lights the lower world,
Then thieves and robbers range abroad unseen,
In murders and in outrage, bloody here;
But when, from under this terrestrial ball,
He fires the proud tops of the eastern pines,
And darts his light through every guilty hole,
Then murders, treasons, and detested sins,
The cloke of night being pluckt from off their backs,
Stand bare and naked, trembling at themselves?
So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke, &c.
Aumerle. Where is the Duke my father with his power?
K. Rich. No matter where; of comfort no man speak:
Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs,
Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth, &c.
Aumerle. My father hath a power, enquire of him;
And learn to make a body of a limb.
K. Rich. Thou chid'st me well: proud Bolingbroke, I come
To change blows with thee for our day of doom.
This ague-fit of fear is over-blown;

An easy task it is to win our own.
Scroop. Your uncle York hath join'd with Bolingbroke.
K. Rich. Thou hast said enough,
Beshrew thee, cousin, which didst lead me forth
Of that sweet way I was in to despair!
What say you now? what comfort have we now?
By heaven, I'll hate him everlastingly,
That bids me be of comfort any more."
Act iii. sc. . Bolingbroke's speech:

"Noble lord,
Go to the rude ribs of that ancient castle," &c.

Observe the fine struggle of a haughty sense of power and ambition in Bolingbroke with the necessity for dissimulation.

Ib. sc. . See here the skill and judgment of our poet in giving reality and individual life, by the introduction of accidents in his historic plays, and thereby making them dramas, and not histories. How beautiful an islet of reposea melancholy repose, indeedis this scene with the Gardener and his Servant. And how truly affecting and realising is the incident of the very horse Barbary, in the scene with the Groom in the last act!

"Groom. I was a poor groom of thy stable, King,
When thou wert King; who, travelling towards York,
With much ado, at length have gotten leave
To look upon my sometimes master's face.
O, how it yearn'd my heart, when I beheld,
In London streets, that coronation day,
When Bolingbroke rode on roan Barbary!
That horse, that thou so often hast bestrid;
That horse, that I so carefully have dress'd!
K. Rich. Rode he on Barbary?"
Bolingbroke's character, in general, is an instance how Shakespeare makes one play introductory to another; for it is evidently a preparation for Henry IV., as Gloster in the third part of Henry VI. is for Richard III.

I would once more remark upon the exalted idea of the only true loyalty developed in this noble and impressive play. We have neither the rants of Beaumont and Fletcher, nor the sneers of Massinger;the vast importance of the personal character of the sovereign is distinctly enounced, whilst, at the same time, the genuine sanctity which

surrounds him is attributed to, and grounded on, the position in which he stands as the convergence and exponent of the life and power of the state.

The great end of the body politic appears to be to humanise, and assist in the progressiveness of, the animal man;but the problem is so complicated with contingencies as to render it nearly impossible to lay down rules for the formation of a state. And should we be able to form a system of government, which should so balance its different powers as to form a check upon each, and so continually remedy and correct itself, it would, nevertheless, defeat its own aim;for man is destined to be guided by higher principles, by universal views, which can never be fulfilled in this state of existence,by a spirit of progressiveness which can never be accomplished, for then it would cease to be. Plato's Republic is like Bunyan's Town of Man-Soul,a description of an individual, all of whose faculties are in their proper subordination and inter-dependence; and this it is assumed may be the prototype of the state as one great individual. But there is this sophism in it, that it is forgotten that the human faculties, indeed, are parts and not separate things; but that you could never get chiefs who were wholly reason, ministers who were wholly understanding, soldiers all wrath, labourers all concupiscence, and so on through the rest. Each of these partakes of, and interferes with, all the others.

“Henry IV.Part I.”

Act i. sc. . King Henry's speech:

“No more the thirsty entrance of this soil
Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood.”
A most obscure passage: but I think Theobald's interpretation right, namely, that “thirsty entrance” means the dry penetrability, or bibulous drought, of the soil. The obscurity of this passage is of the Shakespearian sort.

Ib. sc. . In this, the first introduction of Falstaff, observe the consciousness and the intentionality of his wit, so that when it does not flow of its own accord, its absence is felt, and an effort visibly made to recall it. Note also throughout how Falstaff's pride is gratified in the power of influencing a prince of the blood, the heir apparent, by means of it. Hence his dislike to Prince John of Lancaster, and his mortification when he finds his wit fail on him:

“P. John. Fare you well, Falstaff: I, in my condition,
Shall better speak of you than you deserve.

Fal. I would you had but the wit; 'twere better than your
dukedom.Good faith, this same young sober-blooded boy doth
not love me;nor a man cannot make him laugh."
Act ii. sc. . Second Carrier's speech:

... "breeds fleas like a loach."
Perhaps it is a misprint, or a provincial pronunciation, for "leach," that is, blood-suckers. Had it been gnats, instead of fleas, there might have been some sense, though small probability, in Warburton's suggestion of the Scottish "loch." Possibly "loach," or "lutch," may be some lost word for dovecote, or poultry-lodge, notorious for breeding fleas. In Stevens's or my reading, it should properly be "loaches," or "leeches," in the plural; except that I think I have heard anglers speak of trouts like a salmon.

Act iii. sc. .

"Glend. Nay, if you melt, then will she run mad."
This "nay" so to be dwelt on in speaking, as to be equivalent to a dissyllable - u, is characteristic of the solemn Glendower; but the imperfect line

"She bids you
Upon the wanton rushes lay you down," &c.,
is one of those fine hair-strokes of exquisite judgment peculiar to Shakespeare;thus detaching the Lady's speech, and giving it the individuality and entireness of a little poem, while he draws attention to it.

"Henry IV.Part II."

Act ii. sc.

"P. Hen. Sup any women with him?
Page. None, my lord, but old mistress Quickly, and mistress
Doll Tear-sheet.
P. Hen. This Doll Tear-sheet should be some road."
I am sometimes disposed to think that this respectable young lady's name is a very old corruption for Tear-streetstreet-walker, terere stratam (viam). Does not the Prince's question rather show this?

"This Doll Tear-street should be some road?"
Act iii. sc. . King Henry's speech:

... “Then, happy low, lie down;
Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.”
I know no argument by which to persuade any one to be of my opinion, or rather of my feeling; but yet I cannot help feeling that “Happy low-lie-down!” is either a proverbial expression, or the burthen of some old song, and means, “Happy the man, who lays himself down on his straw bed or chaff pallet on the ground or floor!”

Ib. sc. . Shallow's speech:

“Rah, tah, tah, would 'a say; bounce, would 'a say,” &c.
That Beaumont and Fletcher have more than once been guilty of sneering at their great master, cannot, I fear, be denied; but the passage quoted by Theobald from the Knight of the Burning Pestle is an imitation. If it be chargeable with any fault, it is with plagiarism, not with sarcasm.

“Henry V.”

Act i. sc. . Westmoreland's speech:

“They know your grace hath cause, and means, and might;
So hath your highness; never King of England
Had nobles richer,” &c.
Does “grace” mean the king's own peculiar domains and legal revenue, and “highness” his feudal rights in the military service of his nobles?I have sometimes thought it possible that the words “grace” and “cause” may have been transposed in the copying or printing;

“They know your cause hath grace,” &c.
What Theobald meant, I cannot guess. To me his pointing makes the passage still more obscure. Perhaps the lines ought to be recited dramatically thus:

“They know your Grace hath cause, and means, and might:
So hath your Highnessnever King of England
Had nobles richer,” &c.
He breaks off from the grammar and natural order from earnestness, and in order to give the meaning more passionately.

Ib. Exeter's speech:

“Yet that is but a crush'd necessity.”

Perhaps it may be “crash” for “crass” from crassus, clumsy; or it may be “curt,” defective, imperfect: anything would be better than Warburton's “'scus'd,” which honest Theobald, of course, adopts. By the by, it seems clear to me that this speech of Exeter's properly belongs to Canterbury, and was altered by the actors for convenience.

Act iv. sc. . King Henry's speech:

“We would not die in that man's company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.”
Should it not be “live” in the first line?

Ib. sc. .

“Const. O diable!
Orl. O seigneur! le jour est perdu, tout est perdu!
Dan. Mort de ma vie! all is confounded, all!
Reproach and everlasting shame
Sit mocking in our plumes!O meschante fortune!
Do not run away!”
Ludicrous as these introductory scraps of French appear, so instantly followed by good, nervous mother-English, yet they are judicious, and produce the impression which Shakespeare intended,a sudden feeling struck at once on the ears, as well as the eyes, of the audience, that “here come the French, the baffled French braggards!”And this will appear still more judicious, when we reflect on the scanty apparatus of distinguishing dresses in Shakespeare's tyring-room.

“Henry VI.Part I.”

Act i. sc. . Bedford's speech:

“Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!
Comets, importing change of times and states,
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky;
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars
That have consented unto Henry's death!
Henry the fifth, too famous to live long!
England ne'er lost a king of so much worth.”
Read aloud any two or three passages in blank verse even from Shakespeare's earliest dramas, as Love's Labour's Lost, or Romeo and Juliet; and then read in the same way this speech, with especial attention to the metre; and if you do not feel the impossibility

of the latter having been written by Shakespeare, all I dare suggest is, that you may have ears,for so has another animal,but an ear you cannot have, me judice.

“Richard III.”

This play should be contrasted with Richard II. Pride of intellect is the characteristic of Richard, carried to the extent of even boasting to his own mind of his villany, whilst others are present to feed his pride of superiority; as in his first speech, act ii. sc. . Shakespeare here, as in all his great parts, developes in a tone of sublime morality the dreadful consequences of placing the moral, in subordination to the mere intellectual, being. In Richard there is a predominance of irony, accompanied with apparently blunt manners to those immediately about him, but formalised into a more set hypocrisy towards the people as represented by their magistrates.

“Lear.”

Of all Shakespeare's plays Macbeth is the most rapid, Hamlet the slowest, in movement. Lear combines length with rapidity,like the hurricane and the whirlpool, absorbing while it advances. It begins as a stormy day in summer, with brightness; but that brightness is lurid, and anticipates the tempest.

It was not without forethought, nor is it without its due significance, that the division of Lear's kingdom is in the first six lines of the play stated as a thing already determined in all its particulars, previously to the trial of professions, as the relative rewards of which the daughters were to be made to consider their several portions. The strange, yet by no means unnatural, mixture of selfishness, sensibility, and habit of feeling derived from, and fostered by, the particular rank and usages of the individual;the intense desire of being intensely beloved,selfish, and yet characteristic of the selfishness of a loving and kindly nature alone;the self-supportless leaning for all pleasure on another's breast;the craving after sympathy with a prodigal disinterestedness, frustrated by its own ostentation, and the mode and nature of its claims;the anxiety, the distrust, the jealousy, which more or less accompany all selfish affections, and are amongst the surest contradistinctions of mere fondness from true love, and which originate Lear's eager wish to enjoy his daughter's violent professions, whilst the inveterate habits of sovereignty convert the wish into claim and positive right, and an incompliance with it into crime and treason;these facts, these passions, these moral verities, on which the whole tragedy is founded, are all prepared for, and will to the retrospect be found implied, in these first four or five lines of the play. They let us know that the trial is but a

trick; and that the grossness of the old king's rage is in part the natural result of a silly trick suddenly and most unexpectedly baffled and disappointed.

It may here be worthy of notice, that Lear is the only serious performance of Shakespeare, the interest and situations of which are derived from the assumption of a gross improbability; whereas Beaumont and Fletcher's tragedies are, almost all of them, founded on some out of the way accident or exception to the general experience of mankind. But observe the matchless judgment of our Shakespeare. First, improbable as the conduct of Lear is in the first scene, yet it was an old story rooted in the popular faith,a thing taken for granted already, and consequently without any of the effects of improbability. Secondly, it is merely the canvass for the characters and passions,a mere occasion for,and not, in the manner of Beaumont and Fletcher, perpetually recurring as the cause, and sine qua non of,the incidents and emotions. Let the first scene of this play have been lost, and let it only be understood that a fond father had been duped by hypocritical professions of love and duty on the part of two daughters to disinherit the third, previously, and deservedly, more dear to him;and all the rest of the tragedy would retain its interest undiminished, and be perfectly intelligible.

The accidental is nowhere the groundwork of the passions, but that which is catholic, which in all ages has been, and ever will be, close and native to the heart of man,parental anguish from filial ingratitude, the genuineness of worth, though coffined in bluntness, and the execrable vileness of a smooth iniquity. Perhaps I ought to have added the Merchant of Venice; but here too the same remarks apply. It was an old tale; and substitute any other danger than that of the pound of flesh (the circumstance in which the improbability lies), yet all the situations and the emotions appertaining to them remain equally excellent and appropriate. Whereas take away from the Mad Lover of Beaumont and Fletcher the fantastic hypothesis of his engagement to cut out his own heart, and have it presented to his mistress, and all the main scenes must go with it.

Kotzebue is the German Beaumont and Fletcher, without their poetic powers, and without their vis comica. But, like them, he always deduces his situations and passions from marvellous accidents, and the trick of bringing one part of our moral nature to counteract another; as our pity for misfortune and admiration of generosity and courage to combat our condemnation of guilt as in adultery, robbery, and other heinous crimes;and, like them too, he excels in his mode of telling a story clearly and interestingly, in a series of dramatic dialogues. Only the trick of making tragedy-heroes and heroines out of shopkeepers and barmaids was too low for the age, and too unpoetic for the genius, of Beaumont and Fletcher, inferior in every respect as they are to their great predecessor and contemporary. How inferior would they have appeared, had not Shakespeare existed for them to imitate;which in every play, more or less, they do, and

in their tragedies most glaringly:and yet(O shame! shame!)they miss no opportunity of sneering at the divine man, and sub-detracting from his merits!

To return to Lear. Having thus in the fewest words, and in a natural reply to as natural a question,which yet answers the secondary purpose of attracting our attention to the difference or diversity between the characters of Cornwall and Albany,provided the prémisses and data, as it were, for our after insight into the mind and mood of the person, whose character, passions, and sufferings are the main subject-matter of the play;from Lear, the persona patiens of his drama, Shakespeare passes without delay to the second in importance, the chief agent and prime mover, and introduces Edmund to our acquaintance, preparing us with the same felicity of judgment, and in the same easy and natural way, for his character in the seemingly casual communication of its origin and occasion. From the first drawing up of the curtain Edmund has stood before us in the united strength and beauty of earliest manhood. Our eyes have been questioning him. Gifted as he is with high advantages of person, and further endowed by nature with a powerful intellect and a strong energetic will, even without any concurrence of circumstances and accident, pride will necessarily be the sin that most easily besets him. But Edmund is also the known and acknowledged son of the princely Gloster: he, therefore, has both the germ of pride, and the conditions best fitted to evolve and ripen it into a predominant feeling. Yet hitherto no reason appears why it should be other than the not unusual pride of person, talent, and birth,a pride auxiliary, if not akin, to many virtues, and the natural ally of honourable impulses. But alas! in his own presence his own father takes shame to himself for the frank avowal that he is his father,he has “blushed so often to acknowledge him that he is now brazed to it!” Edmund hears the circumstances of his birth spoken of with a most degrading and licentious levity,his mother described as a wanton by her own paramour, and the remembrance of the animal sting, the low criminal gratifications connected with her wantonness and prostituted beauty, assigned as the reason why “the whoreson must be acknowledged!” This, and the consciousness of its notoriety; the gnawing conviction that every show of respect is an effort of courtesy, which recalls, while it represses, a contrary feeling;this is the ever trickling flow of wormwood and gall into the wounds of pride,the corrosive virus which inoculates pride with a venom not its own, with envy, hatred, and a lust for that power which in its blaze of radiance would hide the dark spots on his disc,with pangs of shame personally undeserved, and therefore felt as wrongs, and with a blind ferment of vindictive working towards the occasions and causes, especially towards a brother, whose stainless birth and lawful honours were the constant remembrancers of his own debasement, and were ever in the way to prevent all chance of its being unknown, or overlooked and forgotten. Add to this, that with excellent judgment, and provident for the claims of the moral sense,for that which, relatively to the drama, is called poetic justice, and as the fittest means for reconciling the feelings of the spectators to the horrors of Gloster's after sufferings,at least, of rendering them

somewhat less unendurable(for I will not disguise my conviction, that in this one point the tragic in this play has been urged beyond the outermost mark and ne plus ultra of the dramatic);Shakespeare has precluded all excuse and palliation of the guilt incurred by both the parents of the base-born Edmund, by Gloster's confession that he was at the time a married man, and already blest with a lawful heir of his fortunes. The mournful alienation of brotherly love, occasioned by the law of primogeniture in noble families, or rather by the unnecessary distinctions engrafted thereon, and this in children of the same stock, is still almost proverbial on the continent,especially, as I know from my own observation, in the south of Europe,and appears to have been scarcely less common in our own island before the Revolution of , if we may judge from the characters and sentiments so frequent in our elder comedies. There is the younger brother, for instance, in Beaumont and Fletcher's play of the Scornful Lady, on the one side, and Oliver in Shakespeare's As You Like It, on the other. Need it be said how heavy an aggravation, in such a case, the stain of bastardy must have been, were it only that the younger brother was liable to hear his own dishonour and his mother's infamy related by his father with an excusing shrug of the shoulders, and in a tone betwixt waggery and shame!

By the circumstances here enumerated as so many predisposing causes, Edmund's character might well be deemed already sufficiently explained; and our minds prepared for it. But in this tragedy the story or fable constrained Shakespeare to introduce wickedness in an outrageous form in the persons of Regan and Goneril. He had read nature too heedfully not to know that courage, intellect, and strength of character are the most impressive forms of power, and that to power in itself, without reference to any moral end, an inevitable admiration and complacency appertains, whether it be displayed in the conquests of a Buonaparte or Tamerlane, or in the foam and the thunder of a cataract. But in the exhibition of such a character it was of the highest importance to prevent the guilt from passing into utter monstrosity,which again depends on the presence or absence of causes and temptations sufficient to account for the wickedness, without the necessity of recurring to a thorough fiendishness of nature for its origination. For such are the appointed relations of intellectual power to truth, and of truth to goodness, that it becomes both morally and poetically unsafe to present what is admirablewhat our nature compels us to admirein the mind, and what is most detestable in the heart, as co-existing in the same individual without any apparent connection, or any modification of the one by the other. That Shakespeare has in one instance, that of Iago, approached to this, and that he has done it successfully, is perhaps the most astonishing proof of his genius, and the opulence of its resources. But in the present tragedy, in which he was compelled to present a Goneril and a Regan, it was most carefully to be avoided;and therefore the only one conceivable addition to the inauspicious influences on the preformation of Edmund's character is given, in the information that all the kindly counteractions to the mischievous feelings of shame, which might have been derived from co-domestication with Edgar and their common

father, had been cut off by his absence from home, and foreign education from boyhood to the present time, and a prospect of its continuance, as if to preclude all risk of his interference with the father's views for the elder and legitimate son:

“He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again.”
Act i. sc. .

“Cor. Nothing my lord.
Lear. Nothing?
Cor. Nothing.
Lear. Nothing can come of nothing: speak again.
Cor. Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
According to my bond; nor more, nor less.”
There is something of disgust at the ruthless hypocrisy of her sisters, and some little faulty admixture of pride and sullenness in Cordelia's “Nothing;” and her tone is well contrived, indeed, to lessen the glaring absurdity of Lear's conduct, but answers the yet more important purpose of forcing away the attention from the nursery-tale, the moment it has served its end, that of supplying the canvas for the picture. This is also materially furthered by Kent's opposition, which displays Lear's moral incapability of resigning the sovereign power in the very act of disposing of it. Kent is, perhaps, the nearest to perfect goodness in all Shakespeare's characters, and yet the most individualised. There is an extraordinary charm, in his bluntness, which is that only of a nobleman, arising from a contempt of overstrained courtesy, and combined with easy placability where goodness of heart is apparent. His passionate affection for, and fidelity to, Lear act on our feelings in Lear's own favour: virtue itself seems to be in company with him.

Ib. sc. . Edmund's speech:

“Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth,” &c.
Warburton's note upon a quotation from Vanini.

Poor Vanini!Any one but Warburton would have thought this precious passage more characteristic of Mr. Shandy than of atheism. If the fact really were so (which it is not, but almost the contrary) I do not see why the most confirmed theist might not very naturally utter the same wish. But it is proverbial that the youngest son in a large family is commonly the man of the greatest talents in it; and as good an authority as Vanini has said“incalescere in venerem ardentius, spei sobolis injuriosum esse.”

In this speech of Edmund you see, as soon as a man cannot reconcile himself to reason, how his conscience flies off by way of appeal to nature, who is sure upon such occasions never to find fault, and also how shame sharpens a predisposition in the heart to evil. For it is a profound moral, that shame will naturally generate guilt; the oppressed will be vindictive, like Shylock, and in the anguish of undeserved ignominy the delusion secretly springs up of getting over the moral quality of an action by fixing the mind on the mere physical act alone.

Ib. Edmund's speech:

“This is the excellent foppery of the world! that, when we are sick in fortune (often the surfeit of our own behaviour), we make guilty of our disasters, the sun, the moon, and the stars,” &c.

Thus scorn and misanthropy are often the anticipations and mouth-pieces of wisdom in the detection of superstitions. Both individuals and nations may be free from such prejudices by being below them, as well as by rising above them.

Ib. sc. . The Steward should be placed in exact antithesis to Kent, as the only character of utter irredeemable baseness in Shakespeare. Even in this the judgment and invention of the poet are very observable;for what else could the willing tool of a Goneril be? Not a vice but this of baseness was left open to him.

Ib. sc. . In Lear old age is itself a character,its natural imperfections being increased by life-long habits of receiving a prompt obedience. Any addition of individuality would have been unnecessary and painful; for the relations of others to him, of wondrous fidelity and of frightful ingratitude, alone sufficiently distinguish him. Thus Lear becomes the open and ample play-room of nature's passions.

Ib.

“Knight. Since my young lady's going into France, Sir; the
fool hath much pined away.”
The Fool is no comic buffoon to make the groundlings laugh,no forced condescension of Shakespeare's genius to the taste of his audience. Accordingly the poet prepares for his introduction, which he never does with any of his common clowns and fools, by bringing him into living connection with the pathos of the play. He is as wonderful a creation as Caliban;his wild babblings, and inspired idiocy, articulate and gauge the horrors of the scene.

The monster Goneril prepares what is necessary, while the character of Albany renders a still more maddening grievance possiblenamely, Regan and Cornwall in perfect sympathy of monstrosity. Not a sentiment, not an image, which can give pleasure on its own account is admitted; whenever these creatures are introduced, and they are brought forward as little as possible, pure horror reigns throughout. In this scene and in all the early speeches of Lear, the one general sentiment of filial ingratitude prevails as the main-spring of the feelings;in this early stage the outward object causing the pressure on the mind, which is not yet sufficiently familiarised with the anguish for the imagination to work upon it.

Ib.

“Gon. Do you mark that, my lord?
Alb. I cannot be so partial, Goneril,
To the great love I bear you.
Gon. Pray you content,” &c.
Observe the baffled endeavour of Goneril to act on the fears of Albany, and yet his passiveness, his inertia; he is not convinced, and yet he is afraid of looking into the thing. Such characters always yield to those who will take the trouble of governing them, or for them. Perhaps the influence of a princess, whose choice of him had royalised his state, may be some little excuse for Albany's weakness.

Ib. sc. .

“Lear. O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
Keep me in temper! I would not be mad!”
The mind's own anticipation of madness! The deepest tragic notes are often struck by a half sense of an impending blow. The Fool's conclusion of this act by a grotesque prattling seems to indicate the dislocation of feeling that has begun and is to be continued.

Act ii. sc. . Edmund's speech:

... “He replied,
Thou unpossessing bastard!” &c.
Thus the secret poison in Edmund's own heart steals forth; and then observe poor Gloster's

“Loyal and natural boy!”
as if praising the crime of Edmund's birth!

Ib. Compare Regan's

“What, did my father's godson seek your life?
He whom my father named?”
with the unfeminine violence of her

“All vengeance comes too short,” &c.
and yet no reference to the guilt, but only to the accident, which she uses as an occasion for sneering at her father. Regan is not, in fact, a greater monster than Goneril, but she has the power of casting more venom.

Ib. sc. . Cornwall's speech:-

... “This is some fellow,
Who, having been praised for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness,” &c.
In thus placing these profound general truths in the mouths of such men as Cornwall, Edmund, Iago, &c., Shakespeare at once gives them utterance, and yet shows how indefinite their application is.

Ib. sc. . Edgar's assumed madness serves the great purpose of taking off part of the shock which would otherwise be caused by the true madness of Lear, and further displays the profound difference between the two. In every attempt at representing madness throughout the whole range of dramatic literature, with the single exception of Lear, it is mere lightheadedness, as especially in Otway. In Edgar's ravings Shakespeare all the while lets you see a fixed purpose, a practical end in view;in Lear's, there is only the brooding of the one anguish, an eddy without progression.

Ib. sc. . Lear's speech:

“The king would speak with Cornwall; the dear father
Would with his daughter speak, &c.
No, but not yet: may be he is not well,” &c.
The strong interest now felt by Lear to try to find excuses for his daughter is most pathetic.

Ib. Lear's speech:

... “Beloved Regan,
Thy sister's naught;O Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, here.

I can scarce speak to thee;thou'lt not believe
Of how deprav'd a qualityO Regan!
Reg. I pray you, Sir, take patience; I have hope,
You less know how to value her desert,
Than she to scant her duty.
Lear. Say, how is that?"
Nothing is so heart-cutting as a cold unexpected defence or palliation of a cruelty passionately complained of, or so expressive of thorough hard-heartedness. And feel the excessive horror of Regan's "O, Sir, you are old!"and then her drawing from that universal object of reverence and indulgence the very reason for her frightful conclusion

"Say, you have wrong'd her!"
All Lear's faults increase our pity for him. We refuse to know them otherwise than as means of his sufferings, and aggravations of his daughters' ingratitude.

Ib. Lear's speech:

"O, reason not the need: our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous," &c.
Observe that the tranquillity which follows the first stunning of the blow permits Lear to reason.

Act iii. sc. . O, what a world's convention of agonies is here! All external nature in a storm, all moral nature convulsed,the real madness of Lear, the feigned madness of Edgar, the babbling of the Fool, the desperate fidelity of Kentsurely such a scene was never conceived before or since! Take it but as a picture for the eye only, it is more terrific than any which a Michael Angelo, inspired by a Dante, could have conceived, and which none but a Michael Angelo could have executed. Or let it have been uttered to the blind, the howlings of nature would seem converted into the voice of conscious humanity. This scene ends with the first symptoms of positive derangement; and the intervention of the fifth scene is particularly judicious,the interruption allowing an interval for Lear to appear in full madness in the sixth scene.

Ib. sc. . Gloster's blinding.

What can I say of this scene?There is my reluctance to think Shakespeare wrong, and yet

Act iv. sc. . Lear's speech:

“Ha! Goneril!with a white beard!They flattered me like a dog; and told me, I had white hairs in my beard, ere the black ones were there. To say Ay and No to every thing I said!Ay and No too was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once,” &c.
The thunder recurs, but still at a greater distance from our feelings.

Ib. sc. . Lear's speech:

“Where have I been? Where am I?Fair daylight?
I am mightily abused.I should even die with pity
To see another thus,” &c.
How beautifully the affecting return of Lear to reason, and the mild pathos of these speeches prepare the mind for the last sad, yet sweet, consolation of the aged sufferer's death!

“Hamlet.”

Hamlet was the play, or rather Hamlet himself was the character, in the intuition and exposition of which I first made my turn for philosophical criticism, and especially for insight into the genius of Shakespeare, noticed. This happened first amongst my acquaintances, as Sir George Beaumont will bear witness; and subsequently, long before Schlegel had delivered at Vienna the lectures on Shakespeare, which he afterwards published, I had given on the same subject eighteen lectures substantially the same, proceeding from the very same point of view, and deducing the same conclusions, so far as I either then agreed, or now agree, with him. I gave these lectures at the Royal Institution, before six or seven hundred auditors of rank and eminence, in the spring of the same year, in which Sir Humphrey Davy, a fellow-lecturer, made his great revolutionary discoveries in chemistry. Even in detail the coincidence of Schlegel with my lectures was so extraordinary, that all who at a later period heard the same words, taken by me from my notes of the lectures at the Royal Institution, concluded a borrowing on my part from Schlegel. Mr. Hazlitt, whose hatred of me is in such an inverse ratio to my zealous kindness towards him, as to be defended by his warmest admirer, Charles Lamb(who, God bless him! besides his characteristic obstinacy of adherence to old friends, as long at least as they are at all down in the world, is linked as by a charm to Hazlitt's conversation)only as “frantic;”Mr. Hazlitt, I say, himself replied to an assertion of my plagiarism from Schlegel in these words;“That is a lie; for I myself heard the very same character of Hamlet from Coleridge before he went to Germany, and when he had neither read nor could read a page of German!” Now Hazlitt was on a visit to me at my cottage at Nether Stowey, Somerset, in the summer of the year , in the

September of which year I first was out of sight of the shores of Great Britain.Recorded by me, S. T. Coleridge, th January, .

The seeming inconsistencies in the conduct and character of Hamlet have long exercised the conjectural ingenuity of critics; and, as we are always loth to suppose that the cause of defective apprehension is in ourselves, the mystery has been too commonly explained by the very easy process of setting it down as in fact inexplicable, and by resolving the phenomenon into a misgrowth or lusus of the capricious and irregular genius of Shakespeare. The shallow and stupid arrogance of these vulgar and indolent decisions I would fain do my best to expose. I believe the character of Hamlet may be traced to Shakespeare's deep and accurate science in mental philosophy. Indeed, that this character must have some connection with the common fundamental laws of our nature may be assumed from the fact, that Hamlet has been the darling of every country in which the literature of England has been fostered. In order to understand him, it is essential that we should reflect on the constitution of our own minds. Man is distinguished from the brute animals in proportion as thought prevails over sense: but in the healthy processes of the mind, a balance is constantly maintained between the impressions from outward objects and the inward operations of the intellect;for if there be an overbalance in the contemplative faculty, man thereby becomes the creature of mere meditation, and loses his natural power of action. Now one of Shakespeare's modes of creating characters is, to conceive any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid excess, and then to place himself, Shakespeare, thus mutilated or diseased, under given circumstances. In Hamlet he seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses, and our meditation on the workings of our minds,an equilibrium between the real and the imaginary worlds. In Hamlet this balance is disturbed: his thoughts, and the images of his fancy, are far more vivid than his actual perceptions, and his very perceptions, instantly passing through the medium of his contemplations, acquire, as they pass, a form and a colour not naturally their own. Hence we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action, consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. This character Shakespeare places in circumstances, under which it is obliged to act on the spur of the moment:Hamlet is brave and careless of death; but he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve. Thus it is that this tragedy presents a direct contrast to that of Macbeth; the one proceeds with the utmost slowness, the other with a crowded and breathless rapidity.

The effect of this overbalance of the imaginative power is beautifully illustrated in the everlasting broodings and superfluous activities of Hamlet's mind, which, unseated from its healthy relation, is constantly occupied with the world within, and abstracted

from the world without,giving substance to shadows, and throwing a mist over all commonplace actualities. It is the nature of thought to be indefinite;definiteness belongs to external imagery alone. Hence it is that the sense of sublimity arises, not from the sight of an outward object, but from the beholder's reflection upon it;not from the sensuous impression, but from the imaginative reflex. Few have seen a celebrated waterfall without feeling something akin to disappointment: it is only subsequently that the image comes back full into the mind, and brings with it a train of grand or beautiful associations. Hamlet feels this; his senses are in a state of trance, and he looks upon external things as hieroglyphics. His soliloquy

"O! that this too too solid flesh would melt," &c.
springs from that craving after the indefinitefor that which is notwhich most easily besets men of genius; and the self-delusion common to this temper of mind is finely exemplified in the character which Hamlet gives of himself;

... "It cannot be
But I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall
To make oppression bitter."
He mistakes the seeing his chains for the breaking them, delays action till action is of no use, and dies the victim of mere circumstance and accident.

There is a great significancy in the names of Shakespeare's plays. In the Twelfth Night, Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, and Winter's Tale, the total effect is produced by a co-ordination of the characters as in a wreath of flowers. But in Coriolanus, Lear, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, &c., the effect arises from the subordination of all to one, either as the prominent person, or the principal object. Cymbeline is the only exception; and even that has its advantages in preparing the audience for the chaos of time, place, and costume, by throwing the date back into a fabulous king's reign.

But as of more importance, so more striking, is the judgment displayed by our truly dramatic poet, as well as poet of the drama, in the management of his first scenes. With the single exception of Cymbeline, they either place before us at one glance both the past and the future in some effect, which implies the continuance and full agency of its cause, as in the feuds and party-spirit of the servants of the two houses in the first scene of Romeo and Juliet; or in the degrading passion for shows and public spectacles, and the overwhelming attachment for the newest successful war-chief in the Roman people, already become a populace, contrasted with the jealousy of the nobles in Julius Cæsar;or they at once commence the action so as to excite a curiosity for the explanation in the following scenes, as in the storm of wind and waves, and the boatswain in the Tempest, instead of anticipating our curiosity, as in most other first scenes, and in too many other

first acts;or they act, by contrast of diction suited to the characters, at once to heighten the effect, and yet to give a naturalness to the language and rhythm of the principal personages, either as that of Prospero and Miranda by the appropriate lowness of the style, or as in King John, by the equally appropriate stateliness of official harangues or narratives, so that the after blank verse seems to belong to the rank and quality of the speakers, and not to the poet;or they strike at once the key-note, and give the predominant spirit of the play, as in the Twelfth Night and in Macbeth;or finally, the first scene comprises all these advantages at once, as in Hamlet.

Compare the easy language of common life, in which this drama commences, with the direful music and wild wayward rhythm and abrupt lyrics of the opening of Macbeth. The tone is quite familiar;there is no poetic description of night, no elaborate information conveyed by one speaker to another of what both had immediately before their senses(such as the first distich in Addison's Cato, which is a translation into poetry of “Past four o'clock and a dark morning!”);and yet nothing bordering on the comic on the one hand, nor any striving of the intellect on the other. It is precisely the language of sensation among men who feared no charge of effeminacy for feeling what they had no want of resolution to bear. Yet the armour, the dead silence, the watchfulness that first interrupts it, the welcome relief of the guard, the cold, the broken expressions of compelled attention to bodily feelings still under controlall excellently accord with, and prepare for, the after gradual rise into tragedy;but, above all, into a tragedy, the interest of which is as eminently ad et apud intra, as that of Macbeth is directly ad extra.

In all the best attested stories of ghosts and visions, as in that of Brutus, of Archbishop Cranmer, that of Benvenuto Cellini recorded by himself, and the vision of Galileo communicated by him to his favourite pupil Torricelli, the ghost-seers were in a state of cold or chilling damp from without, and of anxiety inwardly. It has been with all of them as with Francisco on his guard,alone, in the depth and silence of the night; “'twas bitter cold, and they were sick at heart, and not a mouse stirring.” The attention to minute sounds,naturally associated with the recollection of minute objects, and the more familiar and trifling, the more impressive from the unusualness of their producing any impression at allgives a philosophic pertinency to this last image; but it has likewise its dramatic use and purpose. For its commonness in ordinary conversation tends to produce the sense of reality, and at once hides the poet, and yet approximates the reader or spectator to that state in which the highest poetry will appear, and in its component parts, though not in the whole composition, really is, the language of nature. If I should not speak it, I feel that I should be thinking it;the voice only is the poet's,the words are my own. That Shakespeare meant to put an effect in the actor's power in the very first words“Who's there?”is evident from the impatience expressed by the startled Francisco in the words that follow“Nay, answer me: stand and unfold yourself.” A brave man is never so peremptory, as when he fears that he is afraid. Observe the gradual transition

from the silence and the still recent habit of listening in Francisco's“I think I hear them”to the more cheerful call out, which a good actor would observe, in the“Stand ho! Who is there?” Bernardo's inquiry after Horatio, and the repetition of his name and in his own presence indicate a respect or an eagerness that implies him as one of the persons who are in the foreground; and the scepticism attributed to him,

“Horatio says, 'tis but our fantasy;
And will not let belief take hold of him,”
prepares us for Hamlet's after eulogy on him as one whose blood and judgment were happily commingled. The actor should also be careful to distinguish the expectation and gladness of Bernardo's “Welcome, Horatio!” from the mere courtesy of his “Welcome, good Marcellus!”

Now observe the admirable indefiniteness of the first opening out of the occasion of all this anxiety. The preparation informative of the audience is just as much as was precisely necessary, and no more;it begins with the uncertainty appertaining to a question:

“Mar. What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?”
Even the word “again” has its credibilising effect. Then Horatio, the representative of the ignorance of the audience, not himself, but by Marcellus to Bernardo, anticipates the common solution“'tis but our fantasy!” upon which Marcellus rises into

“This dreaded sight, twice seen of us”
which immediately afterwards becomes “this apparition,” and that, too, an intelligent spiritthat is, to be spoken to! Then comes the confirmation of Horatio's disbelief;

“Tush! tush! 'twill not appear!”
and the silence, with which the scene opened, is again restored in the shivering feeling of Horatio sitting down, at such a time, and with the two eye-witnesses, to hear a story of a ghost, and that, too, of a ghost which had appeared twice before at the very same hour. In the deep feeling which Bernardo has of the solemn nature of what he is about to relate, he makes an effort to master his own imaginative terrors by an elevation of style,itself a continuation of the effort,and by turning off from the apparition, as from something which would force him too deeply into himself, to the outward objects, the realities of nature, which had accompanied it:

“Ber. Last night of all,
When yon same star, that's westward from the pole
Had made his course to illume that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,

The bell then beating one.”
This passage seems to contradict the critical law that what is told, makes a faint impression compared with what is beholden; for it does indeed convey to the mind more than the eye can see; whilst the interruption of the narrative at the very moment when we are most intensely listening for the sequel, and have our thoughts diverted from the dreaded sight in expectation of the desired, yet almost dreaded, talethis gives all the suddenness and surprise of the original appearance:

“Mar. Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again!”
Note the judgment displayed in having the two persons present, who, as having seen the Ghost before, are naturally eager in confirming their former opinions,whilst the sceptic is silent, and after having been twice addressed by his friends, answers with two hasty syllables“Most like,”and a confession of horror:

“It harrows me with fear and wonder.”
O heaven! words are wasted on those who feel, and to those who do not feel the exquisite judgment of Shakespeare in this scene, what can be said? Hume himself could not but have had faith in this Ghost dramatically, let his anti-ghostism have been as strong as Sampson against other ghosts less powerfully raised.

Act i. sc. .

“Mar. Good now, sit down, and tell me, he that knows,
Why this same strict and most observant watch,” &c.
How delightfully natural is the transition, to the retrospective narrative! And observe, upon the Ghost's reappearance, how much Horatio's courage is increased by having translated the late individual spectator into general thought and past experience,and the sympathy of Marcellus and Bernardo with his patriotic surmises in daring to strike at the Ghost; whilst in a moment, upon its vanishing, the former solemn awe-stricken feeling returns upon them:

“We do it wrong, being so majestical,
To offer it the show of violence.”
Ib. Horatio's speech:

... “I have heard,
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day,” &c.

No Addison could be more careful to be poetical in diction than Shakespeare in providing the grounds and sources of its propriety. But how to elevate a thing almost mean by its familiarity, young poets may learn in this treatment of the cock-crow.

Ib. Horatio's speech:

... “And, by my advice,
Let us impart what we have seen to-night
Unto young Hamlet; for, upon my life,
The spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.”

Note the inobtrusive and yet fully adequate mode of introducing the main character, “young Hamlet,” upon whom it transferred all the interest excited for the acts and concerns of the king his father.

Ib. sc. . The audience are now relieved by a change of scene to the royal court, in order that Hamlet may not have to take up the leavings of exhaustion. In the king's speech, observe the set and pedantically antithetic form of the sentences when touching that which galled the heels of conscience,the strain of undignified rhetoric,and yet in what follows concerning the public weal, a certain appropriate majesty. Indeed was he not a royal brother?

Ib. King's speech:

“And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?” &c.
Thus with great art Shakespeare introduces a most important, but still subordinate character first, Laertes, who is yet thus graciously treated in consequence of the assistance given to the election of the late king's brother instead of his son by Polonius.

Ib.

“Ham. A little more than kin, and less than kind.
King. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?
Ham. Not so, my lord, I am too much i' the sun.”
Hamlet opens his mouth with a playing on words, the complete absence of which throughout characterises Macbeth. This playing on words may be attributed to many causes or motives, as either to an exuberant activity of mind, as in the higher comedy of Shakespeare generally;or to an imitation of it as a mere fashion, as if it were said“Is not this better than groaning?”or to a contemptuous exultation in minds vulgarised and overset by their success, as in the poetic instance of Milton's Devils in the battle;or it is the language of resentment, as is familiar to every one who has witnessed the quarrels of

the lower orders, where there is invariably a profusion of punning invective, whence, perhaps, nicknames have in a considerable degree sprung up;or it is the language of suppressed passion, and especially of a hardly smothered personal dislike. The first and last of these combine in Hamlet's case; and I have little doubt that Farmer is right in supposing the equivocation carried on in the expression “too much i' the sun,” or son.

Ib.

“Ham. Ay, madam, it is common.”
Here observe Hamlet's delicacy to his mother, and how the suppression prepares him for the overflow in the next speech, in which his character is more developed by bringing forward his aversion to externals, and which betrays his habit of brooding over the world within him, coupled with a prodigality of beautiful words, which are the half embodyings of thought, and are more than thought, and have an outness, a reality sui generis, and yet retain their correspondence and shadowy affinity to the images and movements within. Note also Hamlet's silence to the long speech of the king which follows, and his respectful, but general, answer to his mother.

Ib. Hamlet's first soliloquy:

“O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!” &c.
This tædium vitæ is a common oppression on minds cast in the Hamlet mould, and is caused by disproportionate mental exertion, which necessitates exhaustion of bodily feeling. Where there is a just coincidence of external and internal action, pleasure is always the result; but where the former is deficient, and the mind's appetency of the ideal is unchecked, realities will seem cold and unmoving. In such cases, passion combines itself with the indefinite alone. In this mood of his mind the relation of the appearance of his father's spirit in arms is made all at once to Hamlet:it isHoratio's speech in particulara perfect model of the true style of dramatic narrative;the purest poetry, and yet in the most natural language, equally remote from the ink-horn and the plough.

Ib. sc. . This scene must be regarded as one of Shakespeare's lyric movements in the play, and the skill with which it is interwoven with the dramatic parts is peculiarly an excellence of our poet. You experience the sensation of a pause without the sense of a stop. You will observe in Ophelia's short and general answer to the long speech of Laertes the natural carelessness of innocence, which cannot think such a code of cautions and prudences necessary to its own preservation.

Ib. Speech of Polonius (in Stockdale's edition):

“Or (not to crack the wind of the poor phrase),
Wronging it thus, you'll tender me a fool.”
I suspect this “wronging” is here used much in the same sense as “wringing” or “wrenching,” and that the parenthesis should be extended to “thus.”

Ib. Speech of Polonius:

... “How prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows:these blazes, daughter,” &c.

A spondee has, I doubt not, dropped out of the text. Either insert “Go to” after “vows”;

“Lends the tongue vows: Go to, these blazes, daughter”
or read

“Lends the tongue vows:These blazes, daughter, mark you”
Shakespeare never introduces a catalectic line without intending an equivalent to the foot omitted in the pauses, or the dwelling emphasis, or the diffused retardation. I do not, however, deny that a good actor might, by employing the last mentioned meansnamely, the retardation, or solemn knowing drawlsupply the missing spondee with good effect. But I do not believe that in this or any other of the foregoing speeches of Polonius, Shakespeare meant to bring out the senility or weakness of that personage's mind. In the great ever-recurring dangers and duties of life, where to distinguish the fit objects for the application of the maxims collected by the experience of a long life, requires no fineness of tact, as in the admonitions to his son and daughter, Polonius is uniformly made respectable. But if an actor were even capable of catching these shades in the character, the pit and the gallery would be malcontent at their exhibition. It is to Hamlet that Polonius is, and is meant to be, contemptible, because in inwardness and uncontrollable activity of movement, Hamlet's mind is the logical contrary to that of Polonius; and besides, as I have observed before, Hamlet dislikes the man as false to his true allegiance in the matter of the succession to the crown.

Ib. sc. . The unimportant conversation with which this scene opens is a proof of Shakespeare's minute knowledge of human nature. It is a well established fact, that on the brink of any serious enterprise, or event of moment, men almost invariably endeavour to elude the pressure of their own thoughts by turning aside to trivial objects and familiar circumstances: thus this dialogue on the platform begins with remarks on the coldness of the air, and inquiries, obliquely connected, indeed, with the expected hour of the visitation, but thrown out in a seeming vacuity of topics, as to the striking of

the clock and so forth. The same desire to escape from the impending thought is carried on in Hamlet's account of, and moralizing on, the Danish custom of wassailing: he runs off from the particular to the universal, and, in his repugnance to personal and individual concerns, escapes, as it were, from himself in generalisations, and smothers the impatience and uneasy feelings of the moment in abstract reasoning. Besides this, another purpose is answered;for by thus entangling the attention of the audience in the nice distinctions and parenthetical sentences of this speech of Hamlet's, Shakespeare takes them completely by surprise on the appearance of the Ghost, which comes upon them in all the suddenness of its visionary character. Indeed, no modern writer would have dared, like Shakespeare, to have preceded this last visitation by two distinct appearances,or could have contrived that the third should rise upon the former two in impressiveness and solemnity of interest.

But in addition to all the other excellences of Hamlet's speech concerning the wassail-musicso finely revealing the predominant idealism, the ratiocinative meditativeness, of his characterit has the advantage of giving nature and probability to the impassioned continuity of the speech instantly directed to the Ghost. The momentum had been given to his mental activity; the full current of the thoughts and words had set in, and the very forgetfulness, in the fervour of his argumentation, of the purpose for which he was there, aided in preventing the appearance from benumbing the mind. Consequently, it acted as a new impulse,a sudden stroke which increased the velocity of the body already in motion, whilst it altered the direction. The co-presence of Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo is most judiciously contrived; for it renders the courage of Hamlet, and his impetuous eloquence, perfectly intelligible. The knowledge,the unthought of consciousness,the sensation of human auditorsof flesh and blood sympathistsacts as a support and a stimulation a tergo, while the front of the mind, the whole consciousness of the speaker, is filled, yea, absorbed, by the apparition. Add too, that the apparition itself has, by its previous appearances, been brought nearer to a thing of this world. This accrescence of objectivity in a Ghost that yet retains all its ghostly attributes and fearful subjectivity, is truly wonderful.

Ib. sc. . Hamlet's speech:

“O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell?”
I remember nothing equal to this burst, unless it be the first speech of Prometheus in the Greek drama, after the exit of Vulcan and the two Afrites. But Shakespeare alone could have produced the vow of Hamlet to make his memory a blank of all maxims and generalised truths, that “observation had copied there,”followed immediately by the speaker noting down the generalised fact,

“That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain!”
Ib.

“Mar. Hillo, ho, ho, my lord!
Ham. Hillo, ho, ho, boy! come bird, come,” &c.
This part of the scene, after Hamlet's interview with the Ghost, has been charged with an improbable eccentricity. But the truth is, that after the mind has been stretched beyond its usual pitch and tone, it must either sink into exhaustion and inanity, or seek relief by change. It is thus well known, that persons conversant in deeds of cruelty contrive to escape from conscience by connecting something of the ludicrous with them, and by inventing grotesque terms, and a certain technical phraseology, to disguise the horror of their practices. Indeed, paradoxical as it may appear, the terrible by a law of the human mind always touches on the verge of the ludicrous. Both arise from the perception of something out of the common order of thingssomething, in fact, out of its place; and if from this we can abstract danger, the uncommonness will alone remain, and the sense of the ridiculous be excited. The close alliance of these oppositesthey are not contrariesappears from the circumstance, that laughter is equally the expression of extreme anguish and horror as of joy: as there are tears of sorrow and tears of joy, so is there a laugh of terror and a laugh of merriment. These complex causes will naturally have produced in Hamlet the disposition to escape from his own feelings of the overwhelming and supernatural by a wild transition to the ludicrous,a sort of cunning bravado, bordering on the flights of delirium. For you may, perhaps, observe that Hamlet's wildness is but half false; he plays that subtle trick of pretending to act only when he is very near really being what he acts.

The subterraneous speeches of the Ghost are hardly defensible;but I would call your attention to the characteristic difference between this Ghost, as a superstition connected with the most mysterious truths of revealed religion,and Shakespeare's consequent reverence in his treatment of it,and the foul earthly witcheries and wild language in Macbeth.

Act ii. sc. . Polonius and Reynaldo.

In all things dependent on, or rather made up of, fine address, the manner is no more or otherwise rememberable than the light notions, steps, and gestures of youth and health. But this is almost everything:no wonder, therefore, if that which can be put down by rule in the memory should appear to us as mere poring, maudlin, cunning,slyness blinking through the watery eye of superannuation. So in this admirable scene, Polonius, who is throughout the skeleton of his own former skill and statecraft, hunts the trail of policy at a dead scent, supplied by the weak fever-smell in his own nostrils.

Ib. sc. . Speech of Polonius:

“My liege, and madam, to expostulate,” &c.
Warburton's note.

“Then as to the jingles, and play on words, let us but look into the sermons of Dr. Donne (the wittiest man of that age), and we shall find them full of this vein.”
I have, and that most carefully, read Dr. Donne's sermons, and find none of these jingles. The great art of an oratorto make whatever he talks of appear of importancethis, indeed, Donne has effected with consummate skill.

Ib.

“Ham. Excellent well;
You are a fishmonger.”
That is, you are sent to fish out this secret. This is Hamlet's own meaning.

Ib.

“Ham. For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog,
Being a god, kissing carrion.”
These purposely obscure lines, I rather think, refer to some thought in Hamlet's mind, contrasting the lovely daughter with such a tedious old fool, her father, as he, Hamlet, represents Polonius to himself:“Why, fool as he is, he is some degrees in rank above a dead dog's carcase; and if the sun, being a god that kisses carrion, can raise life out of a dead dog,why may not good fortune, that favours fools, have raised a lovely girl out of this dead-alive old fool?” Warburton is often led astray, in his interpretations, by his attention to general positions without the due Shakespearian reference to what is probably passing in the mind of his speaker, characteristic, and expository of his particular character and present mood. The subsequent passage,

“O Jephthah, judge of Israel! what a treasure hadst thou!”
is confirmatory of my view of these lines.

Ib.

“Ham. You cannot, Sir, take from me any thing that I will
more willingly part withal; except my life, except my life, except
my life.”
This repetition strikes me as most admirable.

Ib.

“Ham. Then are our beggars, bodies; and our monarchs, and
out-stretched heroes, the beggars' shadows?”
I do not understand this; and Shakespeare seems to have intended the meaning not to be more than snatched at:“By my fay, I cannot reason!”

Ib.

“The rugged Pyrrhushe whose sable arms,” &c.
This admirable substitution of the epic for the dramatic, giving such a reality to the impassioned dramatic diction of Shakespeare's own dialogue, and authorised too, by the actual style of the tragedies before his time (Porrex and Ferrex, Titus Andronicus, &c.)is well worthy of notice. The fancy, that a burlesque was intended, sinks below criticism: the lines, as epic narrative, are superb.

In the thoughts, and even in the separate parts of the diction, this description is highly poetical: in truth, taken by itself, that is its fault that it is too poetical!the language of lyric vehemence and epic pomp, and not of the drama. But if Shakespeare had made the diction truly dramatic, where would have been the contrast between Hamlet and the play in Hamlet?

Ib.

... “Had seen the mobled queen,” &c.
A mob-cap is still a word in common use for a morning cap, which conceals the whole head of hair, and passes under the chin. It is nearly the same as the night-cap, that is, it is an imitation of it, so as to answer the purpose (“I am not drest for company”), and yet reconciling it with neatness and perfect purity.

Ib. Hamlet's soliloquy:

“O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” &c.

This is Shakespeare's own attestation to the truth of the idea of Hamlet which I have before put forth.

Ib.

“The spirit that I have seen,

May be a devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and, perhaps
Out of my weakness, and my melancholy
(As he is very potent with such spirits),
Abuses me to damn me."
See Sir Thomas Brown:

"I believe ... that those apparitions and ghosts of departed persons are not the wandering souls of men, but the unquiet walks of devils, prompting and suggesting us unto mischief, blood, and villany, instilling and stealing into our hearts, that the blessed spirits are not at rest in their graves, but wander solicitous of the affairs of the world."Relig. Med. part. i. sect. .
Act iii. sc. . Hamlet's soliloquy:

"To be, or not to be, that is the question," &c.
This speech is of absolutely universal interest,and yet to which of all Shakespeare's characters could it have been appropriately given but to Hamlet? For Jaques it would have been too deep, and for Iago too habitual a communion with the heart; which in every man belongs, or ought to belong, to all mankind.

Ib.

"The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns."
Theobald's note in defence of the supposed contradiction of this in the apparition of the Ghost.

O miserable defender! If it be necessary to remove the apparent contradiction,if it be not rather a great beauty,surely, it were easy to say, that no traveller returns to this world, as to his home, or abiding-place.

Ib.

"Ham. Ha, ha! are you honest?
Oph. My lord?
Ham. Are you fair?"

Here it is evident that the penetrating Hamlet perceives, from the strange and forced manner of Ophelia, that the sweet girl was not acting a part of her own, but was a decoy; and his after speeches are not so much directed to her as to the listeners and spies. Such a discovery in a mood so anxious and irritable accounts for a certain harshness in

him;and yet a wild up-working of love, sporting with opposites in a wilful self-tormenting strain of irony, is perceptible throughout. “I did love you once:”“I lov'd you not:”and particularly in his enumeration of the faults of the sex from which Ophelia is so free, that the mere freedom therefrom constitutes her character. Note Shakespeare's charm of composing the female character by the absence of characters, that is, marks and out-juttings.

Ib. Hamlet's speech:

“I say, we will have no more marriages: those that are married already, all but one, shall live: the rest shall keep as they are.”
Observe this dallying with the inward purpose, characteristic of one who had not brought his mind to the steady acting point. He would fain sting the uncle's mind;but to stab his body!The soliloquy of Ophelia, which follows, is the perfection of loveso exquisitely unselfish!

Ib. sc. . This dialogue of Hamlet with the players is one of the happiest instances of Shakespeare's power of diversifying the scene while he is carrying on the plot.

Ib.

“Ham. My lord, you played once i' the university, you say?”
(To Polonius.)
To have kept Hamlet's love for Ophelia before the audience in any direct form, would have made a breach in the unity of the interest;but yet to the thoughtful reader it is suggested by his spite to poor Polonius, whom he cannot let rest.

Ib. The style of the interlude here is distinguished from the real dialogue by rhyme, as in the first interview with the players by epic verse.

Ib.

“Ros. My lord, you once did love me.
Ham. So I do still, by these pickers and stealers.”
I never heard an actor give this word “so” its proper emphasis. Shakespeare's meaning is“lov'd you? Hum!so I do still,” &c. There has been no change in my opinion:I think as ill of you as I did. Else Hamlet tells an ignoble falsehood, and a useless one, as the last speech to Guildenstern“Why look you now,” &c.proves.

Ib. Hamlet's soliloquy:

“Now could I drink hot blood,
And do such business as the bitter day
Would quake to look on.”
The utmost at which Hamlet arrives, is a disposition, a mood, to do something:but what to do, is still left undecided, while every word he utters tends to betray his disguise. Yet observe how perfectly equal to any call of the moment is Hamlet, let it only not be for the future.

Ib. sc. . Speech of Polonius. Polonius's volunteer obtrusion of himself into this business, while it is appropriate to his character, still itching after former importance, removes all likelihood that Hamlet should suspect his presence, and prevents us from making his death injure Hamlet in our opinion.

Ib. The king's speech:

“O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven,” &c.

This speech well marks the difference between crime and guilt of habit. The conscience here is still admitted to audience. Nay, even as an audible soliloquy, it is far less improbable than is supposed by such as have watched men only in the beaten road of their feelings. But the final“all may be well!” is remarkable;the degree of merit attributed by the self-flattering soul to its own struggle, though baffled, and to the indefinite half-promise, half-command, to persevere in religious duties. The solution is in the divine medium of the Christian doctrine of expiation:not what you have done, but what you are, must determine.

Ib. Hamlet's speech:

“Now might I do it, pat, now he is praying:
And now I'll do't:And so he goes to heaven:
And so am I revenged? That would be scann'd,” &c.
Dr. Johnson's mistaking of the marks of reluctance and procrastination for impetuous, horror-striking, fiendishness!Of such importance is it to understand the germ of a character. But the interval taken by Hamlet's speech is truly awful! And then

“My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words, without thoughts, never to heaven go.”
O what a lesson concerning the essential difference between wishing and willing, and the folly of all motive-mongering, while the individual self remains!

Ib. sc. .

“Ham. A bloody deed;almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king, and marry with his brother.
Queen. As kill a king?”
I confess that Shakespeare has left the character of the Queen in an unpleasant perplexity. Was she, or was she not, conscious of the fratricide?

Act iv. sc. .

“Ros. Take you me for a spunge, my lord?
Ham. Ay, Sir; that soaks up the King's countenance, his
rewards, his authorities,” &c.
Hamlet's madness is made to consist in the free utterance of all the thoughts that had passed through his mind before;in fact, in telling home-truths.

Act iv. sc. . Ophelia's singing. O, note the conjunction here of these two thoughts that had never subsisted in disjunction, the love for Hamlet, and her filial love, with the guileless floating on the surface of her pure imagination of the cautions so lately expressed, and the fears not too delicately avowed, by her father and brother, concerning the dangers to which her honour lay exposed. Thought, affliction, passion, murder itselfshe turns to favour and prettiness. This play of association is instanced in the close:

“My brother shall know of it, and I thank you for your good counsel.”
Ib. Gentleman's speech:

“And as the world were now but to begin
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
The ratifiers and props of every word
They cry,” &c.
Fearful and self-suspicious as I always feel, when I seem to see an error of judgment in Shakespeare, yet I cannot reconcile the cool, and, as Warburton calls it, “rational and consequential,” reflection in these lines with the anonymousness, or the alarm, of this Gentleman or Messenger, as he is called in other editions.

Ib. King's speech:

“There's such divinity doth hedge a king,
That treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will.”

Proof, as indeed all else is, that Shakespeare never intended us to see the King with Hamlet's eyes; though, I suspect, the managers have long done so.

Ib. Speech of Laertes:

“To hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil!”
“Laertes is a good character, but,” &c.Warburton.
Mercy on Warburton's notion of goodness! Please to refer to the seventh scene of this act;

“I will do't;
And for that purpose I'll anoint my sword,” &c.
uttered by Laertes after the King's description of Hamlet;

... “He being remiss,
Most generous, and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils.”
Yet I acknowledge that Shakespeare evidently wishes, as much as possible, to spare the character of Laertes,to break the extreme turpitude of his consent to become an agent and accomplice of the King's treachery;and to this end he re-introduces Ophelia at the close of this scene to afford a probable stimulus of passion in her brother.

Ib. sc. . Hamlet's capture by the pirates. This is almost the only play of Shakespeare, in which mere accidents, independent of all will, form an essential part of the plot;but here how judiciously in keeping with the character of the over-meditative Hamlet, ever at last determined by accident or by a fit of passion!

Ib. sc. . Note how the King first awakens Laertes's vanity by praising the reporter, and then gratifies it by the report itself, and finally points it by

... “Sir, this report of his
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy!”

Ib. King's speech:

“For goodness, growing to a pleurisy,
Dies in his own too much.”
Theobald's note from Warburton, who conjectures “plethory.”

I rather think that Shakespeare meant “pleurisy,” but involved in it the thought of plethora, as supposing pleurisy to arise from too much blood; otherwise I cannot explain the following line

“And then this should is like a spendthrift sigh,
That hurts by easing.”
In a stitch in the side every one must have heaved a sigh that “hurt by easing.”

Since writing the above I feel confirmed that “pleurisy” is the right word; for I find that in the old medical dictionaries the pleurisy is often called the “plethory.”

Ib.

“Queen. Your sister's drown'd, Laertes.
Laer. Drown'd! O, where?”
That Laertes might be excused in some degree for not cooling, the Act concludes with the affecting death of Ophelia,who in the beginning lay like a little projection of land into a lake or stream, covered with spray-flowers, quietly reflected in the quiet waters, but at length is undermined or loosened, and becomes a faery isle, and after a brief vagrancy sinks almost without an eddy!

Act v. sc. . O, the rich contrast between the Clowns and Hamlet, as two extremes! You see in the former the mockery of logic, and a traditional wit valued, like truth, for its antiquity, and treasured up, like a tune, for use.

Ib. sc. and . Shakespeare seems to mean all Hamlet's character to be brought together before his final disappearance from the scene;his meditative excess in the grave-digging, his yielding to passion with Laertes, his love for Ophelia blazing out, his tendency to generalise on all occasions in the dialogue with Horatio, his fine gentlemanly manners with Osrick, and his and Shakespeare's own fondness for presentment:

“But thou wouldst not think, how ill all's here about my heart: but it is no matter.”

“Macbeth.”

“Macbeth” stands in contrast throughout with Hamlet; in the manner of opening more especially. In the latter, there is a gradual ascent from the simplest forms of conversation to the language of impassioned intellect,yet the intellect still remaining the seat of passion: in the former, the invocation is at once made to the imagination and the emotions connected therewith. Hence the movement throughout is the most rapid of all

Shakespeare's plays; and hence also, with the exception of the disgusting passage of the Porter (Act ii. sc.), which I dare pledge myself to demonstrate to be an interpolation of the actors, there is not, to the best of my remembrance, a single pun or play on words in the whole drama. I have previously given an answer to the thousand times repeated charge against Shakespeare upon the subject of his punning, and I here merely mention the fact of the absence of any puns in Macbeth, as justifying a candid doubt, at least, whether even in these figures of speech and fanciful modifications of language, Shakespeare may not have followed rules and principles that merit and would stand the test of philosophic examination. And hence, also, there is an entire absence of comedy, nay, even of irony and philosophic contemplation in Macbeth,the play being wholly and purely tragic. For the same cause, there are no reasonings of equivocal morality, which would have required a more leisurely state and a consequently greater activity of mind;no sophistry of self-delusion,except only that previously to the dreadful act, Macbeth mistranslates the recoilings and ominous whispers of conscience into prudential and selfish reasonings; and, after the deed done, the terrors of remorse into fear from external dangers,like delirious men who run away from the phantoms of their own brains, or, raised by terror to rage, stab the real object that is within their reach:whilst Lady Macbeth merely endeavours to reconcile his and her own sinkings of heart by anticipations of the worst, and an affected bravado in confronting them. In all the rest, Macbeth's language is the grave utterance of the very heart, conscience-sick, even to the last faintings of moral death. It is the same in all the other characters. The variety arises from rage, caused ever and anon by disruption of anxious thought, and the quick transition of fear into it.

In Hamlet and Macbeth the scene opens with superstition; but, in each it is not merely different, but opposite. In the first it is connected with the best and holiest feelings; in the second with the shadowy, turbulent, and unsanctified cravings of the individual will. Nor is the purpose the same; in the one the object is to excite, whilst in the other it is to mark a mind already excited. Superstition, of one sort or another, is natural to victorious generals; the instances are too notorious to need mentioning. There is so much of chance in warfare, and such vast events are connected with the acts of a single individual,the representative, in truth, of the efforts of myriads, and yet to the public, and doubtless to his own feelings, the aggregate of all,that the proper temperament for generating or receiving superstitious impressions is naturally produced. Hope, the master element of a commanding genius, meeting with an active and combining intellect, and an imagination of just that degree of vividness which disquiets and impels the soul to try to realise its images, greatly increases the creative power of the mind; and hence the images become a satisfying world of themselves, as is the case in every poet and original philosopher:but hope fully gratified, and yet the elementary basis of the passion remaining, becomes fear; and, indeed, the general, who must often feel, even though he may hide it from his own consciousness, how large a share chance had in his

successes, may very naturally be irresolute in a new scene, where he knows that all will depend on his own act and election.

The Weird Sisters are as true a creation of Shakespeare's, as his Ariel and Caliban,fates, furies, and materialising witches being the elements. They are wholly different from any representation of witches in the contemporary writers, and yet presented a sufficient external resemblance to the creatures of vulgar prejudice to act immediately on the audience. Their character consists in the imaginative disconnected from the good; they are the shadowy obscure and fearfully anomalous of physical nature, the lawless of human nature,elemental avengers without sex or kin:

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair;
Hover through the fog and filthy air.”

How much it were to be wished in playing Macbeth, that an attempt should be made to introduce the flexile character-mask of the ancient pantomime;that Flaxman would contribute his genius to the embodying and making sensuously perceptible that of Shakespeare!

The style and rhythm of the Captain's speeches in the second scene should be illustrated by reference to the interlude in Hamlet, in which the epic is substituted for the tragic, in order to make the latter be felt as the real-life diction. In Macbeth the poet's object was to raise the mind at once to the high tragic tone, that the audience might be ready for the precipitate consummation of guilt in the early part of the play. The true reason for the first appearance of the Witches is to strike the key-note of the character of the whole drama, as is proved by their re-appearance in the third scene, after such an order of the king's as establishes their supernatural power of information. I say information,for so it only is as to Glamis and Cawdor; the “king hereafter” was still contingent,still in Macbeth's moral will; although, if he should yield to the temptation, and thus forfeit his free agency, the link of cause and effect more physico would then commence. I need not say, that the general idea is all that can be required from the poet,not a scholastic logical consistency in all the parts so as to meet metaphysical objectors. But O! how truly Shakespearian is the opening of Macbeth's character given in the unpossessedness of Banquo's mind, wholly present to the present object,an unsullied, unscarified mirror! And how strictly true to nature it is that Banquo, and not Macbeth himself, directs our notice to the effect produced on Macbeth's mind, rendered temptible by previous dalliance of the fancy with ambitious thoughts:

“Good Sir, why do you start; and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair?”
And then, again, still unintroitive, addresses the Witches:

... “I' the name of truth,
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show?”
Banquo's questions are those of natural curiosity,such as a girl would put after hearing a gipsy tell her schoolfellow's fortune;all perfectly general, or rather, planless. But Macbeth, lost in thought, raises himself to speech only by the Witches being about to depart:

“Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more:”
and all that follows is reasoning on a problem already discussed in his mind,on a hope which he welcomes, and the doubts concerning the attainment of which he wishes to have cleared up. Compare his eagerness,the keen eye with which he has pursued the Witches' evanishing

“Speak, I charge you!”
with the easily satisfied mind of the self-uninterested Banquo:

“The air hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them:Whither are they vanish'd?”
and then Macbeth's earnest reply,

“Into the air; and what seem'd corporal, melted
As breath into the wind.Would they had stay'd!”
Is it too minute to notice the appropriateness of the simile “as breath,” &c., in a cold climate?

Still again Banquo goes on wondering like any common spectator,

“Were such things here as we do speak about?”
whilst Macbeth persists in recurring to the self-concerning:

“Your children shall be kings.
Ban. You shall be king.
Macb. And thane of Cawdor too: went it not so?”
So surely is the guilt in its germ anterior to the supposed cause, and immediate temptation! Before he can cool, the confirmation of the tempting half of the prophecy arrives, and the concatenating tendency of the imagination is fostered by the sudden coincidence:

“Glamis, and thane of Cawdor:
The greatest is behind.”
Oppose this to Banquo's simple surprise:

“What, can the devil speak true?”
Ib. Banquo's speech:

“That, trusted home,
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
Besides the thane of Cawdor.”
I doubt whether “enkindle” has not another sense than that of “stimulating;” I mean of “kind” and “kin,” as when rabbits are said to “kindle.” However, Macbeth no longer hears anything ab extra:

“Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.”
Then in the necessity of recollecting himself,

“I thank you, gentlemen.”
Then he relapses into himself again, and every word of his soliloquy shows the early birth-date of his guilt. He is all-powerful without strength; he wishes the end, but is irresolute as to the means; conscience distinctly warns him, and he lulls it imperfectly:

“If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me
Without my stir.”
Lost in the prospective of his guilt, he turns round alarmed lest others may suspect what is passing in his own mind, and instantly vents the lie of ambition:

“My dull brain was wrought
With things forgotten;”
and immediately after pours forth the promising courtesies of a usurper in intention:

... “Kind gentlemen, your pains
Are register'd where every day I turn
The leaf to read them.”
Ib. Macbeth's speech:

... “Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.”
Warburton's note, and substitution of “feats” for “fears.”

Mercy on this most wilful ingenuity of blundering, which, nevertheless, was the very Warburton of Warburtonhis inmost being! “Fears,” here, are present fear-striking objects, terribilia adstantia.

Ib. sc. . O! the affecting beauty of the death of Cawdor, and the presentimental speech of the king:

“There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face:
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust.”
Interrupted by

“O worthiest cousin!”
on the entrance of the deeper traitor for whom Cawdor had made way! And here in contrast with Duncan's “plenteous joys,” Macbeth has nothing but the common-places of loyalty, in which he hides himself with “our duties.” Note the exceeding effort of Macbeth's addresses to the king, his reasoning on his allegiance, and then especially when a new difficulty, the designation of a successor, suggests a new crime. This, however, seems the first distinct notion, as to the plan of realising his wishes; and here, therefore, with great propriety, Macbeth's cowardice of his own conscience discloses itself. I always think there is something especially Shakespearian in Duncan's speeches throughout this scene, such pourings forth, such abandonments, compared with the language of vulgar dramatists, whose characters seem to have made their speeches as the actors learn them.

Ib: Duncan's speech:

... “Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
And you whose places are the nearest, know,
We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland: which honour must
Not unaccompanied, invest him only;
But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine
On all deservers.”
It is a fancy;but I can never read this and the following speeches of Macbeth, without involuntarily thinking of the Miltonic Messiah and Satan.

Ib. sc. . Macbeth is described by Lady Macbeth so as at the same time to reveal her own character. Could he have every thing he wanted, he would rather have it innocently;ignorant, as alas! how many of us are, that he who wishes a temporal end for itself, does in truth will the means; and hence the danger of indulging fancies.

Lady Macbeth, like all in Shakespeare, is a class individualised:of high rank, left much alone, and feeding herself with day-dreams of ambition, she mistakes the courage of fantasy for the power of bearing the consequences of the realities of guilt. His is the mock fortitude of a mind deluded by ambition; she shames her husband with a superhuman audacity of fancy which she cannot support, but sinks in the season of remorse, and dies in suicidal agony. Her speech:

... “Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,” &c.
is that of one who had habitually familiarised her imagination to dreadful conceptions, and was trying to do so still more. Her invocations and requisitions are all the false efforts of a mind accustomed only hitherto to the shadows of the imagination, vivid enough to throw the every-day substances of life into shadow, but never as yet brought into direct contact with their own correspondent realities. She evinces no womanly life, no wifely joy, at the return of her husband, no pleased terror at the thought of his past dangers, whilst Macbeth bursts forth naturally

“My dearest love”
and shrinks from the boldness with which she presents his own thoughts to him. With consummate art she at first uses as incentives the very circumstances, Duncan's coming to their house, &c., which Macbeth's conscience would most probably have adduced to her as motives of abhorrence or repulsion. Yet Macbeth is not prepared:

“We will speak further.”
Ib. sc. . The lyrical movement with which this scene opens, and the free and unengaged mind of Banquo, loving nature, and rewarded in the love itself, form a highly dramatic contrast with the laboured rhythm and hypocritical over-much of Lady Macbeth's welcome, in which you cannot detect a ray of personal feeling, but all is thrown upon the “dignities,” the general duty.

Ib. sc. . Macbeth's speech:

“We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,

Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon."
Note the inward pangs and warnings of conscience interpreted into prudential reasonings.

Act ii. sc. . Banquo's speech:

"A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep. Merciful powers!
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts, that nature
Gives way to in repose."
The disturbance of an innocent soul by painful suspicions of another's guilty intentions and wishes, and fear of the cursed thoughts of sensual nature.

Ib. sc. . Now that the deed is done or doingnow that the first reality commences, Lady Macbeth shrinks. The most simple sound strikes terror, the most natural consequences are horrible, whilst previously every thing, however awful, appeared a mere trifle; conscience, which before had been hidden to Macbeth in selfish and prudential fears, now rushes in upon him in her own veritable person:

"Methought I heard a voice crySleep no more!
I could not say Amen,
When they did say, God bless us!"
And see the novelty given to the most familiar images by a new state of feeling.

Ib. sc. . This low soliloquy of the Porter and his few speeches afterwards, I believe to have been written for the mob by some other hand, perhaps with Shakespeare's consent; and that finding it take, he with the remaining ink of a pen otherwise employed, just interpolated the words

"I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to have let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire."
Of the rest not one syllable has the ever-present being of Shakespeare.

Act iii. sc. . Compare Macbeth's mode of working on the murderers in this place with Schiller's mistaken scene between Butler, Devereux, and Macdonald in Wallenstein.(Part II. act iv. sc. .) The comic was wholly out of season. Shakespeare never introduces it, but when it may react on the tragedy by harmonious contrast.

Ib. sc. . Macbeth's speech:

“But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly.”
Ever and ever mistaking the anguish of conscience for fears of selfishness, and thus as a punishment of that selfishness, plunging still deeper in guilt and ruin.

Ib. Macbeth's speech:

“Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed.”
This is Macbeth's sympathy with his own feelings, and his mistaking his wife's opposite state.

Ib. sc. .

“Macb. It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood:
Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak;
Augurs, and understood relations, have
By magot-pies, and choughs, and rooks, brought forth
The secret'st man of blood.”

The deed is done; but Macbeth receives no comfort, no additional security. He has by guilt torn himself live-asunder from nature, and is, therefore, himself in a preternatural state: no wonder, then, that he is inclined to superstition, and faith in the unknown of signs and tokens, and super-human agencies.

Act iv. sc. .

“Len. 'Tis two or three, my lord, that bring you word
Macduff is fled to England.
Macb. Fled to England!”
The acme of the avenging conscience.

Ib. sc. . This scene, dreadful as it is, is still a relief, because a variety, because domestic, and therefore soothing, as associated with the only real pleasures of life. The conversation between Lady Macduff and her child heightens the pathos, and is preparatory for the deep tragedy of their assassination. Shakespeare's fondness for children is everywhere shown;in Prince Arthur, in King John; in the sweet scene in the Winter's Tale between Hermione and her son; nay, even in honest Evans's examination

of Mrs. Page's schoolboy. To the objection that Shakespeare wounds the moral sense by the unsubdued, undisguised description of the most hateful atrocitythat he tears the feelings without mercy, and even outrages the eye itself with scenes of insupportable horrorI, omitting Titus Andronicus, as not genuine, and excepting the scene of Gloster's blinding in Lear, answer boldly in the name of Shakespeare, not guilty.

Ib. sc. . Malcolm's speech:

... “Better Macbeth,
Than such an one to reign.”

The moral isthe dreadful effects even on the best minds of the soul-sickening sense of insecurity.

Ib. How admirably Macduff's grief is in harmony with the whole play! It rends, not dissolves, the heart. “The tune of it goes manly.” Thus is Shakespeare always master of himself and of his subject,a genuine Proteus:we see all things in him, as images in a calm lake, most distinct, most accurate,only more splendid, more glorified. This is correctness in the only philosophical sense. But he requires your sympathy and your submission; you must have that recipiency of moral impression without which the purposes and ends of the drama would be frustrated, and the absence of which demonstrates an utter want of all imagination, a deadness to that necessary pleasure of being innocentlyshall I say, deluded?or rather, drawn away from ourselves to the music of noblest thought in harmonious sounds. Happy he, who not only in the public theatre, but in the labours of a profession, and round the light of his own hearth, still carries a heart so pleasure-fraught!

Alas for Macbeth! now all is inward with him; he has no more prudential prospective reasonings. His wife, the only being who could have had any seat in his affections, dies; he puts on despondency, the final heart-armour of the wretched, and would fain think every thing shadowy and unsubstantial, as indeed all things are to those who cannot regard them as symbols of goodness:

“Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.”

“Winter's Tale.”

Although, on the whole, this play is exquisitely respondent to its title, and even in the fault I am about to mention, still a winter's tale; yet it seems a mere indolence of the great bard not to have provided in the oracular response (Act ii. sc. .) some ground for Hermione's seeming death and fifteen years' voluntary concealment. This might have been easily effected by some obscure sentence of the oracle, as for example:

" 'Nor shall he ever recover an heir, if he have a wife before that recovery.' "
The idea of this delightful drama is a genuine jealousy of disposition, and it should be immediately followed by the perusal of Othello, which is the direct contrast of it in every particular. For jealousy is a vice of the mind, a culpable tendency of the temper, having certain well-known and well-defined effects and concomitants, all of which are visible in Leontes, and, I boldly say, not one of which marks its presence in Othello;such as, first, an excitability by the most inadequate causes, and an eagerness to snatch at proofs; secondly, a grossness of conception, and a disposition to degrade the object of the passion by sensual fancies and images; thirdly, a sense of shame of his own feelings exhibited in a solitary moodiness of humour, and yet from the violence of the passion forced to utter itself, and therefore catching occasions to ease the mind by ambiguities, equivoques, by talking to those who cannot, and who are known not to be able to, understand what is said to them,in short, by soliloquy in the form of dialogue, and hence a confused, broken, and fragmentary, manner; fourthly, a dread of vulgar ridicule, as distinct from a high sense of honour, or a mistaken sense of duty; and lastly, and immediately, consequent on this, a spirit of selfish vindictiveness.

Act i. sc. , .

Observe the easy style of chitchat between Camillo and Archidamus as contrasted with the elevated diction on the introduction of the kings and Hermione in the second scene: and how admirably Polixenes' obstinate refusal to Leontes to stay,

"There is no tongue that moves; none, none i' the world
So soon as yours, could win me;"
prepares for the effect produced by his afterwards yielding to Hermione;which is, nevertheless, perfectly natural from mere courtesy of sex, and the exhaustion of the will by former efforts of denial, and well calculated to set in nascent action the jealousy of Leontes. This, when once excited, is unconsciously increased by Hermione,

... "Yet, good deed, Leontes,
I love thee not a jar o' the clock behind
What lady she her lord;"

accompanied, as a good actress ought to represent it, by an expression and recoil of apprehension that she had gone too far.

“At my request, he would not:”
The first working of the jealous fit;

“Too hot, too hot:”

The morbid tendency of Leontes to lay hold of the merest trifles, and his grossness immediately afterwards,

“Paddling palms and pinching fingers;”
followed by his strange loss of self-control in his dialogue with the little boy.

Act iii. sc. . Paulina's speech:

“That thou betray'dst Polixenes, 'twas nothing;
That did but show thee, of a fool, inconstant,
And damnable ingrateful.”
Theobald reads “soul.”

I think the original word is Shakespeare's. . My ear feels it to be Shakespearian; . The involved grammar is Shakespearian“show thee, being a fool naturally, to have improved thy folly by inconstancy;” . The alteration is most flat, and un-Shakespearian. As to the grossness of the abuseshe calls him “gross and foolish” a few lines below.

Act iv. sc. . Speech of Autolycus:

“For the life to come, I sleep out the thought of it.”
Fine as this is, and delicately characteristic of one who had lived and been reared in the best society, and had been precipitated from it by dice and drabbing; yet still it strikes against my feelings as a note out of tune, and as not coalescing with that pastoral tint which gives such a charm to this act. It is too Macbeth-like in the “snapper up of unconsidered trifles.”

Ib. sc. . Perdita's speech:

“From Dis's waggon! daffodils.”
An epithet is wanted here, not merely or chiefly for the metre, but for the balance, for the æsthetic logic. Perhaps “golden” was the word which would set off the “violets dim.”

Ib.

... “Pale primroses
That die unmarried.”
Milton's

“And the rathe primrose that forsaken dies.”
Ib. Perdita's speech:

“Even here undone:
I was not much afraid; for once or twice
I was about to speak, and tell him plainly,
The self-same sun, that shines upon his court,
Hides not his visage from our cottage, but
Looks on alike. Will't please you, Sir, be gone!
(To Florizel.)
I told you, what would come of this. Beseech you,
Of your own state take care: this dream of mine,
Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch farther,
But milk my ewes, and weep.”
O how more than exquisite is this whole speech! And that profound nature of noble pride and grief venting themselves in a momentary peevishness of resentment toward Florizel:

... “Will't please you, Sir, be gone!”
Ib. Speech of Autolycus:

“Let me have no lying; it becomes none but tradesmen, and they often give us soldiers the lie; but we pay them for it with stamped coin, not stabbing steel;therefore they do not give us the lie.”
As we pay them, they, therefore, do not give it us.

“Othello.”

Act i. sc. .

Admirable is the preparation, so truly and peculiarly Shakespearian, in the introduction of Roderigo, as the dupe on whom Iago shall first exercise his art, and in so doing display his own character. Roderigo, without any fixed principle, but not without the moral notions and sympathies with honour, which his rank and connections had hung

upon him, is already well fitted and predisposed for the purpose; for very want of character and strength of passion, like wind loudest in an empty house, constitute his character. The first three lines happily state the nature and foundation of the friendship between him and Iago,the purse,as also the contrast of Roderigo's intemperance of mind with Iago's coolness,the coolness of a preconceiving experimenter. The mere language of protestation,

“If ever I did dream of such a matter, abhor me,”
which, falling in with the associative link, determines Roderigo's continuation of complaint,

“Thou told'st me, thou didst hold him in thy hate,”
elicits at length a true feeling of Iago's mind, the dread of contempt habitual to those who encourage in themselves, and have their keenest pleasure in, the expression of contempt for others. Observe Iago's high self-opinion, and the moral, that a wicked man will employ real feelings, as well as assume those most alien from his own, as instruments of his purposes:

“And, by the faith of man,
I know my price, I am worth no worse a place.”
I think Tyrwhitt's reading of “life” for “wife”

“A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife”
the true one, as fitting to Iago's contempt for whatever did not display power, and that intellectual power. In what follows, let the reader feel how by and through the glass of two passions, disappointed vanity and envy, the very vices of which he is complaining, are made to act upon him as if they were so many excellences, and the more appropriately, because cunning is always admired and wished for by minds conscious of inward weakness;but they act only by half, like music on an inattentive auditor, swelling the thoughts which prevent him from listening to it.

Ib.

“Rod. What a full fortune does the thick-lips owe,
If he can carry 't thus.”
Roderigo turns off to Othello; and here comes one, if not the only, seeming justification of our blackamoor or negro Othello. Even if we supposed this an uninterrupted tradition of the theatre, and that Shakespeare himself, from want of scenes, and the experience that nothing could be made too marked for the senses of his audience, had practically sanctioned it,would this prove aught concerning his own intention as a poet for all ages? Can we imagine him so utterly ignorant as to make a barbarous negro plead royal

birth,at a time, too, when negroes were not known except as slaves? As for Iago's language to Brabantio, it implies merely that Othello was a Moor,that is, black. Though I think the rivalry of Roderigo sufficient to account for his wilful confusion of Moor and Negro,yet, even if compelled to give this up, I should think it only adapted for the acting of the day, and should complain of an enormity built on a single word, in direct contradiction to Iago's “Barbary horse.” Besides, if we could in good earnest believe Shakespeare ignorant of the distinction, still why should we adopt one disagreeable possibility instead of a ten times greater and more pleasing probability? It is a common error to mistake the epithets applied by the dramatis personæ to each other, as truly descriptive of what the audience ought to see or know. No doubt Desdemona saw Othello's visage in his mind; yet, as we are constituted, and most surely as an English audience was disposed in the beginning of the seventeenth century, it would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro. It would argue a disproportionateness, a want of balance, in Desdemona, which Shakespeare does not appear to have in the least contemplated.

Ib. Brabantio's speech:

“This accident is not unlike my dream.”
The old careful senator, being caught careless, transfers his caution to his dreaming power at least.

Ib. Iago's speech:

... “For their souls,
Another of his fathom they have not,
To lead their business.”

The forced praise of Othello, followed by the bitter hatred of him in this speech! And observe how Brabantio's dream prepares for his recurrence to the notion of philtres, and how both prepare for carrying on the plot of the arraignment of Othello on this ground.

Ib. sc. .

“Oth. 'Tis better as it is.”
How well these few words impress at the outset the truth of Othello's own character of himself at the end“that he was not easily wrought!” His self-government contradistinguishes him throughout from Leontes.

Ib. Othello's speech:

... “And my demerits
May speak, unbonneted.”
The argument in Theobald's note, where “and bonneted” is suggested, goes on the assumption that Shakespeare could not use the same word differently in different places; whereas I should conclude, that as in the passage in Lear the word is employed in its direct meaning, so here it is used metaphorically; and this is confirmed by what has escaped the editors, that it is not “I,” but “my demerits” that may speak unbonneted,without the symbol of a petitioning inferior.

Ib. sc. . Othello's speech:

“So please your grace, my ancient;
A man he is of honesty and trust:
To his conveyance I assign my wife.”
Compare this with the behaviour of Leontes to his true friend Camillo.

Ib.

“Bra. Look to her, Moor; if thou hast eyes to see;
She has deceived her father, and may thee.
Oth. My life upon her faith.”

In real life, how do we look back to little speeches as presentimental of, or contrasted with, an affecting event! Even so, Shakespeare, as secure of being read over and over, of becoming a family friend, provides this passage for his readers, and leaves it to them.

Ib. Iago's speech:

“Virtue? a fig! 'tis in ourselves, that we are thus, or thus,” &c.
This speech comprises the passionless character of Iago. It is all will in intellect; and therefore he is here a bold partizan of a truth, but yet of a truth converted into a falsehood by the absence of all the necessary modifications caused by the frail nature of man. And then comes the last sentiment:

“Our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts, whereof I take this, that you calllove, to be a sect or scion!”
Here is the true Iagoism of, alas! how many! Note Iago's pride of mastery in the repetition of “Go, make money!” to his anticipated dupe, even stronger than his love of lucre: and when Roderigo is completely won,

“I am chang'd. I'll go sell all my land,”

when the effect has been fully produced, the repetition of triumph:

“Go to; farewell; put money enough in your purse!”
The remainderIago's soliloquythe motive-hunting of a motiveless malignityhow awful it is! Yea, whilst he is still allowed to bear the divine image, it is too fiendish for his own steady view,for the lonely gaze of a being next to devil, and only not quite devil,and yet a character which Shakespeare has attempted and executed, without disgust and without scandal!

Dr. Johnson has remarked that little or nothing is wanting to render the Othello a regular tragedy, but to have opened the play with the arrival of Othello in Cyprus, and to have thrown the preceding act into the form of narration. Here then is the place to determine whether such a change would or would not be an improvement;nay (to throw down the glove with a full challenge), whether the tragedy would or not by such an arrangement become more regular,that is, more consonant with the rules dictated by universal reason, on the true common-sense of mankind, in its application to the particular case. For in all acts of judgment, it can never be too often recollected, and scarcely too often repeated, that rules are means to ends, and, consequently, that the end must be determined and understood before it can be known what the rules are or ought to be. Now, from a certain species of drama, proposing to itself the accomplishment of certain ends,these partly arising from the idea of the species itself, but in part, likewise, forced upon the dramatist by accidental circumstances beyond his power to remove or control,three rules have been abstracted;in other words, the means most conducive to the attainment of the proposed ends have been generalised, and prescribed under the names of the three unities,the unity of time, the unity of place, and the unity of actionwhich last would, perhaps, have been as appropriately, as well as more intelligibly, entitled the unity of interest. With this last the present question has no immediate concern: in fact, its conjunction with the former two is a mere delusion of words. It is not properly a rule, but in itself the great end not only of the drama, but of the epic poem, the lyric ode, of all poetry, down to the candle-flame cone of an epigram,nay, of poesy in general, as the proper generic term inclusive of all the fine arts as its species. But of the unities of time and place, which alone are entitled to the name of rules, the history of their origin will be their best criterion. You might take the Greek chorus to a place, but you could not bring a place to them without as palpable an equivoque as bringing Birnam wood to Macbeth at Dunsinane. It was the same, though in a less degree, with regard to the unity of time:the positive fact, not for a moment removed from the senses, the presence, I mean, of the same identical chorus, was a continued measure of time;and although the imagination may supersede perception, yet it must be granted to be an imperfectionhowever easily toleratedto place the two in broad contradiction to each other. In truth, it is a mere accident of terms; for the Trilogy

of the Greek theatre was a drama in three acts, and notwithstanding this, what strange contrivances as to place there are in the Aristophanic Frogs. Besides, if the law of mere actual perception is once violatedas it repeatedly is, even in the Greek tragedieswhy is it more difficult to imagine three hours to be three years than to be a whole day and night?

Act ii. sc. .

Observe in how many ways Othello is made, first, our acquaintance, then our friend, then the object of our anxiety, before the deeper interest is to be approached!

Ib.

“Mont. But, good lieutenant, is your general wived?
Cas. Most fortunately: he hath achieved a maid
That paragons description, and wild fame;
One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,
And, in the essential vesture of creation,
Does tire the ingener.”
Here is Cassio's warm-hearted, yet perfectly disengaged, praise of Desdemona, and sympathy with the “most fortunately” wived Othello;and yet Cassio is an enthusiastic admirer, almost a worshipper, of Desdemona. Oh, that detestable code that excellence cannot be loved in any form that is female, but it must needs be selfish! Observe Othello's “honest” and Cassio's “bold” Iago, and Cassio's full guileless-hearted wishes for the safety and love-raptures of Othello and “the divine Desdemona.” And also note the exquisite circumstance of Cassio's kissing Iago's wife, as if it ought to be impossible that the dullest auditor should not feel Cassio's religious love of Desdemona's purity. Iago's answers are the sneers which a proud bad intellect feels towards women, and expresses to a wife. Surely it ought to be considered a very exalted compliment to women, that all the sarcasms on them in Shakespeare are put in the mouths of villains.

Ib.

“Des. I am not merry; but I do beguile,” &c.
The struggle of courtesy in Desdemona to abstract her attention.

Ib.

“(Iago aside). He takes her by the palm: Ay, well said, whisper; with as little a web as this, will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do,” &c.
The importance given to trifles, and made fertile by the villany of the observer.

Ib. Iago's dialogue with Roderigo.

This is the rehearsal on the dupe of the traitor's intentions on Othello.

Ib. Iago's soliloquy:

“But partly led to diet my revenge,
For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leap'd into my seat.”
This thought, originally by Iago's own confession a mere suspicion, is now ripening, and gnaws his base nature as his own “poisonous mineral” is about to gnaw the noble heart of his general.

Ib. sc. . Othello's speech:

“I know, Iago,
Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter,
Making it light to Cassio.”
Honesty and love! Ay, and who but the reader of the play could think otherwise?

Ib. Iago's soliloquy:

“And what's he then that saysI play the villain?
When this advice is free I give, and honest,
Provable to thinking, and, indeed, the course
To win the Moor again.”
He is not, you see, an absolute fiend; or, at least, he wishes to think himself not so.

Act iii. sc. .

“Des. Before Æmilia here,
I give thee warrant of thy place.”
The over-zeal of innocence in Desdemona.

Ib.

“Enter Desdemona and Æmilia.
Oth. If she be false, O, then, heaven mocks itself!
I'll not believe't.”

Divine! The effect of innocence and the better genius!

Act iv. sc. .

“Æmil. Why, the wrong is but a wrong i' the world; and
having the world for your labour, 'tis a wrong in your own world,
and you might quickly make it right.”

Warburton's note.

What any other man, who had learning enough, might have quoted as a playful and witty illustration of his remarks against the Calvinistic thesis, Warburton gravely attributes to Shakespeare as intentional; and this, too, in the mouth of a lady's woman!

Act v. last scene. Othello's speech:

... “Of one, whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe,” &c.
Theobald's note from Warburton.

Thus it is for no-poets to comment on the greatest of poets! To make Othello say that he, who had killed his wife, was like Herod who killed Mariamne!O, how many beauties, in this one line, were impenetrable to the ever thought-swarming, but idealess, Warburton! Othello wishes to excuse himself on the score of ignorance, and yet not to excuse himself,to excuse himself by accusing. This struggle of feeling is finely conveyed in the word “base,” which is applied to the rude Indian, not in his own character, but as the momentary representative of Othello's. “Indian”for I retain the old readingmeans American, a savage in genere.

Finally, let me repeat that Othello does not kill Desdemona in jealousy, but in a conviction forced upon him by the almost superhuman art of Iago, such a conviction as any man would and must have entertained who had believed Iago's honesty as Othello did. We, the audience, know that Iago is a villain, from the beginning; but in considering the essence of the Shakespearian Othello, we must perseveringly place ourselves in his situation, and under his circumstances. Then we shall immediately feel the fundamental difference between the solemn agony of the noble Moor, and the wretched fishing jealousies of Leontes, and the morbid suspiciousness of Leonatus, who is, in other respects, a fine character. Othello had no life but in Desdemona:the belief that she, his angel, had fallen from the heaven of her native innocence, wrought a civil war in his heart. She is his counterpart; and, like him, is almost sanctified in our eyes by her

absolute unsuspiciousness, and holy entireness of love. As the curtain drops, which do we pity the most?

Extremum hunc. There are three powers:Wit, which discovers partial likeness hidden in general diversity; subtlety, which discovers the diversity concealed in general apparent sameness;and profundity, which discovers an essential unity under all the semblances of difference.

Give to a subtle man fancy, and he is a wit; to a deep man imagination, and he is a philosopher. Add, again, pleasurable sensibility in the threefold form of sympathy with the interesting in morals, the impressive in form, and the harmonious in sound,and you have the poet.

But combine all,wit, subtlety, and fancy, with profundity, imagination, and moral and physical susceptibility of the pleasurable,and let the object of action be man universal; and we shall haveO, rash prophecy! say, rather, we havea Shakespeare!

Notes on Ben Jonson.

It would be amusing to collect out of our dramatists from Elizabeth to Charles I. proofs of the manners of the times. One striking symptom of general coarseness of manners, which may co-exist with great refinement of morals, as, alas! vice versa, is to be seen in the very frequent allusions to the olfactories with their most disgusting stimulants, and these, too, in the conversation of virtuous ladies. This would not appear so strange to one who had been on terms of familiarity with Sicilian and Italian women of rank: and bad as they may, too many of them, actually be, yet I doubt not that the extreme grossness of their language has impressed many an Englishman of the present era with far darker notions than the same language would have produced in the mind of one of Elizabeth's or James's courtiers. Those who have read Shakespeare only, complain of occasional grossness in his plays; but compare him with his contemporaries, and the inevitable conviction, is that of the exquisite purity of his imagination.

The observation I have prefixed to the Volpone is the key to the faint interest which these noble efforts of intellectual power excite, with the exception of the fragment of the Sad Shepherd; because in that piece only is there any character with whom you can morally sympathise. On the other hand, Measure for Measure is the only play of Shakespeare's in which there are not some one or more characters, generally many, whom you follow with affectionate feeling. For I confess that Isabella, of all Shakespeare's female characters, pleases me the least; and Measure for Measure is, indeed, the only one of his genuine works, which is painful to me.

Let me not conclude this remark, however, without a thankful acknowledgment to the manes of Ben Jonson, that the more I study his writings, I the more admire them; and the more my study of him resembles that of an ancient classic, in the minutiæ of his rhythm, metre, choice of words, forms of connection, and so forth, the more numerous have the points of my admiration become. I may add, too, that both the study and the admiration cannot but be disinterested, for to expect therefrom any advantage to the present drama would be ignorance. The latter is utterly heterogeneous from the drama of the Shakespearian age, with a diverse object and contrary principle. The one was to present a model by imitation of real life, taking from real life all that in it which it ought to be, and supplying the rest;the other is to copy what is, and as it is,at best a tolerable but most frequently a blundering, copy. In the former the difference was an essential element; in the latter an involuntary defect. We should think it strange, if a tale in dance were announced, and the actors did not dance at all;and yet such is modern comedy.

Whalley's Preface.

“But Jonson was soon sensible, how inconsistent this medley of names and manners was in reason and nature; and with how little propriety it could ever have a place in a legitimate and just picture of real life.”
But did Jonson reflect that the very essence of a play, the very language in which it is written, is a fiction to which all the parts must conform? Surely, Greek manners in English should be a still grosser improbability than a Greek name transferred to English manners. Ben's personæ are too often not characters, but derangements;the hopeless patients of a mad-doctor rather,exhibitions of folly betraying itself in spite of exciting reason and prudence. He not poetically, but painfully exaggerates every trait; that is, not by the drollery of the circumstance, but by the excess of the originating feeling.

“But to this we might reply, that far from being thought to build his characters upon abstract ideas, he was really accused of representing particular persons then existing; and that even those characters which appear to be the most exaggerated, are said to have had their respective archetypes in nature and life.”
This degrades Jonson into a libeller, instead of justifying him as a dramatic poet. Non quod verum est, sed quod verisimile, is the dramatist's rule. At all events, the poet who chooses transitory manners, ought to content himself with transitory praise. If his object be reputation, he ought not to expect fame. The utmost he can look forwards to, is to be quoted by, and to enliven the writings of, an antiquarian. Pistol, Nym, and id genus omne, do not please us as characters, but are endured as fantastic creations, foils to the native wit of Falstaff.I say wit emphatically; for this character so often extolled as the masterpiece of humour, neither contains, nor was meant to contain, any humour at all.

“Whalley's ‘Life Of Jonson.’ ”

“It is to the honour of Jonson's judgment, that the greatest poet of our nation had the same opinion of Donne's genius and wit; and hath preserved part of him from perishing, by putting his thoughts and satire into modern verse.”
Videlicet Pope!

“He said further to Drummond, Shakespeare wanted art, and sometimes sense; for in one of his plays he brought in a number of men, saying they had suffered shipwreck in Bohemia, where is no sea near by a hundred miles.”
I have often thought Shakespeare justified in this seeming anachronism. In Pagan times a single name of a German kingdom might well be supposed to comprise a hundred miles more than at present. The truth is, these notes of Drummond's are more disgraceful to himself than to Jonson. It would be easy to conjecture how grossly Jonson must have been misunderstood, and what he had said in jest, as of Hippocrates, interpreted in earnest. But this is characteristic of a Scotchman; he has no notion of a jest, unless you tell him“This is a joke!”and still less of that finer shade of feeling, the half-and-half, in which Englishmen naturally delight.

“Every Man Out Of His Humour.”

Epilogue.

“The throat of war be stopt within her land,
And turtle-footed peace dance fairie rings
About her court.”
“Turtle-footed” is a pretty word, a very pretty word: pray, what does it mean? Doves, I presume, are not dancers; and the other sort of turtle, land or sea, green-fat or hawksbill, would, I should suppose, succeed better in slow minuets than in the brisk rondillo. In one sense, to be sure, pigeons and ring-doves could not dance but with éclata claw!

“Poetaster.”

Introduction.

“Light! I salute thee, but with wounded nerves,
Wishing thy golden splendour pitchy darkness.”

There is no reason to suppose Satan's address to the sun in the Paradise Lost, more than a mere coincidence with these lines; but were it otherwise, it would be a fine instance what usurious interest a great genius pays in borrowing. It would not be difficult to give a detailed psychological proof from these constant outbursts of anxious self-assertion, that Jonson was not a genius, a creative power. Subtract that one thing, and you may safely accumulate on his name all other excellences of a capacious, vigorous, agile, and richly-stored intellect.

Act i. sc. .

“Ovid. While slaves be false, fathers hard, and bawds be
whorish.”
The roughness noticed by Theobald and Whalley, may be cured by a simple transposition:

“While fathers hard, slaves false, and bawds be whorish.”
Act. iv. sc.

“Crisp. Ooblatrantfuribundfatuatestrenuous.
Oconscious.”
It would form an interesting essay, or rather series of essays, in a periodical work, were all the attempts to ridicule new phrases brought together, the proportion observed of words ridiculed which have been adopted, and are now common, such as strenuous, conscious, &c., and a trial made how far any grounds can be detected, so that one might determine beforehand whether a word was invented under the conditions of assimilability to our language or not. Thus much is certain, that the ridiculers were as often wrong as right; and Shakespeare himself could not prevent the naturalisation of accommodation, remuneration, &c.; or Swift the gross abuse even of the word idea.

“Fall Of Sejanus.”

Act i.

“Arruntius. The name Tiberius,
I hope, will keep, howe'er he hath foregone
The dignity and power.
Silius. Sure, while he lives.
Arr. And dead, it comes to Drusus. Should he fail,
To the brave issue of Germanicus;
And they are three: too many (ha?) for him

To have a plot upon?
Sil. I do not know
The heart of his designs; but, sure, their face
Looks farther than the present.
Arr. By the gods,
If I could guess he had but such a thought,
My sword should cleave him down," &c.
The anachronic mixture in this Arruntius of the Roman republican, to whom Tiberius must have appeared as much a tyrant as Sejanus, with his James-and-Charles-the-First zeal for legitimacy of descent in this passage, is amusing. Of our great names Milton was, I think, the first who could properly be called a republican. My recollections of Buchanan's works are too faint to enable me to judge whether the historian is not a fair exception.

Act ii. Speech of Sejanus:

"Adultery! it is the lightest ill
I will commit. A race of wicked acts
Shall flow out of my anger, and o'erspread
The world's wide face, which no posterity
Shall e'er approve, nor yet keep silent," &c.
The more we reflect and examine, examine and reflect, the more astonished shall we be at the immense superiority of Shakespeare over his contemporaries;and yet what contemporaries!giant minds indeed! Think of Jonson's erudition, and the force of learned authority in that age; and yet, in no genuine part of Shakespeare's works is there to be found such an absurd rant and ventriloquism as this, and too, too many other passages ferruminated by Jonson from Seneca's tragedies, and the writings of the later Romans. I call it ventriloquism, because Sejanus is a puppet, out of which the poet makes his own voice appear to come.

Act v. Scene of the sacrifice to Fortune.

This scene is unspeakably irrational. To believe, and yet to scoff at, a present miracle is little less than impossible. Sejanus should have been made to suspect priestcraft and a secret conspiracy against him.

"Volpone."

This admirable, indeed, but yet more wonderful than admirable, play is, from the fertility and vigour of invention, character, language, and sentiment, the strongest proof

how impossible it is to keep up any pleasurable interest in a tale, in which there is no goodness of heart in any of the prominent characters. After the third act, this play becomes not a dead, but a painful, weight on the feelings. Zeluco is an instance of the same truth. Bonario and Celia should have been made in some way or other principals in the plot; which they might have been, and the objects of interest, without having been made characters. In novels, the person in whose fate you are most interested, is often the least marked character of the whole. If it were possible to lessen the paramountcy of Volpone himself, a most delightful comedy might be produced, by making Celia the ward or niece of Corvino, instead of his wife, and Bonario her lover.

“Apicæne.”

This is to my feelings the most entertaining of old Ben's comedies, and, more than any other, would admit of being brought out anew, if under the management of a judicious and stage-understanding playwright; and an actor, who had studied Morose, might make his fortune.

Act i. sc. . Clerimont's speech:

“He would have hang'd a pewterer's 'prentice once upon a Shrove
Tuesday's riot, for being of that trade, when the rest were quiet.”
“The old copies read quit,i.e., discharged from working, and gone to divert themselves.”Whalley's note.
It should be “quit” no doubt, but not meaning “discharged from working,” &c.but quit, that is, acquitted. The pewterer was at his holiday diversion as well as the other apprentices, and they as forward in the riot as he. But he alone was punished under pretext of the riot, but in fact for his trade.

Act ii. sc. .

“Morose. Cannot I, yet, find out a more compendious method than by this trunk, to save my servants the labour of speech, and mine ears the discord of sounds?”
What does “trunk” mean here, and in the first scene of the first act? Is it a large ear-trumpet?or rather a tube, such as passes from parlour to kitchen, instead of a bell?

Whalley's note at the end:

“Some critics of the last age imagined the character of Morose to be wholly out of nature. But to vindicate our poet, Mr. Dryden tells us from tradition, and we may venture to

take his word, that Jonson was really acquainted with a person of this whimsical turn of mind: and as humour is a personal quality, the poet is acquitted from the charge of exhibiting a monster, or an extravagant unnatural caricatura."
If Dryden had not made all additional proof superfluous by his own plays, this very vindication would evince that he had formed a false and vulgar conception of the nature and conditions of drama and dramatic personation. Ben Jonson would himself have rejected such a plea:

"For he knew, poet never credit gain'd
By writing truths, but things, like truths, well feign'd."
By "truths" he means "facts." Caricatures are not less so because they are found existing in real life. Comedy demands characters, and leaves caricatures to farce. The safest and the truest defence of old Ben would be to call the Epicœne the best of farces. The defect in Morose, as in other of Jonson's dramatis personæ, lies in this;that the accident is not a prominence growing out of, and nourished by, the character which still circulates in it; but that the character, such as it is, rises out of, or, rather, consists in, the accident. Shakespeare's comic personages have exquisitely characteristic features; however awry, disproportionate, and laughable they may be, still, like Bardolph's nose, they are features. But Jonson's are either a man with a huge wen, having a circulation of its own, and which we might conceive amputated, and the patient thereby losing all his character; or they are mere wens themselves instead of men,wens personified, or with eyes, nose, and mouth cut out, mandrake-fashion.

Nota bene.All the above, and much more, will have justly been said, if, and whenever, the drama of Jonson is brought into comparisons of rivalry with the Shakespearian. But this should not be. Let its inferiority to the Shakespearian be at once fairly owned,but at the same time as the inferiority of an altogether different genius of the drama. On this ground, old Ben would still maintain his proud height. He, no less than Shakespeare stands on the summit of his hill, and looks round him like a master,though his be Lattrig and Shakespeare's Skiddaw.

"The Alchemist."

Act i. sc. . Face's speech:

"Will take his oath o' the Greek Xenophon,
If need be, in his pocket."
Another reading is "Testament."

Probably, the meaning isthat intending to give false evidence, he carried a Greek Xenophon to pass it off for a Greek Testament, and so avoid perjuryas the Irish do, by contriving to kiss their thumb-nails instead of the book.

Act ii. sc. . Mammon's speech:

“I will have all my beds blown up; not stuft:
Down is too hard.”
Thus the air-cushions, though perhaps only lately brought into use, were invented in idea in the seventeenth century!

“Catiline's Conspiracy.”

A fondness for judging one work by comparison with others, perhaps altogether of a different class, argues a vulgar taste. Yet it is chiefly on this principle that the Catiline has been rated so low. Take it and Sejanus, as compositions of a particular kind, namely, as a mode of relating great historical events in the liveliest and most interesting manner, and I cannot help wishing that we had whole volumes of such plays. We might as rationally expect the excitement of the Vicar of Wakefield from Goldsmith's History of England, as that of Lear, Othello, &c., from the Sejanus or Catiline.

Act i. sc. .

“Cat. Sirrah, what ail you?
(He spies one of his boys not answer.)
Pag. Nothing.
Best. Somewhat modest.
Cat. Slave, I will strike your soul out with my foot,” &c.
This is either an unintelligible, or, in every sense, a most unnatural, passage,improbable, if not impossible, at the moment of signing and swearing such a conspiracy, to the most libidinous satyr. The very presence of the boys is an outrage to probability. I suspect that these lines down to the words “throat opens,” should be removed back so as to follow the words “on this part of the house,” in the speech of Catiline soon after the entry of the conspirators. A total erasure, however, would be the best, or, rather, the only possible, amendment.

Act ii. sc. . Sempronia's speech:

...“He is but a new fellow,
An inmate here in Rome, as Catiline calls him.”

A “lodger” would have been a happier imitation of the inquilinus of Sallust.

Act iv. sc. . Speech of Cethegus:

“Can these or such be any aids to us,” &c.
What a strange notion Ben must have formed of a determined, remorseless, all-daring, foolhardiness, to have represented it in such a mouthing Tamburlane, and bombastic tonguebully as this Cethegus of his!

“Bartholomew Fair.”

Induction. Scrivener's speech:

“If there be never a servant-monster in the Fair, who can help it
he says, nor a nest of antiques?”
The best excuse that can be made for Jonson, and in a somewhat less degree for Beaumont and Fletcher, in respect of these base and silly sneers at Shakespeare is, that his plays were present to men's minds chiefly as acted. They had not a neat edition of them, as we have, so as, by comparing the one with the other, to form a just notion of the mighty mind that produced the whole. At all events, and in every point of view, Jonson stands far higher in a moral light than Beaumont and Fletcher. He was a fair contemporary, and in his way, and as far as Shakespeare is concerned, an original. But Beaumont and Fletcher were always imitators of, and often borrowers from him, and yet sneer at him with a spite far more malignant than Jonson, who, besides, has made noble compensation by his praises.

Act ii. sc. .

“Just. I mean a child of the horn-thumb, a babe of booty, boy, a
cut purse.”
Does not this confirm, what the passage itself cannot but suggest, the propriety of substituting “booty” for “beauty” in Falstaff's speech, Henry IV. part i. act i. sc. . “Let not us, &c.?”

It is not often that old Ben condescends to imitate a modern author; but Master Dan. Knockhum Jordan, and his vapours are manifest reflexes of Nym and Pistol.

Ib. sc. .

“Quarl. She'll make excellent geer for the coachmakers here in
Smithfield, to anoint wheels and axletrees with.”
Good! but yet it falls short of the speech of a Mr. Johnes, M.P., in the Common Council, on the invasion intended by Buonaparte:“Houses plunderedthen burnt;sons conscribedwives and daughters ravished,” &c., &c.“But as for you, you luxurious Aldermen! with your fat will he grease the wheels of his triumphant chariot!”

Ib. sc. .

“Cok. Avoid in your satin doublet, Numps.”
This reminds me of Shakespeare's “Aroint thee, witch!” I find in several books of that age the words aloigne and eloignethat is,“keep your distance!” or “off with you!” Perhaps “aroint” was a corruption of “aloigne” by the vulgar. The common etymology from ronger to gnaw seems unsatisfactory.

Act iii. sc. .

“Quarl. How now, Numps! almost tired in your protectorship?
overparted, overparted?”
An odd sort of propheticality in this Numps and old Noll!

Ib. sc. . Knockhum's speech:

“He eats with his eyes, as well as his teeth.”
A good motto for the Parson in Hogarth's Election Dinner,who shows how easily he might be reconciled to the Church of Rome, for he worships what he eats.

Act v. sc. .

“Pup. Di. It is not profane.
Lan. It is not profane, he says.
Boy. It is profane.
Pup. It is not profane.
Boy. It is profane.
Pup. It is not profane.
Lan. Well said, confute him with Not, still.”
An imitation of the quarrel between Bacchus and the Frogs in Aristophanes:

“Χορός.
ἀλλὰ μὴν κεκραξόμεσθά γ',

ὁπόσον ἡ φάρυνξ ἂν ἡμῶν
χανδάνη δι' ἡμέρας,
βρεκεκεκὲξ, κοὰξ, κοὰξ.
Διόνυσος.
τούτω γὰρ οὐ νικήσετε.
Χορός.
οὐδὲ μὴν ἡμᾶς σὺ τάντως.
Διόνυσος.
οὐδὲ μὴν ὑμεῖς γε δή μ' οὐδέποτε."

"The Devil Is An Ass."

Act i. sc. .

"Pug. Why any: Fraud,
Or Covetousness, or lady Vanity,
Or old Iniquity, I'll call him hither."
"The words in italics should probably be given to the master-devil, Satan."Whalley's note.
That is, against all probability, and with a (for Jonson) impossible violation of character. The words plainly belong to Pug, and mark at once his simpleness and his impatience.

Ib. sc. . Fitz-dottrel's soliloquy.

Compare this exquisite piece of sense, satire, and sound philosophy in with Sir M. Hale's speech from the bench in a trial of a witch many years afterwards.

Act ii. sc. . Meercraft's speech:

"Sir, money's a whore, a bawd, a drudge."
I doubt not that "money" was the first word of the line, and has dropped out:

"Money! Sir, money's a," &c.

"The Staple Of News."

Act iv. sc. . Pecunia's speech:

"No, he would ha' done,
That lay not in his power: he had the use
Of your bodies, Band and Wax, and sometimes Statute's."

Read ()

... “he had the use of
Your bodies,” &c.
Now, however, I doubt the legitimacy of my transposition of the “of” from the beginning of this latter line to the end of the one preceding;for though it facilitates the metre and reading of the latter line, and is frequent in Massinger, this disjunction of the preposition from its case seems to have been disallowed by Jonson. Perhaps the better reading is

“O' your bodies,” &c.
the two syllables being slurred into one, or rather snatched, or sucked, up into the emphasised “your.” In all points of view, therefore, Ben's judgment is just; for in this way, the line cannot be read, as metre, without that strong and quick emphasis on “your” which the sense requires;and had not the sense required an emphasis on “your,” the tmesis of the sign of its cases “of,” “to,” &c., would destroy almost all boundary between the dramatic verse and prose in comedy:a lesson not to be rash in conjectural amendments..

Ib. sc. .

“P. jun. I love all men of virtue, frommy Princess.”
“Frommy,” frommepious, dutiful, &c.

Act v. sc. . Penny-boy, sen., and Porter.

I dare not, will not, think that honest Ben had Lear in his mind in this mock mad scene.

“The New Inn.”

Act i. sc. . Host's speech:

“A heavy purse, and then two turtles, makes.”
“Makes,” frequent in old books, and even now used in some counties for mates, or pairs.

Ib. sc. . Host's speech:

...“And for a leap
Of the vaulting horse, to play the vaulting house.”

Instead of reading with Whalley “ply” for “play,” I would suggest “horse” for “house.” The meaning would then be obvious and pertinent. The punlet, or pun-maggot, or pun intentional, “horse and house,” is below Jonson. The jeu-de-mots just below

...“Read a lecture
Upon Aquinas at St. Thomas à Waterings”
had a learned smack in it to season its insipidity.

Ib. sc. . Lovel's speech:

“Then shower'd his bounties on me, like the Hours,
That open-handed sit upon the clouds,
And press the liberality of heaven
Down to the laps of thankful men!”
Like many other similar passages in Jonson, this is εῖδος χαλεπὸν ἰδεῖνa sight which it is difficult to make one's self see,a picture my fancy cannot copy detached from the words.

Act ii. sc. . Though it was hard upon old Ben, yet Felton, it must be confessed, was in the right in considering the Fly, Tipto, Bat Burst, &c., of this play mere dotages. Such a scene as this was enough to damn a new play; and Nick Stuff is worse still,most abominable stuff indeed!

Act iii. sc. . Lovel's speech:

“So knowledge first begets benevolence,
Benevolence breeds friendship, friendship love.”
Jonson has elsewhere proceeded thus far; but the part most difficult and delicate, yet, perhaps, not the least capable of being both morally and poetically treated, is the union itself, and what, even in this life, it can be.

Notes On Beaumont And Fletcher.

Seward's Preface. .

“The King and No King, too, is extremely spirited in all its characters; Arbaces holds up a mirror to all men of virtuous principles but violent passions. Hence he is, as it were, at once magnanimity and pride, patience and fury, gentleness and rigour, chastity and incest, and is one of the finest mixtures of virtues and vices that any poet has drawn,” &c.

These are among the endless instances of the abject state to which psychology had sunk from the reign of Charles I. to the middle of the present reign of George III.; and even now it is but just awaking.

Ib. Seward's comparison of Julia's speech in the Two Gentlemen of Verona, act iv. last scene

“Madam, 'twas Ariadne passioning,” &c.
with Aspatia's speech in the Maid's Tragedy

“I stand upon the sea-beach now,” &c.Act ii.
and preference of the latter.

It is strange to take an incidental passage of one writer, intended only for a subordinate part, and compare it with the same thought in another writer, who had chosen it for a prominent and principal figure.

Ib. Seward's preference of Alphonso's poisoning in A Wife for a Month, act i. sc. , to the passage in King John, act v. sc. :

“Poison'd, ill fare! dead, forsook, cast off!”
Mr. Seward! Mr. Seward! you may be, and I trust you are, an angel; but you were an ass.

Ib.

“Every reader of taste will see how superior this is to the quotation from Shakespeare.”
Of what taste?

Ib. Seward's classification of the plays.

Surely Monsieur Thomas, the Chances, Beggar's Bush, and the Pilgrim, should have been placed in the very first class! But the whole attempt ends in a woful failure.

Harris's Commendatory Poem On Fletcher.

“I'd have a state of wit convok'd, which hath
A power to take up on common faith:”
This is an instance of that modifying of quantity by emphasis, without which our elder poets cannot be scanned. “Power,” here, instead of being one long syllablepow'rmust be

sounded, not indeed as a spondee, nor yet as a trochee; but as - u u;the first syllable is -/.

We can, indeed, never expect an authentic edition of our elder dramatic poets (for in those times a drama was a poem), until some man undertakes the work, who has studied the philosophy of metre. This has been found the main torch of sound restoration in the Greek dramatists by Bentley, Porson, and their followers;how much more, then, in writers in our own language! It is true that quantity, an almost iron law with the Greek, is in English rather a subject for a peculiarly fine ear, than any law or even rule; but, then, instead of it, we have, first, accent; secondly, emphasis; and lastly, retardation, and acceleration of the times of syllables according to the meaning of the words, the passion that accompanies them, and even the character of the person that uses them. With due attention to these,above all, to that, which requires the most attention and the finest taste, the character, Massinger, for example, might be reduced to a rich and yet regular metre. But then the regulæ must be first known; though I will venture to say, that he who does not find a line (not corrupted) of Massinger's flow to the time total of a trimeter catalectic iambic verse, has not read it aright. But by virtue of the last principlethe retardation of acceleration of timewe have the proceleusmatic foot u u u u, and the dispondæus - - - -, not to mention the choriambus, the ionics, pæons, and epitrites. Since Dryden, the metre of our poets leads to the sense; in our elder and more genuine bards, the sense, including the passion, leads to the metre. Read even Donne's satires as he meant them to be read, and as the sense and passion demand, and you will find in the lines a manly harmony.

Life Of Fletcher In Stockdale's Edition, .

“In general their plots are more regular than Shakespeare's.”
This is true, if true at all, only before a court of criticism, which judges one scheme by the laws of another and a diverse one. Shakespeare's plots have their own laws of regulæ, and according to these they are regular.

“Maid's Tragedy.”

Act i. The metrical arrangement is most slovenly throughout.

“Strat. As well as masque can be,” &c.
and all that follows to “who is return'd”is plainly blank verse, and falls easily into it.

Ib. Speech of Melantius:

“These soft and silken wars are not for me:
The music must be shrill, and all confus'd,
That stirs my blood; and then I dance with arms.”
What strange self-trumpeters and tongue-bullies all the brave soldiers of Beaumont and Fletcher are! Yet I am inclined to think it was the fashion of the age from the Soldier's speech in the Counter Scuffle; and deeper than the fashion B. and F. did not fashion.

Ib. Speech of Lysippus:

“Yes, but this lady
Walks discontented, with her wat'ry eyes
Bent on the earth,” &c.
Opulent as Shakespeare was, and of his opulence prodigal, he yet would not have put this exquisite piece of poetry in the mouth of a no-character, or as addressed to a Melantius. I wish that B. and F. had written poems instead of tragedies.

Ib.

“Mel. I might run fiercely, not more hastily,
Upon my foe.”
Read

“I mĭght rūn mŏre fiērcelȳ, not more hastily.”

Ib. Speech of Calianax:

“Office! I would I could put it off! I am sure I sweat quite through my office!”
The syllable off reminds the testy statesman of his robe, and he carries on the image.

Ib. Speech of Melantius:

... “Would that blood,
That sea of blood, that I have lost in fight,” &c.
All B. and F.'s generals are pugilists or cudgel-fighters, that boast of their bottom and of the claret they have shed.

Ib. The Masque;Cinthia's speech:

“But I will give a greater state and glory,
And raise to time a noble memory
Of what these lovers are.”

I suspect that “nobler,” pronounced as “nobiler” - u -, was the poet's word, and that the accent is to be placed on the penultimate of “memory.” As to the passage

“Yet, while our reign lasts, let us stretch our power,” &c.
removed from the text of Cinthia's speech, by these foolish editors as unworthy of B. and F.the first eight lines are not worse, and the last couplet incomparably better, than the stanza retained.

Act ii. Amintor's speech:

“Oh, thou hast nam'd a word, that wipes away
All thoughts revengeful! In that sacred name,
‘The king,’ there lies a terror.”
It is worth noticing that of the three greatest tragedians, Massinger was a democrat, Beaumont and Fletcher the most servile jure divino royalists, and Shakespeare a philosopher;if aught personal, an aristocrat.

“A King And No King.”

Act iv. Speech of Tigranes:

“She, that forgat the greatness of her grief
And miseries, that must follow such mad passions,
Endless and wild as women!” &c.
Seward's note and suggestion of “in.”

It would be amusing to learn from some existing friend of Mr. Seward what he meant, or rather dreamed, in this note. It is certainly a difficult passage, of which there are two solutions;one, that the writer was somewhat more injudicious than usual;the other, that he was very, very much more profound and Shakespearian than usual. Seward's emendation, at all events, is right and obvious. Were it a passage of Shakespeare, I should not hesitate to interpret it as characteristic of Tigranes' state of mind, disliking the very virtues, and therefore half-consciously representing them as mere products of the violence of the sex in general in all their whims, and yet forced to admire, and to feel and to express gratitude for, the exertion in his own instance. The inconsistency of the passage would be the consistency of the author. But this is above Beaumont and Fletcher.

“The Scornful Lady.”

Act ii. Sir Roger's speech:

“Did I for this consume my quarters in meditations, vows, and woo'd her in heroical epistles? Did I expound the Owl, and undertake, with labour and expense, the recollection of those thousand pieces, consum'd in cellars and tobacco-shops, of that our honour'd Englishman, Nic. Broughton?” &c.
Strange, that neither Mr. Theobald nor Mr. Seward should have seen that this mock heroic speech is in full-mouthed blank verse! Had they seen this, they would have seen that “quarters” is a substitution of the players for “quires” or “squares,” (that is) of paper:

“Consume my quires in meditations, vows,
And woo'd her in heroical epistles.”
They ought, likewise, to have seen that the abbreviated “Ni. Br.” of the text was properly “Mi. Dr.”and that Michael Drayton, not Nicholas Broughton, is here ridiculed for his poem The Owl and his Heroical Epistles.

Ib. Speech of Younger Loveless:

“Fill him some wine. Thou dost not see me mov'd,” &c.
These Editors ought to have learnt, that scarce an instance occurs in B. and F. of a long speech not in metre. This is plain staring blank verse.

“The Custom Of The Country.”

I cannot but think that in a country conquered by a nobler race than the natives, and in which the latter became villeins and bondsmen, this custom, lex merchetæ, may have been introduced for wise purposes,as of improving the breed, lessening the antipathy of different races, and producing a new bond of relationship between the lord and the tenant, who, as the eldest born, would at least have a chance of being, and a probability of being thought, the lord's child. In the West Indies it cannot have these effects, because the mulatto is marked by nature different from the father, and because there is no bond, no law, no custom, but of mere debauchery..

Act i. sc. . Rutilio's speech:

“Yet if you play not fair play,” &c.
Evidently to be transposed, and read thus:

“Yet if you play not fair, above-board too,
I'll tell you what
I've a foolish engine here:I say no more
But if your Honour's guts are not enchanted.”
Licentious as the comic metre of B. and F. is,a far more lawless, and yet far less happy, imitation of the rhythm of animated talk in real life than Massinger'sstill it is made worse than it really is by ignorance of the halves, thirds, and two-thirds of a line which B. and F. adopted from the Italian and Spanish dramatists. Thus, in Rutilio's speech:

“Though I confess
Any man would desire to have her, and by any means,” &c.
Correct the whole passage,

“Though I confess
Any man would
Desire to have her, and by any means,
At any rate too, yet this common hangman
That hath whipt off a thousănd măids heads already
That he should glean the harvest, sticks in my stomach!”
In all comic metres the gulping of short syllables, and the abbreviation of syllables ordinarily long by the rapid pronunciation of eagerness and vehemence, are not so much a license as a law,a faithful copy of nature, and let them be read characteristically, the times will be found nearly equal. Thus, the three words marked above make a choriambus -- u u, or perhaps a pæon primus - u u u; a dactyl, by virtue of comic rapidity, being only equal to an iambus when distinctly pronounced. I have no doubt that all B. and F.'s works might be safely corrected by attention to this rule, and that the editor is entitled to transpositions of all kinds, and to not a few omissions. For the rule of the metre once lostwhat was to restrain the actors from interpolation?

“The Elder Brother.”

Act i. sc. . Charles's speech:

... “For what concerns tillage,
Who better can deliver it than Virgil
In his Georgicks? and to cure your herds,
His Bucolicks is a master-piece.”
Fletcher was too good a scholar to fall into so gross a blunder, as Messrs. Sympson and Colman suppose. I read the passage thus:

... “For what concerns tillage,
Who better can deliver it than Virgil,
In his Georgicks, or to cure your herds
(His Bucolicks are a master-piece); but when,” &c.
Jealous of Virgil's honour, he is afraid lest, by referring to the Georgics alone, he might be understood as undervaluing the preceding work. “Not that I do not admire the Bucolics too, in their way.But when,” &c.

Act iii. sc. . Charles's speech:

... “She has a face looks like a story;
The story of the heavens looks very like her.”
Seward reads “glory;” and Theobald quotes from Philaster:

“That reads the story of a woman's face.”
I can make sense of this passage as little as Mr. Seward;the passage from Philaster is nothing to the purpose. Instead of “a story,” I have sometimes thought of proposing “Astræa.”

Ib. Angellina's speech:

... “You're old and dim, Sir,
And the shadow of the earth eclips'd your judgment.”
Inappropriate to Angellina, but one of the finest lines in our language.

Act iv. sc. . Charles's speech:

“And lets the serious part of life run by
As thin neglected sand, whiteness of name.
You must be mine,” &c.
Seward's note, and reading:

... “Whiteness of name,
You must be mine!”
Nonsense! “Whiteness of name” is in apposition to “the serious part of life,” and means a deservedly pure reputation. The following line“You must be mine!” means“Though I do not enjoy you to-day, I shall hereafter, and without reproach.”

“The Spanish Curate.”

Act iv. sc. . Amaranta's speech:

“And still I push'd him on, as he had been coming.”
Perhaps the true word is “conning,”that is, learning, or reading, and therefore inattentive.

“Wit Without Money.”

Act i. Valentine's speech:

“One without substance,” &c.
The present text, and that proposed by Seward, are equally vile. I have endeavoured to make the lines sense, though the whole is, I suspect, incurable except by bold conjectural reformation. I would read thus:

“One without substance of herself, that's woman;
Without the pleasure of her life, that's wanton;
Tho' she be young, forgetting it; tho' fair,
Making her glass the eyes of honest men,
Not her own admiration.”
“That's wanton,” or, “that is to say, wantonness.”

Act ii. Valentine's speech:

“Of half-a crown a week for pins and puppets.”
“As there is a syllable wanting in the measure here.”Seward.
A syllable wanting! Had this Seward neither ears nor fingers? The line is a more than usually regular iambic hendecasyllable.

Ib.

“With one man satisfied, with one rein guided;
With one faith, one content, one bed;
Aged, she makes the wife, preserves the fame and issue;
A widow is,” &c.
Is “apaid”contentedtoo obsolete for B. and F.? If not, we might read it thus:

“Content with one faith, with one bed apaid,
She makes the wife, preserves the fame and issue;”

Or, it may be,

... “with one breed apaid”
that is, satisfied with one set of children, in opposition to,

“A widow is a Christmas-box,” &c.
Colman's note on Seward's attempt to put this play into metre.

The editors, and their contemporaries in general, were ignorant of any but the regular iambic verse. A study of the Aristophanic and Plautine metres would have enabled them to reduce B. and F. throughout into metre, except where prose is really intended.

“The Humorous Lieutenant.”

Act i. sc. . Second Ambassador's speech:

... “When your angers,
Like so many brother billows, rose together,
And, curling up your foaming crests, defied,” &c.
This worse than superfluous “like” is very like an interpolation of some matter of fact criticall pus, prose atque venenum. The “your” in the next line, instead of “their,” is likewise yours, Mr. Critic!

Act ii. sc. . Timon's speech:

“Another of a new way will be look'd at.”
“We must suspect the poets wrote, ‘of a new day.’ So immediately after,

... Time may
For all his wisdom, yet give us a day.”
Seward's Note.

For this very reason I more than suspect the contrary.

Ib. sc. . Speech of Leucippe:

“I'll put her into action for a wastcoat.”
What we call a riding-habit,some mannish dress.

“The Mad Lover.”

Act iv. Masque of beasts:

… “This goodly tree,
An usher that still grew before his lady,
Wither'd at root: this, for he could not woo,
A grumbling lawyer:” &c.
Here must have been omitted a line rhyming to “tree;” and the words of the next line have been transposed:

… “This goodly tree,
Which leafless, and obscur'd with moss you see,
An usher this, that 'fore his lady grew,
Wither'd at root: this, for he could not woo,” &c.

“The Loyal Subject.”

It is well worthy of notice, and yet has not been, I believe, noticed hitherto, what a marked difference there exists in the dramatic writers of the Elizabetho-Jacobæan age(Mercy on me! what a phrase for “the writers during the reigns of Elizabeth and James I.!”)in respect of their political opinions. Shakespeare, in this, as in all other things, himself and alone, gives the permanent politics of human nature, and the only predilection which appears, shows itself in his contempt of mobs and the populacy. Massinger is a decided Whig;Beaumont and Fletcher high-flying, passive-obedience, Tories. The Spanish dramatists furnished them with this, as with many other ingredients. By the by, an accurate and familiar acquaintance with all the productions of the Spanish stage previously to , is an indispensable qualification for an editor of B. and F.;and with this qualification a most interesting and instructive edition might be given. This edition of Colman's (Stockdale,) is below criticism.

In metre, B. and F. are inferior to Shakespeare, on the one hand, as expressing the poetic part of the drama, and to Massinger, on the other, in the art of reconciling metre with the natural rhythm of conversation,in which, indeed, Massinger is unrivalled. Read him aright, and measure by time, not syllables, and no lines can be more legitimate,none in which the substitution of equipollent feet, and the modifications by emphasis, are managed with such exquisite judgment. B. and F. are fond of the twelve syllable (not Alexandrine) line, as:

“Too many fears 'tis thought too: and to nourish those.”
This has often a good effect, and is one of the varieties most common in Shakespeare.

“Rule A Wife And Have A Wife.”

Act iii. Old Woman's speech:

... “I fear he will knock my
Brains out for lying.”
Mr. Seward discards the words “for lying,” because “most of the things spoke of Estifania are true, with only a little exaggeration, and because they destroy all appearance of measure.”Colman's note.

Mr. Seward had his brains out. The humour lies in Estifania's having ordered the Old Woman to tell these tales of her; for though an intriguer, she is not represented as other than chaste; and as to the metre, it is perfectly correct.

Ib.

“Marg. As you love me, give way.
Leon. It shall be better, I will give none, madam,” &c.
The meaning is:“It shall be a better way, first;as it is, I will not give it, or any that you in your present mood would wish.”

“The Laws Of Candy.”

Act i. Speech of Melitus:

“Whose insolence and never yet match'd pride
Can by no character be well express'd,
But in her only name, the proud Erota.”
Colman's note.

The poet intended no allusion to the word “Erota” itself; but says that her very name, “the proud Erota,” became a character and adage;as we say, a Quixote or a Brutus: so to say an “Erota,” expressed female pride and insolence of beauty.

Ib. Speech of Antinous:

“Of my peculiar honours, not deriv'd
From successary, but purchas'd with my blood.”

The poet doubtless wrote “successry,” which, though not adopted in our language, would be, on many occasions, as here, a much more significant phrase than ancestry.

“The Little French Lawyer.”

Act i. sc. . Dinant's speech:

“Are you become a patron too? 'Tis a new one,
No more on't,” &c.
Seward reads:

“Are you become a patron too? How long
Have you been conning this speech? 'Tis a new one,” &c.
If conjectural emendation like this be allowed, we might venture to read:

“Are you become a patron to a new tune?”
or,

“Are you become a patron? 'Tis a new tune.”
Ib.

“Din. Thou wouldst not willingly
Live a protested coward, or be call'd one?
Cler. Words are but words.
Din. Nor wouldst thou take a blow?”
Seward's note.

O miserable! Dinant sees through Cleremont's gravity, and the actor is to explain it. “Words are but words,” is the last struggle of affected morality.

“Valentinian.”

Act i. sc. .

It is a real trial of charity to read this scene with tolerable temper towards Fletcher. So very slavishso reptileare the feelings and sentiments represented as duties. And yet, remember, he was a bishop's son, and the duty to God was the supposed basis.

Personals, including body, house, home, and religion;property, subordination, and inter-community;these are the fundamentals of society. I mean here, religion negatively taken,so that the person be not compelled to do or utter, in relation of the soul to God, what would be, in that person, a lie;such as to force a man to go to church, or to swear that he believes what he does not believe. Religion, positively taken, may be a great and useful privilege, but cannot be a right,were it for this only, that it cannot be pre-defined. The ground of this distinction between negative and positive religion, as a social right, is plain. No one of my fellow-citizens is encroached on by my not declaring to him what I believe respecting the super-sensual; but should every man be entitled to preach against the preacher, who could hear any preacher? Now, it is different in respect of loyalty. There we have positive rights, but not negative rights;for every pretended negative would be in effect a positive;as if a soldier had a right to keep to himself whether he would, or would not, fight. Now, no one of these fundamentals can be rightfully attacked, except when the guardian of it has abused it to subvert one or more of the rest. The reason is, that the guardian, as a fluent, is less than the permanent which he is to guard. He is the temporary and mutable mean, and derives his whole value from the end. In short, as robbery is not high treason, so neither is every unjust act of a king the converse. All must be attacked and endangered. Why? Because the king, as a to A, is a mean to A, or subordination, in a far higher sense than a proprietor, as b to A, is a mean to B, or property.

Act ii. sc. . Claudia's speech:

“Chimney-pieces!” &c.
The whole of this speech seems corrupt; and if accurately printed,that is, if the same in all the prior editions,irremediable but by bold conjecture. “Till my tackle,” should be, I think, “While,” &c.

Act iii. sc. . B. and F. always write as if virtue or goodness were a sort of talisman, or strange something, that might be lost without the least fault on the part of the owner. In short, their chaste ladies value their chastity as a material thing,not as an act or state of being; and this mere thing being imaginary, no wonder that all their women are represented with the minds of strumpets, except a few irrational humourists, far less capable of exciting our sympathy than a Hindoo who has had a basin of cow-broth thrown over him;for this, though a debasing superstition, is still real, and we might pity the poor wretch, though we cannot help despising him. But B. and F.'s Lucinas are clumsy fictions. It is too plain that the authors had no one idea of chastity as a virtue, but only such a conception as a blind man might have of the power of seeing by handling an ox's eye. In The Queen of Corinth, indeed, they talk differently; but it is all talk, and nothing is real in it but the dread of losing a reputation. Hence the frightful contrast between their women (even those who are meant for virtuous) and Shakespeare's. So,

for instance, The Maid in the Mill:a woman must not merely have grown old in brothels, but have chuckled over every abomination committed in them with a rampant sympathy of imagination, to have had her fancy so drunk with the minutiæ of lechery as this icy chaste virgin evinces hers to have been.

It would be worth while to note how many of these plays are founded on rapes,how many on incestuous passions, and how many on mere lunacies. Then their virtuous women are either crazy superstitions of a mere bodily negation of having been acted on, or strumpets in their imaginations and wishes, or, as in this Maid in the Mill, both at the same time. In the men, the love is merely lust in one direction,exclusive preference of one object. The tyrant's speeches are mostly taken from the mouths of indignant denouncers of the tyrant's character, with the substitution of “I” for “he,”" and the omission of the prefatory “he acts as if he thought” so and so. The only feelings they can possibly excite are disgust at the *Æ*ciuses, if regarded as sane loyalists, or compassion if considered as Bedlamites. So much for their tragedies. But even their comedies are, most of them, disturbed by the fantasticalness, or gross caricature, of the persons or incidents. There are few characters that you can really like (even though you should have erased from your mind all the filth which bespatters the most likeable of them, as Piniero in The Island Princess for instance),scarcely one whom you can love. How different this from Shakespeare, who makes one have a sort of sneaking affection even for his Barnardines;whose very Iagos and Richards are awful, and, by the counteracting power of profound intellects, rendered fearful rather than hateful;and even the exceptions, as Goneril and Regan, are proofs of superlative judgment and the finest moral tact, in being left utter monsters, nulla virtute redemptæ, and in being kept out of sight as much as possible,they being, indeed, only means for the excitement and deepening of noblest emotions towards the Lear, Cordelia, &c. and employed with the severest economy! But even Shakespeare's grossnessthat which is really so, independently of the increase in modern times of vicious associations with things indifferent (for there is a state of manners conceivable so pure, that the language of Hamlet at Ophelia's feet might be a harmless rallying, or playful teazing, of a shame that would exist in Paradise)at the worst, how diverse in kind is it from Beaumont and Fletcher's! In Shakespeare it is the mere generalities of sex, mere words for the most part, seldom or never distinct images, all head-work, and fancy drolleries; there is no sensation supposed in the speaker. I need not proceed to contrast this with B. and F.

“Rollo.”

This, perhaps, the most energetic of Fletcher's tragedies. He evidently aimed at a new Richard III. in Rollo;but, as in all his other imitations of Shakespeare, he was not philosopher enough to bottom his original. Thus, in Rollo, he has produced a mere

personification of outrageous wickedness, with no fundamental characteristic impulses to make either the tyrant's words or actions philosophically intelligible. Hence the most pathetic situations border on the horrible, and what he meant for the terrible, is either hateful, τὸ μισητὸν, or ludicrous. The scene of Baldwin's sentence in the third act is probably the grandest working of passion in all B. and F.'s dramas;but the very magnificence of filial affection given to Edith, in this noble scene, renders the after scene (in imitation of one of the least Shakespearian of all Shakespeare's works, if it be his, the scene between Richard and Lady Anne) in which Edith is yielding to a few words and tears, not only unnatural, but disgusting. In Shakespeare, Lady Anne is described as a weak, vain, very woman throughout.

Act i. sc. .

“Gis. He is indeed the perfect character
Of a good man, and so his actions speak him.”
This character of Aubrey, and the whole spirit of this and several other plays of the same authors, are interesting as traits of the morals which it was fashionable to teach in the reigns of James I. and his successor, who died a martyr to them. Stage, pulpit, law, fashion,all conspired to enslave the realm. Massinger's plays breathe the opposite spirit; Shakespeare's the spirit of wisdom which is for all ages. By the by, the Spanish dramatistsCalderon, in particular,had some influence in this respect, of romantic loyalty to the greatest monsters, as well as in the busy intrigues of B. and F.'s plays.

“The Wildgoose Chase.”

Act ii. sc. . Belleur's speech:

... “That wench, methinks,
If I were but well set on, for she is a fable,
If I were but hounded right, and one to teach me.”
Sympson reads “affable,” which Colman rejects, and says, “the next line seems to enforce” the reading in the text.

Pity, that the editor did not explain wherein the sense, “seemingly enforced by the next line,” consists. May the true word be “a sable”that is, a black fox, hunted for its precious fur? Or “at-able,”as we now say,“she is come-at-able?”

“A Wife For A Month.”

Act iv. sc. . Alphonso's speech:

“Betwixt the cold bear and the raging lion
Lies my safe way.”
Seward's note and alteration to

“'Twixt the cold bears, far from the raging lion”
This Mr. Seward is a blockhead of the provoking species. In his itch for correction, he forgot the words“lies my safe way!” The bear is the extreme pole, and thither he would travel over the space contained between it and “the raging lion.”

“The Pilgrim.”

Act iv. sc. .

Alinda's interview with her father is lively, and happily hit off; but this scene with Roderigo is truly excellent. Altogether, indeed, this play holds the first place in B. and F.'s romantic entertainments, Lustspiele, which collectively are their happiest performances, and are only inferior to the romance of Shakespeare in the As You Like It, Twelfth Night, &c.

Ib.

“Alin. To-day you shall wed Sorrow,
And Repentance will come to-morrow.”
Read “Penitence,” or else

“Repentance, she will come to-morrow.”

“The Queen Of Corinth.”

Act ii. sc. .

Merione's speech. Had the scene of this tragi-comedy been laid in Hindostan instead of Corinth, and the gods here addressed been the Vishnu and Co. of the Indian Pantheon, this rant would not have been much amiss.

In respect of style and versification, this play and the following of Bonduca may be taken as the best, and yet as characteristic, specimens of Beaumont and Fletcher's dramas. I particularly instance the first scene of the Bonduca. Take Shakespeare's Richard II., and having selected some one scene of about the same number of lines, and consisting mostly of long speeches, compare it with the first scene in Bonduca,not for the idle

purpose of finding out which is the better, but in order to see and understand the difference. The latter, that of B. and F., you will find a well-arranged bed of flowers, each having its separate root, and its position determined aforehand by the will of the gardener,each fresh plant a fresh volition. In the former you see an Indian fig-tree, as described by Milton;all is growth, evolution;each line, each word almost, begets the following, and the will of the writer is an interfusion, a continuous agency, and not a series of separate acts. Shakespeare is the height, breadth, and depth of Genius: Beaumont and Fletcher the excellent mechanism, in juxta-position and succession, of talent.

“The Noble Gentleman.”

Why have the dramatists of the times of Elizabeth, James I., and the first Charles become almost obsolete, with the exception of Shakespeare? Why do they no longer belong to the English, being once so popular? And why is Shakespeare an exception?One thing, among fifty, necessary to the full solution is, that they all employed poetry and poetic diction on unpoetic subjects, both characters and situations, especially in their comedy. Now Shakespeare is all, all ideal,of no time, and therefore for all times. Read, for instance, Marine's panegyric in the first scene of this play:

... “Know
The eminent court, to them that can be wise,
And fasten on her blessings, is a sun,” &c.
What can be more unnatural and inappropriate (not only is, but must be felt as such) than such poetry in the mouth of a silly dupe? In short, the scenes are mock dialogues, in which the poet solus plays the ventriloquist, but cannot keep down his own way of expressing himself. Heavy complaints have been made respecting the transposing of the old plays by Cibber; but it never occurred to these critics to ask, how it came that no one ever attempted to transpose a comedy of Shakespeare's.

“The Coronation.”

Act i. Speech of Seleucus:

“Altho' he be my enemy, should any
Of the gay flies that buz about the court,
Sit to catch trouts i' the summer, tell me so,
I durst,” &c.
Colman's note.

Pshaw! “Sit” is either a misprint for “set,” or the old and still provincial word for “set,” as the participle passive of “seat” or “set.” I have heard an old Somersetshire gardener say:“Look, Sir! I set these plants here; those yonder I sit yesterday.”

Act ii. Speech of Arcadius:

“Nay, some will swear they love their mistress,
Would hazard lives and fortunes,” &c.
Read thus:

“Nay, some will swear they love their mistress so,
They would hazard lives and fortunes to preserve
One of her hairs brighter than Berenice's,
Or young Apollo's; and yet, after this,” &c.
“Thĕy woŭld hāzard”furnishes an anapæst for an iambus. “And yet,” which must be read, anyĕt, is an instance of the enclitic force in an accented monosyllable. “And yēt,” is a complete iambus; but anyet is, like spirit, a dibrach u u, trocheized, however, by the arsis or first accent damping, though not extinguishing, the second.

“Wit At Several Weapons.”

Act i. Oldcraft's speech:

“I'm arm'd at all points,” &c.
It would be very easy to restore all this passage to metre, by supplying a sentence of four syllables, which the reasoning almost demands, and by correcting the grammar. Read thus:

“Arm'd at all points 'gainst treachery, I hold
My humour firm. If, living, I can see thee
Thrive by thy wits, I shall have the more courage,
Dying, to trust thee with my lands. If not,
The best wit, I can hear of, carries them.
For since so many in my time and knowledge,
Rich children of the city, have concluded
For lack of wit in beggary, I'd rather
Make a wise stranger my executor,
Than a fool son my heir, and have my lands call'd
After my wit than name: and that's my nature!”

Ib. Oldcraft's speech:

“To prevent which I have sought out a match for her.”
Read

“Which to prevent I've sought a match out for her.”
Ib. Sir Gregory's speech:

... “Do you think
I'll have any of the wits hang upon me after I am married once?”
Read it thus:

... “Do you think
That I'll have any of the wits to hang
Upon me after I am married once?”
and afterwards

... “Is it a fashion in London
To marry a woman, and to never see her?”
The superfluous “to” gives it the Sir Andrew Ague-cheek character.

“The Fair Maid Of The Inn.”

Act ii. Speech of Albertus:

... “But, Sir,
By my life, I vow to take assurance from you,
That right hand never more shall strike my son,
Chop his hand off!”
In this (as, indeed, in all other respects, but most in this) it is that Shakespeare is so incomparably superior to Fletcher and his friend,in judgment! What can be conceived more unnatural and motiveless than this brutal resolve? How is it possible to feel the least interest in Albertus afterwards? or in Cesario after his conduct?

“The Two Noble Kinsmen.”

On comparing the prison scene of Palamon and Arcite, act ii. sc. , with the dialogue between the same speakers, act i. sc. , I can scarcely retain a doubt as to the first act's having been written by Shakespeare. Assuredly it was not written by B. and F. I hold Jonson more probable than either of these two.

The main presumption, however, for Shakespeare's share in this play rests on a point, to which the sturdy critics of this edition (and indeed all before them) were blind,that is, the construction of the blank verse, which proves beyond all doubt an intentional imitation, if not the proper hand, of Shakespeare. Now, whatever improbability there is in the former (which supposes Fletcher conscious of the inferiority, the too poematic minus-dramatic nature of his versification, and of which, there is neither proof nor likelihood) adds so much to the probability of the latter. On the other hand, the harshness of many of these very passages, a harshness unrelieved by any lyrical inter-breathings, and still more the want of profundity in the thoughts, keep me from an absolute decision.

Act i. sc. . Emilia's speech:

... “Since his depart, his sports,
Tho' craving seriousness and skill,” &c.
I conjecture “imports,”that is, duties or offices of importance. The flow of the versification in this speech seems to demand the trochaic ending - u; while the text blends jingle and hisses to the annoyance of less sensitive ears than Fletcher'snot to say, Shakespeare's.

“The Woman Hater.”

THE END