The Occultism in the Shakespeare Plays

BY
L. W. ROGERS

THE OCCULTISM IN THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS

By L. W. ROGERS
Author of "Hints To Young Students of Occultism," "Self Development and the Way to Power," etc.

NEW YORK, N. Y.
THE THEOSOPHICAL BOOK COMPANY,
1909.

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

——Hamlet.

THE OCCULTISM IN THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS.

A consideration of the occult teaching to be found in the Shakespeare plays need not involve the question of their authorship. Perhaps most students of occultism who have given any time to the examination of the literature of the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy have found such powerful arguments pointing to Bacon as the author that the matter is, for them, settled. Be that as it may, we are not for the moment concerned with the authorship of what the world of letters is substantially agreed in regarding as the most wonderful and profound delineations of human nature extant. Whoever produced them they are our possession, for our instruction and entertainment. Regardless of their origin we can study them for their intrinsic value — especially for the great heart-lessons they teach — and reflect that such gems from any other pen would have like worth.

That the author of these plays was no ordinary mortal the most superficial reader knows and that his marvelous knowledge of nature extended beyond the physical world is at once obvious to the student of occultism who reads them. He " holds the mirror up to nature " in such fashion that it is difficult to understand

how even the materialistically blinded can fail to see beyond the boundaries of the purely physical and grasp the fact that we are being given a truer picture of mother earth than material senses can paint. The occultism in the plays is altogether too extensive and too prominent to be called incidental. It stands out, bold in its challenge, in the most important of them, in both tragedy and comedy, and is a fundamental part of their life and purpose. There are some who may see a deep undercurrent of mysticism in his work, not to be grasped without the faculty of reading between the lines, but aside from that some of the plays teem with the most obvious occultism. In three of his greatest tragedies — and it is worthy of note that they are precisely those that are most popular in our materialistic age — the return of the dead is introduced, while in the plays as a whole we have nearly the entire catalogue of occult phenomena. There is definite prophecy of the future exactly fulfilled, there are descriptions of clairvoyance, prevision in dreams, ceremonial magic, the control of the elements by an adept and descriptions of the nature spirits. In short, from the solemn tragedies of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* to the rollicking comedy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* his stage is peopled impartially with the varied denizens of both worlds. In limited space one can do but little with a subject upon which a volume might be written with profit, but some of the striking occult features in a few of the plays can be dealt with, and we shall see that the great poet-dramatist possessed a knowledge of the

invisible side of nature as complete and accurate as that transcendent comprehension of human nature that has been the marvel of his critics. His occult phenomena may be examined in the light of the latest investigations without revealing any inconsistencies in them, while his fairies in *The Midsummer Night's Dream* and in *The Tempest* violate none of the principles familiar to the theosophist but possess precisely the characteristics, powers and limitations of the nature spirits described by the present day investigators.

It is an amusing fact that our materialistic friends often quote the phrase, "that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns," as some sort of evidence that the author of *Hamlet* was a materialist! It certainly ought to be clear enough to anybody that, since this expression occurs in a soliloquy by Hamlet, it does not necessarily represent the belief of the author any more than Othello's murderous language proves that the author believed that wives unjustly suspected of wrongdoing should be strangled to death by jealous husbands. Why should we presume Hamlet to represent the author's beliefs any more than Richard or Iago or even Caliban? Hamlet is a man of indecision, doubt and inexperience, and the language fits him. At that moment he had evidently had no personal experience with the invisible world. A little later even he could not have used the expression above quoted, for his father *did* return from "that undiscovered country;" and Hamlet not only identified him but acted upon the information given him by his father.

Those who would find for the introduction of such phenomena as materialization in these plays some explanation that is consistent with the idea that "only children and old women believe in ghosts" will assuredly have trouble enough in any attempt to erase the occultism from *Hamlet* and have anything left. It is not trivial or incidental. It holds the very center of the stage. There is no loophole of "hallucination." The ghost is seen and identified by others before Hamlet meets it. In this matter the author makes "assurance doubly sure" by having for one of the witnesses a skeptic who is convinced by his own eyes. The communication between Hamlet and the ghost is by no means trivial or casual. The whole future of the tragedy turns upon this pivotal point. Hamlet shapes his program by the information thus received. Through this materialization he comes into possession of the proof that his father was murdered and learns by whom and in what treacherous and cowardly manner it was accomplished. Hamlet applies physical tests to this psychical information and, thus getting full confirmation, he carries out his plan of revenge.

Now, why should the great dramatist introduce the ghost unless it is his desire to give us a glimpse of the borderland — to present all the actors vitally concerned in the drama, whether visible to physical sight or not, and to portray their passions and emotions as they are, with their intimate connection with, and possible influence upon, the visible world? It was certainly not necessary to invent a ghost in order to acquaint

Hamlet at this particular moment with the methods by which his father was murdered. It could easily have been done by some secreted servant who observed the uncle's act — after the method of the more materialistic dramatists who, with more regard to startling effects than to exact representations of nature, are never at a loss for means to lay bare a secret, and, if need be, to make uncertain threads meet, can create a few spies out of hand while you wait! If the purpose of this master dramatist was not to give us a picture of human life that reaches beyond the visible, to describe the passions and emotions as surviving the loss of the physical body, then the bringing forward of the ghost violates one of the first principles of dramatic art: the introduction of the superfluous — of an incidental thing that is not required for the comprehension of what is to follow. Unless the purpose is akin to that above indicated the appearance of the ghost is a clumsy, absurd blunder; and so free are the Shakespeare plays from any artistic flaws that when anything is found in them that does not play a necessary part in the whole — does not contribute a ray of light toward the complete illumination of the subject under consideration — the critics conclude it is one of the many interpolations that have crept in since the plays left the author's hands. So the only logical inference to be drawn is that all the varied occultism to be found in the plays is there for a purpose — the very sane purpose of giving us a full and faithful picture of things as they really are and not as those who have but partial sight imagine

them to be.

After *Hamlet, Macbeth* is aparently the most popular of the tragedies and it presents a most attractive array of occult phenomena. As in the former tragedy there is nothing incidental about this occultism. It runs consistently throughout the play. The curtain rises to it and it holds a most conspicuous position to the very end, for it is only in the last scene of the final act that the exact fulfillment of the witches' prophecy is made clear. These witches and their prophecy play a most vital part in the drama. It is they who arouse Macbeth's ambition, setting him to thinking of the possibility of gaining the crown and appealing to the worst that is in him. All that follows, until the very end, is but the working out in the visible world of events thus forecast.

It will be remembered that it is in the first scene of the first act that Macbeth and Banquo are returning victorious from the battlefield when the witches are encountered and that they hail Macbeth as thane of Cawdor, an honor the king is about to confer upon him and of which he is entirely ignorant. They couple this information with the prophecy that he is to be king of Scotland. Before he leaves the spot he learns that the first part of the prophecy has been swiftly fulfilled, and he naturally has faith in the rest of it; and, his mind full of the possibility of attaining the crown, he promptly begins plotting to that end. Thus is the basis for the whole action of the play laid.

The second visit of Macbeth to the weird

sisters results in prophecies accompanied with symbolical apparitions, by means of which the culminating tragedy is exactly set forth. An *armored head* appears and these words are uttered: "Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth, beware Macduff!" and in the final scene, having slain his foe, Macduff appears upon the stage with Macbeth's head upon a pole. The second and third apparition quickly follow, each exactly foreshadowing what is actually to occur. But they are misinterpreted by Macbeth, and instead of serving as a warning only give him greater confidence and confirm him in his villany. The last one seems to him a certain prophecy of long life. It is the apparition of a crowned child with a tree in its hand, and Macbeth hears the words:

> "Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until
> Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
> Shall come against him."

To this he replies:

> "That will never be:
> Who can impress the forest; bid the tree
> Unfix his earth-bound root?"

His confidence in his future is now complete. He believes a long reign is ahead for him. This confidence is as great as had been his ambition to become king. Had not the weird sisters told him of his first promotion before it occurred? Had they not then truly prophesied that he would be king? Now he was being given, apparently, such unmistakable pledges of future security that

he felt certain he would finally die a natural death — would "live the lease of nature." And so, lured on by his own misinterpretation of what he had seen and heard, he went straight forward to his doom, which, to the smallest particular, fulfilled the prophecy. When the son of the murdered king, at the head of the invading army, had reached Birnam wood in the march upon the castle each soldier was order to cut a bough and hold it before him in order to screen the strength of the attacking party as it advanced. Thus "Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill" literally "came against him." To the very letter each separate prediction is fulfilled.

It is inconceivable that a great dramatist would construct a play, the entire first part of which is devoted to prophecies regarding the chief personage in the drama and the remainder of which is given over to the minutest fulfillment of those prophecies, unless he had a definite purpose to be accomplished by it. It is clearly impossible to call the occultism in *Macbeth* incidental. It is the foundation and the culmination. Some form of occultism is continually impressing itself upon the spectator, and it is all as true to occult principles as the characters are true to human life. Macbeth is naturally much overwrought just preceding, and after, the murder of the king. He represents that unique condition of nerve tension common to temporary clairvoyance. In this state of mind he saw the bloody dagger in the air before him, so real that he tries to grasp it. After he has caused the death of Banquo he sees his victim's wraith. Banquo was on his way

to the feast in Macbeth's castle when he was murdered by Macbeth's henchmen. He was hurrying to the castle, with his mind intent upon reaching it, when death overtook him. His wraith appears at the feast, but only Macbeth, with his overwrought nerves, sees it, and his language is fittingly descriptive of wraiths when he says, "Thou hast no speculation in those eyes."

It is most interesting to observe how true to nature and to the theosophical teaching this description of the wraith of Banquo is. Not only the possibility of Macbeth seeing the wraith but the probability of its appearing just where and when it did are faithful to the occult facts. The thoughts of the dying very naturally have their after-death influence and aside from occult literature there are frequent reports of the experiences of friends and relatives who have seen the apparitions of the dead before news of the death reached them. But it is not merely to friends that an apparition may appear. The determining factor seems to be the strong desire of the dying to be with certain people, or at a certain place, whatever the reason might be that caused the desire. Banquo was late, was riding hard, and had the whole of his mental energies upon the problem of arriving at the banquet on time, when he suddenly met death.

In order that the phenomena of wraiths may be understood and the naturalness of the description of the appearance of the wraith of Banquo at the banquet may be fully appreciated it is necessary to understand something of the theosophical conception of the constitution of a human

being. The physical body in which we have our waking consciousness and the astral body in which we consciously exist after bodily death are connected by the "etheric double," constituting an exact duplicate, in etheric matter, of the physical body and occupying the same space, as air and ether do — the interpenetration of two grades of physical matter. This etheric double, which is an exact duplicate of the physical body, is nevertheless not a body, for the ego cannot use it as a vehicle of consciousness as both the physical body and the astral body can be used. It is merely the connecting link between them and its function is to convey the life forces to the physical mechanism. Being of physical, though invisible, matter it perishes with the physical body but immediately after bodily death, it often plays the role of ghost.

"At what is called death, the etheric double is drawn away from its dense counterpart by the escaping consciousness; the magnetic tie existing between them during earth life is snapped asunder, and for some hours the consciousness remains enveloped in this etheric garb. In this it sometimes appears to those with whom it is closely bound up, as a cloudy figure, very dully consciousness and speechless — the wraith."

— *The Ancient Wisdom*, p. 56.

"The ego [at the time of bodily death] quickly shakes off the etheric double, which, as we have seen, cannot pass on to the astral plane, and leaves it to disintegrate with its life-long partner. It will sometimes appear immediately after death to friends at no great distance from the corpse, but

naturally shows very little consciousness, and will not speak or do anything beyond 'manifesting' itself. It is comparatively easily seen, being physical, and a slight tension of the nervous system will render vision sufficiently acute to discern it."— *Man and His Bodies,* p. 31.

It was this nerve tension that enabled Macbeth to see the wraith of Banquo which, to the others, was invisible. There was no "hallucination" about it. He did not look upon a picture painted by that treacherous artist, Fear. Macbeth was not a timid man afraid of shadows, but a veteran warrior of dauntless courage; and to this well-known quality of her husband's character Lady Macbeth promptly appealed:

"Are you a man?"
"Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appall the devil."

Encouraging this attitude of mind Lady Macbeth replies:

"O proper stuff!
This is the very painting of your fear;
This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said,
Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts,
Imposters to true fear, would well become
A woman's story at a winter's fire,
Authoriz'd by her grandam. Shame itself!
Why do you make such faces? When all's done,
You look but on a stool."

But Macbeth saw, and knew he saw, the ghost of his latest victim; and while Lady Macbeth saw nothing and marvelled to observe how deeply her husband was moved *he* was astounded to see that

she was unmoved, so real was the murdered Banquo before him. To her protest that he was throwing the whole assemblage into disorder he replies:

> "Can such things be,
> And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
> Without our special wonder? You make me strange
> Even to the disposition that I owe,
> When now I think you can behold such sights,
> And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,
> When mine are blanch'd with fear."

To Macbeth, whose temporary abnormal condition enabled him to see the etheric matter composing the duplicate of the dead man's physical body, there was no more question of Banquo's presence than there was of the existence of the other people in the room. Of course he would not be conscious of the fact that he could see what the others could not see. It did not even occur to him that Lady Macbeth did not see the wraith. It was as visible to him as the furniture and he expressed his astonishment that she "can behold such sights" and give no outward sign of agitation.

The occult side of sleep and dreams is another subject on which a flood of light is thrown in this great tragedy. What, from the theosophical viewpoint, is the thing we call sleep? It is the temporary withdrawal of the ego from the physical body, which then rests and recuperates. Its depleted energy is restored for the morrow's activities. Of course consciousness does not slumber. It must necessarily be functioning

somewhere and while the physical body lies inert the consciousness is using the astral body as its vehicle. It is not without excellent reason that sleep is so often used as an analogy for death. Sleep is, in very truth, a sort of temporary death, the difference being that the ego is absent from the physical body for a short time instead of permanently.

Every student of occultism is familiar with the fact that when one falls asleep the consciousness leaves the physical body and that the astral body is then its habitation. Hence, the living and the so-called dead may then be together. The terror with which murderers come back into the waking consciousness from slumber and their disposition to automatically go through rehearsals of the murder during sleep are facts that are as commonly known as they are imperfectly understood. In *Macbeth* we are given a most vivid presentation of the fact that sleep thus occultly plunges the murderer back into the tragedy he foolishly believes to be a closed chapter. Neither Macbeth nor Lady Macbeth can sleep, and he speaks of "the affliction of these terrible dreams that shake us nightly." Bold and resolute as she is, Lady Macbeth refuses to sleep without a light burning. In the sleep-walking scene she re-enacts her part in the murder of the king, trying to wash the blood from her hands, as she walks. "Out, damned spot!" she exclaims, and again, "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?" and we learn from the attendant's conversation with the doctor that this is but a repetition of similar scenes. The miser-

able woman finally dies under the strain.

This terror that comes upon the murderer, when in sleep he loses the protection afforded him by the gross physical matter that shuts out the astral world from his waking consciousness, is presented to us again in *Richard III.* Richard has fallen asleep in his tent, that last night of his life, when he meets, as in the flesh, the long list of his victims, each of whom makes it clear that disaster and death are just ahead. So real is all this to Richard that when he awakes he is not at first able to distinguish the astral from the physical consciousness. The late Richard Mansfield used to bring this out admirably when playing the role of the murderous king. "Who's there?" he demands, as Ratcliff approaches the tent after a short absence, during which the king's terrorizing experience occurs. "My lord, 'tis I," says Ratcliff, but Richard doubts his senses. Slowly and fearfully he approaches Ratcliff, stretching out his arm to the utmost, advancing by inches; making sure by the sense of touch that this is really a being of flesh. Finally assured of this he falls limply upon his lieutenant's shoulder and exclaims:

"O Ratcliff, I fear, I fear!
Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd
Came to my tent; and everyone did threat
To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard."

The officer tries to reassure him, and laugh the matter away with a remark on the folly of being afraid of shadows. But they were very real to Richard, and he replies:

"By the apostle Paul, shadows to-night

Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard
Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers."

In *Julius Caesar* we have a prophetic warning, premonition of death and the return of the dead. In the first act a soothsayer warns Cæsar, as he is on his way to the course, to "beware the ides of March." Cæsar calls him "a dreamer" and thinks no more of the matter until when, on that fatal day as he is approaching the capital, he sees the soothsayer in the throng and calls out to him, evidently as proof of the emptiness of the warning, "the ides of March are come;" to which the seer replies, "Ay, Cæsar, but not gone!" Within the hour Cæsar was dead.

Calphurnia had a premonition of Cæsar's death. The night preceding the assassination she saw a statue of the warrior

"Which, like a fountain with an hundred sprouts,
Did run pure blood; and many lusty Romans
Came smiling, and did bathe their hands in it."

— a very accurate symbolical description of what occurred the following day when the conspirators surrounded Cæsar in the senate, stabbed him from every side and then, delighted with the complete success of the conspiracy, crowded about to act on the advice of Brutus to "bathe our hands in Cæsar's blood" and walk forth to proclaim to the people that his death was the birth of peace and freedom. It cannot be argued that the dream was merely some fantastic figment of the brain that happened to occur on that particular night, because it was distinctly con-

nected with the coming tragedy and Cæsar remarks in the early morning:

> "Nor heaven nor earth have been at peace to-night:
> Thrice hath Calphurnia in her sleep cried out,
> 'Help, ho! they murder Cæsar!'"

The ghosts of the Shakespeare plays are rational and natural ghosts. There is always a reason for their appearance, just as there is a reason back of every act of a sane person. The dead king who materializes in *Hamlet* naturally had an intense desire to acquaint his son with the truth about the murder and the fact of his uncle's diabolical treachery. In *Richard III* the murdered victims, thrust suddenly from their physical bodies by the ever-ready blade of the conscienceless Gloster, naturally enough hated him as they would had they remained alive in prison in physical life, while he swaggered about with the crown. It is not strange that they should be pleased with his coming downfall and the warning they gave him, which is a warning to dishearten instead of to save, is most natural. It contains a note of triumph. They see his end and do all they can to make it doubly sure.

In *Julius Caesar* the ghost of Cæsar appears to Brutus, and most naturally so. Between the two there had been so strong a tie that when Cæsar discovers Brutus among his assassins he exclaims in astonishment, "Thou too, Brutus? — then fall, Cæsar!" Whether, when he materialized in Brutus' tent, it was in the role of friend to warn him of approaching death, and thus lessen the shock by reflection upon the inevitable, or in

the role of enemy and persecutor, it is, in either case, a perfectly natural thing. If his love for Brutus had suddenly changed to hatred when he saw him as one of his slayers, and he was unforgiving, Brutus would naturally be the object of Cæsar's revenge, and in that case it might easily be that he came to taunt and dishearten him. But if he felt more sorrow than anger and his affection for this "noblest Roman of them all," as even his enemies called Brutus, remained strong despite his error of joining the conspirators, then it is most natural that Cæsar should be drawn to him with a friendly word on what was coming. The ghost does not appear in a dream but as a materialization while Brutus sits reading in his tent; and whether as friend or foe there is no doubt left in the mind of Brutus about the information thus given him. He has no heart in the last battle. His thoughts are of his approaching end and he says to Volumnius,

> "The ghost of Cæsar hath appeared to me
> Two several times by night,— at Sardis once
> And this last night, here in Philippi fields:
> I know my hour is come."

When we turn from tragedy to comedy we find a different, but no less interesting, phase of occultism. Where shall we find a more fascinating and beautiful picture of the nature spirits than in *A Midsummer Night's Dream?* In this comedy the curtain that shuts a large part of nature from the vision of most of us is lifted a little and we get a glimpse of the life that cannot be observed with the physical senses. The fairies

dance and frolic for us and, while the poet avails himself of the license to which the muse is rightly entitled, he gives us a faithful portrayal of the characteristics of these witching denizens of the world invisible. In their essentials there is no difference between the fairies of the Shakespeare plays and the nature spirits of the Leadbeater books. Puck makes himself visible or invisible at will and quickly assumes various forms to suit the purpose of the moment; and he greatly enjoys the task Oberon assigns him of misleading and glamoring mortals — a characteristic familiar to students of the astral and etheric regions.

"I'll follow you, I'll lead you 'bout around,
Through bog, through bush, through brake, through briar:
Sometimes a horse I'll be, sometimes a hound,
A hog, a headless bear, sometimes a fire;
And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,
Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn."

The dramatist lets us see that these non-human but intelligent beings belong to another order of creation and do not understand life as we do. A thing of much value to us has no value in their eyes. They would not exchange a knowledge of the favorite spots in which

"To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,"

for all the wealth and joys of mortals; and looking on at the incomprehensible actions of the physical plane people Puck exclaims,

"Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

C. W. Leadbeater, in his work *The Astral Plane,* describes these nature spirits — as the whole of this great lower strata of the deva evolution is known to theosophy — as "tricky and mischievous but rarely malicious." These characteristics come out prominently in such characters as Puck and Ariel. Puck describes himself as "that merry wandered of the night" who devotes himself with great gusto to good-natured mischief, for his own and others' entertainment, and it was when he was playing his favorite tricks on his victims that they would "swear a merrier hour was never wasted." Ariel, in *The Tempest,* takes similar delight in making a victim of Caliban. He finds Caliban, on account of his ignorance and stupidity, easily frightened and Ariel plays all manner of pranks with him, leading him astray into bogs, suddenly assuming the form of a porcupine, of which Caliban had a particular dread, and again appearing in his pathway as a chattering ape, to the terror of Caliban and the amusement of Ariel. How true to nature this character is drawn may be seen from the description of the author and investigator above quoted. Referring to the characteristics of this class of astral entities he says:

"In most cases when they come in contact with man they either show indifference or dislike, or else take an impish delight in deceiving him and playing childish tricks upon him. * * * They are greatly assisted in their tricks by the wonderful power which they possess of casting a glamour over those who yield themselves to their influence, so that such victims for the time

see and hear only what these fairies impress upon them, exactly as the mesmerized subject sees, hears, feels and believes whatever the magnetizer wishes."— *The Astral Plane,* p. 79.

Those who credit the existence of fairies at all, are likely to think of them as a little group of beings exhibiting no great diversity of form or powers. The student of occultism knows what a misconception this is, and here again the great dramatist sets us right both in *The Tempest* and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* The dislike of these nature spirits for the cities and their love of the secluded places, commented upon by Mr. Leadbeater, also comes out clearly in these two plays, as does the speed with which they move and the distance from which things may be brought in an incredibly short time. When Oberon wants a certain herb and enjoins haste Puck boasts of his ability to " put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes,"— not in the least an exaggeration of the possibilities of astral plane locomotion.

One thing that seems to have puzzled the critics of these matchless plays is their consistency. Not crediting the invisible world as a fact in nature they have marvelled that the dramatist unites the visible and the invisible in so complete and consistent a whole. One puzzled writer exclaims — " by making what is absolute unnatural thoroughly natural and consistent he has accomplished the impossible!"

It is an extremely significant fact that the Shakespeare plays which the critics are generally agreed upon as being the greatest of them all are

those which contain the most occultism. No other play ever written has received such universal praise as *The Tempest.* It was the last dramatic work of the poet's life and in it is seen, according to general opinion, the acme of his matchless art. Now *The Tempest,* of all the plays, is the most occult. As would be expected there is much difference of opinion about its purpose, but none about its merit. To its analysis learned minds have given the most painstaking labor and it is the theme of many a weighty volume. To the student of occultism this play and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are companions and constitute a class in the Shakespeare plays. The opinions about them, and particularly about *The Tempest,* are almost as numerous as the critics; but perhaps nobody is better qualified to interpret such literature than Hugo. Of these two plays he says: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* depicts the action of the invisible world on man; *The Tempest* symbolizes the action of man on the invisible world."

Prospero is the central figure in *The Tempest* and in him we have a picture of the adept, absolutely controlling the lower orders of life in the invisible world and through that power controlling in perfect mastery the elements. He is the white magician. He has omnipotent power but uses it only for righteous ends and always with mercy. He sometimes temporarily assumes an apparent harshness but is always in fact the personification of gentleness and no offense is too serious for him to forgive and forget. He returns good for evil, and hardship is brought upon the

wrong-doers only for the purpose of bringing the arrogant and conscienceless to their senses. He has clairvoyant vision and moves about in his astral body; for he is not merely aware of what is occurring at a distance but is represented as being *invisibly present* when Ariel arraigns the three evil-doers for their misdeeds. He knows of the danger that threatens the king and Gonzalo and sends Ariel to prevent the would-be assassins from murdering them by awakening Gonzalo at the right instant. He has the power to instantly hypnotize Ferdinand and disarm him with a stick when he draws his sword. To the invisibles that serve him Prospero issues positive commands and exacts unquestioning obedience. Fleming says of this character that Prospero is the personification of wisdom, of power that can execute justice, rewarding right and circumventing wrong.

It was through control of the nature spirits that Prospero produced the storm at sea that drove the ship containing his treacherous brother and his allies to the island shore; and it was through his command of the same entities that his further plans were successfully executed. Ariel, the chief of the invisible hosts that serve Prospero, not any too willingly, is visible or invisible at pleasure and assumes, instantaneously, various forms at will. He possesses the power of glamour in remarkable degree and the shipwrecked men are fully persuaded that the vessel is lost. Ariel reports to Prospero that "the ship, though invisible to them, is safe in the harbor." He separates the stranded men and each group or individual

believes all others have perished. The king believes his son is dead while the prince is certain his father has perished; and through the state of mind thus brought about the problem in hand is worked out successfully. In working them up into the condition that finally made them tractable and penitent, Ariel, in the form of a harpy, frightened the king, Sebastian and Antonio — "three men of sin" — nearly out of their wits. Again, at the head of a band of the denizens of the world invisible, who take visible form, he drives the marauders and would-be murderers from Prospero's home. The final task assigned him by Prospero is to carry out the magician's promise to the king that on the return voyage he shall have "calm seas," and "auspicious gales." With the execution of this task Ariel gained his longed-for freedom from serving the magician whom he called "great master" and won the life he much preferred:

> "Merrily, merrily shall I live now
> Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."

In *The Tempest* there are more actors from the invisible world than from the visible and all are under the control and direction of Prospero, whose compassion is as great as his power. He addresses the would-be assassins as "my friends" and says "let us not remember our troubles past."

If the critics could accept the very apparent fact that the author of these wonderful plays was a great occultist their difficulties and bewilderment would disappear. For one thing they would no longer marvel at his limitless knowledge

on all the subjects he touches. Hazlitt contents himself with calling it genius and says that "there can be little doubt that Shakespeare was the most universal genius that ever lived," and again he remarks that the great dramatist had "the same insight into the world of imagination that he had into the world of reality."

It is amusing to see how different people are struck with the poet's exact technical knowledge on subjects with which they happen to be familiar and how they try to account for it, ignoring the fact that he is quite as much at home with all other subjects. Lord Mulgrave, who was a distinguished naval officer, says that the first scene in *The Tempest* "is a very striking instance of Shakespeare's knowledge in a professional science, the most difficult to attain without the help of experience. He must have acquired it by conversation with some of the most skillful seamen of that time." If the poet-dramatist acquired his marvelous fund of information about the visible world, let alone the invisible, by consulting experts on each subject it would puzzle the critics more to figure out how he had time for anything else than to satisfactorily account for his genius. But if we accept the most probable explanation — that he was an occulist to whom cause and effect in the two worlds lay open — the solution of all the puzzles in his literary work becomes simple.

Those who cannot see that the occultism which permeates such of the Shakespeare plays as it naturally belongs to is there because it is as legitimate a part of them as trees and grass are

part of a landscape, have, so far as I know, offered no other explanation than that "Shakespeare was making a concession to the superstition of his times." But such an explanation is wholly inadequate for a number of reasons. In the first place if it were merely a concession to the ignorant, there would be no reason for it being the notable thing it is in some of the plays. It would be incidental, not vital. We would expect it to be in the form of allusions here and there, as a politician throws out to his audience complimentary and pleasing remarks that have no bearing on his arguments and no part in his purpose. But why should there be a "concession" at all? Why was it necessary? Why was it more necessary in the Shakespeare plays than in any others of that age? Why didn't Jonson and other successful dramatists of the same age have to make the same concession? As a matter of fact precisely the opposite course then, as now, appealed pleasingly to the people. In *The Alchemist* Jonson makes a savage attack upon astrology. He represents its practitioners as barefaced frauds of the most contemptible type and all their patrons as credulous fools. Quite consistently, too, with the temper of the play, he mercilessly ridicules the Puritans, painting them as unprincipled graspers among whom you search in vain for a redeeming virtue; and that must have pleased his audience mightily.

The Shakespeare plays were not written to cater to the passions of the times. With their inherent strength and beauty they can win their way against the prejudices of any age. More-

over, if it had been necessary for a play to have some "superstition" in it, in order to succeed, why was it necessary in some of these plays and not in others? If it was necessary for the success of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* why was it not also necessary for *As You Like It?* If it was essential to the success of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* why not also for *Othello?* The simple truth is that the occultism appears only where it naturally belongs and for the purpose of teaching the lesson that is being presented.

But there are other reasons for rejecting the theory that the great dramatist was making a concession to the ignorance of his times. The plays do not belong exclusively to that age and bear most convincing internal evidence that they were not written for that time any more than for this time or for the future generations. Certainly nobody better than the author himself understood that. It was more than two centuries before this greatest literary achievement of the modern world came to be really appreciated in fair degree. It will undoubtedly be more fully appreciated in future times than in our own, for what is its "superstition" to this generation will be its science to the next. It belongs to all times because it deals with the fundamental things in nature and will be studied with profit as long as men seek to analyze human motives and study the evolution of the race.

Perhaps the most cogent answer of all to the flimsy explanation that the great poet-dramatist was making "a concession to the superstition of his times" is that such a course would have

been a prostitution of his genius inconsistent with the character of his work. His greatness as a teacher is beyond all question; and nothing could be more reprehensible than for one who is far beyond others in intelligence to fasten upon the people wrong beliefs. To lend his pen to any such base purpose would be evidence of a moral weakness and cowardice that could not have belonged to the character of the man who produced these plays, for their moral strength and grandeur is more striking than even their intellectual power. No man capable of that ignoble course could possibly have created such characters as Prospero and Cordelia, or have given us the lofty ideals we find in such plays as *The Tempest* and in *Romeo and Juliet*. The truth is that instead of degrading his work to fit the popular conception of his times he did precisely the opposite; and in an age when lust, cruelty and revenge were exceedingly popular he exalted purity, pity and forgiveness.