

TEXT FLY WITHIN
THE BOOK ONLY

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

="OU 210085r

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OUP—2273—19—11—79—10,000 Copies.

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 822.33 Accession No. 1904

Author Brooke, S.A.

Title On ten plays of Shakespeare

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	1
II. ROMEO AND JULIET	35
III. RICHARD II.	71
III. RICHARD II, IV. RICHARD III.	100
V. MERCHANT OF VENICE	127
VI. AS YOU LIKE IT	155
VII. MACBETH	180
VIII. C O R I O L A N U S	221
ix WINTER'S TALE	253
X. THE TEMPEST	284

I

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Midsummer Night's Dream belongs, probably, to the winter of 1595, and was made, it has been said, to celebrate a marriage. This may well be so; it has a bridal atmosphere. Though the affairs of love are fantastically tangled in it and their music jangled, even in fairyland, yet in the end the tangle is resolved, and the marriage-bells are tuneful.

It is a comedy of love. About four years before, in 1591, Shakespeare had written a tragedy of love in *Romeo and Juliet*. To begin this book with the earlier play would have been more historical, but not wiser. *Romeo and Juliet* is the kind of love-tragedy a young man writes in order to dramatise his pleasure with some imagined sorrow. Shakespeare did not write it out of any personal gloom or any deep knowledge of the trouble of the world. It was written to try his eager and happy hand at tragedy; and a youthful exuberance frequently emerges through its sorrows. Few things are more different than the tragic spirit in *Romeo and Juliet*, which was in the story but not in Shakespeare, than the tragic spirit in *Lear* and *Othello*, which was in himself and then embodied in the tragedies. The real Shakespeare at this time was full to the brim with the joyous spirit of youth. And *Midsummer Night's Dream* represents the actual temper of his soul far more truly than *Romeo and Juliet*. I have therefore chosen to begin with it.

Delight in life; pleasure in himself, and in mankind;

sympathy with brightness more than with sorrow; an enkindling happiness; were, in spite of his tragedies, the very root of Shakespeare. Having power and love and a sound mind, he could, naturally, play with human life; nor did his power to do this prevent his sympathy with its pain, or dim the clear eyes with which he saw its miseries. On the contrary, he owed to the deep-seated joyfulness in him the sanity of his judgment of life, the unbiassed justice with which he weighed its good and evil in the balance, the clear sight he had of physical and moral evil. It is the cheerful poet who sees the gloom most lucidly, most wisely.

When grimness or sulks at life get down to the centre of a man, they disease his judgment, weaken his intelligence, dim his sight, disenable his feeling; and, if he be an artist, enfeeble his grip of his subject, disperse his concentration, deprive him of that creative apartness from his materials which enables him to use them as he pleases for the making of a new thing. He loses, that is, the divine command of his genius, not only over the comedy of life, but also over its tragedy. Deeply as Shakespeare felt the woe, wickedness, and weakness of humanity, he was still their master. If he was in them, he was also beyond them, and in this twofold relation to them lay his artistic mastery of tragedy. It was the same with Sophocles, and it is this which makes him greater than Euripides. This power to stand outside as well as inside of human sorrow belonged to Shakespeare, because at the deepest root of him was, I repeat, delight in life; even rapture—the word is not too strong—with the playfulness of its spring and the fulness of its summer.

Midsummer Night's Dream is Shakespeare at lyric play with human life; and also with the beautiful life of the natural world. As such, it represents the constant, even the dominant, spirit of Shakespeare's nature more truly

than his tragedies. These were written at a time when his natural gaiety was overwhelmed either by personal trouble, or by a transient cynicism, or by the pressure of some deep conviction of the sorrow and sins of the world. He saw, he even touched, it seems, in that hot and eager world, the darkest depths of grief and crime, of weakness, dishonour, of tyrannic passions, and deadly mistake. None have seen them more profoundly, but even in their blackest gloom he created a certain brightness. Comedy, sometimes kindly, sometimes bitter, even cynical, glides in amidst the tragedy; he can still disport himself a little. As the years brought him comfort, he passed out of the darkness into clear light. His ineradicable pleasure in humanity, the sweetness and delight of it, survived its woes and terrors; and the latest plays abide in the clear atmosphere and lovely colour of a gentle, bright, and peaceful sunset. They have their still philosophy, their wise even solemn experience, their melodious forgivingness, their mystic touch on life and death—grave and dignified elements which his passage through the tragedies of mankind had left in his soul. But that passage through the valley of the shadow of death had not destroyed but confirmed his bright sanity, his sweet sympathy with the love and ardour of youth, and his happiness as he looked round on the world. He had become quiet, but his quietude was gay and tender. He still retained the power to play graciously with human life. He still loved Nature and played with her. Ariel, the lively spirit of the air, is as charming as Oberon and Titania, the spirits of the moonlit earth. Caliban is as good an image of the dark coarseness of Nature as Puck is of its mockery of us. The natural description in *Winter's Tale* is even more imaginatively felt than that in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The love of Miranda is more delicate than that of Juliet; the loving of Florizel and

Perdita is as impassioned, though rarely so outspoken, as that of Romeo and Juliet, nor is the love of Rosalind and Orlando more simple, happy, and chivalrous. And the playfulness of his latest work is not less, though it is different. There is even a delightful roguishness, full of odd wisdom, in a character like Autolycus, which is better and nearer to humanity than the mirth of the clowns in the earlier plays with whom we might compare him.

Thus, the central brightness, the sportive happiness at the root of Shakespeare's character and art lasted when he had emerged from tragedy. Therefore, though *Romeo and Juliet* preceded the *Dream*, I have begun with the *Dream*. It belongs to the earliest, to the most enduring element in the soul of Shakespeare.

Certain elements of the play harmonise with the time at which it was written, a time in which the poetic properties and interests of the past were recovered for the imagination, in which new poetic materials were discovered. England, after a long drought, had again felt the freshness of the dew of Romance, and heard the soft falling of its rain. The imagination of the people, re-awakened, urged them into the passionate life of discovery, of adventure, of intellectual pursuit of the unknown. And in Spenser's hands, and here in Shakespeare, all the living creatures of the woodland and the waters in whom Romance had delighted, returned to enliven Nature and to take their kindly interest in humanity. The Nature-spirit in French, Anglo-Norman, and Celtic romance rose again; and Shakespeare, born into it and rejoicing in it, made a new world for its new form. Among remnants of romantic tales like *Huon of Bordeaux*, and among the folk-traditions of the people, he found the dry bones of Titania, Oberon, and Robin of Tiranicoberon and ROBIN. Good fellow, and breathed their nostrils the breath of life. It was a great thing to perfect form of the rediscovered fairyland; and he

did it with such mastery that the fairies have never died. Even modern science, with all its own wonders, has not driven them out of the field, nor does it wish to banish them. It has evolved a science out of them, and not spoilt them. Yet, living as he made them, Shakespeare, with his luminous sanity, makes them creatures of a dream.

Along with this revival of romance, there was the recovery of the classics. — This was the work of the Renaissance, in the English youth of which great movement Shakespeare was born. ITS energy, repressed by the bigotry of the reigns of Edward vi. and Mary, broke into a rapid and fertilising stream when Elizabeth was well seated on the throne. It was not long before Greece and Rome wielded over intellectual and imaginative life as great, perhaps even a greater dominion than romance; and men like Shakespeare, who were not scholars, enjoyed the stimulation of the classic writers and of the history of the great doings and men of the past in the host of translations which lay on every bookshelf. Among these was *Plutarch's Lives*, and the first of them is the life of Theseus. It crept into Shakespeare's imagination, and one of its incidents supplied him with the framework of this play. The subject fell in thus with one of the literary fashions of the day, so fashionable that even the working classes in the towns ^{were} interested in classical stories. They saw them in a hundred pageants, and it is quite Elizabethan that weaver: J§7"beiiows-makers and the rest, should choose the story of Pyramus and Thasbe for their rude representation

Moreover, the classical movement at this time was not altogether apart from the romantic. the legendary in the life of Theseus slipped easily into the world of romance and into the - stories of fairyland. A kind of amalgamation took place, such as had happened before in

the romantic cycles of Troy and Alexander. there is the strangest mingling in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, of Greece and Faerie, of the survivals of romance and the impulses of the Renaissance. The ~~medieval fairies meet~~ to celebrate and bless the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. It is hinted that Oberon was the lover of Hippolyta, and that Titania, herself in love with Theseus, was jealous of his amour with Aegle, Antiope, and Ariadne. History has no chronology, and time scarcely ~~seems to exist~~ in this imaginative world. ~~even the new names of the shepherds and shepherdesses in the Elizabethan pastoral~~ are Oberon takes the shape of Corin, and verses love to amorous Phyllida. Such a lively mixture is the play.

These literary tendencies the day — the classical, the romantic, the pastoral — are used by Shakespeare exactly as a young poet of genius, without scholarship, would use them. But the Euphuist element, so conspicuous in *Love's Labour's Lost*, is scarcely here. Shakespeare had all but got rid of it, and we meet it no more in his work.

Another element in the play is also new, at least in form. Mixed up with the heroic personages and the fairies, with the mechanic patches, whose doings form a piece of real life. Shakespeare has got down to the working men of the lanes and courts of Elizabethan London. It is true they are supposed to be Athenians, but they were drawn from the life. And, indeed, I suspect they were not far from a true picture of the Athenian working man, so curiously does Shakespeare's piercing genius enable him to represent not the particular but the universal characteristics of any class of men with whom he deals. None of those who meet in Quince's house say anything which might not have been said by an Athenian as well as by an Elizabethan working man at a time when, literature being

the vogue, fragments of culture would filter down to the uneducated classes and be travestied by them. These poor folk are vitally interested in their play. They are inventive of means, properties, and suggestive pageantry. They believe in all they do. And they never step out of their own atmosphere.[^] This is a piece of realism, and it opened an old vein in English literature in a new way. It is said that Shakespeare did not care for the common folk. He did not think them fit to govern, but he had a true sympathy for them, an affectionate intimacy with their manners, their humour, and their views of life. And his new realism of the poor has never ceased to be a living element in English literature. It began with Langland and Chaucer. It died away. It rose again in Shakespeare and the dramatists. Ever since then it has ebbed and flowed, and to-day it is stronger than ever in fiction and in poetry.

Another element in the play was purely of Shakespeare's time, and of his own youth. It was the prominence of love. The age was the age of love-poetry. Even the imaginative prose was concerned with love as its chief subject. (But the poets were immersed in it. They made books of sonnets on this passion, and were then called amourists. Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Watson, and many others echoed one another in this form of literature. Moreover, in the resurrection of national joy and honour, in the new confidence England had in herself, she was young again, and of course she sang of love. It is the subject of youth. And Shakespeare, himself young, and having the buoyant joy of genius in its exercise, turned to love as the prominent element in his dramas when they became quite original; and *Love's Labour's Lost*, the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*, even the *Merchant of Venice* (though that play is of a larger dramatic scope), show with what variety

in his earlier period he treated the affairs of love. Nor did he cease to treat them even when the history of his country claimed his interest, or when tragedy laid her grave hand upon his shoulder. As to the latest plays, they are full of the tender loveliness of youthful and married love?

This play, written for a marriage, is, naturally, concerned with love. Theseus and Hippolyta image the sober love of middle age, with here and there a touch of passion. They have no difficulties, no trouble. The tragedies of love, except those arising from jealousy, belong, for the most part, to youth and the beginnings of old age. In middle age the great outside interests of the world modify into quiet that tyrannic passion. Theseus turns at once from Hippolyta to the business of the state. Hippolyta can philosophise with ease on the vagaries of love. And both, not caring for the loneliness with one another which youthful love desires, are delighted with the pleasures of the chase. They rise early in the morning to follow the hounds. Their talk is not of love, but of bygone hunting, of their dogs, their breed, their musical cry.

With the young lovers it is different. Love, as he is in Spenser's mask of Cupid, is a cruel, capricious god to them. Even Puck disapproves of his conduct—

Cupid is a knavish lad,
Thus to make poor females mad.

Lysander loves Hermia, and Demetrius Helena. But Demetrius forsakes Helena for Hermia, and hence are born jealousies, furies, quarrels, dissolutions of friendship, death or a convent to Hermia. Under love's cruel driving, Helena betrays Lysander and Hermia to Demetrius, and is a traitor to honour. Under it the friendship of Helena and Hermia is dissolved, and Demetrius and Lysander seek each the other's death. Love sets them

into madness and confusion. Then with a sudden turn, in the midst of the dream-night, Shakespeare turns to laugh at the folly of youthful love. He makes it depend on the juice of an herb, as if it were only a chance, as if it lay only in the eye. Lysander hateth the woman he loved, Demetrius loves the woman, he hated. Helena and Hermia are driven wild with pain. Titania herself is a victim, and falls in love with Bottom crowned with an ass's head. All is mockery of Love as the maddener, the god of unreason. Only Elizabeth escapes, 'the fair vestal throned in the West,' She is 'fancy free,' and this isolation of her makes the compliment Shakespeare paid her almost as exquisite as the poetry in which it is made.) Finally, the play, the rude mechanics' play, is a love-tragedy as deep as that of *Romeo and Juliet*. But it is turned into laughter, and makes the sorrows of love the tragical mirth of an hour. The note of all this treatment of the subject of love is struck in the first act by Lysander's phrase

The course of true love never did run smooth,

then by Lysander's statements of the crosses of love, then by Hermia's answers, and then by the soliloquy of Helena at the end of the first scene. Nothing can be more characteristic of the time, of its literary life, of the mastery of love as a subject, of Shakespeare's sportive youthfulness, than this hither and thither of love in various fantasies. 'Nowadays,' says Bottom, 'reason and love keep little company together,'

Then there is the scenery. We have no descriptive hints as to what Shakespeare expected the audience to see in Athens with the 'intellectual eye,' It is quite different with regard to the wood where the fairies are. This is not deliberately described, but by scattered touches, in the midst of the dramatic interest, Shakespeare

suggests its landscape, and we, for ourselves, create it. That is his way of natural description; it is the way of genius. We have walked through this wood again and again, and know many of its recesses. We even know its outskirts, for we have companied with Theseus and Hippolyta when they came to its edge to hunt in the morning. There lies the western valley enlivened with the Spartan hounds and foresters, and there climbs the mountain-top which overlooks the valley and the wood, lit with the 'yellow gold' of the morning which Oberon 'oft made sport with.' The wood is full of flowers; faint primrose beds, cowslips, oxlips, wild thyme, musk-roses, eglantine, honeysuckle; of hawthorn-brakes and briers, barked elms, great oak-trees, dewy glades, wild undergrowth; and the moon shines brightly over it. The to-and-fro of the wandering lovers, of the roving fairies, brings us, time after time, into, we imagine, every dell and clearing of it.

This was the landscape, and there was not a groundling in the pit who did not see it more clearly than we see it in the elaborate decoration of our stage. We are held down to the scene-painter's sight of it, and that limits our self-creativity. But every one in Shakespeare's theatre made from the poet's suggestions his own wood out of his own memories of the country. In such a wood Shakespeare may often have wandered! on the outskirts of the London of his day, but he saw it through eyes which had looked with the delight of a youth on the woods round Stratford; and Charlecote's memories enter into this wood near Athens, and into the forest of *As You Like It*.

"It is easy from this play to see how keen was his enjoyment of Nature, and with what an observant eye he watched her doings. Nor was his eye less keen for the animal life in the wood. The squirrels racing up the trees,

the ox stretching his neck to the yoke, the crows fatted with the murrian flock, the snake with enamelled skin, the reere-mice with leathern wing, the owl that wonders at the quaint spirits of the fairies, the hedgehogs, spiders, beetles,

The ousel-cock, so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill;
The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
The plain-song cuckoo gray,

the lark so tunable to the shepherd's ear, the wild geese the creeping fowler eyes, the russet-pated choughs, who,

Rising and cawing at the gun's report,
Sever themselves, and madly sweep the sky ;

the red-hipped humble-bee, the fiery glow-worm's eyes, the painted butterflies,¹ are seen as clearly as Browning saw them, and with the same eye for their colour. To the poetic observer of beasts and birds, colour is their first distinction. Then he sees the other marks which isolate them from one another, and then the points in which each species is excellent. Shakespeare's eye, trained in the country, knew the fine points of animals as clearly as he knew those of men and women. In *Venus and Adonis* every point of excellence in a horse is mentioned. The description of the hare, 'poor Wat, far off upon a hill,' who

Stands on his hinder legs with listening ear,

is as true and vigorous; but neither of these is finer than that of the dogs in this play—

My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,
So flew'd} so sanded ; and their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew ;
Crook-knee'd, and dew-lapp'd like Thessalian bulls ;
Slow in pursuit, but match'd in mouth like bells,
Each under each.

It is like a picture by Velasquez.

¹ All these descriptive phrases are taken from the play, and two are the flowers and trees mentioned above.

The form of the play is simple. The first act and the last are of the waking day, of real life. In the midst is the night, and the fanciful life of a dream. And added to this vivid contrast is the episode of the comic tragedy of Pyramus, which, in a certain sense, combines the real and the imaginative life—for the working men of Athens are lifted above their daily toil into an ideal world by their rude aspiration to art-creation. Their play knits by its object, which is to do honour to Theseus' marriage, the last act to the first. Finally the marriage of all the lovers is accomplished, and the fairies bless the marriage-bed in lovely poetry.

(Theseus and Hippolyta are children of the day, of clear reason, and practical life. Hippolyta is the sensible woman of high rank, with all the natural freedom of a great lady, living and thinking in the open air. Fond of the chase, she remembers with pleasure how the skies, the fountains, seemed all one mutual cry when she bayed the bear with Hercules and Cadmus,—an Amazon as well as a great lady. She is interested in the story of the night. It is 'strange and admirable, and grows to something of great constancy,' But she reasons on it clearly. Her curiosity does not carry away her good sense. Theseus and she discuss the events of the dream, and the several views of the man and the woman are admirably distinguished. She has little patience with folly and ignorance, and is greatly bored with Pyramus and Thisbe. 'This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard,' she says, with her plain intelligence. Theseus sees more deeply. * The best in this kind are būt shadows, and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.' But Hippolyta answers quickly. 'It must be your imagination then, not theirs.' Not for a moment is this Queen asleep, or fanciful, or in a dream. Yet, though a warrior Queen, she does not want a woman's gentleness—

I lore not to see wretchedness o'ercharged,
And duty in his service perishing.

When she hears Bottom mourning over Thisbe, her sympathy is awakened, even though the stuff is silly. 'Beshrew my heart,' she cries, 'I pity the man,'

Theseus is as plainly a King in the daylight. He is in love, but his love has no fantasy. Night, he believes, is the fairies' time, but he spends it in love or in sleep. He turns in a moment from Hippolyta to the business of government, more important to him than love. His deep respect for Athenian law and precedent, his moderation and firmness in judgment, his support, even though he pities Hermia, of paternal authority, all mark the man of the world and the statesman; the lucid reasoner, who has never been in the land of dreams. He does not believe the story of the Night. These matters do not belong to cool reason, but to the seething brains of lovers or madmen. The lunatic, the lover, and the poet

Are of imagination all compact.

Yet, in that famous passage, he can describe the poet and his work better than most, so clear is his sight of things. He sees imagination's work in the acting of the poor mechanics, and therefore sympathises with them, as is fit for a ruler of men. Nor could Shakespeare's noblest men speak with more of a royal nature than Theseus does when he reasons on the homage offered to kings. Hippolyta has objected to the play being heard. It is not kind to these poor folk, for they can do nothing in this way, to hear them. 'The kinder we,' says Theseus,

to give them thanks for nothing.
Our sport shall be to take what they mistake ;
And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect
Takes it in might, not merit.
Where I have come, great clerks have purposed
To greet me with premeditated welcomes ;

Where I have seen them shiver and look pale,
 Make periods in the midst of sentences,
 Throttle their practis'd accent in their fears,
 And, in conclusion, dumbly have broke off,
 Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,
 Out of this silence yet I pick'd a welcome
 And in the modesty of fearful duty
 T read as much as from the rattling tongue
 Of saucy and audacious eloquence.
 Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity
 In least speak most, to my capacity.

This is the good manners of a gentleman. It is as wise in experience as it is courteous in feeling, clear in reasoning. To the last—and not least when he tells the players, 'Never excuse, let your epilogue alone'—ho is of the bright-eyed morning; no king of shadows like Oberon, never in a dream. ;

Nor are the minor characters in the first act less of daylight reality. Egeus, a hateful father, is a plain-spoken tyrant. , Hermia, when she lays her case before Theseus, is very different from Hermia in the dream. Her modest good sense, seated in her faithfulness, does not say much before the King, but what she says is steadfast and clear. Theseus says, 'Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.' 'So is Lysander,' she replies. 'In himself he is,' answers Theseus,

But, in this kind, wanting your father's voice,
 The other must be held the worthier.

HER. I would my father look'd but with my eyes.

' She is admirable in all the rest of the scene: reverent to Theseus, even to her father, but fixed as fate in her fidelity to her lover, wide awake to the events, and of a keen intelligence.

The same luminous daylight shines over the second scene, in Quince's house, where the mechanics order their play. These two scenes in the court and the cottage, so close to real life, Shakespeare took pains to make unlike

a dream. It is only when the lovers are left alone that imagination enters, and the talk becomes poetry. Then love's high fantastic possesses all they say like a spirit. Hermia tells Lysander that she will meet him in the wood: a simple statement, but this is how she words it—

My good Lysander!
 I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow,
 By his best arrow with the golden head,
 By the simplicity of Venus' doves,
 By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,
 And by that fire which burn'd the Carthage queen,
 When the false Trojan under sail was seen,
 By all the vows that ever men hath broke,—
 In number more than ever women spoke—
 In that same place them hast appointed me,
 To-morrow truly will I meet with thee.

This is the way love and youth heighten *To be more I'll come*'—into poetry. It is followed by that fanciful game with words between Lysander and Hermia concerning the troubles of love. Some have called it unnatural. On the contrary, this tossing to and fro of fancies in play is quite natural to lovers when they are young. Then, since the love of natural beauty is akin to human love, the lovers lift into poetry all they say about Nature. For them Phoebe beholds

Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,
 Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass,—

For them the primrose beds are faint where Hermia and Helena were wont to lie.

In this uplifting air of love they are no more of the noonday, but of the twilight, half-way to the moonlight of the midsummer night, on the skirts of the dream. Shakespeare was a master of gradation. The dream-note of the next three acts is thus struck, yet it only sounds dimly, like a far-off bell. As yet, the fancy of the lovers has none of the unreason of a dream. Their speech is

clear, their minds awake. But the atmosphere they breathe is one that easily changes into dream. A

They sleep, and another day goes by. Then comes the Night, the magical midsummer Night, and with it the fairy world. The lovers seek the wood, and so do the crew of mechanics to rehearse their play. And they pass into the dream. The daylight has gone; the moonlight rules. Indeed, the moon is the sky-mistress of the play. She is not only the Queen of the Midsummer Night; she is the goddess of the marriage-bed of Theseus and Hippolyta, whose first speeches dwell on her. The lovers talk of her beauty. Oberon and Titania live in her light and breathe its air. Pyramus and Thisbe meet in moonshine. The fairies bless Theseus' bed in her brightness. All the sentiment of moonlight in a million lovers' hearts pervades the play.

Shakespeare has, with easy power, brought into these three acts the mystery, the fantasy, the dimness, and the unreason of dreamland. Titania and Oberon resemble the stately, graceful creations of our imagination when we are asleep. The fairies who attend the Queen are like those unfinished, childish fancies, begun and broken off, which we see in dreams. Puck is the representative of the grotesque, unmoral, unhuman creations (for fancy, without will, has no conscience, no humanity) which so strangely go and come in dreams. Then, the changes of scene, the appearance and disappearance of the personages, cross and recross one another with the bewildering rapidity of a dream. We are even borne away in a moment to vast distances, for dreams have no geography, and the fairies move as swift as thought through space. Oberon comes from the furthest steep of India. Titania sits with her friend in the spiced Indian air, watching the ships go by. The quarrel is about an Indian boy. The introduction of India (a

country on which the English then spent a world of fancies) adds its own mystery to the dream-atmosphere in which the reader moves.)

Then, too, there is in the wood the confusion, disorder, and unreason of a dream. The lovers fall in and out of love with one another for no cause in the world but the mistakes of a mad spirit, who is himself the plaguing grotesque of a dream. And time and periods of thought are also huddled into confusion. Theseus and Elizabeth are living together; romance and the classic world jostle one another. Hippolyta has been Oberon's mistress; Titania the cause why Theseus betrayed Ariadne.

We may add to this the wild grotesquerie often characteristic of dreams. The ass's head placed on Bottom's thick skull; the elemental Queen embracing the clown; the contrast between the lovely delicacy of Titania's language and the clownish wit of Bottom; the way in which he employs the dainty fairies; his own unthinking acceptance of the new world into which he has come—the most fantastic of Shakespeare's dream-imaginings—are all of a fine grotesque. (Puck is its image, that 'lob of spirits.' He tells of his practical jokes with humanity, of his good nature when it is his humour. He does no fatal mischief, but he is quite out of sympathy with the sorrows of mankind. The jangling of the lovers amuses him, though it wins the pity of Oberon, the higher spirit. It is he who, in the grotesque of the dream, places the ass's head on Bottom and hurries the coarse mechanic into the fine-spun life of fairyland.) The dream reaches its height when the Queen of Dreamland herself is set dreaming. Even dreams dream that they dream; and Titania cries—

My Oberon ! what visions have I seen !
Methought I was enamour'd of an ass.

As to the lovers in the dream, it is a mad business.

The men change their sweethearts without asking themselves why they change. It is different with the women. So far as love is concerned, they are steadfast throughout to what they were outside the magic wood, and I believe that Shakespeare meant to make that difference. He had the strongest belief, as a dramatic artist, in the constancy of women. He has only drawn one inconstant woman in all his plays. Here the affections of Helena and Hermia for their lovers are quite uninfluenced by the magic of the wood, nor do they understand change in love. Helena, even when Demetrius begins to love her, thinks he is mocking her. She cannot comprehend his alteration, even though it is what she most desires. Then, Hermia cannot conceive that Lysander should cease to love her —

I'll believe as soon
This whole earth may be bor'd, and that the moon
May through the centre creep, and so displease
Her brother's noontide with the Antipodes.

A splendid audacious hyperbole ! Even when Lysander calls her 'Ethiop,' 'cat,' 'burr,' * tawny Tartar,' she does not believe him. The dream atmosphere has no power over the love of the women, but it masters that of the men. Reason or unreason — in Shakespeare — are equally powerless to affect a woman's love.

In other matters, in this realm of dream where neither will nor reason reigns, where natural humanity is let loose unchecked by social custom or duty, the women do change as well as the men. Helena's wooing of Demetrius becomes more impassioned, less womanly. Maiden reserve all but perishes. Hermia's educated quietude and modesty of tone vanish away. Her natural fierceness, which has been subdued to courtesy, breaks out in this dreamland. 'Out, dog ! out, cur !' she cries to Demetrius, and Demetrius fears her fierce vein and

ceases to follow her. The men have lost all courtesy, gone back to uncivilised nature. Their language is unbridled, such as we use in dreams when the will is undirected by conscience or good manners. All this comes to a height at the end of the third act. The old and loving friendship of Helena and Hermia is shattered. Helena recalls it only to deny it. Hermia, not as yet convinced that Lysander loves Helena, is amazed at the heat of Helena. But when she is convinced, when Lysander tells her he hates her and loves Helena, the latent fierceness of her nature, fanned into fury by her love, breaks out against Helena—

O me ! you juggler ! you canker-blossom !
 You thief of love ! What ! have you come by night
 And stol'n my love's heart from him !

Mockery follows after mockery, jealousy after jealousy; they attack one another like two women in the market. Then Lysander and Demetrius, stung into wrath by the atmosphere the fierceness of the women has made them breathe, fly also at one another's throats. It is all of the unreason of a dream. The men and women are not themselves. Their extraordinary rudeness or shrewishness does not belong to their waking characters.¹

I may say, in passing, that the whole act is an excellent piece of stage-management. Reading it, it seems con-

¹ That is, to their characters as formed and modified by education and social habits. I cannot say whether Shakespeare intended to say that in the atmosphere of the dream they lost those habits and reverted to their natural uncultured characters; but if, as is probable, he did not mean that, he writes as, if he did—at least, so far as regards the women, who have more need to conceal themselves than men. When Helena and Hermia meet at last in the wood, and jealousy takes a hand in the game, both of them are quite different from their aspect in the first act. Hermia is no longer grave, dignified, moderate in speech. She has gone back to herself as she was at school—a hot-tempered, bold, quick-handed shrew, who terrifies Helena, and who cries, 'Let me come to her.' And Helena, who had already been a traitor, now becomes her natural cowardly self. When they wake, they revert again to their educated selves.

fused. I used to think it could not be staged. But when I saw it, I recognised that it was written by a master of stage-craft. There is not an entrance or exit in this bewildering running in and out of personages which is not accounted for, led up to and arranged for easy representation. And Bacon was about as capable of doing this as he would have been of smoking a pipe in the face of James the First.

'Oberon and Titania, Puck and the fairies, have nothing of this unreason in their world or their life. They are in their own atmosphere; the men and women are not. And the creation by Shakespeare of this fairy region with its indwellers, which, while we are in it, seems wholly reasonable and real, is one of his creative triumphs. Its isolation from humanity is complete. Human nature touches us now and then in Oberon's sympathy with the lovers, in Titania's love of Theseus, in their meeting to bless the marriage-bed; but these touches only make us realise more fully that their life and thoughts are separate from ours, and, therefore, that when men and women get into the fairy realm, they are all astray. To create this impression was Shakespeare's desire, and it is wonderfully done.

The fairies have no conscience, no morality, and no constancy in love. They do what they like without a thought of anything being forbid. They are pure children of Nature, nay, they are Nature herself; embodiments of her forms, of flowers and animals; and the loftier fairies—Oberon and Titania—of her elemental powers. These are the spirits in matter, its thoughts perhaps; and they have the swiftness of thought. Puck can 'put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes,' This is a long time, but then Puck did not possess full fairy powers, or elemental powers. Ariel, on the contrary, comes with a thought. Oberon can come from India to Athens in a

flash. Being invisible, they have the swiftness which is linked in tradition to invisibility, and which science allots to the invisible forces of nature. Shakespeare derived this part of his conception from old tradition, Arthurian or Irish, but he developed it by the metaphysic which, deep in his nature, was yet always suffused with poetic imagination. ;

The fairy realm Shakespeare created was quite different from any that had preceded it—a new creation in the world of imagination. His way of building it gave it consistency, poetry, beauty, and conscious life. He shaped its work, its pleasures, its manners, its poetic mode of speech, its love-affairs, its court, its ritual, and its unmorality. All the fairydom of the next three centuries derives from it. But its image has now degenerated. What our poetry and our child's books give us of fairyland has neither the dignity nor the lovely speech nor the reality of Shakespeare's dream. As there was nothing like it before him, so there has been nothing so good after him.

Yet, new-shaped as it was, it was made out of existing materials ; partly out of the Arthurian stories, out of the fairies of the lake and the wood who loved, like Titania, mortal heroes, and who could wear the same stature and shape as those they loved; and partly out of the English folk-traditions, often rude and unpoetic, concerning elves and dwarfs and a host of little people, who helped or hindered the agriculturist and who were honoured by a blunt, primeval ritual which took different forms among different peoples. Robin Goodfellow, whom Shakespeare developed into Puck, belongs to this folk-tradition, and he has attained in the play a higher life and powers.

These rustic traditions were the only kind of fairy belief which had a popular existence in England when Shakespeare wrote. The Elf-land of Romance was far behind his time. Even Chaucer, writing two hundred years

before him, relegates the faerie of England back to Arthur's time—

In the olde dales of the King Arthoure,
Of which that Bretons speken grete honoure,
Al was this land fulfild of fayerye ;
The elf-queen with hyr jolly companye
Danced fid oft in many a greene mede.

Those days had passed away for Chaucer, to his regret. In Malory's book they were, however, revived for Shakespeare. It is probable also that he had read Huon de Bordeaux. He took then the fairydom of Arthurian story, which from Celtic had become romantic, and he took also the elf-folklore which still lives in rustic England, and made out of both these sources a fairyland of his own. Curious survivals from them appear in single lines, in long passages, and in certain qualities which jut forth, as it were, in Oberon, Titania, and Puck.

1. The description of Puck and his tricks (all belonging to the life of the farm), both by himself and by the fairy who talks with Puck at the beginning of the second act, is a remnant of the rude folklore of the elves of England. It does not belong to the Arthurian sources. But when Puck is developed by Shakespeare into the swift servant of Oberon, he is, though he retains his elvish mischief, lifted on to the romantic plane. He is a spirit between both the traditions—*un esprit panaché*.¹

2. Oberon and Titania are linked to the elemental forces of nature. Their lives, their very temper, are echoed in the doings of the sun and moon, of the seasons, of the weather. When these two are in harmony, all is well

¹ I believe Puck to be a remnant, unknowingly wrought up by Shakespeare, of the tradition of the infant carried off by the fairies who, living with them, gains many of their powers, but is always tricky, half human, half fairy, and a servant to the fairy Queen or King. But Puck also refers back to the agricultural tradition. All his tricks are done to the farm-dwellers; he knows the native proverb, and they are those of English country life (Act in. So. ii.).

with field and furrow, with agricultural humanity. When they quarrel, all goes wrong. That noble piece of poetry in which Titania traces the ruined year to her quarrel with Oberon proves this by its conclusion—

And this same progeny of evil comes
From our debate, from our dissension ;
We are their parents and original.

This conception has no source that I am aware of in the Arthurian romances. It harks back to an earlier world, to those gods and goddesses of the ancient Teutonic and Celtic mythology who were the deities of agriculture, to whom the farmer prayed, who made the weather according to their pleasure or their anger with their worshippers; and who, when Christianity destroyed their rule, continued as the 'fairy host' in Ireland under forms of high imagination; and in England as the elves and dwarfs and tricksy sprites, like Robin Goodfellow, under forms made by rustic and unpoetic superstition. Yet, in whatever shape we find them, they have to do, in one part or another of their life, with the work of the field and the farm, with the natural forces which promote or injure agriculture.

The poetry of that ancient life was, no one can tell how, seized on and restored by our Magician in Oberon and Titania, who have the qualities of divine nature-beings, but on a lower level than they were before Christianity. They are invisible; they come and go as swiftly as thought. They still command the elements. They bless or ban the doings of the tillers of the ground, help or injure them. And it is characteristic of their origin that they consecrate the marriage-bed of Theseus with the dew of the field.

3. Oberon and Titania have a sympathy with, and give protection to, heroic personages, both male and female. They give more than protection; they give love.

24 LECTURES ON SHAKESPEARE

Titania's relations to Theseus, and Oberon's to Hippolyta, are one of the survivals I have mentioned. These love-affairs between the immortal and the mortal go back for their origin not only to the Arthurian cycle of romance, but further still, to the Irish mythic stories, to Cuchullainn, Oisín, and the rest. The relations between men and the fairies had, in the Arthur tales and the heroic Irish legends, the same unmorality which prevails in the lives of Shakespeare's Oberon and Titania. He did not invent it; he derived it.

4. In connection with this, it is plain that Oberon and Titania could, like the romantic fairies and the Irish goddesses, assume the shape and stature of mortal men and women. Some say that Shakespeare's fairies are exceedingly small. And many of Titania's attendants are. They creep, for example, into acorn cups, and hang the dewdrops on the cowslip's ear. But the higher creatures, like the King and Queen, can be, we must infer, as tall, when they pleased, as the men and women they were in love with. Even Puck can assume any shape he pleases, and we may be sure that when Oberon played as Corin with amorous Phyllida, and when Titania sat with her Indian 'votaress of my order' all the day to watch the ships go by, they were more than an inch in height. Even Mustard, Pease-Blgssom, and the rest, when they talked with Bottom, could not have been, for the moment, exceedingly small. This power of changing shape, and of being small and great at pleasure, is shared in by Ariel.¹

These and other elements were Shakespeare's materials. The combination of them into the lovely form of a new world of Faerie was the magical work of his genius. Moreover, he placed these rough jewels of thought in

¹ Those who wish to read more on these matters would do well to get Mr. Alfred Natt's admirable little book on the *Fairy Mythology of Shakespeare*, to which I am much indebted.

the loveliest setting possible—in poetry not one word of which is out of harmony with the fairy atmosphere he has created. He is never more gracious, more consistent in poetry than on the lips of Oberon.

When Oberon brings into his talk 'Cupid all-armed,' whom only he could see, and the mermaid on the dolphin's back whose music drew the stars from the sky, we feel no jar of unbelief, we understand that his common speech is poetry. Nor does Titania fail in this. Her talk has the same exquisiteness; as if the flowers themselves were speaking. What they say is not the highest poetry, not of the depths of passion or thought. That great matter belongs to man. But it is of a light, airy loveliness, like the feelings and images which drift in and out of a happy child. And this is Shakespeare's underived creation. On the lips of Oberon and Titania, it is chiefly concerned with beautiful things in nature, with flowers and birds and wild fruits of the wood, with the sea and the mountains, the moonlight and the morning. The little fairies, their attendants, belong also to what is gracious and gentle in the woods. They take care of the flowers, adorn them with the pearls of the dew, are the enemies of all gloomy and ugly things, drive them from Titania's bed, and sing to her as she sleeps. They are the spirits which dwell in beautiful things, such spirits as Shelley placed in the crystalline spheres that the sun drew upwards from the stream. This invention is also of Shakespeare alone.

Again, he made their life to belong to the moon. It is only in her light that they waken to dance and sing and rejoice. It is only at night that they are happy, and able for their pretty works. This also is Shakespeare's device. But Oberon and Titania are free, or nearly free, from this limitation. When they assume a mortal shape, they share in the day. This, however, is but seldom. Their nature is

to 'follow darkness like a dream,' They are in the shadow world. Yet even there the King has power to play with the outskirts of the dawn.

I with the morning's love have oft made sport;
And, like a forester, the groves may tread,
Even till the eastern gate, all fiery-red,
Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams,
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.

All this is of Shakespeare's own imagination. And it is, I repeat, a wonder of imaginative power that, throughout this fairyland, he should keep his elfin atmosphere quite untouched by humanity.

Two more things may he said. First, Oberon and Titania are quite the King and Queen. Shakespeare had a full respect for dignities, and his groat people always speak with dignity and good manners. It is not different in the fairy world. Tennyson's treatment of Oberon and Titania would have jarred Shakespeare to the bone, and is sufficient to prove how much the Shakespearean ideal of Elf-land has degenerated. There is no rude scolding in the quarrel of the King and Queen, nothing undignified. Even when Titania is in love with Bottom, she never loses her greatness or her grace in speech.

I am a spirit of no common rate ;
The summer still doth tend upon my state.

Oberon does not get his way with her by violence or by authority, but by superior knowledge. He and she are equal in rank and honour. And when he sees her, by his trick, enamoured of an ass, he is sorry for her. He has upbraided her; she—her pride forgotten through his magic—has answered him with patience and given up the cause of their quarrel. Pity awakens in him; he releases her with loving words—

Now, my Titania ; wake you, my sweet Queen,

and Titania instantly gives back his love;

My Oberon, what visions have I seen !

This is all in the high courtly strain.

Secondly, in this shadow world, one human thing persists. It is the difference of sex. Oberon is altogether the man, Titania the woman. It is this element in them which gives them their sympathy with us, with the lovers, with the marriage of Theseus. And it is vividly present in all their words and ways. This sex-difference was vital in Shakespeare's work. No man ever said or did anything womanly in the plays; no woman in them ever spoke or acted like a man. When Rosalind, Portia, Imogen assume the man, there is a subtle, conscious difference in all they say from that which a man would say, which keeps them woman; a more delicate style in phrase and thought and play, an atmosphere of charm. To give this impression when boys acted the parts must have been difficult, but great genius rejoices in difficulty, or does not see it. The modern tendency towards the effacement of sex-difference never appears in Shakespeare. That the difference is always present is at the root of half the power he has over humanity. And here, even in the world of dream, it is as prominent in Titania and Oberon as it is in Beatrice and Benedick, in Desdemona and Othello, in every man and woman in the plays.

, Of all the fantastic events of the dream not one is so fantastic as the introduction into it of Bottom, the rude mechanical, with an ass's head; and of his love-affair with Titania. Titania is still Titania, even when she is enamoured of this monster. Her speech is always poetry, her flower-like life is still mingled with the flowers. She lives in her love without a thought of human morality; and when it is over, she instantly forgets it as if it had

never been; makes no excuse for it, and takes up her life with Oberon immediately. This is quite in character with the unmorality of the Nature-Fays of the Arthurian Romance, and of the Irish goddesses. Her unconsciousness, under the spell, of her folly is charming, yet pitiful; and she has even the melancholy and the absorption of human love. Oberon paints her as wandering alone in the wood seeking for flowers to deck her love, and as forgetting everything else. Her attendant fairies never question her will, nor seem surprised at her vagary—and that too is most fantastically fantastic. Yet, audacious as it is, Shakespeare has made it seem almost natural.

Bottom takes it all quite naturally. In a moment he has been swept into the fairy world, and is loved by its Queen. He does not think he is in a dream till he gets out of it. The humorous vanity of the man not only supports him, but enables him to throw himself eagerly into the situation. He talks to the fairies as if he were one of themselves, and uses their service according to their names. So he would have talked to Quince and Snug, Flute and Starveling. In the dream he keeps his previous vanity; he has always been the king of his little world; he is still the same king in fairyland. But it is a pleasant vanity, and is founded on a real superiority. All his fellows own his greatness. No one objects when he says he can act Hercules if necessary, or take the part, of Thisbe; and when he is lost, the play is given up. He has the activity of pure vanity, does all he believes he can do, and in every difficulty sets to work at once. When he recovers from the dream, he puts it aside in a moment for action. His fellows want to know where he has been. But he will not tell them now.

Not a word of me. All that I will tell you is that the Duke hath dined. Get your apparel together, good strings to your beards, new ribbons to your pumps; meet presently at the palace; every man look

over his part; for the short and long is, our play is preferred. . . . No more words : away ! go ; away.

Even in the presence of the Duke his pushing nature makes him at ease. He is so fond of explaining everything to the lower intellects of the court, of setting every one right, that he interrupts the play for that purpose. He corrects Theseus and puts Demetrius down. Quite proud, at the end, of the success of his play, he offers Theseus an Epilogue or a Bergomask! Yet he has the artist's belief in what he does, and great pleasure in it. Therefore, absurd as he is, Theseus and Hippolyta are quite moved by his acting—

THE. This passion and the death of a dear friend, would go near to make a man look sad.

HIP. Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man.

When his fellows fly from him, after his 'translation,' this same self-confidence sets him at ease with himself, and he begins to sing that they may hear he is not afraid. He is equally at ease in fairyland. Yet, he never seems to realise Titania. Had he for a moment confessed love to her, lie would have lowered her in our eyes. We might have thought real what was due to magic. Nor does he believe it when he wakes. The dream, lingering with him for a moment, amazes him, and confuses his tongue.

* Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was.

Then he becomes fully awake.

I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream; it shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it has no bottom.

He is back almost at once in his plain, honest life

It is different with the lovers. They are naturally at home in the world of imagination. Their dream has been so vivid that for a long time it seems reality—that well-known result of dreaming. Theseus tells them all is right

with them. They have begun to realise this, yet dream-land lingers with them. There is a world of meaning in their words.

DEM. These things seem small and undistinguishable,
Like far-off mountains turned into clouds.

HER. Methinks I see these things with parted eye
When everything seems double.

HEL. So methinks:
And I have found Demetrius, like a jewel,
Mine own, and not mine own.

DEM. Are you sure
That we are awake? It seems to me
That yet we sleep, we dream. Do you not think
The Duke was here, and bid us follow him?

HER. Yea, and my father?

HEL. And Hippolyta.

DEM. Why, then, we are awake.

The Dream is over. Hippolyta half believes it. Theseus puts it down to imagination. But the lovers know it has brought the dreams of their lives into reality.

Shakespeare himself does not disdain his Dream, nor think it only fancy. A creator loves the world he makes, and would assert its reality. And, indeed, while a great part of the events of the time when Shakespeare lived has perished from memory as unsubstantial, this creation of his has taken to itself immortal substance. The fairy-land he made lives still, not only in the play, but in its children—in a thousand books and poems, in pictures and in music. Nor did Shakespeare write as if he thought his dream altogether a dream. He has made it do actual work, as if it were not all compact of shadow. It is dreamland that has made the lovers finally happy, got round the laws of Athens, put the tyrannic and greedy father in the wrong, settled Theseus into the promoter of true love, reversed the cruel tricks of Cupid all-armed, and made every one at ease. Oberon, the King of shadows, has done it.

And I am not sure that in the whole drift of the play

there is not a half-ironical suggestion of Shakespeare's, a transient imagination of his youth—that this life of ours is but a vision, out of which we are to wake at last; out of the disturbed, inconsequent, confused, grotesque condition of which we may pass into the ordered reality. If so, he would hint in this early play what momentarily engaged his thought when he said with Prospero—

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

The lovers rejoice that they have awaked from a dream into reality; but they do not know, as Siva would have said, that it was but a dream within a dream, and that they are still asleep.

The fine poetry of this play is of a twofold character. It might be divided, without being too fantastical, into poetry of the daylight and of the moonlight. There is a delicate spirit, a shimmer of fancy and elfin thought, without any human feeling, in the music and the charm of the poetry Shakespeare puts into the speech of the fairies which seems made of the silver of moonlight and to bring with it the shadows of moonlight. The Indian mythology tells that moonstones in the rays of the moon distil a nectar, with the scent of camphor, which is composed of the substance of the moon and is the essence of its light. Such a moonstone is the fairy poetry of this play. It drops nectar.

Mingled with it, there is another spirit, less delicate, less fantastical, nearer to our thought—the spirit of the woodland, of the life in trees and flowers and the wild fruits of the earth, and of their beautiful indwellers. There is a weightier note in this, a touch as it were of humanity, which gives some substance to the moonlight spirit in the verse. In both, however, the ripple and melody of the

poetry are like the ripple and melody of nature, the movement of the waves of the moon's light, the rustling of the night-wind in the trees and grass. It is not fantastical to believe that Shakespeare felt this harmony of his fairy-poetry with the moonlight and the woodland. Only once in this play does the fairy-poetry lose these notes. It is when Titania describes the country desolated by rain and storm,—the result of her quarrel with Oberon. She does not care much for the miseries of men, but she *thinks* of them, and this thought of hers gives substance to the poetry of her description. A closer humanity belongs to the delightful verse of Puck and Oberon and Titania when, with their train, they fill the house of Theseus and bless the marriage-bed. A domestic charm lives from line to line, and goes with the fairy tribe from one shadowy room to another.

Through the house give glimmering light
By the dead and drowsy fire ;

Quite otherwise is the poetry of the daylight, of the men and women who are not in the dream. It has weight of thought and feeling, and is full of the matter of human life. The first dialogue of Theseus and Hippolyta is marked by an imaginative passion which elsewhere does not appear in their words. It gathers round the moon, and the spirit of the moon has touched it. The rest of the beautiful things they say beautifully is full of that fresh good sense and that morning brightness which, as in Milton, so in Shakespeare, have so much to do with noble poetry. The speech of Theseus concerning the welcome given to kings by simple folk, his famous picture of the antique fables poets, lovers, and madmen make, are touched with that grave matter of thought and human experience without which poetry is an empty shell, full only of sweet sound. As to the rival description by

Theseus and Hippolyta, when in the dawn from the mountain-top they watch the hunt, the very breath of the fresh morning sings and cheers in every word of it.

The lovers too have their own poetry. A different note fills it, the note of youthful, inexperienced love, in its joy and its trouble, full of fast-changing fancies, none of them deep or penetrating. Even in the mad-nesses of the dream their thoughts live only on the surface of things. Passion's touch on the four lovers is slight, claps them on their shoulder, but does not close round their heart. Nature, who, when love is profound, disappears from the lover's eyes, is used by these lovers to illustrate and enhance their love. Helena, being unhappy, is she in whose mouth Shakespeare places the finest love-poetry. Her sorrow adds substance to her fancy. It is she who cries in words which sing themselves

O happy fair !

Your eyes are lode-stars ! and your tongue's sweet air
More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear,
When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.

It is she who describes the school-days' friendship, the childhood innocence of herself and Hermia, in a passage which, in spite of its elaborate beauty, has always seemed to me a little out of tune with the confusion and the wildness of the Dream in which she is then involved. It brings us too much into reality. But this impertinent reproach to Shakespeare is perhaps undeserved. Helena is far the most tormented of the four lovers, and the height of her misery would, in Shakespeare's mind, lift her above the magic of the dream into her natural self.

Poetry moves then through three separate worlds in this play, and moves in all with ease. But its wonders of creation are most unique, most of an unknown, unex-

perienced beauty, in the world where Oberon bids Puck
remember how once in the moonlight he

sat upon a promontory
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
That the rude sea grew civil at her song,
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
To hear the sea-maid's music.

All the magic into which Keats once entered is in the
words and in their melody.

II

ROMEO AND JULIET

GOETHE, when Director of the Theatre at Weimar, put *Romeo and Juliet* upon the stage. He omitted nearly the whole of the first act, and made the play begin with the mask and dance at the house of Capulet—that is, he left out the quarrel in the street, initiated by the servants; the intervention of the Prince between the two great houses at feud; the love-pains of Romeo for Rosaline and the sketch of his character contained in them, before he is made a man; the sketch of Juliet before Love had made her woman, which, given by her mother and the Nurse, is also touched in by Juliet herself; the representation of the young bloods of Verona, overflowing with youthful sap and wit, in which Romeo, Mercutio, and Benvolio are contrasted and isolated into individual characters.

To leave out all this preparation, these studies for the full picture, this slow growth of the tragic storm before the Event suddenly arises which contains, inevitably, the conclusion, is to understand neither Shakespeare nor dramatic art. Over this long preparation broods the long-suffering Justice who punishes quarrels which injure the state; and Shakespeare meant us to understand this. How he meant it I shall afterwards try to explain. It is enough to say now that he suggests it in the Prologue, where he states the ground, the fatal working, and the conclusion of this his earliest tragedy.

In the first four scenes, so long and careful is his

preparation, all the elements of a coming doom are contained and shaped—the ancient feud, deepening in hatred from generation to generation, the fiery Youth-in-arms of whom Tybalt is the concentration; the intense desire of loving in Romeo, which thinks it has found its true goal in Rosaline but has not, and which, therefore, leaps into it when it is found in Juliet; the innocence of Juliet whom Love has never touched, but who is all trembling for his coming; the statesman's anger of the Prince with the quarrel of the houses; and finally, the boredom of the people, whose quiet is disturbed, with the continual interruption of their business by the rioters—

Clubs, bills, and partizans ! Strike ! beat them down !
Down with the Capulets, down with the Montagues !

a cry which seems to ring through the whole play. It is impossible this should continue. Justice will settle it, or the common judgment of mankind will clear the way.

The quarrel of the houses is the cause of the tragedy, and Shakespeare develops it immediately. It begins with the servants in the street; it swells into a roar when the masters join in, when Tybalt adds to it his violent fury, when the citizens push in—till we see the whole street in multitudinous turmoil, and the old men as hot as the young;

CAP. My sword, I say ! Old Montague is come,
And flourishes his sword in spite of me.

MON. Thou villain Capulet ! Hold me not, let me go,

Then, when the Prince enters, his stern blame of both parties fixes into clear form the main theme of the play. He collects together, in his indignant reproaches, the evils of the feud and the certainty of its punishment. We are again forced to feel that the over-ruling Justice which develops states will intervene.

This scene is an admirable piece of history. It brings

before us in a moment the hot passion of a mediaeval town where the nobles are at feud. A servant bites his thumb at the servant of another house, and in five minutes the streets are streaming with blood. It was much the same in Italy when Shakespeare wrote; nor was such disturbance impossible in London, though Elizabeth had welded the nobles together into a common patriotism in which individual quarrels were reduced. In Edinburgh, where the clan system was stronger, the streets leaped in an instant into strife. It is worth while to read, as a parallel to this scene in Shakespeare, the vivid sketch Scott gives in *The Abbot* of the Canongate rushing instantly into crowded rage when the chiefs and retainers of the Seton meet with those of the Leslies on the crown of the causeway.

With what intensity of life both these descriptions by Scott and Shakespeare are infused! The giving of life was their pre-eminent power. Qther dramatists had worked the story before Shakespeare, but the men and women were lifeless dolls. He took the crude, commonplace material, placed its elements in the crucible of his genius, and when the mixture boiled above the fire of, his passion a host of living creatures, each distinct, loving, fighting, talking, in joy and sorrow, poured forth, brimming over with thought, passion, and action, and mingled together to weave the tragic story. It was much to animate the chief personages of the tale, Romeo and Juliet, till they are for ever young, for ever loving; it was more perhaps, for it was of a greater difficulty, to animate with a quick-eyed life and character the minor personages of the play. NThe Nurse and Mercutio are nothing in the original tale. Here they become living representatives each of a separate class. As vivid and as distinctive a life is given to the rest, down to the very servants. None resembles the other. All

have their own ways, their own character, their own results. 'Let there be life,' said Shakespeare, and there **is life.**

And the life in them all is the life of youth, even in the old men. Old Capulet is as hot-headed as Tybalt, so is old Montague. The Nurse lives over her youth in luscious memory. The Friar has a gentle sympathy with young love, tastes with a gusto his youth in the love of Romeo and Juliet. The young men flash into merri-ment and wit and fighting with equal joy and fire. Even Benvolio's quiet is kindled into flame at a touch. Mercutio overflows with the sap of youth. There is not a leaf on the tree of his life which is not thrilling with it. The first fancy of Romeo for Rosaline, even though it is not a deep but a superficial love because it is not returned, is full of the solitudes, the fantasies, the self-brooding and thinking, the imaginative dreams of youth in love with love, of the pranks a lover's intellect plays with words in order to illustrate his love — rather than with Rosaline. | Juliet is a child with a will, but subdued to her mother's hand, till the fated hour comes. Amid all this turmoil of youth, it is pleasant to touch her unconscious childhood. It soon departs, and then she is the incarnation of first love, knowing in one supreme moment all that love commands.

When the hour comes to Romeo and her, the swift 'precipitancy' of youthful ardour seizes them, and never lets them go. The sight of one another across the room is enough. The same night Romeo climbs the orchard wall, speaks with Juliet, and plans their marriage. The next morning they are married. The morning after they part for ever. It is cruel, but even Justice herself seems to have all the impetuosity of youth, and only allows her victims one night of love. Shakespeare has shaken off all the delays of the original story. In it, weeks pass

before the lovers meet. But here, youth scorns delay;
'O, let us hence;' says Romeo, 'I stand on sudden haste.'
Juliet is not less wild with youth's impetuous passion.
She will have her marriage in a moment —

The clock struck nine when I did send the nurse ;
In half an hour she promis'd to return.
Perchance she cannot meet him : that 's not so.
O ! she is lame : love's heralds should be thoughts,
Which ten times faster glide than the sun's beams,
Driving back shadows over lowering hills :
Therefore do nimble-pinion'd doves draw Love,
And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings.
Now is the sun upon the highest hill
Of this day's journey, and from nine to twelve
Is three long hours, yet she is not come.
Had she affections, and warm youthful blood,
She 'd be as swift in motion as a ball ;
My words would bandy her to my sweet love,
And his to me :
But old folks, many feign as they were dead ;
Unwieldy, slow, heavy and pale as lead.
O God ! she comes. O honey nurse ! what news !
Hast thou met with him ? Send thy man away.

'Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,' she cries when she waits for Romeo. The ardour of her youth and love is living in the words.

When they threaten to marry her to Paris, she will die on the moment, as when Romeo hears of her death he resolves to die instantly. Death is a slight thing to youth when the wine of life is drawn ; and the lovers welcome its peace. The Friar, being old, is cautious. 'Too quick is youthful blood,' 'Wisely and slow,' he cries, 'they stumble who run fast,' 'These violent delights have violent ends,' * Love moderately, long love doth so,' Even Juliet herself, for once, in the midst of her hurrying passion, pauses a moment. The black wing of Destiny seemstotouchherer coldly—

I have no joy of this contract to-night :
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden ;

Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say it lightens.¹

The play races, drawn by the steeds of youth. It even seems, I have said, as if Justice herself were in a hurry to accomplish her ends. There is an impression on the reader that she is driving with hastening lash all the characters on to the catastrophe.

In contrast with this speed, there is, at the beginning of the play, the slow dreaming of Romeo over his love for Rosaline. Had he been truly in love he had long since brought his love to a point. He is rapid enough when he is vitally touched; but now he is as quiet as a dove, brooding, cooing to himself, taking no action. Benvolio scoffs at him for this, lectures him, sketches him wandering through the grove of sycamore, flying from his friends into the covert of the wood. His father sketches him shut up all day with the windows closed against the sun; secret and close, 'his own affections' counsellor, 'He loves his own phantom of love, not Rosaline; sick of himself, not sick of love; enthralled within his own personality, though, to himself, he seems to have lost it;

Tut, I have lost myself; I am not here ;
This is not Romeo, he 's some other where.

He amuses himself, as no true lover does, with intellectual, not passionate, fancies concerning love. He paints it in euphuistic tricks of words—it is 'heavy lightness, serious vanity, feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health! Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!' This is dreaming of love, not loving, and the proof is he does not care for anything. 'The true lover cares for

¹ Compare Lygander's illustration in *Midsummer Night's Dream*—

Brief as the lightning in the collied night
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,
And ere a man hath power to say, 'Behold!'
The jaws of darkness do devour it up.
So quick bright things come to confusion.

everything. The only thing which interests Romeo now is himself, himself whom he pities, caresses, nurses, whose misery is his sweetness.

Not a trace, not a shred of this is left, when the true thing dawns, then blazes like the noonday sun; and the contrast, vividly conceived, splendidly executed, was meant by the artist. This supreme love comes like a divine revelation, shaking his estate of man to its centre, destroying the dreamer, establishing the man of action, replacing the fanciful by the actual man. He feels it before it comes; the deep shadow its brightness throws falls upon him; he hears in it the wild call of Destiny; it is one of Shakespeare's mystic passages. Before he enters Capulet's house, just before he sees Juliet, he stays in the street and names his fear.

I fear too early ; for my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels, and expire the term
Of a despised life closed in my breast
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
But he, that hath the steerage of my course
Direct my sail 1 On, lusty gentlemen.

This is the dreadful gate by which he enters the paradise of love. Shakespeare never lets us forget the doom which overhangs the play.

Along with this contrast between the delays of fanciful and the swiftness of real love, there is also the contrast of the unthinking gaiety, the wild youth of Tybalt and Romeo's companions, with the dark fates which follow the star-crossed love of Romeo and Juliet. It is their love which slays Mercutio first, then Tybalt, and then the County Paris; which turns Benvolio's joyousness into sorrow, and strips old Capulet of all his youth-in-age. But before we trace their fates, it were well to touch

the characters of these youths whose brightness throws into relief the early glooms of Romeo.

Benvolio is his close friend; of a steady, still character, equally ready to win his friend out of his useless life by gentle reproof, and to quiet down the riots in the street; the type of the temperate man who lives long, and who is of use at all periods of history. The sketch Mercutio makes of him as one who is ready to quarrel for anything is plainly a mocking of his quiet and reconciling temper. He has no genius, little fancy, and is cut out for a statesman. Nor is he specially Italian. I am sure Shakespeare met this type among the young men of the court of Elizabeth, men who would grow into statesmen like Cecil.

Opposed to him in character, but his friend, is Mercutio; wit's scintillating star, thrilling with life to his fingertips, not caring for women save as the toys of an hour, ready to tackle, on the instant, any woman, young or old; brave, audacious, going swiftly to his point, keeping no thought within him but flinging it at once into speech; 'he will speak more in a minute that he will stand to in a month'; quick in cholcr, ready to attempt the moon and pull the sun down, loose of speech, mocking old and young out of the racing of his blood—the gay ruffler of Italy, such as Shakespeare often met in London, such as many of the Italian novels enclose and paint.

But he is more than that. He has wit. Whatever he touches he finds ten remote analogies for it; his wayward thinking plays with every unimportant matter, as a cat with a mouse, till the matter seem important. Nor is his wit unmanly, like that of the dainty courtiers of the day who conned their quips and cranks out of books, and whose most absurd type is Osric in *Hamlet*. It is, on the contrary, all his own, the fresh coinage of his brain. It is kindly too; while he mocks at Romeo's love he does

not despise him. Those he despises are the fools and the blusterers, like Tybalt—

The pox of such antick, lisping, affecting fantasticoes, these new tuners of accents ! , . . these strange flies, these fashion-mongers, these *pardonnez -mots*, who stand so much on the new form that they cannot sit at ease on the old bench.

Mercutio scorns these water-flies. He has added the sturdy sense of the Englishman to the rippling gaiety of the Italian. More than wit belongs to him. There is a touch of genius in his soul, and a single grain of that rarity makes its possessor loveable. Even in the midst of Romeo's new passion he loves Mercutio. Benvolio weeps for him—

That gallant spirit hath aspir'd the clouds.

Romeo avenges him, swept away by grief to forget for an instant his love of Juliet.

With this touch of genius is imagination, or rather fancy almost becoming imagination. Of that uncommon web of gossamer the well-known description of Queen Mab is an enchanting example. It is not quite of imagination all compact. It flits with amazing grace and lightness over the surface of the thing described; it does not penetrate it. As poetry, it is of the same quality and kind, but not so beautiful, as the speech of Oberon and Titania; delightful, ^graceful, delicate, but not of any depth either of thought or passion; that is to say, it is exactly right as it is, and where it is. But his next speech slips into the earnestness and the beauty of imagination; now into it, now into fancy only—on the borderland of these two powers—

True, I talk of dreams,
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy ;
Which is as thin of substance as the air,
And more inconstant than the wind, who woos
Even now the frozen bosom of the north,
And, being anger'd, puffs away from thence,
Turning his face to the dew-dropping south.

It is said that Mercutio was too brilliant for Shakespeare to support at the same level throughout the whole play; and that, had he not been slain, Shakespeare would have had otherwise to get rid of him. It would be hard to agree with that. Shakespeare's wit always answers his call through the whole range of his plays. It ebbs and flows, but when it ebbs it is because he has felt that it should not be too brilliant, not because he was not able to make it brilliant. He carried Falstaff through three long plays, and Falstaff is wittier than Mercutio. Moreover, the wit of Mercutio is that of the time at which he lived, mostly play with words and with far-fetched analogies; and every Oxford and Cambridge scholar, and every courtier, and every literary man exercised himself in it. In some it was richly, in others poorly phrased, but it was common; and whenever it is a habit in society it becomes as easy to produce wit of word-play as it is difficult to produce when it is not the habit. It is tiresome talk to us; it seemed brilliant then. These puns, fantastic turns of phrase, and fancy-pictures, are to us what they were to Romeo—'talk of nothing,' Yet Romeo himself indulged in them before he loved Juliet. His Euphuism then suited his fancy-love for Rosaline; but when the very fire of the god arrived it burned up all this play with words. It has been blamed by critics, and Shakespeare's art, on account of it, called in question. He did not keep it long. When his genius grew out of sketching the particular in man to drawing carefully the universal, he left it by; but when he was a young artist, it was quite natural to represent the common talk of the day, and those who listened to it caught up every point with pleasure. In Mercutio, it grew out of the very nature of the man. Even when he comes to die—and his death is touched with a master-

hand—he does not lose his wit. He still plays with words;

No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door ; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve; ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me a grave man.

In vain, in vain! The pathetic weakness of death grows on him; his wit dies in bitter regret for lost joy, in anger with fate. Yet that mounting spirit is brave to the last;

Help me into some house, Benvolio,
Or I shall faint. A plague o' both your houses !
They have made worms' meat of nie. I have it,
And soundly too :—your houses !

See how Shakespeare brings home on the lips of the first victim of Justice, working retribution for the guilt of the feud, the main motive of the tragedy.

Tybalt—to continue this sketch of the minor characters—is not, though his ill-temper makes him seem so, a swashbuckler, or a bully. He is the quick-offended duelist of the day, one of those whom the French court called the *raffinds*; hot to challenge a smile, a motion of the hand, but a gentleman quite fit to rank with Benvolio and Mercutio. Like the rest, he is as ready to die as to lure. Unlike Benvolio, who is good-temper personified; unlike Romeo, who is quiet by nature; unlike Mercutio, who is good-humoured, but touchy on the point of honour; Tybalt is of a natural bad temper, quarrelsome, liable to fits of fury. When Capulet, who is as hot as he, bids him lay by his rage at Romeo's appearance in his house, and forces peace upon him, his body trembles;

Patience perforce with wilful choler meeting
Makes my flesh tremble in their different greeting.

'A king of cats,' Mercutio calls him. 1 He slays Mercutio. Romeo, lashed into wrath, slays him. He is the second victim of the event; the second step by which Justice marches through blood to her fixed purpose. His death,

more than Mercutio's, hurries up the catastrophe. Owing to it, Romeo is banished, and Juliet left alone. Owing to it, Capulet forces the County Paris on Juliet. Owing to that, Juliet takes the drug and is thought by Romeo to have died, and Romeo resolves on death.

Another minor character is the Nurse. Those who have seen Mrs. Stirling, when she was old, in that character, have seen it perfectly realised. | It is an original drawing after nature; all the characteristics of the type are keenly observed, generalised, and then embodied in one woman, The old retainer of a great house, the confidante of her mistress, and of her master's wild life, she takes the liberties with them both—the impertinences of an old servant—which her knowledge of their life licenses her to take; she advises and reproves them. She is in the inner circle of the house, and has her own man to attend on her. The licence of the day has not left her untouched. She has lost her virgin honour at the age of twelve, and her life has been unrestrained. No morality has been left in her, she is quite without a conscience. Her only morality is in her determination to marry Juliet—it doesn't matter to whom—and the bigamy she advises at the last is quite naturally advised by this naughty old woman. Her only religion is a pleasurable excitement when she listens to Friar Laurence rebuking Romeo in a long speech like a sermon;

O Lord! I could have stay'd here all the night
To hear good counsel: O, what learning is !

Her life is now made up of garrulous recollections. Like old folk she repeats her stories over and over again, and she loves in them a piece of impropriety to utter over a gossip's bowl. Like Mrs. Gamp, whenever she is worried she calls for a dram. The ruffling Mercutio gives her pleasures rather than offends her; and her appeal to Peter to protect her is of an excellent humour. To make herself

of importance she plays with Juliet's anxiety to know if Romeo will come to be married to her; and worse still, she allows Juliet to think that Romeo is slain, not Tybalt; anything to swell her dignity. For this she even torments the only one she loves on earth. To keep up Juliet's anxiety, which, in its reflection, enhances her importance, she deviates from the point incessantly—

JUL. What says he of our marriage? What of that?

NURSE. Lord! how my head aches; what a head have I!

It beats as it would fall in twenty pieces.

My back o' t' other side; O! my back, my back!

JUL. I' faith, I am sorry that thou art not well.

Sweet, sweet, sweet nurse, tell me, what says my love?

NURSE. Your love says, like an honest gentleman, and a courteous,
and a kind, and a handsome, and I warrant a virtuous,—
Where is your mother?

And all the time Juliet is simmering with impatient passion.

She has nursed Juliet—they are of one blood, therefore she loves her—and she tells the story of it inimitably; with the nearest and most happy phrases. Falstaff was never better in broad humour. She has brought up Juliet—a more foolish companion for a young girl could scarcely be conceived—but Juliet emerges from her governance as pure as crystal. When Juliet is lifted into womanhood by her love, and gains thereby moral power and spiritual passion, she sees the conscienceless character of this old woman; and when her nurse advises her to marry Paris now that Romeo is banished, she flings the old wretch out of her heart

Ancient damnation! O most wicked fiend!

Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain.

Yet the old woman is quite endurable. Proper persons cannot approve of her, but it would be difficult for them to be angry with her. She is too human for that. Her garrulity has its charm, and so has her self-sufficiency.

Her immorality is natural and primeval, and, when it is heartless, is more the result of the society in which she has lived than of her original nature. She has good-humour, devotion to her house, physical fondness for her nursling, and a great respect for the Church.

She is the last of the minor characters, except the Friar, whom I omit at present. I turn now to the lovers.

They meet, and at first sight change eyes, like Rosalind and Orlando, like Ferdinand and Miranda. Love rarely *grows* in Shakespeare's hands. If it does, it has to be helped from without, as with Benedick and Beatrice. For the most part, it leaps, full-grown, into life, and is reciprocal. Romeo and Juliet take fire at the same moment. A single kiss unites them for ever: 'their only love sprung from their only hate,' This is the Event to which the previous scenes conduct, and from which the rest follows. It may be said not to have been made by them, but to be the work of a Power without them whose aim is to punish the feud, which has injured human life so long in Verona, by the sacrifice of the lovers and to put an end to it by their sacrifice. They bear the sins of others and carry them away.

This is certainly, even in so early a play, the intention of Shakespeare. The lovers are *star-crossed*. The Friar, at the end of the play, thinking of all he had done to save them and heal the feud, confesses that

A greater power than we can contradict
Hath thwarted our intents.

Even Romeo and Juliet dimly feel a fateful presence in their love. It steals into that mystic consciousness which underlies our common consciousness, and which vaguely warns and vaguely prophesies. Both the lovers feel beforehand the coming tragedy. This is a piece of the mysticism which lay so deep in Shakespeare's mind,

and which came of his profound conviction that there was a Power behind human life which worked for the whole and was apparently careless of the individual. Again we are conscious, as the play goes on, of the fierce rapidity with which Justice, once she has begun, hurries on the action with terrible insistence. She sweeps to her conclusion like an eagle on her prey. For a moment human effort tries to interfere. The Friar sends to Romeo to tell him Juliet is not dead, and waits for him. The Power laughs, and stops the messenger. Had he arrived, the lovers had been saved. But the lovers have their reward. They have their little day of perfect joy. They die rather than injure it by living away from it.

As they have leaped into love, so through love they leap into manhood and womanhood. Romeo is now all changed from the dreamer into the man of action, and of action as prompt as Tybalt's sword. He has no sooner seen Juliet at the feast than he storms the orchard wall to see her again.

Can I go forward when my heart is here ?
Turn back, dull earth, and find thy centre out.

He will marry her the day after. Instead of gloomy silence with his companions, as before, his intellect awakens now to life, and he answers Mercutio's wit with equal wit—with greater, for Mercutio owns himself beaten. And more, he finds Romeo so changed that he thinks Romeo has ceased to love at the very moment when for the first time he is really in love. His fanciful love for Rosaline has made him morose and dull; his real love for Juliet makes him sociable and brilliant.

MER. Why, is not this better now than groaning for love ? now art thou sociable, now art thou Borneo; now art thou what thou art, by art as well as by nature ;

Yet, had Mercutio known, it was love that had changed the man. All this is excellently conceived by Shakespeare,

Juliet is also lifted into full womanhood. To compare her speech with her mother and her nurse in the first act with her talk with Romeo in the second, is to know that she has instantly grown out of the child into the woman. All that she does and feels afterwards is pure womanhood, full of intelligence and power as well as passion, lovely in truth, fidelity, and resolution; yet tender and sweet as childhood.

With their love, and by it, their whole nature—moral, intellectual, passionate, and imaginative—is heightened. Both hold their love within moral restraint. They break every convention, but they must have marriage and the blessing of the Church. It must be a sacramental bond which unites them. We do not wonder at the intellectual charm of Romeo's talk, for we have seen it even in his talk about Rosaline; but now, it is no longer on fantastic but natural lines. His passion gives wings to his brain. But we do wonder at the intellectual charm which chimes through the talk of Juliet, at her clear sight of things, at her quiet reasoning and self-control even in the hour when she receives the passion of Romeo and declares her own; at her swift determination when the crisis comes to do the only possible thing; at her luminous vision, before she drinks the drug, of all she has to fear, of all that may happen when she wakes in the tomb.

As to imagination, love has heightened that into splendid expression. It exalts their speech into poetry. All the beautiful world is laid under contribution to illustrate and make more beautiful their love, but the love itself is the most beautiful thing they know. It is the fountain of their eloquence. And surely no love-poetry in the world, rising out of innocent and youthful love, with all the warmth of fresh-awakened nature longing for union, with the full glow of the south yet

with a divine innocence in it, and with faith in the divinity of natural love, was ever written with such beauty as Shakespeare has written the meeting in the orchard, the parting on the wedding night, the call of Juliet before it,

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds.

It is imagination at a high and lovely level; nor does the imagination fail when sorrow is as keen in passion as joy has been. The steady beat of its noble wing is preserved. It is even more strong in the last speech of Romeo or of Juliet than it has been before, for death adds to imagination a last intensity.

When Romeo and Juliet first meet after the Mask Shakespeare, like a great dramatist, encompasses them with scenery as lovely as their love. It is only painted by suggestions through their speech, but we see it quite clearly. It is night, and only the light of stars, when Romeo slips over the wall. There lies the orchard, and there the balcony where Juliet stands. While they speak, the moon rises, and 'tips with silver all the fruit-tree-tops.' Before they part, the morning is at hand.

Romeo in the deep shade speaks to himself, and then hears his mistress tell of her love for him. What an outburst of sweet speech! it makes one in love with youth and love. It runs close to the edge of the Overmuch, but does not fall over it; it is hyperbole, but many men would be happy if such hyperbole were natural to them; if they could feel so deeply as to make it true. There is not a phrase which Romeo uses which is not the necessary expression of life at its overflow into infinity. Only a vast indefinite sea and its furthest shore can image his infinite of love.

I am no pilot; yet, wert thou as far
As that vast shore wash'd with the furthest sea,
I would adventure for such merchandise.

Juliet is equally passionate; but of course Shakespeare,

with his exquisite tenderness for women, has saved her innocence from too great unreserve. She speaks to the night her love, unaware of her listener; and when she knows he has heard her confession, she delays her yielding with an array of questions, seeking to recover her maiden reserve. When she yields, her speech is perfect in its womanhood; and then, having established her delicate maidenhood, excused her seeming light behaviour, she is as frank in her love's confession as the day. Her childhood and her womanhood meet in this together; her innocent joy in loving and her passion for her lover; now a woman, now a child. She lives on that sweet borderland. At last, passion, like Romeo, seeks the infinite to express itself, and Juliet uses, but in other ways, the same symbol as he has done;

My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep : the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite.

They part with lingering, sweet delay. Juliet's speech has slowly grown bolder, yet more delicate; and the harmonious mingling of these two qualities is beautiful. Romeo's speech has passed into a deep simplicity and quiet, as if he felt too much to speak; it is only when Juliet is gone that he says the truest and most impassioned thing,

Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast!
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest.

And now the morning comes. Juliet has no past, and waits for the future. But Romeo's past is known to the Friar, whom he has to persuade to marry him to Juliet. 'Tis a difficult task, and the Friar is astounded when he hears that Rosaline is utterly forgotten—

Holy St. Francis 1 what a change is here !

but blindly working the will of Justice, he agrees to marry them in order to turn 'their households' rancour

to pure love'—so carefully does Shakespeare knit into the theme of the play even this sacred personage. But he is also careful to individualise the man into a varied character.

Shakespeare was kind to friars, and Laurence is one of the best of them. All Verona respects him; and though he has played an audacious part in marrying a Capulet to a Montague and in drugging Juliet, his statement of the whole case at the end is listened to quietly, and approved. The Prince does not even reprove him;

We still have known thee for a holy man.

He has done this for policy, to reconcile the feud of the houses. It meets the fate that the interference of churchmen in affairs most often meets. Yet he is more the man than the churchman. Indeed, in his humorous mocking of Romeo for his forgetting of Rosaline, in his tolerance of the hot blood of youth, as well as in his challenge to Romeo to be a man and face his suffering down, he is not only a charitable priest, but also a man of the world. He still remembers his own youth, and has an ancient tenderness for the lovers; too old not to try and moderate the hurry of their passion by his experience, not too old to be kindly to it; charmed into poetry by Juliet's lovely youth and by tender memories of his own youth which awaken at her sight—

Hero comes the lady : O ! so light a foot
Will ne'er wear out the everlasting flint:
A lover may bestride the gossamer
That idles in the wanton summer air,
And yet not fall: so light is vanity.

His age is sententious but not dry; we hear in his sermonising that gentle philosophy of life which in a good man is nurtured by loneliness. Nor does his bland philosophy want a touch of quiet poetry. His eye is

quick to see and his voice to celebrate the beauty of nature, when in the dawn he comes from his cell;

The grey-ey'd morn smiles on the frowning night,
Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light,
And flecked darkness like a drunkard reek
From forth day's path and Titan's fiery wheels.

He mingles a rustic science with his poetic feeling; a gentle herbalist who loves and studies the medicinale plants of the earth, and gathers them for use. While yet the dew is deep he seeks them, and musing on their qualities and comparing them with the nature of man, so slips into his pensive philosophy—a many-natured man ! The passage has its charm, and beyond that admits us into one of these curious side-paths into which Shakespeare wandered in his brooding thoughts on life.

O ! mickle is the powerful grace that lies
In herbs, plants, stones, and their true qualities :
For nought so vile that on the earth doth live,
But to the earth some special good doth give,
Nor aught so good but strain'd from that fair use
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse ;
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,
And vice sometime's by action dignified. ▪
Within the infant rind of this weak flower
Poison hath residence and medicine power :
For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part;
Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.
Two such opposed foes encamp them still
In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will;
And where the worser is predominant,
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.

The event which started the movement of the tragedy, that is, the sudden love of Romeo and Juliet, is now rounded and fulfilled. They are married, and it seems as if the deed had awakened to her work the Justice who punishes and reconciles the feud which had so long distressed Verona. Before even the wedding-night of the lovers, she brings to their death Mercutio and Tybalt.

It is the first of the steps she takes to attain her end, and she takes it in spite of Borneo, who hates to fight with Tybalt, Juliet's 'dear cousin,' But he is driven against his will by an outside power to slay him. Shakespeare makes that plain. And now, again, all the streets of Verona are in confusion; again the Prince enters the scene to denounce the quarrel, again the far-off cause of the tragedy is laid before us. Then Romeo is banished. We leave the civic strife behind, and are now, until the end, involved in the personal fate of the lovers.

• • It is characteristic of Shakespeare's contrasting manner that now, at the very moment when doom begins to darken over the lovers, he places on Juliet's lips in solitude (for indeed we must conceive her words as thought by her, not spoken) that rapturous invocation to her wedding-night in which the very height of the mingled joy of sense and spirit in embracing love is imagined and longed for before it is realised. Many would not have dared to express it; few would have felt they had the power to do it, and to keep it free from grossness. But it slips, in absolute ease, from Shakespeare's sympathy with pure yet passionate maidenhood into language so exquisitely balanced between sensuous and spiritual passion, so thrilled with both inextricably interwoven, so exalted by joy, so on fire with beauty, and all so uplifted by the spirit of imagination, that it seems as if nothing so wonderful was ever written in the world, as if, having been written, it should always be felt to be thought rather than written.

On this youth and ravishment falls the news of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment. Her lover has slain her cousin on her wedding-day, so hot, so quick is Justice on her trail. The to-and-fro of her sorrow and her love, the final conquest of her sorrow for Tybalt and of her momentary repulsion from the Montague who has slain a Capulet, the disappearance of all anger, all sorrow, all ties of

blood, of all the rest of the world, in love and Romeo, is a wonderful piece of subtle analysis, the more subtle from the simplicity of its execution.

Romeo's misery is not less impassioned, but more despairing. The man does not react as quickly as the woman, nor see, as quickly as she does, that nothing matters but the fulfilment of their love. The sentence of banishment brings back the despondent elements in his character, and the Friar inspirits him in vain. He is seized by those quick despairs of youth which an older man leaves behind him. Nothing can be truer to nature than this; and as true is his swift return to life and joy when he hears that Juliet will receive him. They meet at night in wedded passion, drinking its joy upon the narrow edge of death. That mercy Justice permits them. They win it, as it were with violence, out of her grim sacrifice of them for her own ends. And we are almost satisfied that they should die, wo almost accept the cruelty of their fate, because they have had thoir perfect hour. Death is not much, when life has once reached the top of joy.

Then comes the parting in the Italian morning. We taste its air and see its skies as they speak. The nightingale in the pomegranate tree is silent, the lark has begun to sing—

whose notes do beat
The vaulty heavens so high above our heads.

The dawn grows grey, then bright—

Look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.

But more beautiful even than this beauty of nature is the passion in their hearts and its expression—steeped in sorrow, drenched in love, still trembling with desire. And because of these, of a poetry so exquisite in feeling, so

exalted by imagination, so thrilled with the memory of satisfied love and with the agony of present departure, and of so perfect a melody, that it seems made of the best of all the poets of the world. Sorrow and fear give keenness to the lingering of love; and hope, almost afraid, glides into the verse and then retreats. The shadow darkens over them; the mysticism of Shakespeare intrudes on their parting, to presage their death—

- JUL. O ! think'st thou we shall ever meet again ?
 BOM. I doubt it not; and all these woes shall serve
 For sweet discourses in our time to come.
 JUL. O God ! I have an ill-divining soul:
 Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low,
 As one dead in the bottom of a tomb :
 Either my eyesight fails, or thou look'st pale.
 KOM. And trust me, love, in my eye so do you :
 Dry sorrow drinks our blood. Adieu ! adieu !

So Romeo departs, banished by the hand of Justice. Then she plays her next card, swiftly driving on her action. If she were not a goddess, it were unseemly haste to marry Juliet one day to Romeo, and propose the next day that she should be married to County Paris. Yet that is what she docs, that is the card sho plays in her determined speed. No sooner is Juliet out of Romeo's arms, than her mother comes in with this new proposition. It is enough to madden the child; though her intellectual power is never better seen than in the way she seems to attack Romeo for Tybalt's death, while in reality sho expresses her love for him; and she refuses indignantly. Her father rates her with senile fury; his language shocks her mother and her nurse; we see the temper which has made the feud continue; and Juliet is silenced into one piteous prayer—

Is there no pity sitting in the clouds
 That sees into the bottom of my grief?

Her mother leaves her—'Do as thou wilt, for I have

done with thee,' She turns to her Nurse; a sense of fate
is in the words, and great piteousness;

Alack, alack ! that heaven should practise stratagems
Upon so soft a subject as myself!
What sa,'st thou ? hast thou not a word of joy ?
Some comfort, Nurse *1*

But the only consolation the Nurse gives is to advise immediate marriage with Paris, who is 'a lovely gentleman.' Few passages reveal in briefer words more of lonely despair than those in which Juliet meets this traitorous counsel. Father, mother, Nurse are all against her, but this girl of fourteen is resolute: she knits her powers together into quietude. What she will do, she will do alone—

JUL. Speakest thou this from thy heart ?

NUHSE. And from my soul too ;

Or else beshrew them both.

JUL. Amen!

Amen!

NURSE. What!

What!

JUL. Well, thou hast comforted me marvellous much.

Go in ; and tell my lady I am gone,

Having displeas'd my father, to Laurence' cell,

To make confession, and to be absolved.

NURSE. Marry, *I will*; and this is wisely done.

[Exit NURSE.]

JUL. Ancient damnation ! O most wicked fiend !

To deepen her misery, she meets Paris, its cause, who claims her for his wife, at the Friar's cell. Her despair helps her to be reticent. Only when he goes, does her passion break forth—

' 0 1 shut the door ! and when thou hast done so,

Come, weep with me ; past hope, past cure, past help 1

Bather than marry Paris, her knife shall play the umpire in this strife between her honour and her fate. Her speech is wild, the outburst of long-repressed pain, seeking in whirling images to relieve itself. But what a difference from the child of the first act! A few days of love have done the work of many years. Her woman-

hood is not only born; it is mature enough to look death in the face. Yet her youth makes death seem horrible, and she is haunted by its ghastly images;

Or shut me nightly in a charnel house,
O'ercover'd quite with dead men's rattling bones,
With reeky shanks, and yellow chapless skulls ;
Or bid me go into a new-made grave
And hide me with a dead man in his shroud ;

She is sane in her resolution of death rather than dishonour, half insane in her imagination—a subtle situation of the soul, such as Shakespeare loved, in the midst of his simplicities of passion, to draw for his own delight.

¹ The Friar then proposes the drug which shall make her seem dead for forty-two hours, and Romeo shall fetch her then away from the tomb of the Capulets. She takes the drug that night, alone, with a woman's wild courage, but with a child's imaginative fears, and the fourth act closes with her apparent death. Meantime Justice, not to be balked, plays her next card. She so arranges events that the Friar's letter to Romeo fails to reach him. And then the ruin rushes, without a break, to its close. The fifth act doubles and redoubles the fierce hurry of Justice to her aim. There is no scene more hoavy-laden with death than that in the churchyard, nor one in which the scenery is more vividly conceived. Fear, trembling, and horror possess all the characters but Romeo, Paris, and Juliet; their love lifts them above the power of Death's attendants. Darkness is everywhere; only a lanthorn lights the tomb. The yew-trees darken the churchyard. The ground is loose, infirm with digging up of graves. Roineo cries out at the tomb in a madness of raging grief,

Thou detestable inaw, thou womb of death,
as he wrenches open the door. It is a masterpiece of representation to the intellectual eye. No visible scenery is needed.

The dramatic action is not less remarkable: the incessant rush of circumstance, the change of the actors at every moment, save when Romeo is alone in the tomb; the haste, the high-pitched excitement of all the characters, even of the Page and Balthasar, as if the fierce passion of Romeo had infected them all; the silences, the cries from every part of the churchyard! And finally the watch, the rousing of the town, the rush of Capulet and Montague to the grave, the streets full with running men and women, the Prince, and in the midst Paris, Romeo, and Juliet dead. We are lost in admiration. Only a playwright could have composed it for the stage, and the playwright one whose imaginative genius excelled Bacon's as the sun excels the moon.

But I return to the beginning of the act. It opens with Romeo at Mantua, waiting for news. It is characteristic of Shakespeare's mysticism, that, as he has made both Romeo and Juliet have presentiments of evil, so here he represents a common contrary—that excited happiness of the spirit which so frequently precedes death and ruin, the state tho Scots call 'fey.' Romeo has had sweet dreams;

If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,
My dreams presage some joyful news at hand ;
My bosom's lord sits lightly in his throne ;
And all this day an unaccustom'd spirit
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts.

On that, swift as lightning, comes the news that Juliet is dead. He receives it with the same quiet with which Juliet received the news that she was to be married to Paris, that quiet which comes of the instant and intense resolve to die. His youth is swift to act, as swift as his absolute despair. The resolute centre of all his sorrow is given in a word;

Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night.

The means are at hand—I do remember an apothecary '

—a famous description, and so long that some have wondered that Romeo, in his intense passion, could enter into so much and so clear detail. But it is often when passion is most intense that men not only see outward things most sharply and in minute detail, but also, perhaps to relieve the awful strain within, play with the illusive scenery of life. All the deeper is his resolve to die. It is piteous that he so young should suddenly become cynical, but Shakespeare knew the quick-changing heart of youth when despair has fallen on love. This is a momentary cry. There is nothing of its bitterness in the soliloquy in the tomb.

There is thy gold, worse poison to men's souls,
Doing more murders, in this loathsome world,
Than these poor compounds that thou may'st not sell:
I sell thee poison, thou hast sold me none.
Farewell; buy food, and get thyself in flesh.

And he races to Verona to die by Juliet's side.

Paris has been before him. Justice wants another victim to make the sacrifice complete, and Paris is laying flowers on the body of Juliet when Romeo enters. We hear from what he says to Balthasar, his servant, into what fierce intensity he has been wrought during the long night of travel:

If thou return'st to pry on me,
By heaven, I will tear thee joint from joint,
And strew this hungry churchyard with thy limbs;
The time and my intents are savage wild.

What chance has poor, foolish Paris with one whom deadly sorrow all night long has wrought? Romeo tries to save him. In vain! he falls, and dies for his love;

If thou be merciful,
Open the tomb, lay me with Juliet.

Romeo recognises him, and that he is one writ with him in sour misfortune's book. Death brings all enmities

into harmony, and he lays Paris in the tomb. And there is Juliet, whose beauty makes the vault full of light. He speaks, and ever since all the world has listened. We see the silence, the dim light, the vaulted tomb, the lovely face, not dead, but dead to him. His soul lives in every word, his love, his sorrow, his imaginative fire, his unutterable weariness of life. Tenderness is supreme in this lovely speech. Truth thrills through it like a spirit; beauty, like another spirit, is wedded to the truth in it, and the 'passion of death' lifts the truth and beauty and tenderness of it into the world where death is lost in life.

How oft when men are at the point of death
 Have they been merry ! which their keepers call
 A lightning before death : O ! how may I
 Call this a lightning ? O my love ! my wife !
 ^ Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy bievath,
 4 Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty :
 ' Thou art not conquer'd ; beauty's ensign yet
 Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
 And death's pale flag is not advanced there.
 Tybalt, liest thou there in thy bloody sheet ?
 O ! what more favour can I do to thee,
 Than with that hand that cut thy youth in twain
 To sunder his that was thine enemy ?
 Forgive me, cousin ! Ah ! dear Juliet,
 Why art thou yet so fair ? Shall I believe
 That unsubstantial Death is amorous,
 And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
 Thee here in dark to be his paramour ?
 For fear of that I still will stay with thee,
 And never from this palace of dim night
 Depart again : here, here will I remain
 With worms that are thy chambermaids ; O ! here
 Will I set up my everlasting rest,
 And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
 From this world-wearied flesh. Eyes, look your last I
 Arms, take your last embrace ! and lips, O you
 The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
 A dateless bargain to engrossing death ?
 Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide !
 Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
 The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark !

Who is to act this? Shakespeare HAS s thought more than any actor can represent.

Nor is Juliet's death less passionate, though swifter. A woman does not play with thought or its expression on the edge of death. Moreover, she has faced death for the last three days. She is accustomed to its companionship.

What's here ? a cup, clos'd in my true love's hand ?
Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end.
O churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop
To help me after! I will kiss thy lips ;
Haply, some poison yet doth hang on them,
To make me die with a restorative. [*Kisses him.*]
Thy lips are warm !

O happy dagger!

This is thy sheath ; there rest, and let me die.

And in the tomb is the silence of three dead lovers. On this silence comes the uproar I have described: the cries of the watch, the arrest of the Friar, of the Page, and Balthasar; the Capulets, the Montagues, the people and the Prince. The stage fills.

Justice has done her work. She has passed through a lake of innocent blood to her end. Tybalt, Mercutio, Paris, Romeo, Juliet, Lady Montague, have all died that she might punish the hate between the houses. Men recognise at last that a Power beyond them has been at work. 'A greater power,' cries the Friar to Juliet, 'than we can contradict hath thwarted our intents.' The Friar explains the work of Justice to the Prince; the Prince applies the punishment to the guilty—

Where be these enemies ? Capulet! Montague 1
See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love ;
And I, for winking at your discords too,
Have lost a brace of kinsmen; all are punish'd.

The reconciliation follows. That is the aim of Justice. The long sore of the state is healed. But at what a price ?

We ask, was it just or needful to slay so many for this end? Could it not have been otherwise done? And Shakespeare, deeply convinced, even in his youth, of the irony of life, deeply affected by it as all his tragedies prove, has left us with that problem to solve, in this, the first of his tragedies; and has surrounded the problem with infinite pity and love, so that, if we are troubled, it may be angry, with the deeds of the gods, we are soothed and uplifted by our reverent admiration for humanity.

Shakespeare could not toll, nor can we, how otherwise it might have been shaped; but to be ignorant is not to be content. We are left by the problem in irritation. If the result the gods have brought about be good, the means they used seem clumsy, even cruel, and we do not understand. This is a problem which incessantly recurs in human life, and as Shakespeare represented human life, it passes like a questioning spirit through several of his plays. I do not believe that he began any play with the intention of placing it before us, much less of trying to solve it. But as he wrote on, the problem emerged under his hand, and he became aware of it. He must have thought about it, and there are passages in *Romeo and Juliet* which suggest such thinking, and such passages are more frequent in the after tragedies. But with that strange apartness of his from any personal share in human trouble, which is like that of a spirit outside humanity—all the more strange because he represented that trouble so vividly and felt for it so deeply—he does not attempt to solve or explain the problem. He contents himself with stating the course of events which constitute it, and with representing how human nature, specialised in distinct characters, feels when entangled in it.

This is his general way of creating, and it is the way of the great artist who sets forth things as they are, but

neither analyses nor moralises them. But this does not prevent any dominant idea of the artist, such as might arise in his imagination from contemplation of his subject, pervading the whole of his work, even unconsciously arranging it and knitting it into unity. Such an idea seems to rule this play. It seems from the way the events are put by Shakespeare and their results worked out, that he conceived a Power behind the master-event who caused it and meant the conclusion to which it was brought. This Power might be called Destiny or Nemesis—terms continually used by writers on Shakespeare, but which seem to me to assume in his knowledge modes of thought of which he was unaware.' What he does seem to think is; That, in the affairs of men, long-continued evil, such as the hatreds of the Montagues and Capulets or the Civil Wars in England, was certain to be tragically broken up by the suffering it caused, and to be dissolved in a reconciliation which should confess the evil and establish its opposite good; and that this was the work of a divine Justice which, through the course of affairs, made known that all hatreds—as in this case and in the Civil Wars—were against the Universe. We may call this Power Fate or Destiny,*' It is better to call it, as the Greek did, Justice. This is the idea which Shakespeare makes preside over *Romeo and Juliet*, and over the series of plays which culminates in *Richard III*. When we come to the great tragedies this belief of his seems to have suffered shock. Though it lingers in *Hamlet* in such a phrase as this of Horatio's—'There's a divinity both shape our ends, Rough hew them as we may'—yet it has weakened; and it seems replaced in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* by the conception of a Destiny which drives its victims headlong to their death or ruin, and the larger ends of whose justice, if it be just at all, we do not see clearly as we see them in *Romeo and Juliet*

and in *Richard III*. Hamlet dies a victim of events which occurred before he comes to Elsinore, and carries with him to death innocent and guilty alike. Without those events his character would not have slain him. No good is seen to arise from his tragedy. 'The rest is silence,' says Shakespeare. A blind, half-supernatural power of evil starts Macbeth on his course of crime, not the desire of Justice to set wrong things right in the state. Things were not wrong under Duncan. Macbeth's crime brings its natural result, but we are not made conscious of a presiding Justice as we are in *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare seems to have lost that belief

In *Lear* and *Othello* it is not only weakened or lost, it is opposed, it seems, by another conception, or perhaps I should say by another temper of mind, which, looking at the world's misery and guilt, was led to feel rather than to conceive that it was not Justice or Destiny that ruled the world, but a ruthless irony which played with men and women to pleasure its own cynicism, as if the gods sat in a theatre and watched with weary eyes the tragedy, comedy, or farce they ordained for their careless entertainment. It is not Justice which is done; Justice is not their aim, but amusement. And when the curtain is rung down, they think no more of *Lear*, *Othello*, *Troilus*, or *Timon*. It is not even the Destiny of the Greek which sacrifices *Othello*, *Cordelia*, *Desdemona*, or even *Ophelia*. It is a blind or a cynical Will which plays with men and women as if they were marionettes. It was well that Shakespeare did not for long continue in this temper, but that he passed through it is, I think, not to be doubted by those who read *Othello*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and especially *King Lear*. He is passing out of it in *Coriolanus*, and in *Julius Ocesar* he has emerged from it.

Nevertheless, this temper did not wholly master him

while he was under its sway. A strange impression, like a spirit proceeding out of the whole of his tragic work, a subconscious efflux from it, leads us to feel, through the pity with which he encompasses the victims of sorrow, and through the nobleness with which he clothes them, that they were not the mere sport of an ironical Power, but rose above it into a higher world, where such a Power could not follow them. It is so when we think of *Othello* and *Desdemona*, of *Lear* and *Cordelia*. I do not say that Shakespeare was directly conscious of making such an impression when he wrote *Lear* and *Othello*. He could scarcely be, as long as he felt that Justice did not rule the world. But he does make it on us, and in him it was an unconscious reversion to that original type of his thought about the universe, which is to be found in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Richard III*. He there imagined an eternal Justice, such as Æschylus conceived, * the virgin daughter of Zeus,' who directed the fates of men and who insisted that evil should come to an end.

Yet there is a difference. The work of Justice in Æschylus is simple. No complex problem is bound up with it; it is the assertion of divine law in the punishment of the guilty. , "But in *Romeo and Juliet* the work of Justice is done through the sorrow and death of the innocent, and the evil Justice attacks is destroyed through the sacrifice of the guiltless. Justice, as Shakespeare saw her, moving to issues which concern the whole, takes little note of the sufferings of individuals save to use them, if they are good and loving, for her great purposes, as if that were enough to make them not only acquiescent but happy. | *Romeo and Juliet*, who are quite guiltless of the hatreds of their clans, and who embody the loving-kindness which would do away with them, are condemned to mortal pain and sorrow of death. Shakespeare accepted this apparent in-

justice as the work of Justice; and the impression made at the end upon us, which impression does not arise from the story itself, but steals into us from the whole work of Shakespeare on the story, is that Justice may have done right, though we do not understand her ways. The tender love of the two lovers and its beauty, seen in their suffering, awaken so much pity and love that the guilty are turned away from their evil hatreds, and the evil itself is destroyed. And with regard to the sufferers themselves, there is that—we feel with Shakespeare—in their pain and death which not only redeems and blesses the world they have left, but which also lifts them into that high region of the soul where suffering and death seem changed into joy and life. We think of them, but in a way we cannot explain, no longer with pity, but with a certainty that all is well with them, that they have arisen into a true happiness, have become a vital portion of the Justice and Love which sacrificed them for the welfare of the whole. Instead of mourning over their fate, we are content: as we are content when Cordelia and Desdemona perish, even though Shakespeare, grimmer then than he is now, does not bring any recognisable good out of their pain. Even in their sorrow, still more in the wild misery of Othello, we feel by a kind of subconsciousness that they are in that kingdom of the soul, and worthy of it, where the pain and death of earth are like dreams when one awaketh, where what they have become through suffering lives for the inspiration of humanity and attracts its love.

A few observations may be made on the poetry of this play. First, it is sometimes conventional in its phrases. Shakespeare was a playwright, and his audience expected to hear, certainly at intervals, the phraseology to which they were accustomed. It was wise, then, of him to use

it, and even at times to heighten beyond the simplicity of nature the speech of his characters. Such a convention occurs in the speeches of Old Montague and Benvolio in the first act, which describe Romeo's isolation in his love for Rosaline. They are more flowery than natural. But with regard to them and other conventions in the play, they are so inspirited with imagination that we forget they are conventions, and are almost surprised into accepting them as natural because they are so beautifully said. Moreover, in the special instance I have mentioned, we forgive them, not only for their beauty, but also because they strike the keynote of the love-poetry of the play, and enable us to grow into the passionate temper in which the orchard scene and Juliet's invocation and the parting in the morning of the lovers are conceived and wrought. They are another example of Shakespeare's careful gradation.

Secondly, certain soliloquies must be considered as representing thought, not speech. They are to make the audience understand what is passing through the mind of the character, not what, under the circumstances, he would have said aloud. Not all, but a large number of Shakespeare's soliloquies are of this character. A maiden might easily say aloud what Juliet says at the beginning of the night scene from her balcony. It is intimate, but not too intimate for speech. But her speech,

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,

represents the secret passion of her body and soul, and Juliet would not in life have said it aloud. And her soliloquy when in bed she takes the drug is also a representation of her thoughts; it was not spoken in reality. The dramatist is compelled to put it into words and the actress to speak it—but to add to it gesture or great changes in the voice or outward show is to mistake altogether the idea of the dramatist. These soliloquies

should be kept quiet; the actor or actress should, while they speak them, feel them to represent voiceless thought; and the audience should listen to them with the same feeling. If we take this view of them, and that Shakespeare meant them to be so considered, a great deal in them which seems too fantastical, too wild, even too sensational for fine poetry, is both natural and excusable. In some soliloquies, as for instance that of Romeo in the tomb, the contents are mixed. Of this much was said aloud, but some things were only thought by Romeo, and a great actor should make this clear. When he does, he varies easily the delivery of a soliloquy which is too often ranted from beginning to end, and ranted most when it ought to be most quiet.

I have spoken of the love-poetry. It has, whether in its sorrow or delight, the passion, the charm, and the over-brimming of youth. Imagination is in it like a living spirit, but fancy plays through its lighter thoughts, as when Juliet cries,

Give me my Romeo : and, when he shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun.

Its hyperbole is natural to youth. Moreover, Shakespeare knew the Italian tales where this kind of love-talk is so frequent that it must rank as conventional. But in Shakespeare's hands it is exalted into poetry by his impassioned imagination, and his incessant aspiration to beauty. Finally, he has in this poetry that modern quality which combines human passion with the doings of nature. He harmonises nature to the human feeling of the hour. The moon on the orchard-trees, the solitary star, the silent nightingale, and the lark heralding the morn, are as much in tune with the hearts of the lovers as the roaring wind and cataract-rain are to the heart of Lear.

III

RICHARD II

IN 1592, the first part of *Henry VI.* was acted at the Rose Theatre, on March 3. The second part, it is presumed, followed; and the third part the following autumn. These plays were originally written by other men than Shakespeare and were, as some conjecture, revised by Shakespeare and Marlowe in partnership. If so, Shakespeare worked afterwards upon them alone, after Marlowe's death. There are passages, notably at the end of the third part of *Henry VI.*, where Gloucester's character is brought into harmony with his character in *Richard III.*, which are entirely from Shakespeare's hand. Whether these Gloucester passages were written before or after *Richard III.*, they lead up to that play, which of all the historical plays of Shakespeare is said to be the first composed, and was probably acted early in 1593. *Richard II.* followed, it is supposed, almost immediately on *Richard III.*; and many say that as the verse and stylo of *Richard III.* emulated Marlowe's, so *Richard II.* was suggested by Marlowe's *Edward II.* It may be so, I do not know. What we do know is that the work of both plays is done in the manner of an artist whose style is his own. In fire and fury of movement and utterance, in passion of action and rhetoric, in dramatic power and in gloom of fate, *Richard III.* is greater, or shall I say more remarkable, than *Richard II.* In wisdom, thoughtfulness, in a wider range over human nature, in a kindlier humanity, a softer glow, in the pity

which accompanies the dark work of fate, and especially in the loveliness of the poetry, *Richard II.* excels *Richard III.* It seems astonishing that within a year, two plays, each so great, yet each imbued with so different a spirit, should have been written; but after all it is, at this creative time, no more astonishing than the writing within a few years of plays so different as *Tamburlaine* and *Edward II.*

There are, however, other reasons which suggest that *Richard II.* preceded *Richard III.* *Richard II.* is more full of the flowing poetry, so rich in sentiment, which belongs to most of the previous plays. Rhyme is the natural form of such poetry, and it is used copiously in *Richard III.*, and very sparingly in *Richard II.* The play has less power, less incident, less action, and more of sentiment than *Richard III.* It is less close in texture and less complex—that is, it is inferior in dramatic strength and vitality. As an historical drama *Richard III.* is on a higher level than *Richard II.* Both are fateful, but the fate that broods over *Richard III.* is of a deeper, more solemn gloom, and seems to argue a more experienced hand, a graver cast of thought, a more serious view of history. These considerations might lead us to say that *Richard III.* followed its companion; a conclusion I do not accept.

The discussion, however, as to which was first, is not of any importance. The plays were written within the same year, and the reason of their difference in manner, strength, experience, and versification may not arise from any change in Shakespeare's dramatic power, but simply from an artist's desire of change. Shakespeare may have written them differently in order to vary his hand, or because he felt that the character of *Richard II.*, being itself sentimental, fantastic, and fluent, was best represented by the fluid, hurrying, rhyming measures he used, and that of *Richard III.* by the stately gravity of blank

verse. The subject then, in both cases, would make the differences.

Why did Shakespeare and his fellows begin to write plays the subjects of which were drawn from English history? It was that a change had passed over the spirit of England. She had begun to realise, as she had not before, how great she was, how separate from other nations, how free from foreign influences and powers, how united, in spite of some hostile and dividing elements, were her Queen and nobles, burghers and people. A great and imaginative pride in England filled the hearts of men before 1580, thirteen years before *Richard III.*, and is plainly revealed in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Loyalty to Elizabeth as representing this great people now became a passion. France and Spain, hating her Protestantism, were against the Queen; and though she did not wish for war, though she and her ministers avoided it all they could, yet they matched themselves, in the secret drift of their policy, against the Continental powers; played France against Spain and Spain against France, till Philip, the great overshadower of Europe, was sorely troubled. When the sea-dogs of England took up the game, bled, harried, and plundered Spain in the Spanish main, the foil, in England praised God. When in 1587 Drake came home laden with spoil, having ravaged the cities, and taken the galleons, of the western coasts of the Americas, and rounded the world; when he stormed Spain in her own ports, singeing the very beard of Philip, England burst into pride and joy. Philip at last was hurried into fury; and all the world looked on with wonder when the Armada, manned by the flower of Spain, was driven to flight by a host of small ships; and in her flight perished, ship by ship, in the northern seas, and on the western coasts of Great Britain and Ireland.

The victory was felt to be not only political but moral.

God, they said, was on the side of England; and the heart of her people swelled with a religious awe and gratitude when it felt itself chosen as the avenger of injustice and cruelty; swelled as high with personal pride when it also began to know itself to be the mistress of the seas. No wonder the *Faerie Queene* rose from the heart of Spenser. No wonder the dramatists, and Marlowe beyond the rest in *Edward II.*, began the long series of historical plays. No wonder Shakespeare, whose humanity felt all that the nation felt, turned to record the history of his people; and having re-edited *Henry VI.*, began with *Richard II.* and *Richard III.* to describe the past sins, sorrows, glories, and the march of freedom, of his people. All his historical plays have their root in patriotism or some outburst of patriotic passion. It were well to collect them together, but none are finer, not even the closing words of the Royal Bastard in *King John*,

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

than the great cry of Gaunt from his dying bed in *Richard II.* All who love their country know it well. This patriotism fills the heart of *Henry IV.*: and the play of *Henry V.* is full of the sound of trumpets blowing to the glory of England. Had it not been so damaged by the pirates who took it up eagerly because it so spread-eagled England, it would have come down to us less injured by passages unworthy of Shakespeare's dignity.

Of this historical and patriotic drama these two *Richard*-plays are the first entirely written by Shakespeare. He made of them—and this point is of great interest—a framework to enclose a greater drama of the Civil Wars.

He traced their origin, as he conceived it to be, in the usurpation of Bolingbroke and the deposition of Richard. He drew in *Richard II.* the political causes, which were also the moral causes, of Richard's overthrow, and presaged the evils which would follow for the state from the rough seizure of the crown by Bolingbroke.

Then he drew in *Richard III.* the close; the final working out by avenging Justice of the punishment of civil war. He made it clear that the war was caused by the ambitions, jealousies, hatreds of great princes and nobles, who remembered only themselves, and forgot the welfare of the people. As the story of *Romeo and Juliet* expressed the wrath of Justice against the hatreds by which the Montagues and Capulets disquieted Verona, so the dramas from *Richard II.* to *Richard III.* told how the justice of moral evolution punished the kings and nobles who made England swim in blood.

When Shakespeare had written the beginning and the end of this, it stole into the chambers of his imagination to write the intermediate story, to paint the full picture. He had already done some of this work in the three parts of *Henry VI.*; and I think he now made a fresh revision of those plays, and added some few things to them, which would serve to round out this idea of his. Then he filled up his space with *Henry IV.* and *Henry V.*, and the thing was done.

Some suggest he did this with a purpose—to show what bad government was, and its evils; what good government was, and its results.] do not think this true. His purpose was artistic. He desired to complete his conception, to combine all the plays into a whole. In completing it, the moral and political philosophy of good or bad government came in, as a necessary part of the conception, but its lessons were not directly but indirectly given. His true aim was to represent human life in action

and thought within the events which history laid before him. He did that; and then the parts shaped themselves, under his guiding conception, into an artistic whole. He saw it, and rejoiced.

The artistic result is remarkable. We have, in these eight plays, not only eight separate plays, five of which are complete within themselves, but one single drama also, with a unity of its own, with one subject, with one end to which they look forward, and with one divine Justice in them, slowly working out its laws to their fulfilment. And the years over which this mighty drama extends are nearly ninety years. I wish it were possible to act them all in the same day. It would then be seen that *Richard III.* wound up that web of fate which began to be woven in *Richard II.*; and which, weaving on through *Henry IV., F., and VI.*, contains in its living tapestry so great and various a representation of human life as never yet was brought together and harmonised by any genius in the modern world; of life in all classes of society; of life passing from the most tragic sorrows to the most comic even the rudest pleasures; life in the streets of London, in the country, on the battlefield, in the council, at the court and the alehouse, in the camps of France and England, by the dying bed of kings, and in the garret where Falstaff passed away with a broken heart.

The Greek trilogies carry us through long histories, and they are united by the dominance of Destiny working out her moral will. This eight-played drama is a bolder effort. The justice of God, ruling states (for such at this time of his life was Shakespeare's belief), works out in these plays his single aim, and unites them into one Drama. Again, they have not the same unbroken solemnity and dignity which the Greek trilogies possess. They are broken up with comedy and farce, with many scenes unrelated to the end, with the creation of a host of

needless characters, with many things said and done which exceed just measure. They have indeed their great and dignified scenes both of action and speech, scattered and mingled through the rest, and these have a great weight and power. They HEIGHTEN and establish the whole impression, given to us in the plays, of human life which indeed is a more mingled landscape than any Greek play represents. The plays have, then, a greater variety, a larger range over human life, than any single trilogy; nor do they want, when we feel them as a whole, an awful solemnity. Their work is unequal, and that is not the case with the giant work of Æschylus, or the steady greatness of Sophocles—men who do not drop below their power; but Shakespeare was now only learning his work. We do not have him here at his best. Moreover, and this is a great pity, the three plays of *Henry VI* are not originally from his hand. Had he rewritten them altogether, and on the same level as even the two Richard plays, the splendour of this great single drama, made up of eight plays, would baffle the eye and of the soul of man.

Again, the dramas of *Richard II.* and *Henry VI.* are purely historical. Their subject, their persons, their events, were taken by Shakespeare, without change, almost without addition, from the chronicles. They move among kings, nobles, and their dependants. The people are unrepresented except by one or two persons, like the gardener in *Richard II.*, like the two citizens in *Richard III.*

In the second type of the historical play which Shakespeare afterwards invented—in *Henry IV.* and *V.*—many additions are made to the history. The people are brought in, and drawn with mastery. The great folk are there, but so are the other classes—the country justice, his servant, the rustic recruits, the common soldiers, the mistress of a London tavern, the grooms,

ostlers, and travellers, thieves, sheriff-officers, courtezans and bullies, the broken-down gentleman, the merchants, the clergy,—a crowd of types, all invented, all making history vital, all disclosing what lay beneath the battles of kings and nobles, of kites and crows, in the upper air of society.

Richard II. has none of this, nor *Richard III.* Nothing is added to events, or to the personages, save the development of their characters. In this play, the character of Richard, carefully and slowly wrought, dominates the whole, makes the events and makes the catastrophe. It is the play. The character of Bolingbroke is quite secondary. Its outlines are drawn, but they are only partly filled up. What he is meant to be is more seen in his opposition to Richard than in himself. He is the strong man against the background of whose character the weakness of Richard stands out clear. But Shakespeare kept the full presentation of his character till he came to write *Henry IV.*

The Duke of York is a good sketch, but in his senile bluster of words, and his weak reversal of them when any action is required, and in his soft yielding to fate, he is only a faded representation of what Richard, without his touch of genius, might have been as an old man. Even in his furious demand for his son's death as a pledge of his loyalty to Bolingbroke—a scene which is quite unworthy of Shakespeare—he is another image of the excess into which weakness of will is so often betrayed. His haste, his fury, his exaggerated defiance of natural feeling—how could a father ask the King to slay his son?—are nothing more than weakness desperately trying to convince itself that it is strong, a condition of soul into which Richard falls again and again. His loyalty, which is his religion, is first broken down by the iniquity of the King, yet in principle is retained. Then circumstance

steals even his principle away, and he joins Bolingbroke. Then he recovers his principle by transferring his loyalty to Bolingbroke. In a word, he is a very old man, and his words and acts are carefully studied from weak old age. The sketch may well be contrasted with that of Gaunt, who is as old a man, but who has not lost his will, his power, or his courage. He stays but a short time, only in two scenes, but we see him as if he were alive before us; one of the old school of Edward in.; chivalrous, honourable, fit for the works and the trials of war, as fit as Richard was unfit for them; of deep experience in life, yet tender; rigid in justice even to blaming the King; honouring his own caste, yet loving the people; knowing his duties to them and pressing those duties on the King; loving his son, yet loving England more. Old and with the trembling angers of age, as well as its sorrows; old and dying, but never truer, more valiant, more patriotic, and more sorrowful than in death.

As we stand by his deathbed, we see the trouble of the land and presage the doom of Richard. It is part of Shakespeare's preparation for his catastrophe. That preparation has already begun in the first scene of the first act. The murder of Gloucester, Richard's uncle, underlies the challenges of Mowbray and Bolingbroke, and also the policy of Richard towards the challengers. That murder was planned by Richard and executed by Mowbray before the play begins. It is now Richard's policy to exile his tool Mowbray, and then to exile Bolingbroke. He gets rid of his accomplice in the murder, and also of the man whom he suspects as its avenger. Bolingbroke, when he challenges Mowbray, has really attacked Richard for the murder, and the King fears for his crown. This fear is deepened by Bolingbroke's courtship of the common people.

How he did seem to dive into their hearts
 With humble and familiar courtesy,
 What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
 Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
 And patient underbearing of his fortune,
 As 'twere to banish their affects with him.
 Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench ;
 A brace of draymen bid God speed him well,
 And had the tribute of his supple knee,
 With 'Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends';
 As were our England in reversion his,
 And he our subjects' next degree in hope.

It is a fine sketch of an ambitious politician, as fine as that of Absalom in the Book of Kings; and the sketch is as admirably finished on the same lines in the rest" of the play.

The first and third scenes, with all the pomp and circumstance of court, and tournament, and procession—artistic delight in which is part of the character of Richard—are one long preparation, not only for the overthrow of the King and his death, but seem by their length to be the stately introduction to a greater drama than this single play; to the vast drama of which I have spoken which culminates in 'Ae doom of Richard in. and the pacification of tortured ENGLAND and under Henry VII.

Every one has said that Richard is a study of weakness of character. But the study is much more complicated than that easy statement would infer. The character of Richard, as freshly conceived by Shakespeare, is originally gentle, good because untempted, imaginative, loving. He is a fantastic, careless dilettant of life, luxurious by nature, easily excited, easily depressed, weak of will, of conscience, and of reason. As long as he was in a private gentleman's position, and when he first was King, before he fell into the hands of flatterers and luxury, his character was inoffensive, nay more, full of easy charm and poetic sensibility; his weakness did then no harm;

his vanity amused but did not injure the state; his slight touch of wild genius made him loveable. He is the Queen's 'sweet Richard,' her 'sweet guest,' But when he becomes a king, he is tempted by power he thinks irresponsible, and by a horde of parasites who play on his idea of himself and his position till he thinks he is lord of the world. And then, his love of luxury, his weakness and light vanity make him their victims. All his good qualities, for the time, are overwhelmed.

Vanity with a strong character does not destroy good sense or clear sight of affairs, but combined with a weak character and a luxurious life, it rots away, 'insatiate cormorant,' the sense which handles daily life, preys upon itself, and blinds its victim's eyes to events and men. It is no wonder, then, that Richard, now made vain, weak, luxurious—a king, as he thinks, by the decree of God Himself—should be blind to the danger of exiling Bolingbroke and to the strength of Bolingbroke. Shakespeare marks this total blindness, and while we feel, as we read, the folly in Richard of which it is the result, we also feel, as Shakespeare desires us to feel, the piteousness of it. It is impossible to see that lonely figure, ignorant that he has alienated every friend, starting for Ireland, without some dim compassion for his inevitable doom. Even in this far-off way Shakespeare prepares us for the pity we shall hereafter give him.

But it is difficult to give him any pity now. For his *rash, fierce blaze of riot' has made him insolent. That insolence against law and man and the gods, which the Greeks put into a doomed man, reaches a hateful height in Richard, and is the more hateful because he is young. It is shown when, consulting with Bagot and Green, he lightly says that he will farm all England out and give blank charters to his substitutes that they may wring gold from-all classes, without one thought of the civic

guilt and mortal danger of this act; still more shown when, indignantly reprov'd by Gaunt for this iniquity, he violates the decencies of life by mocking and abusing a dying old man who is of as royal blood as himself; who is dignified by his age; whom he should honour as the stay of his kingdom; and to whom his pity is due because he has parted him from the son of his old age. His outburst of wrath at Gaunt's rebuke is vile. It is said, however, in anger, but his words before he goes to see Gaunt are said without passion, in the cold indifference which belongs to a lawless life, and they are viler still—

Now, put it, God, in his physician's mind
To help him to his grave immediately !

This insolence, rooted in the weakness he thinks strength, has neither courtesy, reverence, nor compassion. It is doubled, with an equal ignorance of the danger he incurs, when, with a breath, he seizes all the goods and revenues of which his uncle dies possessed, and disinherits Bolingbroke. This is the insolence of a fool who thinks he can violate all civil and moral law with impunity, because he is a king. But above kings are the gods.

And Shakespeare represents their action. York, Richard's best support, is shaken to the centre of his loyalty. In a noble speech he appeals to Richard not to be unworthy of his great ancestors, and Richard, blind and doomed, buoyed up by the luxurious insolence in him, only says—

Why, uncle, what's the matter ?

York tells him that in seizing on Bolingbroke's succession, he is endangering his own; 'you pluck,' he says to the King, 'a thousand dangers on your head.' 'Think what you will,' cries Richard—

we seize into our hands
His plate, his goods, his money, and his lands.

With that, he leaves for Ireland; and Shakespeare ends the scene by deepening our sense of the loneliness of the King and of his certain doom, as we listen to the talk of the nobles—Northumberland, Ross, and Willoby—who are left on the stage. With such a king there is no certainty in property or law. He has attacked their whole Order in attacking one. Moreover, he has pillaged the commons, and his flatterers devour, like caterpillars, the state. 'Let us go to Bolingbroke,' they cry, 'he will redeem the crown from pawn.'

The next scene doubles the same impression. The Queen, in Shakespeare's mystic way, feels beforehand the coming trouble—

Some unborn sorrow, ripe in fortune's womb,
Is coming towards me, and my inward soul
With nothing trembles ; at some thing it grieves
More than with parting from my lord the King.

And Shakespeare is so interested in this experience of presentiment, that he analyses it in a long conversation. Green breaks in on this quiet scene with the dreadful news of Bolingbroke's arrival, of all the great lords who have gathered to his standard. York follows, crying treason, but conscious of his inability to meet it. The weakness of his character, in which Shakespeare makes a fresh sketch of the weakness which is so great a part of his subject, appears in every speech. 'I know not what to do,' he cries. 'The King is my kinsman and my king. Bolingbroke is also my kinsman, and he is wronged. I am torn between them,'

Then Bushy, Green, and Bagot, the king's flatterers, are left alone. They know their doom is at hand. They bid farewell; farewell for ever. All is over. The first division of the play is done. The rest is the working out of Richard's ruin. The reader sees the ruin as if

it were already accomplished; and then, so vivid is its presentation, he also sees, in his mind's eye, the lonely figure of Richard, far away in Ireland, vaguely wandering; who, unconscious of what he has done, is coming back to death; scarcely one friend left in England, and the only lovers of his person flying for their lives; York, his regent, wavering in loyalty, his queen in sad retirement—a blind pathetic figure on whom the shadow of fate lies dark and deep. Even when he is not on the stage his solitary figure thus dominates the play.

In these early historical plays, Shakespeare, clinging too much to history, does not weave his characters so closely and so dramatically into one another as he does afterwards. Richard II. and Richard III. stand, for the most part, apart from and above the rest, and develop almost independently of the other characters. Nor are the secondary characters less isolated from the play of other characters upon them. In this play Bolingbroke is himself alone, so is York, so is Northumberland, so is the Queen. Only Gaunt is inwoven with the others, in reciprocating thought and action. It seems as if Shakespeare at first felt, as he read his history, that the personal character of a king or a great noble was everything in those times; that it made or marred a state. And he drew that fact into its conclusions in the two Richard plays. But, as he went on thinking, he felt that this could not be quite true. Men were not really so isolated from their fellows. Their character was not only developed by events, but by their clash with other men or women. And he changed his method. In *Henry IV.*, in *Henry V.*, in *King John*, and afterwards in the Roman history plays, the leading characters are closely influenced by, and inwoven with, other characters. And the result is that each character, unlike Richard II. or Richard III., becomes more various, more complex, more than it

originally knew itself to be; not the impersonation of one passion, one vice, or one goodness, but also the presentation of the infinite variety which lies hid in each personality; of the unexpected elements which appear, to our surprise, in men and women whom we think we know, at the touch of new events, at the touch of other characters than their own.

That was a great change in the dramatic development of Shakespeare as a writer of historical plays. I say of historical plays, because he had already reached this point in preceding plays not on historical subjects, as, for example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, where all the characters, down to the Nurse, so act and react on one another that fresh evolution continually takes place in each character. It was this which Shakespeare added to the historical plays which followed *Richard II.* and *Richard III.* The lonely dominance of a single character is no longer to be found, except, perhaps, but greatly modified, especially by his close relation to his mother, in *Coriolanus*.

When we meet Richard next, on his return from Ireland, he is a doomed man, brought face to face with the inevitable results of his folly. No change is wrought as yet in his conceit of kingship or in his weakness. But a twofold change has been wrought in him by the sorrow and dismay of the overthrow which has whirled him from the top to the bottom of the world. The first change is that the insolence, the rudeness, the riotous thoughtlessness, the blindness and folly, which marked him in the first scenes, begin to vanish away. The real amiability, gentleness, sentimentality, affectionateness of the man appear—those qualities for which he was loved by the Queen and his friends. The 'sweet guest,' 'the sweet Richard,' of the Queen takes shape. We see what he would have been, had he never been a king, never been

spoilt by the unlimited power which was too greatly charged with temptation for his native weakness to resist.

This change is common in similar circumstances. But the second change is uncommon, and illustrates Shakespeare's desire to carry Richard's character into variety, to give it originality. He adds poetic passion to the King. The shock has awakened in Richard the imagination and passion which his comfortable luxury had kept in slumber. Yet, the weakness of his nature prevents the poetry Shakespeare has put into his mouth from being great. It is half-frenzied, crying like a lost child, wild with self-pity, loose and vagrant in thought, ineffectual with rage and pride; but it is alive with images, with a constant stream of ideas, with rapid changes, and is frequently conducted by the logic of the imagination to a finished close, as in the passage on page 88. This is an amazing change from the Richard who presides over the duel, or stands by the deathbed of Gaunt, and it makes him profoundly interesting. We give him now the admiration and sympathy which we give to an imperfect genius, however weak may be his win. He is now outside the common herd of kings, and enters the royal realm of art; most like some wild poet who has a natural weakness of character which prevents excellence, and whom sore trouble of his own making besets; out of which trouble he draws the subjects and the bewildered wailing of his verse.

A third change, a moral change, is afterwards represented—so full of ideas is Shakespeare, so attached to Richard's character. The poetic power of the King continues to the end, but it loses its wildness, because his character loses its weakness. Shakespeare lifts, as we shall see, Richard's character above itself. But this moral change has not yet taken place, only the first two changes already mentioned. The King's weakness still remains, though his imagination has awakened. And one idea of

his prideful past clings closely to him, till it is beaten out of him by successive blows—his sense of the divinity of kingship. 'England herself,' he cries, 'her very soil and flowers, her animals, her stones, must take their part against rebellion';

This earth shall have a feeling and these stones
Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king
Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms.

Nay, God Himself is on the side of anointed kings—

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm from an anointed king ;
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord.
For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel.

So high he flies in the weakness of pride. The next moment, with equal weakness, he is hopeless; hearing from Salisbury that his Welsh army has abandoned him. The next moment, spurred by Aumerle's reproach—

Comfort, my liege, remember who you are;

he flies as high as before

Awake, thou sluggard majesty 1 Thou sleepest.
Is not the king's name twenty thousand names ?
Arm, arm, my name I A puny subject strikes
At thy great glory. Look not to the ground,
Ye favourites of a king ; are we not high ?
High be our thoughts :

Fine words, to which Sir Stephen Scroop brings news of dire calamity. Then Richard, plunged again into despondency, unloads his weakness in a flux of words. I quote them; they prove that he has realised at last his folly in the past, his weakness in the present. They prove more—they prove that the imaginative poetic element, the dreamy sentiment of his real nature, has now taken command. He is henceforward the reflective

poet of many words; never the man of action, never the man with an aim, never Bolingbroke.

Of comfort no man speak :
 Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs;
 Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
 Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth ;
 Let's choose executors and talk of wills :
 And yet not so—for what can we bequeath
 Save our deposed bodies to the ground ?
 Our lands, our lives, and all are Bolingbroke's,
 And nothing can we call our own but death,
 And that small model of the barren earth
 Which serves as paste and cover of our bones.
 For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
 And tell sad stories of the death of kings :
 How some have been depos'd, some slain in war,
 Some haunted by the ghosts they have depos'd,
 Some poison'd by their wives, some sleeping kill'd ;
 All murder'd ; for within the hollow crown
 That rounds the mortal temples of a king
 Keeps Death his court, and there the an tick sits,
 Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp ;
 Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
 To monarchise, be fear'd, and kill with looks,
 Infusing him with self and vain conceit
 As if this flesh which walls about our life
 Wore brass impregnable ; and humour'd thus
 Comes at the last, and with a little pin
 Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king !
 Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood
 With solemn reverence : throw away respect,
 Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty,
 For you have but mistook me all this while :
 I live with bread like you, feel want,
 Taste grief, need friends : subjected thus,
 How can you say to me I am a king ?

Carlisle, Aumerle, urge him to deeds on hearing this. And he lifts his heart again. For the moment the ague-fit of fear is overblown. But, when he hears that his uncle York is gone over to the foe, it is the final blow. The up-and-down of his bewildered passion has passed away. Despair is now his only bedfellow.

Over against this excited and wavering man is set the

cool, steadfast irian, with the single aim. Bolingbroke wins the day, but he is not the protagonist of the play. His presence, now that he is again brought face to face with Richard, is used by Shakespeare, not so much to display his character, as to expand the wild, feeble, sentimental character of the King.

We have met Bolingbroke twice before; in the scene between him and Mowbray, and in the scene where he is exiled. In the first he is loud-voiced, somewhat of a blusterer, without the politic courtesy of his after manners. But he may have exaggerated his attack on Mowbray in order to conceal from the crowd what his words really meant—a veiled attack on the King, through Mowbray, for the murder of Gloucester. Mowbray blusters also, but it is the bluster of guilt, side-glancing also at the King, who has with him plotted the murder.

In the second scene Bolingbroke is quite different, quite self-contained. He speaks to the King whom he despises with covert sarcasm. At heart he is vengeful for Gloucester's death, angry with himself, sorry for his father, indignant with the King's treatment of England—but nothing of these passions appears without. The needs of the hour control his soul; and his thirst for power is curbed into waiting. He is content to believe in himself and his fate. Exiled, he knows he will return, though exile galls him to the core. He listens quietly to his father who, out of his long experience, and in the coldness of old age, tries to convince him that exile is nothing to the philosophic man—'Think you are not exiled, and you are not,' But Bolingbroke, as unimaginative as Richard is imaginative, who knows what he is, where he is, and what he means, with absolute clearness, disperses the old man's unreality. Exile not exile by thinking it is not!

O ! who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus 1

Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
 By bare imagination of a feast ?
 Or wallow naked in December snow
 By thinking on fantastic summer's heat ?
 O, no ! the apprehension of the good
 Gives but the greater feeling to the worse.

A full revelation of his practical, clear-sighted, steady character. 'Let ine come home to plain fact,' it seems to say; and then we know that Richard, who never sees the facts around him, will be broken to pieces when he meets Bolingbroke.¹

He meets him now. Bolingbroke, playing his politic game, making no step forward till he has secured his last, luring by a gracious humility Northumberland, York, Percy, to his side, all things to all men, hiding his determined aim to gain the crown, sends a humble message to Richard. 'On both my knees I kiss King Richard's hand. Only to win back my lands, to reverse my banishment am I come,' Yet, in the midst of these meek words, a certain fury once breaks out, born of the wrath and fixed purpose that he hides beneath them—a subtle touch of Shakespeare's—

If not, I 'll use the advantage of my power,
 And lay the summer's dust with showers of blood
 Rain'd from the wounds of slaughter'd Englishmen.

Northumberland bears this message to the King upon the castle wall. Shakespeare, to lift us into pity, makes Richard look like a king; his eye, like an eagle's,' lightens forth controlling majesty'; and this pity gathers closely

¹ It is worth saying that Shakespeare makes the patriotism of the father descend to the son. Bolingbroke ends the scene in this way—

Then, England's ground, farewell; sweet soil adieu;
 My mother, and my nurse, that bears me yet!

Nor is Richard less fond of his country. When ho lands from Ireland he cries—

I weep for joy
 To stand upon my kingdom once again;
 Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand.

round him from this moment; accompanies him to London, to Pomfret, to his death. We forgive the past for the sake of the piteous present. Insolent majesty we resented, but compassion waits on ruined majesty.

What is most pathetic in the castle scene is the inability of its passion. Richard unloads his heart in fluent feebleness till we are touched with contempt. But the contempt is lessened by the imagination in his words. How sensitive they are, every tense nerve thrilling through them; how full of pitiful, half-frantic poetry! He stands at first on his divine right as king. God omnipotent will be his avenger; then he cries that his England will be devastated; her maid-pale peace be changed to scarlet indignation—and in the prophecy Shakespeare means us to presage the Civil Wars which Henry's usurpation will begin. From this high cry he falls, bending to Bolingbroke's desire, and, having yielded, regrets his shame with bitter passion—

O God ! O God ! that e'er this tongue of mine,
 That laid the sentence of dread banishment
 On yond proud man, should take it off again
 With words of sooth. O ! that I were as great
 As is my grief, or lesser than my name,
 Or that I could forget what I have been,
 Or not remember what I must be now.
 Swell'st thou, proud heart ?

He sees Bolingbroke draw near, and the wild, imaginative self-pity, indignation, and fear of what will be, breaks into a storm of self-revealing words—

What must the king do now ? Must he submit ?
 The king shall do it: must he be depos'd ?
 The king shall be contented : must he lose
 The name of king ? o' God's name, let it go :
 I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
 My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
 My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
 My figur'd goblets for a dish of wood,
 My sceptre for a palmer's walking-staff,

My subjects for a pair of carvea saints,
 And my large kingdom for a little grave,
 A little little grave, an obscure grave ;
 Or I 'll be buried in the king's highway,
 Some way of common trade, where subjects' feet
 May hourly trample on their sovereign's head ;
 For on my heart they tread now whilst I live ;
 And buried once, why not upon my head ?
 Aumerle, thou weep'st, my tender-hearted cousin !
 We 'll make foul weather with despised tears ;
 Our sighs and they shall lodge the summer corn,
 And make a dearth in this revolting land.
 Or shall we play the wantons with our woes,
 And make some pretty match with shedding tears ?
 As thus ; to drop them still upon one place,
 Till they have fretted us a pair of graves
 Within the earth ; and, there inlaid : ' There lies
 Two kinsmen digged their graves with weeping eyes.'
 Would not this ill do well ? Well, well, I see
 I talk but idly and you laugh at me.

Exhausted by this ebb and flow of passion, but having freed his soul by it, he meets Bolingbroke with the dignity a doomed man borrows from the belief that all is over, with the sarcasm and the courage which are born in a weak man when he feels that the worst has come; and passes, at Bolingbroke's command, to London.

This to and fro of excitement and depression, soaring and sinking,—and behind it Richard's amazed self-pity, and behind that, our deep pity felt through Shakespeare's pity for one so inevitably mauled by moral law, touched too into sombre colour by our half-contempt for him, and into wild, delicate, sunset colour by our sympathy with his fantastic imagination—are, in this wonderful series of passages, as penetrating, as pathetic as any in the work of Shakespeare.

The act ends with that gentle scene in the Duke of York's garden, where the Queen and her ladies come to breathe the air. It is Shakespeare's dramatic way, after the turmoil and the tempest, to place us in a quiet place, and in quiet thought. It is, he thinks, the way of human

life to do so with us. But he does not leave in it his subject. Rather, he resumes the whole of the previous action of the play, and anticipates its close, in the allegory the gardener makes. The garden is England. The gardener is the King; the fruit-trees are the nobles; the herbs and flowers the people; and the weeds and caterpillars those who devour the state. The gardener and his aids, in their walled quiet, discuss what is good government, and what is not; that is, they discuss that which forms one of the underlying motives of the play itself, and of the whole series of plays down to the close of *Richard III*. And admirably it is done. The serious, philosophic talk of the gardener is set with natural art between the pretty interchange of thought of the Queen and her ladies and the sorrowful break from her ambushade of the Queen when she hears the gardener blame the King—

O I I am press'd to death through want of speaking.

What, thought Shakespeare, are kings and queens and the quarrels of great nobles to this honest quiet workman who does with vital interest the work he enjoys, who has no foolish resentment against the great folk, even when they abuse him ! Nothing but pity stirs his heart.¹ With a delicate sympathy for the Queen and the woman, with the reflective sentiment of one who lives far away from the world, he plants in her memory a bed of herbs whose nature will recall her sorrow and her fate. The lines are exquisitely fitted to the case, the scene, and the man—

Poor queen ! so that thy state might be no worse,
I would my skill were subject to thy curse.
Here did she fall a tear; here, in this place,
I 'll set a bank of rue, sour herb of grace;
"Rue, even for ruth, here shortly shall be seen,
In the remembrance of a weeping queen.

¹ It would be well to compare this passage with the scene in Sir Walter Scott's *Abbot* between Mary of Scotland and the gardener of Bhnkhoolie, who has been, in old days, the Abbot of St. Mary's. The one is as much a piece of genius as the other.

The scene at the beginning of the fourth act in Westminster Hall seems needless, a drag on the movement of the play. The only excuses I can find for it are, first, that it forms an introduction to the entrance of King Richard who is the centre of interest; and secondly, that it reveals those elements of disturbance, lying underneath the seeming peace of the usurpation, which in the succeeding plays bring about the Civil Wars. It is filled with the violent quarrels and fierce speech of hot-headed nobles, We anticipate, as we hear them, rebellion and battle. And this anticipation is enforced by the Bishop of Carlisle, who, indignant at Richard's deposition as violating the divine right of kings, foretells the Civil Wars in a speech which is remembered in *Henry IV.*, when the king draws near to death. The deposition of Richard is the source of the doom that overshadows the following plays. If you crown Bolingbroke, says the Bishop—

let me prophesy,
 The blood of English shall manure the ground
 And future ages groan for this foul act;
 Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
 And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
 Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound ;
 Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny
 Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd
 The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls
 O ! if you rear this house against this house,
 It will the woefullest division prove
 That ever fell upon this cursed earth.
 Prevent it, resist it, let it not be so,
 Lest child, child's children cry against you 'woe !'

It is a passage which suggests that Shakespeare had already conceived the whole series as one drama.

Then the King enters. Shakespeare has evidently spent so much trouble over this scene that he has overdone his work. He has introduced that spectacular scene with the mirror which is quite unnecessary, which

sins against the 'Not too much,' and which, worst of all, not only lowers our pity for Richard because it exhibits his theatrical folly in public, but also degrades the character of Bolingbroke below the level it keeps in the rest of the play. In permitting this antic of Richard, Bolingbroke lays him open to a cruel mockery which his terrible sorrow neither deserves nor ought to have. I wonder Shakespeare's exquisite delicacy towards human nature could have permitted it. Nor is it the only stain on the scene. Shakespeare should have felt that Northumberland's demand that the king, round whom the compassion of all gentle folk should gather, must read out, and sign the record of, all his crimes and follies, was a brutal demand. It is also needless for the dramatic action, and, if it be done to increase the pity for Richard which ought to preside over the scene, is a clumsy way of doing this. There is pity enough. It needs no false heightening. There is more of pathos in this short phrase of Richard's than in all these tricks (from whatever source they were borrowed) to make it keener,

- BOL. I thought you had been willing to resign.
 K. RICH. My crown, I am ; but still my griefs are mine.
 You may my glories and my state depose,
 But not my griefs ; still am I king of those.

It is enough. The words with which afterwards Richard pours out his anger, his misery, are weaker than these. He is, throughout the scene, like a wild animal trapped in the wood, and crying in the night, while the free beasts pass him by and mock at his distress. The scene is piteous; yet we may wish it had been shorter, and less sensational.

The fifth act now begins, and closes all. The last stroke of fate falls on the King; and his death is the first stroke of a new fate which broods over Bolingbroke, and the work of which is wrought out through the two parts

of *Henry IV.* The murder of Richard, the blood of every noble, slaughtered to clear the path of Bolingbroke to the throne, cry for vengeance. The dragon's seed is sown. It springs up finally into the armed men of the Civil War, when father slew the son and son the father. Richard, in the hour of his doom, sees the beginning of this and prophesies it to Northumberland. Again Shakespeare seems careful to prepare us for what is coming in *Henry IV.*; seems as if he already looked forward to the large design of which we have spoken.

Northumberland, thou ladder wherewithal
 The mounting Bohngbroke ascends my throne,
 The time shall not be many hours of age
 More than it is, ere foul sin gathering head
 Shall break into corruption. Thou shalt think,
 Though he divide the realm and give thee half,
 It is too little, helping him to all;
 And he shall think that thou, which know'st the way
 To plant unrightful kings, wilt know again,
 Being ne'er so little urg'd, another way
 To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne.
 The love of wicked friends converts to fear ;
 That fear to hate, and hate turns one or both
 To worthy danger, and deserved death.

Another preparation for *Henry IV.* is also in this act (Sc. iii.). It is the short talk between Percy and Bolingbroke about him who is the Prince of Wales in *Henry IV.* The dissolute, unthrifty, wanton boy who lives with Falstaff is sketched for us, and then his higher future in *Henry V.* 'I see,' says his lather—

As dissolute as desperate ; yet, through both,
 I see some sparkles of a better hope, which elder days
 May happily bring forth.

I wonder, when I read these preparation passages, whether Shakespeare, who was so careful in his art, did not insert them in this play after he had written *Henry IV.*

One word must be said about the second and third scenes, in which York plays so curious a part. The

second is, of course, remarkable for the fine and well-known description of Bolingbroke riding into London. It serves to lift the figure of Richard into even a higher realm of pity. But the third, where York begs the death of his own son from the King, offends the natural instinct of the heart, and is one of the few examples of this in Shakespeare; and though the scene, where Aumerle, York, and the Duchess rush one after another into the closet of the King, may be a good piece of stage effect, it is all the worse for that. It troubles with mere sensationalism the solemn atmosphere of fate which hangs over the death of Richard.

We now come to the representation of Richard in this final act, which opens with his meeting the Queen on his way to the Tower. We read the scene, and are at first amazed. This is not the Richard whom we have known. He is all changed. Shakespeare, who has conceived Richard's original character as of good and loving stuff underneath his native weakness, the Queen's 'fair rose and map of honour,' the 'beauteous inn where no hard-favoured grief should lodge'; who had then represented his weakness as rising, through irresponsible power and luxury, over the goodness and love into vanity, blindness, and insolence; who had then, by terrible misfortune's siege, made him, while he retained his weakness, and indeed through his weakness, into the semblance of a fantastic poet, has now made a further change. He felt that Richard, since he was originally good, since he was betrayed by weakness of will but not by native viciousness into his faults, could not pass through so fierce a torrent of sorrow and misfortune without losing what was base and weak in him, and recovering whatever might be noble and strong. He is purged of his weakness. He is purged of his selfishness. He is purged of his blindness. He is purged of his insolentia. He speaks no longer with

a flux of words. All he says is brief and clear. He sees with equal steadiness the past, the present, and the future. His love is no longer a feeble sentiment. The parting with his Queen is marked by strength and self-control deeply set in love, and with the wisdom of death in every word. He knows he is the victim of Fate, and he knows why—

Join not with grief, fair woman, do not so,
To make my end too sudden : learn, good soul,
To think our former state a happy dream ;
From which awak'd, the truth of what we are
Shows us but this. I am sworn brother, sweet,
To grim Necessity, and he and I
Will keep a league till death.

Can any words, any temper, be more unlike his previous words and temper? He is quite clear as to what the Queen should do; and sets her in the way to do it, briefly and fully. When the Queen, seeing he is changed, and mistaking his brave acceptance of the inevitable, urges him to fierceness:

What 1 is my Richard both in shape and mind
Transform'd and weakened ? Hath Bolingbroke deposed
Thine intellect ? hath he been in thy heart ?
The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw
And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage
To be o'erpowered;

he answers, out of the grave atmosphere of death which wraps him so closely, in quiet words, full of peace and beauty. All that was weak and foolish has passed away, but his lovingness is deepened by the change. His parting words are lovely with tenderness and sweet remembrance.

Nor does Shakespeare, in that last scene in the dungeon, where the murder is wrought, make him lower than this. His long soliloquy is not only descriptive of the place where he sits—Shakespeare never omits to paint for the intellectual eye his scenery—it is, in its gentle philosophy, its sensitive ear, its poetic symbolism, its love of music, and its kindly irony, not un-

worthy of a man, and of a man in the very shadow of death; and its close is beautiful with pathetic and lonely passion. The music which at first he loved, now maddens him; he bids it cease—yet—

Yet blessing on his heart that gives it me !
For 'tis a sign of love, and love to Richard
Is a strange brooch in this all-hating world.

The tender, pathetic cry of this is deepened when, on a sudden, the groom enters and tells how his heart yearned when he saw Bolingbroke ride on roan Barbary, Richard's favourite—

Rode he on Barbary ? Tell me, gentle friend,
How went he under him ?

It is only Shakespeare and Walter Scott who are capable of these divine things. At this, and while Richard is lost in recollection, the murderers break in, and all is over. Richard dies sword in hand,

As full of valour as of royal blood.

The work of justice is done; the punishment of ill government exacted; the fatal result of weakness, when strength was needed, reached; and pity alone remains, and the sorrowful tale to move the hearts of men. Richard himself bequeaths that legacy; and no better close can be given to all we have passed through than his own words, as lovely as they are sad and grave—

Good sometime queen, prepare thee hence for France,
Think I am dead, and that even here thou tak'st,
As from my death-bed, my last living leave.
In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire
With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales
Of woeful ages, long ago betid :
And ere thou bid good-night, to quit their grief,
Tell thou the lamentable tale of me,
And send the hearers weeping to their beds:
For why the senseless brands will sympathise
The heavy accent of thy moving tongue,
And in compassion weep the fire out;
And some will mourn in ashes, some coal-black,
For the deposing of a rightful king.

IV

RICHARD III

Richard III. completes the vast drama, carried on through eight plays, which was begun in *Richard II.* It is, as it were, the fifth act, the winding up of the varied threads of the action of ninety years, the coming home to roost of all their curses, hatreds, and crimes, the accomplishment of the work of avenging Justice, and, in Richmond's victory, the initiation of a new England, purged from guilt.

In *Richard III.*, then, the long tragedy is closed. It brings to death those who, having torn the heart out of their country, have tried to govern England for their own advance, and sacrificed to that the welfare of the people. Richard's figure embodies all the civil evil in himself. He is it, incarnate; and he dominates the play. Over against him, and towering, is Margaret, who is the embodied Destiny of the play. Her worn and wasted figure hovers over it like a bird of doom. Her curse pervades its atmosphere and enters into all its action. One by one the guilty—Clarence, Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Buckingham, all save Richard; one by one the innocent—the two boy-princes, Anne, Elizabeth, are made to feel her presence in the hour they meet their fate, and to recognise in her the impersonated vengeance of natural law in the quarrel which has defiled England with fraternal blood. Richard himself is made her avenger in his bloody passage to the throne, and having finished this work, he is himself destroyed by the evil he has

done. Nothing can be finer than this knitting of all the avenging forces round the supernatural image of Margaret, who is herself the prophetess and the victim of Justice. It clasps all the persons and all the action of the play into unity. It incarnates the judgment of moral law.

Within this main purpose of Justice working out the penalties due to those hatreds of great families which in their exercise injure the people—the conception which is at the back of *Romeo and Juliet*—is the final evolution of Richard's character and of his doom. When this play begins that character has been already fully formed. His long soliloquy in the third part of *Henry VI.* (Act in. Sc. ii.) is Shakespeare's sketch of what Richard is when the new drama opens. The passion at the root of him is, like Macbeth's, ambition for the crown, with tenfold more steadfastness in ambition than Macbeth possessed. Macbeth's ambition does not deliberately premeditate the murder of Duncan. It may have occurred to him at intervals, but it is only a sudden opportunity which lures him into it. When he is in it, he debates the crime, hesitates, fears, thinks of his honour, is imaginative with dark superstition. None of these things touch Richard. He plots all his murders beforehand with a certain joy, with unblenching resolution. He has no hesitation, nor does he debate with his honour, conscience, fear, or affection. He condemns his brothers as well as his enemies. Every means to his aim is right. 'Would,' he cries, 'Edward were wasted, marrow, bones, and all,' and Clarence, Henry, and young Edward dead. They are in my way, they shall be cleared away. What other pleasure in the world but sovereignty is there for me? Love? Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb. Therefore 'I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,' Shall I attain it with all those lives between it and me?

And I, like one lost in a thorny wood,
 That rents the thorns and is rent with the thorns,
 Seeking a way and straying from the way ;
 Not knowing how to find the open air,
 But toiling desperately to find it out,
 Torment myself to catch the English crown :
 And from that torment I will free myself,
 Or hew my way out with a bloody axe.
 Why, I can smile, and murder while I smile,
 And cry, 'Content,' to that which grieves my heart,
 And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
 And frame my face to all occasions.
 I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
 I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk ;
 I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
 Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,
 And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.
 I can add colours to the chameleon,
 Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
 And set the murd'rous Machiavel to school.
 Can I do this, and cannot get a crown ?
 Tut! were it further off, I'll pluck it down.

Fierce ambition, cold cunning, finished hypocrisy, ruthless murder, conscienceless resolve—these are his powers. And he keeps his word, He stabs Prince Edward after the battle with a savage scoff—

Sprawl'st thou ! take that, to end thine agony.

When the others after Tewksbury are talking, he has ridden from the field to London, entered the Tower, and slain King Henry, mocking and rejoicing. And over the dead body of the King he plans the murder of his brother Clarence—

Clarence, thy turn is next, and then the rest,
 Counting myself but bad till I be best.

A masterful person whose iron will makes and leads events! He is, on the contrary, the servant of Justice, and Shakespeare rarely did a closer piece of work than when, without any special insisting on this, he makes us conscious of it. Richard thinks he makes and guides the storm in which so many lives are shipwrecked. He is

really the chief victim of the storm, driven from shoal to shoal, till he is wrecked inevitably.

But the most remarkable thing in his character, as Shakespeare conceived it, is that he is devoid of the least emotion of love. Not one trace of it exists, and it places him outside of humanity. It is not the absence of conscience which is at the root of his evil. Of course, he who has no love has no true sense of right and wrong, and the absence of conscience in Richard is rooted in the absence of love in him. The source of all his crime is the unmodified presence of self alone. As he stabs Henry, he cries—

Down, down to hell; and say, I sent thee thither,
I, that have neither pity, love, nor fear.

This creation of a character absolutely devoid of love is deliberately done by Shakespeare. The Richard of the original play of *Henry VI.* is not without some power or grace of love. Ambition for the crown is also the leading element in this Richard's character; these lines which must be Marlowe's tell us that;

And, father, do but think
How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown ;
Within whose circuit is Elysium,
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy.

But such an ambition would not alone make him the monster he is in *Richard III.*—a man incapable of love. It does not: he feels a passionate grief when he thinks that his father is dead. He has no joy till he hears he is alive. His very revenge is coloured by love: it is the wrath of affection. What feeling of love this earlier Richard has is natural, wholly unlike the semblance of it which Shakespeare puts upon the lips of the Richard of this play, who himself mocks at the words of love which he uses. Nor do we see anything

in the original Richard of the mask of hypocrisy our Richard wears; nothing of the intellectual power, the mastery of guile, the love of guile for its own sake, the chuckling pleasure in his cunning, the deliberate contempt of God and man, the deliberate self-contempt, the deep scorn of women because they loved, the pitilessness, the self-isolation—all of which Shakespeare has added to the Richard of this play; and none of which could have been so complete, so unmodified, if any touch of love had belonged to his character.

This is a unique attempt in Shakespeare's work. Richard is entirely isolated by this absence of love from humanity. He is deprived even of a great number of the passions—all those which are derived from love or opposed to love. Richard has no good passions, but neither has he the evil passions of hatred, envy, or jealousy. Any passion that he has—if the word passion may justly be applied to ambition—is the servant of his intellect. Of course, without love, and the qualities that depend on it, he has no conscience, no repentance, no fear of God. What seems at times remorse in him at the end is the agony of failure, is fury at the breaking down of his intellectual power. When a sense of the existence of conscience occurs to him, it intrudes in dreams only, not in real life. Awake, he passes from one crime to another without one touch of emotion, without one moment of morality.

This separates him even from Iago, whose malignity is partly accounted for, who at least attempts to account for his curious, self-gratulating pleasure in torturing Othello by pretending jealousy. This also accounts for the unhesitating swiftness with which crime follows crime in Richard's course, which otherwise would be unnatural. Macbeth before Duncan's murder is not half so rapid. The sense of honour which serves Macbeth for conscience

makes him pause again and again before the murder, but Richard never hesitates. Old affections, admiration for Duncan's character, the chieftain's sense of honour, hinder Macbeth's quickness in guilt. Macbeth has some love in his heart; he loves his wife; he would not have murdered Clarence nor rejoiced when Edward died. He was naturally full of the milk of human-kindness of which Richard had not one drop. When he acts swiftly, and he is hurried by his love for his wife as well as by his ambition, his haste is lest his sense of honour, of which he is always conscious, should get the better of him. It is only when he has realised that honour is irrevocably violated that he becomes the reckless murderer. Guilt is not his natural element, because he is not mere intellect unbalanced by any affection. One with Richard in ambition, he differs from him by the presence of love in his nature. Richard is loveless intellect, ambitious of unchallenged power—absolute self with cunning—an awful solitary.

Shakespeare felt obliged to account for this supernatural devilry in man; and he does so by making Richard a monster from his mother's womb.

At his birth Nature rebelled;

The owl shriek'd at thy birth, an evil sign ;
The night-crow cried, aboding luckless time ;
Dogs howl'd, and hideous tempests shook down trees !
The raven rook'd her on the chimney's top,
And chattering pies in dismal discord sung.
Thy mother felt more than a mother's pain,
And yet brought forth less than a mother's hope ;
To wit, an indigest deformed lump,
Not like the fruit of such a goodly tree.

And his mother confirms the tale when she lays her curse upon him. But Shakespeare does not think this enough to motive the unnaturalness of the character. Therefore he further dwells on Richard's belief that all the world hates him for his misshapen person, and that

heaven—the only touch of religion in Richard—has made him in its anger;

Then, since the heavens have shap'd my body so,
 Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it.
 I have no brother, I am like no brother :
 And this word 'love,' which grey-beards call divine,
 Be resident in men like one another
 And not in me : I am myself alone.

'I am myself alone'; that is the keynote of Richard's character as conceived by Shakespeare; intellect without love, like Goethe's Mephistopholes; and by the absence of love outside of human nature.

Be resident in men like one another,
 And not in me.

It is this incapacity to even conceive love which makes him try to do things which would seem impossible to any one who loved. No other man could have wooed Lady Anne as he did, or asked Elizabeth for her daughter, yet both are not out of character in one who is wholly ignorant of love.

What though I kill'd her husband and her father,
 The readiest way to make the wench amends
 Is to become her husband and her father ;

is a speech incredible on the lips of any one who has ever loved. It is only when he has won Anne that he is astonished; and in the astonishment a faint gleam of belief in the existence of moral right and wrong for others comes upon him. 'She has God,' he says, 'and her conscience against her.' But this only serves to make him proud of his own isolation in lovelessness from other men. His scorn of himself and of others, and the mixture of bitterness, pride, contempt, fierce self-knowledge, and isolation in the long soliloquy which begins

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd ?

is a splendid example of the power by which Shake-

speare felt and shared within himself a thousand others than himself, and even dared, as here, to paint the nature of one who was set aside by him from all mankind.

This is followed by that masterly scene in the palace where Richard, the lord here of politic intellect, puts himself forward as 'the plain man,' and then as 'too soft and pitiful and childishly foolish for the world'; and so sets all his enemies at loggerheads, plays the interests and passions of each against those of the others, and makes use even of Margaret, the foe of all, to develop and win his schemes. His soulless cunning is triumphant, and he has a certain pleasure, even joy, in his devilment, such as we have in the unhindered exercise of any natural force we possess. In his case, however, the force exercised by absolute want of love is an unnatural force; and the result is—that the will and the intellectual cunning which exercise it are finally broken down. It is lovelessness which spoils his cunning, makes him make mistakes, and finally destroys his aim. Again we get back to the root of his character; he is self alone.

The second idea of the drama comes in (Act. I. Sc. iii.) with the presence of Margaret, the incarnate Fury of the Civil Wars, who has been their incessant urger, and is now the Pythoness of their punishment. 'Small joy have I,' cries Elizabeth, 'in being England's queen,' And Margaret, her first entrance into the action, mutters from the background—

And lessen'd be that small, God, I beseech him.

She is a terrible figure, the Fate and Fury together of the play. She does nothing for its movement; she is outside of that. But she broods above its action, with hands outstretched in cursing. Worn, like 'a wrinkled witch,' her tongue edged with bitter fire, with all the

venom of the Civil Wars bubbling in her heart; grey-haired, tall, with the habit of command, she has not been, like Richard, without love or exiled from human nature. But all she loved are dead. She has outlived humanity, and passed into an elemental Power, hopeless, pitiless, joyless save for the joy of vengeance. It is not till she finds the Duchess of York and Edward's queen sunk in their hopeless pain that she feels herself at one, even for a moment, with any human creature. She sits down and curses with them, but soon leaves them, as one removed; towering over them as she flings back on them her parting curse, incensed that she has been even for that moment at one with their feeble wrath. Her eloquence is that of primeval sorrow and hate. Her curses have the intensity of an immortal's passion.

'O, well skilled in curses,' cries the Queen Elizabeth, 'teach me how to curse,' 'Life is her shame,' Margaret says, but she will not die till she has vengeance. 'Tis the only thing which brings a smile to her withered lips. And her vengeance is felt, like an actual presence in the air, by all who die. Shakespeare takes pains to mark that out. She is not only Margaret and hate to them, but the spirit though whom divine justice works its wrath upon them. And when she sees the end, she passes away, still alive, like one who cannot die; departs in an awful joy—

These English woes will make me smile in France.

Immediately after her first appearance, the curse and punishment begin to act. Richard is left alone on the stage, and the murderers of Clarence enter to receive his command to slay. These are the only persons in the play with whom Richard is at his ease. With murderers he drops his mask. He hails them as if they were comrades;

How now, my hardy, stout-resolved mates I
Are you now going to dispatch this thing ?

I like you, lads ; about your business straight;
Go, go, dispatch.

This murder fills the fourth scene. Shakespeare does not expose it unrelieved. He feels that the passion in the last scene has been too loud and furious, as indeed it has. He therefore lowers the note, and introduces, not to lessen but to deepen the tragedy, the wonderful piteousness, tho wonderful beauty of tho dream of Clarence.

Nevertheless, he does not let loose his main conception. The murder is itself a crime, but it is also part of the great punishment, of the working out of the law that greed produces greed, and the sword the sword. Clarence confesses that his death is morally just.

O God ! if my deep prayers cannot appease thee,
And thou wilt be aveng'd on my misdeeds,
Yet execute thy wrath on me alone.

Immediately, pat on the point, and done in Shakespeare's way of setting over against a grave thought the same thought in a grotesque or ghastly framework, there is now a parody, with a grim earnestness in it, of this same question of the vengeance of conscience. Is there that in us which punishes with thought ? Is there a wrath beyond ourselves ? an imperative command within us ? If so, is it worth regarding ? The murderers debate the question from their rude standpoint, and settle the matter as the robbing and murdering kings and nobles had settled it. They have a warrant for their crime; it is done on command. But these considerations are indifferent, of these conscience might get the better; but the reward, the gain—that conquers conscience; and arguing to and fro with extraordinary variety of base and cunning thought and phrase, they

end by attacking conscience as the most dangerous enemy of states and societies.

SEC. MUEB. 'Zounds ! he dies : I had forgot the reward.

FIRST MURD. Where's thy conscience now ?

SBC. MURD. In the Duke of Gloucester's purse.

I'll not meddle with it; it makes a man a coward; a man cannot steal, but it accuseth him; a man cannot swear, but it checks him; a man cannot lie with his neighbour's wife, but it detects him; 'tis a blushing, shamefast spirit, that mutinies in a man's bosom; it fills one full of obstacles; it made me once restore a purse of gold that I found; it beggars any man that keeps it; it is turned out of all towns and cities for a dangerous thing; and every man that means to live well endeavours to trust to himself and live without it.

This is exactly Richard's point of view, put coarsely. Yet these two are not as bad as Richard. They do feel the pull of conscience. He could not.

The same elements of division appear in the second act. The hatreds of all parties underlie the hollow reconciliation at the deathbed of the King. Buckingham concentrates the falsehood of them all in his perjurious vow. By that falsehood, as a moral matter, his coming death is accounted for. But Shakespeare, though here in his sternest mood, awakens the pity of the audience by the form in which he casts Buckingham's oath. He prays for the very fate which falls upon him. Whenever Buckingham doth turn his hate (he speaks to the Queen) on you or yours

God punish me
With hate in those where I expect most love !
When I have most need to employ a friend,
And most assured that he is a friend,
Deep, hollow, treacherous, and full of guile,
Be he unto me !

And so it falls out. The words make us think of Richard, and Shakespeare answers our thought. 'We only want Gloucester,' says the king,

To make the blessed period of this peace.

He enters, and flings into their false calm, like a shell, the news of the death of Clarence.

Then, Clarence being the first, Edward is the second to feel the judgment which descends on those guilty of the blood of England. His conscience awakens, and he dies, feeling that God's justice is taking hold on men.

It is characteristic of Shakespeare's work that the form of Edward's confession (recalling Clarence and his kindness) throws back a new light of pity on the scene of Clarence's death, and keeps up the continuity of the dramatic action and the dramatic pity. And the pity is made almost terrible by the picture Edward's confession contains of the universal selfishness of the court, where not one has thought of Clarence, only of himself.

My brother kill'd no man ; his fault was thought:

And yet his punishment was bitter death.

Who sued to me for him 1 Who, in my wrath,
KneeFd at my feet, and bade me be advis'd ?

Who spoke of brotherhood ? Who spoke of love ?

Who told me how the poor soul did forsake
The mighty Warwick, and did fight for me ?

Who told me, in the field at Tewksbury,
When Oxford had me down, he rescu'd me,
And said, ' Dear brother, live, and be a king ' V

Who told me, when we both lay in the field
Frozen almost to death, how he did lap me
Even in his garments ; and did give himself,

All thin and naked, to the numb cold night 1
All this from my remembrance brutish wrath

Sinfully pluck'd, and not a man of you
Had so much grace to put it in my mind ! . . .

The proudest of you all

Have been beholding to him in his life,
Yet none of you would once beg for his life.

O G-od ! I fear thy justice will take hold
On me and you and mine and yours for this.

Come, Hastings, help me to my closet. O ! poor Clarence!

Nor is the main scope of the play lost sight of in the next scene between the boys and their aunt and grandam—a quiet moment in this tempest of crime. The fate of

the young princes is shadowed forth in the talk of their cousins. The fate which overgrooms the play is heard in the grief of the women. The gloom is deepened when the Queen enters wailing her husband's death, and she and the Duchess (who, with Margaret, serve the uses, in some sort, of the Greek chorus) toss their sorrow to and fro with the children of Clarence, till the whole world seems full of weeping. Then Gloucester, sheathed in hypocrisy and mocking inwardly the sorrow he has caused, adds poignancy to the tragic pain the audience feels.

The act ends with the arrest by Buckingham and Gloucester of the kinsmen of the Queen. 'Ah me,' she cries, 'I see the ruin of my house'; and then the Duchess, sick even to death of strife and slaughter, gathers together all the woes of the long quarrel as they have touched the house of York.

Accursed and unquiet wrangling days,
How many of you have mine eyes beheld !
My husband lost his life to get the crown,
And often up and down my sons were toss'd,
For me to joy and weep their gain and loss :
And being seated, and domestic broils
Clean over-blown, themselves, the conquerors,
Make war upon themselves ; brother to brother,
Blood to blood, self against self: O ! preposterous
And frantic outrage, end thy damned spleen ;
Or let me die, to look on death no more.

Amidst an astonishing variety of circumstance and character which the Greek dramatists would have repudiated as injurious to unity, the third act keeps close to the tragic development of the work of Justice. The audience knows what fate hangs over the princes on their arrival in London. It expects to have it pre-saged. And it is. Touch after touch, in their graceful prattle, awakes our pity. Some are even put into the mouth of Gloucester. The gallant bearing of the prince,

his hopes to be a famous warrior like Caesar, while his murderer stands by; his misliking of the Tower; the light, peevish, innocent talk of York; his scoff at Gloucester's deformity; the sudden overshadowing of his heart also when he hears of the Tower—all deepen the tragic darkness. And now Richard, having resolved on the murder of the princes, murders all who stand in the way of his design. Yet it is not he who really slays the new victims. It is avenging Justice, wading, as usual, to her conclusion through the blood of the innocent as well as of the guilty. Richard is her blind instrument. Rivers, Grey, Vaughan are now slain, the third, fourth, and fifth after Clarence and Edward who feel the sentence of conscience and the curse of Margaret. Their last words remember her. Next Hastings meets his unexpected fate. While he is talking of Gloucester's friendly face (Shakespeare is at home in these bitter contrasts of life) Gloucester breaks in suddenly, 'Off with his head.' 'He's sudden, if a thing comes in his head,' said King Edward—and Hastings also sees Margaret as he dies. Richard slays them, but Justice holds his sword.

The scenes which follow, where Richard is induced to accept the crown, as it were by force, and where he apparently persuades Elizabeth to give him her daughter, are weakened by their great length, and almost trench on farce. Richard between the two bishops, with the prayer-book in his hand, is ridiculous; and the scene drags on without Shakespeare's crispness, clearness, or concentration of thought. It is a worse blot on the play than the scenes between Richard and Lady Anne, between Richard and Elizabeth. Richard's dissimulation, in spite of the variety of the dramatic talk, seems in these scenes to pass the bounds of nature. Yet it is difficult to find just fault with Shakespeare. It may be that he desired to mark by their strained unnaturalness that

weakness in the intellect of Richard which arises from the absence of love in his character. Intellectual power, without love, grows abnormal, unbalanced, and weak through pride of itself. Nay more, Shakespeare felt that it would not only lose its power, but finally itself. It would be sure to make mistakes in dealing with mankind and with the movements of the world; to overdo its cunning; to end like the plotting of Mephistopheles, in folly and failure. The common-sense of mankind has decided that long ago. In all folklore stories the Devil—intellect without love—is invariably made a hare of in the end.

In the fourth act the coronation of Richard brings about the first movement towards his overthrow. Elizabeth sends Dorset to Richmond, and we scent from afar the ruin of Richard; and, like the rest, she, when anticipating doom, remembers the curse of Margaret.

As the speakers of this scene depart, they are standing in front of the Tower. Shakespeare, who always prepares his audience, does not let these sorrowful women leave the stage without hinting at the murder of the princes, and with an exquisite tenderness speaks—

Stay yet, look back, with me unto the Tower.
Pity, you ancient stones, those tender babes
Whom envy hath immur'd within your walls,
Rough cradle for such little pretty ones !
Rude ragged nurse, old sullen playfellow
For tender princes, use my babies well.
So foolish sorrow bids your stones farewell.

Imagine that! What a playwright was Shakespeare! how effective for the stage is that farewell!

And now, in the next scene (Act iv. Sc. ii.), the disintegration of Richard's intellectual power continues. Anne has already told how in sleep he is not able to beat back superstitious fear. Even his physical courage is then, as we see afterwards, in abeyance

‡ For never yet one hour in his bed
Did I enjoy the golden dew of sleep,
But with his timorous dreams was still awak'd.

! Richard is represented by Shakespeare as without a soul, being without love. But this is when he is awake, and his will at the helm of his life. When he is asleep, Shakespeare, with his belief that in the far background of an evil nature the soul lives, but unknown, unbelieved in, by its possessor, shows how it awakens at night when the will sleeps, and does its work on the unconscious man. Then, and only then, conscience stirs in Richard. Then, and only then, fear besets him. The day-result of this work of the soul at night in Richard is plainly suggested in the dialogue. He is represented at all points as in a state of nervous strain of which he does not know the cause; and this ignorance, irritating the intensity of his wrath with any obstacle, throws not only his intellect, as I have said above, but his management of men and events out of gear. His intellect is no longer clear, for his body is no longer sane. All his powers, even his hypocrisy, are decaying. His doom has begun.

Moreover, he now begins to feel the steady pull of the universe against immoderate crime. To escape this hitherto unknown terror he is driven, as it were by necessity, to add crime to crime. He proposes the death of the princes to Buckingham—'I wish the bastards dead,' Buckingham retreats from this, with a courtier's words—

BUCK. Your grace may do your pleasure.
K. HIGH. Tut, tut 1 thou art all ice, thy kindness freezes.

And this hesitation dooms him—

GATES. The King is angry : see, he gnaws his lip.
K. RICH. I will converse with iron-witted fools
And unrespective boys : none are for me
That look into me with considerate eyes.
High-reaching Buckingham grows circumspect.

And when the princes are dead, Anne his wife shall die,

and he will marry Elizabeth. ' Murder her brothers, and then marry her—uncertain way of gain,'

This is the wild hurry of crime—Justice driving its victim—

But I am in
So far in blood, that sin will pluck on sin :
Tear-falling pity dwells not in this eye.

To double this guilty speed, the news comes of Richmond preparing a power, and the news abides, stings and irritates within him. Its inward insistence breaks out in short soliloquies, even when alone with Buckingham. The accomplished mask-wearer drops his mask; betrays himself. His self-control is giving way; and with that, his intellect fails still more; fails so much that he is touched with superstition. He talks of prophecies—of warnings given by a bard of Ireland. All through this little scene with Buckingham (Act iv. Sc. ii.) he has lost his coolness of temper and his hypocrisy in irritability. His nerve is gone, like Macbeth's, but, also like Macbeth, his courage lives on. The affection is of the mind, not of the body.

And now, just at the turn of things, when Richmond begins to increase and Richard to decrease, Margaret fitly appears for the last time, and at first alone, to concentrate their curse, and hers. Two 'splendid lines introduce the vengeful Queen.

So, now prosperity begins to mellow
And drop into the rotten mouth of death.

To her enter the Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York; and they join in the doom Margaret pronounces on Richard. Had Shakespeare written this scene with his matured power and concentration, it would have been a matchless scene. As it is, it is of an extraordinary force—mightily conceived and shaped. One after another, these three, whose darlings Richard has slain, sit down,

ravished with sorrow, like three Fates, on the earth of England 'unlawfully made drunk with innocent blood,' Hooded, old, grey with grief, are Margaret and the Duchess; Elizabeth, though not yet old, is one with them in sorrow, a prey of time. Under the palace walls, all three, royal yet huddled in the dust, prophesy the wrath and the decrees of justice. They concentrate, not only the misery of their own grief, but all the woe of the Civil Wars, into their speech; and bring the whole weight of their sorrow and sin to a point in Richard, on whom falls their accumulated curse. Margaret rises above the others in the joy of revenge, and leaves them to their session on the earth. 'Forbear,' she cries to Elizabeth, who asks for help in cursing—

Forbear to sleep the night, and fast the day ;
Compare dead happiness with living woe ;
Think that thy babes were fairer than they were,
And he that slew them fouler than he is:
Bettering thy loss makes the bad curser worse :
Revolving this will teach thee how to curse.

Their curse is deep, but it is deepened when Nature herself retreats before it, when it is stronger than motherhood. The scene closes when on Richard's head—who now, in fine dramatic contrast to this almost solitary scene, comes marching by with warlike sound and pomp on his way to overthrow Buckingham—falls his mother's curse. And the curse is a prophecy, as it were, of all his victims will say to him the night before Bosworth field. It is often Shakespeare's habit to anticipate in a short passage a scene which he means to give in full, a sketch of the picture to be completed;

Therefore, take with thee my most grievous curse,
Which, in the day of battle, tire thee more
Than all the complete armour that thou wear'st!
My prayers on the adverse party fight;

And there the little souls of Edward's children
Whisper the spirits of thine enemies
And promise them success and victory.
Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end ;
Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend.

The scene with Elizabeth which follows is of that cunning which overreaches its aim. Richard thinks he has persuaded Elizabeth to give him her daughter—

Belenting fool, and shallow changing woman I

But it is he who has been deceived, he whom the woman has played with. She pretends to consent, but is already in communication with Richmond, to whom she does give her daughter. From this point of view, which I think Shakespeare meant,¹ the unnaturalness of the scene (the far too great length of which is only excused by the impossible effort Richard makes) is modified; and the weakness which has come on Richard's intellect is more than suggested. All is breaking down in him; his self-control, his temper, intelligence, his clear sight of things, his foresight, his power to keep men and subdue them to his will.

The art is excellent with which this is shown in Richard's talk with Catesby, Ratcliff, Stanley, and the messengers. He is no longer the calm, smooth, cautious, deliberate, unimpassioned politician, all his powers held hi hand. He gives half-orders, and stops short, yet thinks he has fully given them, as with Catesby. He gives orders and withdraws them, suspicion darting into his mind, as with Ratcliff—

K. RICH. Catesby, fly to the duke.
GATES. I will, my lord, with all convenient haste.

¹ See Act iv. So. v., where Stanley says to Sir Christopher Urswick Richmond's emissary—

So, get thee gone, commend me to thy lord.
Withal, say that the Queen hath heartily consented
He should espouse Elizabeth her daughter.

- K. RICH. Ratcliff, come hither. Post to Salisbury :
When thou com'st thither,—[To CATESBY] Dull,
unmindful villain,
Why stay'st thou here, and go'st not to the duke ?
- GATES. First, mighty liege, tell me your highness' pleasure,
What from your Grace I shall deliver to him.
- K. RICH. O ! true, good Catesby : bid him levy straight
The greatest strength and power he can make,
And meet me suddenly at Salisbury.
- GATES. I go. [Exit.
- RAT. What, may it please you, shall I do at Salisbury ?
- K. RICH. Why, what would'st thou do there before I go ?
- RAT. Your highness told me I should post before.
[Enter STANLEY.
- K. RICH. My mind is changM.

He flies into a passion with Stanley, but in the end believes in him; yet Stanley is the only one of his followers who is deceiving him. Richmond's name makes him as fierce in words as Macbeth was when his doom had come. The nervous-storm is speaking.

STAN. Richmond is on the seas.

K. RICH. There let him sink and be the seas on him !
White-liver'd runagate ! What doth he there ?

Speech after speech his fury increases. Messenger after messenger comes in with bad news. The third brings good tidings. Richard anticipates it as misfortune, and strikes him down—

Out on ye, owls ! nothing but songs of death.

The furies are upon him.

The fifth act opens with the death of Buckingham. He also feels that divine justice has descended on him. His false oath has come home; and, like the rest, he sees Margaret as he dies.

¹ When he,' quoth she, 'shall split thy heart with sorrow,
Remember Margaret was a prophetess.'

And now all the interest centres around Richard. He has been used by Justice to punish the rest. His

own doom (now that he is with himself in a terrible solitude) is close at hand. Richmond, who is here only a shadow, brings with him the just sentence of God.

‘ God and good angels fight on Richmond’s side.

But though justice is to be done, yet Shakespeare will not quite degrade Richard out of the sympathy of the audience. Action and its need have partly healed his fluttering temper. His native courage, his pride of birth, his natural joy in battle, have dispersed his dreams for a time. His orders are sharply, clearly given. He speaks again like a great commander, and he dies a soldier and a king.

Shakespeare knew the relief which the crisis, having come, gives to a courageous man. He knew also that no amount of crime could do away with physical courage, or make a man forget that he was of high lineage, if that had ever been a power in his life. And it was deep in Richard:

‘ Our aery buildeth in the cedar’s top,
And dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun.

Yet, neither courage nor pride are what they were.

So, I am satisfied. Give me a bowl of wine :
I have not that alacrity of spirit,
Nor cheer of mind, that I was wont to have.

The phrase prepares us for the well-known scene in which the courage of Richard when he is asleep trembles before the ghosts of all whom he has slain. It is equally prepared for by the prayer of Richmond for the help of God whose captain he accounts himself, the minister of whose chastisement he is. Night falls, and each ghost, rising one after another—Prince Edward, Henry VL, Clarence, Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, Hastings, the young Princes, Lady Anne, Buckingham—speaks to Richmond

of victory, lays a curse on Richard. Each bids him
' Despair and die,'

In this, the predominant idea of the drama—the working out into catastrophe of all the evil of the Civil Wars—is brought into full prominence, since Richard is the incarnation of that evil. The connected idea of the supremacy of justice in the course of the world is also brought out so forcibly that Richard, for one brief hour, recognises the lordship of conscience, though he argues that it ought to have none over him. The supernatural world can alone convince him of his guilt, and he fights against the conviction. It is only in the half-conscious state, between sleep and waking when one is scarcely one's self, that Richard gives way to conscience and to fear, and in that state speaks that wonderful soliloquy, which—if we take it as the confused utterances of a man who is half asleep and half awake, half in the supernatural terror of his dreams and half in his reaction from them, half himself, half not himself—is an amazing piece of subtle analysis, only not succeeding altogether because it was more difficult to shape in words than mortal man could manage. None but Shakespeare would even have tried to put it into form.

K. RICH. Give me another horse ! bind up my wounds !
Have mercy, Jesu! Soft! I did but dream.
O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me.
The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight.
Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
What! do I fear myself? there's none else by :
Richard loves Richard ; that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here ? No. Yes ; I am :
Then fly : what! from myself ? Great reason why
Lest I revenge. What I myself upon myself ?
Alack ! I love myself. Wherefore ? for any good
That I myself have done unto myself?
O ! no : alas ! I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself.
I am a villain : Yet I lie ; I am not.
Pooh, of thyself speak well: fool, do not flatter.

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues
 And every tongue brings in a several tale,
 And every tale condemns me for a villain.
 Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree :
 Murder, stern murder, in the dir'st degree;
 All several sins, all us'd in each degree
 Throng to the bar, crying all, ' Guilty ! guilty !
 I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
 And if I die, no soul will pity me :
 Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
 Find in myself no pity to myself ?
 Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd
 Came to my tent: and every one did threat
 To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard.

On this Batcliff breaks in and, for a minute or two, the dream, lingering as dreams linger, still holds Richard in its grip. Then, fully awake, he shakes it off—

By the apostle Paul, shadows to-night
 Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard
 Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers,
 Armed in proof, and led by shallow Richmond.

The momentary weakness of fear, the momentary belief in conscience, which, with all that guilt behind, might make him die ignobly, pass away. He scorns his dreams, he mocks at conscience.

Go, gentlemen; every man to his charge :
 Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls ;
 Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
 Devis'd at first to keep the strong in awe :
 Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.
 March on, join bravely, let us to't pell mell;
 If not to heaven, then hand in hand to hell.

And his speech to his army is a masterpiece of bold mockery of the foe, and of appeal to the pride of England; the words of a fighting partisan, of a king at bay. As we read it, we should sit in his soul, below the words. I wonder if Shakespeare meant the overstrain I seem to detect in it to express the hungry despair which so lately had clutched his heart, and which he strove by passionate

words to beat under. He bluffs himself. It is impossible not to sympathise with his self-conquest and courage; and Shakespeare meant us to do so. Since justice is done, pity may steal in; and circumstance has made Richard its victim, as well as his own will. He goes to battle with a joyful courage, as to a banquet. Macbeth's courage was intermingled with the despondencies of crime and of loss of honour, for he had loved and sorrowed, and of old had resisted evil. Richard's courage has no tenderness, no sense of violated honour to trouble it, for he has never loved. It has no despondency, no philosophising on life and death, when the crisis comes. There is a physical rapture in it.

A thousand hearts are great within my bosom :
Advance our standards ! set upon our foes!
Our ancient word of courage, fair Saint George,
Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons !
Upon them ! Victory sits upon our helms.

But there is no victory for him—

The day is ours, the bloody dog is dead.

Yet, he perishes like a king, slaying five Richmonds in the throat of death. His death would be the death of despair, were he not greater than despair itself. The drama closes with that speech of Richmond's, in which the wrong, the fraternal slaughter, the misery of the Civil Wars are dwelt on, resumed, and absolved in the reconciliation of the white rose and the red, in the union of Richmond and Elizabeth—

· Smile, heaven, upon this fair conjunction,
· That long hath frown'd upon their enmity !

Justice has done her work; and she retires, well pleased.

In this play there is the same conception of an overruling Justice as we have found in *Romeo and Juliet*. Punishment, not arbitrary, but the direct consequence

of crime against humanity, falls on all those who have caused the Civil Wars. This is clearly an artistic conception, and has its parallels in the Greek drama, as for example in the *Seven against Thebes*.

As a dramatic subject, *Richard III.* did not afford sufficient opportunity for the representation of the manifold varieties of human life which now began to allure Shakespeare. It was confined within a limited set of people—kings, queens, the noblesse and their dependants—within their selfish quarrels and ambitions. And what a set they are! And the women, if we exclude the Duchess of York, are nearly as bad as the men. Nor, with the exception of Richard and Margaret, is any one of them seriously intelligent or interesting. Shakespeare must have been tired of the odiousness of it all, tired even of his conception of Justice working out her law on states; anxious to live among a brighter and more varied class of characters, and freely to develop them.

Moreover he was, I think, weary of the limitations laid upon him by the close following of history. Of this last weariness he got rid, as I have said, in *Henry IV.* by entering into the life of the people.¹ I am not sure that he did not begin to break loose from both these limits by the writing of *Richard* ;',', where, while following the main lines of history, he develops out of his own imagination, and apart from history, the character of Richard after his return from Ireland. The Richard of the castle scenes and of the rest of the drama is not the Richard of history. He is Shakespeare's own, as complex in character as Richard in. is simple. It is this out-

¹ We may trace this desire to represent the people even in *Richard III.* The little sketch of the Scrivener, Act in. Sc. vi., is done by a master-hand. We see and feel the man. The three citizens who meet and discuss the political situation in the second act belong to the honest, god-fearing, steadfast, commonplace burghers of London. Their talk is representative, yet each of them is quite distinct in character.

break of Shakespeare's into pure invention which seems to suggest that *Richard II.* was written after *Richard III.* Richard II. has no ambition to be greater than he is. He desires to be let alone to enjoy himself. Richard in. is ambition incarnate. The one has only one desire, the other has a hundred; and the hundred desires make his character as complex as the other is simple. The one is devoid of love, and therefore devoid of imagination. The other has tenderness, pity, sweetness, and thoughtfulness, when he has gone through sorrow; and because he loves and desires to love, he is capable of imagination. Shakespeare makes him more than capable of it. He gives it to him after his fall, and in his hands he becomes the shaper of poetry.

Then, again, the character of Richard n. grows into nobility; at every change he gains; he is noblest before death; but the character of Richard in. loses power day by day, loses even intellectual power, and he ends as only a, royal bravo. There is also far more characterisation and invention in *Richard II.* than in *Richard III.*, and I think this suggests at least that the former was written after the latter. Moreover, the characters who are of vital interest are much more numerous in *Richard II.*, more vivid, more distinct, more complex. The Queen in *Richard II.* is only touched, yet she is alive and distinct, and so is the Duchess of Gloucester. Anne and the Duchess of York in *Richard III.* are not clearly, though they are elaborately, drawn. In *Richard II.* Gaunt is extremely interesting; Old York and Bolingbroke, even Mowbray, are all clearly individualised; but Buckingham, Rivers, Hastings, and Grey in *Richard III.* are not. The only creature, save Margaret and Richard, who is specialised into a greater vitality than the others in *Richard III.* is Clarence in the Tower before his death.

The play itself is unequal, strangely unequal. Its con-

duct wavers from excellence to mediocrity. The overlength of such scenes as that before the coronation, and that between Richard and Elizabeth, wearies an audience, and the first of these is not redeemed by brilliancy of thought or dramatic play. Shakespeare had not yet learned concentration or moderation. There is none of his plays in which one more regrets the Greek measure, and the Greek power to say enough and no more.

Its finer poetry is of less impressiveness because it is the poetry of cursing—a matter somewhat naturally apart from beauty. And the cursing is too long to be intense, to have that closely knitted passion which lifts the curse into the world of art. Margaret rarely reaches that: Lear reaches it in a few sentences. Only one passage in the whole play rises into a splendour of poetry, so piteous and so beautiful that it will live for ever. It is the dream of Clarence.

VIII

CORIOLANUS

THIS play was written, probably in 1609, when Shakespeare's genius had fully matured, after he had proved the splendour of his work in the great tragedies—*Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*—and just before he wrote, in his latest period, *Cymbeline*, *Winters Tale*, and *The Tempest*. It has been greatly praised, and even compared, for dramatic interest, with *Othello*. For my part, I cannot feel that, Shakespeare's power in it, magnificent in many places, is not so equally distributed as in the greater plays, and the splendid passages make the change of amalgamating power even more remarkable. Then, it is, in a lesser degree than *Richard II.* and *Julius Cæsar*, a one-man play. The figure of Coriolanus, and his fate—of Coriolanus in a twofold relation; to his mother and to the people—dominates almost too overwhelmingly the interest of the rest of the drama. Cominius, Aufidius, Menenius, the tribunes, even the women, except Volumnia, are a little too much in the background. If they had been more fully interwoven with the action, the play would have been closer to human life. It is true, we have a great variety in the crowds and disturbance of Rome, in the scenes at Corioli. The stage is full of the movement and clash of parties. A vivid impression of a crisis between the nobles and the people in a great city is given to us. But when the play is done, and even while we read, we feel as if all the noise, fury, folly, and wisdom of the strife were but a scenery for the overmastering

presentation, first of Coriolanus, and then of Coriolanus and his mother. I think, but with great diffidence, that Shakespeare's power of combination, of giving unity to his play in the midst of a vivid variety, had now lessened; or that he did not take as much pains in this matter as of old. He was not quite the absolute dramatic master he had been. And of the three plays that follow this, in the midst of all their exquisite beauty, I would say the same. The poetry itself is as lovely as ever, even more lovely than ever before, in these swan-songs of his, but the co-ordinating power is either less or less carefully exercised.

The story of this play, though it is found in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, a book Shakespeare read, was taken by him, with singular cleverness, from the life of Coriolanus in North's Plutarch, and it is worth while to compare the translation with the play, especially in such important passages as the speech of Coriolanus to Aufidius, and the scene between him and his mother in the fifth act, where Shakespeare has often followed North's rendering almost word for word. The title-page acknowledges Shakespeare's indebtedness to that book of Plutarch's, which indeed, for nearly two thousand years, has been an imaginative inspiration in the souls of all eager young men, and a wise, impelling, and thought-stirring power in the lives of statesmen, philosophers, artists, lawmakers, and of heroic souls in every class of men. It is curious to think that, as the mighty spirit of Shakespeare read his Plutarch, he knew that at certain great moments of his play he could say nothing better than Plutarch had said. It is equally curious that this great creator deliberately copied down the words of Caius Marcius to Aufidius, of Volumnia to Coriolanus. This honours alike Shakespeare and Plutarch.

Three matters of interest are prominent in this work of art: (1) Shakespeare's treatment of the political question

in Rome; (2) the character and fate of Coriolanus; (3) Coriolanus and his mother.

Hazlitt says that all has been said in this drama that can be said for both aristocrat and democrat. It is, he adds, a storehouse of political commonplaces. There are, of course, political commonplaces in the play. Shakespeare was bound to include those opinions and phrases which the man in the street delivers in the midst of every political crisis between the people and the richer classes.¹ But there are a number of wise things also said, such as fall from far-seeing persons, who at a crisis of this kind look backward and look forward. And above all, as I venture to think, we are made to feel, moving like a spirit through the play, the sympathy of Shakespeare with the struggle of the people. It is almost traditionary among the critics to claim Shakespeare as a tolerant mocker of the people, and as a supporter, on the whole, of those, whether of wealth or rank, who stood above them. They make him a kind of Menenius; as if that giant intellect were wholly led away by prejudice, as if he were entirely faithless to his own class and their strife for justice. No one seems to think how impossible, how almost miraculous, considering his many-sided genius, such a position would be for Shakespeare.

It would be wiser to say to ourselves: 'Shakespeare was certain, with that brain of his, to see all sides of the question, and to represent them.' And that is exactly what he does. He had his 'good-humoured laugh' at mobs, their blindness, changeableness, violence, and 'tall talk.' We see the mob of Rome, here and in *Julius Caesar*,

¹ In another play where, as here, the principal character is dominant—in *Richard III.*—Shakespeare has, for the first time, represented the opinions of the man in the street; not those of demagogues, but of three grave London citizens who, without anything to do with the main actions, discuss the news of the day and the affairs of the state with admirable prudence' and each in character (Act u. Sc. iii.).

following the last orator, blessing in one act those whom they curse in another; heaping honour on their tribunes in one scene, and haling them to the Tarpeian rock in another. We read his picture of the mere demagogue, so like our own, and we know how Shakespeare despised the type. He paints it in the first citizen, who shouts for the death of Coriolanus: 'Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict?' 'Let us revenge our wrongs with our pikes, ere we become rakes: for the gods know I speak this in hunger for bread, not in thirst for revenge.' Menenius calls this man, in scorn, 'the great toe of the assembly'—

For that, being one o' the lowest, basest, poorest,
Of this most wise rebellion, thou go'st foremost,

to win vantage for himself, rather than good for his party. Coriolanus is *the enemy* to him. He sees no good in him at all; what services he has done to his country were done to please his mother and foster his pride, not for the people of Rome. 'He's a very dog to the commonalty,'

But to paint what is foolish and extreme in the people did not prevent Shakespeare from painting what was just in their demands, wise and modest in their conduct; as, when he painted the pride, scorn, and oppressiveness of Coriolanus, he did not involve the whole of the patricianate of Rome in the same vices.

In this play Shakespeare, but not so openly as to offend his patrons, was in sympathy with the people. He records with severe plainness the injustice and misery which they had suffered; and to make this more remarkable he places their cries in the mouth of the shouting demagogue he has so broadly sketched. He knew that the wrongs were real even though their mouthpiece was violent. So far Shakespeare sympathised even with him. These wrongs are fully detailed. Menenius answers, just as these oppressors are customed to say, that the patri-

cians 'care for the people like fathers,' 'Care for us!' answers this citizen—

True, indeed ! They ne'er cared for us yet: suffer us to famish, and their store-houses crammed with grain; make edicts for usury, to support usurers ; repeal daily any wholesome act established against the rich, and provide more piercing statutes daily to chain up and restrain the poor. If the wars eat us not up, they will; and there's all the love they bear us.

Then, too, his drawing of Coriolanus suggests his sympathy with the popular movement. No one can help seeing that Shakespeare did not love Coriolanus, nor approve his conduct. The last words spoken over him are not like those spoken over Brutus; and both are spoken by enemies. They are chill and half-hearted. His speeches rarely reach nobility of feeling or thought; except when they are concerned with war, or with his mother. They are loaded with big words, so turgid that when we know how Shakespeare could make his great characters speak, we are convinced that he had no admiration, but all but contempt, for Coriolanus. Of course, he pitied his fate, and this pity recurs again and again in the play, but nothing can be more rigid than his steady drawing of the inevitable punishment to which such a character has doomed himself. It is as if Shakespeare were himself Nemesis. In fact, Coriolanus is made to bear the same relation to the body of the patricians that the demagogue of the first act bears to the mass of the people. He is the blustering assessor of the rights and claims of the aristocracy, without foresight, intelligence, temperance, humanity or knowledge, the victim of his violent temper and fatal pride; but withal the greatest of soldiers.

Again, consider Shakespeare's representation of other citizens and the tribunes. He has drawn the reeling mob and the mouthing demagogue. At the same time he draws the temperate and tolerant citizens in the person of

the second citizen. 'Consider,' he says, 'what services Coriolanus has done for his country,' 'Speak not maliciously,' he cries to the demagogue. And he excuses Coriolanus, even for his pride. 'What he cannot help in his nature, you account a vice in him. You must in no way say he is covetous,' All that is like a prudent and kindly hearted Roman; the very opposite of the loud violence of the mob-leader. Moreover, the people are made by Shakespeare to behave exceedingly well at the election of Coriolanus. They repress their rancour in dealing with their great enemy because he has fought so well for Rome. 'If he tell us of his noble deeds, we must also tell him of our noble acceptance of them. Ingratitude is monstrous,' 'I say, if he would incline to the people, there never was a worthier man.' 'He has done nobly, and cannot go without any honest man's voice,' It is impossible to believe that Shakespeare could really despise the people when he makes them speak in this fashion.

And then the tribunes! They are not mere demagogues. They are fighting the battle of their class with prudence, intelligence, and skill, against the stupidity and oppression of the upper class. Not with the unreason of the mob-orator, but with resolute foresight, they determine to overthrow Coriolanus as the common enemy of the people. Once he is exiled they can deal with the rest of the patricians in a quiet way, and with a good hope of success. And they give themselves to that aim with cool precision of attack. They use no wild words. They speak throughout with quietude and resolution, as men who care for the cause of their fellow-citizens more than for themselves.

Politically considered, the play is the artistic record of the victory of a people, unrighteously oppressed, over their oppressor, who is the exaggerated incarnation of the

temper of his class. I will glance through the play from this point of view.

While the citizens are debating their wrongs Menenius comes upon them. He is the old and jovial aristocrat, who loves a cup of hot wine, and adores a hero like Coriolanus; hasty in temper but keeping no malice, and in politics eager for moderate counsels; bluff of speech because he is old, and because of his class-contempt for the people, which contempt he generally modifies into good-humoured attacks on their follies. He is endured, but seen through, by the tribunes of the people—'Come, sir, come, we know you well enough,' A thorough patrician, who yet desires to be hail-fellow-well-met with the people; who has among them the fame of caring for them, but who does not really care for their wrongs in comparison with the smallest right the patricians claim; the prosperous conservative, quite ready to help the people provided the people are kept down. The possibility of any democratic change never enters his mind. The world of Borne will always go on as it is now. You may as well, he says to the citizens,

Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them
Against the Roman state, whose course will on
The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs
Of more strong link asunder than can ever
Appear in your impediment.

The patricians, the senate, are the centre of Rome; if the centre be weakened the people will perish—and he tells his story of the belly and the rebellious members of the body. 'But we are perishing now,' they say, 'and the nobility are the cause,' 'Wait, keep quiet, don't disturb the state, all will be soon quite comfortable. The one thing needful is no change. All your good comes from the patricians'—

No public benefit which you receive
But it proceeds or comes from them to you,
And no way from yourselves.

When change has been wrought, and he hears that tribunes have been granted, he does not understand it. 'This is strange,' he says. Then, when further change is wrought, and Coriolanus is banished, Menenius accepts the tribunes and the change; and then, when Borne turns against the tribunes, throws himself back into his old position. His conservatism is permanent opportunism. However, at this early point of the play (in his belief in the everlasting continuance of the state as it is), the blindness of this Roman Polonius is clear, though he seem so wise. Coriolanus sees twice as far, just because his hatred of the people opens his eyes. He knows, when the tribunes are given to the people, that the predominance of his class is doomed. Hatred, often blind, is sometimes keen-eyed.

There are many instances of the blindness of Menenius, of the clear sight of Coriolanus. Here is one. Menenius is the slave of custom; Coriolanus is not. One of the touches of the play nearest to his character is where his pride, and in this case his intelligence, overcomes his conservatism, and he throws precedent overboard—

Custom calls me to't;
What custom wills, in all things should we do't,
The dust on antique time would lie unswept,
And mountainous error be too highly heap'd,
For truth to o'erpeer.

That is not the conservative position. Menenius cannot agree with him; Coriolanus must follow all the precedents of the past. Again and again he implores him for temperate conduct; and the battle in his mind between love and admiration of Coriolanus and disapproval of his uncontrolled choler is excellently drawn by Shakespeare. Yet, while he disapproves, and is even weary of the furious temper of his friend, he hates the people the more because they attack his friend. From the moment the battle is set in array till the banishment of Coriolanus no one is harder

on the people than Menenius. No Philippe Egalite is to be trusted. The traditions of their class are stronger than their popular good-nature.

The battle has now begun. The one desire of Coriolanus is to overthrow the concession of tribunes to the people : he sees that it

will in time
Win upon power, and throw forth greater themes
For insurrection's arguing.

The one desire of the tribunes is to overthrow Coriolanus, the unyielding spirit of that aristocratic temper which the people have begun to conquer. If he be not crushed, all they have won is lost. This civil war is aggravated by the proud scorn of Coriolanus for the intelligence, even for the lives of the people. They are of no account in the world save as servants. Whether they live or die, suffer or rejoice, is no matter. If they complain, let me slaughter them;

Would the nobility lay aside their ruth,
And let me use my sword, I'd make a quarry
With thousands of these quarter'd slaves, as high
As I could pick my lance.

Hang 'em! Bid them wash their faces, and keep their teeth clean. Then he mocks at their sufferings—

They said they were an-hungry ; sigh'd forth proverbs :
That hunger broke stone walls ; that dogs must eat;
That meat was made for mouths ; that the gods sent not
Corn for the rich men only. With these shreds
They vented their complainings ; . . .

Go ; get you home, you fragments I

' If they want food,' said Foulon, in the French Revolution, ' let them eat grass.'

The Volscian War then complicates the situation. Coriolanus hails it with joy. It will enable the nobles to expend the 'musty superfluity' of the people; and the huge success of Coriolanus in it makes the patricians

hope that they will now get the upper hand, and by installing Coriolanus as consul, either balance the power of the tribunes, or finally win their cause.

It seems to promise well. Coriolanus comes home, and is at the top of Rome—people, children, women throng to welcome him. But this only serves to make more prominent that division of classes which is the curse of states. Menenius, who was kindly to the people once, is now bitter against them. His scorn of the tribunes is almost as great as that of Coriolanus—'God-den to your worships; more of your conversation would infect my brain, being the herdsmen of the beastly plebeians.' If he thought thus, the rest of the patricians, less tolerant than he, would think the same more strongly. Nor is the real division of the people from the patrician class, in spite of the apparent unity of Rome under the excitement of military glory, less clear. The tribunes are not carried away by the triumph of Coriolanus. They see in it a fresh danger to that liberty of the people for which they are contending: they lay a plot for his destruction as the enemy of the people, and it is just that they should do it. Coriolanus deserved death.

The talk of Sicinius and Brutus, admirably conceived by Shakespeare, proves them masters of the situation. It is marked by that steadfast pitilessness towards the oppressing class which has characterised, in all revolutions of the people, the leaders of the people; and at the back of which is the long hatred of years, sometimes of centuries, as it was in the French Revolution. The enemy must be annihilated. And the way to destroy Coriolanus is clear—to work on his choleric pride till he insults the people. He is elected consul, but the tribunes call him before the tribunal of the people to answer for his ill-deeds against them. He faces them with a suppressed fury of wrath, which, lashed by the tribunes' accusa-

tions, breaks forth into a torrent of mad and scornful anger. They sting him to the quick, playing on his wrathfulness as on an instrument. In the whole of these wonderful scenes in the second and third acts, the tribunes are the only cool-headed, dignified folk. Every one else is infected with the rage of Coriolanus. When, at last, Sicinius cries, 'He hath spoken like a traitor, and shall answer for it as traitors do,' Coriolanus bursts out into a full fury—

COR. Thou wretch I despise overwhelm thee I
What should the people do with these bald tribunes ?
On whom depending, their obedience fails
To the greater bench. In a rebellion,
When what's not meet, but what must be, was law,
Then were they chosen : in a better hour,
Let what is meet be said it must be meet,
And throw their power i' the dust.

BRU. Manifest treason'

Sic. This a consul ? no.

BRU. The aediles, ho I Let him be apprehended.

And instantly, Rome is up. The two parties fight in a riot. The tribunes are masters, and condemn Coriolanus to death. Menenius intervenes, and Coriolanus stands his trial, but his rage, though he tries for temperance, breaks out more wildly than ever. His courage, his pride, his selfishness, his insolence, his furious temper, are worked up to their extremes; and he never ceases to indulge them till he has settled his own ruin. The oppressor of the people is self-oppressed. Violence and weakness, the sister of violence, are his tyrants. Pride is their root, but it is not the pride of a great or a strong man, in whom pride is the master of the passions. The pride of Coriolanus is but the servant or the slavish comrade of his choler. A single word like 'traitor' drives him beyond all bounds, and the reticence of a stately pride is lost,

The fires i' the lowest hell fold-in the people!
 Call me their traitor ! Thou injurious tribune I
 Within thine eyes sat twenty thousand deaths,
 In thy hands clutch'd as many millions, in
 Thy lying tongue both numbers, I would say
 'Thou liest' unto thee with a voice as free
 As I do pray the gods.

This settles his fate; but as a galling favour, he is let off death, and banished on pain of death. His last speech, as he turns on them, has that nobility of tone which adds itself to a vice when the doom of the vice is pronounced. The majesty of the irreparable belongs to it.

COR. You common cry of curs ! whose breath I hate
 As reek o' the rotten fens, whose love I prize
 As the dead carcasses of unburied men
 That do corrupt my air, I banish you ;
 And here remain with your uncertainty !
 Let every feeble rumour shake your hearts !
 Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes,
 Fan you into despair ! Have the power still
 To banish your defenders ; till at length
 Your ignorance,—which finds not, till it feels,—
 Making but reservation of yourselves,—
 Still your own foes,—deliver you as most
 Abated captives to some nation
 That won you without blows ! Despising,
 For you, the city, thus I turn my back :
 There is a world elsewhere.

The people do not care a straw for his scorn. They are lost in joy at getting rid of him—

ÆD. The people's enemy is gone, is gone !

CITIZENS. Our enemy is banish'd !—He is gone!—Hoo ! hoo !

[They all shout and throw up their caps.]

So ends the contest between Coriolanus and the tribunes. They and the people are the victors. And we may fairly conclude that Shakespeare did not despise the cause of the people or its leaders, when we find that the leaders are represented throughout as men who have kept their heads; cool, temperate, prudent, but resolute to attain their end; and using steadily and ruthlessly the

best means for this end. Having won, they are quite sober and quiet. They indulge in no boasting, but go about their business, congratulating themselves on the quiet of Rome. Their just mastership of the stormy elements of the people keeps down the anger of the partisans of Coriolanus. Every day of quiet makes Coriolanus less missed by his friends, who 'blush that without him the world goes well.' Menenius has grown kind again to the tribunes, and talks to them as if they were nobles. He even criticises Coriolanus. Shakespeare has taken pains to lift the struggle of the people into our approval.

Enter SICINTUS and BRUTUS.

Sic. We hear not of him, neither need we fear him ;
His remedies are tame i' the present peace
And quietness o' the people, which before
Were in wild hurry. Here do we iuue his friends
Blush that the world goes well, who rather had,
Though they themselves did sufi'er by 't, behold
Dissentious numbers pestering streets, than see
Our tradesmen singing in their shops and going
About their functions friendly.

Enter MENENIUS.

BRU. We stood to't in good time. Is this Menenius ?

Sic. 'Tis he, 'tis he. O ! he is grown most kind
Of late. Hail, sir !

MEN. Hail to you both 1

Sic. Your Coriolanus is not much miss'd,
But with his friends: the commonwealth doth stand,
And so would do, were he more angry at it

MEN. All's well; and might have been much better, if
He could have teinporiz'd.

Sic. This is a happier and more comely time
Than when these follows ran about the streets
Crying confusion.

Nor does this sympathetic representation end here. When Coriolanus joins the Volscians, and threatens Rome with ruin, the whole city is in wild terror and disturbance; Cominius, Menenius, and the rest of the nobility lose

their heads. All they can do is to abuse the tribunes. Sicinius and Brutus alone are self-controlled and quiet. All they say then and afterwards is full of care for Rome, for the people, for the patricians who only care for their own safety. They speak like steadfast Romans to the terrified citizens;

Go, masters, get you home : be not dismay'd :
These are a side that would be glad to have
This true which they so seem to fear. Go home,
And show no sign of fear.

And the people disperse at once. Afterwards, the tribunes are the accepted advisers of Rome. It is they who persuade Menenius to ask peace from Coriolanus; and he obeys. They speak like men who know they have done right, and who are willing to accept the consequences. Even when all seems lost, they do not lose their dignity. It is the same when the mob attempts their life. Thus, amid the tossing turmoil of Rome, Shakespeare has made the leaders of the people's cause the only hope and trust, and the quiet powers, of the city. He does not point this out. He says nothing. But what he has written stands, and it stands for the people's cause in this play against that idea of government which Menenius held, and Coriolanus exaggerated into its extremes.

(2) Important and dramatic as this political aspect of the play is, it does not take us on to the high levels of poetry. From the poetic point of view the fate of Rome is inferior in interest to the development and representation of the character and fate of Coriolanus. Everything else is brought to bear on this. Cominius, Menenius, and the rest illustrate him. Aundius, the soldier, is set over against him. His mother, his wife and Valeria bring out new elements in his character; the tribunes whip into activity his evil and foolish qualities. The whole people of Rome are in arms against him. He rises alone before

us, like a towering rock from a wide and tossing sea. At the beginning of the fourth act all eyes are fixed on the banished man, as he goes out alone into the friendless world—

Like to a lonely dragon, that his fen
Makes fear'd and talk'd of more than seen,—

The fourth and fifth acts tell the results of his action, and his fall. The play is almost the play of one man.

What ruins Coriolanus? Pride in himself and for himself alone, and the furious choler which, never controlled, breaks out when his pride is injured.¹ He has never from a boy curbed his violent nature, and his mother has encouraged it. He is its victim now.

The force of circumstance ruins the Brutus of *Julius Caesar*. It partly spoils the life of Coriolanus. Had he bent his nature only a little to circumstance, he might have lived honoured in Rome; and been bettered by the bending. Brutus could not have bettered but worsened himself by bending to his circumstances. They were such that to bend to them would have been to lose his moral character. Brutus is overthrown by the Tightness of his nature, Coriolanus by the wrongness of his. Rome, and not self, is first with Brutus. Self, and not Rome, is first with Coriolanus. The cause of freedom is first with Brutus, and he dies for it. The cause of his own pride is first with Coriolanus, and he dies for himself. His pride and fury slay him; and he deserves his fate. When a government reaches the same state, it

¹ Shakespeare, who often thinks of heredity, makes the son of Coriolanus repeat the nature of his father in a boyish fashion,—and a hateful!

VAL. O' my word, the father's son; I'll swear 'tis a very pretty boy. O' my troth, I looked upon him o' Wednesday half an hour together: he has such a confirmed countenance. I saw him run after a gilded butterfly; and when he caught it, he let it go again; and after it again; and over and over he comes and up again; caught it again; or whether his fall enraged him, or how 'twas, he did so set MB teeth and tear it; O, I warrant, how he mammoocked it.

VOL. One on's father's moods.

VAL. Imdeed, la, 'tis a noble child.

slays itself; but a government dies slowly, an individual quickly.

On the other hand, Coriolanus is brave, eager for fame, noble in act and thought when in war, war the very breath of his nostrils. He claims to be modest, and is not truly so. He loves his mother dearly and his wife; he is a good friend, but he does not love—until the end—any of them well enough to sacrifice, for their sake, either the vengeance he desires for the galling of his pride, or his resolve to fulfil the demands his fiery nature makes upon him. This—'to be true to his nature'—is his only conscience; and when the nature is selfish, it is the hardest selfishness in the world.

In relation to the people, he is the type of the haughty, irresponsible feudal noble, whose only law was his own will; the plague of humanity. The people to Coriolanus are a rabble, curs, cowards, not to be trusted, changing every moment; peace makes them proud, war terrifies them. They are not men but beasts, and to be ruled like beasts. In relation to his own class, he is honourable, courteous, even kindly when his nature is not too much interfered with. His mother has trained him to give a loose rein to his impulses; and he cannot understand why she desires him to speak well to the vile people. 'Would you have me,' he cries, 'false to my nature?'

Pride of this kind is sometimes silent and dignified, when there is some other quality in the nature as strong as itself and more noble; but when it devours into itself all the other qualities, it becomes almost a frenzy, and is entirely devoid of pity. It issues then in a raging madness of unbridled temper. This is the case with Coriolanus, and it is splendidly wrought out by Shakespeare. On this swiftly raised choler the tribunes build his ruin. He is, on account of it, a child in their

hands. When they have lashed him into fury, he loses the game—

BRU. Put him to choler straight. He hath been us'd
Ever to conquer, and to have his worth
Of contradiction : being once chaf'd, he cannot
Be rein'd again to temperance : then he speaks
What's in his heart; and that is there which looks
With us to break his neck.

Yet, in his farewell to his own people, he is as gentle, courteous, brave and steady as he is the opposite to the citizens. To his own caste he is the 'perfect gentleman,' to his mother the revering and loving son. That he should be so fine a character among his own class makes his conduct to those not of his class all the worse. Shakespeare understood the ruthless pride of the feudal noblesse to its last grain. And it is like his infinite variety to introduce between the furious scenes of Coriolanus's battle with the people, and the drear misfortunes of his lonely fall into treason to his country, the sweet and tender scene with which the fourth act begins. He bids farewell to his mother, wife, to Menenius, Cominius, and the young nobility of Rome outside the gate of the city; and he speaks nobly to his mother—

COR. Come leave your tears : a brief farewell: the beast
With many heads butts me away. Nay, mother,
Where is your ancient courage ? you were us'd
To say extremity was the trier of spirits ;
That common chances common men could bear ;
That when the sea was calm all boats alike
Show'd mastership in floating ; fortune's blows,
When most struck home, being gentle, wounded, craves
A noble cunning : you were us'd to load me
With precepts that would make invincible
The heart that conn'd them.

Nor is his farewell to his friends less gentle, less noble. Yet in the midst of it, Shakespeare makes us feel that his rage is only for the moment at rest. His wife interrupts him. He cannot bear it. He turns on her angrily

—'Nay, I prithee, woman,' His mother is afraid of his imprudence, of his going away alone. And when Coriolanus hears the doubt, even though it is his mother who expresses it, his temper almost breaks out—'O ye gods!' he cries. The waves are still running high in his soul; his solitude will be dark with wrath and vengeance. That is within his heart which will not cease to gnaw; the snake of a galled pride, the selfish biting of revenge.

Formerly, he fought for fame rather than for his country, but the two happened to be coincident. Therefore, love of his country was attributed to him. Now that he is divided from his country, angered pride is stronger than what seemed love of his country, and he betrays his country. The treason the tribunes accused him of is now really his. He is half conscious of this, and he imputes the change—to what? Not to himself at all, but to the wort of circumstance. This is a common mental trick of those who have spoilt their life by self-indulgence.

O world ! thy slippery turns. Friends now fast sworn,
Whose double bosoms seem to wear one heart,
Whose house, whose bed, whose meal, and exercise,
Are still together, who twin, as 'twere, in love
Unseparable, shall within this hour,
On a dissension of a doit, break out
To bitterest enmity : so, fellest foes,
Whose passions and whose plots have broke their sleep
To take the one the other, by some chance,
Some trick not worth an egg, shall grow dear friends
And interjoin their issues. So with me :
My birth-place hate I, and my love's upon
This enemy town. '

This is the pure nonsense of self-excusing pride. Friendships and enmities are not broken or united in that fashion. When in that fashion love is broken, it proves that, on one side at least, there has been no real

love at all; only that self has been at the bottom of the apparent love. Coriolanus never loved any one half as much as he loved himself. Even his love of his mother was founded on her encouragement of the self within him.

In the whole of the striking scene with Aufidius, when he declares his treason and his greed for vengeance, Coriolanus is savagely true to what he calls his nature. He declares boldly that it is spite and anger that bring him to his enemies' camp; he desires no mercy; he will not abate a jot of himself to save his life. If Aufidius will help him to avenge himself—well; if not, why he will die. His treason is complete. He does the only thing in the world which would turn his friends in Rome against him.

Deeper and deeper, then, is the loneliness in which he moves. The Volscians, however glad they are to have him, know him as a traitor to his country, one who has done that which no common soldier in Corioli would do. Menenius, Cominius, look on him with fear and pain. His mother, wife, and child feel him to be their enemy. He has proved that the tribunes and people were right. To this, at last, to this supreme solitude, self, unrestrained, leads a man. To this treason to himself, his country, and his friends, a furious temper, backed by pride, conducts its victim. Coriolanus accuses his ill-luck; but he is his own destroyer. That which overwhelms him is not destiny, but his own creation. Nothing follows which is not the inevitable result of the hideous position in which he has placed himself. And Shakespeare has wrought out magnificently this inevitableness of ruin. Aufidius is the instrument of the fate of Coriolanus. He shows the bottom of his heart in his answer to his former enemy—

O Marcius, Marcius !

Each word thou hast spoken hath weeded from my heart
A root of ancient envy.

But it is only rooted out because he sees his ancient foe in the gloom of misfortune. Envy is too subtle a devil to leave the heart so soon: and Shakespeare knows its fashions. Moreover with envy ever goes hate. It is envy's boon companion. And Aufidius's hate was deep.

Where I find him, were it
At home, upon my brother's guard, even there
Against the hospitable canon, would I
Wash my fierce hand in's heart.

Such a hatred does not die; it only sleeps for a time. We have a comfortable way of thinking that our vices have gone when the reason of them is momentarily taken away. It was agreeable to Aufidius at first to be magnanimous to his rival, to be able to say, 'Poor Coriolanus,' and to give him half his power. That flattered his patronising pride. But tho moment Coriolanus again took precedence, envy came back with seven more devils than before; and in this resurrection of envy and its results lies the rest of the drama. The envy of Aufidius is deepened by the pride of Coriolanus, who will even in exile have the first place; and he uses this insolent pride, as the tribunes used it before, to work the ruin of Coriolanus, who had learned nothing from all his pain and follies, who was still himself his only law, his only right.

It is characteristic of Shakespeare's work that he introduces here, after Aufidius and Coriolanus meet, a humorous episode in the talk of the servants. The two leaders deceive themselves into an apparent friendship, each ignorant of what their passions of pride and envy are sure to produce. But the servants see much further than their masters. They see the folly of both these great men and laugh at it, especially at that of their master. Their talk is an excellent piece of wit, of human nature; and also of their class, when they are mere hire-

enchantment; and the writer of it, the true Prospero, the true enchanter.

Indeed, it has been said that Shakespeare pictured himself as Prospero, and said farewell in this play to that dramatic poetry in which he had wrought so many enchantments, and seen, through Ariel, his familiar spirit of imagination whom he now set free, into the secret of Nature and the hearts of men. His magic staff he buried now, and deeper than ever plummet sounded, he drowned his book.¹ He had created a whole world, and now he would rest from creation.

The argument might be carried further. It might be said that Shakespeare, looking back on the work he had now laid aside, and on life's comedy and tragedy, expressed his judgment of it in what he said to Ferdinand and Miranda concerning the pageant he had shown them. All we think so vital, the glory, love, and suffering of the world, the cloud-capped philosophy and the solemn temples of law and religion, the earth itself, and all the human struggle on it, are illusion, the flitting in a dream of the Soul of the world, itself a dream, to and fro through empty space; and all its actors, like the spirits in the masque, phantoms in the dream, drawn out of the visionary imagination to make a show, and vanishing into the mist, to leave not a rack behind. It was thus, some theorist might say, that Shakespeare thought of all this world

¹ Many years ago, Emile Montegut elaborated this theory in a long and admirable article in, if I remember rightly, the *Revue des deux Mondes*. It was so well done that it almost convinced the reader, at least for a time, that it was a true theory. There can, however, be no certainty in any of these theories. They are interesting as excursions into the unknowable, but they remain guesses, and no more. One may, I think, argue from the general temper of a play to the temper of the writer's mind when he wrote it, especially when the same kind of temper, though in different moods, prevails through a succession of plays, as in the great tragedies. But Shakespeare was so impersonal in his art, that such argument has not much weight.

when he was near departure from it, and quote **these** famous lines:

These our actors,

As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

This is a thought common to the race.* It seems, so common is it, to belong to the original texture of humanity. In certain circumstances, varying as temperaments vary, it is sure to slip into the mind. Most often it slips out again: sometimes it stays; and it is one of the main thoughts of a religion held by many millions of men. Shakespeare was sure to have felt it moving in his mind, and to have known that it would move in the minds of many of his characters, in forms varying with the various characters. It is expressed again and again in the plays. It is here expressed in lines of such uncommon force and beauty that it ceases to seem common; it is as if no one felt it before Prospero shaped it. And it exactly fits the temper of his mind at this instant of the play; naturally emerging from the scene and the circumstances. But Prospero—and, indeed, Shakespeare, if we mix him up with Prospero—was far too sane and too experienced a character to imagine that life was illusion, or that we were the stuff of dreams, or that sleep rounded our little life. No one should quote the passage as an explanation of Shakespeare's theory of life, only as far as 'rounded with a sleep.'¹ The rest is Prosperous (or Shakespeare's) indication that his picture of the story of humanity arose from the passing weakness of a vexed and weary brain.

The philosophy of illusion is the philosophy of tired people.

Sir, I am vex'd:

Bear with my weakness ; my old brain is troubled.

Be not disturb'd with my infirmity.

If you be pleas'd, retire into my cell

And there repose : a turn OP two I'll walk,

To still my beating mind.

After all, he need not have taken the trouble to explain to Ferdinand and Miranda that they were only alive in a dream. The lovers knew better.

