

pure sky blue of heaven : the female unites the beautiful with the sublime, and the male the sublime with the beautiful.

Throughout the whole of his plays Shakspeare has evidently looked at the subject of love in this dignified light : he has conceived it not only with moral grandeur, but with philosophical penetration. The mind of man searches for something which shall add to his perfection—which shall assist him ; and he also yearns to lend his aid in completing the moral nature of another. Thoughts like these will occupy many of his serious moments : imagination will accumulate on imagination, until at last some object attracts his attention, and to this object the whole weight and impulse of his feelings will be directed.

Who shall say this is not love ? Here is system, but it is founded upon nature : here are associations ; here are strong feelings, natural to us as men, and they are directed and finally attached to one object :—who shall say this is not love ? Assuredly not the being who is the subject of these sensations.—If it be not love, it is only known that it is not by Him who knows all things. Shakspeare has therefore described Romeo as in love in the first instance with Rosaline, and so completely does he fancy himself in love that he declares, before he has seen Juliet,

“ When the devout religion of mine eye
Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires ;
And these, who, often drown'd, could never die,
Transparent heretics, be burnt for liars.
One fairer than my love ? the all-seeing sun
Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun.”

Act I., Scene 1.

This is in answer to Benvolio, who has asked Romeo to compare the supposed beauty of Rosaline with the actual beauty of other ladies ; and in this full feeling of confidence Romeo is brought to Capulet's, as it were by accident : he sees Juliet, instantly becomes the heretic he has just before declared impossible, and then commences that completeness of attachment which forms the whole subject of the tragedy.

Surely Shakspeare, the poet, the philosopher, who combined truth with beauty and beauty with truth, never dreamed that he could interest his auditory in favour

of Romeo, by representing him as a mere weather-cock, blown round by every woman's breath ; who, having seen one, became the victim of melancholy, eating his own heart, concentrating all his hopes and fears in her, and yet, in an instant, changing, and falling madly in love with another. Shakspeare must have meant something more than this, for this was the way to make people despise, instead of admiring his hero. Romeo tells us what was Shakspeare's purpose : he shows us that he had looked at Rosaline with a different feeling from that with which he had looked at Juliet. Rosaline was the object to which his over-full heart had attached itself in the first instance : our imperfect nature, in proportion as our ideas are vivid, seeks after something in which those ideas may be realised.

So with the indiscreet friendships sometimes formed by men of genius : they are conscious of their own weakness, and are ready to believe others stronger than themselves, when, in truth, they are weaker : they have formed an ideal in their own minds, and they want to see it realised ; they require more than shadowy thought. Their own sense of imperfection makes it impossible for them to fasten their attachment upon themselves, and hence the humility of men of true genius : in, perhaps, the first man they meet, they only see what is good ; they have no sense of his deficiencies, and their friendship becomes so strong, that they almost fall down and worship one in every respect greatly their inferior.

What is true of friendship is true of love, with a person of ardent feelings and warm imagination. What took place in the mind of Romeo was merely natural ; it is accordant with every day's experience. Amid such various events, such shifting scenes, such changing personages, we are often mistaken, and discover that he or she was not what we hoped and expected ; we find that the individual first chosen will not complete our imperfection ; we may have suffered unnecessary pangs, and have indulged idly-directed hopes, and then a being may arise before us, who has more resemblance to the ideal we have formed. We know that we loved the earlier object with ardour and purity, but it was not what we feel for the later object. Our own mind tells us, that in the first instance we merely yearned after an object, but in the last instance we know

that we have found that object, and that it corresponds with the idea we had previously formed.

[Here my original notes abruptly break off: the brochure in which I had inserted them was full, and I took another for the conclusion of the Lecture, which is unfortunately lost.]

THE NINTH LECTURE.

It is a known but unexplained phenomenon, that among the ancients statuary rose to such a degree of perfection, as almost to baffle the hope of imitating it, and to render the chance of excelling it absolutely impossible; yet painting, at the same period, notwithstanding the admiration bestowed upon it by Pliny and others, has been proved to be an art of much later growth, as it was also of far inferior quality. I remember a man of high rank, equally admirable for his talents and his taste, pointing to a common sign-post, and saying that had Titian never lived, the richness of representation by colour, even there, would never have been attained. In that mechanical branch of painting, perspective, it has been shown that the Romans were very deficient. The excavations and consequent discoveries, at Herculaneum and elsewhere, prove the Roman artists to have been guilty of such blunders, as to give plausibility to the assertions of those who maintain that the ancients were wholly ignorant of perspective. However, that they knew something of it is established by Vitruvius in the introduction to his second book.

Something of the same kind, as I endeavoured to explain in a previous lecture, was the cause with the drama of the ancients, which has been imitated by the French, Italians, and by various writers in England since the Restoration. All that is there represented seems to be, as it were, upon one flat surface: the theme,¹ if we may so call it in reference to music, admits of nothing more than the change of a single note, and excludes that which is the true principle of life—the attaining of the same result by an infinite variety of means.

The plays of Shakspeare are in no respect imitations

¹ Here occurs another evident mistake of mine, in my original short-hand note, in consequence of mishearing: I hastily wrote *scheme*, instead of "theme," which last must have been the word of the Lecturer.

of the Greeks : they may be called analogies, because by very different means they arrive at the same end ; whereas the French and Italian tragedies I have read, and the English ones on the same model, are mere copies, though they cannot be called likenesses, seeking the same effect by adopting the same means, but under most inappropriate and adverse circumstances.

I have thus been led to consider, that the ancient drama (meaning the works of Æschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, for the rhetorical productions of the same class by the Romans are scarcely to be treated as original theatrical poems) might be contrasted with the Shakspearean drama. —I call it the Shakspearean drama to distinguish it, because I know of no other writer who has realised the same idea, although I am told by some, that the Spanish poets, Lopez de Vega and Calderon, have been equally successful. The Shakspearean drama and the Greek drama may be compared to statuary and painting. In statuary, as in the Greek drama, the characters must be few, because the very essence of statuary is a high degree of abstraction, which prevents a great many figures being combined in the same effect. In a grand group of Niobe, or in any other ancient heroic subject, how disgusting even it would appear, if an old nurse were introduced. Not only the number of figures must be circumscribed, but nothing undignified must be placed in company with what is dignified : no one personage must be brought in that is not an abstraction : all the actors in the scene must not be presented at once to the eye ; and the effect of multitude, if required, must be produced without the intermingling of anything discordant.

Compare this small group with a picture by Raphael or Titian, in which an immense number of figures may be introduced, a beggar, a cripple, a dog, or a cat ; and by a less degree of labour, and a less degree of abstraction, an effect is produced equally harmonious to the mind, more true to nature with its varied colours, and, in all respects but one, superior to statuary. The man of taste feels satisfied, and to that which the reason conceives possible, a momentary reality is given by the aid of imagination.

I need not here repeat what I have said before, regarding the circumstances which permitted Shakspeare to make an alteration, not merely so suitable to the age in which he

lived, but, in fact, so necessitated by the condition of that age. I need not again remind you of the difference I pointed out between imitation and likeness, in reference to the attempt to give reality to representations on the stage. The distinction between imitation and likeness depends upon the admixture of circumstances of dissimilarity; an imitation is not a copy, precisely as likeness is not sameness, in that sense of the word "likeness" which implies difference conjoined with sameness. Shakspeare reflected manners in his plays, not by a cold formal copy, but by an imitation; that is to say, by an admixture of circumstances, not absolutely true in themselves, but true to the character and to the time represented.

It is fair to own that he had many advantages. The great of that day, instead of surrounding themselves by the *chevaux de frise* of what is now called high breeding, endeavoured to distinguish themselves by attainments, by energy of thought, and consequent powers of mind. The stage, indeed, had nothing but curtains for its scenes, but this fact compelled the actor, as well as the author, to appeal to the imaginations, and not to the senses of the audience: thus was obtained a power over space and time, which in an ancient theatre would have been absurd, because it would have been contradictory. The advantage is vastly in favour of our own early stage: the dramatic poet there relies upon the imagination, upon the reason, and upon the noblest powers of the human heart; he shakes off the iron bondage of space and time; he appeals to that which we most wish to be, when we are most worthy of being, while the ancient dramatist binds us down to the meanest part of our nature, and the chief compensation is a simple acquiescence of the mind in the position, that what is represented might possibly have occurred in the time and place required by the unities. It is a poor compliment to a poet to tell him, that he has only the qualifications of a historian.

In dramatic composition the observation of the unities of time and place so narrows the period of action, so impoverishes the sources of pleasure, that of all the Athenian dramas there is scarcely one in which the absurdity is not glaring, of aiming at an object, and utterly failing in the attainment of it; events are sometimes brought into a space in which it is impossible for them to

have occurred, and in this way the grandest effort of the dramatist, that of making his play the mirror of life, is entirely defeated.

The limit allowed by the rules of the Greek stage was twenty-four hours ; but, inasmuch as, even in this case, time must have become a subject of imagination, it was just as reasonable to allow twenty-four months, or even years. The mind is acted upon by such strong stimulants, that the period is indifferent ; and when once the boundary of possibility is passed, no restriction can be assigned. In reading Shakspeare, we should first consider in which of his plays he means to appeal to the reason, and in which to the imagination, faculties which have no relation to time and place, excepting as in the one case they imply a succession of cause and effect, and in the other form a harmonious picture, so that the impulse given by the reason is carried on by the imagination.

We have often heard Shakspeare spoken of as a child of nature, and some of his modern imitators, without the genius to copy nature, by resorting to real incidents, and treating them in a certain way, have produced that stage-phenomenon which is neither tragic nor comic, nor tragic-comic, nor comi-tragic, but sentimental. This sort of writing depends upon some very affecting circumstances, and in its greatest excellence aspires no higher than the genius of an onion,—the power of drawing tears ; while the author, acting the part of a ventriloquist, distributes his own insipidity among the characters, if characters they can be called, which have no marked and distinguishing features. I have seen dramas of this sort, some translated and some the growth of our own soil, so well acted, and so ill written, that if I could have been made for the time artificially deaf, I should have been pleased with that performance as a pantomime, which was intolerable as a play.

Shakspeare's characters, from Othello and Macbeth down to Dogberry and the Grave-digger, may be termed ideal realities. They are not the things themselves, so much as abstracts of the things, which a great mind takes into itself, and there naturalises them to its own conception. Take Dogberry : are no important truths there conveyed, no admirable lessons taught, and no valuable allusions made to reigning follies, which the poet saw must for ever

reign ? He is not the creature of the day, to disappear with the day, but the representative and abstract of truth which must ever be true, and of humour which must ever be humorous.

The readers of Shakspeare may be divided into two classes :—

1. Those who read his works with feeling and understanding ;

2. Those who, without affecting to criticise, merely feel, and may be said to be the recipients of the poet's power.

Between the two no medium can be endured. The ordinary reader, who does not pretend to bring his understanding to bear upon the subject, often feels that some real trait of his own has been caught, that some nerve has been touched ; and he knows that it has been touched by the vibration he experiences—a thrill, which tells us that, by becoming better acquainted with the poet, we have become better acquainted with ourselves.

In the plays of Shakspeare every man sees himself, without knowing that he does so : as in some of the phenomena of nature, in the mist of the mountain, the traveller beholds his own figure, but the glory round the head distinguishes it from a mere vulgar copy. In traversing the Brocken, in the north of Germany, at sunrise, the brilliant beams are shot askance, and you see before you a being of gigantic proportions, and of such elevated dignity, that you only know it to be yourself by similarity of action. In the same way, near Messina, natural forms, at determined distances, are represented on an invisible mist, not as they really exist, but dressed in all the prismatic colours of the imagination. So in Shakspeare : every form is true, everything has reality for its foundation ; we can all recognise the truth, but we see it decorated with such hues of beauty, and magnified to such proportions of grandeur, that, while we know the figure, we know also how much it has been refined and exalted by the poet.

It is humiliating to reflect that, as it were, because heaven has given us the greatest poet, it has inflicted upon that poet the most incompetent critics : none of them seem to understand even his language, much less the principles upon which he wrote, and the peculiarities which distinguish him from all rivals. I will not now dwell upon

this point, because it is my intention to devote a lecture more immediately to the prefaces of Pope and Johnson. Some of Shakspeare's contemporaries appear to have understood him, and imitated him in a way that does the original no small honour ; but modern preface-writers and commentators, while they praise him as a great genius, when they come to publish notes upon his plays, treat him like a schoolboy ; as if this great genius did not understand himself, was not aware of his own powers, and wrote without design or purpose. Nearly all they can do is to express the most vulgar of all feelings, wonderment—wondering at what they term the irregularity of his genius, sometimes above all praise, and at other times, if they are to be trusted, below all contempt. They endeavour to reconcile the two opinions by asserting that he wrote for the mob ; as if a man of real genius ever wrote for the mob. Shakspeare never consciously wrote what was below himself : careless he might be, and his better genius may not always have attended him ; but I fearlessly say, that he never penned a line that he knew would degrade him. No man does anything equally well at all times ; but because Shakspeare could not always be the greatest of poets, was he therefore to condescend to make himself the least ? ¹

Yesterday afternoon a friend left a book for me by a German critic, of which I have only had time to read a small part ; but what I did read I approved, and I should be disposed to applaud the work much more highly, were it not that in so doing I should, in a manner, applaud myself. The sentiments and opinions are coincident with those to which I gave utterance in my lectures at the Royal Institution. It is not a little wonderful, that so many ages have elapsed since the time of Shakspeare, and that it should remain for foreigners first to feel truly, and to appreciate justly, his mighty genius. The solution of this circumstance must be sought in the history of our nation : the English have become a busy commercial people, and they have unquestionably derived from this propensity many social and physical advantages : they have grown to be a mighty empire—one of the great

¹ It is certain that my shorthand note in this place affords another instance of mis-hearing : it runs literally thus—"but because Shakspeare could not always be the greatest of poets, was he therefore to condescend to make himself a beast ?" For "a beast," we must read *the least*, the antithesis being between "greatest" and "least," and not between "poet" and "beast." Yet "beast" may be reconciled with sense as in *Macbeth* : "Notes and Emend." 420.

nations of the world, whose moral superiority enables it to struggle successfully against him, who may be deemed the evil genius of our planet.

On the other hand, the Germans, unable to distinguish themselves in action, have been driven to speculation: all their feelings have been forced back into the thinking and reasoning mind. To do, with them is impossible, but in determining what ought to be done, they perhaps exceed every people of the globe. Incapable of acting outwardly, they have acted internally: they first rationally recalled the ancient philosophy, and set their spirits to work with an energy of which England produces no parallel, since those truly heroic times, heroic in body and soul, the days of Elizabeth.

If all that has been written upon Shakspeare by Englishmen were burned, in the want of candles, merely to enable us to read one half of what our dramatist produced, we should be great gainers. Providence has given England the greatest man that ever put on and put off mortality, and has thrown a sop to the envy of other nations, by inflicting upon his native country the most incompetent critics. I say nothing here of the state in which his text has come down to us, farther than that it is evidently very imperfect: in many places his sense has been perverted, in others, if not entirely obscured, so blunderingly represented, as to afford us only a glimpse of what he meant, without the power of restoring his own expressions. But whether his dramas have been perfectly or imperfectly printed, it is quite clear that modern inquiry and speculative ingenuity in this kingdom have done nothing; or I might say, without a solecism, less than nothing (for some editors have multiplied corruptions) to retrieve the genuine language of the poet. His critics among us, during the whole of the last century, have neither understood nor appreciated him; for how could they appreciate what they could not understand?

His contemporaries, and those who immediately followed him, were not so insensible of his merits, or so incapable of explaining them; and one of them, who might be Milton when a young man of four and twenty, printed, in the second folio of Shakspeare's works, a laudatory poem, which, in its kind, has no equal for justness and distinctness of description, in reference to the powers and qualities

of lofty genius. It runs thus, and I hope that, when I have finished, I shall stand in need of no excuse for reading the whole of it.

“ A mind reflecting ages past, whose clear
And equal surface can make things appear,
Distant a thousand years, and represent
Them in their lively colours, just extent
To outrun hasty time, retrieve the fates,
Roll back the heavens, blow ope the iron gates
Of death and Lethe, where confused lie
Great heaps of ruinous mortality :
In that deep dusky dungeon to discern
A royal ghost from churls ; by art to learn
The physiognomy of shades, and give
Them sudden birth, wondering how oft they live ;
What story coldly tells, what poets feign
At second hand, and picture without brain,
Senseless and soul-less shows : to give a stage
(Ample and true with life) voice, action, age,
As Plato's year, and new scene of the world,
Them unto us, or us to them had hurl'd :
To raise our ancient sovereigns from their herse,
Make kings his subjects ; by exchanging verse,
Enlive their pale trunks ; that the present age
Joys at their joy, and trembles at their rage :
Yet so to temper passion, that our ears
Take pleasure in their pain, and eyes in tears
Both weep and smile ; fearful at plot so sad,
Then laughing at our fear ; abus'd, and glad
To be abus'd ; affected with that truth
Which we perceive is false, pleas'd in that ruth
At which we start, and, by elaborate play,
Tortur'd and tickl'd ; by a crab-like way
Time past made pastime, and in ugly sort
Disgorging up his ravin for our sport :—
—While the plebeian imp, from lofty throne,
Creates and rules a world, and works upon
Mankind by secret engines ; now to move
A chilling pity, then a rigorous love ;
To strike up and stroke down, both joy and ire
To steer th' affections ; and by heavenly fire
Mold us anew, stol'n from ourselves :—

This, and much more, which cannot be express'd
But by himself, his tongue, and his own breast,
Was Shakspeare's freehold ; which his cunning brain
Improv'd by favour of the nine-fold train ;
The buskin'd muse, the comick queen, the grand
And louder tone of Clio, nimble hand
And nimbler foot of the melodious pair,
The silver-voiced lady, the most fair
Calliope, whose speaking silence daunts,
And she whose praise the heavenly body chants ;

These jointly woo'd him, envying one another ;
(Obey'd by all as spouse, but lov'd as brother)
And wrought a curious robe, of sable grave,
Fresh green, and pleasant yellow, red most brave,
And constant blue, rich purple, guiltless white,
The lowly russet, and the scarlet bright ;
Branch'd and embroider'd like the painted spring ;
Each leaf match'd with a flower, and each string
Of golden wire, each line of silk : there run
Italian works, whose thread the sisters spun ;
And these did sing, or seem to sing, the choice
Birds of a foreign note and various voice :
Here hangs a mossy rock ; there plays a fair
But chiding fountain, purled : not the air,
Nor clouds, nor thunder, but were living drawn ;
Not out of common tiffany or lawn,
But fine materials, which the Muses know,
And only know the countries where they grow.

Now, when they could no longer him enjoy,
In mortal garments pent,—death may destroy,
They say, his body ; but his verse shall live,
And more than nature takes our hands shall give :
In a less volume, but more strongly bound,
Shakspeare shall breathe and speak ; with laurel crown'd,
Which never fades ; fed with ambrosian meat,
In a well-lined vesture, rich, and neat.
So with this robe they clothe him, bid him wear it ;
For time shall never stain, nor envy tear it."

This poem is subscribed J. M. S., meaning, as some have explained the initials, "John Milton, Student": the internal evidence seems to me decisive, for there was, I think, no other man, of that particular day, capable of writing anything so characteristic of Shakspeare, so justly thought, and so happily expressed.

It is a mistake to say that any of Shakspeare's characters strike us as portraits: they have the union of reason perceiving, of judgment recording, and of imagination diffusing over all a magic glory. While the poet registers what is past, he projects the future in a wonderful degree, and makes us feel, however slightly, and see, however dimly, that state of being in which there is neither past nor future, but all is permanent in the very energy of nature.

Although I have affirmed that all Shakspeare's characters are ideal, and the result of his own meditation, yet a just separation may be made of those in which the ideal is most prominent—where it is put forward more intensely—where we are made more conscious of the

ideal, though in truth they possess no more nor less ideality: and of those which, though equally idealised, the delusion upon the mind is of their being real. The characters in the various plays may be separated into those where the real is disguised in the ideal, and those where the ideal is concealed from us by the real. The difference is made by the different powers of mind employed by the poet in the representation.

At present I shall only speak of dramas where the ideal is predominant; and chiefly for this reason—that those plays have been attacked with the greatest violence. The objections to them are not the growth of our own country, but of France,—the judgment of monkeys, by some wonderful phenomenon, put into the mouths of people shaped like men. These creatures have informed us that Shakspeare is a miraculous monster, in whom many heterogeneous components were thrown together, producing a discordant mass of genius—an irregular and ill-assorted structure of gigantic proportions.

Among the ideal plays, I will take “The Tempest,” by way of example. Various others might be mentioned, but it is impossible to go through every drama, and what I remark on “The Tempest” will apply to all Shakspeare’s productions of the same class.

In this play Shakspeare has especially appealed to the imagination, and he has constructed a plot well adapted to the purpose. According to his scheme, he did not appeal to any sensuous impression (the word “sensuous” is authorised by Milton) of time and place, but to the imagination, and it is to be borne in mind, that of old, and as regards mere scenery, his works may be said to have been recited rather than acted—that is to say, description and narration supplied the place of visual exhibition: the audience was told to fancy that they saw what they only heard described; the painting was not in colours, but in words.

This is particularly to be noted in the first scene—a storm and its confusion on board the king’s ship. The highest and the lowest characters are brought together, and with what excellence! Much of the genius of Shakspeare is displayed in these happy combinations—the highest and the lowest, the gayest and the saddest; he is not droll in one scene and melancholy in another, but often

both the one and the other in the same scene. Laughter is made to swell the tear of sorrow, and to throw, as it were, a poetic light upon it, while the tear mingles tenderness with the laughter. Shakspeare has evinced the power, which above all other men he possessed, that of introducing the profoundest sentiments of wisdom, where they would be least expected, yet where they are most truly natural. One admirable secret of his art is, that separate speeches frequently do not appear to have been occasioned by those which preceded, and which are consequent upon each other, but to have arisen out of the peculiar character of the speaker.

Before I go further, I may take the opportunity of explaining what is meant by mechanic and organic regularity. In the former the copy must appear as if it had come out of the same mould with the original; in the latter there is a law which all the parts obey, conforming themselves to the outward symbols and manifestations of the essential principle. If we look to the growth of trees, for instance, we shall observe that trees of the same kind vary considerably, according to the circumstances of soil, air, or position; yet we are able to decide at once whether they are oaks, elms, or poplars.

So with Shakspeare's characters: he shows us the life and principle of each being with organic regularity. The Boatswain, in the first scene of "The Tempest," when the bonds of reverence are thrown off as a sense of danger impresses all, gives a loose to his feelings, and thus pours forth his vulgar mind to the old Counsellor:—

"Hence! What care these roarers for the name of King? To cabin: silence! trouble us not."

Gonzalo replies—"Good; yet remember whom thou hast aboard." To which the Boatswain answers—"None that I more love than myself. You are a counsellor: if you can command these elements to silence, and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more; use your authority: if you cannot, give thanks that you have lived so long, and make yourself ready in your cabin for the mischance of the hour, if it so hap.—Cheerly, good hearts!—Out of our way, I say."

An ordinary dramatist would, after this speech, have represented Gonzalo as moralising, or saying something connected with the Boatswain's language; for ordinary

dramatists are not men of genius : they combine their ideas by association, or by logical affinity ; but the vital writer, who makes men on the stage what they are in nature, in a moment transports himself into the very being of each personage, and, instead of cutting out artificial puppets, he brings before us the men themselves. Therefore, Gonzalo soliloquises,—“ I have great comfort from this fellow : methinks, he hath no drowning mark upon him ; his complexion is perfect gallows. Stand fast, good fate, to his hanging ! make the rope of his destiny our cable, for our own doth little advantage. If he be not born to be hanged, our case is miserable.”

In this part of the scene we see the true sailor with his contempt of danger, and the old counsellor with his high feeling, who, instead of condescending to notice the words just addressed to him, turns off, meditating with himself, and drawing some comfort to his own mind, by trifling with the ill expression of the boatswain's face, founding upon it a hope of safety.

Shakspeare had pre-determined to make the plot of this play such as to involve a certain number of low characters, and at the beginning he pitched the note of the whole. The first scene was meant as a lively commencement of the story ; the reader is prepared for something that is to be developed, and in the next scene he brings forward Prospero and Miranda. How is this done ? By giving to his favourite character, Miranda, a sentence which at once expresses the violence and fury of the storm, such as it might appear to a witness on the land, and at the same time displays the tenderness of her feelings—the exquisite feelings of a female brought up in a desert, but with all the advantages of education, all that could be communicated by a wise and affectionate father. She possesses all the delicacy of innocence, yet with all the powers of her mind unweakened by the combats of life. Miranda exclaims :—

“ O ! I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer : a brave vessel,
Who had, no doubt, some noble creatures in her,
Dash'd all to pieces.”

The doubt here intimated could have occurred to no mind but to that of Miranda, who had been bred up in the

island with her father and a monster only : she did not know, as others do, what sort of creatures were in a ship ; others never would have introduced it as a conjecture. This shows, that while Shakspeare is displaying his vast excellence, he never fails to insert some touch or other, which is not merely characteristic of the particular person, but combines two things—the person, and the circumstances acting upon the person. She proceeds :—

“ O ! the cry did knock
Against my very heart. Poor souls ! they perish'd.
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth, or e'er
It should the good ship so have swallow'd, and
The fraughting souls within her.”

She still dwells upon that which was most wanting to the completeness of her nature—these fellow creatures from whom she appeared banished, with only one relict to keep them alive, not in her memory, but in her imagination.

Another proof of excellent judgment in the poet, for I am now principally adverting to that point, is to be found in the preparation of the reader for what is to follow. Prospero is introduced, first in his magic robe, which, with the assistance of his daughter, he lays aside, and we then know him to be a being possessed of supernatural powers. He then instructs Miranda in the story of their arrival in the island, and this is conducted in such a manner, that the reader never conjectures the technical use the poet has made of the relation, by informing the auditor of what it is necessary for him to know.

The next step is the warning by Prospero, that he means, for particular purposes, to lull his daughter to sleep ; and here he exhibits the earliest and mildest proof of magical power. In ordinary and vulgar plays we should have had some person brought upon the stage, whom nobody knows or cares anything about, to let the audience into the secret. Prospero having cast a sleep upon his daughter, by that sleep stops the narrative at the very moment when it was necessary to break it off, in order to excite curiosity, and yet to give the memory and understanding sufficient to carry on the progress of the history uninterruptedly.

Here I cannot help noticing a fine touch of Shakspeare's knowledge of human nature, and generally of the great

laws of the human mind : I mean Miranda's infant remembrance. Prospero asks her—

“ Canst thou remember
A time before we came unto this cell ?
I do not think thou canst, for then thou wast not
Out three years old.

Miranda answers,

“ Certainly, sir, I can.”

Prospero inquires,

“ By what ? by any other house or person ?
Of any thing the image tell me, that
Hath kept with thy remembrance.”

To which Miranda returns,

“ 'Tis far off ;
And rather like a dream than an assurance
That my remembrance warrants. Had I not
Four or five women once, that tended me ? ”

Act I., Scene 2.

This is exquisite ! In general, our remembrances of early life arise from vivid colours, especially if we have seen them in motion : for instance, persons when grown up will remember a bright green door, seen when they were quite young ; but Miranda, who was somewhat older, recollected four or five women who tended her. She might know men from her father, and her remembrance of the past might be worn out by the present object, but women she only knew by herself, by the contemplation of her own figure in the fountain, and she recalled to her mind what had been. It was not, that she had seen such and such grandees, or such and such peeresses, but she remembered to have seen something like the reflection of herself : it was not herself, and it brought back to her mind what she had seen most like herself.

In my opinion the picturesque power displayed by Shakespeare, of all the poets that ever lived, is only equalled, if equalled, by Milton and Dante. The presence of genius is not shown in elaborating a picture : we have had many specimens of this sort of work in modern poems, where all is so dutchified, if I may use the word, by the most minute touches, that the reader naturally asks why words, and not painting, are used ? I know a young lady of much taste, who observed, that in reading recent versified accounts of

voyages and travels, she, by a sort of instinct, cast her eyes on the opposite page, for coloured prints of what was so patiently and punctually described.

The power of poetry is, by a single word perhaps, to instil that energy into the mind, which compels the imagination to produce the picture. Prospero tells Miranda,

“ One midnight,
Fated to the purpose,¹ did Antonio open
The gates of Milan ; and i' the dead of darkness,
The ministers for the purpose hurried thence
Me, and thy crying self.”

Here, by introducing a single happy epithet, “ crying,” in the last line, a complete picture is presented to the mind, and in the production of such pictures the power of genius consists.

In reference to preparation, it will be observed that the storm, and all that precedes the tale, as well as the tale itself, serve to develope completely the main character of the drama, as well as the design of Prospero. The manner in which the heroine is charmed asleep fits us for what follows, goes beyond our ordinary belief, and gradually leads us to the appearance and disclosure of a being of the most fanciful and delicate texture, like Prospero, preternaturally gifted.

In this way the entrance of Ariel, if not absolutely forethought by the reader, was foreshewn by the writer : in addition, we may remark, that the moral feeling called forth by the sweet words of Miranda,

“ Alack, what trouble
Was I then to you ! ”

in which she considered only the sufferings and sorrows of her father, puts the reader in a frame of mind to exert his imagination in favour of an object so innocent and interesting. The poet makes him wish that, if supernatural agency were to be employed, it should be used for a being so young and lovely. “ The wish is father to the thought,” and

¹ Coleridge, of course, could only use the text of the day when he lectured ; but, since that period, many plausible, and some indisputable, changes have been introduced into it : one of them occurs in reference to the word “ purpose,” for which *practice* has been proposed as the true reading : the change is not absolutely necessary, but still we can entertain little doubt that “ purpose ” is a corruption, arising perhaps out of the similarity of the appearance of the words “ purpose ” and *practice* in hastily-written manuscript. The word “ purpose ” recurs in the very next line but one.—J. P. C.

Ariel is introduced. Here, what is called poetic faith is required and created, and our common notions of philosophy give way before it: this feeling may be said to be much stronger than historic faith, since for the exercise of poetic faith the mind is previously prepared. I make this remark, though somewhat digressive, in order to lead to a future subject of these lectures—the poems of Milton. When adverting to those, I shall have to explain farther the distinction between the two.

Many Scriptural poems have been written with so much of Scripture in them, that what is not Scripture appears to be not true, and like mingling lies with the most sacred revelations. Now Milton, on the other hand, has taken for his subject that one point of Scripture of which we have the mere fact recorded, and upon this he has most judiciously constructed his whole fable. So of Shakspeare's "King Lear": we have little historic evidence to guide or confine us, and the few facts handed down to us, and admirably employed by the poet, are sufficient, while we read, to put an end to all doubt as to the credibility of the story. It is idle to say that this or that incident is improbable, because history, as far as it goes, tells us that the fact was so and so. Four or five lines in the Bible include the whole that is said of Milton's story, and the Poet has called up that poetic faith, that conviction of the mind, which is necessary to make that seem true, which otherwise might have been deemed almost fabulous.

But to return to "The Tempest," and to the wondrous creation of Ariel. If a doubt could ever be entertained whether Shakspeare was a great poet, acting upon laws arising out of his own nature, and not without law, as has sometimes been idly asserted, that doubt must be removed by the character of Ariel. The very first words uttered by this being introduce the spirit, not as an angel, above man; not a gnome, or a fiend, below man; but while the poet gives him the faculties and the advantages of reason, he divests him of all moral character, not positively, it is true, but negatively. In air he lives, from air he derives his being, in air he acts; and all his colours and properties seem to have been obtained from the rainbow and the skies. There is nothing about Ariel that cannot be conceived to exist either at sun-rise or at sun-set: hence all that belongs to Ariel belongs to the delight the mind

is capable of receiving from the most lovely external appearances. His answers to Prospero are directly to the question, and nothing beyond; or where he expatiates, which is not unfrequently, it is to himself and upon his own delights, or upon the unnatural situation in which he is placed, though under a kindly power and to good ends.

Shakspeare has properly made Ariel's very first speech characteristic of him. After he has described the manner in which he had raised the storm and produced its harmless consequences, we find that Ariel is discontented—that he has been freed, it is true, from a cruel confinement, but still that he is bound to obey Prospero, and to execute any commands imposed upon him. We feel that such a state of bondage is almost unnatural to him, yet we see that it is delightful for him to be so employed.—It is as if we were to command one of the winds in a different direction to that which nature dictates, or one of the waves, now rising and now sinking, to recede before it bursts upon the shore: such is the feeling we experience, when we learn that a being like Ariel is commanded to fulfil any mortal behest.

When, however, Shakspeare contrasts the treatment of Ariel by Prospero with that of Sycorax, we are sensible that the liberated spirit ought to be grateful, and Ariel does feel and acknowledge the obligation; he immediately assumes the airy being, with a mind so elastically correspondent, that when once a feeling has passed from it, not a trace is left behind.

Is there anything in nature from which Shakspeare caught the idea of this delicate and delightful being, with such child-like simplicity, yet with such preternatural powers? He is neither born of heaven, nor of earth; but, as it were, between both, live a May-blossom kept suspended in air by the fanning breeze, which prevents it from falling to the ground, and only finally, and by compulsion, touching earth. This reluctance of the Sylph to be under the command even of Prospero is kept up through the whole play, and in the exercise of his admirable judgment Shakspeare has availed himself of it, in order to give Ariel an interest in the event, looking forward to that moment when he was to gain his last and only reward—simple and eternal liberty.

Another instance of admirable judgment and excellent

preparation is to be found in the creature contrasted with Ariel—Caliban ; who is described in such a manner by Prospero, as to lead us to expect the appearance of a foul, unnatural monster. He is not seen at once : his voice is heard ; this is the preparation ; he was too offensive to be seen first in all his deformity, and in nature we do not receive so much disgust from sound as from sight. After we have heard Caliban's voice he does not enter, until Ariel has entered like a water-nymph. All the strength of contrast is thus acquired without any of the shock of abruptness, or of that unpleasant sensation, which we experience when the object presented is in any way hateful to our vision.

The character of Caliban is wonderfully conceived : he is a sort of creature of the earth, as Ariel is a sort of creature of the air. He partakes of the qualities of the brute, but is distinguished from brutes in two ways :—by having mere understanding without moral reason ; and by not possessing the instincts which pertain to absolute animals. Still, Caliban is in some respects a noble being : the poet has raised him far above contempt : he is a man in the sense of the imagination : all the images he uses are drawn from nature, and are highly poetical ; they fit in with the images of Ariel. Caliban gives us images from the earth, Ariel images from the air. Caliban talks of the difficulty of finding fresh water, of the situation of morasses, and of other circumstances which even brute instinct, without reason, could comprehend. No mean figure is employed, no mean passion displayed, beyond animal passion, and repugnance to command.

The manner in which the lovers are introduced is equally wonderful, and it is the last point I shall now mention in reference to this, almost miraculous, drama. The same judgment is observable in every scene, still preparing, still inviting, and still gratifying, like a finished piece of music. I have omitted to notice one thing, and you must give me leave to advert to it before I proceed : I mean the conspiracy against the life of Alonzo. I want to shew you how well the poet prepares the feelings of the reader for this plot, which was to execute the most detestable of all crimes, and which, in another play, Shakspeare has called "the murder of sleep."

Antonio and Sebastian at first had no such intention :

it was suggested by the magical sleep cast on Alonzo and Gonzalo ; but they are previously introduced scoffing and scorning at what was said by others, without regard to age or situation—without any sense of admiration for the excellent truths they heard delivered, but giving themselves up entirely to the malignant and unsocial feeling, which induced them to listen to everything that was said, not for the sake of profiting by the learning and experience of others, but of hearing something that might gratify vanity and self-love, by making them believe that the person speaking was inferior to themselves.

This, let me remark, is one of the grand characteristics of a villain ; and it would not be so much a presentiment, as an anticipation of hell, for men to suppose that all mankind were as wicked as themselves, or might be so, if they were not too great fools. Pope, you are perhaps aware, objected to this conspiracy ; but in my mind, if it could be omitted, the play would lose a charm which nothing could supply.

Many, indeed innumerable, beautiful passages might be quoted from this play, independently of the astonishing scheme of its construction. Every body will call to mind the grandeur of the language of Prospero in that divine speech, where he takes leave of his magic art ; and were I to indulge myself by repetitions of the kind, I should descend from the character of a lecturer to that of a mere reciter. Before I terminate, I may particularly recall one short passage, which has fallen under the very severe, but inconsiderate, censure of Pope and Arbuthnot, who pronounce it a piece of the grossest bombast. Prospero thus addresses his daughter, directing her attention to Ferdinand :

“ The fringed curtains of thine eye advance,
And say what thou seest yond.”

Act I., Scene 2.

Taking these words as a periphrase of—“ Look what is coming yonder,” it certainly may to some appear to border on the ridiculous, and to fall under the rule I formerly laid down,—that whatever, without injury, can be translated into a foreign language in simple terms, ought to be in simple terms in the original language ; but it is to be borne in mind, that different modes of expression frequently arise

from difference of situation and education : a blackguard would use very different words, to express the same thing, to those a gentleman would employ, yet both would be natural and proper ; difference of feeling gives rise to difference of language : a gentleman speaks in polished terms, with due regard to his own rank and position, while a blackguard, a person little better than half a brute, speaks like half a brute, showing no respect for himself, nor for others.

But I am content to try the lines I have just quoted by the introduction to them ; and then, I think, you will admit, that nothing could be more fit and appropriate than such language. How does Prospero introduce them ? He has just told Miranda a wonderful story, which deeply affected her, and filled her with surprise and astonishment, and for his own purposes he afterwards lulls her to sleep. When she awakes, Shakspeare has made her wholly inattentive to the present, but wrapped up in the past. An actress, who understands the character of Miranda, would have her eyes cast down, and her eyelids almost covering them, while she was, as it were, living in her dream. At this moment Prospero sees Ferdinand, and wishes to point him out to his daughter, not only with great, but with scenic solemnity, he standing before her, and before the spectator, in the dignified character of a great magician. Something was to appear to Miranda on the sudden, and as unexpectedly as if the hero of a drama were to be on the stage at the instant when the curtain is elevated. It is under such circumstances that Prospero says, in a tone calculated at once to arouse his daughter's attention,

“ The fringed curtains of thine eye advance,
And say what thou seest yond.”

Turning from the sight of Ferdinand to his thoughtful daughter, his attention was first struck by the downcast appearance of her eyes and eyelids ; and, in my humble opinion, the solemnity of the phraseology assigned to Prospero is completely in character, recollecting his preternatural capacity, in which the most familiar objects in nature present themselves in a mysterious point of view. It is much easier to find fault with a writer by reference to former notions and experience, than to sit down and read him, recollecting his purpose, connecting one feeling with

another, and judging of his words and phrases, in proportion as they convey the sentiments of the persons represented.

Of Miranda we may say, that she possesses in herself all the ideal beauties that could be imagined by the greatest poet of any age or country ; but it is not my purpose now, so much to point out the high poetic powers of Shakspeare, as to illustrate his exquisite judgment, and it is solely with this design that I have noticed a passage with which, it seems to me, some critics, and those among the best, have been unreasonably dissatisfied. If Shakspeare be the wonder of the ignorant, he is, and ought to be, much more the wonder of the learned : not only from profundity of thought, but from his astonishing and intuitive knowledge of what man must be at all times, and under all circumstances, he is rather to be looked upon as a prophet than as a poet. Yet, with all these unbounded powers, with all this might and majesty of genius, he makes us feel as if he were unconscious of himself, and of his high destiny, disguising the half god in the simplicity of a child.

END OF THE NINTH LECTURE.

THE TWELFTH LECTURE.

IN the last lecture I endeavoured to point out in Shakspeare those characters in which pride of intellect, without moral feeling, is supposed to be the ruling impulse, such as Iago, Richard III., and even Falstaff. In Richard III., ambition is, as it were, the channel in which this impulse directs itself ; the character is drawn with the greatest fulness and perfection ; and the poet has not only given us that character, grown up and completed, but he has shown us its very source and generation. The inferiority of his person made the hero seek consolation and compensation in the superiority of his intellect ; he thus endeavoured to counterbalance his deficiency. This striking feature is pourtrayed most admirably by Shakspeare, who represents Richard bringing forward his very defects and deformities as matters of boast. It was the same pride of intellect, or the assumption of it, that made John Wilkes vaunt that, although he was so ugly, he only wanted, with any lady,

ten minutes' start of the handsomest man in England. This certainly was a high compliment to himself; but a higher to the female sex, on the supposition that Wilkes possessed this superiority of intellect, and relied upon it for making a favourable impression, because ladies would know how to estimate his advantages.

I will now proceed to offer some remarks upon the tragedy of "Richard II.," on account of its not very apparent, but still intimate, connection with "Richard III." As, in the last, Shakspeare has painted a man where ambition is the channel in which the ruling impulse runs, so, in the first, he has given us a character, under the name of Bolingbroke, or Henry IV., where ambition itself, conjoined unquestionably with great talents, is the ruling impulse. In Richard III. the pride of intellect makes use of ambition as its means; in Bolingbroke the gratification of ambition is the end, and talents are the means.

One main object of these lectures is to point out the superiority of Shakspeare to other dramatists, and no superiority can be more striking, than that this wonderful poet could take two characters, which at first sight seem so much alike, and yet, when carefully and minutely examined, are so totally distinct.

The popularity of "Richard II." is owing, in a great measure, to the masterly delineation of the principal character; but were there no other ground for admiring it, it would deserve the highest applause, from the fact that it contains the most magnificent, and, at the same time, the truest eulogium of our native country that the English language can boast, or which can be produced from any other tongue, not excepting the proud claims of Greece and Rome. When I feel, that upon the morality of Britain depends the safety of Britain, and that her morality is supported and illustrated by our national feeling, I cannot read these grand lines without joy and triumph. Let it be remembered, that while this country is proudly pre-eminent in morals, her enemy has only maintained his station by superiority in mechanical appliances. Many of those who hear me will, no doubt, anticipate the passage I refer to, and it runs as follows:—

"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 house,
Against the envy of less happier lands ;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Feared by their breed, and famous by their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry,
As is the Sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's son :
This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world,
Is now leas'd out, I die pronouncing it,
Like to a tenement, or pelting farm.
England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
With inky blots, and rotten parchment bonds."

Act II., Scene 1.

Every motive to patriotism, every cause producing it, is here collected, without one of those cold abstractions so frequently substituted by modern poets. If this passage were recited in a theatre with due energy and understanding, with a proper knowledge of the words, and a fit expression of their meaning, every man would retire from it secure in his country's freedom, if secure in his own constant virtue.

The principal personages in this tragedy are Richard II., Bolingbroke, and York. I will speak of the last first, although it is the least important ; but the keeping of all is most admirable. York is a man of no strong powers of mind, but of earnest wishes to do right, contented in himself alone, if he have acted well : he points out to Richard the effects of his thoughtless extravagance, and the dangers by which he is encompassed, but having done so, he is satisfied ; there is no after action on his part ; he does nothing ; he remains passive. When old Gaunt is dying, York takes care to give his own opinion to the King, and that done he retires, as it were, into himself.

It has been stated, from the first, that one of my purposes in these lectures is, to meet and refute popular objections to particular points in the works of our great dramatic poet ; and I cannot help observing here upon the beauty,

and true force of nature, with which conceits, as they are called, and sometimes even puns, are introduced. What has been the reigning fault of an age must, at one time or another, have referred to something beautiful in the human mind; and, however conceits may have been misapplied, however they may have been disadvantageously multiplied, we should recollect that there never was an abuse of anything, but it previously has had its use. Gaunt, on his death-bed, sends for the young King, and Richard, entering, insolently and unfeelingly says to him :

“ What, comfort, man ! how is't with aged Gaunt ? ”

Act II., Scene 1.

and Gaunt replies :

“ O, how that name befits my composition !
Old Gaunt, indeed ; and gaunt in being old :
Within me grief hath kept a tedious fast,
And who abstains from meat, that is not gaunt ?
For sleeping England long time have I watched ;
Watching breeds leanness, leanness is all gaunt :
The pleasure that some fathers feed upon
Is my strict fast, I mean my children's looks ;
And therein fasting, thou hast made me gaunt,
Gaunt am I for the grave, gaunt as a grave,
Whose hollow womb inherits nought but bones.”

Richard inquires,

“ Can sick men play so nicely with their names ? ”

To which Gaunt answers, giving the true justification of conceits :

“ No ; misery makes sport to mock itself :
Since thou dost seek to kill my name in me,
I mock my name, great king, to flatter thee.”

He that knows the state of the human mind in deep passion must know, that it approaches to that condition of madness, which is not absolute frenzy or delirium, but which models all things to one reigning idea ; still it strays from the main subject of complaint, and still it returns to it, by a sort of irresistible impulse. Abruptness of thought, under such circumstances, is true to nature, and no man was more sensible of it than Shakspeare. In a modern poem a mad mother thus complains :

“ The breeze I see is in yon tree :
It comes to cool my babe and me.”

This is an instance of the abruptness of thought, so natural to the excitement and agony of grief ; and if it be admired in images, can we say that it is unnatural in words, which are, as it were, a part of our life, of our very existence ? In the Scriptures themselves these plays upon words are to be found, as well as in the best works of the ancients, and in the most delightful parts of Shakspeare ; and because this additional grace, not well understood, has in some instances been converted into a deformity—because it has been forced into places where it is evidently improper and unnatural, are we therefore to include the whole application of it in one general condemnation ? When it seems objectionable, when it excites a feeling contrary to the situation, when it perhaps disgusts, it is our business to enquire whether the conceit has been rightly or wrongly used—whether it is in a right or in a wrong place ?

In order to decide this point, it is obviously necessary to consider the state of mind, and the degree of passion, of the person using this play upon words. Resort to this grace may, in some cases, deserve censure, not because it is a play upon words, but because it is a play upon words in a wrong place, and at a wrong time. What is right in one state of mind is wrong in another, and much more depends upon that, than upon the conceit (so to call it) itself. I feel the importance of these remarks strongly, because the greater part of the abuse, I might say filth, thrown out and heaped upon Shakspeare, has originated in want of consideration. Dr. Johnson asserts that Shakspeare loses the world for a toy, and can no more withstand a pun, or a play upon words, than his Antony could resist Cleopatra. Certain it is, that Shakspeare gained more admiration in his day, and long afterwards, by the use of speech in this way, than modern writers have acquired by the abandonment of the practice : the latter, in adhering to, what they have been pleased to call, the rules of art, have sacrificed nature.

Having said thus much on the, often falsely supposed, blemishes of our poet—blemishes which are said to prevail in “ Richard II ” especially,—I will now advert to the character of the King. He is represented as a man not deficient in immediate courage, which displays itself at his assassination ; or in powers of mind, as appears by the foresight he exhibits throughout the play ; still, he is weak, variable, and womanish, and possesses feelings, which,

amiable in a female, are misplaced in a man, and altogether unfit for a king. In prosperity he is insolent and presumptuous, and in adversity, if we are to believe Dr. Johnson, he is humane and pious. I cannot admit the latter epithet, because I perceive the utmost consistency of character in Richard : what he was at first, he is at last, excepting as far as he yields to circumstances : what he shewed himself at the commencement of the play, he shews himself at the end of it. Dr. Johnson assigns to him rather the virtue of a confessor than that of a king.

True it is, that he may be said to be overwhelmed by the earliest misfortune that befalls him ; but, so far from his feelings or disposition being changed or subdued, the very first glimpse of the returning sunshine of hope reanimates his spirits, and exalts him to as strange and unbecoming a degree of elevation, as he was before sunk in mental depression : the mention of those in his misfortunes, who had contributed to his downfall, but who had before been his nearest friends and favourites, calls forth from him expressions of the bitterest hatred and revenge. Thus, where Richard asks :

“ Where is the Earl of Wiltshire ? Where is Bagot ?
 What is become of Bushy ? Where is Green ?
 That they have let the dangerous enemy
 Measure our confines with such peaceful steps ?
 If we prevail, their heads shall pay for it,
 I warrant they have made peace with Bolingbroke.”

Act III., Scene 2.

Scroop answers :

“ Peace have they made with him, indeed, my lord.”

Upon which Richard, without hearing more, breaks out :

“ O villains ! vipers, damn'd without redemption !
 Dogs, easily won to fawn on any man !
 Snakes, in my heart-blood warm'd, that sting my heart !
 Three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas !
 Would they make peace ? terrible hell make war
 Upon their spotted souls for this offence ! ”

Scroop observes upon this change, and tells the King how they had made their peace :

“ Sweet love, I see, changing his property
 Turns to the sourest and most deadly hate.
 Again uncurse their souls : their peace is made
 With heads and not with hands : those whom you curse

Have felt the worst of death's destroying wound,
And lie full low, grav'd in the hollow ground."

Richard receiving at first an equivocal answer,—“Peace have they made with him, indeed, my lord,”—takes it in the worst sense: his promptness to suspect those who had been his friends turns his love to hate, and calls forth the most tremendous execrations.

From the beginning to the end of the play he pours out all the peculiarities and powers of his mind: he catches at new hope, and seeks new friends, is disappointed, despairs, and at length makes a merit of his resignation. He scatters himself into a multitude of images, and in conclusion endeavours to shelter himself from that which is around him by a cloud of his own thoughts. Throughout his whole career may be noticed the most rapid transitions—from the highest insolence to the lowest humility—from hope to despair, from the extravagance of love to the agonies of resentment, and from pretended resignation to the bitterest reproaches. The whole is joined with the utmost richness and copiousness of thought, and were there an actor capable of representing Richard, the part would delight us more than any other of Shakspeare's masterpieces,—with, perhaps, the single exception of King Lear. I know of no character drawn by our great poet with such unequalled skill as that of Richard II.

Next we come to Henry Bolingbroke, the rival of Richard II. He appears as a man of dauntless courage, and of ambition equal to that of Richard III.; but, as I have stated, the difference between the two is most admirably conceived and preserved. In Richard III. all that surrounds him is only dear as it feeds his inward sense of superiority: he is no vulgar tyrant—no Nero or Caligula: he has always an end in view, and vast fertility of means to accomplish that end. On the other hand, in Bolingbroke we find a man who in the outset has been sorely injured: then, we see him encouraged by the grievances of his country, and by the strange mismanagement of the government, yet at the same time scarcely daring to look at his own views, or to acknowledge them as designs. He comes home under the pretence of claiming his dukedom, and he professes that to be his object almost to the last; but, at the last, he avows his purpose to its full extent, of which he was himself unconscious in the earlier stages.

This is proved by so many passages, that I will only select one of them ; and I take it the rather, because out of the many octavo volumes of text and notes, the page on which it occurs is, I believe, the only one left naked by the commentators. It is where Bolingbroke approaches the castle in which the unfortunate king has taken shelter : York is in Bolingbroke's company—the same York who is still contented with speaking the truth, but doing nothing for the sake of the truth,—drawing back after he has spoken and becoming merely passive when he ought to display activity. Northumberland says,

“ The news is very fair and good, my lord :
Richard not far from hence hath hid his head.”

Act III., Scene 3.

York rebukes him thus :

“ It would beseem the Lord Northumberland
To say King Richard :—Alack, the heavy day.
When such a sacred king should hide his head ! ”

Northumberland replies :

“ Your grace mistakes me : only to be brief
Left I his title out.”¹

To which York rejoins :

“ The time hath been,
Would you have been so brief with him, he would
Have been so brief with you, to shorten you,
For taking so the head, your whole head's length.”

Bolingbroke observes,

“ Mistake not, uncle, farther than you should ”

And York answers, with a play upon the words “ take ” and “ mistake ” :

“ Take not, good cousin, farther than you should,
Lest you mistake. The heavens are o'er our heads.”

Here, give me leave to remark in passing, that the play upon words is perfectly natural, and quite in character : the answer is in unison with the tone of passion, and seems connected with some phrase then in popular use.² Bolingbroke tells York :

¹ So Coleridge read the passage, his ear requiring the insertion of *me*, which is one of the emendations in the corrected folio, 1652, discovered many years afterwards.—J. P. C.

² Nicholas Breton wrote a “ Dialogue between the Taker and Mistaker,” but the earliest known edition is dated 1603.—J. P. C.

"I know it, uncle, and oppose not myself
Against their will."

Just afterwards, Bolingbroke thus addresses himself to Northumberland :

"Noble lord,
Go to the rude ribs of that ancient castle ;
Through brazen trumpet send the breath of parle
Into his ruin'd ears, and thus deliver."

Here, in the phrase "into his ruin'd ears," I have no doubt that Shakspeare purposely used the personal pronoun, "his," to shew, that although Bolingbroke was only speaking of the castle, his thoughts dwelt on the king. In Milton the pronoun "her" is employed, in relation to "form," in a manner somewhat similar. Bolingbroke had an equivocation in his mind, and was thinking of the king, while speaking of the castle. He goes on to tell Northumberland what to say, beginning,

"Henry Bolingbroke,"

which is almost the only instance in which a name forms the whole line ; Shakspeare meant it to convey Bolingbroke's opinion of his own importance :—

"Henry Bolingbroke
On both his knees doth kiss King Richard's hand,
And sends allegiance and true faith of heart
To his most royal person ; hither come
Even at his feet to lay my arms and power,
Provided that, my banishment repealed,
And lands restor'd again, be freely granted.
If not, I'll use th' advantage of my power,
And lay the summer's dust with showers of blood,
Rain'd from the wounds of slaughter'd Englishmen."

At this point Bolingbroke seems to have been checked by the eye of York, and thus proceeds in consequence :

"The which, how far off from the mind of Bolingbroke
It is, such crimson tempest should bedrench
The fresh green lap of fair King Richard's land,
My stooping duty tenderly shall show."

He passes suddenly from insolence to humility, owing to the silent reproof he received from his uncle. This change of tone would not have taken place, had Bolingbroke been allowed to proceed according to the natural bent of his own mind, and the flow of the subject. Let me direct

attention to the subsequent lines, for the same reason ; they are part of the same speech :

“ Let’s march without the noise of threat’ning drum,
That from the castle’s tatter’d battlements
Our fair appointments may be well perused.
Methinks, King Richard and myself should meet
With no less terror than the elements
Of fire and water, when their thundering shock
At meeting tears the cloudy cheeks of heaven.”

Having proceeded thus far with the exaggeration of his own importance, York again checks him, and Bolingbroke adds, in a very different strain,

“ He be the fire, I’ll be the yielding water :
The rage be his, while on the earth I rain
My waters ; on the earth, and not on him.”

I have thus adverted to the three great personages in this drama, Richard, Bolingbroke, and York ; and of the whole play it may be asserted, that with the exception of some of the last scenes (though they have exquisite beauty) Shakspeare seems to have risen to the summit of excellence in the delineation and preservation of character.

We will now pass to “ Hamlet,” in order to obviate some of the general prejudices against the author, in reference to the character of the hero. Much has been objected to, which ought to have been praised, and many beauties of the highest kind have been neglected, because they are somewhat hidden.

The first question we should ask ourselves is—What did Shakspeare mean when he drew the character of Hamlet ? He never wrote any thing without design, and what was his design when he sat down to produce this tragedy ? My belief is, that he always regarded his story, before he began to write, much in the same light as a painter regards his canvas, before he begins to paint—as a mere vehicle for his thoughts—as the ground upon which he was to work. What then was the point to which Shakspeare directed himself in Hamlet ? He intended to pourtray a person, in whose view the external world, and all its incidents and objects, were comparatively dim, and of no interest in themselves, and which began to interest only, when they were reflected in the mirror of his mind. Hamlet beheld external things in the same way that a man of vivid

imagination, who shuts his eyes, sees what has previously made an impression on his organs.

The poet places him in the most stimulating circumstances that a human being can be placed in. He is the heir apparent of a throne ; his father dies suspiciously ; his mother excludes her son from his throne by marrying his uncle. This is not enough ; but the Ghost of the murdered father is introduced, to assure the son that he was put to death by his own brother. What is the effect upon the son ?—instant action and pursuit of revenge ? No : endless reasoning and hesitating—constant urging and solicitation of the mind to act, and as constant an escape from action ; ceaseless reproaches of himself for sloth and negligence, while the whole energy of his resolution evaporates in these reproaches. This, too, not from cowardice, for he is drawn as one of the bravest of his time—not from want of forethought or slowness of apprehension, for he sees through the very souls of all who surround him, but merely from that aversion to action, which prevails among such as have a world in themselves.

How admirable, too, is the judgment of the poet ! Hamlet's own disordered fancy has not conjured up the spirit of his father ; it has been seen by others : he is prepared by them to witness its re-appearance, and when he does see it, Hamlet is not brought forward as having long brooded on the subject. The moment before the Ghost enters, Hamlet speaks of other matters : he mentions the coldness of the night, and observes that he has not heard the clock strike, adding, in reference to the custom of drinking, that it is

“ More honour'd in the breach than the observance.”

Act I., Scene 4.

Owing to the tranquil state of his mind, he indulges in some moral reflections. Afterwards, the Ghost suddenly enters.

“ *Hor.*

Look, my lord ! it comes.

Ham. Angels and ministers of grace defend us ! ”

The same thing occurs in “ *Macbeth* ” : in the dagger-scene, the moment before the hero sees it, he has his mind applied to some indifferent matters ; “ Go, tell thy mistress,” etc. Thus, in both cases, the preternatural appearance has all the effect of abruptness, and the reader

is totally divested of the notion, that the figure is a vision of a highly wrought imagination.

Here Shakspeare adapts himself so admirably to the situation—in other words, so puts himself into it—that, though poetry, his language is the very language of nature. No terms, associated with such feelings, can occur to us so proper as those which he has employed, especially on the highest, the most august, and the most awful subjects that can interest a human being in this sentient world. That this is no mere fancy, I can undertake to establish from hundreds, I might say thousands, of passages. No character he has drawn, in the whole list of his plays, could so well and fitly express himself, as in the language Shakspeare has put into his mouth.

There is no indecision about Hamlet, as far as his own sense of duty is concerned ; he knows well what he ought to do, and over and over again he makes up his mind to do it. The moment the players, and the two spies set upon him, have withdrawn, of whom he takes leave with a line so expressive of his contempt,

“ Ay so ; good bye you.—Now I am alone,”

he breaks out into a delirium of rage against himself for neglecting to perform the solemn duty he had undertaken, and contrasts the factitious and artificial display of feeling by the player with his own apparent indifference ;

“ What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her ? ”

Yet the player did weep for her, and was in an agony of grief at her sufferings, while Hamlet is unable to rouse himself to action, in order that he may perform the command of his father, who had come from the grave to incite him to revenge :—

“ This is most brave !
That I, the son of a dear father murder’d,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a cursing like a very drab,
A scullion.”

Act II., Scene 2.

It is the same feeling, the same conviction of what is his duty, that makes Hamlet exclaim in a subsequent part of the tragedy :

"How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
If his chief good, and market of his time,
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more. * * *

————— I do not know

Why yet I live to say—'this thing's to do,'
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do't."

Act IV., Scene 4.

Yet with all this strong conviction of duty, and with all this resolution arising out of strong conviction, nothing is done. This admirable and consistent character, deeply acquainted with his own feelings, painting them with such wonderful power and accuracy, and firmly persuaded that a moment ought not to be lost in executing the solemn charge committed to him, still yields to the same retiring from reality, which is the result of having, what we express by the terms, a world within himself.

Such a mind as Hamlet's is near akin to madness. Dryden has somewhere said,

"Great wit to madness nearly is allied,"

and he was right; for he means by "wit" that greatness of genius, which led Hamlet to a perfect knowledge of his own character, which, with all strength of motive, was so weak as to be unable to carry into act his own most obvious duty.

With all this he has a sense of imperfectness, which becomes apparent when he is moralising on the skull in the churchyard. Something is wanting to his completeness—something is deficient which remains to be supplied, and he is therefore described as attached to Ophelia. His madness is assumed, when he finds that witnesses have been placed behind the arras to listen to what passes, and when the heroine has been thrown in his way as a decoy.

Another objection has been taken by Dr. Johnson, and Shakspeare has been taxed very severely. I refer to the scene where Hamlet enters and finds his uncle praying, and refuses to take his life, excepting when he is in the height of his iniquity. To assail him at such a moment of confession and repentance, Hamlet declares,

"Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge."

Act III., Scene 4.

He therefore forbears, and postpones his uncle's death, until he can catch him in some act

“ That has no relish of salvation in’t.”

This conduct, and this sentiment, Dr. Johnson has pronounced to be so atrocious and horrible, as to be unfit to be put into the mouth of a human being.¹ The fact, however, is that Dr. Johnson did not understand the character of Hamlet, and censured accordingly: the determination to allow the guilty King to escape at such a moment is only part of the indecision and irresoluteness of the hero. Hamlet seizes hold of a pretext for not acting, when he might have acted so instantly and effectually: therefore, he again defers the revenge he was bound to seek, and declares his determination to accomplish it at some time,

“ When he is drunk, asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th’ incestuous pleasures of his bed.”

This, allow me to impress upon you most emphatically, was merely the excuse Hamlet made to himself for not taking advantage of this particular and favourable moment for doing justice upon his guilty uncle, at the urgent instance of the spirit of his father.

Dr. Johnson farther states, that in the voyage to England, Shakspeare merely follows the novel as he found it, as if the poet had no other reason for adhering to his original; but Shakspeare never followed a novel, because he found such and such an incident in it, but because he saw that the story, as he read it, contributed to enforce, or to explain some great truth inherent in human nature. He never could lack invention to alter or improve a popular narrative; but he did not wantonly vary from it, when he knew that, as it was related, it would so well apply to his own great purpose. He saw at once how consistent it was with the character of Hamlet, that after still resolving, and still deferring, still determining to execute, and still postponing execution, he should finally, in the infirmity of his disposition, give himself up to his destiny, and hopelessly place himself in the power, and at the mercy of his enemies.

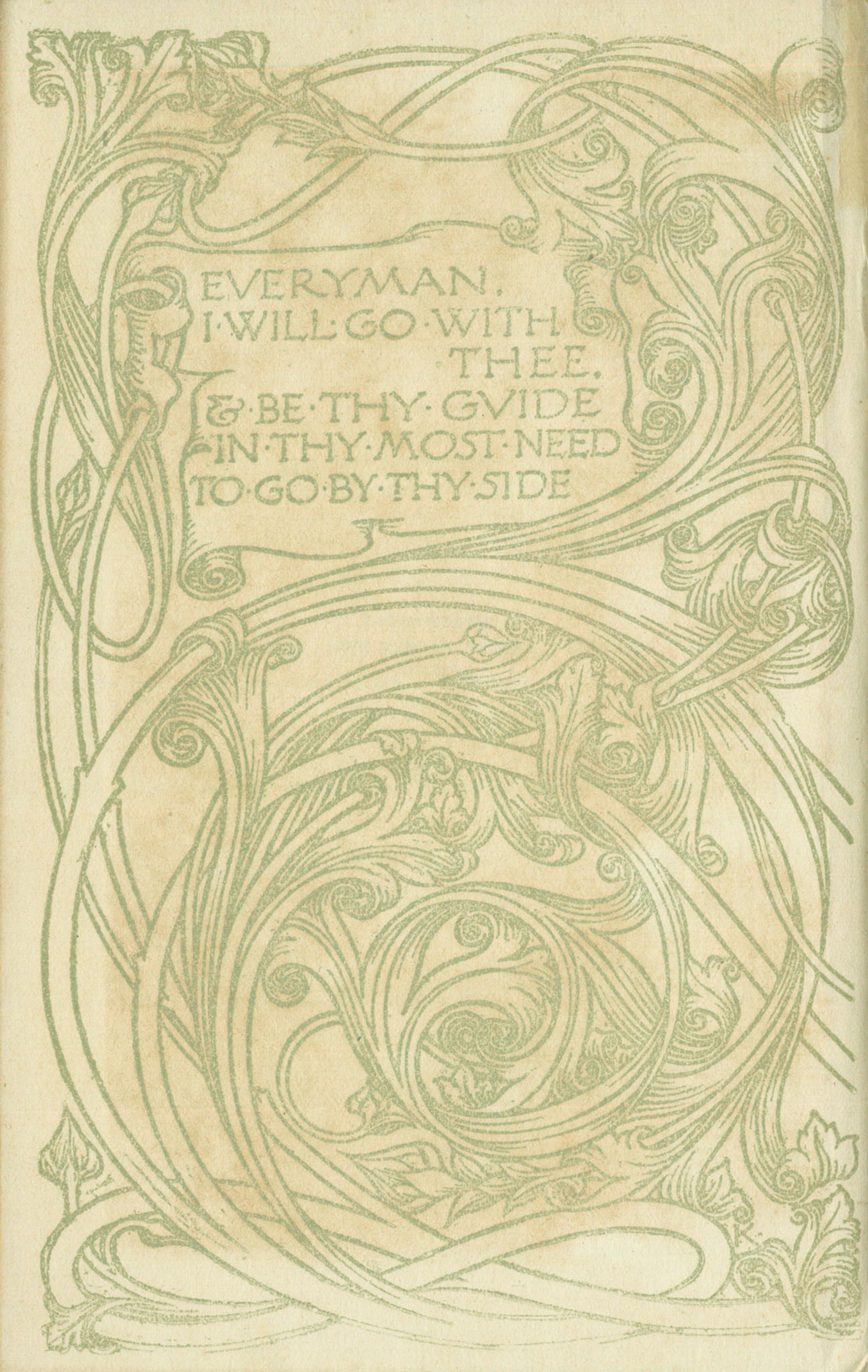
Even after the scene with Osrick, we see Hamlet still indulging in reflection, and hardly thinking of the task he has just undertaken: he is all dispatch and resolution, as far as words and present intentions are concerned, but all hesitation and irresolution, when called upon to carry his

¹ See Malone's Shakspeare by Boswell, vii., 382, for Johnson's note upon this part of the scene.—J. P. C.

words and intentions into effect ; so that, resolving to do everything, he does nothing. He is full of purpose, but void of that quality of mind which accomplishes purpose.

Anything finer than this conception, and working out of a great character, is merely impossible. Shakspeare wished to impress upon us the truth, that action is the chief end of existence—that no faculties of intellect, however brilliant, can be considered valuable, or indeed otherwise than as misfortunes, if they withdraw us from, or render us repugnant to action, and lead us to think and think of doing, until the time has elapsed when we can do anything effectually. In enforcing this moral truth, Shakspeare has shown the fulness and force of his powers : all that is amiable and excellent in nature is combined in Hamlet, with the exception of one quality. He is a man living in meditation, called upon to act by every motive human and divine, but the great object of his life is defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve.

END OF THE TWELFTH LECTURE.



EVERYMAN.
I WILL GO WITH
THEE.
& BE THY GVIDE
IN THY MOST NEED
TO GO BY THY SIDE



RKC

1905

