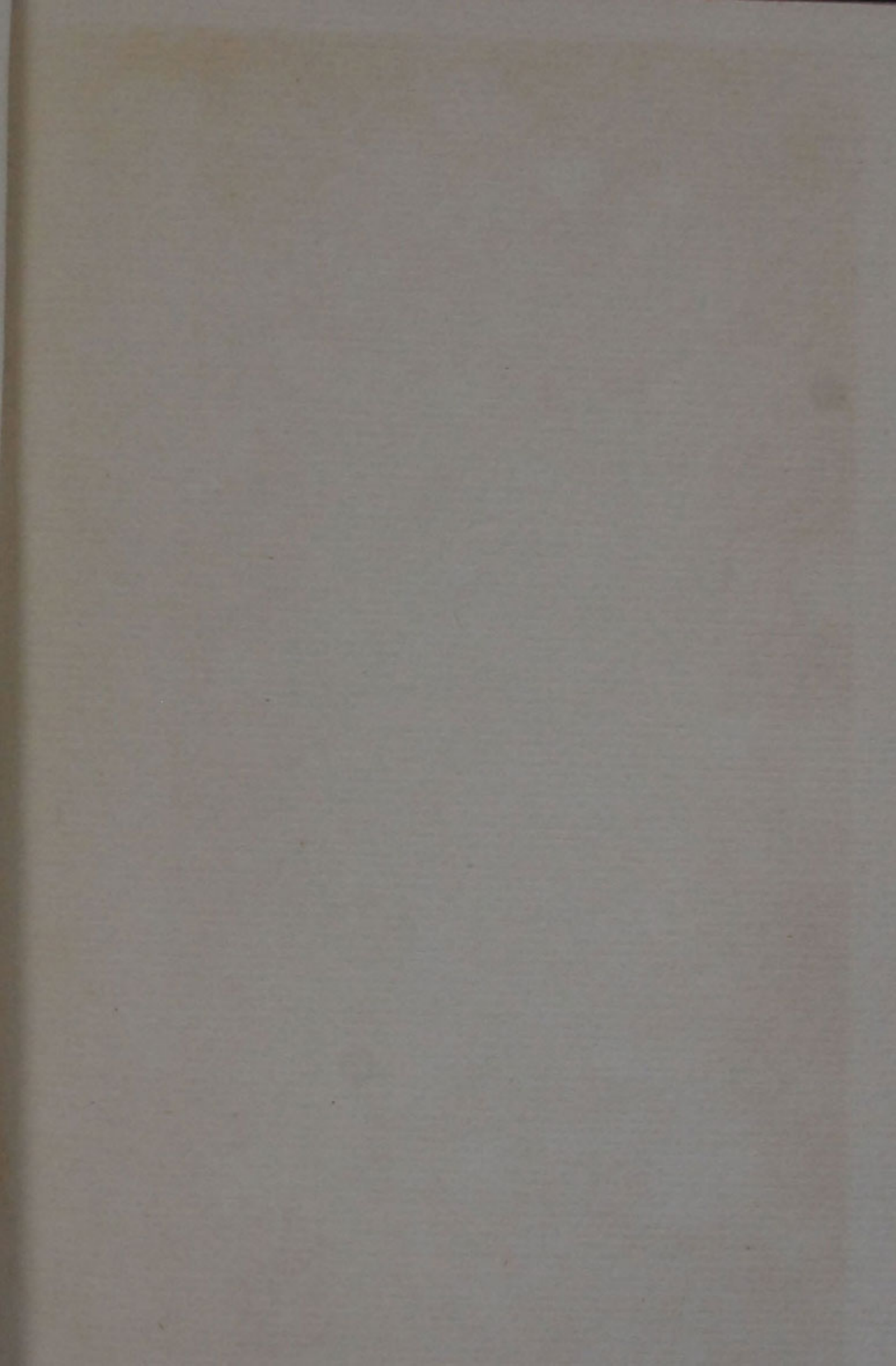

"HAMLET" ONCE MORE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Croce as Shakespearean Critic.
The Canon of Shakespeare (Part I).
The Problem of "Hamlet."
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Shakespeare and Chapman:
A Thesis of Chapman's Authorship of "A Lover's Complaint," and his origination of "Timon of Athens." With Indications of Further Problems.
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IN PREPARATION

The Shakespeare Canon. Part II.
The Authorship of "Titus Andronicus":
An Introduction to the Study of the Canon of Shakespeare.

"HAMLET" ONCE MORE

BY

J. M. ROBERTSON

LONDON
RICHARD COBDEN-SANDERSON
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PREFACE

PERHAPS the most necessary thing to say by way of preface to this book is that the documentary solution of the HAMLET problem which it posits anew, as against the various "subjective" solutions down to the latest, was in substance advanced and effectively developed in the work on "The Genesis of HAMLET" by the American Professor Charlton Miner Lewis, of Yale University, published in 1907 (New York: Holt). Of that work I had heard nothing when, in 1919, I published "The Problem of HAMLET"; and an American reviewer of that has recently remarked that there I "strangely" omit to mention Professor Lewis's book. As I had never seen or heard of it, the fact is no more strange than Professor Lewis's failure to mention either my brochure of 1885 on "The Upshot of HAMLET," or my paper entitled "Is HAMLET a Consistent Creation?" in the FREE REVIEW of July 1895; or the paper of Sir G. H. Radford on "The Sources of HAMLET" in his SHYLOCK AND OTHERS (1894), in which the compulsion laid on Shakespeare by the old play—already touched

upon by Halliwell-Phillipps in 1879—is definitely posited. The explanation in both cases is the same. Professor Lewis's book, so far as I can discover, was never published in England; and during the past year I have sought in vain to procure a copy from the States. Only after the present volume was written, typed, many times revised, and ready for the press did I get at "The Genesis of HAMLET" in the British Museum. And Professor Lewis, I am certain, knew no more of my early essays, which broach his theory and mine, than I knew of his book in 1919. I should have eagerly welcomed it had I ever heard of it.

As we stand at the same critical point of view, and proffer the same general solution, I am not in the least surprised that in the GENESIS and in the present volume Professor Lewis and I often express ourselves in nearly identical terms. The fact, *pro tanto*, tells for the validity of the positions and the inferences. And at the few points at which we diverge, I am full of hope that a critical consensus may yet be reached. The main divergence, I think, is over the disappearance from Shakespeare's play of a detail which in Kyd's foundation play adequately explained Hamlet's delay in compassing his revenge. We agree that we are entitled to infer from the old German BRUDERMORD that in Kyd's play the hero twice pointed to his uncle as "constantly surrounded by his guards"; and that there was thus in the

foundation play no such "mystery" as attaches to Hamlet's self-avowed delay in Shakespeare's. Professor Lewis, putting the question, Why is it only in the German Hamlet that we hear of the king's bodyguard ?, writes (p. 81) :

> "The obvious answer is that Shakespeare *suppressed* all the evidence of the difficulty of the task, chiefly because that difficulty did not interest him. He cared little for adventure. . . . Accordingly Shakespeare instinctively slighted things that to Kyd were essential. In Kyd, as in Belleforest, Hamlet *could* not[1] kill Claudius; while in Shakespeare the only question of any interest was whether Hamlet *would*."

As will be seen below, in Chapter V, Mr. Clutton-Brock, over the same issue, contends that in dropping the detail and the mention of the guards Shakespeare must have been deliberately altering the action of Kyd's play at a vital point, with a clear purpose ; and here Professor Lewis is *ad hoc* at one with him. I am none the less convinced that in the light of Professor Lewis's own general thesis and mine there is to be inferred, *not* a deliberate alteration by Shakespeare with a plan to shape a newly hesitating Hamlet, but a simple dropping of the barbaric setting of the court of Claudius and the substitution of an Elizabethan court-setting, *which was probably carried out before Shakespeare handled the play*. Even in Kyd's play

[1] That is, at the outset. In all, he *does*.

(whether in its first or in a revised form[1]), as discernible from the archaic portions of the First Quarto, the court atmosphere and aspect had become rather Elizabethan than barbaric; and my own conclusion is that by 1594 there were no "guards" left, and hence no mention of them. Thus, as I had previously put it, the play reached Shakespeare with a character of unexplained delay partly stamped upon it, whence that procedure of self-accusing soliloquy whereby Shakespeare created the problem over which criticism has been struggling more or less continuously for a hundred and fifty years.

If Professor Lewis should see fit to modify his argument here—as I think is essential to the consistent formulation of his own case—the argument, I think, would be found so adequate to the whole problem that the naturalistic solution, as against all the "subjective" (including the unnaturalistic) solutions, would sooner or later carry the day. Professor Lewis's book, I gather from Professor Stoll's, has been as much blamed as praised in the States; and this is what was to be expected. Fallacious "subjective" solutions, ably expounded, have held the ground since Mackenzie

[1] Professor Stoll puts the interesting view that the original HAMLET was prior to THE SPANISH TRAGEDY. Over that possibility I have often speculated; but as regards the *existing* pre-Shakespearean verse in Q 1, one is bound to avow that the double-endings date it later than 1590; and as to the prior work, there is no evidence save Nashe's attack of 1589.

and Goethe, that of Coleridge and Schlegel having coloured the bulk of English criticism down to that of Professor Trench; and for such solutions men fight as they do for dogmas. But there was never any general critical agreement; and even the great advance in scientific method and temper made by Professor Bradley left the dispute going on very much as before. Yet the right critical note had been sounded as early as 1736, by Hanmer (or another: there is no decisive evidence, though the ascription to him of the REMARKS of 1736 was general in the eighteenth century, and was probably correct); and in 1877 Halliwell-Phillipps indicated the true line of solution, though he did not develop it.

Between the treatises of Professor Lewis and Professor Stoll, however, the sound solution has inevitably gained ground in America; and, I would venture to add, would gain further ground if Professor Stoll, instead of chiming with the conventional view that TITUS ANDRONICUS is an imitative work by Shakespeare, would reconsider that and other early plays in the light of the internal evidence of style and diction which reveals them as the work of other men, slightly adapted by the young Shakespeare. The Canon, I would once more urge, must be revised all round; and MEASURE FOR MEASURE challenges criticism no less than does HAMLET.

But the HAMLET problem stands forth for most

readers by itself ; and it is to be hoped that when the solution put by Professor Lewis is accepted in such a " safe " handbook as the " Shakespeare " contributed by Professor Raymond M. Alden, of Stanford University, to the American " Master Spirits " series (English ed. : Allen & Unwin, 1922), it will receive at least a fair and patient hearing from English readers. The great preponderance of critical weight, I am satisfied, is on the side of the method of Professors Lewis and Stoll, which logically proceeds from the point of view briefly set out by Halliwell-Phillipps ; and I can see no essential incompatibility between it and the admirable criticism of our own Professor Bradley. I am the more concerned to combat the attempt of Mr. Clutton-Brock to carry the question, by means of an abracadabra, back to a ground that is conspicuously more untenable than that of the Coleridgean theorem, of which the fundamental weakness was long ago indicated by Coleridge's son, in the act of propounding one that was so much weaker as to win no support at all. In the following pages, I have attempted once more to clear the ground. The fact that it should be necessary to show at some length, as against Mr. Clutton-Brock, that my theory is no more a disparagement of Shakespeare than his was intended to be, is one of the illustrations of the fashion in which criticism tends to be handled in our press.

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"HAMLET" ONCE MORE

CHAPTER I

SOME CRITICAL CANONS

DISSENSIONS on " Hamlet " have a disquieting likeness to conflicts on metaphysics, which proceed, century after century, with no sign of capacity to end themselves. Hence the recurrent dismissal of the former by the nihilist as what he calls a " drug in the market "—which in an economic sense they are, as compared with treatises on cricket, tennis, and golf. Still, there is something to be said for mental exercise, as against physical, and even the demand for a decision may be met by the assurance that the " Hamlet " debate shows signs of a crisis. The latest debater, Mr. Clutton-Brock, in his essay " Shakespeare's ' Hamlet ' " (1922), has more or less clearly posited the claim that he has a non-intellectual perception of the hero as a manifestation of the Unconscious ; and it will be remembered that when Schelling affirmed an unconscious and non-intellectual perception of the Absolute, Hamilton was moved to a pronouncement which at least ended one stage of the metaphysical debate. The latest debater, in a word, has in effect reached

a position of critical "solipsism," and that is at least something of a stop in its own direction.

It might have been supposed, indeed, that the criticism in question, unexpectedly amounting as it does to a relegation of the Hamlet problem from the sphere of æsthetics to the sphere of physiology, would have incurred dismissal on that score at the hands of the belletrist critics. For that is what is really done by the critic while he professes to justify his verdict by an appeal to "æsthetics." But as his verbal plea apparently sufficed to blind them to his actual procedure, it is necessary to point out that he who professes to explain Hamlet the man, and thereby the play, in terms of a physiological diagnosis, implicitly imputing neurasthenia to the hero, has got outside of æsthetics proper. Drama, it must once more be pointed out, deals with the moral world, the world of wills and motives; and a drama which should present an action determined not by a mental choice (wise or unwise) but by "engine trouble," so to say, at the nerve centres, would be a medical thesis rather than a work of art. This would hardly be denied of a play or story which presented the hero or protagonist as "positively" insane: in that case we are certainly outside the moral world, and the processus is not one ministering to either æsthetic or moral judgment. But we are no less essentially outside the moral world when volition is represented as decisively mis-

carrying through shock-injury to the nerve apparatus. In such a case the process of action is the statement of an accident, and can be "tragic" only in the sense of being as painful to contemplate as an accident in the street. It matters not whether the "shock" be physical or mental if the result be physiological damage. But this canon is apparently as little regarded by the reviewers as by its contravener; and there is nothing for it but to re-open the whole case.

The short treatise entitled "The Problem of HAMLET" was offered four years ago as indicating a way out of the deadlock achieved in the past by mere persistence in impressionist methods. It proposed an explanation of the conflicting data which generate the critical conflict by a tracing of the actual structural history of the play, a course not before taken in the debate in this country,[1] though it had been entered on in the birth-tercentenary debate in Germany last century, albeit very inadequately. HAMLET, the present writer suggested, is a marvellous composite, the result of imposing a new psychological treatment

[1] As is stated in the Preface to the present volume, Professor C. M. Lewis, of Yale University, had published his valuable work on "The Genesis of HAMLET" in 1907. Not being published in this country, the book had no notice here—at least I had heard nothing of it in 1919. I should add that, though in 1885 I cited the important pronouncement of Halliwell-Phillipps on the pre-determination of the action of Shakespeare's play, I was not till recently aware of Sir George Radford's handling of the question in his volume of 1894.

on an old drama of delayed barbaric revenge; a treatment which, retaining the old action, could not, even in the hands of the supreme Master of dramatic illusion, wholly unify the matter. Hence grounds for conflicting impressions, soluble only by recognition of the nature of the process.

The reply, apart from some acceptance of the solution, has taken the form of a new outbreak of impressionism, partly repudiating and partly professing scientific method, and even resorting to illicit extremities of dialectic by way of getting rid of the other scientific method suggested. It is now proposed to show that the dialectic in question is but verbalism, and the new impressionism even more nugatory than the old, as regards the pretension to offer a conclusive solution of the long debated HAMLET problem. For there is a real and lasting "Hamlet problem"—the problem of the *play*. The new impressionism either cannot or will not see this, and insists on reducing the issue to its subjective vision of the problem of Hamlet the imagined man.

Impressionist criticism in general is of course not in the least to be deprecated. Most of us who have meddled with criticism have engaged in that form: three people out of four, indeed, even among "readers," will not look at any other. And when one recalls the long series of studies of HAMLET, down to that of Mr. Stopford Brooke, in TEN MORE PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE (1912), one is bound to

pay tribute to so much of vigorous thinking and good writing. It is in the nature of things that much of literature should consist in comment on previous literature ; and those who disparage that procedure as a whole have given too little thought to the subject. The comment means the digestion by mankind of its literary store ; a process in which much is rejected, and much more is made to yield a widely extended nutrition. And it is part of the common literary education to apply the procedure of impressionist comment to the plays of Shakespeare. In some hands, it can be both stimulating and illuminating, leading new readers on pleasant paths which they might otherwise not have trodden, and teaching others to see beautiful things that they might, save for guidance, have missed. A good instance, in comment on Shakespeare, is supplied by the work of an editor of the last century, the Rev. Henry Hudson, professor at Boston. He did not rank among the foremost scholarly Shakespeareans of his time ; and there are even elements of rubbish in his philosophy and his diction ; but his introductions to the plays had a virtue of intimate suggestiveness which must have counted for much in making young readers alive to the infinite interest of Shakespeare's portraiture. Introducing LEAR, he writes of Cordelia as one possessed and magnetised by her presence, noting her every change of feature and the intonation of every word. Whatever our English editors may

say, such "æsthetic criticism" is quickening and light-giving to the young student, and even to the adult.[1]

But on some of the Shakespeare plays, and above all on HAMLET, criticism runs largely and continuously to conflict; and an endless course of reading pro's and con's, all contributing to a vast heap of contradiction, is not seriously to be recommended to ordinary readers by anyone who has essayed the task. The one person who might be supposed to be committed to it is the critic who ventures to add to the heap. Is it a reasonable course for him to add without studying the previous deposits? Can he plausibly hope to do any good save by noting how in general the contradictions run, and by suggesting some test or method which may end the strife? Is it a true critic's function, in such a case, to go about to carry his point by a merely louder or more eloquent or more violent asseveration of his particular impression? Is it not possible, in a word, where criticism has become a mere continuous conflict, to bring into it something of the method of science—some concern for evidence, for proof, for elimination of personal equations and demonstrable error, and this without mis-

[1] Mr. Clutton-Brock, in an essay on Shakespeare (ESSAYS ON BOOKS, p. 6), would have us feel that "Cordelia is something of a shrew." Her father tells us that

> Her voice was ever soft,
> Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman.

Can both be right?

representation of any of the views assailed? That is, broadly speaking, the method of science, which in the main results not in a mere multiplication of clashing dicta but in some measure of solution, either by the expiscation of a theory which will cover the phenomena under debate or in a recognition that a satisfactory theory cannot so far be reached.

In literary matters, unfortunately, such solutions are particularly hard to reach, because the literary temperament is commonly impressionistic, and the literary method is commonly one of unction in affirmation rather than of judicially weighing counter-propositions. There is in fact a strong bias among many lovers of literature as such to resent the introduction into their field of anything that savours of the scientific temper (unless it comes under the guise of a slack "psycho-analysis" which appeals to the empiric in all of us [1]), to flout it as an index of literary deficiency, and to denounce the innovation as *per se* a mark of unliterary mentality. And of course that bias in turn is proclaimed by stress of asseveration and aspersion in the manner of the ordinary criticism of appre-

[1] A high medical authority, Lord Dawson of Penn, has observed that "the way in which all sorts and conditions of people, without scientific training or medical knowledge, not only discuss but seek to apply analytical psychology, would be ludicrous if not so dangerous." In the kind of case under notice it is hardly "dangerous"; but it painfully often partakes of the nature of what may be called "the higher charlatanism."

ciation and depreciation, which almost necessarily assumes that success consists not in the attainment of tested truth but in saying things in the most impressive impressionistic way.

If there is any literary debate in regard to which even literary people might be expected to grow tired of that method after a certain point, it is the endless discussion of the problem of HAMLET. Few have read even the selection of pronouncements made in Furness's Variorum edition, readable though many of them are. Halliwell-Phillipps once unjustly described the whole collection as in the main "an almost impenetrable mass of conflicting opinions, wild conjectures and leaden contemplations, a huge collection of antagonistic materials which, if not repulsive, is certainly appalling."[1] "Much" of it, nevertheless, he admits to be "exceedingly clever"; and no real student of the HAMLET problem will ignore it. But the Shakespearean was entitled to say that it had led to no agreement; and where he turned nihilist, giving up the problem as insoluble even in giving a real lead to its solution, protesting that all "æsthetic" or "sign-post" criticism was futile, others of less weary temperament recognise the need for something more than fresh asseveration. Were they then right or wrong in supposing that some critical results were really attainable, beyond the simple

[1] MEMORANDA ON THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET, 1879, *postscript*.

scholarly data which elucidate texts and illustrate passages ?

The most notable attempt that has been made in our time to bring order and light into the imbroglio is undoubtedly the masterly study of Professor A. C. Bradley, in his great work on SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY, which is so far above the plane of mere impressionism. There the scholar's sense of the need for comparison of views has dictated a survey as judicial as the original criticism is competent ; and there is critically reached a decisive valuation of a whole series of "solutions"—the Goethean ; the Schlegel-Coleridgean ; the view of Werder, that Hamlet is hampered by the external obstacles ; and the old notion that he is insane. So clarifying is the whole process that a return to the old miscellaneous conflict might have seemed to students of the book impossible. If only, one felt, if only Dr. Bradley had taken up Halliwell-Phillipps' reminder that Shakespeare's construction was "to some extent fettered" by his material, the whole debate might have been solved. And yet the production of fresh independent pronouncements goes on with little or no regard to what had been thus far accomplished. Halliwell-Phillipps was simply ignored. Max J. Wolff, with Bradley before him, took no account of the Englishman's work in his theoretic schema of the play ; Professor Trench found in the lectures on HAMLET no light for *his*

undertaking; and Mr. Stopford Brooke penned his own very interesting lecture without regard to those of his predecessor.[1] Something further, some fresh orientation of the problem, would seem to be needed before the values of previous analysis can be assimilated.

Such an aim underlay the essay entitled "The Problem of HAMLET." It recognised the existence of a number of hopelessly conflicting formulas, expounded often with much literary power by men of high literary status, but all of them put substantively without regard to the counter-formulas. For every formula in turn there was something plausibly to be said, in the way of citation of supporting passages. But every formula in turn was faced by countervailing passages; and any reader who was honest enough to weigh all—a course not very often taken—was driven to avow that none took into account all the data, unless that could be said of the verdict—already common in Coleridge's time—which pronounced the play inconsistent in conception and structure, and laid the blame on Shakespeare.

The present writer, who has recently been accused of an inordinate reverence for Shakespeare, confesses to having found that verdict inconclusive. On the face of the case, Shakespeare was adapting in HAMLET a previous play, as he has done in the

[1] If, that is, Mr. Brooke's lectures were not delivered long before publication.

great majority of his dramas ; and all the evidence went to show that in the case of Hamlet in particular he had profoundly transmuted the character set forth in the crude foundation play, while retaining all the main features of the action. It seemed, then, not only possible but probable that the problematic aspect of the character and action thus involved was the inevitable result of pouring the new wine into the old bottle. So far from finding this a ground for indicting Shakespeare, one saw in the wonderful result only a signal proof of the unmatched power which had carried transmutation so far. An argument to that effect, however, in the essay on " The Problem of HAMLET," has had the singular effect of eliciting an answer which begins by charging upon the essay the sin of denying that HAMLET was in any way a success. How reviewers handled the point may be guessed. The absurd charge is taken as the datum, and the essay is denounced accordingly, by writers who hold it " a baseness to write fair," and " stuff o' the conscience " to asperse without knowledge and without inquiry.

It is at least desirable to lift the dispute above that level ; and the more so because the attack is opened in terms of a critical doctrine which must vitiate every similar issue to which it may be applied. The critic who is chiefly dealt with in the following pages, Mr. Clutton-Brock, appeals markedly to the support of the impressionistic as

against the reflective part of the reading public. Avowedly resenting Mr. T. S. Eliot's estimate of the play as an "artistic failure" because it does not explain itself, he argues that that writer has unwarrantably applied an "intellectual" process to an "æsthetic" issue, and that only by a purely "æsthetic" process is a work of art as such to be judged—judgment being in Mr. Clutton-Brock's view (or one of his views) a process of sheer feeling in which reasoning does not enter. We are "convinced" as to Hamlet, he says, by our state of feeling. Feeling, that is, on seeing the play properly played. But, as will appear in the following pages, Mr. Clutton-Brock in effect denies that the play is ever properly played! The proposition, as will be seen in subsequent sections, is hardly for a page consistently adhered to by its framer; but it is quite definitely put; and it is necessary to point out, not only that it is never conformed to by him when he has a criticism of his own to vend, but that it could not be, being in fact an untenable concept, resting on a false dichotomy.

This particular proposition, I suspect, emerges from a miscomprehension by Mr. Clutton-Brock of a verdict in Mr. W. L. Courtney's lectures on The Idea of Tragedy. That able critic justly, if inexactly, charges on Solon (in respect of Plutarch's story of his scolding of Thespis for representing lies) and on Plato—unjustly, I think, on

Aristotle—that "they applied the analytic processes of logic to a phenomenon, an artistic birth, an æsthetic illumination."[1] It was an oversight, I think, to add the words: "which has little or nothing to do with mental processes at all." Surely æsthetic processes are mental.[2] The technically correct charge would be that Solon and Plato irrelevantly applied the ethical standards of social conduct to the art of dramatic fiction, of which the tests are æsthetic, and of which the practice is nowise unethical, since it does *not* "deceive." That charge, however, Mr. Clutton-Brock fallaciously extends to the act of complaining that a given dramatic work is not in itself æsthetically consistent—a charge *æsthetically* justified if true. Æsthetics must use "analytic processes of logic" in its own judgments, like any other code or standard of judgment: else there can be no standard of æsthetic judgment at all. Mr. Courtney would never affirm *that*: he expressly aims at establishing æsthetic standards by ratiocination. Where he blames Solon and Plato for misapplying a moral judgment—for reasoning irrelevantly—Mr. Clutton-Brock blames a fellow-critic for passing an æsthetic judgment on an æsthetic performance.

[1] THE IDEA OF TRAGEDY, 1900, p. 2. Cf. p. 37 as to Aristotle.

[2] Mr. Clutton-Brock, in his third chapter, sees as much, observing (p. 93) that "intellect comes into art because it comes into all experience, and so into all values." He flatly ignores that truth when he criticises Mr. Eliot in the passage under notice.

What he is driving at (for the time being) is the critical notion that the only fit way to " experience " a play is to be absorbed in the persons and the action without asking yourself (questions of acting apart) whether they are behaving intelligibly. You must not *qua* æsthete ask yourself during the play why Hamlet delays, and therefore you are not entitled to call it an artistic failure (which I did not, but Mr. T. S. Eliot did, in the case of HAMLET), if when you ask yourself that question afterwards you can find no satisfactory answer. In this remarkable argument, it will be found, there is embedded another proposition, namely, that if you had properly " experienced " the play you would have felt that Hamlet's delay was perfectly natural, because you felt that everything Hamlet did was just what he would do, being what he is ! Two arguments in a circle, one within the other, form an achievement above the common run of controversial " æsthetic " criticism, and may perhaps be welcomed by some on that score. But the thing is on the whole unprofitable, even if entertaining. By such canons, no play can ever be bad.

Mr. Clutton-Brock has evolved a void argument because he was arguing against arguing, so to speak. Demanding that his sheer impression shall be conclusive, he has to offer *reasons* why it must. The moment you compare two dissident impressions of anything you must either go on to offer

what Mr. Clutton-Brock disparages as "intellectual" or "scientific" considerations, or you must drop the subject—unless you want a mere contest in shouting. And it is hoped that readers will not be deterred from the first course by the fashion in which adepts of the impressionist school intimate from their tripods that any one who takes it proves himself incapable of "experiencing a work of art." It is, in point of fact, Mr. Clutton-Brock and his school who, by their own account, habitually fail to experience a work of art *as such*. They want us to experience it as *reality*, in a state of hallucination; and the ideal pathic for Mr. Clutton-Brock's purposes would be the ingenuous spectator who from the gallery execrates the villain. Transcending alike Solon and Thespis, they insist that art presents actual history. Constantly Mr. Clutton-Brock talks of "the real Hamlet," after expressly positing that the only Hamlet is what we can see of the hero in the play.[1] And we are in effect ordered to feel about the hero in the way of the pathic in the gallery.

From this point of view, the person who alone experiences a picture as a work of art is (*a*) the observer who is hallucinated by it—*par excellence*, the man in the Greek story, who sought to brush

[1] Most of the reasons offered in discussions on Hamlet, he writes (p. 2), are "subject to this objection, that they are guessed or imagined *as if he were a real man*, a person of history, instead of a character in a play." That is just what the critic in the end does for himself.

from the picture the painted fly—or (*b*) the observer who finds the purpose and the pleasure of the picture in the story it tells him, not in the rendering of light, colour, and form, which are the grounds of the pleasure of the artist who enjoys the picture. Thus in terms of Mr. Clutton-Brock's argument (for he really was arguing, though he perhaps supposed himself to be legislating) the one person who cannot appreciate a painting as a work of art is the man who regards it as a painting. That is to say, the artist alone fails to " experience " a work of art by another artist. If I am impressed by a Velazquez simply as a striking semblance of a human being, the impressionist critic obligingly certifies me as " experiencing " a work of art in the proper way, provided that I ask no questions and profess no sense of technique. But if an artist comes along to point out the subtle skill with which the lights are laid, he, being so far scientific, is disqualified. This engaging dialectic will really not do. It is precisely the artist who most fully experiences the work of art as such, and this because he is thinking of the art revealed in the production. And he is more and not less an artist because he can transcend the primary " æsthetic " recognition of a simple resemblance, combining a scientific train of thought with a perception.

What the impressionist is blind to is the fact that the people who do not rest contentedly in his

impression have had an impression of their own, and something more. With curious reiteration, our critic insists that Hamlet the man is always intensely interesting. And who, pray, ever found him otherwise? That was put as presumably common ground in "The Problem." But if we are not impressionists first and last, we can be intensely interested and still be able to reflect. Reading Thackeray, who had a gift of shaping quasi-reality not often excelled since Shakespeare, one can admiringly feel the mastery of the creation and still note at times how the fatality of beginning publication in monthly parts before the book was half written could induce prolixity and irrelevance to the extent of occasional weakness. Were the impressionist true to his dogma, he would ban that judgment as outgoing the proper "experiencing of a work of art." If he entertains it (and Mr. Clutton-Brock permits himself to find habitual "irrelevance" in Hamlet and in Shakespeare) he is quashing his own dichotomy by joining an "intellectual" to an æsthetic judgment. It is an "intellectual" process to note at once where the art has faltered and to infer the causation; as it is for the artist to note the technical mastery (or otherwise) of the lighting in the picture.

No two arts are strictly analogous, but the analogies here are fairly plain. To experience a play as a work of art, we must not be in the state of trance which the impressionist critic so strangely

prescribes. We may indeed concede that to experience aright a good piece of acting is to be in a state on the verge of illusion; but even in that case, the "experiencing" of the art of the actor, as art, means a continuous perception of it as art—art of management of face, eye, voice, intonation, gesture, and posture. And if with regard to the play as a whole we are so hallucinated by one character as never to ask ourselves, over the most staggering anomalies, or over the most obtruded perplexities, whether the play as a whole hangs together, we are not experiencing it as a work of art; we are in a state in which we do not know art as art. And if, when afterwards challenged over a difficulty which we do not feel (as Mr. Clutton-Brock avowedly feels no difficulty about Hamlet's delay even when Hamlet in the play is obtruding on us his own intense perplexity about it), any claim we may then make that nobody has a right, in æsthetic criticism, to go beyond his feeling, is a very idle pass. For in the terms of the case the other has had the feeling we had not; and to deny that he had it is idler still. But even if the perplexity came to him *after* seeing the play or upon reading it, that impression is of the order of an artist's second thought over a picture which he had at first thought right and afterwards perceives to be wrong in its drawing or lighting. To bar his second thought would be to reduce æsthetic criticism to a game of chance.

But we go further. The state of sensation which alone Mr. Clutton-Brock and his school will admit to be "æsthetic" is one below the plane of criticism altogether. Even in impressionist literary criticism, as a rule, the critic at least sometimes gives his reasons, adding to his statement of impression some grounds for it in analogy or comparison or deduction from principle. If he never did, we should tire even of his eloquence; though a little reasoning will suffice for most readers. The psychological fact is, as Mr. Clutton-Brock once expressly avows, though his "psychology" does not appear to include any such axiom, that in our critical judgments an element of reasoning is always involved. The very statement of the impression, if it is to go beyond an interjection, is a collection of sensations into a reflection and a judgment. Only a few of us, at least, are ever in the state of mind of the man in the gallery who hurls execration at the villain.[1] Therefore it is that not only have the series of previous theorists on HAMLET made appeal to our reasoning faculties and used their own, but even Mr. Clutton-Brock perforce does so. The very proposition that an æsthetic judgment as

[1] Quite recently I heard from a practical entertainer an account of how a play of good and bad fairies, prepared for juvenile audiences, had to be abandoned because one large audience of children simply refused to tolerate the bad fairy's evil deeds. They "rose at her," to the helpless dismay of the amiable actress concerned. In the words of Mr. Clutton-Brock, they were "experiencing" the play—with a vengeance!

such excludes any intellectual or scientific process is doubly futile in that it itself raises an insoluble intellectual or scientific problem: for how shall we make the proposed discrimination without resort to reflection upon categories? and how is *that* judgment to stand if we deny that the æsthetic judge as such can reflect? *Qua* æsthete—Mr. Clutton-Brock's æsthete—how can he tell what he has been doing?

That is perhaps enough said in advance on the critical attack and exposition dealt with in the following sections; and it may serve to justify further an appeal to readers who are minded to take any trouble in the matter, that they should recognise the problem of HAMLET as not one to be lightly concluded on. It is not, I think, really obscure, if only the relevant phenomena be fully collated and the justifiable inferences be drawn. The trouble has always been, as aforesaid, that each new theorist—or, as is now nearly always the case, each new vendor or adapter of old theories—does but express his impression or his inference in disregard or evasion of every other. To this procedure there can be no end, save for individuals who end in unreflecting nihilistic disgust over the whole matter.

The appeal now made is to those who, recognising the supremacy of Shakespeare alike in dramatic poetry and in dramatic art, are willing to take some pains to come to a considered opinion. To no

others is there any use in appealing. The nihilist, who is neither a student nor a critic, has nothing to do with the matter, though he will doubtless think it necessary to proclaim anew his nihilism, and call it criticism. *Nihil fit.* The present writer pleads guilty to a reverent admiration of Shakespeare. He also pleads that when he acknowledges in Shakespeare at any point a falling short of perfect conquest of unsurmountable difficulty,[1] it is not a sane criticism that imputes to him even a shadow of disrespect to a Master whose prodigious achievement consisted mainly in laying the hands of genius upon other men's work and recreating their inferior creations of character.

This last fact, unfortunately, is not yet at all commonly realised even as to HAMLET, though we are told by the last impressionist that no one denies the existing HAMLET to be a superpositing of Shakespeare's matter on an older play. Perhaps not till HAMLET is recognised as but one of many such cases in the Shakespeare aggregate will readers get into the habit of examining in order to see how the transmutation is made. That is to say, there is still much trouble to be taken by way of transcending mere impressionism before a serviceable critical habit in Shakespeare-study can be built up. But he is no very ardent lover of

[1] Mr. Stopford Brooke would seem to incur a special risk of vituperation from the impressionist chorus when he calls Hamlet's disposal of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern "a blot on the play."

Shakespeare's art who refuses to take it. Let him, then, who professes to be a serious student, give the thesis fair play.

This is not a claim to present a conclusive pronouncement. Like other theses propounded in the course of a larger general inquiry, it is put with a request for criticism on the merits, and with not only the hope but the expectation that when the matter is considerately studied by others there will accrue rectifications and extensions of view. That is what happens among men who work whole-heartedly at what we term the problems of science. And if we are again to be told that the method of science has nothing to do with matters of literary judgment, the answer is ready in advance. " Science " is not a mere collecting of data and inferences on the facts of Nature so called. It is a matter of vigilant mental attitude on the procedure of opinion, being but the application of a stricter common-sense to a problem where lax common-sense has reached either a wrong or an insufficient solution. Ptolemy is scientific relatively to the man who merely sees that the sun goes round the earth: he has taken more trouble to collate the facts. Copernicus does not induce a new mental process: he merely scrutinises the facts more narrowly and more patiently, and thus reaches a sounder and more durable inference than that of Ptolemy. Later observers, extending the inquiry, correct and add to Copernicus.

And so for ever: Einstein is but the latest reviser.

If the literary man will do nothing but go on repelling every appeal to scientific method for the settlement of his feuds, blankly insisting that such method has no place in his world, we can but blankly reply that it is high time it had. He conforms to the type of the men of Galileo's day who refused to look through Galileo's telescope. They were quite as sure of themselves as he can be. But they failed to carry their point with posterity, or even with men of fair common-sense in their own time. Mr. Clutton-Brock doubtless will reply that, with all his vetoes on intellectual judgments of æsthetic cases, he has actually appealed to science — to what he calls "psychology" — in support of his æsthetics. He has in fact anxiously striven to explain that when he does this he is "not going behind the play" for his psychological theory, because the play suggests it to him. As if it had not been the play that suggested to other people their puzzle over Hamlet's delay! Do what he will, the impressionist is in the hopeless dilemma that if he seeks to validate his impression by argument he stakes his impression *on* the argument, whatever he may say about the æsthetic validation of the impression by itself. The impressionist "theory," in a word, repudiates impressionism and challenges reason by offering reasons. So that in spite of himself he grants that

"æsthetics" is more than *aisthesis*, and that an æsthetic impression so-called must prove itself "rational" in order to have any status above that of blank self-assertion. It remains to see whether the end is in the special case attained.

Chapter II

THE POLEMIC OF MR. CLUTTON-BROCK

§ 1. *Clearing the Ground*

IT was not for a moment to be supposed that such an attempt at solving an age-long controversy as was made in " The Problem of HAMLET " would escape opposition—unless it might be by passing unnoticed. But it has been an astonishment to the author that the criticism by Mr. Clutton-Brock, entitled " Shakespeare's 'Hamlet,' " should be prefaced by a statement containing this :

" I am provoked to publish it now, after rewriting it, by the theories of Mr. J. M. Robertson and Mr. T. S. Eliot . . . which imply or assert that HAMLET is not a masterpiece at all, but an accident or a failure."

On the thirteenth page of his first chapter he writes thus :

" Mr. Robertson, indeed, praises the play as much as he blames it, *and even more*. . . . Shakespeare's triumph was, he says, 'to turn a crude play into *the masterpiece which he has left us*. It is a perfectly magnificent *tour de force*, and its ultimate æsthetic miscarriage is only the supreme illustration of the vulgar but ancient truth that an entirely

satisfactory silken purse cannot be constructed, even by a Shakespeare, out of a sow's ear.' "

On the strength, nevertheless, of the statement in Mr. Clutton-Brock's preface, and of his further description of the book as an " attack " on the play, at least four London reviewers and several elsewhere, disregarding or overlooking the second passage quoted, have referred to " The Problem of HAMLET " as a work which denies that HAMLET " is a masterpiece." As it happens, Mr. Clutton-Brock's statement is as thoughtless in regard to Mr. Eliot as in regard to me. Mr. Eliot obviously used " masterpiece " in the special sense of " best work of its author." " So far," he wrote, " from being *Shakespeare's masterpiece*, the play is most certainly an artistic failure."[1] To represent this as denying that the play is " a masterpiece at all " —giving the word another force—would be flatly uncandid if it were not simply heedless. " Not *a* masterpiece at all " is equivalent to " not a great or masterly performance at all." Towards me, on the other hand, Mr. Brock takes the course of making me deny what I expressly asserted. Nowhere did I either contradict my own description of the play as " a masterpiece " or suggest the inane pseudo-antithesis, " but an accident," to which I can attach no distinct meaning. I had in fact used language, actually cited by Mr. Brock,

[1] THE SACRED WOOD, p. 90.

which absolutely excludes, for me at least, any such conception as " accident " in regard to the total progress, though I showed that one accident in detail did take place. He, however, challenged as to the statement in his preface and the countervailing quotation in his text, has made the defence that my phrase, " its ultimate æsthetic miscarriage," negates " masterpiece." He had put no such proposition in his book. Another critic, who avowedly had followed Mr. Clutton-Brock's prefatory statement without having even seen my book, which he proceeded to asperse, claimed to defend himself by citing Mr. Clutton-Brock's further quotation as to " miscarriage "—still without turning to the enveloping context in the original book, which might have served to reveal to any reader that the verbal argument about " miscarriage " negating " masterpiece " was a mere darkening of the issue. The enveloping context referred to runs thus, after the words " out of a sow's ear " :

" —if one can without indecency apply that figure to a barbaric saga which ultimately yielded us HAMLET. Æsthetically it is improper. For, when all is said, the 'pragmatic' test is final for such a thing as a drama. HAMLET has 'made good.' It has enormously surpassed the simple end of the playwright, to entertain. The miraculous puppetry of the actor-manager has kept millions at gaze for centuries now ; and if Shakespeare could be recreated and asked why he managed here and

there so oddly, he might with an unanswerable effect open eyes of wonder and ask what should make us thus put his mechanism to the rack. 'Do you want an absolute,' he might ask, 'as a stage entertainment?' And though we might make play with Hamlet's dictum about holding up a mirror to Nature, we should be met by the reminder that that too is part of the play; and we should know that Shakespeare had non-suited us."

Many previous critics had ascribed blemishes to the play: Mr. Stopford Brooke had recently done so, while treating it as a masterpiece; and, as we shall see, Mr. Clutton-Brock had done the same, besides affirming generally that Shakespeare "wrote from hand to mouth, and was often content with his second best both in conception and in execution."[1] Mine was, I think, the first criticism in which the precaution was taken of pointing out that a miscarriage does not cancel a masterpiece as such.

That this position should be held by any critic to amount to saying or implying that "HAMLET is not a masterpiece at all, *but* an accident" is only made more surprising by the argument about "miscarriage"; for, unless Mr. Clutton-Brock attaches some occult meaning to that term, he has placed himself in exactly the kind of position he professes to find untenable; he having imputed to the play lapses of execution for which "miscarriage" would be, on any ordinary construction,

[1] This was in another volume, however (ESSAYS ON BOOKS, pp. 3-4).

a fairly accurate label, if perhaps not quite emphatic enough. A sensitive reviewer might conceivably even say there had been an "attack."

As to the meaning of "masterpiece," it may suffice to say that it normally carries one of three: (*a*) "that which only a 'master' could have done"; (*b*) "the best work of its author"; or (*c*) "one of its author's best works." Sense *a*, which I employed, perhaps carries for some people the force of "an absolutely flawless work of art"; but there are probably many more people, of critical habit, who incline more or less strongly to deny that such an absolute, on any large scale, has ever existed. OTHELLO commonly passes as a masterpiece; but when it has been pointed out that, as the play stands, Othello's jealousy begins to take shape at a time when it has not been possible for Desdemona to have had even an interview with Cassio since the marriage, few critics will deny that there has been a flaw in the construction, or that it might fitly be termed a miscarriage. If it is denied that there is a "flaw," it is hardly possible to continue the argument.

Mr. Clutton-Brock, indeed, has in another connection maintained the cryptic thesis that a work of art is either quite good or quite bad, either a perfect success or a failure. But, whatever may be thought of the extravagance of the objective proposition, it is quite clear that, subjectively considered, it is an argument in a circle. Its

author is merely asserting that *for him* a work is either perfect or bad : he is not even addressing himself, on the common ground of the necessity of an agreed terminology, to the position of those who call a work admirable but ascribe to it flaws. It is to be inferred, accordingly, that he will refuse to let " masterpiece " mean " that which only a master could have done," save on a further question-begging definition of " master " involving the same verbalism, the same logical circle.[1]

It may here suffice to say, then, first, that having regard to the ordinary use of language, the pretended antithesis of " masterpiece " and " miscarriage " (like the term " attack ") is but a verbal device, with no logical content ; and, secondly, that if such an antithesis be held to exist Mr. Clutton-Brock is hoist with his own petard. For besides imputing to Shakespeare " irrelevance " in respect

[1] J. Addington Symonds, referring to " Shakespeare's Chronicle Plays " as presented in the traditional Canon, speaks of " these masterpieces " (SHAKESPEARE'S PREDECESSORS IN THE ENGLISH DRAMA, ed. 1900, p. 291). He certainly did not mean to suggest that they are all faultless ; and in the same paragraph he writes of " the best plays of Shakespeare's historical series," thus avowing that there are better and worse. Soon afterwards (p. 294) he speaks tentatively of 2 HENRY VI as " a work of considerable merit retouched by the master's hand." Of Heywood's A WOMAN KILLED WITH KINDNESS, he speaks (p. 331) as " a masterpiece in its way," before proceeding to speak (p. 373) of its admitted weaknesses. English critical usage, in fact, treats " masterpiece " as a term of praise that does not imply " faultlessness " or " entire artistic coherence." And Mr. Clutton-Brock, where it suits him, avails himself of the usage.

of the passage about the child actors and other matters in HAMLET, and admitting that in the "To be" soliloquy there may be "an inadvertence," he complains (p. 71) that the scene between Hamlet and his mother "begins a little theatrically, as if Shakespeare had not, at this moment, a very firm grasp of Hamlet's behaviour. . . . So Shakespeare falls back upon the splendid rhetoric which is his usual resource when *at a loss*."[1] If, then, Shakespeare is frequently "at a loss," and is so in an important scene in HAMLET, Mr. Clutton-Brock's concept of "a masterpiece" is either "a great thing which may have flaws" or "a term which I can manœuvre with in debate." He has made rather a stronger detraction than mine. I affirmed "ultimate æsthetic miscarriage" in an undertaking which *could not* be wholly successful. He flatly declares the dramatist to be "at a loss" in an important scene of the play that is declared to be perfect (else the critic is accepting the thesis he proposes to repugn); and he adds the charge that the poet is often thus at a loss. Yet he sees fit to describe another critic as "hampered throughout" a study of the play by "acknowledgment" of its supreme merits in the act of setting forth its anomalies.

[1] Elsewhere (ESSAYS ON BOOKS, p. 4), the critic pictures Shakespeare as an artist who "certainly sinned," having "an itch for writing," though "he knew well enough that his rhetoric was only a useful makeshift." This is said with a quite general application. Surely some reviewers must have detected an "attack."

In view of this bi-frontal attack on the part of Mr. Clutton-Brock, I might suggest that Mr. T. S. Eliot's expression, "an artistic failure," though to my thinking open to verbal correction, was probably intended by that critic to stand for very much the same general view as I have set forth with the caveat that a work of art is surely a success if it keeps the educated world at gaze for three hundred years. If this is a failure, where are the successes? "Failure," like so many other words, carries different meanings in respect of different *relative* forces. If a work that was meant to be perfect is at any point imperfect, it is *quoad hoc* a failure, though it be a marvel of genius in the main. But whereas "a failure" frequently suggests sheer disaster, I imagine that Mr. Eliot meant no such thing, but very much what Mr. Clutton-Brock meant when he wrote "at a loss." The whole terminology involved is inexact. Mr. Clutton-Brock, in fact, admits (p. 15) that Mr. Eliot is to be understood to use the expression "artistic failure" in another sense than that of "dramatic failure," having regard to the history of the play. I must not, however, seem to commit Mr. Eliot, who can so well defend himself, to a position that he might decline to take up.

Before coming to the systematic analysis of Mr. Clutton-Brock's treatise, it may be well to explain to the reader that his book abounds to an embarrassing extent in verbal entanglements such as

that just noticed. In a discussion which calls for exactitude in terms, he writes with more than the inexactitude that is usual in æsthetic comment, taking for granted empirical dichotomies between "æsthetic" and "intellectual" in the act of contravening them; and employing the terms "convince" and "conviction" where most people would say "impress" and "impression." These confusions, I think, inhere irremediably in Mr. Clutton-Brock's dialectic method; but at times he appears to me to create the most gratuitous difficulties. For instance, he writes on page 83:

> "When Mr. Robertson says that HAMLET is to be understood only *in terms of* some earlier play, I would answer—'Then it cannot be worth understanding."

This by way of repelling or discrediting my proposition that "the history of the play is vital to the comprehension of it"; that HAMLET as it stands cannot be understood—in respect, that is, of its anomalies and perplexities—without a knowledge of the antecedent works out of which it has grown. Either "in terms of" is another cryptic expression or the passage cited is simply another stroke of verbalism, involving another self-confutation. For Mr. Clutton-Brock himself many times over does actually resort to the "earlier play" to explain things which he feels to be anomalous. As thus:

"But here" [in Hamlet's behaviour after the exit of the Ghost], "if he were influenced by the old play, we should expect to see clearly its influence and its crudity; for the pretended madness of Hamlet is part of the original story, and we may assume with Mr. Robertson that it was pretended in the old play,[1] as it is in the German version, to avert the suspicions of the King. Further, madness is very crudely treated in the Elizabethan drama . . . but here there is no trace of this crudeness or of the old motive except in the words:

> How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,
> As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
> To put an antic disposition on—

which, as I have said, were probably put in to satisfy those who, remembering the old play, *would expect the same pretence of madness in this one. . . .*" (p. 43).

"It is *probable* that Shakespeare kept that formula from the older play, since it is in the German version" (p. 70).

"We may find ingenious explanations of this inconsistency, but here I suspect a survival from the old play" (pp. 71–2).

"This is enough, I think, to *explain* why Shakespeare dispatched him" [*i.e.* Hamlet], "making use, *no doubt*, of a crude device in the old play. Its crudity does not matter since it is not inconsistent. . . ." (p. 77).

It is after these repeated justifications of my statement in its natural meaning that Mr. Clutton-Brock meets it with the retort before quoted, which

[1] This is a blunder. I made no such suggestion as to the old *play*. The point is discussed hereinafter.

is in the circumstances meaningless save on some undisclosed construction of " understand ": and yet again describes me (pp. 117–18) as explaining something away " as being the result of a cue from the old play (*which does not survive*)." It survives sufficiently, that is, for his purposes when it suits him to rely on it, but not for mine. And this is only one of many instances in which Mr. Clutton-Brock figures as opposing positions which he has actually accepted, and propounding, as his own contention against the book he is assailing, views which are in entire agreement with those there set forth.

It is disappointing, to one who appreciates the literary merit of his book. He writes in general well and workmanly, puts his varying impressions vividly, and excels in unction—here recalling Hudson. And, strange as are his tactics in the procedure first discussed in this section, not for a moment is he to be suspected of planning his distortions of the issue. They are products of mental confusion. But the result of his impressionist conception of the task of criticism is that almost no modern book on the subject, certainly none equally well written, so entirely fails to advance the discussion for those who are familiar with the ground, whatever may be its success in impressing impressionists. Even an intelligent impressionist, indeed, who should take note of a few of Mr. Clutton-Brock's astonishingly numerous

self-contradictions, must feel that there is something seriously wrong with the exposition. But there is no counting on the impressionist reader for vigilance when the impressionist writer unconsciously confutes himself twenty times over. Mr. Clutton-Brock's preparatory statement sufficed the writer of a leading article in the TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT for a complaint that the critic has wasted some time in discussing "almost insane theories," to wit, *inter alia*, the "theories" the leader-writer had divined for me from Mr. Clutton-Brock's reckless sentence about "not a masterpiece at all." He was good enough to add that the authors of the surmised theories were far from mad, but cheerfully intimated that he "had not read Mr. Robertson's book." It is but fair to say that it really did not matter. If there is any "theory of Hamlet" that can with any propriety be pronounced at any point "insane"—outside of the work of the allegorists—it will be found to be Mr. Clutton's-Brock's; and the reviewer, with that before him, failed to detect the fact.

The reviewer in question finds himself in agreement with Mr. Clutton-Brock when that writer sums up that "the law of art is all case law, and HAMLET is a case that has been decided in the court of experience"; thus assimilating the characteristic laxity of Mr. Clutton-Brock's use of the terms "law" and "all," which in effect asserts that the only critical issue over a work of art is as

to how long people in general continue to like it. But the contained germ of truth is exactly what was put, as above indicated, in the summing-up of "The Problem of HAMLET," which the reviewer had divined to be "almost insane" in its theories.

Another journalistic expert (signing "C. B."), writing in THE NEW STATESMAN, was similarly able, on the basis of that one sentence in Mr. Clutton-Brock's preface, to pronounce that the author of "The Problem" possessed qualities "unclouded by any tincture of æsthetic sensibility." One of the qualities imputed was honesty; but, alas, "this lack of [clouding] sensibility makes him quite incapable of appreciating these arguments that are most relevant to the controversy." It may seem harsh, but it is necessary, to point out that even "the tear of sensibility" is not a certificate of literary percipience; that the diction of the sensibilious one is in this case almost a certificate to the contrary; and that ignorance and inexactitude are not without fallacy to be regarded as proofs of insight. Nay, even the confident courage with which the critic proceeds to asperse a book which he has not seen, on the strength of a passage in one which he has not read through, is an inadequate evidence of habitual literary sensibility—save indeed of the kind which admittedly "clouds" honesty, erudition, and exactitude, where they happen to exist.

Thus is the long confused debate over HAMLET

conducted among "the mob of gentlemen who write with ease." Even the initialled oracle was so far at odds with Mr. Clutton-Brock that the latter had to write in deprecation of a decision issued by the other—which happened to be a view advanced many times before. It is sufficient, argued the oracle, to regard Hamlet's shrinking from action as the result of his "normal consciousness of past infamies and future woe," where Mr. Clutton-Brock preferred another kind of formula (implicit, in so far as it is sane, in many others of the past, partly endorsed by Dr. Bradley, and duly indicated in "The Problem") which made Hamlet suffer (as I had phrased it) from nerve shock. And at this stage Mr. Clutton-Brock makes the elucidatory announcement (italics mine): "I agree with him that *my theory of the shock* is *not needed* for the *experience* of the play." The meaning is that you do not need an explanation of the play while you are seeing it (curtailed and imperfectly performed) on the stage (whatever you need in reading it), but that you may find use for an explanation which justifies your "experienced" impression. So the explanation is to stand.

In the face of the imbroglio it is difficult to be sure as to the sense in which Mr. Clutton-Brock holds by any of his propositions. On page 83 he virtually surrenders to Mr. Eliot, whose verdict of "artistic failure" seems to have moved him to the exposition in which he in effect ascribes that

verdict to me. Mr. Eliot, he laxly reasons, implies that the play " is not worth understanding " ; to which he adds : " To him I am provoked to reply—*But* it is one of the documents from which we may learn what artistic success is." Mr. Eliot, I should say, might very well assent, the " but " having granted him his case ! Yet the oracle of sensibility, being somewhat insensitive to logic, proclaims himself blandly satisfied that Mr. Clutton-Brock's surrender is a knock-down blow to Mr. Eliot !

It is necessary, then, in the interests of the " hungry sheep " who " look up and are not fed " (if it be admitted that there are any looking up), to make one more attempt to clear the long entanglement which Mr. Clutton-Brock has freshly confused, with the help of the impressionist reviewers whom he edifies. When we have systematically set forth the theory he claims as his, and the interwoven tissue of contradictions by which he assumes to support it, the HAMLET problem may really be some little way advanced to elucidation.

For it would be absurd to doubt that an exposition which failed to satisfy Mr. Clutton-Brock has also failed to satisfy others ; and as the close study of his objections has revealed to me points at which it was inadequate, yet readily susceptible of development, it may be that I thus owe him thanks for his counter-action. My own case, I think, will be found to have been made clearer and stronger

at the close of the debate. But first I must deal with the other in detail.

§ 2. *The Genesis of the Theory*

Mr. Clutton-Brock's " theory " took shape, as he tells us, in an impression at the theatre, being " first suggested " to him by a performance of the play given by Mr. William Poel a number of years ago. " It left out a good deal of the play, and was imperfect in execution ; but it seemed to me right in conception, and suddenly I understood HAMLET, or thought I did, and saw that it was *not* a puzzle *but* a masterpiece." (The critic somewhat inordinately affects these obscure antitheses.) Our own first puzzle over the passage is as to how the theory, soon to be indicated as that of real " mental disorder " on the part of Hamlet, came to be " first suggested " to a student of Shakespeare in that fashion. Controversy on that score, as was pointed out by the late Sir George Radford,[1] has raged (perhaps " flickered " would be the truer term) for nigh two centuries. It seems to have begun at least as early as 1735, by Aaron Hill, who in his PROMPTER put the proposition that, besides Hamlet's assumed insanity, there was in him a melancholy which bordered on madness.[2]

[1] Essay on "Hamlet's Madness" in SHYLOCK AND OTHERS, 1894.

[2] See SHYLOCK AND OTHERS, p. 78. This item is not noted in Furness's Variorum HAMLET. I have not been able to meet with Hill's paper, which is not in his collected works. Writing intelligently

Dr. Johnson, on the other hand, argued (1765) that Hamlet " does nothing which he might not have done with the reputation of sanity," but the very fact that, as he says, " there appears no adequate cause " of the *feigned* madness, served to keep up a conflict of opinion. A generation after Hill, the commentator Steevens writes (1778):

> " The late Dr. Akenside once observed to me that the conduct of Hamlet was every way unnatural and indefensible, unless he was to be regarded as a young man whose intellects were in some degree impaired by his own misfortunes " ;

and as Dr. Furness notes in his Variorum edition, Ritson in 1783 wrote :

> " That his [Hamlet's] intellects were really impaired by the circumstances enumerated by [Dr. Akenside] is very probable ; and indeed Hamlet himself, more than once, plainly insinuates it."

Mr. Clutton-Brock will perhaps protest that this way of putting things is not his theory : a point to be more fully examined later. But surely the old doctrine could have " suggested " this theory to him in the course of his earlier studies—if he had previously studied the problem at all. Indeed, there is hardly a substantive observation in his essay (apart from two egregious series to be dis-

as he did on the art of acting, he was doubtless led to the problem in that connection ; and it may be that his remarks stimulated those of Hanmer.

cussed below) which is not to be found in effect, though not in his phraseology, in the mass of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century criticism collected by Furness. All manner of refinements on the thesis of Hill and Akenside have been put by later writers, down to the introduction of the magic word "psychological," with which Mr. Clutton-Brock makes so much play. "In a word," wrote Dr. Maginn (1836),

> "HAMLET, to my mind, is essentially a psychological exercise and study. The hero, from whose acts and feelings everything in the drama takes its colour and pursues its course, is doubtless insane. But the species of intellectual disturbance, the peculiar form of intellectual malady, under which he suffers, is of the subtlest character.

Even in the eighteenth century, Dr. William Richardson (1797) had partly anticipated a device which Mr. Clutton-Brock employs with diligence, that of suggesting the play of "the unconscious":

> "I would ask, then, whether on many occasions we do not allege as the motives of our conduct those considerations which are not really our motives? Nay, is not this sometimes done almost without our knowledge? Is it not done when we have no intention to deceive others; but when by the influence of some present passion we deceive ourselves?"

About the same time, in Germany, Garve (1796) observes that while Hamlet certainly feigns insanity, "at the same time, it is equally undoubted that he speaks and conducts himself on several

occasions as he alone would whose mind was already more or less shattered." And, arguing that a man really insane cannot feign insanity: that to assume insanity as a mask demands complete presence of mind and a high degree of mastery over one's self, Garve pronounces that "When, therefore, sanity and insanity are mingled in Hamlet's case, I cannot avoid the conclusion that there is a departure from nature and truth." Mr. Clutton-Brock, whose "theory" ends in an alternation of claims that Hamlet's reason is always sovereign and that most of the time it is not, might perhaps have profited by noting how his position is thus antagonised in advance.

Whether or not as a result of the German suggestion or of the previous English discussion, Coleridge, the critic whom every student of Shakespeare is supposed to read (and of whose general thesis Mr. Clutton-Brock's is to the extent of one-half only a formal modification), puts the definite proposition that "Hamlet's wildness is but half false: he plays the subtle trick of pretending to act only when he is very near really being what he acts";[1] and Charles Knight, who was perhaps the chief populariser of Shakespeare in England in his day, assenting to this, put the qualification: "not madness, even (?) in the popular sense of the term—certainly not madness, physiologically

[1] Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare, etc., Ashe's ed., pp. 357–8.

speaking, but unfixedness, derangement, we would have said, had not that word become a sort of synonym for madness."[1]

And thereafter the theme was many times discussed. Mr. Stopford Brooke, in his thoughtful and interesting lecture, at once repels the proposition as to Hamlet's partial insanity and makes concessions to it. The charge, he observes, is one always made by "the active, practical, quick-deciding type" of man or woman against the "pensive, sensitive, imaginative, contemplative, idealising type of humanity," which the former cannot understand; and he somewhat heedlessly classes with the practicals "the specialists in insanity, who, believing themselves to be an unanswerable authority on what is madness and what is not, are the very blindest and most foolish guides in this matter."[2] "The fact is," he contends, here following Sir George Radford and others, "that Shakespeare never intended to represent Hamlet as mad or half mad or verging on madness. . . . After all, the main question with regard to this matter is not whether Hamlet was mad or half mad, or not mad at all, but whether Shakespeare meant him to be mad; and to that there is but one answer possible"[3]—Horatio being the sufficient authority.

[1] STUDIES IN SHAKESPEARE, 1849, pp. 323–4.
[2] TEN MORE PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE, pp. 94–5.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 96–7.

"Even Polonius, though he was convinced Hamlet was mad from love, says, 'though this be madness, yet there's method in't'—method, the one thing madness never has. No, what mad talk Hamlet has hereafter is his own clever imitation of it. Yet it is a bad imitation. No sane man can imitate madness well. His sanity forces him to link thought to thought; Hamlet always does that. No madman ever does—in the sphere of his madness."[1]

All this (barring one sentence) is well put. And yet, when he comes to the disposal of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the critic pronounces, as against those who point to it as proof of Hamlet's practical faculty:

"I only see in it the cunning almost of a madman. That action of his—an action of treachery and of mean treachery—is so apart from the rest of his magnanimous character that, *if ever* Hamlet passed the limit between feigned and real madness, he seems to me to have passed it then."[2]

Thus does the impressionist method, in able hands, once more yield contradiction; and the solution, once more, is to be found only in the study of the evolution of the play on the basis of Kyd's original. That we shall see later: the present business is to note the evolution of Mr. Clutton-Brock's "theory" which at so many points does but reproduce previous commentary. The debate on Hamlet's madness has lasted for generations, and has often run on Mr. Clutton-Brock's lines. Dr. Bucknill,

[1] *Id.*, p. 106. [2] *Id.*, p. 123.

writing as a medical specialist (1859), prepared the way for him by pointing out that Hamlet's tests, "My pulse as thine both temperately keep time," and the other, are tests

> "about as fallacious as could well be offered, and which could apply only to febrile delirium and mania . . . the second is true enough for the acute forms of the disease; but it is not so in numberless cases of chronic mania, nor in melancholia or partial insanity."

Is it not, then, arguable that Mr. Clutton-Brock, after all that age-long discussion, must have got his supposed first suggestion from the "unconscious self" of his own "theory," which had retained ideas without critically or otherwise developing them? Be that as it may, it is still to be deprecated, in view of the vast mass of past discussion on HAMLET, that new critics should merely add to the mass without a thought of seeking persuasion by collation and weighing of opinions,[1] after the manner of men of science. As I understand him,

[1] I should perhaps take blame to myself for not giving a fuller account of past discussion in "The Problem of HAMLET." I was deterred by recollection of the blame for "overloading a subject with useless learning" that is so frequently passed by literary people on such surveys. But I had supposed that most readers knew (they did in my youth) of the frequency of discussions on the question "Was Hamlet really mad?" And I took it for granted that most students had reached the conclusions (*a*) that Hamlet is not *meant* by the dramatist to be regarded as "insane"; (*b*) that if he is to be so regarded the tragedy as such collapses; and (*c*) that mere "disorder" which does not amount to "irresponsibility" is not worth debating. There is "nothing in it."

Mr. Clutton-Brock goes in fear of having an æsthetic impression " clouded " by any process of reflection bordering on science ; but even he, as aforesaid, assumes to go through some processes of reasoning when he seeks to repel propositions which seem to him to grate upon the impression he is sworn to maintain *à outrance*. If, then, there is to be in criticism any appeal to reason at all, is it not worth while to make it with circumspection, with a recognition of the law of reciprocity ? Is the end of criticism to be the conveyance of an opinion or the communication of a state of sense ; for which the maximum of unction is the due medium ? If the latter, is not the victory to him who can ululate loudest ? And is that, then, Mr. Clutton-Brock's conception of " the function of criticism at the present time " ?

Coming to the concrete matter in hand, let us note the progression of the impressionist. (1) He got his " first suggestion " of his " theory," as aforesaid, at a theatre performance with much of the play left out and the rest imperfectly executed. The impression is afterwards labelled, for safety, as an " æsthetic experience," declared to be as such non-intellectual. Yet it instantaneously yielded a " theory." (2) Soon (p. 9) we learn that " one would need to see HAMLET performed *as Shakespeare meant it to be performed* before one could judge what, if anything, was irrelevant in it." Later (p. 33) we have (3) the dictum that " a play

exists fully only when it is acted." There is no stipulation for the quality of the acting or the intelligent perception of it. And that is indeed a delicate point, since, for this critic, "in a play there is more than the words, although often we can deduce that more only from the words." At the same time (p. 34) we are to note that what is called the "stage business" was communicated to the players "orally by Shakespeare himself, and his business was as much a part of the play as the words." (This is either, then, "deducible only from the words" or is another "more.") But then (p. 34) a good actor may make new discoveries, as presumably Burbage did; and Shakespeare, who "may have joyfully consented" to Burbage's discoveries, would, by implication, joyfully consent to new discoveries—by a new actor, or by Mr. Clutton-Brock. For (p. 35) "it is open to *anyone* to say how he thinks a play or a part ought to be acted." That is to say, it is *not* necessary, after all the asseverations to the contrary, to see the play acted in order to know how it ought to be experienced; because when one is laying down the law one may be "merely deducing . . . from the words."

Thus in the mere preliminary statement of how a "theory" is or may be or ought to be arrived at, we have boxed the compass of specification, each new dictum unsaying some of those which preceded. Yet on the next page (36) we are again

told that " Shakespeare's plays can be experienced as he meant them to be experienced only when they are acted." And as Mr. Clutton-Brock believes he got his theory from an " imperfect " performance with a good deal of the play left out, he got it from an experience that Shakespeare certainly did not mean him to have. Nor does he explain how he ever was able to get the right experience. Performances, he complains, may be misleading ; and " In most performances of HAMLET that I have seen, the very text, and so the whole part of Hamlet, was misrepresented on an essential point." No hint is given that Mr. Clutton-Brock ever witnessed the right performance, his sole illuminating " experience " being from an imperfect one. And it was in that parlous state that he got his " theory."

One proposition seems to stand, at least for the time being. It is that if the " discoverer " of new meanings in the play " conjectures anything that could be of no use to a player, since it could neither be acted nor have any bearing on the acting, then he is wasting his own time and that of his readers " (p. 36). It is not suggested in this connection that the something which Mr. Clutton-Brock desires to see acted has ever been acted : the plain implication is that it has not. It is a " theory " which he once " experienced " without having experienced the play as the dramatist would have wished him to do. But in the terms of the case, he feels it to be actable. Let it stand, then, at that.

What the theory is to explain, we gather (p. 31), is Hamlet's delaying to kill the King—a magnanimous plan on Mr. Clutton-Brock's part, since, for him,

"during that theatre experience, we are not interested in the delay—indeed, we hardly notice it—for as in all the greatest dramas,[1] what interests us is what is happening, not why it happens, or what is going to happen. We are absorbed by Hamlet himself. . . . But still, I think, the delay may be explained in psychological terms."

When you are so happily capable of "not being interested" in a delay while the delayer is himself, on the stage, vehemently declaring [2] that he cannot understand why he delays, it is certainly kind of you to explain it to those who *were* interested. What is not quite clear is, why you got interested afterwards. This, according to Mr. Clutton-Brock, is a scientific process, which must be sternly kept apart from "æsthetic experience" in critical matters—at least he inculcates that course on Mr. Eliot. It would seem that he benevolently hopes, after all, to enable Mr. Eliot and the rest of us to get the right experience when we go to see HAMLET, though he has ostensibly explained that the right experience is impossible unless the play be acted

[1] Irrespective of good or bad acting?

[2] Can it be that Mr. Clutton-Brock is *here* founding on the fact that one of the great soliloquies is dropped from the Folio? Is he *here* implying that that excision proves that the dramatist did not finally wish us to hear Hamlet saying those things?

as Shakespeare meant it to be, and as Mr. Clutton-Brock feels it ought to be, and never is. And as the soliloquy, "How all occasions do inform against me," is actually dropped from the Folio, which suggests that Shakespeare dropped it from the stage version, our problem is complex indeed. For our critic expressly claims (p. 11) that "our document for Shakespeare's intentions and procedure is only HAMLET in its final versions," and challenges my assent. I cannot in the least assent as to the term "procedure"; and I do not understand the plural in "final versions." *The* final version is the Folio, which, as aforesaid, drops the great soliloquy. What, then, does Mr. Clutton-Brock make of that?

§ 3. *The Thesis*

And now, to know what the polemic is all about! Thus it goes:

(1) The actors, who might do so much, are always misrepresenting Hamlet, exhibiting him (p. 37),

"except for a few unaccountable lapses from decorum and a few regrettable actions still more unaccountable, as a perfectly well-behaved English gentleman; whereas in the text it is all the other way. There Hamlet behaves outrageously except in *some* of the soliloquies, with Horatio, in part of his interview with his mother, and in his converse with the players.[1] In particular, his behaviour

[1] So he is behaving outrageously in his interview with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and in the talk before the Ghost appears.

to Ophelia is obscene and cruel ; and if this is toned down, if his dirty jokes in the play-scene are left out, as they usually are, *if his demeanour throughout is far more sympathetic than his actions or words*, then a Hamlet is presented to us who is not Shakespeare's at all, and who *is not to be explained in terms either of his words or his actions.*"

I invite the reader to pause at this point, because we are on the verge of a countersense which eclipses anything yet achieved by the critic. So far, the actors are being condemned for presenting a Hamlet " who is not to be explained in terms either of his words or of his actions." And immediately the critic goes on to posit for himself a Hamlet " who is not to be explained in terms either of his words or of his actions." As thus :

" Yet the text is plain enough ; for not only does Hamlet begin to behave wildly immediately after the interview with the Ghost, but, when dying, *he insists that all through the play he has been misexpressing himself.*"

The first question is not whether Mr. Clutton-Brock is here speaking truly : it is as to what on earth he means by blaming the actors for presenting a Hamlet who is not explicable by his words or actions, when he himself is expressly insisting that exactly such up to the point of death is the Hamlet of the play. It is not our business either to defend the actors from Mr. Clutton-Brock or to discuss his view of their potentialities ; but

when it is pointed out that what he is calling upon them to present all through the play is " a Hamlet who is misexpressing himself," and that at the very close he is demanding that the player of the dying Hamlet shall convey this fact to the audience, by his manner of saying a few lines which in themselves convey no such idea, the reader may begin to perceive that the chances of Mr. Clutton-Brock's " theory " ever vindicating itself on the stage are those of " a snowball in Tophet," as they put it in the States. The crowning bewilderment is that after expressly censuring the actors, in the passage above cited, for making Hamlet's behaviour to Ophelia " more sympathetic than his actions or words," the critic no less expressly writes (p. 67) that

> " The scene with Ophelia is merely painful and unintelligible *unless the actor can show* that *Hamlet is misexpressing himself* under a compulsion he does not understand."

The reader should now collate the progression of the critic's thesis :

(1) The true " experience " of Hamlet must be from the acting.

(2) The actors always misrepresent him.

(3) Hamlet reveals at the very close (where nobody else ever found it) the fact that all through the play he has been misexpressing himself. It is only *in articulo mortis* that he makes the discovery for himself.

(4) So that the actors have misrepresented him in not *letting* him misrepresent himself.

(5) They ought *not* to make Hamlet *behave* sympathetically while he is bullying Ophelia in words. He must misrepresent himself.

(6) But it is also their business to *make* him behave sympathetically, else the scene is " merely painful and unintelligible."

(7) Their business is, all the same, to make him misrepresent himself all through the play, and then at the close, in the delivery of three lines which make no such representation, reveal to the audience the fact that he has misrepresented himself.

(8) Thus we get " the real Hamlet " (a conception yet to be discussed).

Mr. Clutton-Brock has said (among others) so many affable things about me that I am acutely embarrassed at having to point out, first, that he has here achieved a more unqualified " insanity " of theory than has ever before been put forth on the subject of the play, or of Hamlet ; and, secondly, that his interpretation of the passage by which he assumes to prove his " theory " is if possible more absurd still. Thus his text runs (p. 38) :

" His [Hamlet's] last anxiety is that Horatio shall set him right with the world :

> Horatio, I am dead,
> Thou livest ; report me and my cause aright
> To the unsatisfied.

And again, a few lines later :

> O good Horatio, what a wounded name,
> Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
> To tell my story.

His anxiety cannot be merely [!] that Horatio shall explain the external facts, the murder and his mother's unfaithfulness, which could be done in a few words [!]. It is that Horatio shall make the world understand what he himself, now that his brain is cleared by approaching death, and a task at last performed, understands so clearly that he thinks Horatio too must see it. . . . His last words are—'The rest is silence,' meaning that he cannot say what he most wishes to say" [not even: "I have misexpressed myself"]. "So the tragedy and the interest of Hamlet lie in the fact that, *by some compulsion, he is forced to misexpress himself in action and words.*"

For the moment, I put aside the words last italicised. The unsophisticated reader has by this time anticipated the inevitable verdict that Mr. Clutton-Brock, even if tested solely by his own declared principle that no theory of a play is valid which cannot be set forth by the acting, is just hopelessly and distressingly wrong. The lines to which he gives such a preposterous meaning were never so interpreted by any human being before him, and would not be so now even by a reviewer, if any reviewer should chance to read so far. The lines mean just what the theorist says they do not

mean: that the "external facts" are to be told to a world which does not know them—a narrative which *cannot* be put in a few words, while the proposition, "I have always misexpressed myself," goes into five. "Report me and my cause" means "tell to the world what you have learned from your own observation, from the dying avowals of Laertes and the Queen, and from me"; and "things standing thus unknown" means: "the facts of the case—the murder; the Queen's relation to Claudius, the coming of the Ghost, the trouble thus laid upon me, the unintentional character of the killing of Polonius, the king's plot to have me killed in England, his plot with Laertes, and his plan with the poisoned drink."

That is the absolutely unanimous decision of the court by whose finding Mr. Clutton-Brock professes to stand. No man of any nation before him ever dreamt of reading into Hamlet's dying speech what he reads into it, much less of calling upon actors to express that impossible meaning by their way of delivering words which say nothing of the kind. This much the very reviewers would have told him if they had read his book with any attention up to that point, instead of switching off from the preface, after a glance at the rest, to denounce somebody who was supposed to have alleged that Hamlet is "not a masterpiece at all but an accident." If they had read Mr. Clutton-Brock's book up to page 38, a modicum of the "sensibility" to which

some of them lay claim would have moved them to tell him that he had reduced the masterpiece to

> a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

Certainly he could have replied that after page 38 he says a number of different things. The trouble is that he is always saying different things. But the disorder is already past mending; and the further developments arouse in any comprehending mind only new astonishment, alike at the positions reached and at the methods of the reviewers who contrived not to see them.

§ 4. *The Impressionist's "Real Hamlet"*

The thesis, as already noted, affirms that "the tragedy and the interest of Hamlet lie in the fact that by some compulsion he is forced to misexpress himself in action and words." Which would seem to mean that the critic's "real Hamlet," so often alluded to by him, is not the Hamlet of the play, who for the critic always, save in some soliloquies, misexpresses himself. The "real" Hamlet, that is to say, is a Hamlet who neither acts nor speaks (save in the soliloquies), but is to be largely inferred through the misexpression which in effect fills the rest of the play. And as the critic, like the rest of us, is fascinated by Hamlet, he for his part is largely fascinated by misexpression. Ptolemy would seem

to be here well outdone. By the geocentric theory, applied to the cosmos of the play, we get the conception of a "real earth" which is not the earth we see, but which is to be inferred from the failure of the earth to do "the right thing," so to speak. It all suggests obscurely the "tenth body" which the Ptolemaists added to their system, for the sake of having a "perfect number."

The "real Hamlet," it is to be observed, is under "some compulsion" to misexpress himself; and the compulsion comes, we find, from something which for the theorist is in the terms of his case somehow unreal, though it is the factor upon which he relies for his explanation. And the compulsion turns out to be an "unconscious self" in Hamlet, which in general, from the moment of the exit of the Ghost, makes him act otherwise than he "consciously" thinks he ought to.

That Hamlet has been profoundly shaken, first, by his mother's remarriage to his detested uncle, then, hard upon that, by the shattering revelation of the Ghost—this lies upon the face of the play, abundantly "expressed"; and every critic is supposed to see it. That the shock to Hamlet's inner nature is to be inferred as causing his delay to fulfil his vow of revenge is either explicit or implicit in several of the attempts to show that such an explanation accounts for everything; and it had been explicitly put by me as entering into Shakespeare's conception. That the pessimism

into which Hamlet is cast is set forth in the play as a laming condition, making mere revenge for him a vanity, was put by me in my youth as a fairly obvious proposition, even in the act of pointing to the old play as explaining how the debate has been set up. Shakespeare had laboured wonderfully to evolve a Hamlet whose apparent abstinence from a possible and eagerly proposed revenge should be as it were emotionally intelligible. The difficulty was that Hamlet went on doing the things done by the barbaric Hamlet before him; and this persistent incongruous action partly undid the emotional assent by obtruding perplexity. The Shakespearean Hamlet of the poetry, one felt (for the rest of us have our feelings, like Mr. Clutton-Brock), should have acted otherwise. Why, then, does he act as in the play? And the simple answer was and is that the old action subsists just because Shakespeare was but transmuting an old play without reconstructing it—doing this because for the purposes of the theatre the old situations were requisite. The audiences would have jibbed at any excision of the Ghost, the mock madness, the "ragging" scenes, the railing at Ophelia, the killing of Polonius, the "lugging the guts into the neighbour room," the doom of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the leaping into Ophelia's grave, and all the rest of it. To retain and to irradiate all this was possible to no man but Shakespeare; and he so irradiated it that to this day the play

holds us spellbound. But there stands the persisting æsthetic anomaly; and one invited the ever-living host of inconclusive debaters to accept the simple fact that the anomaly inheres in the procedure.

That Shakespeare was, as I put it,[1] under a "compulsion," Mr. Clutton-Brock cannot understand; and he raises one of his mystifications over the word. He is strong on occult and unintelligible compulsions: he cannot realise this perfectly simple one,[2] because, like most literary critics down till the other day, he has never in this connection[3] realised Shakespeare as a working actor-playwright, seeking first and last plays that could be relied on to "draw" with the theatre-going public, and pouring much or little of his genius into them as he saw his way for the time being.

But Mr. Clutton-Brock assures us that Hamlet—the "real" Hamlet of his intuition, who is so diligently misexpressed by the Hamlet who speaks and acts—is under a "compulsion" always to speak and act unreally; and (by implication) that this was Shakespeare's conception of *his* Hamlet. The compulsion, he suggests, was "psychological."

[1] Sir George Radford had said the same thing: "He [Shakespeare] was bound by the conditions of his work to preserve what were considered the essential features of the story" (SHYLOCK AND OTHERS, 1894, p. 65).

[2] That is, where it does not suit his case. On page 43, as before noted, he recognises that "spectators who remembered the old play would expect the same pretended madness in this one."

[3] Though in another essay on Shakespeare (ESSAYS ON BOOKS, p. 3) he writes that the Master "wrote from hand to mouth."

As he describes it, however, it is flatly pathological. Hamlet is for him so shaken by his shocks that he is under an "inhibition" to do what he would. For always the critic helplessly recurs to the irremovable datum that in the play Hamlet *purposes* a bloody revenge and denounces himself for delaying it. So far as any firm proposition can be gathered from the critic's exposition, he argues that we are to conceive Hamlet as being habitually switched from his purpose and his "thought" by an "unconscious self" *created by the shock.* This is for the critic "psychology"—a modest verbalist amateur psychology acquired from the current discussions of the Freudians.

The student will at once see that as a "theory" this is but a formal modification of the older "psychological" formulas, of which the most catching was Coleridge's, that of an "overplus of reflection" which made the hero-victim swerve from action—except when it did not! On this Mr. Stopford Brooke's presentment is but a partial improvement. Mr. Clutton-Brock's formula, or one of his formulas, is (p. 42) "*a repulsion that he* [Hamlet] *does not understand.* And finally[1] this *obstacle becomes* for the time his *purpose*"—the purpose, that is to say, imposed by the "unconscious self," which mysteriously swerves from action—save when either it or the real self acts!

[1] This is said, however, of the very opening stage, and applies to Hamlet's action from the moment the Ghost has left the stage.

In sum, Coleridge's " overplus of reflection " now becomes an eviction of the conscious self by the unconscious, which makes Hamlet " misexpress himself in action and in talk." And this, forsooth, is supposed to be the thesis or sub-thesis of a play adapted for an Elizabethan theatre by the actor-playwright. Shakespeare's " purpose," says the critic (p. 47), " is to *represent* the *complete* Hamlet, the Hamlet of his own thoughts *as well as* the Hamlet who is *provoked to excess by people and things*." And *this*, once more, is supposed to be done by making Hamlet *misexpress* himself " throughout the play."

It is in this connection (p. 47) that Mr. Clutton-Brock reaches the luminous conclusion that " the inner " [*i.e.* the misexpressed] " Hamlet is as much a part of the drama as the outer " [*i.e.* the misexpressing] : " without the inner, the outer would be *the erratic puppet that Mr. Robertson and Mr. Eliot make him out to be*." I am content to leave it to the intelligent reader to decide for himself as to who in this field is the manufacturer of erratic puppets. An inner Hamlet who is always (save in soliloquy) misexpressed by the outer ; and an outer who always, save by " accident," acts otherwise than the inner proposes to act, seems to me the very last word in erratic puppetry ; and I invite the student to pronounce that such puppetry is not Shakespeare's.

It is true that, while thus formulating the most

erratic puppet ever conceived—I will not say by a dramatist, but by an impressionist wholly innocent of play-making—Mr. Clutton-Brock professes to be entirely satisfied that, in the theatre, he always knows the "real" Hamlet through the constant misexpression (by "a man with a gift for expression") of the "unconscious self"—dominating the "Hamlet who *would be* doing so many things," but "*is forced to be thinking of only one thing*, and that a thing contrary to his own nature," and so making him leave his thinking, all the same, to the unconscious self, which (presumably) does not consciously think. In the mass of "psychological" comment on HAMLET, there is certainly no confusion to match this. And it is of this fabric of impossible contradictions that its framer, in good set terms, declares (p. 25): "though Hamlet's behaviour may seem to us unintelligible psychologically, we are æsthetically convinced by it. *As he acts, we feel, so he would act.*" In other words: He always misexpresses himself; and we feel that he always would—he, the "real" Hamlet, who is never expressed save in the soliloquies which express him to himself. And this after the avowal (p. 22) that "you have no right to discover motives in a play as if it were a history of a real person," and, above all, after the stupefying challenge (p. 24): "WAS ANY CHARACTER IN DRAMA EVER EXPRESSED MORE COMPLETELY THAN HAMLET?"

Mr. Clutton-Brock irresistibly invites us to apply to his own psychosis the simple formula by which he accounts alike for Hamlet and for the position of Mr. Eliot. "His arguments," he writes of the latter (p. 15), "raise the suspicion that his conclusion is based, not on them, but on some strong, unconscious wish to reach that conclusion." His own conclusion is certainly not based on his arguments, which yield no thinkable conclusion: indeed, he has told us that he got it spontaneously at the theatre, on seeing an imperfect performance of a "cut" version of the play. And he has banned argument as the introduction of an intellectual process into æsthetics. Then there must have been the "strong, unconscious wish" at work in Mr. Clutton-Brock. Of me he affirms (p. 7) that I am "torn" between a desire to prove the influence of Kyd and a theory that Chapman inserted an irrelevant scene. The charge is a mere blunder. For anyone who understands the argument, there is absolutely no conflict between those positions. For me, Hamlet and many other plays in the Folio, as well as many non-Shakespearean plays, are palimpsests, revealing the work of various hands. Disowning the soft impeachment of being "torn," on the ground that, after twenty revisions, I really knew what I was saying, I will yet not retort on my critic that he is "torn" by his internecine ideas. Self-confutations do not trouble him. They occur on nearly every page of his book; and he seems to

gain in confidence as they multiply. But it would seem almost imperative that we should give him the benefit of the excuse of an " unconscious self," which he finds so satisfactory as to Hamlet. The Freudians should really investigate the case.

The difficulty, or one of the difficulties, for some of them, will be that Mr. Clutton-Brock's " psychology " is in itself a mere tangle of contradictions in terms. With apologies (p. 44) for his inexpertness in psychology, he puts his fullest statement of his " psychological formula " thus :

> " When Hamlet was implored by his father's ghost to avenge his murder, and in particular to put an end to the incestuous marriage between his mother and the murderer, his conscious resolve, made with all the force of his will, was to obey his father. But the shock which he suffered on hearing of the murder, and particularly on realizing the full horror of his mother's re-marriage, made, as it were, a wound in his mind, which hurt whenever he thought of the murder, or of his uncle, or of his mother's connexion with his uncle. The pain of the wound was so sharp that, *unconsciously*, he " [*i.e.* the " real " and *conscious* Hamlet] " flinched from it and *seized every pretext* to *forget* it.[1] He would will to remember it as he willed to take vengeance; but here ' the law of reversed action ' worked within him. The more he *tried to force himself* into action the more *his unconscious invented pretexts* why he should delay to act. In fact, the play is made by Hamlet's irrelevance, not " [the usual pseudo-antithesis] " by his purpose of

[1] A very gross paralogism in psychology. A *pretext* to *forget* is a contradiction in terms.

revenge. It is the essence of the tragedy that his irrelevance, the result not of any weakness in Hamlet's character but of his nervous shock, causes many deaths where there should be only one, and causes Hamlet to misexpress himself in action and in talk. *The soliloquies are the great exception.* They are far more numerous than in any other of Shakespeare's plays, and they are there to contrast the *real* with the *misexpressed* Hamlet and to keep the former in our minds."

This engaging use of " psychology " (" what is known as psychology," as Mr. Punch puts it) recalls irresistibly the ingenuous " statistics prove " of the juvenile debating society; though " the law of reversed action " has a somewhat imposing effect—for those who find science in the Freudian Theory of Dreams. That would ostensibly explain Clarence's Dream as the outcome of " the secret wish "—with perhaps the Wells Complex as an additional factor. Mr. Clutton-Brock flatteringly assumes that we all know all about it; but among the various psychological " laws " so describable there is unhappily none, worthy of that name, which will help him out, because there is none which can explain how a " conscious " can " *unconsciously seize a pretext to forget* " which is " invented " by his " unconscious." The subconscious (which may or may not be what our critic means by the awkward term, " the unconscious ") *may* shrink from the full remembrance of a painful fact. There is a charming case of the

kind in poetry. In Poe's ULALUME, the poet, pacifying his Psyche, who sub-consciously fears remembering the lost one, talks to her beautifully of the star Astarte, Psyche trembling and shrinking the while, till the door of the tomb recalls to the sub-conscious and the conscious self at once the memory of the " dead burden." Poe's psychology was every way truer than Mr. Clutton-Brock's. For the poet, it is the sub-conscious Psyche that obscurely remembers the abiding grief while the speaking self finds a brief oblivious comfort in the beauty of the night. This " pretext " is not in the least invented by the sub-conscious : it is the other way about.

Coleridge too is rather nearer true psychology than our prose critic when he argues that Hamlet is switched off from action by his ever-generalising intellect, which sets him thinking of the cosmos when he should be thinking of the business in hand. The defect of Coleridge's interesting thesis [1] is its failure to note the fact that Hamlet, unlike Coleridge,[2] *has* a strong will, and thinks energetically about acting, and can and does act with great efficiency when he will, as Coleridge admits. But Mr. Clutton-Brock's formula, in which the " unconscious " invents for " the conscious " pretexts

[1] I put aside the question whether it is originally his or Schlegel's.

[2] " I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so." TABLE TALK, June 24, 1847. That was the " sub-conscious " motive for the theory when it was framed.

to "forget" what the conscious remembers, misses even formal plausibility as well as psychological truth. His "conscious" Hamlet admittedly evades all "pretexts to forget" precisely when, in the terms of the case put, he needs them most—when he is communing with himself, and suffering his full pain. When they are not so needed, when he is conversing or acting, he is supposed to be under the spell of the pretexts invented by the unconscious—that is, just when the rational psychology of real observation of life could readily understand him as "forgetting to remember." Mr. Clutton-Brock's hysteron-proteron Hamlet, on the contrary, has to "remember (unconsciously) to forget." Our critical summing-up must be that a pseudo-psychology has been framed to bolster up verbally the "strong unconscious wish to reach that conclusion."

For the conclusion was avowedly foregone. The critic was, as he puts it, "æsthetically convinced," by which he means "æsthetically impressed"; for by his own account (p. 24) his æsthetic "experience" gives no chance for any process of reasoning. "Convince," which etymologically once meant "overthrow," normally means to-day "persuade by evidence, or by evident sincerity"—a process involving inference which rejects a previous doubt. And it is his own private impression, which he engagingly labels "our" conviction, not in the journalistic sense, that he is determined to force

upon us, though he reached it through an imperfect performance of a curtailed play. Then it was that the play gave him (p. 27) " a human being so vivid and moving that *thought is baffled by him.*" " As he acts, we feel, so he would act." And still more aggressively comes the assertion (p. 23) :

> " The play would be an artistic failure if, seeing it acted on the stage, we found ourselves asking,[1] ' Why does Hamlet behave thus ? ' or protesting—' But he would not behave thus.' No one, I think, ever made that protest "

—ever made it, that is to say, while watching the play. At once " we " put to Mr. Clutton-Brock his own question to Mr. Eliot : " How does he know this ? " For " I think " has here the force " I am sure." And I answer that I cannot conceive a thinking man missing the perplexity *while he is listening to Hamlet's self-accusing soliloquies.*[2]

[1] Observe, merely asking, even if we should proceed to find the answer in Coleridge or in Mr. Clutton-Brock.

[2] As against Mr. Clutton-Brock's strangely positive assertion, it may suffice to quote the words of Mr. Stopford Brooke, who is presumably as weighty a witness : " A child would comprehend the outline of Hamlet's story. An alert boy or girl, *on seeing the play*, would probably ask *the same questions we ask.* Did Hamlet believe the Ghost ? Was he really in love with Ophelia ? . . . If he thought the King had really murdered his father, why did he not kill the King at once ? Was he mad or only pretending ? These and many others are simple questions which naturally arise. And I am not sure whether the answers to them are not quite simple also. They would be so, if Shakespeare had not troubled our answers and confused our minds with his addition to the simple

Thus it is Mr. Clutton-Brock who declares the play to be " an artistic failure " *for everybody who is able to think about the purpose of Hamlet's self-accusing soliloquies while he is listening to them in the theatre.* Once more, Mr. Eliot is vindicated by his critic. And the question arises, Were the soliloquies (or one of them, as commonly happens) omitted in the performance which gave Mr. Clutton-Brock his conviction? If not, we are left simply with the " solipsist " proposition that if you think critically in the theatre, or " experience " otherwise than does the solipsist who finds Hamlet " mis-expressed " save in the soliloquies, you are doing what you have no business to do!

And what, let us ask, remains of this empty asseveration when we demand: Is the play then an artistic failure if when we *read* it we are puzzled, as a hundred thousand men have admittedly been puzzled, as Mr. Clutton-Brock would seem by implication to have been puzzled till he " unconsciously " got his " theory " of the conscious–unconscious Hamlet out of the unreasoning " experience " of an imperfect performance?

What is this but, in effect, yet another surrender to Mr. Eliot? Let the " artistic failure " formula be set down to the critic who thus endorses it to

outlines of the most subtle and complex representation of the thoughts and feelings of the characters. The more we hear of their inner life, the less are we able to say clearly why they did this or that; the more subtle and the less simple seems the true answer to the questions." Vol. cited, pp. 91–2.

the mind while rejecting it in words. It is not my formula. I never could see " failure " in the most fascinating of all dramas, even while I " felt " or reasoned that the magical whole did not cohere as life coheres. For me, it is first and last a work of art, not a gratuitous pretence of presenting as a tragic hero a poor sufferer from brain-storm, who cannot act because he needs a rest-cure !

§ 5. *The Pathological Hamlet*

It is, I repeat, a pathological and not a " psychological " Hamlet that is presented to us by Mr. Clutton-Brock. His Hamlet immediately after the passing of the Ghost presents (p. 42) " a symptom of mental disorder "—Coleridge's idea, unmodified this time. The New Hamlet (p. 98) " remains an artist even through *mental disorder*, and is even more an artist [!] because of it." Nay :

> " To *express* such a *character* fully, it seems *necessary* that he should be subjected not only to external, but to internal misfortune ; or rather that external misfortune, of the kind to which he is subjected, *must* produce mental disorder " (p. 99).

That is to say, *mental* disorder is necessary " to *express* such a *character fully*." It is difficult to believe that Mr. Clutton-Brock realised what he was saying when he penned this astonishing proposition, which, besides, so stultifies his account of

Hamlet as misexpressing himself. And again (p. 88):

"It is not only the character of Hamlet that makes the unity of the play; but it is also a particular, and morbid, state of that character; for without the shock suffered by Hamlet, and the consequent disorder of his mind, the plot would lack all reason and coherence."

Upon this the first comment must be a caveat against any new verbal confusion. Either "mental disorder" is to stand for something in the nature of madness, some unbalancing of *reason*, or it is nothing to the purpose. In any lesser sense, it differentiates Hamlet in no way from Macbeth or Othello or Antony, all of whom exhibit mental stresses to the point of disorderly thinking and defect of sound judgment. The formula "mental disorder" must mean more than this if it is to mean anything. And to such a proposition the first answer is the (substantially) old one that a mentally disordered hero is not and cannot be the subject of high or great tragedy, unless the mental disorder is represented as making him psychically *greater* for the time than before—as is Lear. No man, indeed, could so clothe madness with pity and tears as could Shakespeare: his transmutation of the mad Ophelia of the old play, who was actually a theme for laughter to the old audience,[1] into the

[1] See Mr. John Corbin's important essay, THE ELIZABETHAN HAMLET, 1895.

heart-breaking thing that survives forever, is assuredly not the least winning of his wizardries. But Ophelia is tragical in madness, as in death, not as a heroine but as a victim. HAMLET is a play without a heroine. Temporary madness makes Lear *more* tragical, because the poet lends to the madness as it were a dreadful sanity which unveils the world. But the " disordered mind " of our critic's Hamlet, by his own showing, is not a factor of illumination or elevation, but something laming, weakening, a sickness, a thing distressing, pathetic, not heroically tragical. And it is an interesting thing that critics who claim to abound in sensibility should be complacently blind to such a fact. Mr. Clutton-Brock's neurasthenic sufferer, ridden by " his unconscious," is strictly " not responsible for his actions " : you are set thinking that if only he had " a good rest " he might successfully tackle his revenge. For it is on the cards that " nerve shock " can be cured !

Now, " the tragedy of Hamlet " (which our critic at one time finds to consist in Hamlet's " irrelevance," at another in his failure to understand " his unconscious," and yet again in his failure to express himself) lies, broadly speaking, in the fact that no medical treatment can change the experience which hems him in. Let him get " his unconscious " ever so thoroughly in hand, it will be only the more clear to the conscious spirit that there is no way out. Killing the king will not still

the revelation of the Ghost that the murderer, before the murder,

> Won to his shameful lust
> The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen

—a point which Shakespeare is fain to slur over later or to make Hamlet slur over as the Ghost willed, for the doubling horror of it.[1] A Hamlet who is the "erratic [and neurotic] puppet" of "his unconscious" to the extent of seeking every pretext (whether of his Box or of his Cox) to forget his trouble, is a Hamlet who is helplessly and hopelessly seeking to evade his tragedy. Is that a hero?

To see the pitiful disservice done by Mr. Clutton-Brock to the figure which he goes about to extol (for he really does, later) we have but to compare his "real Hamlet" with the Hamlet limned by Professor Elgar Stoll, who,[2] perfectly recognising that Shakespeare's Hamlet is the skeleton of Kyd's re-incarnated, finds him heroically adequate in that his delays are the quasi-conventional delays of the hero of the standardised Seneca–Kyd tragedy of revenge, who *must* delay, as Hieronimo delays in the SPANISH TRAGEDY, and be reproached for delay, as in that and in many an ancient tragedy, and talk of having forgotten—as if he could forget.

[1] It is noteworthy that the point of the Queen's degree of complicity is obscure even in the original story, remains so in the Kyd play as preserved in the BRUDERMORD, and is left so by Shakespeare.

[2] See his very able treatise, HAMLET: AN HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE STUDY, Univ. of Minnesota, 1919.

Professor Stoll's presentment of the hero, always kept within the bounds of critical reason, is just as attractive for the intelligent impressionist as Mr. Clutton-Brock's; and the latter, after attacking it, seemed to realise this, and was fain to rebuke a fellow-critic who, in the now prevalent journalistic manner, had flouted Mr. Stoll without having even seen his treatise. Mr. Clutton-Brock, indeed, permits himself (p. 122) to express a doubt whether Mr. Stoll—or Mr. Eliot—has read the play! These forms of dialectic are injudicious, as inviting emphatic retorts,[1] especially in the case of a critic who says a play is to be *seen*, and who got his own theory of it from a cut performance. But for us the issue is clear enough: Professor Stoll's Hamlet remains a hero; Mr. Clutton-Brock's is most of the time a subject for medical attention and commiseration.

That is the first part of the answer to him on this head. The second part is that he himself (through the ministry of his unconscious self, perchance?) realises this, and unsays, as usual, his own formula. For after—or through—all the iterations as to Hamlet's mental disorder, his subjection to his unconscious, his inability to express himself (albeit

[1] In the passage cited, Mr. Brock first suggests that I "must forget the journey to England" when I say Hamlet is chargeable with "delay" only in the interval between Acts I and II; and then, quoting Prof. Stoll's remark that after the killing of Polonius Hamlet "is in custody," answers: "But the play itself *says nothing* of this." Being referred to the play, IV. iii. 14, he conceded (in the Times Lit. Supp.) that he had actually "forgotten" that!

he is so perfectly "expressed"), his penultimate "dazed and aimless state" (p. 97) from which the clouded brain is cleared only at the point of death (p. 38), we have the flat contradiction (p. 96):

> "There would be no tragedy, and no beauty, if the jangled bells were not sweet, if the reason were not noble, *and even sovereign, through all its disorder.*"

Sovereign, through all its disorder! Sovereign when dethroned! Sovereign when the Unconscious is forcing its puppet to misexpress himself! Whether or not Mr. Clutton-Brock means here that the bells remain sweet when jangled, it is impossible to be certain; but that appears to be involved in the context. Nay, even that is advanced upon (p. 109):

> "It is not merely conscience but his *sovereign* reason that *rebels* and is *shaken* by its own *rebellion.*"

Shakespeare is the master of words: our critic would fain be their tyrant. It will not do. The language remains a common possession; it is Shakespeare who tells us that "sweet bells jangled" are not sweet but "out of tune and harsh"; the critic himself had previously (p. 90) put it that Ophelia's two lines, given in full, supply "the key" [the fourth key, I think] "to the tragedy"; and the common law of language rules that you shall not count "sovereign" when you say "disorder,"

"obscene and cruel," "dazed and aimless," "shaken by its own rebellion."

But this perpetual contradiction in terms is part of Mr. Clutton-Brock's fatality. One of his recurring *motifs* is (pp. 89–97) "the beauty of Hamlet's character," which "seems to flow out of it *and to fill the whole play*"; and to this we have the recurring *contra*: "His behaviour to Ophelia is obscene and cruel . . . his dirty jokes . . . makes a dirty joke, as being the kind of conversation fit for courtiers" (pp. 37–55). And still (p. 100) the dramatist "presents Hamlet to us not only vividly but *always in terms of beauty*."

The critic, I suppose, has ready a salving quibble: "That is the real but misexpressed Hamlet—the Hamlet who is misexpressed throughout the play, from whose misexpression we divine the beauty of the character of the said real Hamlet." Would it not be simpler, and quite as effective with the impressionists who dote on misexpression, just to say: "It is no use telling me that Hamlet is contradictory: for me, contradictions are not contradictions?" Evidently they are not. But for the rest of us they are; and a brief and incomplete list of Mr. Clutton-Brock's may usefully be put in an appendix, for the instruction of those who are disposed to study him in what he would demur to as a "scientific" way.

For the rest, by way of putting once more a substantive case as against Mr. Clutton-Brock's

confusion, which some readers, it is to be feared, will find trying, I am fain to repeat here my own account of the impression Hamlet makes upon "us"—an account which Mr. Clutton-Brock had before him, but which an unknowing reader could not guess from his book to have been ever suggested by me:

"What he [Shakespeare] did, remains a miracle of dramatic imagination. In the place of one of the early and crude creations of Kyd, vigorous without verisimilitude,[1] outside of refined sympathy, he has projected a personality which from the first line sets all our sympathies in a quick vibration, and so holds our minds and hearts that even the hero's cruelties cannot alienate them. The triumph is achieved by sheer intensity of presentment, absolute lifelikeness of utterance, a thrilling and convincing rightness of phrase, and of feeling where wrong feeling is not part of the irremovable material. He who will may argue that Shakespeare should not have accepted intractable material. Let him tell us whether he would rather have been without HAMLET, and whether he cannot see that the practical compulsion to handle or retain intractable material underlies half a dozen of the Shakespeare plays as well as HAMLET—TIMON, PERICLES, CYMBELINE, HENRY V, the WINTER'S TALE, MEASURE FOR MEASURE, ALL'S WELL, to say nothing of other comedies. Till that is seen, Shakespeare is not revealed. . . .

"Evolving a Hamlet of the highest mental lucidity, Shakespeare himself at one point accepted the inference

[1] This, of course, does not apply to *Arden*, which is later, and psychologically very much superior to the *Tragedy*, though little better in point of verse technique.

of an 'almost blunted purpose,' a will that will not act when it should; and by a score of subtle strokes he tacitly suggests how a man may feel the barrenness of the revenge to which he is vowed. But that is only half of his composite Hamlet: the other is the presentment of a man who can act with lightning speed and force, and will 'make a ghost of him that lets me.' Of all the explanatory formulas that of Mackenzie, so little discussed, is the best. He posits an excess of sensibility which yields uncertain and divergent action—a spirit which recoils as uncontrollably from straightforward killing as from another's villany or unworthiness. With a difference, Professor Bradley pronounces that Hamlet 'tries to find reasons for his delay in pursuing a design which excites his aversion.' Such a conception may as easily be read into Shakespeare as that of psychic shock, or pessimism arising out of personal disillusionment. But it also is inadequate to the data. Hamlet thrusts through the arras without hesitation, and shows no horror at his deed, and has no scruple about sending his school-fellows to their death on the bare surmise that they knew the contents of the King's despatch. A 'sensibility' which yields at once these results and an insuperable recoil from vengeance on a villain is not finally thinkable. In the words of Salvini, 'A man like Hamlet has never existed, nor could exist.' This, as we must admit at the conclusion, is not really an ultimate indictment of Shakespeare; but it is a necessary estoppel of certain theorists who turn an æsthetic suggestion into a false historic theorem."

The prophetic soul, it would seem, had "unconsciously" divined the advent of Mr. Clutton-Brock, for such is his procedure with his "real

Hamlet." Captured by an impression, received at a curtailed performance of the play, and holding that no "intellectual" justification of it is necessary, he has yet sought to find for it a reasoned justification, without facing the reasons which bar it. "The heart answers, I have felt"—the fundamental formula of impressionism as such. The thought that a denial of the possible "reality" of Hamlet is an aspersion on Shakespeare has driven him to the fantastic course of hypostatising a "real Hamlet" in the shape of a neurasthenic who not only does not consist with the data of the play but could not possibly have been conceived by Shakespeare or any other Elizabethan dramatist as a stage figure.

Turning for a moment to inductive method, the critic has suggested (p. 8) that Shakespeare "saw Hamlet, with the certainty of intuition, behaving in a certain way. Perhaps, reading the old play,[1] he said to himself: 'But would a man need to pretend madness in such a case?' And then, perhaps suddenly, he saw the whole story *in terms of reality*." The meaning apparently must be that Shakespeare thought a man stricken as Hamlet was would be so disordered in mind as to exhibit the disorder in exactly that way without make-

[1] Thus the old play is for the critic part of the process of "understanding" his own theory, as regards the question how Shakespeare went to work.

believe. And this (though not new) is a pointless proposition, seeing that Hamlet not only tells Horatio that he may see fit later to "put an antic disposition on," but unquestionably does so in several scenes. Nor did it need Shakespeare to evolve the idea that a man might be so shaken with sorrow as to be moody and strange or even distraught. In the first form of Kyd's SPANISH TRAGEDY, Hieronimo ostensibly becomes partially insane after the murder of his son, and this aspect is heightened in the additions to the play. But there the insanity does not withhold Hieronimo from plotting for revenge when he ascertains beyond doubt who the murderers are. As in HAMLET, there is a double proof. First, Belimperia reveals the fact to Hieronimo; but he remains doubtful till the testimony of Pedringano clinches the other. And it is practically certain that in Kyd's HAMLET the hero's doubt as to the testimony of the Ghost and his resort to the device of the court play were schemed in exactly the same way. It is simply part of the machinery of the theatrically necessary delay of the action.[1]

It becomes particularly idle, then, to argue, as Mr. Clutton-Brock does, that the play-scene is

[1] Halliwell-Phillipps, independently of Werder, argued that Hamlet was bound to seek more substantial evidence than the Ghost's if he would not in turn figure as a mere murderer himself (MEMORANDA ON THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET, 1879, p. 73). But this was for Kyd only an item in his involution.

something peculiarly germane to the "real Hamlet."[1]

> "Whether he was drawn from some one whom Shakespeare knew, or from himself, or from both, or whether he was conceived because he was the man for that story, we feel that it could be told about no one else [!]. Take, for instance, the device of the play-scene, itself a pretext for escaping from the task of revenge—Is not Hamlet the only one of all Shakespeare's tragic characters to whom that device would be quite natural ? You cannot imagine it occurring to Othello, or Coriolanus, or Macbeth, or Romeo. Or take the soliloquies. . . ."

It would be difficult to argue to less purpose. It is perfectly certain that the play-scene is originally the device of Kyd, who has a play-scene in the SPANISH TRAGEDY as the machinery of the revenge ; and that Shakespeare retained Kyd's machinery here. Hamlet is the one character in Shakespeare who employs the device because he

[1] Mr. Clutton-Brock adds the footnote : "I have the impression, which I find is shared by others, that Hamlet was drawn from a real man ; but, as there is nothing to prove it, it will not interest a reader who does not share that impression." The "impression" is, as usual, an old one. See Halliwell-Phillipps's MEMORANDA ON HAMLET, p. 58. Some have held Hamlet to be Essex or Sydney—or the poet himself. The recalcitrant reader may fitly remark that the thing might be more plausibly said of fifty characters in Shakespeare than of Hamlet—for instances, Hotspur, Glendower, Polonius, Horatio, Coriolanus, Capulet, Cordelia, Fluellen, Cleopatra, Antony, Constance, Kent, Volumnia, Virgilia, Imogen, Emilia, Banquo, Falconbridge. But the theory here is only another echo of an old one.

is the one character who, in the given plot, *could* employ it for the given purpose. Once used to convict a suspected person, it could not be so used again : were Othello to play a play-scene (supposing one to be thinkable) in order to prove the guilt of Desdemona, it would have to fail. The allusion to Coriolanus and Romeo is a mere collapse of ratiocination, evidencing only a resolve to show that Hamlet is somehow specially " real." And the reiteration of the thesis that the play-scene is " a pretext for escaping from the task of revenge " is in the same case. It is no more such a pretext in Shakespeare's play than in Kyd's. That idea belongs solely to the theorist's conception of a neurasthenic Hamlet who helplessly plays at hide-and-seek with " his unconscious." Determined to repel a naturalist conception of the growth of the play, the theorist can but produce an unnaturalist one. And even that he finally cancels by an exposition in which Hamlet, ceasing to be the distracted puppet of the theory, becomes one of the Supermen of history.

APPENDIX

SOME OF MR. CLUTTON-BROCK'S CONTRADICTIONS

"The motive of the play is discovered and defined [by certain critics]—it is the effect of a mother's guilt upon her son—and then we are told that the play is a failure because that motive will not explain everything in the play. But *you have no right thus to discover motives in a play as if it were a history of real persons.* Certainly the effect of Gertrude's guilt upon Hamlet is part of the play, but *only so much as appears in the play itself.*" Pp. 21–2.

"Take . . . the device of the play-scene, itself *a pretext for escaping from the task of revenge.* Is not Hamlet the only one of all Shakespeare's tragic characters to whom that device would be *quite natural*?" P. 49.

"Hamlet *behaves outrageously,* except in some of the soliloquies," etc. P. 37.

"I do not say that all this [Hamlet's inhibitions] *can* be acted; but I believe that, by means of it, an actor *could* give meaning and consistency to the part." P. 59.

"The tragedy lies in this, that he [Hamlet] does so many things which trouble us, which seem contrary to his real character; and yet we never doubt that he would do them." P. 26.

"Action does not become action until performed by people *who are real to us.*" P. 28.

"You have no right to discover motives in a play as if it were a history" (*ut supra*).

"Hamlet . . . is forced to be thinking of only one thing, and that a thing *contrary to his own nature.*" P. 51.

"That 'unmistakeable tone' . . . comes from Hamlet himself, and is the *beauty of his character,* which seems to . . . *fill the whole play.*" P. 97.

"After his interview with the Ghost, Hamlet says he may hereafter think fit to put an antic disposition on. It is not what the *real* Hamlet *would* say, but Shakespeare *put it in to prevent questions*." P. 30.

"He [Hamlet] is a character in a play, and therefore we must look for the causes of his behaviour *in that play*: we know nothing about him except what is in it, for there is nothing else to know." P. 3

"You have no right," etc. (*ut supra*).

"The more fully we experience the play, the more we shall see that the delay, given the circumstances and Hamlet's *character*, is *inevitable*." P. 31.

"It is not only the character of Hamlet that makes the unity of the play, but a *particular* and *morbid* state of that character; for without the shock suffered by Hamlet and the consequent *disorder of his mind*, the plot would lack all reason and coherence." P. 88.

"So much for the formula, which was unknown to Shakespeare, and which, by itself, will not, of course, account for the effect of the play upon us." P. 48.

"The formula [of 'unconscious' compulsion] is not a part of his character, but a *mechanism* to which it is subject, and to which *any other character* might be subject." P. 48.

"The obstacle *becomes* for the time his *purpose*." P. 42.

"Was any character in drama ever *expressed* more completely than Hamlet?" P. 24.

"Hamlet, having seen his mother in Ophelia, still sees her, horribly changed, in Ophelia; and his anger with his mother involves her. . . .

[In saying to Ophelia, "I loved you not"] "He must be as faithless as his mother, he means. But if he is doomed to be faithless, Ophelia had

There is no other explanation of his sudden change of manner to Ophelia." P. 64.

" The scene with Ophelia is merely painful and unintelligible unless the actor can *show* that Hamlet is *misexpressing himself under a compulsion he does not understand.*" P. 66.

better . . . go to a nunnery." P. 65.

" All that he says is the very opposite of the truth about Ophelia, *but that is why he says it.*" P. 66.

" If his *demeanour* [to Ophelia] throughout is far more sympathetic [as acted] than his actions or his words, then a Hamlet is presented to us who is not Shakespeare's at all." P. 37.

" We may know scientifically what we do not know æsthetically." P. 36.

" Shakespeare's plays can be experienced as he meant . . . only when they are acted." P. 36.

" In most performances that I have seen, the very text, and so the whole part of Hamlet, was misrepresented on an essential point." P. 37.

" Though Hamlet's behaviour may seem to us unintelligible psychologically, we are æsthetically convinced by it" (*i.e.* at the theatre). P. 25.

" He parodies Osric to his face as he parodied Laertes; and he enjoys doing it, for again it is *art* which *diverts him from reality.*" P. 79.

" He has the artist's dislike for all kinds of unreality." Same page.

" Hamlet is one of those " [like Cæsar, Disraeli and Christ, but *not* Gladstone !] who are *aware,* not only of the desires, purposes, pleasures and pains of the moment, but also of

" The fact that he cannot put his unconscious self before himself is the tragedy." P. 48.

" His distaste, caused, though he does not know

their *permanent* attitude to all things." P. 110.

it, by the crime of the King and Queen, has spread to everything." P. 58.

"Another pretext for delay suggested by his unconscious." P. 59, etc.

"The repetition here ['except my life, except my life'] is a symptom of a *mechanical* falling back into a persistent state of melancholy." P. 53.

§ 6. *The Cancelment of the Theory*

It is after conducting to this point his "theory," or his (admittedly) loose re-composition of prior theories, that Mr. Clutton-Brock comes to his chapter "On 'Hamlet' as an Æsthetic Document," which sets a reader asking, As what has it been contemplated in the previous chapters? The answer cannot well be that it has not been considered as an artistic construction at all, for though the critic has in the main been contemplating Hamlet the play-person and not HAMLET the play, he has intermittently recognised that there is a play-problem. But what critically happens when the play is thus definitely faced as a document? What we witness is not any new recognition by the critic of the problem he has been eluding, but the final flight of his "theory" into "the intense inane" in which impressionism fitly ends as a

philosophic conception. The passage chiefly in question demands complete transcription. I add only some italics and capitals to guide the reader's apperception :

"In Hamlet there is the first vivid and complete representation of a kind of character which still bewilders and fascinates us, the character, namely, which possesses, and expresses itself in terms of, an incessant double consciousness. Hamlet is one of those who are aware not only of the desires, purposes, pleasures, and pains of the moment, but also of their own permanent attitude to all things, and of a general situation, not only of themselves but even of the universe. It is not that he is a professed philosopher or critic, but that his mind works, not like the minds of most men in unison, but in harmony, and so, sometimes, is discord. All his thoughts, feelings, words, actions even, are richer than those of other men, because of the accompaniment supplied by his permanent attitude, and the implied [!] comment of that attitude on all that happens to him. Such men fascinate us by a superior disinterestedness, intellectual rather than moral; they seem to be not merely themselves, but a larger intellectual conscience contemplating themselves and all things. They are *commonest* in the most civilised societies, impossible perhaps among savages, and rare in simple impulsive ages like the Elizabethan; but always, when they appear and *play a part in history*, they arouse a peculiar interest even in those who least understand them. JULIUS CÆSAR seems to have been such a man; and that is why he interests us so much more than other able men of action, such as Cromwell, or Napoleon, with only a single consciousness; and why Shakespeare's Cæsar, who had no

double consciousness, disappoints us.[1] Another example, nearer to our own time, is DISRAELI, and we forgive in him what we would not forgive in the single consciousness of Gladstone.

"We may be puzzled by the value we put upon this double consciousness, but it is to us a prophecy of a higher state of being, of men who shall escape permanently from the narrowing tyranny of the struggle for life, who shall be artists and philosophers even while engaged in that struggle, concerned not only to succeed in this or that, but at the same time to live a continuous life of thought and expression. We value *such a man* above, even, specialized artists or philosophers, who may be beings of simple consciousness, because he is what they do [!], and does, however imperfectly, achieve that fusion of the æsthetic and intellectual with the practical which is the lasting ideal of the human mind. The greatest example of this fusion known to us in history is *CHRIST*, and in literature, Hamlet; and we have the same deep, if bewildered, interest in both. . . ." (pp. 110–12).

It is an instructive performance. As there is no materialist so ingrained as the spiritualist, so there is no cloud-compeller to match the impressionist when he proceeds to use his speculative faculties. The parallelism: *Hamlet*, JULIUS CÆSAR, DISRAELI, *JESUS CHRIST*, as far as I observed, was not so much as noted by any of the reviewers: it occurs rather late in the book, and few of them, probably, got so far. Offered to the public as a

[1] An interesting descent to *terra firma*, which should be put to the critic's credit. But how, one wonders, does he account for the failure of Shakespeare, who made Hamlet, to grasp Cæsar?

sample of the results of impressionism, it would perhaps have failed to impress in the fashion desired. To the reader who can weigh one impression against another, and reach a reasoned result, it is the *reductio ad absurdum* of intuitionism.

Observe, first, how untrue is the primary generalisation, and how decisively it is repelled by the parallels. Determined to force on us a "real Hamlet" who always, save in soliloquy, misexpresses himself, and acts at haphazard in a state of neurasthenia, the critic brings him into line with Cæsar, Disraeli, and Jesus by the amazing formula of "double consciousness," which—save in a sense that reduces it to insignificance—is simply not true of Hamlet to begin with, in any of the varying senses in which it is true of Cæsar and Disraeli. It is a nature entirely devoid of "double consciousness" that is presented to us in Hamlet's opening soliloquy. He is wholly possessed with his nausea at his mother's marriage, a cast of mind which we have only to bring for an instant in comparison with Cæsar's to see the nullity of the thesis. Hamlet, as he is given us, cannot for an instant see his mother's case as that of an independent person; and he is in the same unitary mode in his scene with her after the play—a scene which moved Stevenson to a curious indignation against the hero for his very lack of range of recognition. Cæsar indeed is recorded to have seriously demanded that his wife must be outside

suspicion ; but conceive him speaking as Hamlet does in either the soliloquy or the closet-scene !

The transition to Disraeli is so grotesque, and the next leap, to Christ, so stupefying,[1] that one can but note inductively how absolutely, in each case, the mere resort to a verbal formula has turned even impressionism out of doors. For no other impressionist, assuredly, ever thought of those four personalities together, any more than any student of life, or history, or psychology, ever saw anything mental in common between Hamlet and Disraeli or Cæsar and Christ, or any one of the four and any other. To linger over it—to note even the strange laxity of the assumption that Cromwell and Napoleon and Gladstone were devoid of the so-called " double consciousness " credited to the others—would be to chase the butterfly with the sword. The only adequate criticism would be to extend the list, making it include Falstaff, Pascal, David, Coleridge, Burns, Goethe, Keats, Heine, Mr. Mantalini, Poe, Napoleon, Becky Sharp, Wordsworth, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Note, finally, the consummate irrelevance of the generalisation to the special " theory " of Hamlet which motives the book. Hamlet, we have been earnestly assured, is nerve-shocked to the point of

[1] I have been at times reminded that writings of mine were not unamenable to the Blasphemy Laws. But I had never expected to find Mr. Clutton-Brock in the same category.

incapacity to express himself aright save in soliloquy: only at the point of death does his brain clear. And besides his "double consciousness" in terms of this generalisation, he has an "unconscious" which makes a puppet of his "conscious." And still he is to figure as the compeer of Cæsar and Disraeli, to say nothing of Christ! The simplest summing-up would be that for our critic Hamlet is a set of dissolving views which he insists on presenting in turn as "the real Hamlet"—the shaken soul that cannot express itself, the expatiating soul that can express itself and everything else, the spirit that recoils from repellent action, the spirit that leaps to repellent action at a touch.

Perhaps after this consummation of impressionist criticism, in which the double consciousness of Disraeli "is to us a prophecy of a higher state of being, of men . . . who shall be artists and philosophers even while engaged"—in "arriving," the open-minded reader may consent to inquire whether there is not something more substantial to be reached in the study of the problem of HAMLET, even if we approach it once more by reconsidering Hamlet, with Cæsar and Disraeli and Christ left out of the picture.

Chapter III

PRINCE HAMLET

IT is bare justice to our impressionist to say that neither in style nor in statement is he ever platitudinous—except indeed in his closing sentence,[1] of which more anon. But it may be useful, in extricating the theme from the clouds, to counter him with a solidly commonplace proposition, to wit, that Hamlet, the *dramatis persona*, is the creation of Shakespeare. Hamlet is not a wonderful " real man " : he is a wonderful projection from Shakespeare's mind, in Shakespeare's language.[2] The impressionist's literary tact indeed fails him when he pronounces (p. 42) that Hamlet " flashes and *dances* through a

[1] Perhaps I should add: and except in some inadvertent moments, as when, after quoting (p. 60) Hamlet's " strutted and bellowed," he proceeds to say that " The scene with Rosencrantz is not *merely* words to be bellowed, nor is it merely character to be displayed: it is character subject to a particular psychological state." What did the critic think he was saying, through three clauses, that does not hold of everything in all drama?

[2] In another book (ESSAY ON BOOKS, p. 11) Mr. Clutton-Brock blurs this fact by one of his false antitheses: " Hamlet . . . talks as Shakespeare himself could talk only in the ecstasy of creation; yet it is always Hamlet who talks, and *not* a poet at large." It is *both* !

hideous world which heightens his beauty by contrast; and that beauty is the *theme* and *justification* of the play." Critics who talk of psychology, and who dwell upon Hamlet's obscenity and cruelty, should be a little more painstaking in their analysis, whether of their subject or their own psychosis.

But Hamlet, the *dramatis persona*, is a wonderful figure, precisely because into this play Shakespeare has put more (in quantity) of his mental power and his poetic magic than he bestowed on any of the score of other men's plays which he more or less transmuted. Hamlet is the most deeply interesting of all dramatic characters because Shakespeare has so flooded the part with his genius, in all its modes. The impressionist rather infelicitously brackets him once with Mercutio; but he is there at least feeling towards the fact of the creative process. Shakespeare "creates" personalities for us because, with his supreme capacity for outward and psychic differentiation, he yet makes them always "talk Shakespeare." And to say that is to say that he makes them transcend actual humanity.[1] He does it at times even with Cæsar—at the times when he really lays hands upon that great figure as presented in a previous play.[2]

That Shakespeare, in creating Hamlet, had a

[1] An attempt has been made to develop this view in the author's paper on "The Paradox of Shakespeare" in the BOOK OF HOMAGE, 1916.

[2] See THE SHAKESPEARE CANON (Part I), Section II.

real man partly in view, as the impressionist may be held to suggest, is likely enough. Perhaps most of us, in reading novels of our own time, tend more or less frequently to associate characters (always barring the villains) with persons we actually know. And it may be that as Tourguénief avowedly did this with the characters he created, Shakespeare did the same. But to say this is not to admit that he could have found his Hamlet in any man.

At the close of his last chapter (this is the dive into platitude above alluded to) our impressionist sees fit to write :

> "As Mr. Robertson says: You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear ; and not even Shakespeare could have made Hamlet out of a play of Kyd's."

Perhaps "platitude" is not the word: the passage is almost worthy of some of Mr. Clutton-Brock's confrères. Assuredly Shakespeare did not, in the sense of the critic's phrase, "make Hamlet out of a play of Kyd's" ; and the apparent suggestion that somebody said he did is difficult to comment. *Guarda e passa.* Shakespeare made Hamlet out of himself—not out of his character, as somebody has suggested, but, in the words of Maurice Morgann, as a "modification of [a giving mode to] his mind." And when we turn back on our critic's devious path to note that he writes (p. 49): "I have the impression, which I find is shared by others, that Hamlet was drawn from a

real man," he sets us once more taking stock of the critical value of impressionism.

Shakespeare may have had some man in his mind when he re-shaped Hotspur or Capulet or Falstaff or Hamlet, as I may have some woman in mind when I read the lines of Virgilia or of Volumnia ; but to say that "Hamlet was drawn from a real man" is to entitle us to protest that the impressionist and his backers are really impeaching the genius of Shakespeare. This is the "very ecstasy" of impressionism, the hallucination of the pathic who does not experience a work of art as such. From no man who ever lived could Hamlet be "drawn" by any man ; and the failure of the critic to glimpse the fact that he is here belittling Shakespeare is the finishing stroke to his achievement.

The futility of the whole of the critical process involved is quite distressingly clear when we remember what the Hamlet is that Shakespeare is supposed to have "drawn from" a real man. In framing his "theory," Mr. Clutton-Brock made the relatively reasonable suggestion—here with no proposition as to the existence of an actual model—that Shakespeare might have asked himself whether a man stricken as Hamlet was had need to sham insanity. But at the same time he put it that though Shakespeare did not know "psychology" in the "scientific" way in which we privileged Georgians know it, he would intuitively know what we know.

Having pointed out that we cannot possibly know what Mr. Clutton-Brock thinks he knows about the unconscious making the conscious become an unconsciously erratic puppet, I am moved to avow that I certainly think Shakespeare knew intuitively and from observation all that a man of genius or of science can know now of the psychic as distinct from the physiological reactions conceivable in one stricken as Hamlet was. And still the proposition that Hamlet is "drawn from" an actual man is impressionism of the most uncritical kind, and further a vital disparagement of Shakespeare. In the ecstasy which evolves the vision of Hamlet as an equation with Cæsar, Disraeli, and Christ, the impressionist outgoes even the disparagement which he so astonishingly imputes to me. If Hamlet is a mere transcript from an observed case, how can he be said to be "made" at all?

Shakespeare, in short, has to be vindicated from the impressionist, who, after describing him as writing from hand to mouth, professes to be defending him from an aspersion on his mastery. As to the critical rectitude of the device of suggesting such a process of actual transcription from life, within a few pages of the attempt to bar an argument from the previously admitted existence of the old *play*, it is hardly necessary to speak. The suggestion of an actual model may fitly be classed, in the impressionist's own words, as the outcome

of the "strong unconscious wish to reach that conclusion," by way of blindly bolstering up the "theory." It not only collides with the theory (for what man of Shakespeare's day had Hamlet's experience ?), it amounts to saying that the wealth of poetry and feeling which makes the play immortal is less of Shakespeare's making than of his finding.

And in other ways than this the impressionist unwittingly belittles the play he claims to be newly vindicating. In a strange passage (p. 81) he observes that "The end is sudden. . . . The nature of the plot is such that the end *could not be seen or prepared long beforehand.* It must come of events which force Hamlet to act on the spur of the moment"—a proposition to which after a dozen attempts I can attach no meaning save this, that in drama in general the dramatist foreplans his conclusion and that here he did not because he could not. As if this play herein differed from OTHELLO or MACBETH, or ROMEO AND JULIET, or LEAR or CORIOLANUS, or ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA! As the conclusion is certainly given in the old play if anything is, the only residual inference from the passage cited is that the conclusion is somehow unimpressive. And though our critic has expressly claimed (p. 26) that Shakespeare has made the play more exciting than Kyd could, that conception is doubtless possible to an impressionism which, losing even itself in its vision of a "real" Hamlet,

fails to see the sheer final effectiveness of the play in which he is placed. The final action-climax of Hamlet is one of the most thrilling in all drama; and it is necessary to insist, as against the subjective vision of a Cæsar–Disraeli–Christ–like Hamlet, that Shakespeare in all his artistry never lost sight of his function of play-making for his audience.

Were it only for that reason, it is impossible that he should have been occupied with enigma-spinning to the extent of compounding a pathological Hamlet, a kind of spiritual Harlequin in the black and white of Conscious and Unconscious, for future Freudians to exclaim over. Whatever might be the "miscarriage" in transforming a barbaric into an intellectual Hamlet with the action unchanged, the dramatist was bent on presenting, not a Harlequin, but, as Professor Stoll insists, a Hero; and the practical or theatrical "artistic success" is secured precisely in making him so. Our impressionist at one stage founds on the theatrical success as barring once for all the verdict of "artistic failure," and at another excludes the very procedure of theatrical success from view to make way for his "theory" of a Harlequin–Hamlet who could never have reached a theatre audience at all. Let the student try to realise how the last scene in HAMLET was played under Elizabeth and James, when Shakespeare "scored for full orchestra," as Professor Stoll puts it: the panting duellists, with every nerve and sinew alert and tense, fencing,

it is to be supposed, as our actors do not now; the intent audience, knowing that there is death in the cup, poison on the foil, and two villains in the plot counting on one or other infallibly succeeding; and over all, at every hit by Hamlet, the boom of the "cannon," as it were the advancing stride of death:

> At each rap a blast
> From the horns of hell,

till the crashes of sound are swallowed up in the moral lightning-flash of fourfold doom.

Whereupon our impressionist would have the actor who plays the dying Hamlet contrive so to speak his lines to Horatio as to convey the message: "I have always misexpressed myself." It was verily not that thought that the Globe audiences carried away; and that was assuredly not the thought of the master magician, who had made Hamlet express every thought that genius could lend him within the scope of the old unchanged action.

That Shakespeare felt he had completely conquered his problem I do not for a moment believe. He was not a modern æsthete. But he doubtless knew that he had done a great thing, whether or not he dreamt of posterity's long applause. He knew that, while he had projected a personality so alive with feeling as to hold all spectators, he had at length put himself, as we say, "across the footlights"[1] as in no previous work had he been able to do.

[1] Of course there were no footlights then!

To understand the zest and energy with which Shakespeare poured himself into HAMLET, we do well to look back on his prior output. Up to 1600 we find him at work (save for the DREAM and the LABOUR) on eking or adapting or re-writing chronicle plays, comedies, and ROMEO, TROILUS, and CÆSAR, plus the poems. In all this, how much of scope was given to the higher poetic powers of his mind? To Romeo he could add a wealth of poetry and portraiture; but the old play which admittedly underlies his seems to have called at most for refining; and at that stage it contented him to do as much. Had he indeed re-written the JULIUS CÆSAR which the traditional Canon imputes to him as of his origination and of his composition throughout, he could have found in that large theme some such scope as he actually takes in HAMLET. But between the considerations which might very conceivably deter him from grappling with the political ideas involved, and the amount of work that may be inferred to have been already done on the play by other hands, it is easy to understand that as late as 1599 he was content to carry his handling of it no further than he has done. And it may well be that some special inner experience thereafter moved him to seek an outlet such as he had not before craved.

There is reason to think that in the years between 1599 and 1604 he read much of Florio's translation of Montaigne, portions of which we know to have

been passing from hand to hand some years before its publication. And both in HAMLET and in MEASURE FOR MEASURE (commonly dated 1604) there is to be found the maximum evidence (apart from the transcription in the TEMPEST) of his study of Montaigne,[1] which of all books of that age was the best fitted to stir his spirit to new activities of thought. It is indeed more than likely that his own life-experience concurred deeply in the excitation; but here was a kind of stimulus to new and various utterance such as the age had not before undergone. Montaigne's Essays form the most vital book of the age before Shakespeare's advent; and the dramatist was of all men in England the most fitted vitally to respond to it.

And when we read such a play as 1 HENRY IV, we seem to divine how the poet would kindle at the opportunity given him by HAMLET. Here, taking a free hand, though probably on a prior framework, with chronicle matter such as he had before never handled freely, he flushes alike the serious and the comic scenes with an exuberant power. All the figures talk in excess of dramatic requirement:[2] there are whole scenes that could be dropped without loss (*e.g.* IV. iv): we divine that the poet is rejoicing in his still young strength

[1] See the author's MONTAIGNE AND SHAKESPEARE, new ed. 1909, Section II.

[2] As played in full at the "Old Vic." the play takes considerably over three hours; though to give unconstrained room for the comic scenes the blank verse is spoken at a distressing speed.

and unmatched opulence of rhythmic and electric speech. The winged verse is wholly freed from the semblance of Marlowe's influence: it has the single stamp of the new Master's style, inimitable even in youth, terse even in exuberance, so intensely is it informed with ideation. Yet he has still to conform to the type. The battle has to be staged in the old absurd fashion, the prominent persons popping in for purposes of single combat and the required declamation. Reality of poetry and unreality of action go hand in hand. The mind and the artistic faculty that move so consummately through all could not miss, where we cannot, the sense of the intellectual inadequacy of the product to their high potency, consummate as is the power at play. This is but mastery of the work of the normal drama as vivid action and entertainment, with an overplus of expatiation so good that it constitutes for the reader an added boon: the heights and the depths of the human soul are opened only in the dying speech of Percy and the Prince's comment, with its touch of the priggery entailed on the character by the primary play, which is to be followed in the sequel by the hard hypocrisy of the dismissal of Falstaff.

Does any one, let us ask, suppose that even the young Shakespeare found entire satisfaction in *that* adherence to the track beaten for his art by the prior drama? Is not his acceptance of it but one of the proofs of what critical insight has

seen [1] to be the idiosyncrasy that made the supreme genius capable of his destiny as a working playwright, the gift or penchant for compliance with his economic and social conditions — the one specialty of his character, as distinct from his philosophy and his art, that emerges from our closest survey of him? Nay, is not this abnormal faculty of compliance as it were the coefficient of the strange power to be everyone in drama, to be alternately Hamlet and Ophelia, Cordelia and Lear, Hotspur and Hal, Romeo and Juliet—the power, in a word, to be the Shakespeare that we read and *so* know? If we are to conceive him critically at all, I take it, it must be as a unique personality, a coalition of unparalleled power to project itself into every conceivable mode of humanity, and of no less marvellous power to raise the imagined personality to all the heights of expression. And this presupposes a power to merge the mere self, as it were, in any environment, to accept all adaptable conditions of work as of ideation, refusing only the conditions which quite barred the due ideation for the supremely fine critical faculty that matched the creative power. And save where the existing material sufficiently served the business needs of the stage (in which case he could tranquilly leave it alone), the barring conditions had to be quite rigorous in point of

[1] See Professor Mackail's British Academy lecture on Shakespeare. And cf. Mr. Clutton-Brock, p. 106.

inadaptability to be decisive for a faculty which could so infinitely transcend the semblances of things. Tourguénief would have balked at an Iago as at a Falstaff. Shakespeare could pass into both.

The art of Shakespeare is from first to last a conjoined triumph of such compliance with unmatched achievement within the limit set for it and accepted by it, the artist's genius finding its sufficient compensation in the power to flood with his own thought and feeling, in so far as he cared, whatsoever of his given material he felt he could transmute. Again and again did he forgo effort in the face of inherent obstacles. Of TROILUS he has amazingly transfigured whole sections, yet leaving an unconsummated play. In CÆSAR, with a composite structure that other hands had made in the main theatrically effective, he has but laid his transfiguring touch on certain scenes and speeches, with a general revision of the older matter which he did not replace. In MEASURE FOR MEASURE, with a prior structure which could not be reduced to conformity with right feeling, he has instilled so much of power and poetry as to leave many critics obstinately bent on finding the whole worthy of him, and others content to impute mishandling where the internal evidence reveals simple abstention. In HENRY V there is still less of effort to purify and unify the composite yielded by the old stage and by later adaptive handiwork.

All of these plays as we have them belong to the HAMLET period—the years 1599–1604.

But in HAMLET the compliant genius found a field where well-nigh its utmost power of intensive transmutation could get at work—a play in which the vital action could become that of the spirit, where sheer poet-craft could light, splendidly or luridly, even a specially barbaric action with all the poetry of life and death, of horror and fear, of sin and of the hate of sin. Could he have added that of love, stronger than death, he would have outgone even his HAMLET, as he was to do in LEAR. And that he did not do it here, save inasmuch as the love of Hamlet and Horatio sunsets the close—this, be it said once more, is due to the inherited material. Ophelia is irradiated, not new-planned. And Hamlet remains the doer of strange deeds, the hard slayer who yet delays to slay, with the spirit of Shakespeare at work in his every scene. In the poet's view, the upshot tells us, HAMLET could not be new-constructed as LEAR was to be. It was Hamlet, the *dramatis persona*, that was to be new-incarnated.

Acrid things have been said of Shakespeare's predilection for princes and nobles as personages in his plays, the innuendo being that he loved a lord. The answer is, I think, not merely that that selection was set for him in the mass of the drama of his age, but that he handled such personages with a zest born of the sense of their rela-

tive mental *freedom*—an aspect of the feudal world which indeed had determined much of the previous practice, though that had also a decisive lead from the classic drama. Free utterance on great lay themes, for that age in England as for France down to the eighteenth century, was most readily imagined as coming from heroes, princes, nobles, men whose status conceivably gave them at once outlook and audacity. Scholars could not be so presented in drama as then evolved ; and priests and friars must talk in character : though Shakespeare gave them good scope, they could not touch all the stops. Falstaff could be the chartered libertine of Bohemia ; Jaques might be let rail in his special vein ; but for large discourse on human life the star-crossed Prince of Denmark is the dramatist's first ideal mouthpiece in the period of his mature power. The Duke in MEASURE FOR MEASURE, in his lesser degree, fulfils the same function. Mercutio and Romeo belong to the period of LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST ; Henry the Fifth could only in a speech or two be lifted above the dramatic and spiritual planes previously marked out for him ; the great orations in TROILUS are magnificent pieces of writing inferably substituted for harangues by another hand, and as such often non-dramatic, having no special congruence with any rôle or character. But the princely spirit of the ideal Hamlet, vibrating under his torture, through his own pain doubly alive at

once to all the beauty and all the tragedy of the world, wrung to universal judgment by his very sense of evil, set to inflict a penalty which left his own unchanged—this was a vision to which the deepening mind of the Master responded as never before to any task. Well may he have returned to it again and again, as Swinburne inferred from the Quartos; and if it be true that the last soliloquy, being dropped from the Folio as it presumably was dropped from the acting text, is thereby admitted to have injured the dramatic effect (as Swinburne implies in his general proposition), none the less is it a wonderful dramatic and poetic outlay from that transcendent treasury, which had such wealth to throw away.

And still there remains to be faced the fact that the cancelled scene is in itself a confession that there is something out of joint in the play, something that needs explaining, since Hamlet was already committed in the previous soliloquy to an avowal that he unintelligibly delays his purposed vengeance. This remains the crux of the play; and the impressionist, bent on validating the "impression" he has unconsciously shaped from previous theories, accompanies his case with a creation of unreal problems suggested by that. He will have it, for instance (p. 64), that Hamlet behaves as he does to Ophelia because, "having seen his mother in Ophelia," he "still sees her, horribly changed, in Ophelia; and his anger with

his mother involves her." That thesis in turn is backed up by the dictum that "Men get an idea of woman from their mothers, and fall in love with women in whom they recognise the same idea." This, as a generalisation, is quite false: it can hold only for given cases, being wholly inapplicable in many. It would be as true to say that men in general choose as friends, and that women in general choose as husbands, those who resemble their fathers. Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia is one more heritage from "the old play" which the critic will recognise only when he can guess no other way of explaining what even he feels to be an anomaly. In the primary form of the story, a "fair lady of the court" acts as the tool of Fengon —Claudius; and Ophelia in a measure is made to do so still by her father. Common-sense criticism has suggested that Hamlet gets a glimpse of the spying king and counsellor behind the scenes while he is talking to Ophelia, and is thereby moved to treat her as he does. The impressionist, forcing his thesis (Ophelia = Gertrude) at all costs, backs it up by saying, "You may think this too fanciful; but the text bears it out, and there is no other explanation of his sudden change of manner towards Ophelia." The other explanation has been actually current for at least a century: the impressionist has either not met with it or is determined to reject it. And nevertheless it *is* the explanation of the sudden change; whereas

his thesis gives no reason whatever for a sudden change, but implicitly posits a change before the scene which should have made Hamlet hostile from the start. False to begin with, the assumption breaks down in application.

Of a piece with this is the proposition (p. 49) that the device of the play-scene is " itself a pretext for escaping from the task of revenge." It is no such thing ; and the sufficient answer to the sequent question : " Is not Hamlet the only one of all Shakespeare's tragic characters to whom that device would be quite natural ? " is this : " Is not Hamlet the only one of Shakespeare's plays in which that plot-device is given him by the foundation play ? " and this : " Is not Hamlet the only one of all Shakespeare's plays in which such a means of detecting guilt is feasible ? " ; and this : " Is not Hamlet the only one of all Shakespeare's plays in which anybody's guilt is required to be proved otherwise than by testimony ? "

In a word, is not the critic's question puerile ? And could he have committed such a puerility were it not for the burden of a thesis that must be backed by fantastic pleas because it does not admit of sound ones ? Kyd's device of a play-scene is but a variant on his device in the SPANISH TRAGEDY ; and while some of the audience might possibly chafe at its repetition, it is, as Professor Stoll shows,[1] quite adequately justified for stage pur-

[1] Halliwell-Phillipps had previously made the point.

poses by the mass of contemporary belief as to the delusive and diabolical character of ghostly communications. The suggestion that " It is a damned ghost that we have seen " was perfectly admissible to the general Elizabethan mind, however convinced an audience might be of the Ghost's veracity. But the true inductive summary is simply that for Shakespeare the play-scene was already there ; and that it seems to have undergone a revision from other hands either before he transmuted the play or concurrently with his transmutation of the rest. It is precisely in these acceptances of existing conditions that Shakespeare reveals his great idiosyncrasy.

And so, if we will be rationally critical, we come once more to the position that if we are fully and finally to understand the Hamlet problem, " the play's the thing "—the whole play, and its bases.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAKING OF THE PLAY

THE beginning of wisdom, then, in regard to the puzzles of our play is the surmise that it was not thus planned, but evolved; and the beginning of insight into the evolution is a notation of the antecedents. From a study of the mere prose story in Belleforest one can discern a growth from that root; and from the contemporary allusions to a HAMLET actually played in London long before the date of the First Quarto we gather that there lay an intermediate form. But the same inference arises from the First Quarto itself, with its marked differences in diction from portions of the Second; and when we examine the old German play on Hamlet, first published in 1781,[1] and note to start with that its Polonius is named Corambus, as he of the First Quarto is Corambis, we are strongly led to surmise that here we have in substance the pre-Shakespearean HAMLET. And that that play was the work of Thomas Kyd, author of THE SPANISH TRAGEDY, is now a widely accepted opinion.[2]

[1] Rep. in Albert Cohn's SHAKESPEARE IN GERMANY, 1865.

[2] It should be noted in this connection that Kyd may not have framed the play alone: he may have had one or more coadjutors

This inference, first drawn by Malone, was perhaps based primarily on the use of the Ghost, which is referred to in one of the early allusions to the old play; but it now rests more definitely on (*a*) the actual survivals of Kyd's phraseology in the First Quarto and (*b*) on the nature of the gibes by Nashe at the author of the old HAMLET play in his preface to Greene's MENAPHON in 1589. These, singly and collectively, seem to point indisputably to Kyd; and when we note how he in the SPANISH TRAGEDY sets forth (1) a delayed revenge—in that case of a father for the murder of his son; (2) a Ghost, calling for revenge; (3) a play-within-the-play helping on the action; and (4) the suicide of the bereaved mother paralleling that of the bereaved daughter in HAMLET, the Kyd hypothesis becomes so strong as to be reasonably posited as historical fact.

One of Mr. Clutton-Brock's mystifications is an apparent attempt to deny that there are real traces of Kyd in the surviving English HAMLET; this after admitting (p. 4) that the old play was very likely written by Kyd. After declaring (p. 16) that no one denies the existence of an older play, or that Shakespeare did in some respects follow it, or that traces and fragments of this older play are to be found in the First Quarto, he goes about to dispute all the textual parallels which are cited to identify Kyd as the primary author. Yet it is nothing to Mr. Clutton-Brock's purpose *who* was

the original author. Where there is close verbal identity, as in the case of the " For if the king like not the comedy " couplet, he earnestly urges that " Shakespeare was actually *quoting*, and misquoting, Kyd " ; and where there is echo without verbal identity, as between Kyd's " fair curls " of Phœbus and " forehead like the table of high Jove " and Shakespeare's " front of Jove himself," he as gravely argues that such echoes are " not parallels at all." Heads, he wins ; tails, we lose. Close verbal parallel is only quotation : formal echo without identity of phrase must not be reckoned a parallel. Thus there *could not* be a parallel under any circumstances, from the critic's adjustable standpoint !

What, then, is the dispute about ? The parallels had been cited solely as showing, in respect of slight survivals of Kyd's diction, his original presence. Mr. Brock says nothing of the other—the structural—grounds, or of Nashe's allusions ; but he argues, as against Mr. Eliot's remark that Shakespeare was in places revising Kyd's text, that " such methods " could prove PARADISE LOST to be a revision of the text of a lost poem by Sylvester. And all the while the objector admits that our HAMLET *is* a revision of something ; and has no kind of pretext for resisting the Kyd ascription. Gradually we are invited to infer that, inasmuch as Mr. Eliot seems to say HAMLET is an artistic failure because " Shakespeare was revising

a play of Kyd's," the implicit censure can be rebutted by denying that the original play has been or can be proved to be Kyd's. As if that were a rebuttal of Mr. Eliot's criticism.

Mr. Clutton-Brock has been wasting his and our time. One of his phrases (p. 18) suggests that he thinks Shakespeare has been accused of retaining scraps of Kyd "because he would not be at the pains to *write his own play*"; and this imaginary and elusive thesis, he assures us, is not worth discussing. It assuredly is not; and as it never was advanced by anybody, and as its obtrusion serves only to veil from the ingenuous reader the real issue, we are entitled to say that the mystification was not worth raising. Shakespeare had no play "of his own," though he made Hamlet his own. From first to last he handled the ill-framed though attractive structure of Kyd. The real thesis is that, taking up as he did Kyd's play—*the* old play which our caviller admits to have existed—Shakespeare did not "write his own play" at all; but did progressively re-write Kyd's, transfiguring the central character as he transmuted most of the diction, but retaining almost the whole of the original action, both of Hamlet and the other characters.

Probably Mr. Clutton-Brock, whose great concern is that we should be adequately hallucinated by Hamlet, instinctively recoils from any such analysis. But the rest of us, being un-hallucinated,

combine our admiration for Hamlet's vivid utterance with a sense of the incongruity of some of it with some of his actions ; and we are concerned to show how this incongruity came about. It happens because there is a limit to the possibilities of dramatic reincarnation even at the hands of genius where there has been no reconstruction of the action in which the reincarnated person moves. And the fact that Shakespeare did not reconstruct the play for his reincarnated Hamlet remains a critical datum the evasion of which is a critical misdemeanour.

How little he has reconstructed the play, most readers and critics seem never to recognise. Mr. Clutton-Brock anxiously claims (p. 4) that "since we know nothing of Kyd's play, the extent of its influence upon HAMLET must be conjecture." To be more sure of knowing nothing, the critic has abstained from reading the German play. But those who take that and other reasonable means of knowing can satisfy themselves that the entire *story*, broadly speaking, was in Kyd's play. And only on that score can we explain Shakespeare's handling. So closely has he adhered to divagations of construction for which there is no ultimate validation that we might surmise the explanation to be an esteem for Kyd as a playwright. For we must remember that however small be the appeal of the SPANISH TRAGEDY to us to-day, and however faulty may be the structure of HAMLET, Kyd

was on the whole the most *dramatically* (as distinct from poetically) gifted of the pre-Shakespearean group.[1]

To the shaping of both plays there went an amount of dramatic constructiveness and inventiveness that marks Kyd as a gifted pioneer. A third-rate poet, he was a natural play-maker; and in ARDEN OF FEVERSHAM he has left us a play so curiously vital that some readers still lean to Swinburne's unhappy explanation of it as a youthful work of Shakespeare. It is no unreasonable surmise that his associate Marlowe caught from Kyd the lead which took him from the rambling expatiation and declamation of TAMBURLAINE to the relatively plotted construction of the JEW and even of EDWARD II. In a strict sense of the term, Kyd may be called the formative force of the Elizabethan drama. And Shakespeare must have recognised the constructive as well as the psychological competence shown in ARDEN. When, then, *he* retained so many *culs de sac* in the structure of HAMLET it may very well have been out of early deference to Kyd's prestige.

Among these, as the play stands, is the whole machinery of the embassy to Norway, so obtrusively unnecessary for the real purpose of the play.

[1] It is worth while to remember that the actor-brothers Eduard and Otto Devrient thought Q1 superior to Q2 for acting purposes. Widgery's Harness Prize Essay on THE FIRST QUARTO EDITION OF HAMLET (with Herford's), 1880, pp. 183–4.

That it may be part of the *débris* of an original two-part play, in which Hamlet and Fortinbras were involved in an action reminiscent of part of the SPANISH TRAGEDY, was suggested by me many years ago; and beyond offering the hypothesis [1] there is no more to be said save that, if we are to conceive the embassy business as never having had any better structural footing than at present, it is fumbling work, which Shakespeare could usefully have discarded—as it actually was in the (plainly curtailed) German play. The sole function it can theoretically be said to fulfil is the notation of lapse of time; and if it were introduced solely to establish lapse of time, and so convict Hamlet of delay, it must be reckoned a cumbrous and uneconomical device for the purpose.

And so with the scene in which Polonius instructs Reynaldo (Montano in the First Quarto) to go to Paris to spy on Laertes. Why is it there? I have pointed to its obvious theatric function of relieving the tension set up by the tremendous Ghost-scene.[2] It was perhaps for that sole purpose that Kyd introduced it; though here again there are possible inferences as to an original action in which Montano–Reynaldo, commissioned to go to Paris to spy on Laertes, actually served to carry to him

[1] Mr. Clutton-Brock (p. 5) says of me that I "believe" Kyd's play was in two parts. I never put it so. Surely a reasoned hypothesis can be treated as such and not as an assertion or a conviction.

[2] Mr. Clutton-Brock puts this as his own proposition.

the news of his father's death at Hamlet's hands. That, again, however, would have been cumbrous, pioneering work, the tentative of a half-developed playwright in the infancy of modern play-making. For the SPANISH TRAGEDY, it seems probable, Kyd had an Italian original: for HAMLET he had none, and was uncertain in his movement.

But an æsthetically weak item the scene remains, since the mere desire to relieve tension is no good justification for a scene that in itself serves nothing to the action; and to proceed to justify this as Mr. Clutton-Brock does (p. 6) on the further ground that "it also *leads into* the first scene between Polonius and Ophelia; and it exhibits Polonius fussing about both of his children," is to raise the question whether any work of Shakespeare is to be raised at will out of the sphere of reasonable criticism altogether. To argue as our critic does (p. 20) that all the talk in I. 3 is "entirely relevant to *the play*," is to make one almost hopeless of any agreement on the principles of play-construction. "The play" would remain quite unaffected as a plot-action if that episode were wholly dropped, save as regards the item of the order to Ophelia to shun Hamlet; and that is not vital either, since Hamlet's main action is not affected by it. The critic further assigns it as a merit in the opening part of Act II, scene 1, that it "leads into" the other, and he further treats it as a valid justification of the whole of both scenes that they exhibit

Polonius fussing about both his children. Is that then a Shakespearean achievement?

Elsewhere (pp. 28, 88) the same critic insists that the play is all about Hamlet, and that we are interested in the other characters only as they concern him. In what sense, then, or to what end, is the fussing of Polonius valid drama? In him, for himself, we are not interested, by the critic's own assertion. This is the longest play in the Folio; it is admittedly too long for the stage; and it was probably never played in full by Shakespeare's company. Why then was it eked out to exhibit Polonius fussing, in a fashion that in no way affects the action?

The critical truth is that alike the counsels of Laertes to Ophelia, of Polonius to Laertes, and of Polonius to Ophelia, constitute blind-alley scenes, in no way furthering the central action, and in themselves what Mr. Clutton-Brock elsewhere classes as irrelevances. Unless (as is not impossible) Polonius was, as has been supposed, a skit on Lord Burleigh, in which case they are still irrelevant, they are explicable only as opportunities for the delivery of sententious remarks, which are interesting only because Shakespeare has re-written them. There is nothing else in the action to show that brother and father *needed* to warn Ophelia against attempts upon her virtue by Hamlet. There is never elsewhere a suggestion that Hamlet was capable of such an attempt. Ophelia is lec-

tured by father and brother to no structural purpose. And the ultimate explanation is just the one which Mr. Clutton-Brock is so nervously unwilling to face—that Shakespeare took over this matter and method from Kyd,[1] abstaining from a recast of the overloaded action even where such a recast might have been economical.

"A few superfluous scenes in an Elizabethan play matter little," argues Mr. Clutton-Brock again (p. 8), "if they are short." If the critic could pretend to believe that the whole play was ever played, this kind of special pleading might pass, since there is no question as to the Elizabethan practice in general involving many superfluous scenes. But to play the whole of HAMLET, as given in the Second Quarto and the Folio, would take at least four hours. And the framing of blind-alley scenes, extraneous to the main action, can no more be first-rate drama in Shakespeare than anywhere else, however vivid be the dialogue it yields us. Much of the *genre*-work in HAMLET would be justified by the theatre-men as comic relief; these scenes are not so explicable, though they had doubtless an analogous claim.

Such criticism Mr. Clutton-Brock will perhaps describe as an "attack" on the play, that being

[1] It may be remembered that in the SPANISH TRAGEDY also the brother proposes to guide and control the sister. But I have at times suspected that the allocutions in question were originally introduced by Greene, who has many such in his prose works, and one in JAMES IV.

one of his ways of getting general support in regard to his theory, though he himself " attacks " JULIUS CÆSAR, and (obliquely) CORIOLANUS; besides declaring in a general way that Shakespeare " wrote from hand to mouth." But, after all, what is sauce for one theory is sauce for another; and Mr. Brock ought at least to be able to understand how his poet with an itch for writing and a happy knack of rhetoric, working from hand to mouth, could at times be content to re-handle the rhetorical themes of an old play for their own sake instead of planning a new whole to background the hero whom he was making anew. That the passages as they stand are so describable will, I think, be admitted by any competent and unbiassed critic; and it seems unlikely that Kyd had given them any better footing, though he conceivably might have done so by giving Hamlet an independent development that would have made relevant the counsels of Polonius and Laertes to Ophelia.

But the reasons for assigning to Kyd (or a colleague) the initiation of these scenes as well as of all the main action had better be posited afresh.

1. The Ghost and the pretended madness of Hamlet are alluded to as early as 1596, not as novelties, but as familiar things. They are, in fact, admitted by all critics to belong to the primary play. And here we have the first serious divagation of Kyd; for the mock-madness of Hamlet, which in the old story of Belleforest was a means to

escape death at the hands of the wicked uncle, now puts Hamlet for the first time in danger. It is not *needed* in the new circumstances, as this king is not hostile to begin with. Mr. Clutton-Brock's remark (p. 30) that "in the old *play* Hamlet had probably feigned madness to avert the suspicions of the king" is wholly astray. In any form of the play, once the Ghost is introduced as revealing an act which in the old story was known to everybody, the device of madness is deprived of purpose. Shakespeare's retention of it is really one of the (compulsory) flaws of the construction.[1] In the old story there was no Ghost, and no need for one. By introducing the Ghost as sole revealer of the crime, and still making Hamlet play the madman, the dramatist has made an unsound combination. But men of the theatre would doubtless have answered, had the point been put to them, that Ghost and madness were alike good stage business, and that no other justification was needed. And Shakespeare clearly assented on that score. To drop the Ghost would be to lose a colossal "thrill": to drop the madness would be to alter vitally the very aspect of the stage Hamlet. The anomaly, then, *must* so far subsist.

2. The embassy business may just as confidently be assigned to Kyd, not only because there is similar business in the SPANISH TRAGEDY and its

[1] "It was a compulsory legacy left to Shakespeare by the previous dramatist" (Radford, as cited, p. 67).

antecedent "comedy," but because Shakespeare had nothing to gain by introducing it.

3. When we compare the First and Second Quarto versions of the admonitions of Laertes and Polonius (Corambis in Q1) to Ophelia, we find plain vestiges of prior work—that is to say, we find early and clearly non-Shakespearean work, rationally to be assigned to the drafters—though rather to a date after 1590 than to one before. Much of the text of the First Quarto is certainly a mangled version of that given in Q2, and much of it is clearly of Shakespeare's re-writing ; but in such passages as the following we have more or less regular though flaccid versification, in a diction as characteristic of the pre-Shakespeareans as it is uncharacteristic of Shakespeare :

> *Laertes* (to the King). My gracious Lord, your favourable licence,
> Now that the funeral rites are all performed,
> I may have leave to go again to France,
> For though the favour of your grace might stay me,
> Yet something is there whispers in my heart
> Which makes my mind and spirit bend all for France.

This speech is *re-written* in Q2. And so with these, in the same scene :

> *King.* And now, princely son Hamlet,
> What mean these sad and melancholy moods ?

For your intent going to Wittenberg,
We hold it most unmeet and unconvenient,
Being the joy and half heart of your mother,
Therefore let me intreat you stay in court,
All Denmark's hope, our cousin and dearest son.
Hamlet. My lord,[1] 'tis not the sable suit I wear,
No, nor the tears that still stand in my eyes,
Nor the distracted haviour in the visage,
Nor all together mixed with outward semblance,
Is equal to the sorrow of my heart.
Him have I lost I must perforce forgo ;
These but the ornaments and suits of woe.

These are not mere manglings of the Q2 text : they are the work of an earlier hand. Hamlet's soliloquy " O that this too too solid flesh," immediately afterwards, is in Q1 a bad hotch-potch of the text we get in Q2 ; and here I submit with some confidence a hypothesis I formerly put as doubtful, to wit, that the " To be " soliloquy, of which there is a mangled version in Q1, does yet contain pre-Shakespearean matter (a point on which I was formerly unsatisfied), and that it was in the original play placed *here*, where it has a fitness that is lost when it is placed after Hamlet's meeting with the Ghost. Dr. Bradley has praised Shakespeare's removal of it from its Q1 position (before the arrival of the players) to where it now stands, after the " O what a rogue " soliloquy and

[1] In Q2 the speech is a reply to the Queen.

the conference of the King's group on Hamlet's case. Improvement there may be, as between the two Quartos, but nothing, surely, can make the "To be" soliloquy congruous with the Ghost experience when it is placed subsequent to that. The fashion in which some rhapsodists continue to flout the anomaly is significant of the amount of mental attention with which Shakespeare is commonly read. The rhapsodists would never of their own force have seen anything odd in Hamlet's soliloquising as he does after the shattering vision of the Ghost, though it was remarked on in the eighteenth century, and probably in the seventeenth. While the anti-critical æsthete, strong in his simplicity, can see nothing wrong, Mr. Clutton-Brock, seeing all things through his theory, is quite satisfied that Hamlet, whether the "real" or the compound, has really *forgotten* the meeting with his father's spirit. That critic's faith in the faculty of others for forgetting is really in excess of "the form of plausive manners."

Now, the "To be" soliloquy in Q1 is so mangled, and yet so far consists with the later text, that it is natural to suppose it a mere muddling of that by a bad reporter. But there are in it so many lines which read more or less regularly, and yet are quite distinct from the later text, that, when once we have realised the pre-Shakespearean character of the other passages above cited, we are in critical fairness constrained to regard them in the same

category with these, though there is some mangling even of the old matter.[1] For instance :

> To die, to sleep, is that all ? Ay, all. No.[2]
> To sleep, to dream : aye, marry, there it goes ;
> For in that dream of death, when we awake,
> And borne before an everlasting judge,
> From whence no passenger ever returned,
> The undiscover'd country, at whose sight
> The happy smile, and the accursed damned.
> But for all this, the joyful hope of this,
> Who'd bear the scorns and flattery of the world,
> Scorned by the [3] rich, the rich cursed of the poor ?
> The widow being oppressed, the orphan wronged.
> The taste of hunger, or a tyrant's reign
> And thousand more calamities besides.

There is here so much different matter that the actual correspondences, such as :

> To grunt and sweat under this weary life,
> When that he may his full quietus make
> With a bare bodkin,

do not entitle us to say that it is a mere misreporting of the present text. The fair inference is that there was a previous form. And that this form was

[1] As happens in the texts of Kyd's other plays.

[2] In Q1 the " no " begins the next line ; but Mr. Hubbard in his valuable edition (Wisconsin Univ., Madison, 1920) rightly rectifies the " lining " in this and other places.

[3] " Right rich " in text. " Right " seems to be a mere printer's error.

Kyd's is more than likely. The soliloquy is a display of melancholy by a personage who also parades madness; and this again is done with Hieronimo in the SPANISH TRAGEDY, melancholy being in the psycho-physiology of the age regarded as "to madness near allied." And if we suppose Kyd's "To be" soliloquy to have originally stood where Shakespeare has placed the much more dramatically effective one, "O that this too too solid flesh would melt," the whole matter becomes perfectly intelligible. The "To be" soliloquy had been in itself an effective piece of declamation, and Shakespeare re-writing it as such, could preserve it only by placing it later, where it becomes incongruous at the point of "the bourne from which no traveller returns." But Mr. Clutton-Brock's Shakespeare (as seen by the critic before he framed that theory), with his habit of writing rhetoric "from hand to mouth" for his rhetoric-loving audience, was just the dramatist to do this.

4. That the Reynaldo–Polonius scene [1] is in any

[1] Mr. Clutton-Brock astonishes one by declaring, in reply to Mr. Eliot's characterisation of "the Polonius–Laertes and the Polonius–Reynaldo scenes" as having "little excuse," that there is no Polonius–Laertes "scene," but only a speech to Laertes in a composite scene. Then there is no "Reynaldo scene" either; for the Reynaldo episode is only part of a scene, by English notation. And there is no "Ghost-scene" either! By the French, the Polonius–Laertes episode *is* a scene. All Mr. Clutton-Brock's argumentation on this ground is factitious; and his dictum as to what is "entirely relevant to the play" is as unsupported as it is unacceptable.

form of Kyd's initiation is perhaps less arguable, though not to me very doubtful. I have argued that as it stands it is *genre*-work of the order of so much of Chapman's matter, written expressly to catch the audience by a kind of satire of current life without any valid connection with the main action. It certainly existed before the name Corambis had been changed to Polonius; and I claim that it is non-Shakespearean. An Italian critic has protested against my remark that it is "unthinkable" that Shakespeare should have framed the Reynaldo scene as it stands, for the mere purpose of "relief." Doubtless, to readers who have been in the habit of regarding as unquestionably Shakespearean everything in the Folio, or at least in the great plays, such a pronouncement will seem quite unwarrantable; and one can but indicate the grounds.

It is true that, as Mr. Clutton-Brock observes, the dialogue about the child-actors in the scene with the players is irrelevant, and that it is nevertheless Shakespearean. It is, in the modern phrase, "topical"—a comment on contemporary affairs imposed on a play where it does not belong. I have just been contending further, that the moralities of Polonius and Laertes are irrelevant, and that yet Shakespeare has written them as they stand in our version. But though irrelevant to the action they are not alien to it in the sense of creating a mere perplexity. As rhetorical moralities they

can easily pass. But the mission of Reynaldo to Paris is so obvious an excrescence that it can be justified only by a special pleading which would not be employed on behalf of anything but a neck-or-nothing theory about Hamlet. My own strong surmise is that Kyd initiated it—for the opening lines of Q1 are different, yet regular—as a kind of contrast to the moral counsels of Polonius to Ophelia ;[1] and that it has been re-written as these were. But I cannot conceive that the re-writing here is Shakespeare's, though he may have modified some lines. To begin with, the versification, with its twelve double-endings in the first nineteen lines, and its general monotony of end-stopped movement, is not at all like him. Let the reader contrast, in the second section of the same scene, the diction of Ophelia's speech in Q1 beginning :

> O young Prince Hamlet, the only flower of Denmark,

which is so clearly Kyd's, with that inserted in Q2 and the Folio, and he will find another problem facing him. If the latter is Shakespeare's, it must be early work, for the movement here too is end-stopped. Yet it is a different kind of work from

[1] On the theory that Corambis was originally a skit on Burleigh, the episode was "topical." See Sir I. Gollancz's essay in THE BOOK OF HOMAGE, 1916, for the further view that the name Polonius was substituted to dissociate the part from Burleigh. The Burleigh theory in general, it may be said, is supported by Hamlet's remarks to Polonius on the value of the "good report" of the players.

the speeches of Polonius to Reynaldo: we might almost surmise that it is a re-writing by Kyd of his first version. And as Kyd was still alive in 1594, that is possible. But the talk of Polonius to Reynaldo is as it were caricature, the mere exhibition of the old courtier maundering, and this at time-devouring length.

If the student will now turn to Chapman's MONSIEUR D'OLIVE, he will find in the elaborated maunderings of that personage, which so overlay a play to which he originally did not belong at all,[1] and with which he has never any organic plot-connection, a kind of matter and a manner closely analogous to those of the speeches of Polonius to Reynaldo. Now as the foisting of d'Olive on the other play seems to have won new vogue for a piece that had failed under its own title, the employment of the same hand to re-write a scene-section in HAMLET when it was being "freshened up" is at least intelligible.

But it is not only the resemblance in matter and manner that motives the hypothesis of the intervention of Chapman. In SHAKESPEARE AND CHAPMAN I have set forth the reasons for believing that about the HAMLET period that dramatist was doing a good deal of work for Shakespeare's company. The theory originated in the discovery of a mass of internal evidence for ascribing to Chapman the

[1] See Fleay's BIOG. CHRON. OF ENGLISH DRAMA, i, pp. 56, 59. Cf., however, Prof. Parrott's introduction to the play in his edition.

un-Shakespeare-like poem A LOVER'S COMPLAINT, printed at the end of the Sonnets. Clues of vocabulary pointed further to certain plays, in particular to TIMON OF ATHENS, and the hypothesis (supported by me with a body of evidence from style, syntax, sentiment, topics, phraseology, and vocabulary) has now received, in the main, the weighty support of Professor Parrott, the accomplished editor of Chapman's works, though he differs from me (as from Dr. A. C. Bradley) in supposing Shakespeare to have drafted the play. Yet further, applying the hypothesis as the clues seem to point, I advanced evidence for the ascription to Chapman of a large share in ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, and of the actual authorship of the masque in THE TEMPEST, as well as of a much larger share than Shakespeare's in the MERRY WIVES.[1]

All this, I am well aware, must at first sight seem mere extravagance to Shakespeareans in general. But the student who goes into the matter will at least see that the various hypotheses are not arbitrary, but in all cases reached by a composite induction. And so it was with the hypothesis of the occasional presence of Chapman's hand in HAMLET. Mr. Clutton-Brock, glancing at it in pursuance of his task of removing all apparent

[1] See THE PROBLEM OF "THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR," published for the Shakespeare Association by Chatto & Windus, 1918.

obstacles to his theory of a neurasthenic Hamlet, is of course at no pains whatever to examine the argument, and does not even mention the suggestion that Chapman had a hand in revising the play-scene. It is characteristic of impressionism that it is insusceptible of many impressions which it might be expected to incur, rejecting them simply because they are not spontaneous with every impressionist.[1] Mr. Clutton-Brock accordingly flicks aside the whole problem. He titters agreeably (pp. 7, 20, 21) over the supposed notion of Chapman as " a kind of affable, familiar ghost " who *went about* inserting irrelevant scenes in other men's plays, having a " passion for irrelevance " ; and he reaches the safe conclusion that " Chapman may just as well have played his tricks on Shakespeare as on Kyd." He really might ! One of course does not for a moment expect the affable impressionist to face a set of tedious problems that are not dreamt of in his æsthetics. It may suffice to explain to the student that the hypothesis posits a frequent *employment* of Chapman by Shakespeare's company either as a draftsman or as an adapter of plays, and as a " repairer " or patcher of some ; and the corollary that Shakespeare, often revising Chapman's work, which he must frequently have found trying, might very well let pass, as appealing

[1] In matters of versification, for instance, many persons who plume themselves on " sensibility " seem wholly deaf to differences of movement.

to sections of the audience, *genre* and other work which he for his own part would never have thought of penning.

The alternative solution, open to the impressionist if he cares to have one, is that wherever in the Folio we find marked resemblances to the known work of other men, it is a matter not of the retention of their work in plays acquired by Shakespeare's company, but of deliberate and unwearying imitation by him of the work of nearly every contemporary playwright, good, bad, or indifferent. In terms of this theory the Supreme Master is the Supreme Parrot or Sedulous Ape, copying everybody, alike in style and in substance, for copying's sake, and wilfully filling well-nigh half his plays with imitative verse and dialogue in every way inferior to his own natural utterances.

The two conflicting conceptions must fight out the matter between them, the studious public being in the long run the only arbiters. Mine is being gradually, I hope patiently, set forth in a series of studies on the SHAKESPEARE CANON, with which this essay and its predecessor on the HAMLET problem are connected in purpose and in method.

Meantime, it will perhaps be recognised that the debate set up by Mr. Clutton-Brock over those minor issues has really little bearing on his main issue. The fundamental question for him and us is this : Did Shakespeare, or did he not, take over from the old play, as pre-determined, a set of

actions ; and are those actions congruous with the transmutation of Hamlet's psychosis which all admit him to have effected? No matter whether the critic sees fit to describe an antagonist as "attacking" the play, and yet being "hampered throughout" by a sense of its marvellous merits, expressly and insistently proclaimed. The real issue is as to how Shakespeare wrought his transformation; how far he was or seems to have felt himself under a compulsion to retain the old action, and how far such retention qualifies his ultimate or cumulative æsthetic success for readers who are willing to face all the data.

We have noted thus far (1) the retention of the two ill-paired factors of Ghost and madness; (2) the retention of the surplus action of the embassy; (3) the retention (with revision) of moral allocutions by Polonius and Laertes to Ophelia, and of Polonius to Laertes, which in the light of the total action are rhetorical redundancies; (4) the retention of the Polonius–Reynaldo episode, leading to nothing; (5) the retention of the (displaced?) "To be" soliloquy, in a position where its content clashes with the action.

To what general inference are we so far led? Surely to this: that Shakespeare was not anxiously concerned to *reconstruct*[1] radically the play he was so signally transmuting by his portraiture

[1] In THE PROBLEM OF HAMLET (p. 59) I have inadvertently spoken of reconstruction where I should have written "re-arrangement."

of Hamlet. That he was deeply interested in *that* is presumably common ground for all of us. It was on that side, and, let us say, on the side of expression in general, that his interest was enlisted, so that his work is in the main one of spiritual or literary transfiguration of other men's poorer handiwork. A playwright bent on inventing new plots he certainly was not: his actual function was in general to take up all manner of plots framed by other men, with rather a minimum than a maximum of concern for plot-reconstruction. Judgment in plot-construction he must of course have had, even as in the matter of acting; but if there is one thing clear on this side of our general problem it is that, however closely good taste in his day coincided with that of ours in respect of acting, the theatre points of view as to plot, then and now, are widely different. If any reader is disposed to repugn spontaneously at this opinion, let him go about to vindicate the plot of MEASURE FOR MEASURE,[1] or of ALL'S WELL, or of TROILUS AND CRESSIDA, or TIMON, or CYMBELINE, or AS YOU LIKE IT, and he will find his task an onerous one. Shakespeare's day was not consciously exercised about plot-construction, and was tolerant where modern critics would be censorious. The terms are to be taken, of course, in a general application: there are always

[1] A theory of this play as a partial revision by Shakespeare of one by Chapman, based on Whetstone, I hope to submit in a forthcoming volume.

exceptions. Sidney, like the French classicists of the next generation, contemned the heedless construction of the pre-Marlowe play-makers, and Ben Jonson may be said to have had an active judgment on matters of play-construction as against his contemporaries, whom at points he acridly criticised. But Jonson, though he made a good plot in the ALCHEMIST, produced some of the merest talk-plays of his age, and could be laboriously undramatic. Shakespeare is relatively as much more practical as he is more inspired. Above all things he recognised the variety of the public taste, which could favour alternately a "servant-monster," a Polonius caricature, a Richard, a Hamlet, a Holofernes, a Brutus, a fairy tale, a classic history, and a romance of maritime Bohemia.

And thus it was that in handling HAMLET the thing he changed least was the plot, even down to the mere rhetorical openings, which he knew had their attraction for his public. If he displaced the "To be" soliloquy as I have surmised, he did so because, firstly, he saw that the mood of Hamlet after the King's exhortations to him, to which the poet may of his own accord have added the Queen's,[1] called for a far more concrete and

[1] In Q1 she does not intervene. But if Q1 was put together on the basis of a version shortened for a provincial tour (as Messrs Pollard and Dover Wilson have shown to be a common practice) there may at this point have been an elision of old matter. See note at end of chapter.

passionate outburst[1] than an abstract musing on death and immortality; and if he placed the re-written "To be" soliloquy where it is in part sharply inappropriate, it was because he knew how well that monologue tells with every audience, as well as with most readers. Of course there are exceptions. Goldsmith's petulant denunciation of the metaphors, latterly endorsed by Professor Eichhoff, of Anklam, is by the latter taken as a ground, with the anomaly of the denial of *revenants*, for excluding it from his revision of the First Quarto text[2] as "bad." But the re-written soliloquy is in Shakespearean verse, and there need not be the least hesitation about ascribing it in that form to the Master, who knew his business as theatre-poet, and

[1] In the PROBLEM (p. 55, n.) I put the opinion that the "O that this too too solid flesh" soliloquy is given "in a prior form" in Q1. But on reconsideration I find this view untenable, and am led to the conclusion that not merely is the bulk of the Q1 version here a mere mangling of the Q2 text, but even the difference in the opening lines is really a part of the same process of mangling, by someone who badly remembered the speech as delivered on the stage. Such a variation as

> Would melt to nothing or that the universal
> Globe of heaven would turn all to a chaos

is certainly a wide divagation. But it is not verse, at least not Elizabethan verse, at all; and since all that follows is a corruption of the speech in Q2, this must perforce be recognised as a possible concoction of the blundering reporter. It all goes to support the view that Q1 is partly made up from accurate repetitions by one or more actors, partly from MS. parts, and partly from extremely poor memory work.

[2] Appended to VERSUCH EINER PRAKTISCHEN HAMLET-KRITIK, in ANGLIA, 1907 (?).

was not going to lose a big stage effect for the avoidance of an anomaly. In these matters he was long ago affectionately credited with a "royal carelessness"; and at the risk of being indicted for an "attack" I repeat the characterisation here.

Thus deductively as well as inductively we are led to the conclusion that, with his trained eye to the "two hours traffic" of his stage, he gave his artistic care, not to a logical reconstruction of plots (compare MEASURE FOR MEASURE), but to the stage effects of which he was the unrivalled master. And when we set against this doubly based conclusion the theory that in HAMLET he believed himself to be fusing the old barbaric action into consistency with a profoundly changed personality, by cryptically suggesting, never in plain words but in some fashion so occult as to be wholly undiscoverable by his audience, a secret physiological flaw in a refined Hamlet who nevertheless does exactly all the deeds of Kyd's barbaric prince, we realise in our entire æsthetic perception and "experience" as well as in our reason that the theory is a baseless fantasy. It is false not only in its conception of the play: it is more profoundly false in its conception of Shakespeare. It credits him with a kind of fantasy-mongering that he would no more have dreamt of pursuing than he would have contemplated planning Hamlet with an eye to Mary Queen of Scots or making LEAR an allegory, as some have dreamt, of the Reformation.

Even where the theorist was not, so to speak, committed to finding an occult purpose in the dialogue, he obtrudes it to his own confusion. Insisting that the "compulsion" on Hamlet begins immediately after the Ghost-scene (or scene-section ?), he writes that

> "Something prevents him from telling ; but it is not policy, it is an obstacle within himself, a repulsion that he does not understand. And finally this obstacle becomes for the time his purpose ; and he makes them swear with desperate particularity that they will be silent about the whole matter."

This is said in utter disregard of the fact that *the Ghost* is made to urge the secrecy. Had Mr. Clutton-Brock made the experiment of consulting the German play, he would have found the whole business there—the repeated call of the Ghost and the repeated change of ground, and this final pronouncement of the barbarian Prince :

> "O ! now I understand what it is : it seems that the Ghost of my lord father is not pleased that I should make this matter known. Gentlemen, I beg, leave me ; I will reveal everything to you to-morrow."

Thus the barbarian Prince of the ground-play has done exactly what the Prince does in ours, giving the Ghost's wish as his reason. And thus once more does the "theory" collapse on the simplest scrutiny.

NOTE ON THE FIRST AND SECOND QUARTOS

The question of the relation of the First (1603) to the Second (1604) Quarto has been much and ably debated, ever since the discovery of the former in 1823. A brief account of the earlier stages is given in the preface to the able Harness Prize Essay of C. H. Herford (now Professor) published with that of the joint prizeman, Mr. W. H. Widgery, in 1880. By that time, the balance of critical opinion, probably, lay with the revised view of the Clarendon Press editors, that "Q1 represents a play in course of revision by Shakespeare, and retaining with much of his work a great deal that is alien," which consists not ill with the essayist's own view that "the original of Q1 was something scarcely less different from Q2 than *it* is from Q2." The contrary view, which takes Q1 to be but a piratical corruption of the text given in Q2, is latterly supported by Prof. Creizenach of Cracow. It can make no appeal to those who can recognise in Q1 a certain quantity of verse that is no mere mangling of matter given in Q2, but verse of a slighter, poorer, and earlier quality. In "The Problem of HAMLET" and in this chapter I have noted examples, to which may be added many of the lines in the scene between Hamlet and the Queen.

The present state of the question may be gathered on the one hand from the brochure of Mr. J. Dover Wilson: "The Copy for 'Hamlet,' 1603, and The Hamlet Transcript, 1593" (Moring, 1918), and the introduction by Professor F. G. Hubbard of Wisconsin University to his valuable and welcome edition of Q1: "The First Quarto Edition of Shakespeare's Hamlet" (Madison, 1920). Mr. Wilson, applying a hypothesis well developed by him and

Mr. A. W. Pollard in regard to other Quartos (f.i. HENRY V), reaches the position that besides the reproductions of certain speeches by the actor who presumably played Marcellus, "Voltemar," and other parts, there underlay Q1 "a *shortened* copy of Shakespeare's partially revised manuscript made for a touring company"; and that the German HAMLET "was undoubtedly derived from the parent English manuscript before Shakespeare had begun that revision to which Q1 bears witness." With these views, my own argument is in entire harmony. They account for the presence in Q2 of certain details found in the BRUDERMORD but not in Q1.

Whereas, however, Mr. Wilson imputes piracy to the producers of the First Quarto, Professor Hubbard finds no sufficient evidence of fraud, inferring that the publishers obtained the right of publication "in a regular manner by purchase from the Lord Chamberlain's (King's) men." And it is conceivable that, given the right, the publishers had to shift for themselves in getting together the copy; though such a bargain does not seem natural. As the Quarto stands, it may be confidently said to represent some use of (curtailed) copy, some use of the recital of one or more actors, and some very bad memory work indeed. But through all this the archaic matter is at points clearly discernible.

It may be added that in "The Book of Homage" (Oxford Univ. Press, 1916) there is a very interesting paper (p. 473) by Dr. B. A. P. Van Dam, of The Hague (author of "William Shakespeare's Prosody and Text"), on the question "Are there Interpolations in the text of 'Hamlet'?"; wherein are given some very noteworthy reasons for thinking that the text of the Second Quarto reveals within itself modifica-

tions apparently made for the purpose of actors' effects. And in this connection it may be noted that some extremely interesting problems of a similar kind are raised by the preceding paper in the same volume, " Reading Shakespeare's Sonnets," by W. G. C. Byvanck, Librarian of the Royal Library, The Hague. Those two Dutch scholars have shown an insight into textual possibilities in the fields in question that would be held to prove exceptional perspicacity on the part of English-born scholars. But I have seen no English discussion of the questions raised in either paper.

CHAPTER V

THE MAKING OF HAMLET

REALISING Shakespeare as a transmuter of previous drama by poetic and psychic elevation of utterance, we can follow with understanding his transmutation of Hamlet. In the old story, the Prince is a vigorous barbarian ; in Kyd's play,[1] framed on that, he is still in a semi-barbarian or early feudal environment, living at a Court where the king is " always surrounded by guards," and where, *therefore*, he cannot take vengeance on his uncle as he would ; but where, nevertheless, men deliver sententious moral allocutions in the Elizabethan manner, and the prince himself can soliloquise formally on the problems of immortality and suicide. To such exercises in rhetoric the Elizabethan drama was committed by the Senecan tradition, which greatly swayed Kyd, and by the total culture atmosphere as generated by " morality " plays, interludes, book dramas, tales, poetry, and religious literature. Kyd is pace-maker or suggestive model for Shake-

[1] As inferable, first, from the German curtailment, and secondly from elements actually retained by Shakespeare.

speare on this side, as was Greene on that of the sympathetic presentment of refined women, Lilly on that of sparkling dialogue, and Marlowe on that of vigorous handling of forceful figures, historic and other. What he brought to his work was a supreme genius for poetry in general and the blank-verse form in particular ; also a far subtler perception of character of all kinds, and a far more delicate endowment of feeling, than were given to his corrivals.

Hamlet, accordingly, becomes at once in his hands a sensitive and cultured Elizabethan, princely in bearing and speech as in soul. The barbaric feudal court becomes, or rather has already become, that of Elizabethan England, with no guards normally about the throne. To remove them would be a natural economy as soon as the play reached the stage indicated in the earlier matter of Q1. Thus at the very outset of Shakespeare's transmutation the plain reason for Hamlet's delay, twice set forth by him in the German version which so clearly preserves an early though curtailed and at times altered version of the English, has absolutely disappeared *as statement*. And if, as is so likely, this change had in effect been made in an early modification of Kyd's HAMLET[1] (which was as

[1] These considerations, I admit, should have been more fully put forward in THE PROBLEM ; but I had lectured and twice before published studies on the subject, and was there aiming at brevity. Had I previously met with Professor Lewis's book, it would have shown me the special need for a fuller discussion.

likely to undergo changes as the often-manipulated SPANISH TRAGEDY), Shakespeare found to his hand, when he took up his great task somewhere about the year 1600, or at any time after 1594, a play in which a delayed revenge is staged without the plain explanation of the delay which originally excluded any air of mystery. Mystery had thus already emerged, for Hamlet now delays without avowed or obvious reason. The simple presentment of an Elizabethan instead of a barbarian or feudal Court had subtly deranged the machinery of the play; though, as we shall see, it preserves indications of the previous state of things.

Over this simple proposition, as previously put by me, our impressionist skirmishes vigorously. He begins (p. 5) by representing me as saying "that Shakespeare, for reasons which are difficult to understand, left out Kyd's explanation without providing one of his own." The "difficult to understand" is not of my suggesting, though I did not in my essay duly set forth the simple explanation that the withdrawal of the guards was the natural result of staging the play on contemporary Elizabethan lines, and that this had probably been done at least as early as 1594. After arguing over the scenes described by me as extraneous, my critic proceeds (p. 8):

"But it does matter much, in Elizabethan as in any drama, if, in the revision of a play, the delay in the main action is retained, but the causes of it are not. That

would indeed be a gratuitous mismanagement, impossible to Shakespeare or indeed to anyone."

Now it is the same critic who has elsewhere pronounced that Shakespeare "wrote from hand to mouth"; and if Shakespeare did so it is idle to profess astonishment at seeing other and earlier theatre-men drop from a play a particular detail, and miss seeing how the omission affects the whole. We find flat contradictions in JULIUS CÆSAR, explicable, in my opinion, only on the theory of repeated re-handling, and let pass by Shakespeare, even as he let pass obvious anomalies in MEASURE FOR MEASURE. If my inference is at this point correct, Shakespeare found the play with the original "guards" left out. He had had no control over the old HAMLET, which in 1594 was not the property of his company, and was not drawing over well, to judge from the small receipts then noted by Henslowe.[1] The play, once popular, had probably "gone down" in popularity. As a student of Shakespeare's work in all its aspects, I have not the least difficulty in thinking of him as taking over the old play at a later date, and proceeding to "touch it up" without making any search for Kyd's first text, or even inquiring closely as to why Hamlet delayed. Planned and delayed revenge, as Professor Stoll points out, was a quite

[1] DIARY, ed. Greg, i. 19. The small receipts in this section of the diary seem to be shares. HAMLET is about the average in the particular series.

familiar motive in the old drama. It is paraded throughout the SPANISH TRAGEDY, even as planned and delayed murder constitutes the main action of ARDEN OF FEVERSHAM.

After treating it, however, as an impossible thing that any adapter should retain an action without retaining the plain statement of the cause of it at one point, my critic puts his argument differently. Dealing with my remark that Shakespeare "suffered or accepted compulsion imposed by material which, as a stage manager revising a popular play of marked action, he did not care to reject," he argues (pp. 9–10):

"If there was any compulsion at all, it must have been, given a certain plot, to retain the dramatic essence of that plot, and not to retain certain scenes and episodes which, according to Mr. Robertson, are clearly superfluous. There was nothing to prevent Shakespeare from cutting out the Fortinbras and the Reynaldo episodes; there was everything to prevent him from cutting out the very mainspring of the plot without finding another to put in its place. . . . If Shakespeare did ignore Kyd's causes for the delay, he must have had his reasons for doing so: it was not a matter of compulsion at all. . . . He did rewrite the whole of Hamlet, and, on Mr. Robertson's own showing, so freely that he left out an essential part of Kyd's play. What then becomes of the notion that while leaving it out, he was compelled to put nothing else in to take its place?"

Only the "compulsion" set up by having his

own axe to grind could well have motived all this special pleading on the critic's part. Obviously, the compulsion of which I spoke was the general one, recognised by Shakespeare's very re-writing of "the whole [1] of Hamlet," to retain all the main features of the old piece *as he found them.* They were retained because Shakespeare knew they had all in some degree appealed to audiences. And the sense of "compulsion" is set up particularly when we note how the new Hamlet to the end does things which (here directly antagonising the impressionist) we spontaneously feel that such a Hamlet would not have done.

That Shakespeare, however, was under a compulsion to drop the original "guards" who surrounded the Danish King's throne I never suggested: [2] on the contrary, though I omitted to develop that issue, I suggested that the play came to Shakespeare with a character of unexplained delay somehow stamped upon it. And the "compelled to put nothing else in, to take its place" (which my critic finally and without explanation substitutes for his first formula of mere omission of causes) is so far from representing anything said or hinted by me, that it wilfully ignores my express

[1] I do not assent literally to "the whole," but agree as to the general process.

[2] In the preface, above, I have commented on Professor Lewis' view, which at this one point coincides with Mr. Clutton-Brock's. The notion that Shakespeare deliberately "suppressed" the mention of the guards is to me quite incredible.

declaration that Shakespeare did very subtly and strikingly indicate again and again a possible line of explanation for the delay, to wit, that for Hamlet, so deeply wounded by his mother's action before he had any notion of the murder, mere revenge on his uncle was no remedy. An instilled message of pessimism had been for me the earliest inference from the study of the play and its problem; and in the essay published in 1919 I put it that "this, if there be any, is the new ground-note of Shakespeare's Hamlet," while dwelling on the ultimate inadequacy of that solution to the retained action of the old play. But a deliberate suppression of Kyd's original explanation would have been a wholly gratuitous act of mystification, and I am convinced that Shakespeare did no such thing.

The issue is again distorted when the critic, after saying (p. 12): "We may assume that for Shakespeare, as for us, the character of Hamlet was the thing"—which does not rightly state the case, but which in effect grants my point that the poet made little account of the action—writes that

> "In spite of all the compulsion put upon him he did try to transform the play from one of incident into one of character; and Mr. Robertson admits that he succeeded, although he was forced to exhibit that character through a series of incidents for which there remains no adequate cause."

This wording does not rightly summarise either the facts or my thesis. I pronounced that, while keeping an action at many points incongruous with the new character, Shakespeare had raised it from a tale of barbaric revenge to a tragedy of souls; but I stressed the point that the action remains incongruous, and proceeded to the conclusion that this incongruity, on a balance, is something not to be disposed of by any "subjective" theory of Hamlet, and is to be understood only when the play is seen as a re-writing without a reconstruction of Kyd's, with the old action and a new psychosis. For our impressionist, bent on imposing a new subjective theory, this solution is of course unacceptable.

Let us finally note, then, in detail, how his neurasthenia theory consists with the facts of Shakespeare's procedure in re-writing the play. Many cruces, indeed, he merely ignores. The whole element of the reported conduct of Hamlet—for instance, Ophelia's story of his coming to her in a state of mental and external disorder—is passed over, leaving us asking as before whether that was part fulfilment of Hamlet's plan "to put an antic disposition on," or whether we are to take it as intended to impress us with the intensity of Hamlet's love for Ophelia; and if so to what purpose?[1] But precisely where Kyd's action is

[1] Here again Halliwell-Phillipps has an interesting remark: "Those critics who depreciate the love of Hamlet for Ophelia over-

most obviously a theatrical machinery of delayed action, the theorist insists on making Shakespeare see in it the perfectly intelligible action of a neurasthenic as such. Hamlet in the old piece arranges the play-within-the-play, which was for Kyd so much good stage business, justifiable in the plot on the score that many Elizabethans regarded "spirits" as frequently the disguises of demons, though probably the bulk of the audiences were as willing to take the Ghost in literal earnest as we are to take it for granted as an effective stage device.[1]

look the fact that, notwithstanding the bitterness of his regret for the death of his father, he was making love to her in the very depth of his sorrow. There appears to be something in his intense affection for her that is important in the construction of the tragedy, the complete effect of which I do not profess to understand" (MEMORANDA, p. 52). I have long had a similar feeling on the point. The whole relation of Hamlet to Ophelia seems to have been originally schemed with a wider purpose than is to be found in the subsisting action. Professor Lewis decides (p. 113) that "Hamlet's sole purpose [in his visit to Ophelia] is to deceive," and further (p. 117) that the soliloquies show he "cared nothing for Ophelia." Here I am loth to assent. Incidentally I would demur to a reversion at this point to the fashion of treating Hamlet as a real person. The better mode would be to ask, Why is Hamlet *made* to do so-and-so.

[1] Perhaps I should qualify the "we." Professor Eichhoff argues (Essay cited, p. 10) that a Ghost who talks is no thinkable ghost for us; and he further cites the noteworthy declaration from Moritz Rapp's introduction to his translation of HAMLET: "It is not by way of paradox, and no one will misunderstand me, if I venture the opinion that of all the poet's works HAMLET seems to me the richest in thought and deepest in feeling, and yet, simply regarded as drama, the most inadequate, in fact the worst." Rapp's case is, in brief, that the ghost business in the first Act is progressively impressive to the highest degree of poesy; but that this is

In a play in which the audience saw the King always surrounded by guards and heard Hamlet stress the fact, the device of the play-scene would pass very well, as being interesting in itself and confirmatory evidence of the King's guilt. In my view, it was certainly given to Shakespeare, and was retained by him as a fixed and effective feature of the play. That was his sufficient reason for retaining it. But our impressionist, intuitively certain that the real Hamlet was *ensorcelé* by nerve-shock, will have it that Shakespeare spontaneously conceived the play-scene as exactly the sort of device that a neurasthenic would plan by way of pretending to one stratum of himself to be taking action when he was really obeying another stratum which recoiled from action. Was there ever a more intricately impossible mare's nest?

Next we come to the prayer-scene. That was certainly Kyd's: the King's praying soliloquy in Q1 is clearly of his writing, not Shakespeare's; and so with the speech of Hamlet following. And when Halliwell-Phillipps[1] writes of the "unfortunate and inexplicable prayer scene" he is oddly blind to the force of his own general proposition:

"Unless we bear in mind that Shakespeare's treatment

the prelude to an impossible drama, the climax being reached here. On this, perhaps, I shall be at one with Mr. Clutton-Brock in replying that Hamlet is to be read as an Elizabethan play for an Elizabethan audience, and that such criticism is beside the case.

[1] MEMORANDA ON HAMLET, p. 66.

of the story of Hamlet was influenced by the succession of events in the older tragedy, and that the construction of his own drama was to some extent fettered by the circumstances under which he wrote, there can never be an æsthetic criticism of Hamlet which will be other than one that involves an unsuccessful attempt to reconcile inconsistencies that are not explicable on any other hypothesis."

Precisely so. Shakespeare has re-written the prayer-scene because it was an item in the drawing power of the play; not in the least because he anticipated Mr. Clutton-Brock in a fancy about the natural tendency of a neurasthenic to be the puppet of "his unconscious" in refraining from stabbing a praying man in the back. Assuredly he never said to himself, as our impressionist seems to have done: "If Hamlet were in his natural healthy state, he would have stabbed Claudius in the back and so ended the whole business." If he troubled himself at all to justify the scene to his own mind, it would be, I take it, by way of reflecting how empty a satisfaction such a killing would be, with Gertrude beyond in her closet, devoted to her new spouse. But Shakespeare was not anxiously weighing such considerations. He let his genius play on Hamlet in particular, and on the text in general, always by way of heightening the literary and dramatic vitality of the old play, which he was not going to try to reconstruct in its plot-action.

And so again with the despatching of Hamlet to England after the killing of Polonius. The deed of the original barbarian, with his cry of "A rat! A rat!" is done by the new Hamlet exactly in the old way, and with the same show of barbaric unconcern afterwards. Why? Because Shakespeare felt that a nerve-shocked prince of high Elizabethan culture and courtesy would quite naturally behave exactly as did the barbarian in the old story? That he would divine the rapier thrust as a stroke of the Unconscious? To borrow and adapt the cry of Hamlet were a vulgar relief to our sense of stupefaction over the "theory," which here seems to disturb even its framer. He is resolute, however, to include Hamlet's departure for England. That must be the special act or aim of the Unconscious, since it takes Hamlet off the road to revenge, as the Unconscious would like to do. Over my suggestion that Hamlet's actual delay is only in the interval between Acts I and II the critic is peremptory: I "forget," he observes, "the journey to England": as who should say, forgot the existence of the grave-diggers scene, or the Ghost. The journey to England is one of the primary data, taken over by Kyd from the old story; and it is motived with entire adequacy, in all three handlings. For our impressionist, it must nevertheless mean first and last solely the physiological swerving of a neurasthenic Hamlet; and, as we saw, he felt able to inform Professor

Stoll that there is nothing in the play about Hamlet's being under compulsion at this stage. He has so far faced the music as to admit that he had forgotten ; but there is thus far no doubt for him that his theory remains intact, it being held by a tenure above the reach of evidence. For he had not had the slightest difficulty in ascribing to Shakespeare this conception and train of thought : " Whereas Hamlet is sent to England by his wicked uncle in the old story to be made away with ; and whereas the old play puts it in the same way, the action is really one that would quite naturally be engineered by a nerve-shocked Prince wire-pulled by his Unconscious ; and accordingly Hamlet shall still go to England for that reason, thus maintaining the psychological unity of the play." The courage of the theorem almost compels admiration. But here there is pitted against the fantasy of Mr. Clutton-Brock not only the *force majeure* of commonsense but the evidential force of an anomaly in the construction which he, in his self-accommodating way, has overlooked. He had " forgotten " (may we say ?) that the text is against him again. The point may be indicated as put by Halliwell-Phillipps : [1]

" 'I must to England ; you know that ?' (Act III, sc. 4, and onwards). 'When, where, or from whom,' observes Mr. P. A. Daniel, 'could they have had the

[1] MEMORANDA, p. 64.

intelligence? The Queen might possibly have known that some such scheme was in contemplation, but could not know that it had been resolved on, and Hamlet himself must have been quite in ignorance of the matter. The author's knowledge of the plot seems to have cropped out here prematurely' (TIME ANALYSIS, i. 212). Precisely so; and in the same way *it is assumed that the King was carefully guarded,* that Hamlet was surrounded by spies, etc. The words of the text just quoted show decisively either that Shakespeare, in the rapidity of composition, had neglected to be sufficiently explanatory of his plot, or that a knowledge of it by the audience was taken for granted."

The veteran commentator has incidentally corroborated in advance the view that the disappearance from the play of Hamlet's express *allusions* to the King's guards was a simple matter of changing the medieval into an Elizabethan court, and that the guards had actually existed in Kyd's original play. He also, in advance, annihilates this one of Mr. Clutton-Brock's mare's nests. Of course the critic, greatly daring, may try the thesis that Shakespeare meant this to show that it is Hamlet's Unconscious that pulls all the wires, and that it is It that moves the King, upon Hamlet's suggestion, to plan to send him to England. But if the critic is not in worse case than his own Hamlet, he will get out of the clutches of his preoccupation and come round to the side of reason. In any case, HAMLET was not made as he, on the strength of a Freudian intuition, has supposed.

It was made in the fashion hereinbefore set forth. Shakespeare progressively re-wrote without reconstructing the play; and when by pouring his genius into Hamlet he had made him of another world than that of Kyd's rhetorically sophisticated barbarian, he yet left him doing "the deeds of Barabbas." In the process he could not but take some account of the incongruity between man and things. The play had actually been entitled "The Revenge of Hamlet," and is so entered in the Stationers' Register in 1602 for publication. Revenge was for Shakespeare no inspiring theme; and in the atmosphere he sheds we reach the recognition of it as something that may be wholly inadequate to the rectification of the balance of a life shattered by evil. Hence the high adequacy of his Hamlet to that sense of "values" (as Mr. Clutton-Brock would say) by which we ultimately estimate personalities. But that does not make the play as such an objectively coherent construction; and the attempt to make it out so by a parade of Freudian psychology is something that would have made Shakespeare laugh, in the mood in which he wrote LEAR. He had handled HAMLET as he handled a dozen plays, only very much more greatly than ever before, because he was so much more interested by its openings. And, as I have before observed, he would have stared in blank wonderment had he been told that after three hundred years men would be debating over the

fashion in which he had laid his transfiguring hand on this play in particular; that they would be ascribing profundities of new plan to him in a piece that he never affected to re-plan; and that some of them should affect to count it treason to suggest that he could have missed structural perfection in anything. Remembering MEASURE FOR MEASURE, he must finally have smiled at that.

CHAPTER VI

ULTIMATE CRITICISM

ON a broad retrospect, the latest attempt to reach a "transcendental" view of HAMLET can be seen to arise out of a critical attitude of two or three generations ago, when Gervinus and Ulrici and many another German strove to present Shakespeare as a kind of poetical and theatrical Bacon, planning his every work with an eye to the moral instruction of mankind. It was mainly a German effort; and though on some sides there was English response, the sheer weight of the facts, the mere *facies* of the pell-mell of the plays, forced most men who really knew their Shakespeare to decide that "it wasn't like that." Halliwell-Phillipps expressed the general conviction when he repugned the thesis of Gervinus. And in Germany itself criticism to-day would be more likely to plump for the view of Pope, that the Master

> For gain, not glory, winged his roving flight,
> And grew immortal in its own despite.

But the conception of him as no less supreme on the architectonic than on the "creative" side, no less masterly in management than in presentation,

no less vigilant on the machinery of his art than on life, has remained, implicit or explicit, in the thought of many of those who drink of his fountain. It was explicit in Coleridge, who in effect affirmed, what Schlegel had said explicitly, that everything Shakespeare really did (certain of the assigned plays being definitely put aside as wholly or partly alien work) was as perfect as art could make it, though the same critic found MEASURE FOR MEASURE a hateful play. And perhaps the very excellence of the literary analysis of Dr. Bradley, who alone—and with so much riper thought—has outgone Coleridge in critical influence among instructed readers, has tended to engender anew the faith in the inerrancy of the Master, so convincingly does it reveal or illumine his masteries.

Thus it has come about that a critic who had expressly spoken of Shakespeare as writing from hand to mouth could yet, in a polemic mood, frame a theory of HAMLET as absolutist and as à priori as any of Gervinus or Ulrici, imputing an all-embracing and coherent plan to a play that is but a transfiguration of an old piece of which the ground-plan remains unchanged. And at once there arises a chorus of belletrist applause, which proclaims without the slightest inquiry that any diverging account is an "attack," a disparagement of Shakespeare in general and in particular. In this fashion there can be reached neither new knowledge nor new critical insight. Belletrist "criticism,"

complacently ringing the changes on its own inveterate empiricism, and dismissing with its facile scorn all more considerate inquiry as unliterary, does but mark time. Mr. Clutton-Brock's misguided effort is, for those who will take the trouble to follow it with attention, a much more wholesome performance than the idle fireworks of the "critics" who acclaim it without even perusal. He made a critical effort. These are but the "notices" that fail to note the gist of the thing "noticed."

There remains to be viewed in a larger relation what we may term the ultimate critical problem—the evaluation of Shakespeare after we have realised him in terms of what he really did. We who seek to attain the strict truth will be told we have belittled him—we who are moved to the quest precisely by our lifelong delight in him. We may begin by answering that the truth is not really reached by saying he "wrote from hand to mouth." He wrote, indeed, as occasion called or offered, with no such architectonic schemes in his head as theorists have assigned to him. But he wrote with a strange security of thought and feeling and phrase, of idea and style, which makes a line from him ring like gold beside any other metal; and the real lover of style is much more inclined to call him, with Buckle, "the greatest of the sons of men," than to think that the collapse of the theories of the schematists lowers his true prestige.

After spending over him almost more time than I care to realise, I remain somewhat of Emerson's opinion that he is very hard to know. But, with Dr. Bradley, I think patience can carry us further than Emerson went, true as was his gift of divination. Coleridge, after seeming to claim much knowledge by divination, declared that we know nothing of Shakespeare. On a long scrutiny we at least know him as one who could put his hand to the re-furbishing of any kind of play; who, when he would, could make bombast itself something as wildly fine [1] as the leap of the chamois; who could arrest our hearts forever with the unending vibration of one simple prose phrase; who could ride the whirlwind of measureless passion in the most exquisitely rhythm'd verse, raising his chosen instrument once for all to a perfection that baffles all rivalry; who could at the mere need of the theatre for a song throw off one that endures as a diamond for ever, and yet never be moved to multiply his gems; who could mint without limit fine gold, yet did it only in the way of business, hardly ever, perhaps, planning a play for himself, for the sheer sake of making the thing—doing

[1] As in that passage in TROILUS cited by Dr. Bradley:

> Blow, villain, till thy sphered bias cheek
> Outswell the colic of puffed Aquilon!
> Come, stretch thy chest and let thy eyes spout blood!
> Thou blow'st for Hector!

everything only as need was.[1] Arnold, shocked by the spurious scene which figures in the forefront of MACBETH, academically unable to see that not a word of it is Shakespeare's, could bring himself to cut the knot by speaking of him as in this aspect "not even eminently an artist."[2] We know better. He was an artist *sui generis*, an artist in *his* way, which was not the way of the Arnolds any more than of that conceived for him by Gervinus, or Coleridge, or Mr. Clutton-Brock.

He did not "sing because he must" (at least not in his maturity, apart from the sonnets), though he assuredly found joy in singing. And this connects, belike, with the secret of his greatness. He boiled his pot, like a mortal, with fire given by the Gods: he was not fretted by ambition, by the

[1] This is not the proposition that Dr. Bradley rightly oppugns when he writes (OXFORD LECTURES, p. 319): "What cannot with any logic or any safety be inferred is that he, any more than Scott, was impelled to write simply and solely by the desire to make money and improve his social position." Scott, like Shakespeare, certainly wrote much to make money; but the very direction of the effort in both cases presupposes a satisfaction in the task of literary creation. What I mean as to Shakespeare is that, coming to the theatre originally for a livelihood and becoming a play-adapter and play-maker for his company after learning his business as an actor, he went to work always in the way of business, developing his powers and fulfilling his genius in so doing, but not planning plays in sheer pursuance of either a literary or a social ambition. He took his themes, in nearly every case, as they came to his hand, often handling intractable matter more or less against the grain, and leaving a number of plays very imperfect. Perhaps the DREAM is the clearest case of a forthright and spontaneous construction.

[2] *Mixed Essays*, 1879, p. 194.

thirst for fame, any more than by the normal artist's yearning to go on creating for creation's sake ; though with a humility as rare as his genius he craved for " this man's art and that man's scope " when he was at work. I half adhere to an early surmise that had his father's business prospered and all gone well in the home we should never have had a line from him, for at home he would have stayed.

But let not the à priori artist-theorist dream that the man thus amazingly detached from normal impulsions is the less an artist because he produced on demand, or for pelf, and never ostensibly for sheer art's sake. The faculty testifies for itself. Call him worldly if you will: he is still the heavenly singer ; and bethink you whether your yard-measure is really the right thing to gauge him by.

Ideals of art must in the end quadrate with what art actually achieves in more or less permanent impact on him who contemplates it. They cannot be established to any purpose by an à priori process which subsumes certain mental attitudes as canonical in the artist. But what men will always spontaneously do is to differ in their psychic impressions from given work, and, if they are mentally given, to advance their reasons for dissenting from a common opinion. The mere vogue of an admiration is a challenge to inquiring and self-asserting spirits ; and reaction against the immense prestige

of Shakespeare is a matter of course, not rationally to be resented as a phenomenon. Protest is stimulative to reconsideration. Goldsmith's protest, really flimsy, against the metaphors of the "To be" soliloquy, earned him no such retaliation at English hands as met the squib of Voltaire. It was felt to be negligible: Voltaire was felt to be unqualified and presumptuous. Yet a closer attention to Voltaire might have hastened the recognition of alien elements in Shakespeare, as a thoughtful weighing of Goldsmith's essay might have quickened the perception of the quality of the soliloquy as a formal exercise motived by a prior model, rather than a spontaneous play of Shakespeare's genius, such as are the other soliloquies in the play.

And so, when M. Georges Pellissier produces his SHAKESPEARE ET LA SUPERSTITION SHAKESPEARIENNE (Paris, 1914), our proper course is to note, first, how much of his polemic strikes at matter which for analytic criticism is a survival of work that Shakespeare adapted,[1] and secondly to point out how much of the polemic proceeds upon a subsumed theory of dramatic art as a strict construction, proper to minds which plan plays systematically, and alone fit to pass as good

[1] One would have expected even a hostile French critic to note that almost no English scholar now regards the vision scene in CYMBELINE as Shakespeare's work. But M. Pellissier, bent only on idol-breaking, cannonades it in all seriousness, thereby usefully warning the traditionist to clear his mind of rubbish.

dramatic method. And as to this we reply that thus to try Shakespearean drama by the technique of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—nay, even of the eighteenth—is to force an open door. We none of us pretend that Shakespeare thought to plan like Scribe. He was a man of the Elizabethan theatre, adapting all manner of other men's plays for that. The case is hardly put aright by Mr. Clutton-Brock when, following Dr. Bradley, he speaks (p. 8) of "the Elizabethan method" as a "swift succession of scenes changing easily from one into another." This is rather meaningless. Relative swiftness and ease can be predicated properly only of the amount or minimisation of scene-shifting. Of that there was certainly a minimum on the Elizabethan stage.[1] In a Molière play the scenes—which we should often notate as scene-sections—follow on as "easily" and as "swiftly" as any of the Elizabethans. The real point is as to the frequent disconnectedness, the plotless discursiveness, of the Elizabethan movement; and this is what incurs M. Pellissier's censure. But what then? To condemn an art or a composition for not being something else is in itself an irrelevance in criticism, unless the form is *claimed* to be the something else; and if the general polemic of

[1] When, however, Dr. Bradley writes (OXFORD LECTURES ON POETRY, p. 283) that "scene followed scene without a pause," one must note that the words cannot be literally taken.

M. Pellissier strikes professed defenders of Shakespeare, so much the worse for them, who took up an untenable position.

The question is whether the assailed art-form—or rather whether a given specimen of it—is or is not in itself a remarkable and delightful product. Touchstone's marrying of Audrey, as M. Pellissier sternly insists, has nothing to do with the plot. But Shakespeare was not there bent on a trimmed plot (though he could on occasion make or adapt a well-calculated plot, as in CORIOLANUS or in TWELFTH NIGHT or OTHELLO—even then with a certain looseness): he was making an entertaining play for his audience, who would enjoy the Touchstone–Audrey scene without asking whether it had anything to do with the plot. And on the question of the merits of the well-knit as against the loosely knit play we simply sum up that, whereas a quite well-knit play may have very little literary interest or human content for us, a rather loosely knit play may be charming if it is penned by a poet with an eye for the colour and an ear for the music of humanity. In that very play, light and lax comedy as it is, with passages of extravagant romanticism and even melodrama, we find a kind of touch that no one else has given us. After two lively but immemorable opening Acts, we pass into the forest of Arden, and into poetry, expatiation, pastime, the poetry culminating in the scene in which Orlando, touched by a kind answer

where he had offered menace, craves pardon and goes on :

> But whate'er you are
> That in this desert inaccessible,
> Under the shade of melancholy boughs,
> Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time.

And it is as if an enchanter had smitten the earth with his wand and the whole action become music. The effect is quite alien to those of the well-made play, ancient or modern. It is perhaps not very great on the stage, now ; but for the reader, at the twentieth perusal, it is something charmed. And that is but a minor kind of effect, for Shakespeare, belonging to his first period.

But, says the modern formalist, this medley of poetry and fun, sententious talk and farce, with its primitively romantic plot, is but juvenile drama *as* drama ; and again we agree, being very sure that Shakespeare never reckoned it wonderful. Had he done nothing but the comedies and ROMEO AND JULIET, we should indeed have reckoned him a uniquely delightful artist in " licentiate " drama, a poet who meets Milton's passing account of him as " fancy's child, warbling his native woodnotes wild." It is for his later and mightier grasp of the great themes of life, in a poetry and with a power rising to the height of every call, that we say of him, recalling the other and greater tribute of Milton, that our wonder is his monu-

ment ; and that the "labours of an age in piled stones" of commentary and exegesis are the due outcome of the desire to get right that sorely mishandled text.

This in spite of the plain validity of the charge that his drama is as a rule laxly constructed from the point of view of classic and modern drama ; that many columns even of HAMLET are, as we have seen, surplus matter from the point of view of the sheer exposition of an action. It is rather dramatic poetry than drama proper. But it remains memorable literature even in these portions ; and the total effect of drama and poetry, action and reverie, is such that the German translator who finds HAMLET quite "bad" as a play, is moved to rapture by its wealth of poetic thought and feeling. What sane criticism will not do is to meet such an "attack" with a plea that all the surplusage is dramatically relevant, that the action is well schemed as a whole ; that irrelevant scenes become relevant by being "swift" ; and that the countersense between changed character and unchanged action is somehow made good by a pseudo-Freudian psycho-analysis which, far outgoing the solution of Coleridge, credits Shakespeare with conceiving a personality and an action never together dreamed of by Christian, Pagan, or Turk. *Non tali auxilio.* He remains an immortal for what he was, not for what he was not.

And, when all is said, he remains a master

dramatist. Laying out his plays for the Elizabethan audience, without a thought of a remote criticism which should put his work on trial for not being schemed to the optic of the ages, he none the less made live plays for that audience. This "licentiate" drama *is* drama, as our "licentiate iambic" verse is our blank verse *par excellence*. And though it would be extravagant to say that licentiate drama at its best is as essentially a greater thing than strict drama as licentiate iambic is a greater thing than strict iambic, which is a mere "body of death," still it may be, and often is so, in Shakespeare's hands. None of the men of rule, in his day or in ours, could have made a greater dramatic effect, pure and simple, than that of Macbeth's

> Which of you have done this?

at the vision of the blood-boltered Banquo. They would not have done it if they could, we may be told, seeing that the stage must either have a mannikin hoisted, according to the old stage directions, or dare to let Macbeth stare on vacancy, as we know Shakespeare would have preferred. But let us turn to work where no such dilemma arises, and note the strength of Shakespeare in sheer drama—rightly taking that word to mean the exhibition of human feeling and character in action. The presentment of the spirit-broken Lear:

> Pray do not mock me:
> I am a very foolish fond old man,
> Fourscore and upward, not an hour [1] less,
> And, to deal plainly,
> I fear I am not in my perfect mind—

will be granted, I suppose, even by M. Pellissier, to be in the way of pure drama, open to no cavil on the score of irrelevance, seeing that Lear is the theme of the play. If this be not granted, if it be argued that the dramatist's business was to conduct us to the end of the action without displaying Lear in his flight of madness and his shattered return, we shall have a very definite ground of critical conflict. In the Elizabethan drama, as compared with the classic, there is one new and vital constructive element which holds good as apart from any mismanagement of it—the element, namely, of action directly represented in preference to the classic method of narration. The method of action is not indeed an English invention : it was common

[1] I would respectfully submit to editors that the accepted reading, "not an hour *more or* less," *must* be the blunder of a compositor or of a corrector. The "more or" makes the line absurd, and is reasonably to be explained as the mistaken emendation of one who read "hour" as a monosyllable. So read, the line would not scan. But "hour," like "fire," "power," "sour," and many other words, was for the dramatists of 1590–1610 as often as not a dissyllable. It is to me incredible that Shakespeare should make Lear say:

> Fourscore and *upward*, not an hour *more or* less,

by way of making him *thus* exhibit continued mental collapse. But it may be a result of mere printer's error.

to the Italian, Spanish, and French stages in the sixteenth century, and was vigorously exploited in France by Alexandre Hardy in Shakespeare's own day. But (to say nothing of Spain) in Italy the method of action, operated by playwrights without judgment and without genius, yielded a drama of which we have an example in the non-Shakespearean TITUS ANDRONICUS[1]—a drama in which action is mainly repulsive and wholly unredeemed by poetry or psychic insight; and in France the crude fertility of Hardy, with his six hundred plays, instead of creating a great poetic drama, furnished, on the one hand by its extravagance and on the other by its lack of saving poetic power, the main grounds of the critical reaction towards classic limitations which determined the form of the classic tragedy of Corneille, Racine, and their corrivals and successors.

In England, freedom was justified of her children, inasmuch as they had among them the requisite genius. The essential lift given to poetic drama by Marlowe, aided by that recognition of the final importance of structure which Kyd had partly derived from his knowledge of Italian drama and which he seems to have impressed upon Marlowe, made the way for Shakespeare, whose genius consummated the form once for all. It was not destined to a long development, were it only because

[1] Of which the probable Italian derivation is a matter to be separately discussed.

genius is so rare a thing, and English culture-conditions in the ensuing age were so unpropitious to a high progression. But the Elizabethan drama, of which Shakespeare is the glory and the crown, remains as a literary possession where the coeval drama of France and Italy is for us a charmless ruin.

It is in its far freer handling of life, then, its mainly fortunate development of possibilities which other stages handled infelicitously, that Elizabethan drama has for us its special aspect of superiority to the later classic French drama, with its paralysing restriction to recital where the Elizabethans [1] showed things actually happening. Here, we say, they showed the truer and higher perception of dramatic possibilities, the greater conception of drama as such; and it belonged to their vital notion of drama that they exhibited character in action as the French classic drama, even in the gifted hands of Racine, never could. The vision of Lear raving; returning, broken, to sanity; and agonising over the dead Cordelia, is something that the French drama has simply nothing to compare with.

M. Pellissier, discussing the play, labours over the horror of the blinding of Gloucester, not noting that Shakespeare reduces the horrid action to a minimum, and that the fate of the blinded Gloucester is in itself true and great tragic matter. The

[1] Jonson was partly with the classicists: the rest, broadly speaking, were with Marlowe and Shakespeare.

Elizabethan zest for action yielded an enlargement of the whole dramatic sphere ; so that passion mounts upon wings denied to the French classicist. This has been recognised by so many French critics that we must not seem to make the debate a national one ; but if we were to apply to Corneille and Racine the vital dramatic tests which Shakespeare so triumphantly meets, we might frame an impeachment that would eclipse his ; and this without even raising the question of the relative dramatic values of blank and rhymed verse ; and perhaps without falling to the level of M. Pellissier's dismissal of the Fool in LEAR as a mere vendor of twaddle. To lift the Fool into tragic air was one of Shakespeare's strangest master-strokes ; and the critic dominated by an ideal of canonical form does not see what has been done. But this too is drama, tragic drama, albeit not dreamt of in the classic æsthetic. The Fool lives for us as part of the tragedy of LEAR, in whose storm he too is shattered.

In fine, Shakespeare's drama, so little recognisant, in many cases, of structural form, outgoes the critical plane for which structural form is an end rather than a means, even as it outlasts drama which makes form a strait-waistcoat for action and feeling. Defect for defect, and power for power, the Shakespearean product is by far the more satisfying to the free sense of truth and beauty. We return to it as the French public returns to nothing—unless it be to Racine.

To write thus, one hopes, is not to imitate the devotees of Dickens, who canonise puerility itself in gratitude for the alternate lusty ministry of farce and fancy, and who are ardently respectful alike to cheap mannerism and to caricature, to crude melodrama and cruder propaganda. Something of what M. Pellissier urges will stand, though mostly as against groundwork merely adapted, not originated, by Shakespeare. But our contention is, first and last, that the mere recognition of Shakespeare's real procedure, his alchemy of transfiguration, is a way to a more intense appreciation of his mastery than can ever be attained by seeing him either in the conventional or in a newly unconventional way as a deliberate schemer of theoretic masterpieces.

And this is not merely a claim that "nothing succeeds like success," that the Shakespearean output is certified by its lasting (though admittedly discontinuous) hold on the stage. Shakespeare is a dramatist above as well as for the stage. Critics who argue that the sheer theatrical effectiveness of RICHARD III proves it must be his, avow that CORIOLANUS on the stage is found "intolerable." They do not—though they well might—mean what Lamb meant when he so truly said that Shakespeare transcends the stage.[1] They mean that it

[1] Lamb in effect chimes with Coleridge, who declared (LECTURES, ed. Ashe, p. 479) that he never saw a play of Shakespeare performed "but with a degree of pain, disgust, and indignation."

misses the popular "interest": this though—or because?—it includes, besides the presentment of Coriolanus, three portraits of women which only Shakespeare ever matched, and all without the normal "love interest" of tragedy. And yet it is a great drama, great as only Shakespeare is great, in poetry, in portraiture, in power, in completeness of seizure, in its burden of tragic inevitableness. The French classic stage could not accommodate that tremendous clash of mighty will with mightier moral obstacle; and in seeking to do so usually reduced the conflict to declamation, as nobody sees better than the French critics who have acclaimed Shakespeare's play. There are English critics, indeed, who in turn "attack" Shakespeare's play. Mr. Lytton Strachey, in an argument about the later plays which does not really reach its objective, pronounces Coriolanus "intolerable" in its resort to "rhetoric." He would dismiss as rhetoric, apparently, the thick thunder of

> You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
> As reek o' the rotten fens;

while he is rapturous over the rhetoric of Racine. It is so satisfactory, in a way, to find an English critic who dislikes Coriolanus zealous for Racine, while so many French critics are zealous for Coriolanus as a great construction, that one is moved less to exclamation over Mr. Strachey's notion of

rhetoric than to the query whether his defence of Racine by dithyramb is really the most persuasive case that can be made out for that delicate and accomplished artist of a strait convention. It may suffice here to remark that the cry of Coriolanus :

> O mother ! mother !
> What have you done !

is something beyond rhetoric, and beyond Racine. And when Mr. Clutton-Brock tells us[1] that you can imagine Shakespeare's Coriolanus in Hamlet's place killing his mother, and that " CORIOLANUS is a descriptive play compared with HAMLET, which is creative : in CORIOLANUS we are aware of events more than people, and the people seem to be there to illustrate the events,"[2] we are aware once more how exceptionally inadequate impressionist criticism can be when it is ridden by a false theory. The theorist who can find a generally truer or greater portraiture of *persons* in HAMLET than in CORIOLANUS is spell-ridden of his own formula. Perhaps we may agree to see in his thesis a peculiar testimony to Shakespeare's ideocratic power of lifting us above the theatre to the world of his *poiesis*, " out of space, out of time." There, if you will, is his ultimate standing ground for criticism. But we are not there in a criticism which seeks to find in his stage world a theoretic perfection in its kind.

[1] SHAKESPEARE'S " HAMLET," p. 50. [2] *Id.*, p. 27.

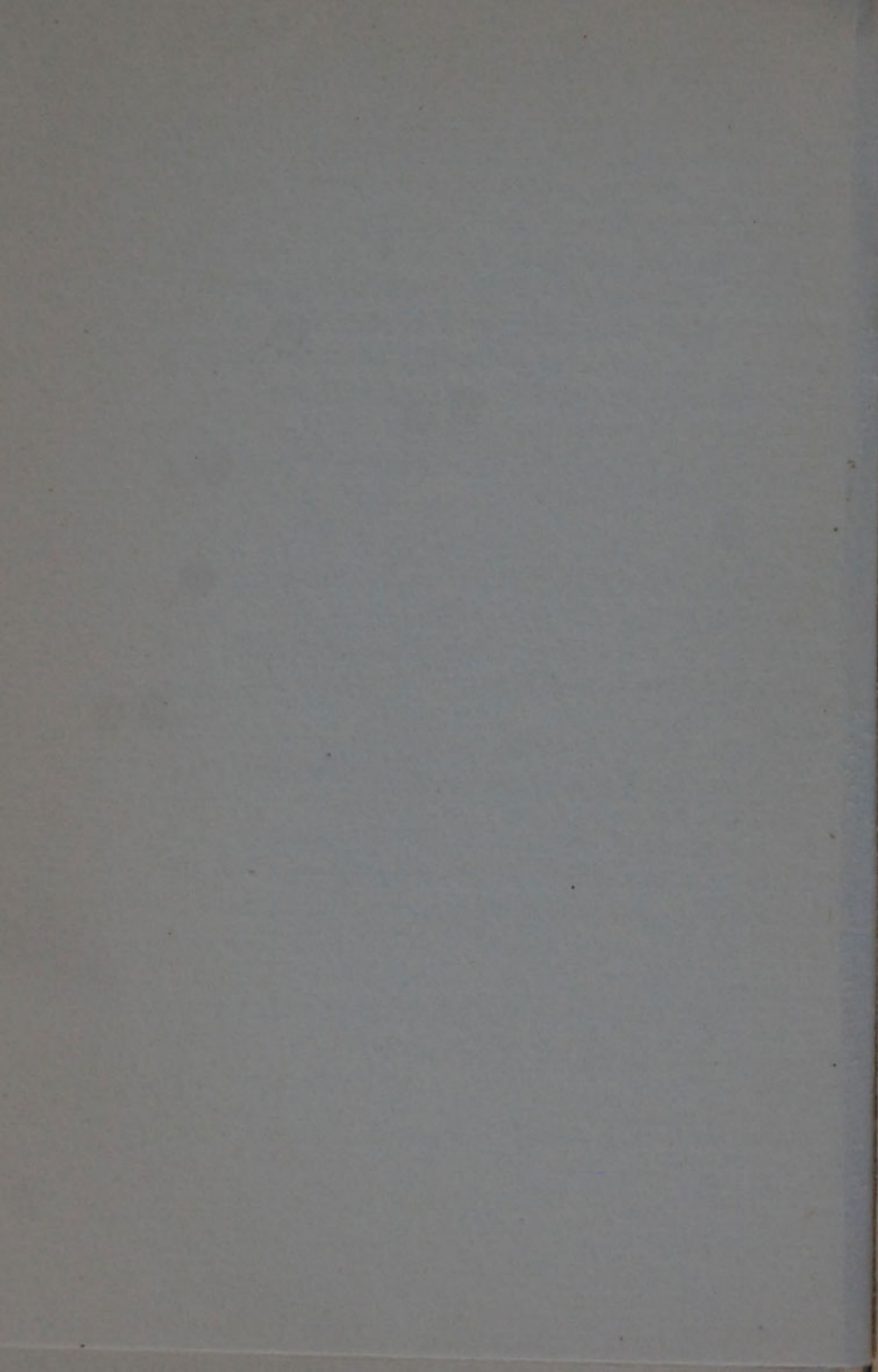
"There remains a mystery after all that we can say," avows our impressionist theorist in conclusion; "but we shall not pluck out its heart by trying to prove that it is no mystery." Yet that is just what he has gone about to do; and our answer is that the one abiding mystery in Shakespeare is even the mystery of genius, fitly to be faced as such. It is no valid tribute to the genius to denaturalise its work into abracadabras:

> Traded pilots 'twixt the dangerous shores
> Of will and judgment.

They do but "put in circumscription and confine," by incogitable formulas, the unparalleled play of power which we see transcending the limits laid for it by the accepted task, and projecting an ideal world of solely spiritual dimension. He who wrote:

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on

has no need of abracadabral vindication. His genius was not subdued to what it worked in. Hence the acclamation of three hundred years.



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Printed in Great Britain by Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ld.,
London and Aylesbury.