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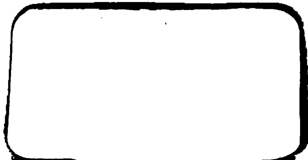

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SHAKESPEARE.

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COMMENTARIES

BY

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PROFESSOR AT HEIDELBERG.

TRANSLATED

UNDER THE AUTHOR'S SUPERINTENDENCE

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ERRATA.

Vol. I. Page 61, line 29, *for* "Skakespeare", *read* "Shakespeare".
,, ,, 79, lines 17 and 29, *for* "Lilly", *read* "Lily".
,, ,, 99, line 28, *for* "inF ord's", *read* "in Ford's".
,, ,, 300, line 28, *for* "there fore", *read* "therefore".
,, ,, 324, line 16, *for* "farra ther", *read* "far rather".
,, ,, 653, line 23, *for* "renevation", *read* "renovation".

Vol. II. Page 129, line 7, *for* "habit have become a", *read* "have become a habit".

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THIRD PERIOD OF SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC POETRY.

We have been able to become acquainted with our poet, at least in isolated features of his life, during the first and second periods of his poetical career; for the second some precious documents were given us which let us cast a glance upon the history of his soul. Of the third epoch of his life we know scarcely anything. We learn from time to time something of his financial affairs and circumstances, of purchasing and selling, which exhibit him constantly as a man of wealth and comfort. The most important public event which occurred in this latter period of his life, was the death of Elizabeth, the accession of James I., and the union of the three kingdoms. Shakespeare celebrated these changes in his Macbeth (1605), in which besides the skilful interweaving of the Stuarts and the patriotic salutation to the first king who carried "two-fold balls and treble sceptres", a flattering reference to the Scottish dynasty was implied in the subject itself. Schlegel justly compares the ingenious and at the same time artistically independent

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manner, in which this drama is formed into an occasional poem, with Sophocles' praise of Athens and Æschylus' glorification of the Areopagus in the Eumenides. Shakespeare celebrates in Macbeth an ancient obligation of Scotland to England, who at that time freed the Scottish throne from the tyrant, and established the lawful king together with milder customs; and this old debt Scotland now paid off, when she gave a king to the empty throne of the Tudors, who maintained the peace which Elizabeth had planted, and brought in a love of art and learning. Shakespeare himself is supposed to have written an epigram, still extant, which extols James for his knowledge; and according to another tradition, the king, who from more than one testimony loved to see the pieces of our poet, wrote him a kind letter in his own hand. At any rate Shakespeare's honourable position and estimation continued under this king. From some knowledge of localities in Macbeth, it has been concluded that he had personally visited Scotland. A division of his company under Laurence Fletcher, probably an elder brother of the poet, was in Scotland from 1599 to 1601, but Shakespeare at the very time was so active in writing for the London stage, that his presence in Scotland is little probable. Immediately upon his arrival in London, James took the Shakespeare company into his pay and patronage, and called them the royal servants; the patent specifies nine players, among whom Fletcher stands at the head, and Shakespeare occupies the second and Burbadge the third place. The document grants the company their former liberty to play throughout the kingdom, and secures to them protection from all damage, and all the courtesies which formerly fell to the lot of people of their place and quality.

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We have seen how at the close of the 16th century, Shakespeare was occupied with indescribable activity, and was seized with an overweening desire for satisfying his creative genius. The cheerfulness, the assurance, the copiousness, with which we saw him work at the close of the second period, continued in the first few years of the third, or rather increased. In the six years which elapsed between 1598 and 1603, Shakespeare wrote on the average at least two plays a year. Subsequently his works become more scanty; from the years 1604 to 1612 there is on the average only one play a year, and this alone contradicts the notice of Ward, that Shakespeare in his older days, when he lived at Stratford, furnished two pieces annually for the stage. It is much more probable, that from the year 1612, when the poet took up his abode in Stratford, he not only sought to free himself from his outward connection with the stage, but also concluded his dramatic and poetical career.

Looking over Shakespeare's dramas of the third period in comparison with those of the second, the most striking difference is, as we before intimated, that from the beginning of the new century the tragedy and the serious tragic drama extraordinarily predominate. Previous to 1600, if we set aside the seven pieces of the first period, there are twelve comedies and merry plays to four real tragedies; but after the group of comedies last discussed there now follow eight tragedies of the gravest purport, and really no more comedies. For the dramas (Cymbeline, Measure for Measure, the Tempest, and the Winter's Tale,) have all more or less a tragic colouring, and even in Troilus and Cressida, the seriousness and thoughtfulness of the poet in his work

prevent a sensation of mirth; the merry humourists, the comical female characters, the shallow figures of his romantic comedies, wholly cease from this time. If we have found the poet occupied in the pieces of the second period with those reflections upon the contrast of outward show and inward reality, of the actual and the conventional worth of things, a theme capable of the most manifold poetical representation, another system of thought of a character throughout serious, elegiac, and tragic, appears predominant in a great series of the creations of the last period; in their matter we see a new moral relation in the foreground, which returns ever and again under various modifications, and seems to chain the poet's reflection and consideration with the same interest as the previous subject in the works of the middle period. The unnatural dissolving of natural bonds, oppression, falsehood, treachery and ingratitude towards benefactors, friends, and relatives, towards those to whom the most sacred duties should be dedicated, this is the new tragical conception, which now most powerfully and profoundly occupies the poet in the most various works of this epoch of his life. Thus in Julius Cæsar, Brutus' defection is represented as an act of faithlessness and ingratitude, which the spirit of the murdered friend resents and retaliates. In Henry VIII., Wolsey's self-seeking plans, in opposition to his royal patron, express a like thankless faithlessness. Macbeth's treason towards his benefactor Duncan displays the same ingratitude in a still higher degree. And as in Lear, this ingratitude and faithlessness advance by gradual progress, through friends, princes, benefactors, and relations, to the highest pitch of vice, in the profligate alienation of children from their

father, in the rebellion of kindred blood in the bosom of the family; we find here also in Lear and Cymbeline the pure contrast of unshaken fidelity set before us in the child, the subject, the servant, and the wife. In Troilus the same theme is continued in the faithlessness of Cressida and the league-breaking of the Greeks. In Antony, the faithless rupture of old and newly formed political, friendly, and nuptial ties, in order to keep faith with an unworthy paramour, is represented as the catastrophe in the fate of the hero. Coriolanus' defection from his country, falls more remotely under the same category. On the other hand, the subjects of Timon and the Tempest, the disgraceful ingratitude and the faithless alienation of the false friends in the one, and the usurpation of brother against brother in the other, rank entirely under this head.

Whether the striking constant recurrence of the poet to such instances of injured confidence, broken obligations, evident ingratitude, and breach of natural ties, can be accounted for by any personal and sorrowful experiences which would at once explain why he dwelt more on these dark pictures, than on the opposite bright ones of fidelity,— this, unfortunately we do not know; nay, that which in Shakespeare's life might have perhaps corresponded with his inclination to the tragic, we should hardly be able to guess, if from outward facts, and from probable grounds and causes we were to trace his more serious, more gloomy frame of mind. We have heard from his sonnets, that at the zenith of his friendship with that favourite youth, some adverse fate befel him, which cast him into affliction and melancholy. This unhappiness which overtook him, we can refer to nothing unless it be to the death of his son Hamlet in the

year 1596. A heavy blow also to his heart was indisputably the rebellion of the Earl of Essex in the year 1601, in which Southampton was involved; as well as the conspiracy in 1603, which cost the lives of Watson and Clarke. Essex was beheaded in February 1601; Southampton remained in confinement during the reign of Elizabeth; in 1603, began the lengthy imprisonment of the famous Raleigh, who certainly stood high in Shakespeare's esteem, if not in closer relation to him. It is possible enough, that Julius Cæsar was written just about 1601 or 1602, not without reference to these conspirators and independent spirits. We have seen from the prologue to Henry V., what a sympathizing delight Shakespeare manifested in Essex, and still later in Macbeth; Steevens has conjectured, that in the account of the death of the Thane of Cawdor he had in view the behaviour of the Earl at his execution. Much importance cannot, however, be placed on these allusions; those misfortunes too do not appear sufficient to call forth such an important change in the tone of his life, as is to be found in Shakespeare's works after the year 1600. Much more essential to the explanation of this change must be those inner experiences of the poet, amid which he had even earlier confessed himself to his friend as refined and purified in a transformation of his nature. The hour seemed to have come to him also, as he had so often represented it in his humorous characters, in which he renounced the frivolous practices of the world; age advanced upon him, he acquired an extended knowledge of history and an increasing experience of life, which dispose no men with any depth of character and cultivation to be more merry, frivolous, and shallow as years go on. If we take into account his aversion

to his profession, and the impression which the degeneracy of stage-poetry may have made upon him, the crudeness of the age so repugnant to him in many of its features, the capricious and not rarely bloody arbitrariness of the government, we have motives sufficient to incite the poet to descend still deeper into the recesses of human nature, to roll back the page of history further than he had hitherto done, to search after passions of still greater force in the traditions of the past, and to trace still deeper furrows on the brow from the more profound contemplation of the world and of humanity. It is however striking, that the very play, the hero of which bears the name of Shakespeare's deceased son, may be regarded as a vehicle for the elegiac humour of the poet. Hamlet is the only piece of this later period, in which one might conjecture a pathological interest on the part of the poet; we might perceive, that he had treated the hero as a counterpart to Prince Henry, and in both together we might feel that Shakespeare displayed the various points of his own nature in greater fulness, than had been possible in one alone. In one of the sonnets the melancholy feature in Hamlet's character is so prefigured, that one is tempted to believe that the plan of this poem was projected by Shakespeare since the period in which "the world was bent to cross his deeds". We may call to mind in Hamlet's famous soliloquy, the motives which led him to draw the idea of self-murder from the consideration of the course of this world, the weariness at the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the pangs of despised love, the law's delay, the insolence of office, and the spurns of merit, and we shall read a similar soliloquy in the 66th sonnet, which the poet addressed like all

the others to his friend.* But if the reader takes for granted this correspondence between this personal poem and the drama alluded to, he must beware of inferring from this that a hypochondriacal state of mind attacked Shakespeare in his later years, making him regard the world and its course with a darkened vision, and suggesting to him the gloomy and dismal pictures of his tragedies, as somewhat far removed from his former nature. We utter this warning, because even here, our Romanticists have sought to mislead us on a false track. William Schlegel called Hamlet a "tragedy of thought", suggested by constant and *never-satisfied* reflections on human destiny, on the sad complexity of the events of this world. This view was embraced by Frederic Schlegel in his history of literature, and he unfolded it further: he perceived in Shakespeare a nature deeply sensitive, and austerely tragic, a disposition isolated, reserved, and solitary, — and this in the poet, whom these very Romanticists could not admire enough for his wit and mirth, in the man who, in the great market of life was the judge

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* Tir'd with all these, for restful death I cry; —
As, to behold desert, a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplac'd,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill,
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,
And captive good attending captive ill:
Tir'd with all these, from these would I begone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.

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and agent in all matters and in every kind of intercourse. These critics impute their own confusion and bluntness to the powerful nature, whose measure is so far beyond them. Even in Hamlet, Shakespeare has delineated with such objective acuteness this weary depression and unsatisfied frame of mind, this too-close search into the gloomy side of life, and he stands himself in such clear and distinct light above this mental disorder, that this very play must be regarded as a triumph, in which he must have overcome his vein of melancholy, if any such existed within him. If such a gloomy elegiac mood had lastingly governed him, he would not possibly have written the merriest of his comedies almost at the same time with Hamlet, nor have continually inserted in his serious tragedies the most comic scenes full of unclouded humour. And in his latest tragedies, in Macbeth and Lear, let no one imagine that what he depicted there of austerity and cruelty, was less known and experienced by the poet than we experience it; it was his *intention* to exhibit harsh and violent subjects, and his tenderness of feeling in the midst of these pieces ever lies close by the side of the severity which the subject required. If any one believes Shakespeare to have been sunk in melancholy during this latter period of his life, and sees him dwell with satisfaction upon the gloomy pictures of his tragedies, we will alone draw his attention to Cymbeline, where the poet has really taken for theme and subject the complexity of the affairs of this world, their apparent contradictions, discords, and injustice, and where he resolves them into a harmony which utterly excludes from his heart every idea of shallow discontent, of weak disgust of the world, and of a harassed spirit.

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The plays of Shakespeare's second period turn especially upon love, friendship, country, upon all the most sacred emotions which most engage a youth; in all these pieces we thought to find the key to the prevailing idea, in the personal nature, history, and circumstances of the poet himself. The works of the third period take a wider range in subject and interest, from the increasing sphere of observation attained by the mature man; they enter more acutely into the profounder problems of life, investigating and solving them; they divide themselves into several groups, in which we see tragedy, history, and romantic pieces appearing in much more pure and more refined forms than before; and it is singular, that in these groups the different dramatic styles coincide at once with the different times and localities in which they are played. This striking and self-evident grouping has induced us to depart, in our further discussion of the plays, from the strict succession of time. We shall, as we have already indicated, make the transition to the tragedies from the comedies last discussed, by Measure for Measure. Next to that group of comedies in chronological order, we ought according to all indications to place the tragedies of Othello, Cæsar, and Hamlet (1600—2); we shall shift Cæsar back to the other Roman plays and place by Hamlet its counterpart Macbeth (1605), and next to this, Lear (1605) and Cymbeline (1609), which we see in similar relation to each other. In four of these pieces we stand in the world of myths and heroes of Gallo-Germanic antiquity, in which Shakespeare sought for more powerful passions for a magnificent tragedy, than later civilized ages could afford; on this account Othello is naturally ranged with them. From these works, where the genius of the poet is at its

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height, we make our passage through Troilus and Cressida (1608—9), to the three Roman histories (Antony 1607, Coriolanus 1610), in which this style also, on account of the lesser dependence on national material, and the purer sources from which they are derived, is fashioned into a purer form. To these we add Timon (1610), that we may place the representations from the old world completely together. From this historical world, we pass in the Winter's Tale and the Tempest (1611), once more in glaring contrast back to the fantastic world of wonder, so that in this third period we meet again with the same features, which we have observed already in the first, that Shakespeare as from an instinctive necessity seized at once the most various subjects, periods, and styles, as if to root himself in no one-sided direction or frame of mind.

In all the works of this period, Shakespeare remained true to the national Saxon character, after he had once laid aside the Italian taste in art. In What you Will, his delight was most positively expressed in the old homely popular songs, and in the deep effect, which this simple art possesses beyond the affected words of the fashionable poetry. The specimens of Italian lyric now cease entirely, the allusions to the songs and wise adages of the people become more frequent, the unnatural conceits are withdrawn, and for the future where the diction borders on bombast, the design of the characterization is always perceived. The strong and forcible language is accounted for by an Othello or a Coriolanus; profoundness is no longer, as in those conceits, lavished on shallow ideas, but it is enjoined by the subject itself With regard to the externals of the poetic language, the rhyme is ever more confined to

elevated passages, to sentences and concluding verses; the formation of iambics is more free and irregular; at that productive period at the close of the century, prose predominates extraordinarily. Whether in this lighter diction, or in the most sublimely pathetic passages, or in the wise sentences, with which Hamlet and Troilus are interspersed in such rich abundance, Shakespeare has in this period far advanced in everything, in subjects, ideas, and forms; in it lie almost all the magnificent works, which ever come foremost to our mind, when Shakespeare is spoken of. The English language was fashioned anew under his hands, as our own was under Luther's, and with pride Meres declares of him that, "As Stolo said, that the Muses would speak with Plautus' tongue, if they would speak Latin, so I say, that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine-filed phrase, if they would speak English."

And this fine-filed phrase was so naturally given to the poet, that in fact he is said never to have needed the file. The editors of his works said with admiration, and Ben Jonson with blame, that in his manuscripts scarcely a blot was found. Ben Jonson, who, with all his reverence for our poet, which he avows in his Discoveries, had no glimpse into Shakespeare's soul, wished he had made a thousand blots and had had the exercise of his wit as much in his power as the wit itself; he considered that applicable to him, which Augustus said of Hatterius: *sufflaminandus erat;* so that ridiculous things might not have here and there escaped him, as in the verse, which we read differently in our present text:

Cæsar did never wrong, but with just cause.

According to the present judgment of Shakespeare, no one any longer perceives that the exercise of his wit was any worse than the wit itself. If he polished little in isolated passages and in separate lines, (on which indeed with friendly actors little depended in works only written for representation,) we know well, that he undertook very essential improvements on a large scale, sometimes even completely remodelling his pieces. But the "break", which Ben Jonson wished to lay upon Shakespeare, might have transformed Shakespeare into Ben Jonson. Rather will we have the man with all his faults, if they will point them out to us! For the verse quoted, even if it once did stand thus written, a pedant may consider nonsense, but certainly no Cæsarian statesman or warrior would do so. Besides where the growth is so luxuriant, redundancy is not merely pardonable, not merely unavoidable, but it belongs to the man and to his nature, it can never interfere with our love for these wonderful creations. This every reader will experience, who impresses upon himself the wise counsel, expressed by Shakespeare's friends in the preface to his works (1623): "Read him therefore; and again and again; and if then you do not like him, surely, you are in some manifest danger — not to understand him!"

Shakespeare died in the year 1616, on the 23rd April. It appears that he had been ill for a long time and had for this reason made his will. The report, therefore, which Mr. Ward noted in his journal, is not very credible, that Shakespeare had caroused too much at a visit from his friends Ben Jonson and Drayton and had on account of this died of a fever. The mere similarity besides of the tradition of Greene's death makes it suspicious. The poet had lived

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to see the marriage of his two daughters; at 45 years of age he had already become a grandfather; he left his family well provided for.

After his death, his bust was placed in Stratford as a memorial, the opinion of which by competent judges is that the face was copied after death. The editors of his plays in 1623, added another picture of the poet to his works, which is thinner, more intellectual and not so bloated as the bust. Shakespeare's contemporaries call him a fine, well-formed man, and with this the high brow and the large, bright, and calm eyes of this picture well accord. Ben Jonson praised the likeness, and it gave rise to a thousand improved copies. For in itself it is a very imperfect drawing, from which we can only just conclude, that this man so normal in mind was regular also in his physical form, to render which in drawing without being lifeless and insipid, is ever notoriously difficult.

We will now follow the poet through the series of the works of his later years, and endeavour in conclusion in looking back upon the results of our reflections, to gather together his poetical, moral, and intellectual qualities in one complete picture, which will bring most expressively before us the inner characteristics of this great mind.

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MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

The vein of deep thought, which so strikingly distinguishes the works of Shakespeare's latter period, beats in its fullest pulse in Measure for Measure, the drama most closely linked to the comedies last discussed. It was performed in the year 1604; and probably not written much earlier. The basis of the piece is an Italian tale in Giraldi Cinthio's Hekatomithi (8. 5.), translated in Whetstone's Heptameron of Civil Discourses. 1582. The cruel and painful purport of this tale is briefly this. The Emperor's deputy in Inspruck, Juriste by name, who is enjoined to be guilty of nothing contrary to justice during his prince's absence, passes sentence of death upon a youth on account of the crime, which Claudio commits in Measure for Measure; by the double promise of marriage and the release of her brother, he seduces the pleading sister (Exitia) into the same crime, for which he had sentenced her brother, and orders him then notwithstanding to be put to death and the corpse to be sent to his sister's house. The Emperor sentences his deputy to marry Exitia and then to be beheaded. At her intercession his life is spared, and she retains him as her husband.

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The same Whetstone, who translated this tale, had before (1578) published a piece in ten acts upon this subject, entitled Promos and Cassandra, which was never performed. Even he felt the necessity of moderating the repulsive tenor of the narrative. As the piece from its happy conclusion was to be a comedy, he interspersed the serious action with burlesque interludes, which caricature the meaning, and thus offer a counter-balance to the painful impression. The sinning brother, as in Shakespeare, is not put to death; the gaoler sets him free, and carries the sister the head of a dead man instead of that of her brother. For the rest the details are similar to those in the novel.

Shakespeare has on his part in his Measure for Measure still more moderated and purified the story by carrying out still further Whetstone's track. With him, the head of the dead man is not brought to the sister, but with a more natural and less cruel object, to the judge. The sister's fall is avoided by the introduction and substitution of Angelo's former affianced one, and thus a change is effected in that part of the story which is the most offensive, because the marriage with the murderer of her brother, or with him who at least ordered the sentence of death to be executed, has in it something extraordinarily degrading to the woman.

After all these improvements, however, in the feeling of most readers in the present day, all that is offensive in the tenor of the piece, is not yet quite removed. We are not inclined to pardon the poet for having brought upon the stage the cruel subjects of the Italian novelists both here, in All's Well that Ends Well, and in Cymbeline, and

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for having demanded from us, that we should look with the more sensitive eye on the representation of that which in narration falls less forcibly on the blunter ear. Measure for Measure indeed is performed even to this day in moral England, and that without abridgment or alteration, and the experience can thus be made, that the representation itself softens much which appears repugnant to us in the piece. Notwithstanding the play found little favour with most English critics, Hunter, Knight, and others; even an admirer, like Coleridge, called this play the most painful or rather the only painful work among Shakespeare's dramas. He considered the comic and tragic parts alike bordering on the detestable, the one disgusting, the other terrible; he called the pardon and marriage of Angelo degrading to the female character and not in conformity with the demands of severe, indignant justice; for cruelty combined with lust and infamous baseness could not be forgiven, because we could not consider them heartily repented of. These objections would be indisputable, were we convinced from the course of action and the nature of the actors, that a sincere repentance was indeed unimaginable in Angelo, and were we to admit that "severe indignant justice" is the only true justice, a justice in this instance well employed. To form a correct judgment on these passions, it is necessary, that we should as usual go back to the motives of action, and discover their psychological connection.

A novel, taken from Shakespeare's play, furnished with all his characteristic touches and with his representation of circumstances, and placed by the side of the original source or by the side of Whetstone's play, would evidence in the

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simplest and most striking manner, that wonderful difference between one poetry and another, which exhibits our poet as so unique and distinct. What a richness of reflection do we meet with in Shakespeare, when we search into the elements of the facts before us! What a depth in the characters, compelling attention from us, even before we see them entangled in such painful intricacies! What a boldness in bringing the very noblest characters into these same odious intricacies, just as if he aimed at multiplying the difficulties, and contradictions of the plot! And then, what a careful construction of circumstances, so that from the outset our apprehension is calmed as to the gloomy incidents, and we are allowed to anticipate an end, not altogether disastrous!

And first of all, in how masterly a manner is the ground prepared, on which the poet has placed the scene of these habits, characters, and incidents! The scene is laid in Vienna. Moral corruption here "boils and bubbles till it o'erruns", society is destroyed by it, and all decorum is lost. We cast a glance into the prisons and brothels, which allows us to estimate the extent and shamelessness of the prevailing licentiousness; in the streets we see dissolute fellows, who make full use of the freedom, with which low manners may evade the law. Debauchery has become a common custom. Every mind seems occupied with transactions and matters of this kind. He who has never exposed himself to evil report, like Angelo, is not regarded as a sound and perfect man; the Duke, who has never had intercourse with women, escapes not the poisonous tongue of Lucio, the lightminded calumniator; and even in the cloister, where the Duke hides himself, Friar Thomas

believes at first, that an affair of gallantry drives him to that place of secrecy. Existing restraints are cast down; unbridled liberty plucks justice by the nose; law, like an unused rod to the child, is rather mocked at than feared. There is a severe old statute, which awards the punishment of death to unchastity. It has been set aside as too severe for fourteen years, or as Claudio, whom it subsequently touches, says exaggeratingly, for "nineteen zodiacks", and it has fallen into oblivion. It was a scare-crow, says Angelo, which from custom and want of motion was become rather a perch for birds of prey than their terror.

The reigning Duke, who had thus allowed this law to slumber, had done so from kindness of heart and innate mildness. He thinks himself justified in bearing testimony to himself, that even to the envious he must appear a scholar, a statesman, and a soldier. He confesses that high moral view, that the ruler and judge ought to be as holy as he is severe, a pattern in himself, "grace to stand and virtue go"; he considers him as a tyrant, who punishes in others the faults into which he falls himself. His whole nature is that of a man of moderation, gentleness, and calmness, his whole endeavour that of a circumspect philosopher. He loves his people, but he relishes not their loud applause and thronging, nor does he think the man of safe discretion, that affects it. He has a leaning to solitude, and plays the part of a friar perhaps even better, than that of a statesman; his earnest endeavour was ever to know himself, but also to know men and to test the instruments of his rule, seemed to be a kind of necessity with him. This circumspect wisdom, never seeing things imperfectly or from one point of view, shows itself also in his conduct

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respecting the morality or immorality of the people of Vienna, which by degrees had attained to such a height, that the prince could no longer remain inactive. He is himself not of a sensual nature, but he does not, like Angelo, judge those who are so, with unreasonable severity and strictness. In this mild spirit he has allowed those severe laws to slumber, but by this he has given free course to crime; these fruits of his kindness rouse him into seeking a remedy. But even while he now has recourse to severity, he allows the same two-sided consideration to rule, which is throughout peculiar to him: he reflects, that it would be tyrannical in him, if he, who by his lenity had first given a free passage to sin, should all of a sudden turn to rigour. He therefore withdraws himself, and imposes on a deputy this office of making the change from the hitherto lax administration of justice to a new inculcation of the old, neglected, and severe laws.

For this post he chooses, with a well-weighed and "leavened" purpose, not Escalus, the man who first ought to come in question, who is next the duke in rank and is like him of a wise moderation and upright spirit, endowed with all the qualities of a great justiciary and statesman, but the younger Angelo, whose severe morals and firm discretion appear exactly to recommend him as suitable for bringing back the sharper discipline. A sacred halo surrounds this man, who enjoys an unapproachable reputation for integrity and purity of life. In the strange phenomenon of an isolated stoic in the midst of a Sybarite city, we see him with a serious suitable bearing, with sober countenance and well considered words, as if he would frighten away all kind of levity. The Duke calls him severe and precise; he scarcely

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allows that his blood flows, or that "his appetite is more to bread than stone". In the eyes of the wanton debauchees he is a man "whose blood is very snow-broth"; one who has blunted the natural stings of the senses with profits of the mind, study, and fast. In the silent deliberations of his own soul he can confess to himself, that sensual delight never stirred his temper, and that "when men were fond", he smiled as at a contemptible and incredible thing. When Escalus subsequently on his severity towards the immoral, reminds him of the possibility of a similar crime on his side, he hesitates not to call down upon himself punishment and blame, and proudly to answer: "'Tis one thing to be tempted, another thing to fall". That this virtue and sobriety in such extreme youth is constrained and exaggerated, is evidenced by the anxious care with which Angelo lays greater stress upon outward appearance than upon inward reality. He is continually upon his guard against envy, he has the most nervous ambition never for a moment to lose his irreproachable reputation. This ambition, this pride in his virtue, he hardly even ventures to confess to himself in his soliloquies. This ambition is closely connected with his aspiring endeavour after outward rank and dignity. He has buried himself in the study of politics and law, over these grave employments he has really repressed his ardour and affections, he has formed equally severe and uncompromising principles for his moral life and conduct, for a knowledge of law and for the exercise of politics and justice, so that with all these qualities he may advance himself on the path of honour.

It is these unnaturally strained endeavours that the psychological Duke observes in the useful, promising young

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man thus richly endowed by nature. He appears to distrust his political as well as his moral ambition, and he welcomes the opportunity of at once testing both. The investigating and observing Prince had marked how he before had acted in a situation concealed from the eyes of the world, and this experience appears to have made him doubt, whether the talented man was not in his ambitious efforts on the road to become a cold ascetic, a heartless lawyer, and an egotistical diplomatist; whether the feigned show of virtue did not weigh with him more than his still untested virtue. The duke had learned that this Angelo was affianced to one Mariana, the sister of Frederic, a noble and famous naval hero. Before the appointed nuptials, the brother perished at sea with his vessel and with the dowry of his sister; and the bridegroom was cruel and hard-hearted enough to forsake her who could now advance him no further either with her property or kindred; nay he even pretended discoveries of her dishonour in order to give a colour to his proceedings. In this trait also, we at once recognize a proud aspiration after rank, property, and importance, and a proud display of a highly sensitive morality; the poet has wisely started with this, just as in Much Ado about Nothing he preluded Claudio's subsequent deception by an earlier one, in order more definitely to mark out the character. The Duke in conferring upon Angelo the post of deputy, has before him the double aim of testing how he will be affected in this wider field of action, to what steps his severe morality will lead him, and what influence his new power will exercise upon his character. The Duke himself pleads a journey as a pretext, but disguised in a friar's habit he watches all events in the immediate neighbourhood. The

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manner, in which we now see the circumspect man watching every incident, and, as it were, playing the part of providence, has this effect upon us, that the events which are unfolded, find us prepared and calm; the painful and the severe in them becomes thus much mitigated; in the play itself we perceive the superior scene-shifter and observer, before whom the action seems to pass like a drama within a drama; in this way we are unconcerned for the evil issue of the evil actions. In the novel and in Whetstone's piece, no trace of this arrangement is to be found nor of the delicacy which dictated it.

Now begins the official career of the eager young statesman. He "picks out" from the dust the Draco-like statutes; the law is no more to remain a derided scare-crow; unexceptional mercy is no longer to prevail, but unexceptional justice. The inflexible lawyer is satisfied that the world should perish, so that law should hold its course; he imagines himself humane when in the administration of justice he aims at intimidating, because by unsparing severity, the law, like a prophet, stifles sin before its birth, or takes the germ of development from the evil already "hatched". In this behaviour his moral indignation concurs with the over-weening feeling of his own purity, and with the pride of his new dignity; it suits his inclination like a giant to use the "giant's strength" conferred upon him. Even now Claudio and Lucio see that double bias of his soul at work in the new part he plays, they see his pride of virtue, his desire to make himself a name, and his delight in the new splendour of his government. The young deputy orders now all disorderly houses in the suburbs to be "plucked down"; the prisons are filled with offensive criminals

of every kind; even a young noble we see publicly led to www.libtool.com.cn prison to the scandal of the town for the sake of a single offence; an example is to be made of him which will strike the eyes of all. Whether the object of intimidation with respect to the crime which it concerned, was to be attained by this severity, seems indeed to be rendered very doubtful by the immediate results. The judges among high and low who know the nature of this sin and the nature of men, such as the Lucios and the Pompeys, give us the little consolatory prospect, that this class of crime, grown indeed too great, would not be "extirped, till eating and drinking be put down"; that if heads should be cut off for this, there would soon be a want of heads. And yet this is not even pointed out as the first difficulty. With the pulling down of those abodes of crime, crime is in no wise extirpated, the trade only departs and changes its place. Habitual sinners do not allow themselves to be frightened by admonition and threatening. Besides the instruments of justice err: the stout Elbow, of the race of the Dogberrys, apprehends a poor knave, who, according to the intimations of the Clown is indeed not capable of sinning, while in Elbow's own house matters are worse, and his own wife is notoriously more guilty than the imprisoned Froth. This then, according to Shakespeare's method, is the burlesque parody of Angelo's administration of justice, who is at last more open to sin than any of his delinquents. Those, however, who pass unpunished in this system, are just the most obdurate and the most crafty, whom the law ought to have touched first of all. A Lucio, the infamous slanderer and liar, whose familiar sin it is "with maids to seem the lapwing and to jest", who coldly brings his accomplice

into misfortune as his sacrifice, but hesitates not to free himself with false oaths, he, the incorrigible man, is just out of reach of the law, he mocks at its severity, he passes unpunished, while a lesser offence is to bring his friend Claudio to the block.

Claudio was betrothed to a near friend of his excellent sister Isabella; by a secret union she became his wife; the outward form of marriage was postponed, because Juliet's dower remained in the coffer of her friends, whose favour was first to be gained for the marriage of the two. Juliet is a being who appears honourable by the mere friendship of Isabella; we only catch a glimpse of her in her prison, composed and repentant in her innermost soul. Claudio himself is designated as a man true to his word, and so much the less was any bad intent in the mutual error. He erred, because with a lively and sanguine nature, very different to Angelo's, he surrenders himself to every momentary impression. The poet shows us the excitable, easily influenced nature of the man very distinctly in the scene, where he is at first quite filled with the Duke's representations of the evils of life and the consolations of death, but immediately afterwards he is overwhelmed by his own ideas of the horrors of death, compared to which even the weariest life seems to him a Paradise. Thus we subsequently learn to know him, when, in the first feeling of honour, he utterly rejects the price at which Isabella is to purchase his life, and immediately afterwards, when he pictures to himself the terror of death, he would see her pay the price. "He offended as in a dream", the provost himself says compassionately of Claudio; "all sects, all ages smack of this vice", and he alone is to fall a sacrifice to a pitiless law, he is to die by

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that Angelo, who has been guilty towards Mariana of a much worse moral crime from a perfectly similar motive. For which, indeed, was the more guilty, the anticipation of matrimonial right on the part of the faithful Claudio, or Angelo's breach of faith and his dissolving a firmly contracted alliance? Did not the similarity of the circumstance remind the severe judge of his own guilt? Abundantly is this remembrance brought home to him by Escalus, by Isabella, and by the Provost. But he thinks only of the letter of offence and law, and in his invulnerableness he feels himself secure against all the remonstrances and appeals to his own bosom. He forebodes not how soon even this his pride of virtue was to be confounded.

Claudio sends a request to his sister Isabella, since his appeal cannot reach the duke, that she would petition Angelo for his life. He knows that her youth and beauty will move him, he knows that she possesses happy mental endowments, that she is able to persuade, "when she will play with reason and discourse". He can also know of her that she sees through men judiciously; at least she proves it afterwards in his own case. She knows him well when she is to deliver Angelo's request to him; she sees through his weakness and love of life before she utters it; when he gives her his assurance, she believes him; and then at first in his firmness he meets the expectations of her belief, but far more in his despondency those of her just and former fear. This knowledge of human nature, this mind and beauty, these rich endowments for the world and its use, Isabella is on the point of carrying into the cloister. She possesses like the Duke in well-balanced proportions that two-sided nature, the capacity to enjoy the world according to

circumstances, or to dispense with it. She has already begun her noviciate; the rule of the cloister is known to her; its restraint to her is too slight rather than too strict. The low-minded Lucio, to whom an Angelo and his virtue, the Duke and his rank, the monk and his position, are not too sacred to be profaned by his aspersions, Isabella alone is capable of inspiring with respect by the impression of her nature; he sees her already as "a thing ensky'd", sainted by her renouncement, an immortal spirit, "to be talked with in sincerity, as with a saint". When she learns her brother's crime, she is rigorous enough to raise no objection to the law and its execution; nor is she so over-heroic in her virtue as not to feel the human emotion of gladly saving her brother's life; she sees in his case a punishable crime, but she sees no crime in pardoning him; she goes even so far as to estimate before the judge the fault of Claudio less than she thinks it. Strong as she is, she does not hesitate to take upon herself and her whole sex the show of weakness, a great contrast in this to Angelo, who falls with a show of strength and moral austerity. When her virtue is put to the test, she exhibits herself in truth as the hero she had formerly supposed Angelo to be; and sympathizingly as she had before felt for Claudio, as soon as he wishes to purchase his life with her shame, regarding not her twice-repeated reminder of their honourable deceased father, she indignantly rejects him, for she now regards his sin not as "accidental, but a trade". However much this severity and this heroism may seem in its asceticism and sobriety similar to Angelo's pride of virtue and show of honour, yet is she even in this the opposite to Angelo, so far from all false pretensions, that upon the

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friar-duke's remonstrance that "virtue is bold and goodness never fearful", she hesitates not to take upon herself the appearance of crime for the sake of a truly virtuous object, and agrees to his adventurous plan which by a pious fraud is to procure safety to her brother, and to restore her faithless lover to the rejected Mariana. Sympathy with her brother leads her not to disregard the sin, but only the appearance of sin; feeling and womanliness are developed in the very action, which seems to demand a masculine renunciation of womanly delicacy. A perfectly similar instance is once again to be remarked in her subsequently, when she is petitioned by Mariana to implore for the life of Angelo, whom she yet regards as the murderer of her brother. It may seem to require the strength of a masculine asceticism, when she even now calms herself upon her brother's death, that he "had but justice"; but certainly it demanded the utmost womanly gentleness and pity and the absence of every feeling of spite and revenge, when in the same breath she petitions for Angelo's life. The mixture of commiseration and strength of character, of personal purity and forbearance for the weakness of others, of tenderness and firmness, of womanly timidity, aye, even of mistrust of herself and the surest decision of action, of modesty and ability, of humility and a display of power mental and moral, penetrates the whole character of this woman. She stands in the midst of the universal depravity, elevated in stainless purity of soul far above all the basenesses of crime, a being whose thoughts already were wafted above the earth, and from whose feelings the emotions of all common passion were removed.

However much such a being, from the almost super-

natural greatness of her virtue, may forfeit our sympathy, yet, if we are to understand poetry a little symbolically, it entered excellently and perfectly into the poet's plan, to present just such an angel as the tempter of Angelo's virtue. Both characters and the results of their meeting are only to be explained by the most attentive weighing of each word in their intercourse together. Isabella, accompanied by Lucio, appears before the deputy, and the natural disinclination of her chaste soul to plead for a vice which she most abhors, is still struggling within her with commiseration for her brother; her petition takes, therefore, the significant turn, that she enjoins condemnation of the sin and pardon for the sinner. She is in strife between wishing and not wishing, she is, therefore, not in the humour for persuasion; in this frame of mind she cannot *will* to "play with reason and discourse"; she acknowledges, therefore, the justice of the indeed severe law at the first official and laconic refusal, she gives up the life of her brother and retires. Even this trait, this strange manner of urging a suit, must strike the sober and serious judge and inspire him with esteem. Upon Lucio's reproachful censure of her coldness, she resumes once more the interrupted petition. Acknowledging the justice of the law, she sees nothing which can stand in the way of mercy. She maintains this with sense, she puts it to his heart with feeling; maidenly timidity is laid aside; with the emotions of pity she recovers at once her natural eloquence, and displays more and more her noble heart. At the first sound of this touching tone struck from the soul of the great and severe woman, Angelo feels himself moved, and as if in foreboding of the power which this being might

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obtain over him, he prays her to begone. She seizes him more strongly; she reminds him of the eternal justice, which had found mercy and atonement for the whole forfeit race of man. He wishes not to appear in her sight as a barbarian and in more words than are his wont, he condescends to explain to her the human side of pity in his severe administration of justice. He concludes with a renewed refusal, and with the request that she should be content. The general grounds on which she had striven to shake his official conscientiousness and feeling are now exhausted; her natural aptness makes her now change the mode of attack: she speaks to him personally; and as his last words had shown him as a man of sensible intellectual nature, she involuntarily calls to her aid the last weapons of her mind. "So" she says,

> "You must be the first, that gives this sentence;
> And he that suffers: O! it is excellent
> To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
> To use it like a giant"!

From this last tone she passes even to sarcastic bitterness in her image of the puny great ones of the earth, who if they could thunder as Jove does, would consume their short-lived existence in nothing but thundering; in comparing the little brief authority of man with God, she can at the same time indirectly remind him of his fleeting appointment, which should oblige him all the more in the exercise of his power to bear in mind his "glassy essence". But how completely does the deeply thoughtful conclusion of this attack break the point of all that might be offensive and irritating in it! "Proud man", she says,

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"like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
As make the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
Would all themselves laugh mortal".

How beautifully does this characterize this half-sainted being, that she believes angels are weeping over our human arrogance, that when she invests them in idea with our human satirical nature, she sees as the result, that they would laugh themselves mortal, because this disposition has, in her eyes, no part in heaven. Isabella gives time to the silent and surprised Angelo to reflect upon the profoundness of her words and the deep traits of her character, while she now is in the mood to give free course to her eloquence. She surprises and engages him with ever new striking attacks upon his innermost feelings. The mere glance upon this man has betrayed his nature to her instinctive knowledge of the human heart; she must in a moment have perceived that which the Duke and Claudio and Lucio have from long observation believed of him, that he is deeply impressed with his powerful position and his unblemished virtue. She has, therefore, first reminded him of the right use of his power, and she reminds him now of that of his virtue; she flatters at the same time (without *willing* it, since she, according to her subsequent expression, fully believes in his virtue) the best part in him, and by this gives additional force to that which her bitterness upon the arrogance of the great among men might have marred. She puts it to his heart, that we ought not to weigh our brother with ourselves, that *he* ought not to weigh hers with himself. She only hints upon this strength of his virtue; but that she may not have even the appearance of flattery, she returns to the idea of outward power and greatness:

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"Authority, though it err like others,
Hath yet a kind of medicine in itself,
That skins the vice o' the top".

She means: that necessity for the maintenance of outward dignity, which is imposed upon the mighty, compels him the more to govern his faults and sinful inclinations, and when these cannot be repressed, to cover them over with the varnish of a fair show; she reminds him thus, that if he however deep within his own heart perceives the *disposition* to such a "natural guiltiness", and acknowledges something human and natural in that weakness, he must then "sound no thought" against her brother's life. She touches him thus on the side of his pride of virtue, and at the same time of that hypocrisy and pretence of sanctity, which lay deep in the secrets of his bosom; what wonder then, that all the hitherto quiet feelings of his soul burst forth at last in the expression of deep astonishment: — "She speaks, and 'tis such sense, that my sense breeds with it". He receives the pregnant riddles which she utters, in an understanding and ready spirit, since every word is drawn from the innermost system of his own principles, his thoughts, and his whole nature. Yet till now he is ever master of himself; once more he bids her farewell. Then, in one simple repeated request, the fatal word escapes him: "come again to-morrow"! — the path of temptation is entered with these few syllables. The proud man yet once more has the opportunity for a happy retreat! "Hark", she says, "how I'll bribe you"! "How! bribe me?" he asks. And Lucio fears at once that this one word would mar her suit. But she gives the matter a new turn, which must again fascinate the wavering man: "Ay", she replies, "with such gifts

that heaven shall share with you, with prayers from preserved souls, from fasting maids, whose minds are dedicate to nothing temporal".

He confesses now, when we are alone with him, that he is on the way leading to temptation, "where prayers cross" his wishes. We find him so again subsequently, when his own prayers and thoughts are at variance: heaven has his empty words, his imagination anchors on Isabella. Suddenly the suppressed feeling revenges itself on the unnatural restraint, and all that has made the man hitherto ambitious and proud, his studies are grown "feared and tedious" to him, and his virtuous gravity he could change for "an idle plume". He who was never in the least exposed to the temptation of light women's art or nature, *he* yields to the dangerous temptation of modesty; the cunning enemy catches the saint with a saint, and goads him on to sin "in loving virtue". Isabella herself, after she has surveyed the whole course of Angelo's error, and had had to suffer from it, bears witness to him, that she must believe a due sincerity governed his deeds, till he met with her. And that this whole appearance, so much mind, beauty, and virtue, in wonderful combination, should seize the fancy of the man, should suddenly overpower all his senses, and compel him to the acknowledgment, that his blood is like the blood of other men, that she at once should overthrow his statesmanlike composure, his judicial gravity, his ascetic placidity, who would not understand this? But why is not his first thought on an honourable and lawful love? Why do his thoughts tarry at once upon the picture to him so full of reproach, while he asks himself:

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"Having waste ground enough,
Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary,
And pitch our evils there"?

If he regards her, as was possible from his knowledge of her, as an already dedicated nun, his designs were all the more criminal. But even without this, his connection with Mariana was naturally in his constant remembrance, he had to fear her protest against every marriage; he avoids the public announcement of this secret history, and loses himself more and more in the intoxication of his passion, which seduces him to take such an advantage of power and opportunity, as allowed him to maintain the appearance of blamelessness except in the eyes of one, whose estimation ought indeed to have out-balanced that of all the rest of the world. His earlier heartless behaviour towards Mariana is thus the source of a second greater outrage; the nature, at work in the one, influences this new connection also. When Isabella visits him again at the appointed hour, he resigns himself like a fatalist to the impression, which he is to receive from her: he is divided in his mind as to his suit, just as she had been with hers, when she first came to him. Once more she is quickly retiring, satisfied with his refusal. He holds her back. He would fain even now avoid the temptation, but Isabella is dangerous for him; she is clever, he can speak to her without the blunt distinctness, which would even now make him blush. Unhappily she half meets him with a sentence, which he could so misunderstand, as if she regarded a crime like that of her brother's as not so blameable. Upon his first insidious question she quickly understands him, but she is under the conviction, that he intends only to test her. She evades

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him with equivocal replies, which leave him in doubt, whether craftiness or innocence speaks in her; the clever game of her first conversation begins again on a more dangerous ground; her misunderstandings allure him continually to speak indeed in riddles, but in ever clearer ones. When she yet once again makes a general remark upon the frailty of the female sex, which may sound like compliance, he then steps boldly and plainly forward; the same tongue, which had uttered sentence of death against the sin, invites to a more disgraceful perpetration of the same sin. Not yet does she believe it fully; only when he swears to it, does her whole abhorrence of him burst forth. It makes no impression upon the cold lawyer, upon the heartless cautious man, who has before weighed every emergency, and is on the very road to harden himself into a regular villain. He rests his boldness upon the same protection, which his "unsoiled name" affords him; he knows, that in her tender shame she will not venture to inform against him, since she will be herself more damaged than he: his "false will o'erweigh her true". The vein of tyranny, which had slumbered in this man of cold consistency, awakes as soon as he is excited and has once cast the mask aside; he torments her now even with the threat of aggravating her brother's death. When he now believes himself to have reached his aim and has committed the one misdeed, he is drawn further along the downhill path of crime; and ever more apparent becomes the deep shadow cast by the light of this richly-gifted man, and the evil disposition hitherto concealed within his soul. He weighs in his mind the embarrassments which must result from the release of Claudio, whose death, he the inexorable, had

solemnly announced from the public judgment seat. His pardon, unexpected by him, would support an accusation from Isabella, were she to venture one. But that which expressly determines him, contrary to his promise to permit the sentence against him to be carried into execution, is the fear, that the riotous youth may seek revenge for "so receiving a dishonoured life", and will not be restrained by the considerations, which he expects from the shame and prudence of Isabella.

As soon as Angelo has reached this extreme, repentance seizes him; he perceives with fear, into what evil he is now resistlessly carried, once he had lost his virtue; he stands crippled and incapable for every thing; the summons of the Duke, who announces his return and invites public information of all injustice, strikes his heart with anguish. How gladly would he believe, that the Duke is mad! What frightful torture must oppress him, when he hears the modest Isabella in the open street raising aloud the fearful accusation of the nameless baseness in the man, whose virtue had hitherto appeared unequalled! How must pain and despair seize him, when he hears the voice of the rejected Mariana, and sees her veil drop! How he stands at last disgraced before all the world, he who till now has been regarded as a saint! How confounded must he depart, constrained to consummate the formality of marriage with Mariana, after the consummation of which, his possessions are to fall to the forsaken one, and he himself is to die for Claudio's death. A load of dishonour and disgrace is now cast upon him, to whom honour and dignity, the mantle and show at least of dignity and honour, had been beyond everything, and from whom now this veiling mantle was

so violently withdrawn, that the very body and substance of his honour was lacerated at the same moment. How deeply degraded he now stands in the estimation of the good, of the Duke and of Escalus, he who hitherto had stood highest in opinion! Thus we may readily believe him, when he says to the latter, that "sorrow sticks so deep in his penitent heart, that he craves death more willingly than mercy". For must not death to a criminal of this character have been a greater benefit than this shame? His life is, however, to be spared and he is to be raised from his fall. The poet, in this character, has designed a new variation of his favourite theme of *show*. The task in Angelo is a worthy sequel for the actor who represented the gross hypocrisy, arising from the systematic selfishness of a villain like Richard, and the regardless contempt of all show, founded as in Prince Henry on the absence of all selfishness; the demand is here, to represent a man, who is too little for the great, bold, dangerous projects of an ambitious selfishness, too noble for the weak errors of a vain self-love, who wavers negatively between the two, who aspires after honour, who would be a master in his political vocation, a saint in his moral life, but who in the hour of temptation is found as false and tyrannical in the one, as he is hypocritical and base in the other. The task demands, that the actor should not allow the mental endowments and the germ of good in this character utterly to be lost sight of in the midst of his fall, that he should let the original nobility of this nature appear through all the immoderate errors, and leave open the surer prospect of a radical return and repentance. Or could it be true, as Coleridge was of opinion, that a sincere repentance on

the part of Angelo was impossible? Yet certainly after this deed, *show* was for this man utterly gone. The eyes of the tester will no more leave him; he will deceive no one again. He has henceforth only the prospect of becoming a great criminal or of raising himself to lasting virtue and honour. She who has most to complain against him, — Isabella, she petitions for him and seems to trust in the germ of good within him. She who takes the greatest interest in him, — Mariana, she will keep him with all his faults, and she pleads in his behalf, that "men are moulded out of faults, and become much more the better, for being a little bad." She speaks in the sense of the prince in Whetstone's play, who says at last to the saved judge: If thou art wise, thy fall can make thee rise; when the lost sheep was found, for joy a feast was prepared.

But the severe indignant justice which Coleridge desired, was not executed upon Angelo. Though he had even so solemnly challenged the whole rigour of the law against himself and had uttered his own sentence! Though he had even deserved a severer doom than Claudio, against whom he had committed a judicial murder, when his own greater crime was to go unpunished! Though a new moral disgrace, a broken promise and a formal official error, a command for an execution at an unusual hour, had magnified his misdeed! Though to him to whom much is given, more would be required! Even the Duke's own feeling and sentence seemed unrelentingly to condemn him. Had he not once pronounced himself a tyrant if he should suddenly punish that which he had before overlooked, how must he then have regarded Angelo who punished that crime with death, a worse one than which he had committed himself!

And moreover this severe condemnation had solemnly fallen from the lips of the Duke:

> "An Angelo for Claudio, death for death:
> Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure,
> Like doth greet like, and Measure still for Measure".

This equal retribution has ever been the poetical expression of a "severe and indignant justice", and its sentence seemed here to be inexorably pronounced. Yet apart from all poetry, Angelo's doom, according to law, would not be altogether in conformity with justice. Angelo's double crime, the disgrace of Isabella and the death of Claudio, had indeed not been carried out. The severest law could have pronounced upon Angelo only the highest chastisement for attempt. Moreover the Duke is not in earnest as to his sentence of retaliation; it is only one of those exciting tests, which he has delighted in inflicting upon Claudio and Isabella and now upon Angelo. He says indeed expressly that Angelo shall die on the very block "where Claudio stooped to death", who by means of himself and his contrivances is still alive. And how should the Duke execute the sentence of death on Angelo, whom he had expressly led upon this ground of temptation and trial by the revival of that severe discipline, and by the charge of that high and slippery office? How ashamed must he have stood before his Isabella, who was so just that she liked not intent and thought to be punished; who was so mild and good, that even when she believed Claudio dead, she took into account in Angelo's favour, even *that* temptation which lay in her mere appearance! If she thus would take a crime upon herself on account of the opportunity she had unwillingly offered for it, must not the Duke

seriously have charged himself with the temptation, which
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he had consciously and wilfully occasioned? And how should *he* execute this severe act of punishment, he who shuddered to surrender to death the gipsy Barnardine, a brute, a Caliban, a heavy stubborn malefactor? *he*, in whose heart, not "severe indignant justice", but mercy and mildness lay? *he* who demanded of the prince, who bears the sword of heaven, that he should pay to others neither more nor less than he could justify, after weighing his own offences and respecting human weaknesses?

And this indeed is not only the spirit of the Duke, but that of our whole play, in which the Duke is, as it were, the chorus: — that jealous justice is not true justice, but *that* circumspect equity alone, which suffers neither mercy nor the severe letter of the law to rule without exception, which awards punishment not *measure for measure*, but *with* measure. Neither the lax mildness, which the Duke had allowed to prevail, and which he himself condemns, nor the over-severe curb which Angelo applied, is to be esteemed as the right procedure; the sluggishness which gives license to sin, and the system of intimidation which destroys the sinner with the sin, meet with the same condemnation. This play in its strikingly practical character has become like a defence of the corrective system, the only system of punishment, which a poet's moral intuition could pronounce to be suitable to the world. The Duke loves to employ intimidation in suspense, threats, and torments of imagination, but in actual cases of penalty, he permits mercy to rule, when possible, thus giving opportunity for moral reformation. Like Escalus, he pursues sinners by habit and trade rather than the casual fallen one, the bawd and the

seducer rather than the seduced; thrice they warn even the more punishable of their punishment; and the poetic punishment which meets this trade in Pompey, is not the removal of the person, but the investing it with dishonour and with the detestation which belongs to the hangman's office. The Duke despairs not even of the dull Barnardine; he wants advice, is his first thought upon the picture sketched of him; and although in his own opinion this murderer has justly incurred the penalty of death, he attempts at last even in him the effect of instruction. It is for this reason that so much stress is laid throughout the piece upon the mercy, which mediates between severe justice and crime, and it is for this that the poet turns so decidedly against the absolute execution of the law, and the literal meaning of its letter. Whilst he quotes in Claudio's lips the word of God (Rom. IX. 15): "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," he looks with bitterness on the human justice, which places itself on this infallible ground of that Judge, who even in his *arbitrary will* must appear just to us. But from man to man, the poet would wish, that every sentence should by all means as much as possible have regard to the motives of the erring, and should certainly (to continue the words of the apostle) rest somewhat on "him that willeth and him that runneth" (*"an Jemandes Wollen oder Laufen"*). Thus in Germany also, poetry at the period of its revival in Goethe's youth, afforded a similar practical resistance to the inhuman and merciless punishment of such errors, in which human inclinations concurred, whose strength and proportion to our education and ability we have not bestowed upon ourselves. The German poems of the former century, which stirred up all the feelings of

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humanity against the practice of capital punishment for child-murder, may be closely compared with this piece, which stood in very similar relation to equally barbarous English laws. Thus for instance Chalmers drew attention to the revival of a statute in 1604, which decreed death to all persons, who married whilst their former husbands or wives were yet alive.

But whilst our play first of all recommends moderation in the exercise of justice, it occupies at once a far more general ground, and extends this doctrine to all human relations, so that it exhibits, as it were, the kernel of that opinion so often expressed by Shakespeare, of a wise medium in all things. It calls us universally from all extremes, even from that of the good, because in every extreme there lies an overstraining, which avenges itself with the contrary reaction. There was good in the Duke's mildness, but it turned to the detriment of the common weal, and scattered the seeds of crime. There was good in Angelo's severity, but it erred throughout by the exaggeration of its aims, and as of Elbow, the question might have been also put with respect to him: "Which is the wiser here? Justice or Iniquity"? There was good in Angelo's serious state-studies, but the suppression of the senses which accompanied them, avenged itself by bursting asunder the unnatural restraints. There was good in his exalted virtue, but when he prided himself in it, he "fell by virtue". If it is indeed excellent to have a giant's strength, the warning is given, not to use it like a giant. We are dissuaded from all unbridled action, because the reaction will be restraint:

"As surfeit is the father of much fast,
So every scope by the immoderate use
Turns to restraint".

As this doctrine of the harmful excess of all and even of good things lies in the facts, it is to be found also in the images and similes of this poem so rich in maxims. Thus the crowd around the sick man, who wish to help, becomes an injury; the crowd around the beloved prince, for the sake of applause, becomes a burden. And just so does this doctrine lie in the characters and in the contrast of their position with regard to each other. The single character of Angelo, with the unnaturally over-strained exaggeration of his nature, counterbalances alone a series of contrasts; with his severity he counterbalances the mildness of the Duke, with his sobriety the levity of Claudio, with his heartlessness the tender weakness of his faithful Mariana, with his anxious adherence to the appearance of good Lucio's indifference to the basest reputation. Between these extremes stands Isabella alone, a type of a *complete* human nature, which renders it plain, that all extreme is only imperfect and fragmentary, that moderation and a wise medium is not weakness and indolence, that far rather it forms in man the true moral centre of gravity, which holds him secure from all waverings and errors, and qualifies him for the highest power which can be required of man.

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OTHELLO.

Out of the same collection of tales by Giraldi Cinthio (Hekatomithi III b. 7.), from which Shakespeare borrowed his material for Measure for Measure, did he take that for Othello. He read it probably in the Italian original, for no English translation of his time is known.

The story of the Moor of Venice offered somewhat more to Shakespeare than that of Juriste for his Measure for Measure; yet here also, all is poor and barren in motive and characterization. Disdemona (for so is her fatal name here written) loves the Moor for the sake of his virtues, and marries him against the will of the family. The ancient destroys the happiness of the pair, because he loves Disdemona and believes her to be enamoured of the Moor's lieutenant. The circumstances, which serve to provoke the jealousy of the Moor, the dismissal of the lieutenant, Disdemona's intercession for him, the lost pocket-handkerchief, &c. are to be found in the story, but all in much simpler form, and without the ancient appearing so prominently as in Shakespeare to be the originator of the favourable circumstances, which are to serve his ends. The figure

of Rodrigo is wholly wanting in the tale. Upon the Moor there is a shadow cast, especially in the unpleasing conclusion. He allows his wife to be barbarously murdered by the ancient, then seeks carefully to hide the cause of her death, and upon the rack denies his guilt, upon which he is banished and subsequently is put to death by a relative of Disdemona. One sees out of this single comparison, what a gulf even here separates the novel from the drama.

In Othello, of whose origin no definite period lies before us, beyond the notice of a performance in 1604, we place by the side of Measure for Measure a play which, though from another point of view, makes upon most readers a similarly painful impression. Both pieces demand the somewhat stronger nerves of the time in which they originated. Both repel us by the bare subject, the latter still more deeply by the cutting truth of its development. Both pieces give evidence beyond many other works of Shakespeare, that the interest in moral and psychological truth stood ever higher with our poet than that of outward æsthetic beauty, but above all far higher than consideration for an over-softness of feeling. In Measure for Measure he smoothed and moderated with the greatest refinement of feeling the painful situation, which formed the plot of the story; but so far would he not go, as to let fall the whole purport, morally so valuable. In Othello he created with wonderful psychological perception, a magnificent tragic field for the passion of jealousy, which commonly belongs rather to man's petty self-love and is more suited to comic treatment; but just for this reason, he forfeited the possibility of consideration for the feelings of his readers and of forbearance in agitating their minds. With

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his sense of psychological truth he sought the ground of a passion of such strength as the issue of that story of the Moor of Venice supposed, and he accepted it, when found, with all its necessary consequences. He suffered the flood of this excited sea to rise according to the power of the storm, unmindful of the finer natures, which could not stand the hurricane. Even Ulrici, who generally stood on the side of our poet against criticizing opinion and prejudice, considered the harshness here in the distraction of the beautiful as outweighing the consolatory and the elevating; because the conclusion affords not here, as in Romeo and Juliet, an agreeable dénouement. But this, it seems, lay unavoidably in the subject itself. Romeo and Juliet fall by their own will in the excess of the most ravishing passion of love, which even in its agony appears sweet to us; in the tragedy before us the innocent wife falls by the hand of her husband under the frightful power of the bitterest and most malignant passion, which completely annihilates the sweeter emotion of love. This was indeed only to be avoided by relinquishing the subject itself, which certainly would be a far greater cause of regret, than if the poet had not written Measure for Measure on account of its painful plot. The question therefore is only, whether the poet has done all that he could, having once undertaken the theme, to avoid what is needlessly terrible, and to soften what is necessarily severe. That he has done this, must have so appeared even to Ulrici. For he found, that with the comprehension of the whole and with reflective consideration, he perceived the harmony which he had before missed. This different result from a different contemplation can be scarcely the consequence of an inner want of har-

mony in the poem, or the reflective comprehension of the whole would itself discover it, whilst on the contrary it just convinces us, that although indeed passion is here aroused and displayed in all its strength and power, leading to the most terrible actions, yet no actual discord in the melody is to be distinguished. The fault must thus lie in ourselves. The reflective comprehension is not with us in unison with our moral or æsthetic feelings; either our understanding in the final comprehension of the play, or our feeling in the first impression of it, must have erred.

And truly we shall discover by the more accurate examination of the play and of ourselves, that so far as the object and design of the drama is concerned, we are rather in opposition to the poet in the system of our moral perceptions. The entire spirit of the tale of the Moor of Venice is laid down by Giraldi Cinthio in the following plain words from Desdemona: "I fear", says she, "that I must serve as a warning to young maidens, not to marry against the will of their parents; an Italian girl should not marry a man, whom nature, heaven, and mode of life have wholly separated from her." These prosaic truths meet us also in Shakespeare's tragedy, set forth in glowing poetry, and grounded on the deepest experiences of life. But we in our day have not so lively an appreciation of the first of these truths, we do not estimate so highly the opposition of Othello and Desdemona against family-claims as did Shakespeare and his time. If we follow this natural method of consideration, we perceive not the crime which makes the sufferers deserve such suffering, and we stumble at their heavy punishment. If we place ourselves and our judgment (which with some knowledge of history is not so

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difficult for us,) on the poet's point of view, we find his solution of the problem logical, right, and irrefragable. Whether in the estimation of this starting point *we* or the poet are right, who will decide! For moral ideas in those respects where they interweave and come in contact with social, necessarily change with the nature of society. To us it appears essential, if we would be just to the poet and his works, to seek *his* point of view and to place ourselves entirely within it. But besides this we should perhaps find it well, not to go too far in our confidence in our personal and present ideas, customs, habits, and views, in the presence of such a man, nor to feel too secure in it. For if any one were free from the prejudices of his age, it was *he*. Have we not seen him in the play which we discussed before this, taking a place in human sympathies such as our German poets only reached two centuries later? Shall we not see him in the piece which we discuss after this, preparing the way for all that sentimentality and softness of feeling, which two centuries after him first became popular in the poetry and mental disposition of the Germanic people? These pieces were written at *one* time; do we not then place ourselves in the same rank with Voltaire, when in Othello we condemn the poet as a pedantic preacher of morality, while in Measure for Measure he appears to us so liberal in sentiment, and in Hamlet so refined and sympathetic? The point then is, that in the examination of the inner truth of this poetic picture, we must not merely consult our moral-social theories or feelings, but before every thing our experience. For we then may easily find that our experiences even in the present day do not accord with our own theories. Whoever has had opportunity of drawing

frequent experience from family and married life, will find that no other of Shakespeare's plays presents such rich and striking application to the actual, oft-recurring circumstances of life, — to circumstances and experiences, which attest that the tragedy brought about by parental tyranny is often exceeded by that, which arises from the wilfulness of the child. With however good reason we assume to ourselves the freedom of the marriage choice and the right of the child, yet the counter-claim, which Shakespeare makes in the Winters' Tale, is the justest and the most natural which can be advanced: in making this choice the father should at least be heard. However independently the newly-founded family ought to enter upon life, universal experience tells us, that there is no security, when it has forcibly sundered itself from the elder families out of which it arose. Men who from caprice or wilfulness disturb the peace of a family, are little qualified to maintain peace in their own. The first transgression makes the way easy for another; the deceitful act makes even him mistrustful, against whom it was practised in love; the passion, which once forsakes the path of discretion, destroys the belief in self-command and in the power of virtue. And where doubts of this kind are once planted in the mind, unhappiness and discord are necessarily the bitter fruit. Following out this sad experience, the poet has depicted such family-discord in different points of view, in Lear and in Cymbeline, in Othello and in the Winter's Tale, and in considering these, he has risen, not in a passing humour, but out of wise principle, to that severe austerity, which he so impressively confesses in Othello. And the question will be asked, whether this elevated morality, then or now or at any other time, can be

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called too severe, and whether it is not rather that in ourselves laxity of morals and slackness of feeling is *too great*, rendering us unfit for this austerity, and therefore insusceptible of the tragic example set in Othello and too sensitive to his fearful warning. The question will be, whether this moral energy which we despise, is not rather urgently to be commended to us, and whether it could be commended to us from a more unsuspicious source, than from this cheerful, large-hearted man, such as we have learned to know Shakespeare in all his plays of this date? The question will be, whether the weaker opinion of Sterne's time was of more value, when people wept over Hamlet's sensitive nature, or the stronger, which condemns his weak-minded indecision? And while in all ages there will be men, who answer differently these and similar questions, while these questions always and ever must remain unsolved riddles, may we not with the greater certainty take a firm position out of these very inquiries and above these very doubts:— that the poet, who with such unbiassed feeling and undivided judgment united in himself the double, hardly reconcilable qualities of mildness and severity, self-discipline and freedom, that this poet must have had a greatness of soul and spirit, before which it is good to humble oneself, by which it would be well to be influenced, and by the just perception of which the richest treasure is to be gained by every thinking being.

We will, therefore, endeavour with the utmost possible fidelity, to point out the leading features of this tragedy, in order to discover the true meaning of the poet, unmixed with our *own* views and opinions. This task is easier in this play than in many others. The sense is simple and

scarcely to be missed, because the story is not complicated, because the one action hinges upon one passion of giant magnitude, whose whole history, whose origin, whose increase even to the explosion of the vessel, we can follow in its whole course. It is on this account, that this play, beyond all Shakespeare's tragedies, has ever excited a great interest. The old editors of Shakespeare's works from Johnson onwards, excel in their consideration of such a piece, in their remarks, in their conception of single scenes, in their estimate of characters; and later critics have with acuteness and penetration set forth the whole structure of this and similar favourite plays.

The task lay before the poet, to exhibit the passion of jealousy to that extent, in which the lover can be thought capable of destroying the object of his love. We think a man of inflamed sensibility, of heated blood, of the most violent irritability especially capable of such a deed; and even him only in the frenzy of intoxication, in the sudden incentive of opportunity, in the feverish excitement of a fit of rage. But such a deed would never be a subject for art; such a man, acting in an irresponsible condition, would never win our sympathy for his tragic fate. But could it be conceivable, that such a deed could ever be committed by a man of fixed character and steadfast disposition, who indeed before the act had captivated our interest? in whom this passion, one of the lowest which actuates a man, could appear so ennobled, that he, even in spite of and after such a deed, could engage our sympathy, aye, even excite our pity? It would appear impossible! And yet the poet in Othello has made such a man commit such a deed. Or rather, he has made it even there be committed by a man

who united the two natures, calmness with ardour, rashness
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with circumspection, the traits which make the murder possible, and those which allow us to admire and to pity the murderer. How the poet in this contradiction should evolve truth, was the point in which especially his art and his knowledge of human nature was to be displayed. But this task he has in such a manner discharged, that the play of Othello must on this account be reckoned among his highest works.

Let us first bring out the image of the Moor from the shadow of the Past, before we consider him in the action of the play.

Othello is by race, complexion, habits, and natural disposition, a stranger in the state which we see him serving, although he has become a christian and a Venetian. The stain of his birth is ever kept in fresh remembrance by his dark skin, and neither his deeds nor his royal origin can free him from the prejudices of men. The peculiar disposition of his mauritanian race, the violent temperament, the power of passion, the force of a tropical fancy, could not be effaced, however much the self-command of the much-tried man, steeled by deeds and sufferings, had attempted it. That which most surely destroys in us the original and luxuriant strength of passions, he had missed in life; the quiet, early, uninterrupted, all-powerful influence of education and conventional habits, which softens the wild natural power of our impulses by this means, that from the very outset it modifies and relaxes it. What in this respect birth and origin had begun in Othello, his fate, education, calling, and life had continued. From his seventh year he grew up in the "tented

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field" and remained estranged and alienated from the peaceful world, the citizen-life, the state of market or home, the arts, cultivation, enjoyment, and repose. He was a "full soldier", to whom the flinty and steel couch of war was as a thrice-driven bed of down. In his speeches all his images and comparisons are taken from the wars, the sea, or the chase. When landing in Cyprus, he has just escaped the tumult of the elements, his heart is opened and his tongue loosened, and contrary to his habit he is then talkative, kindly, and tender; in deeds and dangers he finds the source of cheerful vigour. There is his spirit, his range of sight, his power of mind, his cool determination; the noblest gifts and acquirements of his nature are at their highest point, when dangers surround him: it is a picture full of greatness, which Iago draws of his immoveable calmness, which never left him even when the cannon scattered his battle-array, and tore his own brother from his side. To this inclination for deeds and adventures, this delight in bold and threatening enterprises, he has yielded under the impulse of an heroic nature, journeying by land and sea to the ends of the earth to behold its terrors and its wonders. He had been in "antres vast and desarts idle"; he had had "hair-breadth scapes i'th'imminent deadly breach"; he had been taken prisoner, and sold to slavery and again redeemed; he had seen

"Cannibals that each other eat,
The anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders".

So he told Desdemona, when he was least inclined for fable; he informed the senate of Venice of this narration,

when the most accurate truth was his duty and his interest; the strongest sincerity lay besides in his nature and principles. He, therefore, must have believed, he had actually seen those marvels of distant regions; his southern fancy had mingled with his power of observation; or he related only from hearsay*; credulity and superstition betray at any rate his origin and the power of his imagination; and these are traits, which it behoves us to hold in lively remembrance, in order subsequently to comprehend the incredible and fatal exercise of these very qualities. Deeply is the belief in mysterious powers rooted in that redundant imagination, which is so natural in the hunter, the sailor, and the adventurer. The magic, with which he invests the handkerchief, his wedding-gift to Desdemona, is not merely feigned, to increase its value and significance in her estimation; she receives it so trustfully, that she questions not his belief in such wonderful powers; and other places there are, where he speaks credulously of the omen of a "raven o'er the infected house", and the influence of the moon upon the spirits of men. With this previous history, Othello had entered the service of the Venetian state. He had become so naturalized there, that like a patriot he held the honour of the state as his own honour: this he showed at Aleppo, when in the midst of the enemy's land, he stabbed the Turk who insulted Venice by striking a Venetian. By his warlike deeds he had made himself

* Thus as Sir Walter Raleigh in the description of his journey to Guiana in 1595, tells of the cannibals, amazons, and the headless people of Ewaipanoma, on which Shakespeare, according to commentators, must have thought in this passage of the wonders of Othello's journey; although he may just as well have had Mandeville before him.

indispensable to the state; he was "all in all" to the senate; the people and public opinion, "the sovereign mistress of effects" were on his side. Only among the noble and the higher classes has he open enemies and enviers; those who have the privileges, have ever the prejudices too. We hear, indeed, in what tone Iago and Rodrigo speak of the "black devil" and "the thick-lips"; we hear, how poisonously Iago, under the mask of good intention, tells him to his face, what prejudices as to his colour and birth are circulated in Venice; we see plainly, at what a distance he was regarded by Brabantio, at whose house he was even a favoured guest. In the eyes of these people, he was not the deserving warrior of their country, but a vagrant, vagabond, foreign barbarian; the finger of scorn pointed at him, and he felt it. That he should meet his enemies with disregard and contempt, lay in his proud nature; we hear, that he rejected important requests for Iago; we see him opposing the pride of the senator's cap (Brabantio) by the assertion of his own royal birth; if he treats as he does the powerful and influential father-in-law in the moment of closest union, how might he have acted in the case of provocation! There rested upon him as upon the descendants of the Jewish people, the stain of unequal birth and the fate of expulsion; the more his services emancipated him, the more sensitive, one may believe, would he be to the prejudices, which yet remained. But before he attained to this position, throughout his whole life, resentment and bitterness must have been planted in his spirit through this paria-condition. The feeling of disregard oppressed him; disunion with the world, discord with men raged concealed within; this gave him the grave expression, the silent reserved nature, that

brooded deeply over thoughts and conceptions; it gave him the inclination, so common with rugged characters, to yield himself up to soft compliant dispositions, to the apparent honesty of the hypocritical Iago, to the pliable Cassio, and entirely to the gentle Desdemona. There was a time, when this feeling of rejection called forth in him a disturbance within, which with one of his strongly expressive comparisons, he called "chaos", and which he shudders to look back upon. He had cooled his hot Moorish blood, but he could not change it. He had learned to repress his raging temperament in the school of circumstances, but these struggles, one thinks, had become hard to him and had often been fruitless. If from some just and heavy cause the flood-gates of restrained passion gave way, then his condition became "perplexed in the extreme", stubborn obstinacy seized him, and the out-burst of frightful emotions betrayed the inherent power of his nature, threatened his mind with distraction, and overcame even his body with spasms and faintness.

But the degree, in which Othello exercised self-command, the measure of self-possession and power over his passions, which he acquired, this it is, which attracts us to him still more, than his deeds and warlike talent. The profession of arms had invested him with calmness, firmness, severe discipline, and strength of will and purpose; these qualities related to his innermost nature and influenced his intercourse with men. He could no longer refine his habits after a long camp-life according to the gentle fashion of courtly society, but he disciplined them like a soldier. He had cooled down his anger and zeal on principle. As we become acquainted with him, he leaves upon

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every one around him the impression of a mastery over self, firmly to be relied upon; he appears to all a man of large heart, one not easily irritated, whom no passion decides, and whose firm virtue no chance or fate can shake. On the ground of this inward repose, the beautiful qualities of his mind appear the more clearly. A warrior, knowing "little of this great world", he had no great versatility of mind; he was "little blessed with the set phrase of speech"; ignorant of the arts of cunning and craftiness, he was pliable, credulous, and easily deceived by the hypocrisy, which he perceived not. With these his mental deficiencies, the excellent natural qualities of his heart stand in the closest union. His confidence was without limits, when once established; to dissemble was difficult to him, aye, impossible; all ostentation and conceit were foreign to him; the candour, the lack of suspicion, the constancy of this true soul, his perfect kindness, his thoroughly noble nature, were acknowledged even by his enemies. With that strong self-discipline, with that calm demeanour, with this noble-mindedness was united the most manly sense of honour. He had *won* for himself the honour, which others inherit; and he defended it with the jealousy and care, with which the possessor watches over a property, whose acquisition had been difficult. With toil had Othello thus risen to that even balance of conduct, which rests in the genuine honest self-reliance, to which his merits had advanced him. But even at this highest point of his self-contentment, we never quite lose the impression, that this self-reliance does not stand unalterably firm, that this evenness of conduct fluctuates in the balance, in one scale of which the acknowledgment he meets with, alternates with the other scale

of his secret discontent springing from the feeling of his birth. The slightest jar on the one side or the other, one fears, would disturb the equilibrium, if not wholly destroy it.

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But just at the point of time, in which we are introduced to the play, an unexpected happiness befalls the Moor, which seems as if it must for ever ensure this equilibrium: the most perfect woman in Venice falls to his lot. In the delineation of this woman, the poet has sketched a character of extraordinary truth and naturalness, the comprehension of which must next occupy our attention. Shakespeare has invested Desdemona with all that can render her precious and invaluable to the Moor. He has endowed her with a beauty, "that paragons description, and wild fame". Othello became acquainted with her as a busy housewife, "delicate with her needle, an admirable musician", whose voice could "sing the savageness out of a bear", and even had charms for the Moor, though he cared not for music. Her kindly zeal for others, her goodness, and gratitude, we observe in the affair with Cassio. Her father Brabantio says of her, that she is "of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion blushed at herself." Essential traits of her character, the poet has indicated in the passage (Act II. sc. 1.), where Iago, challenged by Desdemona, sketches the picture of a "deserving woman", to disfigure it after his own fashion with an "impotent conclusion"; in this picture he evidently takes her own character as a model. For it suits her when he says, that she was "ever fair, and never proud": as her choice demonstrates. It suits her: that she had "tongue at will and yet was never loud": as she gave evidence before the senate.

We will also believe of the modest maiden, that which Iago further adduces as tokens of womanly merit; that she "never lacked gold, and yet went never gay"; we know of her, that she could "see suitors following, and never look behind"; we can observe, that "she could think and ne'er disclose her mind"; and that on the point to become mistress of her desires, she can delay or resign them. And in the most tragic moment of her life we see later, how far from all revenge she is, when she blesses her calumniator, and in her death seeks to save her murderer by an untruth, which merits heaven. Yet one ironical trait does Jago add to his picture of a "deserving woman", which among so many moral endowments appears like a mental want: he invests her with no more wisdom than was necessary, not to sacrifice an evident advantage for a disadvantage, not "to change the cod's head for the salmon's tail". And in truth Desdemona at all events possesses not the quick wit of those Beatrices and Rosalinds, which with word-catchers and sophists, like Iago and the clown, would come off victorious in the combat. In her retired life the highest blessing, which ignorance of the world and of its vain propensities can impart, has become hers: the happiest freedom from every prejudice with respect to rank and position, the purest human development of all qualities of the heart; but great circumspection, ready activity and versatility of mind, penetration and knowledge of human nature are not acquired in this school. She is regarded by the Moor as prudent and imaginative, but she is so no further than is necessary to a little feminine dissimulation and denial, consistent with the unsuspicious nature of a good conscience; she would not be capable of

serious insincerity; even the prudent and innocent subterfuge dies upon her lips, if any severity of accusation has made her timid. Conspicuous mental endowments would perhaps have repelled rather than attracted the Moor; his own plain nature would not have felt easy by the side of a woman of this nature. This genuine manliness is only attracted by the most genuine womanliness, and this again Othello would have found belonging rather to the feeling, than to the witty nature of woman. He would exchange the splendour of all mental endowments for the one characteristic, which belongs to Desdemona, the highest charm of the womanly nature, which Iago names not, because he knows it not, or believes not in it: her humility, her harmless ingenuousness, her modesty, and innocence. Not the breath of an impure thought has ever darkened the mirror of this soul; the mere word of sin, it abhors her to speak; her name is clear and "fresh as Dian's visage". The genuineness of her soul and mind culminates (and this is the highest point of her nature) in a perfect unsuspiciousness, which has taken too deep a root in her for this suspicious world. This unsuspiciousness is the source of all her noble qualities, but it is also the cause of her calumniation and aspersion; in it she raises faults to noble virtues, but she sustains also her virtue in less circumspect demeanour; the very excess of the most innócent consciousness makes her idle and careless of appearance; she never needed the law, and knew of no sin; she might err against many rules of conventional custom, but her heart would be pure from stain, because any infraction of the eternal moral law would be impossible to her; she has no suspicion of other men, and dreams not, that they could

think evil of her; thus by this ingenuousness she obtains her happiness, and through it causes her unhappiness.

It is not every woman who would take the step towards her happiness, which she does; the most conscious design and cunning were alone capable of it, or the unconscious and naïve innocence, which rises to this degree of unsuspiciousness in Desdemona. She has heard "by parcels" the story of Othello's life. The charm which an energetic manly nature exercises upon a healthy feminine soul, has seized her, an affection like that which Ulysses awakens in Nausicaa, is aroused in her. She had shunned the "curled darlings" of Venice, who had wooed her; the deep interest, which she took in the great warrior, directed her eye to him, who was so dissimilar to her in beauty, habits, and years. She had to struggle with the natural disinclination to a being so diverse, and feared to look on him before she learned to love him: an experienced woman who had not like her been deprived of maternal guidance and education would have listened to this first voice of the soul, but not she. The great qualities of Othello's heroic nature prevailed over her, who was of a less sensual nature. She "saw his visage in his mind", her love was not the fruit of a fleeting ebullition of passion, but the slowly ripened admiration of his valour and manly power; she surrendered herself to him with the determination of a perfectly confiding feminine soul, innocent and unmindful she submitted to the ridicule of the world, and endured patiently the trumpet of report. She did not understand the concealment of these powerful emotions in her soul; it is more just to say: it did not occur to her to attempt it. Othello took a pliant hour to dilate his pilgrimage intentively to her. The pity, which according

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to Olivia's experience also, is a first step to love, added to her admiration. She gave him "a world of sighs"; and she swore (even in remembrance the Moor deemed it strange and wondrous pitiful), that she wished she had not heard his story. The idea of the burden of difficulties which opposed her love, and of the pain which the destruction of her quiet desires would prepare for her, drew from her this sigh, which she was as little able to restrain. She went still further: she wished that heaven had made her such a man, and bade Othello, that if he had a friend that loved her, he should but teach him how to tell his story; and that would woo her. With this hint the maiden proffered herself to him, a being worthy in his estimation to grace an emperor's side. Perhaps with him nothing less than these advances from such a being would have availed, if he was to approach nearer to a woman, for he was little tempted to the service of love and women. The nature of the warrior, designed for action, is, according to general experience, rarely sensual; besides his roving life had never permitted the feeling of domestic repose to gain ground in him. But that he loved Desdemona, he says himself, he would not have relinquished his unhoused free condition. His years have long extinguished in him the first glow of passion. In the evening when Desdemona followed him, he is called to the senate: he will speak one word with her before he goes, and it is but one. In the same night, not enjoying his love, separated from Desdemona, he is to set out for Cyprus, and with both there is not a word of resistance. In the bridal night at Cyprus, they are roused by tumult, and the disciplinarian captain is in all haste and circumspection at his post. He had even solemnly sworn

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to the senate, that the presence of his wife would not "taint his serious business", nor his disports corrupt it: much rather, if ever the light-winged toys of love should foil "with wanton dulness" his speculative and active instruments, housewives should make a skillet of his helm, and all indign and base adversities should make head against his reputation. His love is not that love in idleness, which leads Proteus and Romeo into effeminate uselessness, but with regard to the claims of his vocation, he unlooses, as it says in Troilus and Cressida, the amorous fold of Cupid from his neck, and "like a dew-drop from the lion's mane", shakes it to "airy air". Just this Desdemona desires in him; for this she will go with him in war and sea, that he should not be bereft of the deeds for which she loves him. And in this there lies again, that which on his side chains him so heartily to her, which must make him so happy and must dispel in him the night of chaos. Whatever honour the state and people of Venice had shown him, it had only been because they had reaped the advantage from it; it had been, as it were, in spite of his person and the prejudice that weighed heavily upon it. But Desdemona had first and alone loved his personality as the very source of his deeds; and this love came to him from such a being, that it could counterbalance the hatred and envy of the world. With this love there falls a sunshine upon his life, which resolves into perfect harmony every former discord. What wonder, that she afterwards "played the God" with him, and could win him over to all that she wished? that he would not resign her for a world, which heaven might make him of one entire and perfect chrysolite, and offer it in exchange? She is henceforth the place where he can garner up his

heart, where he must live or "bear no life"; she is the fountain (these are all his own words) from the which his current runs, or else dries up.

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So much did Desdemona in her innocence do for the man of her admiration and choice; but she does yet more for him, and this *more* was too much, and led beyond the deceptive limits between happiness and unhappiness. She united herself to him without the knowledge and will of her family, and assents to an elopement from her father's house. The free consent of her father must have appeared to both unimaginable; the pride of Othello, which struggled against stooping and imploring, the mistrust of his darker nature, (a heritage of the old variance,) his regardlessness, the conviction that his services would out-tongue the complaints of the father, the feeling of his indispensableness, co-operated on his side to the step, which she took to please him in the obedience of the already married wife. Thus Othello sails into the harbour of his happiness with a hostile attack, and himself inserts a new discord into the wondrous resolution of the old torments of his soul. Brabantio is indeed a man, who with wounding pride would have set a value upon his Venetian blood in opposition to the Moor. Hardly would he have consented to this union, which would have appeared to him against all rules of nature; he says himself that he would have refused his daughter to the Moor; that if he possessed another child, this experience with the first would have taught him to hang *clogs* on her. He has the inclination, to insist upon his paternal right and upon the honour of his house even with tyrannical severity; Desdemona's step appeared to him a revolt and a treason of the blood; superstitious as he is,

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he is convinced in the bitterest seriousness, that impious magic has ensnared the heart of his child to "fall in love with what she feared to look on". He had scornfully expelled the wooing Rodrigo from the house, he had attempted to wrest his daughter by force of arms from the abductor Othello; in the midst of the weightiest and most pressing business of state he brings forward his complaint, for his grief "swallows the general care". But in spite of all this, who can conjecture the influence that the way of truth might have had over this severe and obstinate man? The improbable so often comes to pass; Othello and Desdemona might have experienced this in Brabantio, had they taken the straight course of action, instead of allowing Brabantio, as they do, to experience it in them. He had heard the unvarnished story of Othello's natural witchcraft, with which he had bribed Desdemona herself to woo him; the father swears that if this is confirmed out of Desdemona's mouth as only half the truth, he will undertake nothing further against the Moor. He might have said the same, if his daughter had not rebelled against him; and he might have given her in her new home his blessing, if not his good will. And how good had it been for the wife of the soldier, whose vocation drove him here and there in the world, to have at times a refuge in her father's house! How good for the wife of the Moor to have the support of her family to oppose to his foreign nature! How good had it been if, at once upon that fatal expedition to Cyprus, she could have tarried under her father's roof, which both now so scornfully refuse! As soon as Desdemona has confirmed the Moor's narrative, Brabantio in heart and word abandons with bitter grief his "jewel", his only child. "God be with you! I have

done!" With these words he hurries to the affairs of state, www.libtool.com.cn and stifles grief and anger within his crushed heart. At the first moment, he saw bitterness before him for the rest of his life; the marriage was fatal to him, and sorrow cut in twain the threads of his old life. In his anger and involuntary curse germinated the little unnoticeable shoot, which grew into the powerful root of revenge and finally undermined the edifice of love and life raised by Othello and Desdemona. In departing, the father had warned the Moor to be watchful: she had deceived her father and might deceive him also! This was the first sting that settled in his soul, he felt not its point now, when he staked his life on her fidelity. But the significant tokens of destiny and the forebodings of the soul permitted not the blessing of possession to prosper for a moment in either. In the evening of their first union, in the bridal night, they were disturbed, on the voyage to Cyprus they were separated, and their stormy voyage is like a symbol of the fate which awaited them. United with her again, Othello stands on the threshold of the highest happiness, but there lies over his soul something of an unbelieving foreboding. Joy "stops" his voice, the fulness of his heart discharges itself in violent kisses. "If I were now to die," he says,

> "'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear,
> My soul hath her content so absolute,
> That not another comfort like to this
> Succeeds in unknown fate".

It is like Romeo's foreboding on entering the house of the Capulet. The Moor is immediately entangled in the nets of Iago, which the latter weaves out of the virtues of both

for their destruction. They had not ensnared him, if that curse of Brabantio had not exercised its natural magic power.

We must next make ourselves acquainted with this fearful instrument, whom fate employs in destroying the happiness of this union.

The character of Iago is maintained by the poet throughout in a great and profound contrast to Othello. Among the many opposite relations to each other in which the poet has ever placed his main figures, in obedience to the fundamental idea which occupied him, this is by far one of the most profound and remarkable. The essentially distinguishable conceptions of malevolence, envy, and jealousy are united under the common characteristic, that these denote a dissatisfaction at the good which others possess. Under this common idea the characters of Othello and Iago can be equally classed, however wide they differ in modification. In Othello, this dissatisfaction is originally grounded on that dark feeling of neglect, which his birth brings upon him. In spite of his glorious deeds he never attained to the enjoyment of honour, which devolved upon others without merit on their side. Without grudging to these their advantages, in the consciousness of his superiority he had a right to be dissatisfied at his exclusion from them. On this ground his love for Desdemona is rooted, because she appeared not to share this prejudice of the world, and upon this ground too rests his jealousy, because he is constrained to believe that she too has deceived and misused him. Well-founded jealousy justifies malevolence; for the possession of the wife is a blessing, which others have no claim to share. In Othello it is moreover still more justifiable, because with

him it is heightened to its enduring strength rather by the feeling of wounded honour and deceived confidence, than by the sense of lost love and fidelity; and respecting his honour man is his own judge. In Iago on the contrary, a similar disposition appears developed into a perfectly different appearance and nature.

This sensitive feeling of honour in the first place, this jealousy of stainless honour as regards both his house and person, he possesses not. Good name and reputation are indifferent to him; however beautifully he understands how to talk of it before the Moor, entering into his feelings, before Cassio he declares himself in a perfectly opposite manner according to his own feeling, and declares that the loss of reputation is to him of less offence than any other material injury. Whoever has a sensitive feeling of honour, must know men whom he esteems, for only such can wound our honour. Such men Iago knows not. To his incarnate egotism only those men appear as fellows of "some soul", who seek their own advantage, indifferent to the injury of others, who know how to advance themselves, careless of the means used. One who "knew how to love himself", he has never found. He himself will become a speaking example of this his human ideal. Towards all others he is filled with deep contempt. Before Desdemona he calls himself a slanderer, and he evidences at once his strength in this quality, when in characterizing the different kinds of women, he "praises the worst best", and declares her whom he must acknowledge to be truly deserving, to be a being of an inferior kind, good enough "to suckle fools and chronicle small beer". He believes not in honourable men, because he believes not in virtue; it is "a fig" to him. To

him reason alone is the measure of things, because it is the influencing power in all our actions. The simple man, the blockhead, such as Rodrigo, is to him only a machine whom he uses according to his interest. The credulous and honest man, such as Othello, is to him a "fool" and an "ass", whom he leads according to his necessity. The moral and conscientious man, such as Cassio, is to him "too severe a moraler", a tender weakling, whom he uses for his wicked schemes. The pure blameless one, such as Desdemona, is to him an insignificant creature, and what is more, the natural aim of his love of calumny; for he does not believe in this same blameless purity, and still less likes to believe in it.

If jealousy of honour, which at length made Othello such a severe murderer, is utterly foreign to him, jealousy of love is so also. For this, each and every feeling is lacking in him. Black in his soul, as Schlegel called him, he is cold, unfeeling calculation throughout; in every single action, this permanent stony hardness of his heart comes to light, a hardness to which Othello only unnaturally rose sometimes through grief and rage; a hardness evidenced perhaps still more, and more awfully, when he does not act directly. With icy coldness he sees Othello in a swoon, and with pitiless insensibility he sees the unhappy Desdemona, who had done him no wrong, fall a sacrifice to his malignity. Reflecting upon means to revenge himself, he forges at first double plans. Among them is even one, and this in the novel is represented as his design, for himself making Desdemona unfaithful to the Moor. But he who only knows self-love, cannot in deed and earnestness love this charming being; as he himself says, not even "out of absolute lust". But he would have reasoned himself into this love for the

aims of his revenge alone, just as he reasoned himself then
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into jealousy. He had heard by report that the Moor had been trifling with his own wife. He knows well that it is false, but he "will do as if for surety". He will be even with the Moor; he buries himself so in this thought, that "like a poisonous mineral it gnaws his inwards"; yet even this jealousy, in glaring contrast to Othello's, is only artificial, only a means to other ends, only a whetstone to his revenge against the Moor. For his wife had formerly little and now nothing to suffer from this jealousy, just because against her, he has no other ground of vengeance than against Othello.

Iago is thus a stranger to the jealousy of honour and love, but on the other hand he is filled with a coarser variety of this passion, with jealousy of rank, with ambition of position, with true envy and malevolence. Somewhat of this sort of jealousy is by Othello possibly perceived on the occasion of Cassio's advancement. In this contrast the whole difference between Othello's kindly nature and Iago's coldly prudent one, comes to light. This is at once the point at which these characters come into hostile collision, and at which Othello commits an error against Iago, by which he himself causes the encroachments of this dangerous enemy upon his fate. He has awakened this jealousy of rank in Iago, and spurred him by this to a thirst for revenge; and there lies a touch of retribution in this, that Iago imbues him in return with that jealousy of love and honour, which urges him to such frightful revenge. That Iago is a valiant soldier, is the testimony of all. The Moor has seen proofs of his ability among christians and heathens; Iago had expected, therefore, to have received the position of lieutenant; according to the old custom of

"gradation", and if favour and affection were not to decide, it belonged to him; his merit also awarded it to him in his own estimation: — "I know my price": he says, "I am worth no worse a place." But against him also, Othello undesigningly allows an undue regardlessness to govern him. He prefers before him, Cassio, who as a foreigner (a Florentine) and as a younger comrade must even doubly provoke Iago's envy, and who (as far as we may judge from our own acquaintance with him,) is not too unfairly dealt with by his adversary, when he calls him compared to himself rather a soldier of "the bookish theoric", who understands nothing of the practice of war. The feeling of slight raises Iago against Othello, and rouses in him his diabolical enmity. Othello should have thought thrice before he inflicted an injury upon another, from which he had himself suffered so much; he should not have inflicted it upon *him*, who understood not how patiently to command himself in silent suffering, who, once excited, filled all his thoughts with plans of revenge, and whose mind was inexhaustible in expedients. Added to this, Iago possessed all the gifts impossible even to be imagined by the Moor. For just as Othello is open and honest, simple and upright, Iago is endowed with all the arts of dissimulation. Just as Othello is harmlessly trustful and ignorant of the world, Iago is an observer of human nature, flexibly and adroitly knowing how to handle everyone after his kind and everything according to time and circumstance. And just as Othello is patient, good-natured, and noble, Iago is active and malicious, his inflamed hatred requiring vent and action. For the sake of Cassio's advancement he had been slighted by Othello, but he feels, and on the side

of his mental capabilities only too justly, not merely equal
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to Cassio's position; and since the Moor refuses it to him, he is impelled to shew him with fearful distinctness, how far superior he is even to himself.

If Iago's actions could be entirely traced back to this wounded self-reliance, as to their radical ground, the character would appear infinitely more excusable; but his malevolence has a still deeper ground, imparting to the man that fearful trait of malice, which makes Othello look for his cloven foot. It is indeed not only envy coveting the possessions and honour of another, it is not only malevolence believing itself more worthy of happiness than others, which forms this character in its innermost recesses, it is far more the climax of these passions, which puts them in motion, the dissatisfaction at the perfection of others, the aversion to the good in itself. This depth of his wickedness is manifested in his relation to Desdomona. In Rodrigo, Cassio, and Othello, a man like Iago has only outward endowments to envy, and no inward superiority. In Desdemona who excludes him from no appointment and no rank, his eye is necessarily directed to her inward perfections. Had these been indifferent to him, it would be too unnatural that he should plunge this guiltless and helpless one into the very severest misery. But they are nothing less to him than that. Otherwise he would not be so indefatigable in degrading her and her virtues! In Othello he was every moment willing to acknowledge a good quality, even if he distorted it into a mental weakness; but in Desdemona, it would have been altogether more difficult to him to acknowledge such a quality, or even if he does so, his malice is still more busy in defiling the mirror-like purity

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of the image of her being. The aim of this involuntary outburst of his love of detraction seems throughout to be that of dissuading himself from the belief in her virtue and goodness. It is indifferent in the estimate of this leading feature of Iago's character, whether he believes or not, all that which he says to Desdemona's disadvantage; unconscious to himself there lies within him a necessity to depreciate the good, aye, even to annihilate it. Just because she offers him no cause of hatred and injury, he seeks to devise means for the exercise of his censoriousness and envy. His whole plan for the excitement of Othello's jealousy is grounded on the persuasion, which he more and more endeavours to raise into a conviction, that Desdemona is no better than others; that she, a "super-subtle Venetian", as he calls her to Rodrigo, even with the little prudence which he knows she possesses, must understand the art of deceiving as well as any one; that she must conceive the unsuitableness of her union with Othello, and young and a woman as she is, must seek change, and must prefer the graceful Cassio to the Moor; that nature, that is, what *he* calls nature, sensuality and fickleness, will operate in her as in others. If he could indeed believe in her virtue, how could he ever believe that the Moor, simple as he too was, would despair of this virtue? Whenever he is seized with the passing feeling of belief in her virtue, he is then all the more eagerly desirous of transforming it to crime, and of spinning out of her very goodness, the web which is to destroy her and every one. Nothing, says Bacon, reconciles envy with virtue, but death.

He thus sets an example of the old and sad doctrine, that the world falls a prey to the circumspect and unprin-

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cipled man of action, who is regardless of means. His superiority, all that is connected with mind, activity, and adroitness, ever first strikes the eye of every observer of this character; he is a type of those dangerously endowed beings, whose brains have become sharp and inventive with the hardening of their hearts. It has been rightly said, that this versatility of his mind and this power of his will keeps our interest in Iago ever active, without, however, blunting our horror of him; the disgust, with which his aims inspire us, (thus Schlegel expressed this observation from the reverse point of view,) is rendered bearable by this; because the attention of the spectator is diverted by the means he uses, which offer endless employment to the understanding. We see this man at the highest point of his genius in the first scene of the fifth act, which is the more glaring repetition of the night, in which he makes Cassio drunk. He reflects on the means by which he can kill two birds with one stone, and get rid of two of his burdens — Rodrigo and Cassio; he excites the one against the other; he sees Rodrigo fall; he hears with quick ear, that Cassio's coat is proof against a thrust; he gives him, therefore, a wound on the leg; immediately afterwards he is there again in his shirt, and stabs the hitherto only wounded Rodrigo, since he suddenly reflects, that if repentant he might confess everything; he then convinces himself, whether Cassio recognized him, when he wounded him; he seeks finally to shift the suspicion of the bloody deeds upon Bianca. Upon these qualities, here seen in action, in possession of which Iago is never confused, never embarrassed, and shrinking back from nothing, is quickly decided in every change of circumstance, fixing his eye upon his

aim, carefully seizing his means, surely and deeply seeing into men and into their springs of actions, with far-seeing glance creating the circumstances, which are again to forward his plans, — upon these qualities all critics have ever lingered with the same emphasis. Especially compared to the novel, great stress has always and that not unjustly, been laid upon the point, that the poet makes all happen through Iago's contrivances, which in the novel is rather referred to chance. The wickedness of the character and its demoniacal superiority is thereby extraordinarily increased; and it has, therefore, been doubted, whether this character is natural, and whether any trace, however slight, is to be discovered of any element of good mixed with that of evil in him. The poet himself suggests this idea to the reader, when Emilia surmises, that some "eternal villain" must have ensnared Othello, "to get some office", and when Iago himself replies: "There is no such man: it is impossible!" But in Richard III., in the history of his own country, Shakespeare had found the picture of a character, which perhaps had committed in reality more unnatural deeds, than Iago in poetry. After that, he might well assume the possibility of such a form of human nature! Yet the poet, as we discovered, had endeavoured to link even his Richard by one weak thread at least to the good side of human nature, namely by his superstition and the involuntary paroxysms of conscience. Not even this little has he left to Iago. Thus it would appear. But perhaps on closer inspection one such small passage may be discovered even in him, where even *he* is fettered by this conscience, which he would have called a weakness, or like Richard, an invention. Above all, if we admire the skill of Iago's

machinery, we must not go so far, as to believe, that according to his mere arbitrary will he determines and prepares the destinies of men, at which he is aiming; the poet would, had he so arranged it, have lost the first and highest aim of tragic poetry, which is ever intended to render perceptible, how man himself is the originator of his own fate. In following out the course of action, we shall on the contrary perceive throughout how far fate forwards Iago's plans, how far the actual, though perhaps vague consciousness of guilt in those he pursued, assisted him in making a devised guilt credible. Iago's plans are from the first in no wise so established, that he had nothing to do but consistently to pursue his aims and means in one direction. In the soliloquy at the close of the first act, the idea, which he subsequently carries out, floats dimly in his mind. In the mean while, other projects, such as his designs upon Desdemona, cross this first plan. In a later soliloquy (Act II. sc. 1.), he acknowledges to himself this vagueness in his projects: they are only a dream, "'tis here, but yet confused." The wit and understanding by which we work, this he knows, demands favourable opportunity, and this, therefore, he awaits for his designs. Meanwhile the aim and wish is more and more developed in him to let circumstances themselves forward his schemes, and he has a lively joy in finding the nature of his characters suitable to them, and fate only requiring, as it were, that he should give the impetus. This wonderful interweaving of means, and the furtherance which his evil designs meet with from his desire of revenge, from chance, and from the nature of his victims themselves, this first gives Iago the eminent position, in which he appears throughout

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as the executor of fate. And just here, delicately and excellently is the train interwoven, which shows even in this man a trace of conscience and a little remnant of awe. Throughout he betrays an involuntary inclination to persuade himself, that he has just grounds for his revenge, and that his calumnies will be verified by actual sins. Throughout he betrays the propensity to contrive his misdeeds without insidious counsels and to impute the issue to the awkwardness of the immediate actors. Throughout he seeks to hide himself behind truths, when he has lies and deceit in his heart. He would fain deceive even his own conscience, and as guiltless as possible perpetrate his deeds, casting the appearance and the reality of the guilt upon the innocent. Therefore he takes it for granted, that he has grounds for jealousy of Othello; therefore he does "well believe", that Cassio loves Desdemona and Desdemona Cassio; therefore he even thinks, that he has cause to fear for his wife on account of Cassio; therefore he finds it so natural, that Desdemona should deceive Othello. Further, therefore, he makes such a show of the appearance of truth and honour, as if he aimed at deceiving even a secret judge. For this reason he warns Othello so kindly of jealousy, and so truly of his censoriousness and suspicious nature; and with this trait also the sarcastic boldness of that truth is allied, with which he concludes his advice to Cassio to entreat Desdemona to intercede for him: he would wager anything, that "this crack of their love shall grow stronger, than it was before." Further to this may be added, that Iago ever with such diabolical skill misuses the foolish Rodrigo as a shield and weapon for his own designs and deeds. This quality in Iago, of which we speak, is not

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exactly the main key to his character, but it is indeed a double key, which in another manner leads very nearly to the same solution, as that which we tried above. Therefore every one has vaguely felt, that in the soliloquy at the close of the second act, the main explanation of the nature of this villain is to be sought. There Iago, in a kind of enthusiastic self-contentment with his "divinity of hell", asks, who would now call *him* a villain?—him, who had given his friend Cassio indeed the sincerest counsel, which would never have led him, the counsellor, to his aim, if Cassio and the Moor and Desdemona had not assisted him in destroying themselves.

After we have thus first pointed out in Othello's and Desdemona's nature, the threads with which they spin their own fate, and are now better prepared to see the entanglements of this spider, Iago, at work within this double net, we shall now more easily comprehend the origin of Othello's jealousy, its form and kind, and its effects. We shall throughout let the poet himself speak, seeking the merit of explanation only in the arrangement of facts, in gathering together scattered traits of character, in more and strongly emphasizing the principal points, upon which the reader and actor must throw that stress, that stronger light, which gives the picture its full efficacy and truth. There are five essential agents, which influence the creation of this fearful passion in Othello, and which we must consider in succession, each one more active and of greater weight than the other: the perfect dissimulation of Iago, the character of Cassio, the excitable nature of Othello, and his whole relation to human society, above all the curse-burdened commencement to his marriage and the natural disposition of Desdemona, which in the

subsequent development of this marriage continues to operate as fatally, as it had done at its origin.

That a man so base, in possession of such mental resources, as Iago, would easily ensnare a man so little circumspect, so unarmed against cunning and deceit as Othello, is in itself clear. His audacious assurance in his plans of vengeance against the Moor as well as against the equally unsuspicious Cassio and Desdemona, is so great, that in every moment when he undermines their peace, he appears at the same time as their best friend and most careful adviser. At the very beginning of the play we find Iago as the disturber of the first hour which the new married couple spend together; he gains in Rodrigo a lasting tool for his vengeance. To Othello, however, he feigns himself at the same time to be a watchful and prompt friend. He assures him that it was difficult to him not "to yerk" the proud Brabantio "under the ribs", and when the latter comes to try the force of arms against Othello, he presses quickly forward to attack Rodrigo, as if he were the most jealous to stake his life for his general's happiness and safety. The Moor always esteemed him as a brave soldier; Iago now draws closer to him with that personal interest, of which Othello is so susceptible. He is at once rewarded by the confidence with which Othello commits to him the escort of his wife. The scene is transferred to Cyprus. Iago's next object is directed to this, to strike a blow at Cassio. He entangles him in the unseasonable quarrel which exposes him to the anger of the general; but he himself appears in his report as the honest soldier and at the same time as the forbearing friend of his lieutenant. He now brings the latter from his appointment, he soon gains the

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appointment for himself; yet far removed from being satisfied with these results, they are only so many incentives to him to set ever wider bounds to the course of his vengeance. He employs the moment, in which Cassio is shattered by his fall, to link with this result the attempt to make him and Desdemona suspicious to the Moor. He enjoins him to solicit Desdemona to intercede for him. He knows that he unsuspecting can and will do this, he knows that Desdemona equally unsuspicious will bring about her suit for Cassio; in the mean time he goes to bring the Moor unexpectedly to this interview, and with an exclamation, apparently heedless, he plants the first suspicion in his heart. Upon the skill, with which this first ground of Othello's jealousy is designed, all hinges; as soon as the soil is prepared for it, this passion increases of itself and creates its own nourishment. Therefore here at the very outset his hypocritical arts display their most masterly power. That at the close of the conversation Othello says of him, this fellow's of exceeding honesty and experience, this is the most eloquent eulogium of his cunning adroitness in dissimulation, or of the delineation of hypocrisy by the pen of the poet. With what openness does Iago accuse himself of foul thoughts and warn the jealous man of himself and his censoriousness! With what good intentions and palliating excuses does he allege that "the best sometimes forget"! How fearfully he paints the torments of the lover, who has cause to doubt! How forcibly he warns of the green-eyed monster, jealousy, while Othello had caught already at the still unbaited hook! How tenderly he recommends forbearance to him for the sake of his good name, by which he touches indeed the string, which produces the sharpest discord for the

Moor. Once enveloped in this veil of the most tried honesty, Iago has for the future an easy and successful game. He entangles the Moor in a two-fold unhappy delusion: all the doubts in the world occur to him concerning the fidelity and honour of Desdemona, no doubt strikes him as to the dissimulation of this villain. The light and dark side of Othello's nature, his unsuspecting mind and his suspicion, err decidedly in the first moment which with him is the decisive one. Desdemona's behaviour overpowers him still here and there with the impression of her perfect innocence, but the single apparent proofs of her guilt weigh heavier with him. Her integrity rests quietly and inactively in itself, while the honesty of Iago presses ever actively forwards in new proofs and services. Othello perceives in him at first little tokens and qualities of falseness, but he imputes another signification to them from the beginning. To suffer the whole being of the malicious man to affect him in the whole, this Othello understands not. His own honesty of nature has made him so short-sighted with regard to knaves and knavish tricks, that even that accomplice of Iago's, the unfortunate Rodrigo, surpasses him in acuteness. He is fascinated by just as dazzling a passion as the Moor, he is urged by a sensual love for Desdemona, and Iago keeps up this passion in him just as artfully as that in Othello, and deceives both credulous souls in a similar manner. Even this weak head, however, has still at least fits of suspicion against the false ancient, which fear of the loss of his money suggests to him; but Othello, who is threatened by a loss so much greater, who is so shattered by the mere idea of this loss, is not provoked by this grief to the shadow of a suspicion against

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the suspecting enemy of his wife; nay, even after his fearful deed, even after the first doubt in his conviction of Desdemona's infidelity, no doubt of Iago's integrity touches his soul.

So securely had the revengeful hypocrite taken possession of this heart with the object of filling it with incurable jealousy. By this plan he could hope to work out his revenge in the boldest manner, because the most favourable material for it (for *this* very plan) lay ready for him in the persons and circumstances. To throw suspicion upon Desdemona's connection with Cassio, for this the mere personal appearance of the latter was strikingly in his favour. He had acted the mediator between her and Othello, and how truly and silently he had kept this secret, is exhibited in his conversation with Iago (Act I. sc. 1.), where he affects ignorance of the whole marriage-history. He had become so intimate with both, that in intercourse with Desdemona he could indulge in all proper familiarity. She had been so frank with him, that she had often spoken to him "dispraisingly" of the Moor, while he had taken the part of the latter; and that Othello knew. In outward manners, form, and appearance, no greater contrast can be thought of, than that between Cassio and the Moor. Beautiful in figure and face, young, of "a smooth dispose", as Iago says, "almost damned in a fair wife", endowed with all the gifts and arts of the elegant world, he possesses all that in which the Moor knows himself most defective; he is naturally an object to attract the attention of women, and in this he is just as seducing as he is seducible. If on this point the mistrust of the Moor in his own endowments could be stirred up, it was easy to direct suspicion to this gifted substitute.

Even as long as he still believed in Desdemona's virtue, it might appear to him compatible with it, that she had indulged in a weakness for this very Cassio. For there was no other man so faithful to his duty, so heartily devoted to his general, no other who so scrupulously valued his good name, no other who with more feminine timidity insisted upon good morals. The vices of men, such as drunkenness, were foreign and detestable to him; the name "drunkard" from Othello's lips was as sad to him, as to Desdemona was that invective against her womanly honour, which she could not utter. But all these virtues were almost too refined to furnish confidence in their stability; Iago was thus right, when he regarded Cassio as a man, formed for suspicion. That his good-nature at times passes into quarrelsomeness, this all the world knows; that his aversion to wine may be overcome as occasion offers, and that then even his zeal for service can be exchanged for forgetfulness of duty, this Othello must experience. If anything is yet wanting to make him a fit person for Iago's tragedy, it is that similar unsuspiciousness of character, which belonged to Desdemona and Othello, that similar confidence in Iago's honesty and friendship, which he too does not doubt even to the end.

Iago's power of dissimulation and Cassio's seducing gifts would nevertheless have not ensnared the Moor into that immoderate error of his suspicion, if all the earlier circumstances of his life and the manner of his union with Desdemona had not facilitated the play of the former. Othello knows himself quite free from the empty motives which urge others to jealousy. In himself he is as incapable of groundless suspicion as of groundless anger. It troubles

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him not, if others extol his wife's beauty and endowments, even if they were to depreciate him with her at the same time. His self-reliance is still awake: "she had eyes," he says, "and chose me." But this self-reliance was just on this point so easily to be shaken. For as soon as Iago only reminds him of the arts of the Venetian women, "not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown," of the Venetian deceit, which Desdemona practised on her father, of the dissimulation with which she had shut his eyes, then the ardent imagination of the susceptible man is directed to the point at which the inflammable matter can never be wanting. Iago uses to the Moor the very words of Brabantio which he, being present, had heard: "She did deceive her father, marrying you; and, when she seemed to shake, and fear your looks, she loved them most." "And," says the struck Moor, "so she did." The expression, which is to be thrown into these words, cannot be significant enough. Ira Aldridge put to shame in passages like these the most cultivated actor. The curse of the father discharges itself in them upon Othello's soul; the light of his faith in Desdemona is with them extinguished. From this time musingly and silently he loses himself in the thought, whether in her choice she may not have erred against nature, and in pursuing this path both he and she are lost. Here Iago seizes him at once with the ready skill of his wickedness, well knowing, that this is "the point", which it behoves him to cultivate. Under the appearance of bold and inconsiderate openness he represents to him with all the emphasis possible the unnaturalness of their unsuitability, and suggests for his consideration, whether "a will most rank and thoughts unnatural" may not have been at work in Desdemona, whether, recoiling to her better judg-

ment, she may not have repentingly compared him with her own country-men. This rankles in the mind of the Moor. Because his years decline, yet therefore not so much, — but because those soft parts of conversation are lacking, because he is black, — how possible, that against this her taste and her prejudice may have stumbled! How at once, from this point of view, does his wife seem exposed to the most natural doubts! Still self-reliance and mortification struggle in him, but his fancy lingers already upon the one fearful idea: "I am deceived and abused." His first resolve is hatred and rejection. To torment himself with suspicion lies not in his nature; he will not doubtingly love, and loving he will not doubt; if he *must* doubt, he will see and prove, and according to the result, he will make an end of love or jealousy. This is now an incitement to Iago, to provide a seeming proof.

Immediately after Iago (Act III. sc. 1.) had sown the first seeds of suspicion in Othello's bosom, Desdemona had left at his request. At this threshold at which he was to enter the labyrinth of jealousy, the full impression of his present happiness stood before Othello's versatile fancy, joined to the impression of the fearful future which would await him if he had ever cause to renounce that happiness: and these impressions disburden themselves in those few words so full of meaning, so full of mingled happiness and bitter foreboding, which must be regarded as the commencement of the catastrophe, as the main substance of Othello's passion, and as the guide to its development:

> Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul,
> But I do love thee, and when I love thee not,
> Chaos is come again!

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No doubt has been yet named to him, and already before his busy imagination there stands the complete picture of his possible misery, which according to his fashion he compresses into a single word. Subsequently Desdemona's mere appearance seems for once to master his doubt, and he goes away with her. But immediately afterwards, when he returns, he is entirely overpowered, and that without fresh cause, by the idea, that the endless happiness, which this wife had prepared for him, was only a delusion, and that she had been false to him. But how is it possible, that this man so deliberate in fight and danger, and who subsequently executes that fearful punishment on Desdemona with such considerate calmness, should now be so dazzled by a mere idea of possible things as to take them for actual? How is it possible that his whole being should be shattered by a fancy, and be upset by a delusion? Is it not unnatural, that thus without conceivable ground, Othello should suddenly be so utterly disturbed, that he utters a painful farewell to his tranquil mind, to his content, to his glad vocation — war, that he sees his occupation gone, that he seizes in rage and fearful excitement the destroyer of his peace, and entreats him for proofs, when further proof was scarcely indeed required? But let us still bear in mind, that *all* false jealousy rests on mere imagination! that this delusion, because it is a weed, grows luxuriously upon the poorest soil and in the scantiest space, whilst here a ground so fatally fruitful for it was prepared, where position and circumstances gave an unusual force and depth to the suspicion, and must have opened to the quick eye of doubt so wide a view, that the near would almost necessarily be overlooked. Let us bear in mind, that just in this first inroad of a suspi-

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cious fancy lay the greatest disturbing power, destroying at once in the Moor all resolve and all ability for examination. Let us bear in mind finally and above all, the fearful excitement that this very Othello from the whole course of his life and fate, must receive from the mere supposition of Desdemona's infidelity. If she were really false and untrue towards him, she had not fallen from him in the ebullition of passion, but her falseness was premeditated, and the marriage with him had been a finely woven deceit! His noble nature, his childlike openness had been abused in the basest manner, as Iago forgets not to impress upon him; with quiet circumspection a disgraceful game had been carried on with his manly uprightness and candour! All the pity and sympathy which she had shown him, was but the dissimulation of the vilest prostitute! All the love which he had thought to have found in her, was only a mockery, and the whole heaven which she had opened to him, was a hellish deception! Faith in all virtue and in all mankind was shattered in him, and this purest vessel was a "cistern for foul toads to knot and gender in!" And this immense ruin had befallen *him*, who with such bitter efforts had aimed at greatness and honour, who stood before the curious and admiring world, who had at last attained even this envied and delightful contentment, the possession of such a wife! This ruin with one stroke had hurled him from the height so laboriously reached into the depth of an immeasurable ignominy, which would make him the derision of the age. And this humiliation, this disappointment, this crushing of his heart, had been inflicted upon him by the being whom he had regarded as the most valuable possession, which the world comprised! And this idea which contained in itself his

ruin both inwardly and outwardly, approached so close to
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probability! He who called it forth in him, spoke so honestly and so anxiously! She who was accused, had committed one irregularity, why not the other also? If she had committed that one against her father who begat her, why not this against her husband, who was foreign to her, and a black? Had not he who was accused with her, the virtuous Cassio, had not he also contrary to all expectation just as much deceived Othello's confidence? And he, the victim of all this deception, was he, the Moor, upon whom the old curse of rejection had ever weighed heavily! All this, this whole extent of that one idea, was not, as by us now, expressed and circumscribed by Othello, for it lay neither in the nature of his brooding silence, nor in the nature of his momentary outbursts of rage, to be able to display to himself or others his condition within. He has a strong designation for the fearful condition of his soul, which now as of old returns in him, but he cannot analyze it. That this, however, was indeed the shattering purport of his innermost thoughts and ideas, this lies in the nature of the matter and shews itself forthwith in the effects; the actor must introduce it in the expression of the sudden change of the whole being.

Othello knew himself rightly, when he said, that he could not long torment himself with uncertainty and doubts; the passionate blood, the power of his imagination frets him; he presses Iago for proofs; it is as if he longed for the confirmation of Desdemona's falsity as for comfort; surely it would now indeed require many certain facts to convince him of her innocence, whilst one apparent proof will strengthen his belief in her guilt. In the excel-

lent delineation of the jealousy of the weak, which Gottfried
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of Strasburg has sketched in his Tristan, sensual weakness is characterized in a contrary manner, king Marke shuts his eyes to the certainty of the infidelity of his Isolda, he gladly allows his doubt to be removed, he deceives himself with confidence in her innocence; the sinner is too beautiful for him to hate her, and from lust, he overlooks injury and disgrace. The jealousy of the strong differs just in this, that all the pain, which it excites, refers to the loss of honour, and not of enjoyment, and by this it receives its depth. William Schlegel indeed seemed to deduce the strength of passion in Othello merely from his stronger sensuality. The dream of Cassio, which Iago relates to Othello, poisons his fancy, we must confess, with sensual images, which never subsequently loose their hold of him. Schlegel, misled by these passages, considered his jealousy to be of the sensual kind, which in the tropic zones has produced the unworthy watchfulness over women. But it is not thus indeed in the older man, in him who no longer on this point is so excitable. The idea, that he should share with others the attractive beauty of his wife, the idea of the greatness of this beauty, which he then resolves to annihilate, these thoughts rise in his mind amid others, as we can well conceive: there where he sees her sleeping before him in all her charms just before his fearful deed; there, where with Iago the remembrance of this charm seizes him, and wrings from him the sorrowing words: "But yet the pity of it!" But just then he is mild and tender, and we see, that the thought of his privation of this charm and enjoyment, neither stimulates him to revenge, nor restrains him from it. But that which excites him so fearfully in this idea of

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Desdemona's intimacy with Cassio, which Iago has excited, is nothing but the shattering thought on the shameless game, which this mirror of virtue must have played with him, on the shame and dishonour, which she drew upon him. In this sense we must read the subsequent outburst of his rage before Desdemona herself, and the passages, where the picture of the deceived husband presents itself to him, and we shall find indisputably, that the anger of a hero at his outraged misused honour is here speaking, and not the jealousy of a slave to sensuality. We do not mean to say, that these ideas do not also of themselves seize the lively fancy of the Moor; they overwhelm him at the first suggestions with the power, which seems corresponding on all occasions to his strong nature; it is from this that he falls subsequently into a trance. Yet his jealousy, such as it is in him, is not influenced nor characterized by these ideas, nor is it urged by them to its extreme. In the very scene (Act III. sc. 3.), at which we stand, these ideas help to prepare the irritable frame of mind, but the first and the decisive outburst follows only when Iago mentions, that he has seen the handkerchief, Othello's first gift to Desdemona, in Cassio's hands, only when Othello believes that he has now a sure proof. Still Iago himself has only doubted, whether the handkerchief, which he has seen, really and in truth is that very one or only any one of Desdemona's, and already the furious man blows his love to heaven, calls black vengeance from his hollow cell, and swears with all the reverence due to a sacred vow, almost with deliberate rage, that his bloody thoughts shall never ebb back to humble love till revenge swallow them up. In other places also Othello proves, that he is master of the agitations of

passion, and that anger and zeal overpower him only where he has ground and certainty for his suspicions. No smouldering fire of sensuality helps in this case to plunge him into the overhasty conviction of Desdemona's infidelity; superstition and a bad conscience are the only agents. Upon the handkerchief and its faithful preservation rested, according to prediction, the happiness of his marriage; the giving away of the dear treasure commended to her was to him a sure proof, that the relation was broken; fickleness in the treatment of the pledge must have recalled to the Moor's remembrance the similar fickleness, which Desdemona had committed against her father in her union with him.

It is true, in the moment of his first outburst of rage, Othello still lacks the strong proof, that the handkerchief and the fidelity of Desdemona are bestowed upon another. But he goes to gain this proof from her for himself. Her behaviour can only serve to confirm her guilt to him. If in Iago's hypocrisy, in Cassio's suspicious qualities, in Othello's own excitability, in the previous history of the married pair, there were already powers enough at work to call forth the jealousy of even a more sober-minded man, and that even in still more fearful force, to all this in Desdemona's character, a still more powerful agent was added. The wide division between the two natures is obvious, but unhappily it was not perceived by Desdemona, and for her nature moreover it was difficult to perceive it. She believes him inaccessible to jealousy, she expects not this weakness from his manly power; and she is right; in its general nature, this passion would be as little found in him, as in Desdemona. In woman's nature it is too often the property

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of love to torment itself and the lover with petty jealousies, for the sake of the joy of reconciliation and of quieted doubt, for the sake of keeping the fire of love bright by their light. But the love of Othello and Desdemona was not formed for such trifling; and that which she had never known in herself or in him in its weakest form, how should she forebode it in him in its most fearful degeneration? And yet, had anything been able now to save both, it would have been alone the cunning and intelligent dexterity in Desdemona, which seeing through his condition might have understood how to cure it, and might have led the now deluded Moor back to truth by a beneficial delusion. The cunning of an Isolda, the prudence of a counsellor like Brangane, united to Desdemona's innocence, this might have again exorcised the evil spirit in Othello. But how far removed is this kind of mental strength, often bestowed by nature on the weak woman, from this pure and guiltless being! Her ingenuousness knows nothing of the shielding arts of foresight; carelessly she commits some indiscretion every moment, and this helps to her destruction. Othello, seeking to find a foundation for his suspicion, stands before his wife in deep inward emotion and enquires after the gift whose fatal significance he explains to her with fearful earnestness; she is alarmed at the loss of the handkerchief, but she forebodes nothing of the ground nor of the depth of his emotion. The poor creature had let the handkerchief fall in a kindly service for the Moor; in this little circumstance carefulness and carelessness were just as closely united, as in the great circumstance of her marriage, affection for Othello and want of affection towards her father had been before. Both times, and ever, her complete

nature influences her, her unsuspicious character, which is the consequence of the best consciousness. In this error she is aware of no fault, in the midst of her consternation she is unconcerned, she feels the threatening in Othello's passionate words, but she has never seen him so, and she knows not, how to treat the strange-humoured man; in contrast to his angry Moorish rage her lighter Venetian nature is unhappily called into play; with levity she passes from this heavy conversation to her suit for Cassio, and thus pours oil on the flame. Innocently she does in small things, that which she may seem to Othello to have done in great ones: carelessly she seems to trifle with the happiness and unhappiness of a man of his self-reliance in favour of an insignificant rival; the one scene may seem to reflect to him the whole nature of their relation. As soon as Iago hears that Othello has left his wife in anger, he hastens to him in triumph; the only danger to his intrigues is the effect upon the Moor of the wholly innocent nature of Desdemona; he hears, that it has operated not with softening, but with exciting power; this is an immense step forwards. He finds him and that more calm, than he had imagined (Act IV. sc. 1.); he purposes once again to attempt his former arts, once again to remind him of the handkerchief, once again to depict to his senses the revolting image of her infidelity, when he perceives by the swoon, into which Othello falls, that his poison has already worked more effectively, than he thought. He now becomes bolder, and ventures to exhibit Cassio to him as a victorious lover. Othello wishes to be found "most cunning in his patience", but the listener betrays the impatience which boils in him, and which allows him only to observe Cassio's malicious mimicry, but

not to hear his words distinctly. Subsequently when he reads
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Lodovico's despatches, he shows that he can listen well enough when he will; now in the inward throng of his doubts he only half hears everything, and therefore with prejudiced judgment. Bianca's words respecting the handkerchief, might have startled him, had he heard them; but in the mere sight of the handkerchief he sees the confirmation of his suspicion; to prove it and to fathom the matter, never occurs to him. This publicity of his shame, this equalization of his wife with the lowest women of the street, entirely destroys the self-command of the Moor. The feeling of his endless loss seizes him sadly in the midst of the fury of his revenge. But it gives way again just as quickly, when in Lodovico's presence he believes, that Desdemona is trifling with him so shamelessly, that she does not avoid acknowledging it before the eyes and ears of all. This overcomes the once calm self-mastered man to that degree of self-forgetfulness, that he strikes his wife in the presence of the Venetian ambassador; for well might it now seem to him, that the faithless pair must have been "as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys", that is, worse than even Iago had before depicted them; remembering these words of Iago's, he hastens away. That too which passes in this scene, must, in another frame of mind, have made Othello circumspect and perplexed. To the disciplinarian warrior, Cassio, as governor of Cyprus, must now be an unapproachable person; Desdemona's joy at Cassio's promotion ought, instead of provoking him, rather to have consoled him, for how should she, in intimate connection with him, have rejoiced at a separation from him! But let the most circumspect reader prove for himself, whether he,

in quietly reading the play, will not forget to make these considerations! how should Othello make them, when he has fallen a prey to the unhappiest deceit!

The actor of Othello will not overlook, that in the scenes hitherto we see by turns exhibited his good-nature and his chaotic mood, the higher and lower nature which possess this man, the twofold product of a strong nature and a character trained on principle. The rage, the fury, the bitterness, and despair are predominant, so long as he is in doubt, and the idea of his shame only by degrees becomes complete in him; as soon as he has approached this point, the repose of cold resolve appears pre-eminent, but with it also the feeling of his loss and of an endless sorrow. So far, in the last scene, had he attained already to this calmness in his resolve, that, even repressing in himself the voice of right, he would not expostulate with Desdemona, that she might not disarm his vengeance by amiability. Yet it urges him to enquire of Emilia. *Her* words also (Act IV. sc. 2.) ought to have made him thoughtful and mistrustful; she warns him of the insinuations of a calumniator, she, the wife of Iago! But he regards her as a "subtle whore", and her pious kneeling and praying he appears almost to take as a proof of her participation in guilt. Iago has not neglected his moment to taunt Othello upon his credulity, by this he has secured it to himself and his suggestions, he has by this sharpened the mistrust of the Moor against the believed guilty one. When Desdemona comes, Othello forgets his intention of not expostulating with her, but he seems to cling to the other design all the more expressly, not to allow himself to be overcome by her sweet nature nor to be turned from his fearful doom. And yet, this being exercises at

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once her charm over him, and the man who had not learned to weep, breaks forth in tears, and thrice quickly bids her to go away, as if he feared already that her sweetness would draw forth this softness and mildness, and annul his vow of vengeance. And now follows the beautiful passage upon which in acting no stress moving enough can be placed, — the passage in which Othello appears incomparably more unhappy than he has been cruel and barbarous anywhere before, in which he once again after his fashion in few but pregnant words designates his character and condition in its whole compass: to what sufferings, to what greatest of trials he felt himself steeled; what measureless happiness she had bestowed upon him; in what a condition of shame she had now plunged him, when even the angel of patience looked grim as hell! She awakens in him the idea of the sin of which he believes her guilty; he dwells upon it with his coarsest images, but he is not roused by this from his tender mood. Then suddenly his rage bursts forth anew at her innocent question: "What ignorant sin have I committed?" The verb *to commit* is used in a particular sense for the crime of adultery, but this the modest woman knows not, and again, according to the fatal characteristic of her nature, by her very innocence, she provokes her husband to regard her as a shameless criminal. In this scene of the meeting of Othello with Desdemona, and in all in which the latter appears with Emilia and others, we see in an excellent manner the unhappy effects of the different nature and descent of the married pair, and how on this point also the abandonment of the paternal home, and the unadvised and defenceless surrender of herself to the stranger, is revenged on Desdemona. The Moor,

once made suspicious, sees in her only the dissembling Venetian; she ever unsuspicious forebodes not what has passed in his mind, and even after her attention has been drawn to his jealousy, she knows not how to meet it. She herself suspects no one, and understands not that she is suspected. A child in innocence, she is a child for rebuke; of this kind of punishment no more can be laid upon her than upon a child; now, thus mistreated and harshly used beyond all moderation, for a moment her nature is hardened; she cannot weep; still less could she have further intercourse with Othello, to ask him to analyze the grounds of his displeasure; only when Emilia assists her with her words and feelings, do her tears, her sensations, her protestations find vent. When she is afterwards alone and is undressed by Emilia, her innermost soul utters its misgivings upon her situation, when she sings that touching song of Barbara and provides an arrangement for her death; but her meditative spirit receives not these deep impressions which lie upon her heart; she would otherwise more circumspectly have weighed her relation to her husband, she would have seen through his painful condition, she would have felt his sorrow rather than his outbursts of rage, she would not have resigned the deeply troubled man to a sleepless night without persuasion, and she would not have laid herself to rest with so little solicitude. In the midst of the excellent scene (Act IV. sc. 3.), in which Desdemona's beautiful nature is so richly unfolded, we can perceive a gap, which if it did not now once for ever separate this couple, would ever occasionally have separated them again and again. Both souls, at the moment when their connection experiences its first trial, veil their innermost thoughts from

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each other, instead of revealing them; the Moor will not expostulate with her, even in the hour of her death he will not believe her oath, and hardens his heart at her denial; she too, although she finds his very anger and scorn charming, refuses to speak like an injured child; and even with death before her, when she hears of Cassio's murder, she finds no word to assert her innocence, but in the bewilderment she once more accuses herself by speech and behaviour, and like a frightened deer she falls a victim to the death which she would gladly have escaped.

To this murder itself Othello proceeds with the repose of a judge; the feeling of the man and the husband, the sensibility of the injury to his honour and love, are therefore not extinct in him. To estimate this his deed from *his* mind, we must remember his severe service and the incorruptible discipline which we have before seen him exercise towards Cassio. This is essentially a prelude to the main action, which allows us in a less exciting case to cast a calmer glance into the innermost nature of this strange character. No conviction of Cassio's well-regulated life, no familiarity of personal relation to him, could then move him to spare the favourite in such a serious matter, a matter in which he would not even have spared his own brother. He made an example of Cassio, not out of anger, for his wrath is first aroused by examination into the confirmed guilt of his lieutenant, but out of prudence and from a political sense of duty. In this we trace the same mode of action, in a case which has nothing to do with love and jealousy, as he pursues now towards Desdemona. Here too, anger overpowers him ever especially at those times, when he thinks he has received proofs or confessions of her guilt; here too, he

punishes not in wrath, but from a feeling of honour. It is not passion (with these words he approaches Desdemona's bed), but it is the *cause* which urges him. The reflection therefore, whether after its accomplishment he might repent of the deed that could never be amended, detains him not. Her beauty, her charm, extort tears from him yet again, but they could not weaken his resolve; the magic of her kiss almost persuades justice to break her sword, but she remains firm. A higher justice speaks in his "cruel tears"; once dead, he would kill her even a second time, and the murder which is to heal her sin, will not injure his love; his sorrow is like that of heaven; "it strikes, where it doth love". Therefore *because* he would punish her from love, his first thought, to repudiate her with hate, rests not in his mind; he will not expose this beloved being to the contempt of the world nor abandon her to sin, but withdraw her from both, from shame and sin, by his punitive rather than avenging deed. For this reason, once again in the last moment he is agitated at her denial of the crime, of which he is firmly convinced; he would fain punish as her last judge for the sake of atonement and purification, her denial provokes him to call that a murder, which he thought a sacrifice. Here too, in one word he compresses in his fashion an infinity of inward feelings, for which he had no separate designation. He regards himself as the chastising judge of her shame, and as the physician of his honour; he performs this deed according to his last testimony, not from hatred, but from honour. When he finds himself mistaken, he punishes himself with the same exalted coolness and calmness, and with the same propitiatory act, and therefore there lies such deep significance in the fact, that

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at his suicide, at the very last, he remembers the stab with which he had smote the Turk in Aleppo: he had then found the honour of the Venetian state as great a provocative as his domestic honour is now; and then, to avenge this honour, the peril of his life could as little restrain him, as the annihilation of his most precious possession can now. Therefore after Desdemona's death, he is far from repenting of his deed or concealing it. He permits her not in dying to take the deed upon herself, he pleads aloud guilty to the deed, to which just grounds alone have urged him. Therefore he is hard to convince that he has erred; Desdemona's angelic falsehood at her death, and Emilia's accusation of her own husband, confuse him not, because his conscience was clear; repentance and revenge turn only then against himself, when the proof against his own conduct is as certain, as he had before believed that against Desdemona's.

From the moment when Emilia learns Othello's deed from his own lips, the poet disburdens us in a wonderful manner of all the tormenting feelings, which the ripening of the catastrophe had awakened in us. Emilia is a woman of coarser texture, good-natured like her sex, but with more spite than others of her sex, light-minded in things which appear to her light, serious and energetic when great demands meet her; in words she is careless of her reputation and virtue, which she would not be in action. At her husband's wish, she has heedlessly taken away Desdemona's handkerchief, as she fancied for some indifferent object. Thoughtless and light, she had cared neither for return nor for explanation, even when she learned that this handkerchief, the importance of which she knows, had caused

the quarrel between Othello and Desdemona; in womanly fashion, she observes less attentively that which goes on around her, and thus in similar but worse unwariness than Desdemona, she becomes the real instrument of the unhappy fate of her mistress. Yet when she only knows that Othello has killed his wife, she unburdens our repressed feelings by her words, testifying to Desdemona's innocence by loud accusations of the Moor. But when she hears Iago named as the calumniator of her fidelity, she testifies to the purity of her lady by unsparing invectives against the wickedness of her husband, and seeks to enlighten the slowly apprehending Moor, whilst she continues to draw out the feelings of our soul and to give them full expression from her own full heart. At last when she entirely perceives Iago's guilt in the matter of the handkerchief and therefore her own participation in it, her devoted fidelity to her mistress and her increasing feeling rise to sublimity; her testimony against her husband, in the face of threatening death, now becomes a counterpart to Othello's severe exercise of justice, and her death and dying song upon Desdemona's chastity is an expiatory repentance at her grave, which is scarcely surpassed by the Moor's grand and calm retaliation upon himself. The unravelment and expiation in this last scene is wont again to awaken repose and satisfaction even in the most deeply shattered reader. In a just representation of the play the painful excitement in the third and fourth acts is besides far more softened than in the reading. That which we have before alleged as the ground for tolerating the character of Iago co-operates in inducing this: the mental suspense with regard to all the levers which are here in motion,

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diverts us, and added to this, the rapid progress of the play does not suffer single emotions to dwell so long on the mind. This milder impression will be much increased, if the actor of Othello so conceives the character, as Burbadge from an allusion before mentioned must have done: allowing the deep painful sorrow of the being thus helplessly thrown back into misfortune to predominate throughout over the fury and rage of the jealous man. In the German translation the Moor acknowledges in conclusion that he was hard to rouse, but once roused that he raved endlessly (*unendlich raste*). One such expression can utterly disturb this part, and with it the effect of the whole piece. In the English original, Othello acknowledges only that he was "perplexed in the extreme", and he denotes by this nothing else, than that return of "chaos", the pressure of a terrible inward unhappiness. If by a suitable representation, the spectator attains at least to as much sympathy with the Moor as indignation against him, he will bear the death of Desdemona with more emotion than bitterness, and the atoning death of Othello will expiate for all. Or, in spite of all our explanations, does the ruin of both remain too terrible, because their conclusion is so much less reconciliatory, than that of Romeo and Juliet? Yet for them it cannot be pleaded, as for Romeo and Juliet, that their secret marriage was made in the ardent intoxication of early youth and in the unreasonableness of passion; they entered on their union with cooler feelings and in full self-possession. It cannot further be pleaded for them, that their self-willed union, as that between Romeo and Juliet, was concluded in the midst of threatening fates, amid the bitterness of contending families, on the

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ruin of domestic relations, that it was the only expedient for the two, favoured moreover by a holy man, and offering a prospect of peace between the discordant houses. Here on the contrary, the peace of a family was disturbed, and the happiness and life of a father destroyed. If even there the secret union bore its bitter fruit, if there wild joy had a wild end, here also according to the words of the demon-like Iago, the violent commencement must have an answerable sequestration. Not alone did Othello intend, but the poet intended also that the death of Desdemona should be brought as a sacrifice, and that of Othello as an atonement, to the manes of the broken-hearted father. The tidings of this death no longer reach Desdemona. "I am glad thy father's dead", says the uncle who brings the tidings, otherwise the fate of his child "would do him a desperate turn". But this sentence is also true in its reverse sense. If Desdemona had lived to know it, not the death of her father, but the cause of his death would have been an experience to her just as fearfully undeceiving, as the lost confidence of Othello. For just as she had no foreboding of this, she had none also of the effect which her independent step had had upon her father. The same nature and qualities were at work in her, when she gave the fatal blow to the life of her father, and when she gave occasion for the suspicion of her husband. The same innocence of heart, the same lack of suspicion, the same inability to intend any harm to any one, allowed no touch of bashfulness to appear in her in the first instance before the public council, and placed in her lips subsequently the dangerous intercession on behalf of Cassio. In both cases

she intended to do right and good, and from the very purity
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of her consciousness arose her misinterpreted actions. Like Othello, like Romeo and Juliet, she falls a sacrifice to her own nature, and not to the law of any arbitrary and unjust moral statute; to a nature, which in the strength of that directness and originality, which interests us in all, oversteps the limits of social custom, unites guilt and innocence in strange combination, which draws death as a punishment upon itself, and endures death like a triumph, a nature, which divides our feelings between admiration and pity. It seems as if here perfect satisfaction was afforded to all the demands of tragedy. It seems also, that this performance is consistent with the freest moral view. For the poet, by this conclusion, has not once for all condemned *every* unequal marriage, nor *every* secret union, just as little as in Romeo he has condemned all passionate love. With such partiality, Shakespeare has never and nowhere meditated upon moral problems. Otherwise, in All's Well that Ends Well he would not have carried an unequal marriage to a prosperous end through so many difficulties; he would not in Cymbeline have suffered a secret union to turn out for good, nor in the Merchant of Venice would he have justified the abduction of a child and a self-willed marriage. Not the letter of the law, but the circumstances and nature of men, are in the poet's wise opinion the spring from which good and evil, happiness and unhappiness arise. *These* furnish also the line of conduct, according to which both must be measured. In proportion to the circumstance and nature of the man, evil often becomes a source of good, and good a source of evil, apparent hap-

piness a misfortune, and misfortune a happiness. And this is with conscious intention observed and carried out in this play, in which the noble Desdemona falls into sin through innocence and goodness, and by a sinful lie commits the most beautiful act of forgiveness.

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HAMLET.

The story of Hamlet originally appeared in a clumsy form in Saxo Grammaticus; it was afterwards treated more gracefully in Belleforest's Tales (1564), and from this was taken the English edition of "the Hystorie of Hamblet", the earliest known impression of which was in 1608. According to this fable, Horvendile was killed by his brother Fengon, who took possession of his dominions and of his wife Geruth. The feigned madness of Hamlet is the central point of the story, and his ambiguous, ingenious, yet insane propositions were, to a Scandinavian taste, the main charm of the narrative, which concludes with Hamlet's successful revenge and his elevation to the throne. The scene, in which Hamlet endeavours to recall his mother to the path of virtue, murdering the listening spy, and the snare, which he lays for the ambassadors sent to England, are the only touches, which could guide Shakespeare in his own different comprehension and treatment of the story. The characters of Laertes and Ophelia are wanting in the original; utterly unconnected with the main action there is a maiden, brought up with Hamlet and beloved by him, whose last affection he gains, conjuring her to hold this secret in the

profoundest silence. Poor, crude, and clumsy, the one touch is a type of the whole story. To no other play of Shakespeare's, is there a source of such rude deformity assigned, and just from it has he formed this tragedy, which, wherever the poet's name is mentioned, comes first to remembrance; which appears to unite the most contradictory points of his art and genius; which surpasses in originality every other of his dramas, and is yet so popular and so free from all artifice. It is a text from nature of truest life, and therefore a mine of the profoundest wisdom; a play, which next to Henry IV., contains perhaps the most express information of Shakespeare's character and nature; a work of such a prophetic design, of such anticipation of the growth of mind, that after nearly three centuries it is first perceived and appreciated; a poem, which has so influenced and entwined itself with our own later German life, as no other poem even of our own age and nation could boast, with the exception of Faust alone.

There were special historical and literary circumstances in Shakespeare's time, which must have animated this rough legend in an unusual manner to the poet's mind, and must have brought it before him for closer consideration. The events, which took place in Scotland in 1567, on the murder of Darnley and the marriage of his widow, Mary Stuart, with Lord Bothwell, offered in the latest Past a living counterpart to the action in Hamlet, to which Karl Silberschlag has lately drawn attention. There was too an older play of Hamlet, which intervened between the original source and Shakespeare's tragedy. At the close of the 16th century, when revenge was the theme for competition throughout a whole series of tragedies, this subject

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was not overlooked. According to Thomas Nash, in his preliminary epistle to the "Menaphon" of Robert Greene, to which we have before referred, there was a drama upon Hamlet as early as 1589 and perhaps even 1587; in the year 1594, a play with this title was represented at the theatre at Newington Butts; and this may have been that older Hamlet. Several English critics believe this old piece itself to be the work of Shakespeare's youthful hand. And it is certain, that the poet was occupied with this subject, as with Romeo and Juliet, at an earlier stage of his dramatic career. According to the much enlarged quarto-edition of 1604, the play received the form, in which we now read it, about 1601—2; indeed the manifold allusions in it to Julius Cæsar would make us believe, that this last revision occurred at the same time as the Roman historical play of this title. But in the first cast the play was not elaborated into this form. We possess a quarto-edition of 1603, which is regarded indeed by Collier, Dyce, and Mommsen, as a faulty and illegal print of the complete piece, but on the other hand according to the indisputably more just opinion of Knight, Delius, and Staunton, it contains an earlier design of the poet's, though in a mutilated form; the comparison of this with the riper work, just as in the case of the two Romeos, manifests the advancing mind of the poet in that point especially, which is by far the most interesting to us and to our method of perception: in the clearer formation of his play according to one fundamental idea. That the edition of 1603 is not merely a pirated copy of the complete work, may be gathered from the different names, which Polonius and his servant bear in it, the one Corambis and the other Montano. But far more its whole character

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proves, that Shakespeare's play in the beginning included, it is true, all the actual circumstances of Hamlet, though with no exact realization of their intrinsic meaning. A series of passages are there wanting, which the poet must have subsequently inserted for the purpose of a more distinct characterization of his hero, of his nature, and of his course of action. The significant contrast between Horatio's character and Hamlet's, which is put into the mouth of the latter just before the play of Gonzago's death, is not in the older text. All those sententious allusions to the meaning of the piece in Gonzago's part are wanting. The short soliloquy (Act III. sc. 2.) is omitted, in which the motive for Hamlet's passionate agitation is stated, which explains the scene with his mother and the murder of Polonius. In the soliloquy of the king (Act III. sc. 3.), all the finely interspersed contrasts are absent, which assist to a more true understanding of the piece. We miss the whole scene, in which Hamlet falls in with Fortinbras' troops, and the whole soliloquy, which offers the readiest key to the idea of the entire work. If all these were the accidental omissions of a fraudulent copyist, there must have been a kind of method in his want of hearing. But it is far more probable, that the poet in the later revision of his work added these enlightening touches to the riddle of his drama, which for so long a time was a book with seven seals, and at its first appearance may have been in no less degree a mystery to many.

Since this riddle has been solved by Goethe in his Wilhelm Meister, it is scarcely to be conceived that it ever was one, and one is hardly disposed to say anything more towards its elucidation. No work of Shakespeare's is truly

more clear in its design than this, although none, if we
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except the sonnets, has been so long and so entirely misunderstood. We have before amply quoted Voltaire's complimentary verdict. Malone also could make nothing out of the play; he considered, that Hamlet's feigned madness conduced little to its aim. Others, like Akenside, maintained, that the poet intended to attribute actual madness to Hamlet; and we know, that Tieck has also attempted similar old innovations. Johnson discovered no adequate cause for Hamlet's feigned madness; he called Hamlet rather a tool than a free acting being, because he makes no preparation for the punishment of the convicted king, who falls at last in consequence of a circumstance, in no wise brought about by the son, in whom revenge was a duty. But all that in those censures of Voltaire's referred to a want of design, suddenly crumbled into dust, when Goethe demonstrated the strict logical consequence of the play; all, that appeared to lie open to criticism in those reproaches of Johnson and Malone, was changed at once into so many eulogiums, when it was shown, that it was the very design of the poet to represent his hero as a man, whose reason had been disturbed by the shock of too difficult a task; to lead him, according to that profound simile of Horatio's, to the dreadful summit of a steep, whose height makes him giddy; as Goethe has expressed it: to delineate a mind, oppressed by the weight of a deed, which he feels unable to carry out.

That this was really the design of the poet, is evident from the facts themselves, but it is also made palpable by express and repeated reference to the meaning he would convey through them, and this even to a greater degree

than in Romeo, or in any other play. Let us once more clearly consider the two, the facts and the elucidations which the tragedy itself unfolds.

An heroic king of Denmark, a man without "his like", of noble form and majesty, was murdered by his brother, who supplanted on the throne the son of the deceased king, and had even during the life of the latter stolen the affections of his queen by insinuation and gifts. Ambition, thirst of power, and evil desires, had urged him to this unnatural deed; he understood how "with devotion's visage, and pious action, so to sugar o'er the Devil himself", that the queen, now his wife, surmises not the murder. No outward comeliness commends the bloated Claudius, whom Hamlet's scornful epithets (paddock, gib, peacock, etc.) designate as a voluptuous vain being, whose daily life is passed in scheming and carousing. No inward virtues adorn the hypocritical "laughing villain"; unless it be that quick perception of his understanding and of his guilty conscience, which makes him attentive to every danger and threat, which makes him interpret every event, every word, every sigh, which makes him gather round him with skilful grasp the weakest spies and tools. The ghost of the fallen hero now rises from the grave, and conjures the son, if he has nature in him, not to leave his murder unrevenged, not to sit in inactive indifference at his corruption, as his own significant image has it, nor to be so dull concerning the unnatural crime, as "the fat weed that rots itself in ease on Lethe wharf". A slave of destiny, wandering in the torments of purgatory, lays this monstrous exhortation to Hamlet's heart; besides, revenge in that age was regarded as a duty, which ought to have been discharged unwarned; Hamlet moreover had rather to execute

justice than vengeance, for he was the unlawfully supplanted heir to the throne and the judge of the land. Joined to these powerful impulses and grounds for vengeance both without and within, the readiness of the means adds encouragement to the good cause. The dead father is held by all in the liveliest and deepest remembrance; "every fool can tell," according to the grave-digger, the year and date on which he overcame old Norway; towards the new king the people prove refractory after the death of Polonius, and are ready to establish another sovereign in Laertes. He is therefore no adversary to be feared, unless it be from the one cause, that he himself fears and is cautious. But the young Hamlet has all advantage over him in the favour of the people, who "dip all his faults in their affection"; nay, even in his own mother, who is attached to him by a love almost extravagant, he, rather than her new consort, would find an ally in case of need. These outward means, which consist in the circumstances, are strengthened by the personal gifts of Hamlet, who in Ophelia's sight is courtier, soldier, scholar, endowed with powers of mind and body, which we are capable of observing ourselves; just thirty years of age, he has reached a period at which physical and moral strength are most fully, most equally balanced. To the cause, motives, means, and power, nothing is at length lacking but the good will, to secure the full accomplishment of the required deed of vengeance. This too Hamlet possesses. He swears by heaven to the ghost of his beloved father, that he will make his command his watchword, and "from the table of his memory wipe away all trivial fond records", that "with wings as swift as meditation, or the thoughts of love", he will sweep to his revenge.

Yet in this first soliloquy it strikes us with surprise that the man so apparently resolute should immediately call on his heart to "hold", and to his sinews, to "grow not instant old, but to bear him stiffly up", and that in the deepest emotion, he should lament that time was "out of joint", and that he was born "to set it right!" It is strange that he does not at once impart his secret to the friends, to whom his father had appeared, and only subsequently to one of them, to Horatio; that he chooses far-fetched means for a matter so simple, feigning himself mad like Brutus, when there was no mighty tyranny to overthrow; that he fortifies himself against the doubt and suspicion of those, who held *him* in fear, and that by this very means he attracts observation to his actions, and excites the distrust of the king, whom the desponding sadness of his step-son had already disquieted. Playing the part of one mentally deranged, Hamlet is now seen exciting alarm at the court, putting riddles to the spies, tormenting his beloved, forgetful of his mission. Two months pass by, and he thinks not of his watchword, until a declaiming player (Act II. sc. 2.) "in a fiction, in a dream of passion" reminds him of his own part; conscience-stricken he then assails himself with violent invectives, calls himself "John a-dreams, a dull and muddy-mettled rascal", a coward who takes every mortification, who is "pigeon-livered, and lacks gall to make oppression bitter". But even now this merited self-reproach urges him not to action; the effect of the players upon his own soul suggests rather the idea of "catching" the king's conscience in a play. By the lapse of time the procrastinator is even led to doubt, whether the spirit of his father, whom at the time with such proud emphasis *he* had called to his friends "an

honest ghost", may not have been the devil, who "is very potent with such spirits", weak and melancholy as his are.

The play is acted. The poet has made use of it, before there ensues any appeal to the conscience of the king, to speak first to the conscience of Hamlet himself, and at once to convey to the spectator the meaning of his work. Scarcely has Hamlet interpreted the language of the acted queen into "wormwood" for his mother, than he himself receives the same from Gonzago, who plays the part of his father, and the voice of the ghost speaks to him again in the words:

> "What we determine, oft we break.
> Purpose is but the slave to memory;
> Of violent birth, but poor validity:
> Which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree;
> But fall, unshaken, when they mellow be.
> Most necessary 'tis, that we forget
> To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt:
> What to ourselves in passion we propose,
> The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.
> The violence of either grief or joy,
> Their own enactures with themselves destroy".

The trial of the play answers. Cautiously Hamlet orders Horatio to observe the king, that he may himself appear "idle". Both are now convinced of the guilt of the murderer. The poet now shows us the king alone, trying to pray and to repent (Act III. sc. 3.). Almost every sentence of his soliloquy bears a comparison with the state of Hamlet's mind, in whom the duty of revenge exists in the same proportion, as in Claudius the duty of repentance. The hypocritical murderer stands wavering between his deed and his repentance, just as Hamlet does between the deed and its revenge. The king has the will to pray, as Hamlet has to

punish; but the impulse of their nature accords not with their task; "the stronger guilt defeats the strong intent" of the praying man, the extreme of conscientiousness causes the backward ebb of the avenger's passion, even when it has begun to flow. Thus it is with both, as Claudius says, that they, "like men to double business bound, stand in pause where they shall first begin, and both neglect". He knows that Heaven is rich in mercy, but he finds no means of obtaining it; just as Hamlet sees the path of punishment prescribed to him by Heaven, and in his soft mind dares not tread it. "Whereto serves mercy", asks Claudius, — whereto serves punishment, might Hamlet also ask, "but to confront the visage of offence"? The two-fold force of prayer is

> "To be forestalled, ere we come to fall,
> Or pardoned, being down";

and similarly might Hamlet say immediately afterwards, when Claudius lays a snare for his life, the two-fold force of retribution is to punish the crime accomplished and to prevent its repetition. The king attempts the penitential prayer which he has at heart, yet there is not that active repentance at work, which would lead him to renounce at once the possession of the crown and of the queen; so Hamlet attempts revenge, but conscientiousness effects in him, that which hardness of heart does in the king, that he cannot bring his will to action. Repentance can do all things, says Claudius, "yet what can it, when one can not repent?" — so by Hamlet all scope is given to revenge, but the avenger himself is lacking. The king's soul, entangled in the meshes of crime, strives to free itself, and becomes more and more

ensnared; Hamlet's excited feelings seem impatient of restraint, while all the more surely he is held captive by procrastination.

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Just at the moment, when these considerations are passing through the king's mind, Hamlet approaches him, and the best opportunity is given him for the accomplishment of his revenge. His temper too is stimulated to the deed; it is night, the hour of ghosts. But for ever irresolute, he finds a new far-fetched cause for delay. For the very reason that he prays, he will not send the murderer to heaven, who killed his father "with all his crimes broad blown"; he loses the convenient opportunity, to await another more fearful, more effective; he goes away, and the spared king arises to tell us, — that he could not pray. However, the excited mood of Hamlet's mind continues at this time, and after the agitation of the play he alarms his mother's conscience by words that enter into her ears like daggers; then in the eagerness of this conversation, believing he hears the listening king, he thinks to strike him through the arras, and kills the father of his beloved! The man who thus conscientiously hesitates to avenge a murder, has now unwarily become a murderer himself. Hamlet himself regards the mistake not only as a punishment of Polonius, but also of himself. Yet a more pointed punishment for him, is the re-appearance of the ghost. The spirit comes to dissuade him from the persecution of his mother, which he had previously forbidden, and to admonish him again to vengeance on the murderer, which he had before so imperatively commanded. The conscience-stricken son knows at once that the ghost is come to chide him who is "lapsed in time and passion", who in alternate moods of over-excite-

ment and procrastination, has blunted the edge of his resolution.

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The error in his revenge ought alone to challenge Hamlet urgently, at last to act in earnest; but he falls into still more striking delay. He meets young Fortinbras, who presents a striking contrast to Hamlet, in his ready energy for action. He had some old offence of his father's to revenge on Denmark, not indeed the murder of a relative; he took up arms contrary to the will of his uncle, and when the latter arrests his progress, his youthful energy seeks an outlet in a war against the Polack for the sake of "a little patch of ground, that hath in it no profit but the name". Hamlet must himself acknowledge, that a divine ambition puffs the spirit of the ardent warrior, although he considers that he errs in his object, and exposes himself "for an egg-shell", while he himself with the strongest inducements, provided with will, power, and means, remains inactive. He regards this encounter as a fresh cause to urge his slumbering vengeance; he himself perceives that "examples, gross as earth", exhort him. He assails himself with renewed reproaches:

> "What is a man,
> If his chief good, and market of his time,
> Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
> Sure, he, that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before, and after, gave us not
> That capability and godlike reason
> To fust in us unused".

He himself threatens his thoughts with contempt, if from this time, they are not bloody. And yet he is even now upon the point of suffering himself to be quietly sent to England, far enough from the object of his vengeance. It is only through an accident, which lay not in Hamlet's hands, that by an assault of pirates, he again speedily returns to Denmark.

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Even now he follows not out his aim, although he has learned that the king attempts his life. But as every moment now may bring the intelligence from England that the ambassadors have been executed in his stead, as this intelligence must lead to decisive explanations between him and the king, this necessity and the fear of the king's snares urge him strongly, and now his weakness becomes most apparent, he is sick at heart, and weary of spirit. And so the design of his uncle overtakes him sooner than his own vengeance strikes his uncle, and it seems, as if neither the duty of punishment nor the condition of self-defence would ever have brought him to the avenging thrust, if at length the agitation of the death-wound had not roused him against the poisoner, to whose designs the life even of the queen, whose soul he had murdered, is unexpectedly sacrificed.

Thus evident in itself, the main action of the play and the conduct of the hero become still more evident from the unusually expressive contrast, in which Shakespeare has placed Laertes to Hamlet, and in whose history and behaviour Hamlet himself discovers the contrast to his own case. Perhaps nowhere else is the design of the poet in the touches of his characterization so strikingly prominent as here. Hamlet has stabbed Polonius. His son Laertes, somewhat of a hero à la mode, a fencer, a knight of honour of the French school, of temperament as choleric as Hamlet's is melancholy, a man utterly unendowed with the splendid physical and mental gifts of Hamlet, flees from the distant Paris to Denmark, to avenge the death of his father. Of all the precepts of his father, one above all appears to have remained with him:

"Beware
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Of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,
Bear it, that the opposer may beware of thee".

The one thought of vengeance fills his mind, and every nerve in him is strained to action, even before he knows the murderer with any certainty. The king has had the body of Polonius secretly interred, and by this means draws suspicion upon himself. The position and power of the conjectured murderer confuse not the avenger Laertes. A mere rumour, whisperers and calumniators are his sources, not "an honest ghost", risen from the earth. He has not the power nor the means which Hamlet has, but those which he has, he will "husband so well, that they shall go far with little". He is not the lawful heir to the throne, he is not in the sight and favour of the people, not a prince of the house royal, but *he*, the subject, creates "a rebellion which looks giant-like", and shakes the king upon his throne. Pressing into the presence of the king, he curses the drop of blood that's calm in him, because it proclaims shame to his father and to himself as an unnatural son. He dooms his allegiance to hell, he sends conscience and grace to the profoundest pit, he dares damnation, whilst Hamlet speculates doubtfully in the sunlight. He would cut the throat of his father's murderer "i' the church", (and the king himself approves of this, because "no place, indeed, should murder sanctuarize,") whilst Hamlet in pious scruples concerning this very king, passed him by as he was praying. Laertes goes so far as to poison his sword, that in single combat with Hamlet he may more surely obtain his end. He sullies by this his knightly honour, although he treats his revenge rather as a matter of honour, while for Hamlet it

is a heavy matter of conscience. But in the midst of this
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passion strained even to unscrupulousness, he is strictly confined to the one object of his revenge, whilst by Hamlet's loitering steps, the guiltless Polonius falls, Ophelia becomes crazed, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are made a sacrifice, and himself and his mother perish. The king need not have addressed to Laertes those exhortations (Act IV. sc. 7.), which were more calculated for Hamlet:

> "That we would do,
> We should do when we would; for this *would* changes,
> And hath abatements and delays as many,
> As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents".

But he need just as little have warned him of the encroachments of his rage against the innocent; the man of just passion surpasses in moderation the subtle arts of the avenger, and wisdom speaks from the desperate warrior, whom arrogance and success might have dazzled. He will open wide his arms to the friends of his father, and "like the kind life-rend'ring pelican, repast them with his blood." He desires alone to meet the murderer of his father, he has only this one object before him and he expresses it in the first moment, in which he appears before Claudius, in the short and sharp enquiry for his father; but in this one endeavour not all the will of the world shall stay him.

And all this for what a father! Of Hamlet's father we hear those proud often-quoted words, the most splendid epithet of a great man:

> "He was a man, take him for all in all,
> I shall not look upon his like again".

What a contrast to this is Polonius! The exact design of this contrast can never have been perceived by those who

endeavoured to place this character in a favourable light, an endeavour which is not worth refutation. If Polonius' bad and ridiculous qualities had been even partially concealed by his good ones, why should Hamlet enjoin the players when he commits them to *him*, the father of his beloved, to "mock him not?" Why should he say in the presence of his daughter, that her father is a fool? Why should he call him a tedious old fool? Why moreover would he say over his corpse, that he was "in all his life a foolish prating knave?" We see him commit no especial acts of knavery, but we see him indeed in a service and employ by no means over-honourable; for crooked ways, for aside-thrusts, for eaves-dropping, he has an unwearied predilection, to which he at length is sacrificed; he meddles with everything, and gains a scent of his son's doings and actings even in Paris, not so careful for the virtue as for the outward behaviour of his children, neither of whom he trusts. The man hunts out everything, and binds himself, "if circumstances lead him", to find where truth is hid, "though it were hid indeed within the centre"; but the transactions at the death of the old Hamlet and the marriage of his widow he has never surmised, or if he has, like a genuine courtier he has had neither feeling nor opinion on the matter. It is just such company as this, that a king like Claudius requires; upon state-affairs he asks him nothing, but on domestic things he hears him greedily, willingly accepts his empty eloquence, and excuses his confidence of opinion. Arrived at a ripe age, the schooled courtier lacks not experience and observation, which he has carefully gathered and loquaciously gives forth; the self-conceit of emptiness is apparent in him, and with the

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same self-sufficiency he gives good precepts to his son, a lesson on human nature to his servant, and counsels to his king. In his fancied craftiness he considers himself a man of wisdom and great circumspection, and he builds with confidence upon the infallibility of his head. We all know the insolence of the self-complacent positive man, who even in the face of events which give the lie to his prophecies, declares that he had anticipated everything as it has come to pass; we all know the fool with a good memory for wise sayings; and the eloquent man, who speaks with greater wisdom than he possesses, until unawares he betrays more of his folly and ignorance than he wished. Such a man is Polonius. It costs him nothing to tell the lie that will reflect upon himself the acuteness of having perceived Hamlet's love for Ophelia, before he was told of it. He then accurately sees through the gradual progress of the madness of Hamlet, who is perfectly in his senses. He wishes to understand everything, to be acquainted with everything, to have been everything: a clever actor, — an assertion, at which we feel tempted to reflections similar to those which Hamlet expresses on it; a madman suffering "much extremity for love", like Hamlet, from which we may gather so much, that he was an old sinner. He seeks to stand well with all, for however positive he may be, he yields just as readily to the opinions of others; and if people ridicule him, he affects, says Goethe, not to observe it; one would rather believe, that for the most part he actually does not observe it. In this manner, he gets on with every one, except with Hamlet; in the presence of this deeper nature, which lies quite beyond his reach, he is helpless; then the simpleton always comes to light,

although he esteems the prince to be a madman. Hamlet too, is just as little able to accommodate himself to him. He hates too thoroughly the shallowness and falsehood of the character, to attempt to conceal his aversion, even where the most ordinary consideration would have demanded it from the lover of Ophelia, towards the daughter of the father, or towards the father of the daughter. And this is the man, to avenge whose death Laertes hazards "both the worlds", while Hamlet forgets the hero who rises from the grave for his admonition.

Thus then the structure of the play stands in perfect unity and connection before us; all the action has one point in view, the least conspicuous figures are in close and essential relation to the main subject. The truth-loving, moral hero stands in the midst of those, who wander on none but crooked ways in hypocrisy, dissimulation, and untruth; his sensible, conscientious, circumspect nature is opposed in strong contrast to the unprincipled conduct of all the others, to the heartless or thoughtless heedlessness of their actions and their consequences: the king and queen, Polonius and Ophelia, even all the subordinate figures (with the exception of Horatio, who only observes and never acts), Fortinbras, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and even Osric, all fall more or less under this aspect; and the line, on which moreover Laertes, the express contrast to Hamlet, is drawn, is distinguished by its peculiar sharpness and delicacy; in the attainment of his object he is more severely conscientious than Hamlet, but unscrupulous in his means, and this excellently prevents the subordinate hero from rising too highly in our interest. How excellently, however, this whole action and its inner connection is

designed and accomplished, we feel in no play more than in this, that which we before alleged of the Merchant of Venice: that with Shakespeare the action is ever the secondary, the subsequent, the result, and that the true point of unity in his works ever leads to the source of the actions, to the actors themselves, and to the hidden grounds, from which their actions spring. In the negative action of this play, in the evasion of the deed, in the lack of outward events, and in the absence of inward energy and vigour, we could take but little interest for its own sake. Yet we take the deepest interest in this Hamlet; proof sufficient, that the especial charm lies in the character. If we have thoroughly penetrated it, we may then first believe, that we have dived to the ground of the action. And not this alone; in this source of action we believe to have attained at once to an incomparably richer and more fertile perception; we can then imagine this highly endowed man under other circumstances, different and yet ever the same; we learn to regard the action as a mere outlet, as merely one outlet of a deep original spring, from which can be also traced the tide of similar or different actions; we then perceive the moral deduced from the story only as a lesson, that may be traced to a higher, more comprehensive truth. It remains with us then to examine, what form of character this is, what were the elements of its origin, what pursuits and peculiarities affect this nature, and make it so irresolute and incapable of action.

His mother depicts Hamlet as to his appearance, as "fat and scant of breath", and thus Burbadge represented him, and not in that common youthful elegance, in which we are accustomed to see him pourtrayed since Garrick's time,

which is even more repugnant to the higher conception of this character, than the representation of the "smiling villain" Claudius as a gloomy thick-bearded tyrant. In accordance with this intimation of his mother's, Hamlet says himself, that his uncle is no more like his father, than he to Hercules. According to this, remarked Goethe, he lacked the external strength of the hero, we might say with more simplicity, the strength of a practical and active nature. His temperament is quiet, calm, phlegmatic, and free from choler; his mother in an expressive image compares his patient repose to that of the turtle-dove sitting over her "golden couplets". In violent passion with Laertes, Hamlet says of himself, that he is not "splenetive and rash", yet he has in him something dangerous, which the wisdom of his enemy may fear. This "something dangerous" is his sensitive excitability, which originates in a heated imagination, and which supplies this passive nature with a goad for defence, a weapon for assault, but only at a moment of extreme necessity. For in this very imagination originates also Hamlet's faintheartedness, his anxious uneasiness and weakness; this is a psychological circle, only too often verified by human nature. From this one source, there springs among whole nations, as Montesquieu has observed, among the old Iberians and Indians for instance, the same mixture of mildness with exaggerated energy under provocation; the sensitiveness of their organization, which causes them to fear death, causes them to fear a thousand things still more than death, the same susceptibility leads them to flee from danger and to scorn it, when compelled to face it. Thus is it with Hamlet. His busy imagination suggests to him a condition with its fearful and remotest

results; he sees himself surrounded by dangers and snares, and seeks to obviate them with elaborate preparation. He believes in ghosts and therefore sees them, differing in this from his more rational friend Horatio, who hardly believes after he has seen it, that "the thing" is the ghost of Hamlet, who in its very presence calls it an "illusion", and attempts to strike it with his partizan, who according to his own confession believes the traditions of Christian superstition only "in part", and according to his tone, not at all. When the ghost appears to Hamlet, when his "fate cries out", then in the excitement of the moment, he fears not death, and "each petty artery" in his body is "as hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve"; but then too, according to Horatio's expression, he is "desperate with imagination". After the play, in "the witching time of night", when his imagination is heated, he could "drink hot blood, and do such business as the bitter day would quake to look on"; then it seems to him, as if the soul of Nero could enter his bosom; he sharpens the edge of his revenge, and when in this over-excited mood the occasion surprises him, and no time is left for consideration and doubt, he shows himself capable of the deed, from which, in a calmer state, recollections and scruples restrain him. Nor is this excitement suddenly quieted by the disappointment of his mistaken vengeance; he torments his mother in the violence of his emotion more than his father permitted him, he speaks bitter words over the corpse of Polonius and only subsequently weeps over it; the patience of the dove then comes sorrowfully back to him. So too, when surprised by the tidings of Ophelia's death, he hears Laertes' ostentatious lament over her grave, a storm of passion rises within him, and finds vent in a

burst of exaggerated language. By this excess of excitement Hamlet blunts the edge of purpose and action, which in the habitual tardiness of his nature he renders dull; he alternately touches the chords of the two different moral themes of the drama: namely, that intentions, conceived in passion, vanish with the emotion, and that human will changes, and is influenced and enfeebled by delays. These waverings of his nature, this alternate inertness and passion, indolence and excitement, Hamlet perceives in himself with all the torments, faults, and results, which belong to them; nothing is, therefore, more natural, than that his soul, as soon as she "could of men distinguish her election", should have sealed the noble Horatio for herself, in whose contrary character she might find support and edification. Horatio is indeed just as little an energetic character as Hamlet; such a one, as Fortinbras, would be too dissimilar for his friendship, but Horatio is a man of perfect calmness of mind, schooled to bear suffering and to take with equal thanks fortune's buffets and rewards, he is a hero of endurance, one of those blessed, on whom Hamlet might look with envy,

> "Whose blood and judgment are so well co-mingled,
> That they are not a gripe for fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please",

nor are they the resistless slaves of passion.

This same elasticity in Hamlet's nature which leads him from supineness to passion, and from vehemence to apathy, shows itself also in the contrast of good and bad temper, of spleen and humour, and in the balance of the sanguine with the melancholy side of his temperament. The poet has placed in close context with the witty satirical traits,

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which allow us to perceive in Hamlet a merry and happy nature, those of an elegiac sentimental character, which exhibit him a prey to deep melancholy; both influence his humour less by turns, than by a blending of each, the fruits of which are those bitter sarcasms which form his usual manner of expression. In prosperity the cheerful side of Hamlet's nature would have been developed; his pre-disposition to melancholy would then only have borne a contemplative character; he would perhaps have always visited church-yards and solitary places, and have given way to tender moods and emotions, but this inclination would never have degenerated into a melancholy that amounts to despair. The cause of this extremity of dejection lies in the events which befall him, events which suddenly impoverish him, which rob him, as Goethe says, of the true conception he had formed of his parents, which unhinge his mind, and roll upon him a tide of affliction, sorrow, uneasiness, and dire forebodings, which in the course of their fulfilment produce unrestrained derangement. From the unfortified heart, with which he bears misfortune, we should just conclude, that he was a man, created rather for happiness, whose distinguishing quality would then have been a witty cheerfulness and light-heartedness; this appears in him equally innate as acquired. He exhibits himself just as one of those ready and witty orators according to the taste of the age, more skilful in playing a part in comedy than in tragedy; for the sagacity which serves, from the necessity of the time, to the assumption of his tragic madness, would under brighter circumstances have involuntarily taken a comic aspect. As a child he had hung already on the lips of the jester Yorick; we see him employed even now in

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the midst of his sorrow, in reading satires; he is ready to quibble with men of every degree according to their fashion; the humorous jest, the play of wit and word, has become habit and second nature to him; in the midst of his depressed condition, in his solemn mourning, and dejected visage, he amuses himself with the absurdities of his assumed madness. For the very reason that these habit have become a with him, his jests and play of words mingle involuntarily with his agitated tragic moods, and the actor has to guard against nothing more than laying stress upon them, and provoking laughter or attempting glaring alternations of mirth and melancholy. He would indeed have the merriment of the pit on his side, but he would excite the sadness of the more intelligent, who take no pleasure in this want of harmony, hut prefer the consistent exhibition of the poet's meaning. Humorous and sarcastic images, comparisons, and allusions, escape Hamlet with unconscious readiness in the midst of his excitement. The strangeness of this mode of expression in the oath-scene ought not for a moment to disturb the pervading horror, nor in the church-yard scene to interfere with the tone of the most touching sadness. With the deepest sorrow for his father's death and his mother's fickleness, mingle bitter words, which must penetrate the soul, although the same expressions under other circumstances would only excite cheerful laughter. As in Richard II.'s sorrow and misfortune, his merry intercourse in times of prosperity could be inferred, so is it with Hamlet also. Gonzago's words suit both: —"where joy most revels, grief doth most lament". The acuteness of his wit as of his sorrow is therefore with Hamlet the uniform expression of his characteristic habit of mind, which from misfortune is

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led to speculate upon the darkest aspect of things, as under ordinary circumstances it would have exhibited itself in sparkling repartee and witty rejoinder. With regard to this two-sided disposition and nature, nay indeed in other essential respects also, Hamlet may be regarded as a kind of counter-picture to Prince Henry. To the latter also, the trait of despondency and melancholy was no stranger; at the sickness and death of his father it became evident enough in his nature. But his fortunes and his propensities were not favourable to this bias; he pursues his cheerful way through life until he becomes aware of the solemn grandeur of his vocation; he then exhibits the calm equanimity and the well-balanced qualities, which fit their owner for the most exalted business of life. So on the other hand a joyful temper is no stranger to Hamlet; we might fancy that the same society and the same circumstances would have led the man similarly opposed to conventionality into similar excesses. But yet his bearing would have been essentially otherwise under such a brighter aspect of things. Philosophy, principles, study, a more diffident, more reserved nature, would have soon made the boisterous society of the Prince a burden to him; with his quiet almost womanly way he would not have abandoned himself to the Prince's youthful misdemeanors; but for the same reason he never attained to his manly virtues. According to a view now obvious to us, we may consider Hamlet on a higher scale, like Prince Henry, as one of Shakespeare's humorous characters, suddenly influenced by the solemn demands of the realities of life. We see in him a new modification of these characters. To those who proved themselves valiant and matured under such circumstances, or who were ripening

by degrees, to Prince Henry who surpassed all expectations at this moment of emergency, is now added Hamlet, who falls short of the royal hopes to which he bids fair, who is ill-prepared for the mission which falls to his lot, and who perishes in it by a tragic end.

In harmony with what we have seen of Hamlet's appearance, temperament, and natural disposition, are the rich endowments of mind and morals with which the poet has invested him. His uncle himself designates the kindly man as of a nature "sweet and commendable"; all gentle virtues, all tender and delicate feelings belong to him. His childlike piety is that which at once strikes us most forcibly. The reverence with which he reflects on his deceased father, is unbounded; the sorrow, which he endures for him, testifies to the greatest warmth and sincerity of feeling; his grief at his mother's fickleness causes a shock to his whole moral nature; the certainty of his uncle's crime completely overwhelms him. The heaviness of this sorrow may indeed partly result from the innate susceptibility peculiar to Hamlet's nature: he has a kind of delight in dwelling upon gloomy ideas, and in revelling in thoughts of suicide and death. Yet the shock to his moral sensibilities adds essentially to the burden of his grief; and well may he call his indignation "virtue", when he gives it vent in the scene in which with an ethical invective of the highest power he urges his mother to confession and repentance. In great traits he is throughout placed before us, as a moral nature endowed with as much depth as delicacy. He leaves the common highway of thoughtless life, as a man guided by principle. The king's son has renounced all the restraints of conventionality: his intercourse is with players, he is the friend of

the poor Horatio and the lover of Ophelia, who is far beneath him in condition. The inclination to simple natural habits, which is here manifested, would also account for his aversion to all mean subterfuge and falsehood. In the church-yard he expresses his sincere abhorrence of the vain folly of women, of politicians who "would circumvent God", of lawyers and courtiers; towards this kind of "water-flies" like Polonius and Osric, the "diminutives of nature", as they are called in Troilus, he manifests his intense antipathy or sarcastic contempt. The often admired scene in which he ridicules the young Osric, a man with all the gloss of superficial culture, who, an accomplice in Laertes' scheme, challenges Hamlet to the fatal fight with the same polite formalities, as, to use Hamlet's words, "he did comply with his dug, before he sucked it", is a scene highly expressive of Hamlet's character. It places him in glaring contrast to this "breed" of people on whom "the drossy age dotes", who get "the tune of the time and outward habit of encounter", without the reality of true culture; who have gathered "a kind of yesty collection, which carries them through and through the most fan'd and winnowed opinions", until a point of trial is met, where their wit vanishes, and "the bubbles are out". As Hamlet here appears opposed to the false culture of the age, he is equally vehement against its lack of refinement. He will know nothing of the brawls and revels of the generation; the intemperance of his uncle, the quarrels of Fortinbras, are far from his nature. Thus in the task assigned to him, an inner conflict perplexes him; the strife of a higher law with the natural law of vengeance, the struggle of fine moral feelings with the instinct of nature. His irresolution results in no wise exclu-

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sively from weakness, but essentially also from conscientiousness and virtue; and it is just this subtle combination which renders Hamlet such an essentially tragic character. His doubts as to the certainty of the fact and the legitimacy of revenge, the gentleness of his soul, which unconsciously struggles against the means of vengeance, the bent of his mind to reflect upon the nature and consequences of his deed, and by this means to paralyze his active powers, all these scruples "of thinking too precisely on the event", he himself calls in the warmth of self-blame,

> "A thought, which quartered, hath but one part wisdom,
> And ever, three parts coward";

but the poet has so well balanced the combination, that we, in spite of Hamlet's witness against himself, would impute the half at least to wisdom. As an excess of feeling and love deprives Romeo of reflection and thought, and thus prepares a violent end to his unbridled joy, so Hamlet is robbed of his power of action by an excess of conscientiousness, gentleness, and sorrowing melancholy;

> "For goodness, growing to a plurisy,
> Dies in his own too-much";

here and there

> "The violence of either grief or joy,
> Their own enactures with themselves destroy".

Refined in morals, richly endowed with feeling, Hamlet is pre-eminent also in intellectual gifts and culture, he is of a contemplative mind, of deep inner experience and observation, according to Ophelia, — "of noble and most sovereign reason; the observed of all observers." From this side,

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Hamlet's character is that of a man of genius; the soliloquies of this "prince of speculative philosophy" are master-pieces of reflection, in which Shakespeare had recourse to the most profound depths of his wisdom; and the intricacies of his subtile thoughts mock the profundity of Scandinavian mysteries. He is essentially a man of letters; he carries memorandum-books with him; allusions to his reading are ready to him; in advanced years he was still at the university and longs to return there; not like Laertes at Paris, but in Wittenberg, a name honoured by the Protestant hearts of England; no royal ambition urges him to the society of his equals; his associate is the scholar Horatio, the friend of his school-days and his fellow-student. We become acquainted with Hamlet as the friend and judge of acting, as a poet and a player. He has seen the players before and has had closer intercourse with them, he inserts a passage in the piece they are playing, he declaims before them, he gives them instructions. His praise of the fragment of Pyrrhus sustained in the old Seneca-like style is perfectly serious; it distinguishes him from Polonius, whom a jig pleases better; this, as well as his instructions to the players, exhibits him as a man of cultivated mind and taste, as that judge whose single appreciation is worth more than that of all the rest of the theatre. It is, therefore, so natural that the idea should occur to him of "catching" the king's conscience in a play; he seeks, as it were, an ingenious revenge; and to accomplish this under the touching effect of the presence of his conscience-stricken mother, had evidently a kind of theatrical charm for him. When this trial of the king by means of the play succeeds, it is extremely characteristic, that it is not the fearful evidence of the crime

which occupies him at first, but the pleasure in his skill as actor or poet; not the result, so much as his art which has effected it. "Would not this," are his first words, "get me a fellowship in an cry of players?" This question still more than the performance itself, would certainly appear to mark his aptitude for the position. It is from this same inclination of Hamlet's as much as from his character, that he adopts the strangely indirect course of feigning himself mad, and that he is able to sustain his part naturally and ingeniously. He had the power of disguising himself artfully and artistically, and of skilfully remaining his own master behind the mask, averse as he is to dissimulation in life. Immediately after the departure of the ghost, still agitated from the apparition, he receives his friends with a falcon-call, as if in the most joyful mood, and knows how to conceal his emotion at first as well as his secret at last. To imagine himself in the position of the player and on all occasions to study "the word", is a natural trait, resulting from his intellectual life and pursuits. He goes with a kind of joyful preparation to rouse his mother's conscience by a moral lecture and a flood of impressive eloquence, to speak daggers rather to use them, whilst he neglects the deed of vengeance, which would of itself have gained his object; when Laertes bursts forth in the bombastic outpouring of his brotherly grief, he receives it as a challenge for a war of words. Hamlet is aware of the fault in himself, he recognizes it as a hindrance to his active emotion, and blames it in himself with the same vehemence as he declaims against the conscientiousness of his cowardice and the cowardice of his conscience. The soliloquy (Act II. sc. 2.) after his first interview with the players, is in this respect expressive even

to ultradistinctness. After assailing himself with every slanderous name, in order to stir up his stagnant passion, he calls himself "unpregnant of his cause", because he can — *do* nothing, we should expect, but he merely adds, because he "can *say* nothing"; for first of all he would please himself like the actor in playing a scene which

> "Would drown the stage with tears,
> And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
> Make mad the guilty",

as he afterwards does with his mother. Then follows a fresh flood of invectives; he applies to himself the deafening volleys of his eloquence; he surprises himself in the midst of his boasting, and turns upon himself fresh words of scorn:

> "Why, what an ass am I? This is most brave;
> That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
> Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
> Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
> And fall a cursing, like a very drab,
> A scullion"!

He deprecates this digression and rouses himself to action. "About," he cries out, — my *hands*? we should expect it, but, "my *brains*," are his words. And then he devises the play, which is to be a fresh prelude to his vengeance. Thus from natural impulse and habit, the mind of this man of deep reflection is unconsciously the over-ruling agent in everything; thought has become with him the measure of things. Shakespeare invests him with a philosophical principle, which contains a most characteristic modification of the poet's own worldly wisdom. That virtue and vice, good and bad actions, acquire no real importance in themselves,

but ever from circumstances, objects, and natural character; that it is not the *what* but the *how* that decides the value of an action, is a maxim of Shakespearian experience, which is too frequently and too forcibly repeated in word and example, for the poet not to have always well weighed every word which he wrote in this sense. This maxim is thus modified in Hamlet's lips: "there is nothing either good or bad, but *thinking* makes it so."

In this maxim lies the origin of all the doubts which perplex Hamlet upon the duty of revenge, which would make him tremble and delay at every weighty call to action. This revenge is not in itself determined as a good or a bad action on the part of Hamlet; but the *circumstances* render it, according to Shakespeare's representation, a duty on the part of the lawful king and judge of the country, a just act of punishment for an open crime, an easier task and a better cause than that of Laertes. But "thinking" renders this very duty a matter of doubt and difficulty to Hamlet. The "thinking too precisely on the event" excites at first the moral scruple of being unscrupulous and overhasty, and then awakens prudence and precaution in going circumspectly to the performance of the work. The phlegmatic nature of the man causes, that in both, in conscientiousness and foresight, too much is done, — for his mission and action nothing. His mental acuteness sees through this defect in his nature, and half with envy, half with esteem, he acknowledges the able qualities of Laertes and Fortinbras; his just acknowledgment of that which invests men with worth and esteem, causes him to reproach himself vehemently for his deficiencies even to a pitch of passionate excitement; he rises then to a passing ardour in which he casts aside

his hindering considerations, but he has once for ever lost the sure instinct of action, and at last, at the moment of the deed, he makes a mistake. For just as little as hesitating deliberation, can fleeting irritability make a man of action, but earnest persistency and constancy alone, because any comprehensive action of important consequences is not to be accomplished hastily, but only by time. After he has erred in the murder of Polonius in a manner so important in its results, Hamlet loses himself in a kind of fatalism, which weakens him entirely. He forms the conviction, that all consideration avails nothing, that our deepest plots do pall, that we can only rough-hew our ends, that providence shapes them as he will. This opinion his *thoughts* have formed, and he can conveniently use it to render himself still more averse to independent activity. He remembers not, that it was not a rough, but a too ingenious and too subtle scheme of revenge, which had been frustrated; ever more sluggishly he lets his vocation drop. From this his incapability for action, Hamlet is convinced by self-knowledge and experience; *before* both indeed, by the dim and instinctive feeling of this peculiarity of his nature, he is oppressed to the earth. Before the call for vengeance has reached him and after it has sounded, life weighs upon him like an insufferable burden, and this urges him in his reflections to the very limits of suicide. Passing from the fear of a possible crime, of an unwarranted revenge, he thinks upon the certain crime of suicide, against which the Everlasting has fixed his canon.

But from this deed also, which he would fain commit that he might escape the deed required of him, the same consideration of the issue restrains him; he is not free-

minded enough to do violence to his conscience which prohibits suicide, nor to the reflection of what may follow after death. If he were sure of the eternal sleep, this would be an aim most heartily to be desired. But when he thinks on possible dreams, on a life in which he might be again called to action, then he stands wavering between two worlds, not qualified for life, nor for death. The same cowardly reflection and conscientiousness urge him from this point to that and back again from that to this. Thus it must be admitted that in that famed soliloquy "to be or not to be" as every reader must feel, this character is at its height, and the idea of the play reaches its central point in that sentence, in which moral and intellectual considerations, conscience and thought, are regarded as drags upon the power of action:

> "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
> And enterprizes of great pith and moment,
> With this regard, their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action".

Shakespeare's entire worldly-wisdom preaches an active apprehension of life, and deeply conscious was he, that the one-sided fostering of head and heart crippled the effective power of the man. Cutting sentences in Troilus utter this in scornful words: that subtle reasoning upon the demands of action is to "shut our pates and sleep"; that

> "manhood and honour
> Should have hare-hearts, would they but fat their thoughts
> With this cramm'd reason";

that

> "reason and respect
> Make livers pale, and lustihood deject".

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Here in Hamlet the poet has expressly undertaken the splendid task of depicting the immense gap between a sense of duty and its fulfilment, between willing and doing, between discernment and resolve, between resolve and action. He is occupied in developing the relation of a fine soul to a great character, of a sensitive and intelligent nature to a practical one, of intellectual strength to power of action. He shows us, how, by the one-sided training of the mind, the working side of our nature is crippled and fettered; how the finest cultivation of the heart is fruitless for energy, when the discipline of the will is neglected; how, being absorbed by the world within, we are alienated and diverted from that without, giving reality to shadows, and casting a cloud over the actual; how the hand, which is least occupied, possesses the more tender feeling, but how, on the contrary, the tenderer feeling necessarily effeminates the hand; how hard the transition may be found from the noblest principles to real action; how the best qualities without the due cultivation of the mental, social, and active powers fail in perfect value, and miss their aim at last; how without this harmony of all points of the human being, the noblest mind (to use Ophelia's expression) is overthrown, a bell out of tune, though designed in the finest mould. Thus noble in nature has Shakespeare designed his Hamlet. He has endowed him with all great gifts of heart and mind; if we take hold of this side of the character, we are captivated by his amiable qualities, and are tempted to believe, that the poet intended to magnify this inner life of man *before* the outer one of action; for he has placed the figures of this opposite colouring, Laertes and Fortinbras, very much in the back-ground compared

with Hamlet. If we do not look out for the shadow-side of his hero, if we do not take into consideration his tragic end, if we did not remember those grand forms of Henry and Percy, we might strengthen ourselves in this belief; but in this we shall only perceive, that the poet knows how to honour one side of human nature as much as the other; we see him again, in a fresh and greater instance, exhibiting that wonderful, impartial, many-sided interest, equally in all the qualities which belong to man. He places Hamlet at the highest point of mental gifts and moral effort, without being blind to the faults or deficiencies of his qualities and education, which detract so much from his worth and his virtues. The delight, with which he evidently dwells upon this character, becomes on this account all the more agreeable, because it makes us sensible in the poet of the condescension of a superior, and not of the sympathy of an equal. For in his sight, the very quality, it must be admitted, which is lacking in Hamlet, alone gives man his true value. As, filled with this conviction, that active life is the only real life, he has depicted that Henry and Percy with such glad preference, so this poem of Hamlet is also only a eulogy and a glorification of the active nature, from the picture of the contrary. In his mental nature, so rich in fancy and so full of soul, born rather for feeling than acting, more for thinking than doing, more as an artist and scholar, than as a hero, warrior, or statesman, Hamlet with his superior mind has discovered the true principle of life, the noblest, which Shakespeare has perhaps ever pronounced, and which he has pronounced alone for noble men, in that before-quoted passage:

"Rightly to be great,
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Is, not to stir without great argument;
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw,
When honour's at the stake".

But Hamlet, a master in intelligence, can only *utter* this principle; he cannot *carry it out*, as that Henry did, who is a master in life and action. He has the "excitements of his reason and his blood" for a great task; with him not alone honour, but even right, law, his own safety, and his life, are at stake, but the self-created doubts of reason have destroyed in him the impulse of the blood, his mind has marred his instinct, the genuine spring of certain action. He falls short of this ambition and of that stimulating self-reliance, qualities bestowed on those heroes of arms as the main-spring of their deeds. He accuses himself indeed before Ophelia, of pride, revenge, and ambition, but he possesses none of the three. Much rather does that sigh proceed from his innermost nature, when he says to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who in their turn imagined him to be ambitious: "I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space." He is, we see, as far from the nature of a Hercules, as from that of an Alexander, who found the world too small a scope for him. The deprivation of his succession to the throne provokes him not to kingly ambition, nor the desire for war in a Fortinbras to that fame-coveting rivalry, which made such heroic natures of Percy and Henry; at the most, a little envy and jealousy of Laertes' fencing-talent is excited in him. In Hamlet, a social character of modern times is, as it were, depicted, one which tends to abandon the heroic customs of the age, in which fate has placed him, an age,

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in which everything hinges upon physical power and the desire for action, which nature has denied to *him*. All the bloody unnatural events, which we see before us, adultery, poisoning, and revenge for bloodshed, and the warlike deeds, on which we cast a glance, the combat between the old Hamlet and Norway, when "he smote the sledded Polack on the ice", all this transports us to such a rude and wild period, from which Hamlet draws back with his whole nature, and to which he falls a sacrifice, because, by habit, character, and education, he is alienated from it, and like the boundary-stone of a changing civilization, he touches a world of finer feeling. His is a more tender nervous frame, than that of the natures which surround him; he is invested with a knowledge and a power of thought, which agrees not with the muscular strength of the old heroic age; a sensibility and delicacy of feeling is his inheritance, which he entailed upon the remote centuries after the poet's life. Our modern sensibility is anticipated, as it were, by two centuries in Hamlet. The words: "Alas, poor Yorick!" which Hamlet utters in the church-yard, with bitter tears, in the super-abundant emotion of his soul, have become a sort of fruitful source of those tender and gentle moods, which in the former century spread like an epidemic in England and Germany. Sterne, prompted by these words, wrote his (Yorick's) Sentimental Journey, and this book operated like the opening of a sluice, letting loose the whole stream of sensibility, which at that time like a flood poured over the Germanic lands.

In this anticipation there lies on the side of the poet a true greatness; there is no doubt, that in this deep sensibility as well as in the high intelligence, with which he

invested Hamlet, only very few of his contemporaries could follow him. The honour of being in advance of the age, is in most cases only equivocal. A man should belong to his age, and the work, which lies nearest, he should advance according to his ability. Anticipating time moreover is only too often the incapability of idealistic enthusiasts to bear the actual. Alone when a man, such as Shakespeare, entirely and fully belongs first to his age and its cultivation and business in every essential direction, and anticipates besides by his strong mind the method of thought and feeling among generations to come, then alone do we render homage to this advanced position, as the token of a true and great superiority. If on the other hand we were to apply this verdict to our present play, if we were to see Hamlet in such an advanced position with relation to his age, the view would at once be changed. We have shewn, that we may consider him as such an anticipator of his time, withdrawing from the rude, but vigorous habits of an heroic age, and we shall see in Macbeth, that this point of view was not foreign to Shakespeare himself. But Hamlet presents himself to us not as one, who satisfied the customs and demands of his time, but as one, who fell far short of their nearest claims, in spite of his capacity for meeting their larger and more distant requirements. He appears to us as an idealist, unequal to the real world, who, repelled by it, not only laments in elegiac strains over its deficiencies and defects, but grows embittered and sickly about it, even to the injury of his naturally noble character. If Hamlet on the side of his sensibility is an anticipation of the feeble generation of the former century, on the side of this bitterness of feeling, he is a type of our German

race at the present day. And this it is, which has made Hamlet the most known of all Shakespeare's plays, and the most discussed among us for now nearly a hundred years: because the conditions of the soul, which are here depicted, seem to us the most expressive and the most living. We feel and see our own selves in him, and in love with our own deficiencies, we have long seen only the bright side of this character, until of late we have had a glimpse of its shadows also. We look upon the mirror of our present state, as if this work had first been written in our own day; the poet, like a living man, works for us and in us in the same way, as he intended to do for his own age. So deep and true is this poet's observation of nature, so great is the similarity of nature and its effects in the whole and in the particular, that the comparison between a people and an individual of entirely different times, such as we here only suggest, we could easily carry on much further than for the sake of brevity we may allow ourselves to do.

The picture, which we Germans see before us in this mirror, is similar enough to alarm us. Not I alone have expressed this; it has been remarked and experienced by thousands. A poem by one of our present political poets begins with the words: "Hamlet is Germany." And this declaration is indeed no ingenious play of words or confused ideas. For just like Hamlet, we have been placed, up to the present day, between an approaching task of a purely practical nature, and a customary desuetude to work and action. Just so have we been deeply absorbed with the occupation of the mind and the cultivation of the heart, even to a forgetfulness of the world without; just so did Wittenberg and its bequests lay nearer to our hearts than

warlike struggles for honour and power; just so was our life filled up with poems and dramas, and to act the task of the time on the stage, to amuse ourselves with words and with the show of heroism, pleased us better than a composed and steady preparation for the seriousness of the age. Did not the spirits of our forefathers approach us warningly in those early days of our political elevation from the French yoke, and rejoice over our quick resolve? But we soon let our ardour drop, and in fleeting petty paroxysms of passion we let our wings hang weary in dove-like patience. Examples, gross as earth, exhorted us also, and spurred us on, but we left them unheeded. Just like Hamlet, we lost delight in our existence, and fled from the real world to the kingdom of the ideal; we injured the sure tact of instinctive life by too much exercise of the mind, by reflection, and by the constant perception of the actual in our whims and fancies. Just so we grew sceptically embittered against the world, life, and mankind; with such qualities for esteeming human worth, we excited ourselves into misanthropy, and with such a vocation for active service in the world, we indulged in a passive universal sorrow (*Weltschmerz*). Have we not all, in the soliloquies of our literature, felt proud in the acquisitions of our mind, and found man so like a god, so noble in reason, so infinite in faculties, and yet like Hamlet without delighting in him? May not all the bearers of this "universal sorrow" and all the "weary ones of Europe" (*Europamüden*) discover their own striking picture in the man, who bore with such impatient heart,

"the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
. . . . the law's delay,

The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes"?

Are their embittered feelings something more than the echo alone of that sickly melancholy, with which Hamlet regards the world as a prison, the earth as "an unweeded garden", "a steril promontory", air and firmament as a pestilent congregation of vapours, the age as drossy and narrow, and all in it as tedious, shallow, dull, and useless, uttering over it all an exclamation of the profoundest disgust? And more. Thus destroying our souls by loathing the world, have we not, like Hamlet, wholly forgotten the near for the distant? We have thought ourselves, each single man amongst us, obliged to bear the affliction of the whole, to become its saviour and deliverer, without each man ever thinking for himself individually. Each one uttered with Hamlet his lament, that the time was out of joint, and each thought himself called upon to set it right! It is hard to make the dull-minded sensible of the fact, though the intelligent feels it for himself, that in this sentence the basis of Hamlet's ruin lay as well as our own! For thus we too imagine, that our vocation in literature and politics lies in the far distance and in an unknown combination, and on account of this we delay and forget to do, that which falls to our lot and is our nearest task. This Hamlet had a near and easy vocation to fulfil, he had to set right a little world; if this, however, were too hard for him, his task became first of all to put his own self in joint, and to become his own reformer. This he saw not. And thousands of reformers among us are in the same case. Like Hamlet they extend their indignation in petty experiences upon the whole race of mankind, and they enlarge their near

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vocation into one utterly remote; excessive egotism, a fruit, fostered so easily by a purely intellectual life, makes them refer all to themselves, as if each one were the champion of the world, and yet notwithstanding it makes them incapable of satisfying any demands. When this weakness becomes conscious of itself, self-contempt rises against it, and Hamlet scorns himself, that such fellows as he, should crawl between earth and heaven. This trait also, the representatives of our German life in literature and politics have not seldom betrayed; they stand in the clearest light of self-knowledge, just as Hamlet does, without being in the slightest degree thus influenced to a change. And that which carries the similarity of our public character with Hamlet's to its height, is this: that however noble and ideal may be everything which we have exhibited in word and demeanour hitherto, at the first point of transition from principle to action, our national nature suddenly appeared injured and cankered. The moment of action surprised us unexpectedly, we undertook it in the exaggeration of passionate ardour, and missed the aim which we had not wisely measured. And in this, the unsatisfactory change in the national character stepped suddenly to light. That which, at the period of that first great rise to outward and inward freedom, we had known as honest, true, open, genuine, and good-natured, at the period of a subsequent effort, took secret paths, and appeared faithless, perjured, destitute of all honour, and deprived of all good. When the heroes of word were called at last to that work and action, for which they had so long protested, the poison within burst forth in loathsome corruption, and cruelty, revenge, bloodthirstiness, and assassination,

stained the German name, while no one in the prime of mental culture and domestic morality had divined in us such a glaring unruliness.

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Thus too in Hamlet, to return to him from the last point of this digression, as soon as he rises to his vocation for action in the manner of one uncalled to the task, the beautiful qualities of his character become damaged and injured, and we see at last before us a man who has himself spoiled the best properties of his nature. He who bore the sufferings of humanity with such a feeling soul, becomes in his egotism cruel and severe towards those who stand nearest to his heart. He who is so irritable an enemy to all dissimulation, falsehood, and cunning, venturing not upon the straight path to action, he himself takes the crooked way of cunning circumlocution and deceiving dissimulation. He who had weighed his task so conscientiously, veers round from conscientiousness itself, or from tardiness into unconscientiousness, and converts his mildness into severity. There, where he finds his uncle kneeling in prayer, and will not kill him, lest he should send the penitent to heaven; there, where according to his propensity to neglect the near duty and to consider the remote one, not capable of his own revenge, he wishes, as it were, to take upon himself the vengeance of God, does he not abandon himself that he may have an excuse for his inaction, to a refinement of wickedness and cruelty, such as before he would not have endured even in thought? He was here still in excitement and ardour, as at Polonius' death he was in the confusion of passion, but we see him presently sacrificing innocent men with cold premeditation, — he, who was too over-thoughtful to strike the guilty.

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He is brought to England by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They carry with them a Urias-letter for his death, but they know it not. The open, upright Hamlet opens this letter, writes with feigned hand (an art, he had practised in his youth) their names instead of his own, and thus these, the friends of the youth, to whom, according to his mother's evidence, he adhered more than to any other, fell into the same pit, which was dug for Hamlet, but not by them. They "go to't"? asks his Horatio in reproachful surprise. But he lightly disregards this emotion of conscience; to dig a mine and prepare a trap, suit his nature better than the direct open deed; his ever ingenious head had alone to act here; to plant a counter-mine is to him as easy as a clever idea; he rejoices inconsiderately and maliciously in these arts, praises himself for the quickness of his thought and the rapidity of its accomplishment, and sophistically he sees God's help in the prosperous success, — *he* who would not see the many distinct intimations, which pointed out to him his duty of revenge! Thus then at last he himself reaches the same point of malice and cunning as his uncle, whose misdeeds he was called upon to revenge.

Still more reproachable does Hamlet appear to us in his relation to his beloved one. Goethe said of Hamlet's feeling for Ophelia, that it was without conspicuous passion. The poet has at least not exhibited him to us in such a position, where this passion appears pre-eminent. When he casts his love in the scale with that of forty thousand brothers, exaggeration speaks in him, which allows no standard. Beyond this passage, Shakespeare has only once afforded him a direct opportunity in a few, aside-spoken words to give us the key to his feeling for Ophelia, in those

words which precede his conversation with her: "Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered"! — words, which we have heard uttered by famous actors strangely enough in a tone of comical or facetious address. On the other hand this very conversation affords the actor scope sufficient to intimate *indirectly* the nature of Hamlet's feelings for Ophelia. If the performer does not here "tear the passion to tatters", he will bring the spectator in this scene into a heavy and profound sadness, the very mood in which the conversation leaves Ophelia; it is the farewell of an unhappy heart to a connection broken by fate, it is the serious advice of a self-interested lover, who sends his beloved to a nunnery because he grudges her to another, and sees the path of his own future lie in hopeless darkness. All that here, in his treatment of Ophelia's father, in his disregard of her brother, in his coldness and indifference towards Polonius, aye, even in her own death, may appear heartless and inconsiderate, all this is consistent even with a predominant passion for Ophelia in this strange-natured man. His mother regarded this connection as serious in spite of the inequality of station between the two lovers; his oaths to Ophelia we cannot indeed consider in Hamlet as incipient deception. This son loved his father with enthusiastic reverence, without being able to do anything for him for the sake of love, and his mother also, without being able to adhere to his father's exhortation, not to torment the weak and deluded woman. Thus he may also have loved Ophelia with a warm heart, without contradiction to the apparently most contradictory quality of his nature, that cold egotism, with which he torments her first with his madness, then leaves her, and after the

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unhappy death of her father, devoid of sympathy and sensible to nothing but his own misery, abandons her to despair and insanity. To these traits of character we must seek the counterpart in the history of the affections of equally genial beings, in whose unfortified souls we shall not rarely meet with this blending of the most sensitive feeling and cold hard-heartedness. From these very traits we must moreover find the key-note for Hamlet's intercourse with Ophelia. At his first approach, inexperienced and unsuspicious, she has given him her heart, she has been free in her audience with him, so that neighbours perceiving it have warned the family, and the family herself; his conversation with her is equivocal, and not as either Romeo, Bassanio, or even Proteus have spoken with their beloved ones. This has infected her imagination with sensual images and inspired her in her quiet modesty with amorous passions; this is seen in her songs which she sings in her delirium, and in the significant flowers which she distributes, as clearly as anything so hidden in its nature altogether can and may be unveiled. Further than this we would not venture to go with Goethe's apprehension of this character. Far less with those other views, which returned to the rude legend in Saxo Grammaticus, and would regard Ophelia as a fallen innocent. It was not like the fine feeling of Shakespeare, over the corpse of such a fallen one, when the priest would fain refuse her "sanctified ground", that he should have made the brother utter those sublime words:

> "A ministering angel shall my sister be,
> When thou liest howling".

It was not like the poet, that he should expressly say over her grave:

> "From her fair and unpolluted flesh
> May violets spring"!

This would indeed be a frivolous insult to innocence in the most solemn place and moment.

The poet has scarcely brought Ophelia before us in her harmless nature, before the tragic events of her life have wounded and lacerated her heart; so far as he lets us cast a glance upon this part of her history, she appears perfectly unselfish, devoted, and tender, even to dependence and lack of will; in her connection with Hamlet she allows herself to be easily guided by her father and brother; she lends herself to the snare, (this Vischer has made conspicuous in his reflections upon Hamlet,) placed for her all-sensitive lover, who sees himself abandoned and betrayed by all; when she has seen him in his distraction, she gives him back his gifts, which effects the irritable man in this condition like a farewell act. Thus far she is not without guilt in the fate which meets her, however much it belongs to the plan of the play, that her fall should strike Hamlet's conscience, as that of an innocent sacrifice. Of Polonius, Hamlet himself says éxpressly, that the death of the innocent is his punishment who let the guilty live; a much greater punishment for him is the end of Ophelia, whose father, *he*, the lover had killed, and thus had rent in twain every bond which linked her to the world. To this death her songs incessantly relate; her real madness punishes the feigned insanity of Hamlet, which gave the first shock to her mind. Just the same, Rosencrantz and

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Guildenstern fall victims to Hamlet's ruined nature. If poetic justice appears too cutting in these destinies, it is only that avenging justice may all the more severely recoil upon Hamlet himself. The poet has expressly placed in Hamlet's lips the fearful sentence of cold egotistical levity, which may exhibit these terrible bloody results of his dread of blood, in the right light; a sentence which may be also applied to the end of Paris in Romeo and Juliet. "'Tis dangerous", he says at the death of his friends, "when the *baser nature* comes between the pass and fell incensed points of mighty opposites". In this manner does the man of great genius trifle with the subordinate creature, whom he regards as appointed to play inferior parts only on this stage of life. Thus is it then, that the conscientiousness, foresight, and consideration, which restrain Hamlet from the murder, from the just punishment of a single man, bury at last the guilty and the guiltless in one common ruin; his own want of determination, the avenging rage of Laertes, the poisoned cup of his uncle, the careless weakness of his mother, the officiousness of his friends, the inoffensive folly of Polonius, the innocence of the devoted lover, each and all these, — virtue, and pardonable faults, and inexpiable mortal crimes, suffer the same ruin, so that scarcely any of the living remain upon the stage. This has been declared to be a kind of barbarous, bloody tragedy, worthy of a rude age, in which thus at last all characters are swept from the stage. But in this the aim of the poet has been, to use this unnecessary bloodshed as part of the characterization as well as punishment of his hero, who had not courage to shed necessary blood. Shakespeare himself has said this with distinct consciousness. The king

asks Laertes, whether it is "writ in his revenge, that, sweepstake, he will draw both friend and foe, winner and loser?" The master of revenge, little conscientious, is satisfied with the punishment of the one guilty one. But the conscientious Hamlet contrives, that *he*, as the king designated it, at once actually destroys all by his clumsy revenge. With one single significant word, the poet evidently intimates his deep design at the end, and his reference to that question of the king to Laertes. Over the heaps of dead, Fortinbras exclaims, — "this quarry cries on havock!" a word, which in sporting language signifies that game, useless from its amount and quality, which is killed by unpractised sportsmen; as here by the unskilfnl avenger. Thus then this bloody conclusion is not the consequence of an æsthetic fault on the part of the poet, but of a moral fault on that of his Hamlet, a consequence which the sense of the whole play and the design of this character aims at from the first.

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MACBETH.

Shakespeare took the subject of Macbeth from Holinshed, who, on his side borrowed it from Bellenden's Scotch translation of the Latin chronicle of Hector Boethius (1541). In perfect contrast to the rude origin of Hamlet, an excellent and finished subject lay here before our dramatist, and one the theatrical nature of which Buchanan had already perceived. Here in the material itself, all lay ready, and it required alone psychological development. Macbeth, the cousin of the weak king Duncan, by nature inclined to cruelty, is with Banquo (according to history as well as Shakespeare) the support of the throne against internal rebels, and external enemies. According to both, the witches prophesy to the two chieftains; Macbeth's haughty and proud wife excites him to the regicidal deed, the suspicion of which falls upon the sons who flee. (In the details of the murder, Shakespeare has referred to an earlier page of Scottish history, — the murder of king Duff by Donald.) Envy and mistrust of Banquo, who, as Shakespeare also faintly indicates, was his confidant, determine Macbeth to remove him out of his path, but his son Fleance escapes. The growth of Macbeth's suspicion, tyranny, and thirst for

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blood, his mistrust of Macduff, the flight of that chieftain, the murder of his family, the further deceptive prediction of the witches, the deliverance of Scotland, all is handed down to the poet in such a simple and natural connection, that he could take the whole plot, aye, even lengthy passages, such as the conversation between Macduff and Malcolm, without alteration.

This tragedy has ever been regarded and criticized with distinguishing preference among Shakespeare's works; our own Schiller has treated it, Schlegel has spoken of it with enthusiasm, Drake has called it "the greatest effort of our author's genius; the most sublime and impressive drama which the world has ever beheld". It has also obtained favour above the other plays of Shakespeare in lands peopled by other than the Teutonic race, either from its felt or perceived resemblance to ancient tragedy, or from its unity of design and the simple progress of its development, or from its apparent characterization, in which the poet has employed less mystery than usual; most of all indeed from its pictorial charm and poetic colouring. If perhaps no other play of Shakespeare's can vie with Hamlet in philosophical insight into the nature and worth of the various powers at work in man, — none with Henry IV. in fresh delight in a vast and active career, — none with Othello in profoundness of design and careful carrying out of the characters, — none with Lear in the power of contending passions, — none with Cymbeline in the importance of moral principles, Macbeth in a like manner stands forth uniquely pre-eminent in the splendour of poetic and picturesque diction and in the living representation of persons, times, and places. Here Schlegel has already perceived the vigorous heroic age of the North

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depicted with powerful touches, the generations of an iron time, whose virtue is bravery. How grandly do the mighty forms rise, how naturally do they move in an heroic style! How differently does this tyrant Macbeth appear by the side of the heroes Macduff, Banquo, and Siward, compared to that Crook-back Richard amid a crooked generation! Locally, we are transported into the Highlands of Scotland, where everything appears tinged with superstition, with tangible intercommunion with the supernatural world, full of prognostics of the moral life through signs in the animate and inanimate kingdom; where, in conformity with this, men are credulous in belief, and excitable in fancy; where they speak with strong expression, with highly poetical language, and with unusual imagery, such as strikes us even at the present day in popular orators of the Gaelic races. This mastery over the general representation of time and place, is rivalled by the pictures of single circumstances and situations. Justly has Reynolds admired that description of the martlet's resort to Macbeth's dwelling as a charming image of repose, following by way of contrast the lively picture of the fight. More justly still has praise been ever lavished on the powerful representation of the horrible in that night-wandering of Lady Macbeth, in the banquet-scene, in the dismal creation of the weird sisters. Still far above all this, is the speaking truth of the scenes at the murder of Duncan, which have a powerful effect even in the most imperfect representation. The fearful whispered conference, in the horrible dimness of which the pair arrange and complete their atrocious project; the heart-rending portraiture of Macbeth's state of mind at the deed itself; the uneasy half-waking condition of the sacrificed attendants, one of whom

dreams on of the evening feast, the other in paralyzed consciousness seems to anticipate the impending atrocity; lastly, the external terrors of the night, in foreboding contrast to the tumult of merriment over the yawning graves; all this is so perfectly natural, and wrought to such powerful effect with so little art, that it would be difficult to find its equal in the poetry of any age.

Concerning the date of Macbeth we only know with certainty, that it was acted at the Globe in 1610; the diary of Dr. Forman mentions expressly a representation of it on the 20th April of that year. It is conjectured however with great probability, that the play was written earlier. The allusion (Act IV. sc. 1.) to the union of the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland ("and some I see, that two-fold balls and treble scepters carry"), could have no point, unless made shortly after the event; and James I. was proclaimed king of Great Britain and Ireland, on the 20th October 1604. According to this, Macbeth appeared probably about 1605. We place it, however, directly after Hamlet, because, as Coleridge has already remarked, it is written in a complete contrast to this play.

Hamlet is a thoroughly peculiar enrichment of the tragic matter, of which ancient tragedy would not have been susceptible. The piece treats of the same theme as Orestes. A husband and father is murdered by the paramour of his wanton wife; the duty of revenge is incumbent on the son. But at once a greater christian mildness is to be perceived in the touches, in as much as no share in or fore-knowledge of the murder is attributed to the wife, (and this is much more distinctly expressed in the oldest edition of 1603 than in our text,) and the spirit of the murdered man especially

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enjoins the son to attempt nothing against his mother. But besides this, the greater severity of the old myth shows itself in every other trait. Orestes schools himself to his revenge from his youth up, his sister urges him on with the same obstinacy of purpose, the task is not alone that of punishing a murderer and usurper with death, but a mother; the avenger has alone this one aim and has no scruple; conscience is first awakened *after* the deed. Here, however, it is aroused in the sensitive christian heart *before* it, and it weakens both resolve and energy; the poet has, in Hamlet, expressly given prominence to the good catholic christianity of the acting personages, and dwelt upon legends, prayers, purgatory, and religious scruples, more than is his wont. The ancients depicted as tragic characters those especially, who broke out into violent opposition to the divine law and justice, through excess of courage and strength, through an over-estimate of human will and human freedom; but in Hamlet, an excess of weakness is tragically depicted, pursued by adverse fate for tardiness of action. In Macbeth, on the other hand, this is reversed. He is the direct opposite to Hamlet, and a tragic character in the full sense of the ancients, straining human might and manly audacity to the utmost, whilst he rashly dares fate to enter the lists against him. In that just medium, in which Prince Henry is represented, accomplishments, mind, youth, and piety restrain him not from action, and ambition, power, happiness, and opportunity seduce him not to deeds of insolence and injustice; to this medium Hamlet and Macbeth stand in opposite extremes, and perish through their own excess. In both, as it says in Macbeth, "a good and virtuous nature recoils in an imperial charge", but in each in a manner wholly

different; the tragic reaction is in both equally terrible, but the palsied effort of the one, stands in strong contrast to the spasmodic action of the other. The external character of both plays is in perfect accordance with this inner and fundamental difference. The slow advance of the action in Hamlet affords a striking contrast to the rapid march of the catastrophe in Macbeth, the dimness of the former to the strong light and glowing colouring in the latter, the creeping fever of passion in the one, to the hasty movement in this play, where the passions in Lear are carried to the utmost bounds of nature and that of the strongest human kind. The character of the uncertain, fluctuating, wavering Hamlet imparts to the action in that play the image of standing, stagnant water, stirred only in places by whirlpools, while in this one a mighty dangerous rushing stream roars past, in which the boldest swimmer loses power and mastery.

We imagined before in Hamlet that we perceived an intention on the part of the poet to depict, as it were, a double-sided period, a turning point in civilization and development in the relation of the hero to his fellow-men; a man of a civilized period standing in the centre of an heroic age of rough manners and physical daring. Here it is reversed, and this appears to us to prove that the contrast was intended; a man, with the old strivings of the heroic age stands on a similar boundary line, at which the age and those around him aim at milder christian manners, whilst Macbeth stands like a man, belonging to the wilder Past, not by his nature exactly, but returning to it by his deed and its effects, as on the other hand it seemed the task of Hamlet, to maintain the usages of the olden time by the exercise of his

revenge. The glance, cast in the play upon the holy Edward of England and the divine power of healing which lay in his hands; the opposite character in which, compared to the wild heathenish Macbeth, the pious English Siward appears, the true champion of the sainted king, who with resignation sees his son perish in the troop of God's soldiers; the restoration of the rightful rulers of Scotland by the English who, according to the chronicle, first brought delicacy, luxury, and greater refinement of manners to Scotland, — all this indicates the approach of gentler times. Macbeth is unfriendly to them and to their effeminacy. He contemptibly calls these English deliverers, "epicures". When Banquo's ghost appears to him, while he is already in the midst of his career of blood, he plainly refers to old times and ways:

> "Blood hath been shed ere now, i 'the olden time,
> *Ere human statute purged the gentle weal;*
> Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd
> Too terrible for the ear; the times have been,
> That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
> And there an end; but now, they rise again", —

such deeds now disturb the conscience which before was not so tender.

What makes the natures of Hamlet and Macbeth so radically different, is that heroic physical strength, which Goethe found lacking in the one, and which the other so fully possesses. When Macbeth appears at the beginning of the play, he is, in all eyes, an admired general; during the fight he had coolly manifested all the qualities of a perfect soldier, "valour's minion", "Bellona's bridegroom". As a man of action exclusively, he is deficient in the intellectual

culture which was Hamlet's pride. Not that he, like Percy, resisted and strove against it; it never even approached him; nothing of the kind is ever alluded to, not even as a contrast to those around him; at the most, Macbeth's disinclination to all refined cultivation shows itself in the above-mentioned contempt of "the English epicures". It belongs to this simple soldier-nature, that he possesses not a trace of that histrionic art and dissimulation, which necessarily resulted from Hamlet's turn of mind. Even where these qualities would have been helpful to him in forwarding his aims, or in defending him against danger, he knew not how to adopt them, in spite of his willingness, in spite of his wife's good example, her instructions, and her impressive warnings. At the very first prediction of the weird-sisters he betrays his emotion to Banquo; he meets his wife with a pre-occupied countenance, which she immediately enjoins him to change for one of concealment; in deep thought he quits the table where the king is his guest; Garrick played this part so as to shew that, when once excited, he could not conceal the emotions of his soul, even before Duncan, least of all in the moment of the promotion of the prince of Cumberland. That which further acutely distinguishes Macbeth from Hamlet, and which is in close connection with his innate thirst for action, is his ambition. This displays itself, just as he is newly excited by the Northern Fates, in the letter to his wife, the "dearest partner of his greatness"; Macbeth's whole communication with her leads us to infer long cherished projects of ambition, for his soaring aims lodge deeper in his wife's bosom than even in his own. For a great object, for a certain gain in this life, Macbeth is ready, (and this is the boldest expression

of the passion in him) to "jump the life to come", which
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filled Hamlet with fear and doubts. And when once this ambition is set in violent motion by all the combining circumstances of fortune and opportunity, we see Macbeth, the vassal, unlawfully and bloodily taking possession of the throne of his king and benefactor; whilst Hamlet, the true heir, feels neither courage nor inclination to reclaim by a lawful act, the throne that is his by right.

However criminal and violent this passion may appear to us thus developed in Macbeth, it is not in him from the outset; the strongest temptations were necessary to bring it into this rapid flow. As long as his ambition yet untempted slumbered within him, we look upon a better nature in Macbeth, which even in his extremest decline never suffers him to sink quite below himself, nor to lose all his dignity. Before the fatal resolve of the king's murder is fully ripened in his mind, good and evil are weighed in equal balance within him. When his mind is first overtaken with the temptation, he hesitates whether to wait till the way may open to him of itself, or to force the obstruction to yield; before the good nature in the one scale is overburdened by the pressure of his wife's ambition on the other, the equal balance of his nature is indicated by the characterization of Macbeth in the lips of this very wife in a fine and striking manner. Macbeth appears to us here exactly at the point where his double nature separates, like Hamlet in his first soliloquy, when he stands suspended between his high resolves and the downward pressure of his sluggish temperament. "Thou would'st be great"; says Lady Macbeth,

"Art not without ambition; but without
The illness should attend it. What thou would'st highly,

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> That would'st thou holily; would'st not play false,
> And yet would'st strongly win: thou'd'st have, great Glamis,
> That which cries, *Thus thou must do, if thou have it:*
> *And that which rather thou dost fear to do,*
> *Than wishest should be undone*".

She calls him "too full of the milk of human kindness, to catch the nearest way". This is a description, which brings him in his inner undisturbed self in close relation to Hamlet; these words might even be spoken of Hamlet. The poet would intimate, that he does not find a delicate mental organization inconsistent with strong physical power. He invests Macbeth at the outset with the tender sentiments of Hamlet; they display themselves in him by the powerful stirrings of his conscience. This voice is in him no less loud, nay, perhaps it is even louder than in Hamlet; only that in the man of business and action, it has not convenient scope for its extension, as in the other. Conscience has not alone in Macbeth, as in the passive Hamlet, to reflect and to doubt, but it has to *do*; it has before the deed to struggle with ambition; then, victorious in its overthrow, at the very deed itself, it rouses repentance in him to a degree of fearful torture, and the man, who before never uttered the name of God, who in his conference with the murderers all but declared himself an atheist, and mocked at an hereafter, is now in a religious anxiety seized with a piteous melancholy, which shocks even his hardened wife, at the idea that he could not say *Amen* to the prayer of Duncan's attendants. Further on, this mighty voice of his conscience, stifled by a powerful will, yields to his daring, but it is still active and resisting to the last moment. If Macbeth, in this point, is not unlike Hamlet in the original constitution of his mind, he resembles him still more in the

excitability of his fancy. But if Hamlet's irresolution sprang out of his conscientiousness, and his cowardice out of his imagination, there is evidence in Macbeth on the other hand, how an innate manly power and effort can give the mastery over the strongest stirrings of conscience, as well as over the mightiest workings of the fancy. For as we have said, that the voice of conscience was *perhaps* louder in Macbeth, than in Hamlet, the paralyzing effect of imagination was without doubt stronger in him, than in the other. Anxious presentiments find in him an easily alarmed nature. He says himself, that, in ordinary circumstances, his fancy gave rise to fear and excitement. The time had been, when a night-shriek would have cooled his senses, and a dismal treatise would rouse his "fell of hair". His wife was aware of this his peculiarity, and knew how apt it was to weaken his activity and his resolve; she warns him, therefore continually not to be alone, nor to indulge in dark thoughts; "you do unbend your noble strength", she says to him, "to think so brainsickly of things." Nevertheless in this very quality, which in the energetic man is energetic and therefore indeed of a different nature and effect to that in Hamlet, there is for Macbeth an actual incentive to action. "Present fears are less" to this man of action than "horrible imaginings"; on the battle-field he maintained a natural cheerfulness, under the power of evil forebodings he becomes weak. The mere conception of the murder makes his "seated heart knock at his ribs", and "shakes his single state of man" so violently, that "function is smothered in surmises" of the future, and nothing is present to him, "but what is not." So that, quite unlike Hamlet, who inactively revels and delights in the appearance

of the ghost, and in the torture of his forebodings and fancies, Macbeth gives us the impression of rushing into action to escape the agony of mental struggle and terror. On his way to commit the crime, his heated imagination brings a dagger before him, on which he sees "gouts of blood" arise; his eyes are here "the fools o' the other senses", as his ear is afterwards, when he fancies he hears the voice cry: Glamis hath murdered sleep! But this imagination restrains him not from murdering the servants, nor did that first apparition from the murder of the king. The contrast is evident here also, that Macbeth's fancy rests not in doubts and soliloquies, but impels to action, picturing to him the very weapon for his deed, whereas in Hamlet's case, the admonisher both seen and heard, the ghost of his father, vanishes again from his remembrance like a delusion. That they see ghosts, is, with both Hamlet and Macbeth, the strongest proof of the power of the imaginative faculty. We need hardly tell our readers, whom we imagine to be more and more initiated into the mind of our poet, that his spirit-world signifies nothing, but the visible embodiment of the images conjured up by a lively fancy, and that their apparition only takes place with such as have this excitable imagination*. The cool Gertrude sees not Hamlet's ghost, the cold, sensible Lady Macbeth sees not that of Banquo, the dry, ironical Lenox and his companions see neither this nor the witches; these appear indeed to Banquo, who is neither free from ambitious ideas

* Shakespeare, therefore, did not mind the apparent inconsistency in Hamlet, of making the man to whom the ghost has appeared, say that from the bourn of that undiscovered country, no traveller returns.

nor is mastered by them, but the witches address him not till he speaks to them.
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In the witches, Shakespeare has made use of the popular belief in evil geniuses and in adverse persecutors of mankind, for a similar, but darker creation of beings, than that for which he employed the belief in fairies in the Midsummer-Night's Dream. This creation is less attractive and complete, but not less masterly. The poet, in the text of the play itself calls these beings *witches* only by way of abuse; they call themselves weird-sisters; the Fates bore this denomination, and these sisters remind us indeed of the Northern Fates or Valkyries. They appear wild and weather-beaten in appearance and attire, common in speech, ignoble half-human creatures, ugly as the evil one and in like manner old and of neither sex. They are guided by more powerful masters, their work is entirely from delight in evil, and they are wholly devoid of human sympathies. That which our Schiller made of them, entirely destroys the poet's intention, and nothing that Schlegel has said against this travesty is too harsh. The reverse of the ancient Eumenides, these weird-sisters are not avengers after the deed, but tempters to it, the panders to sin. But in no wise is a definite, mechanical power over man bestowed on them; and Lamb was utterly wrong in his opinion, that they *generated* deeds of blood, and *originated* evil impulses in the soul. Thus Schlegel said also, that Macbeth sank under a deep-laid hellish temptation and under supernatural impulses; but this gives throughout an opposite idea of Shakespeare's meaning, if more is to be understood by it, than that the soaring and ambitious desires of Macbeth himself are of a supernatural and more than ordinary strength. The poet has endowed these

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creatures with the power to tempt and delude men, to entangle them with oracles of double meaning, with delusion and deception, and even to try them, as Satan in the book of Job, with sorrow and trouble, with storms and sickness; but they have no authority with fatalistic power to do violence to the human will. Their promises, their prophecies, leave ample room to the freedom of action; their occupations are "deeds without a name". They are simply the embodiment of inward temptation; they come in storm and vanish in air, like corporeal impulses, which originating in the blood, cast up bubbles of sin and ambition in the soul; they are weird-sisters only in the sense, in which men carry their own fates in their own bosoms. Macbeth in meeting them has to struggle against no external power, but only with his own nature; they bring to light the evil side of his character, which was not to be read in his face; he does not stumble upon the plans of his royal ambition, because the allurement approaches him from without; but this temptation is sensibly awakened in him, because those plans have long been slumbering in his soul. Within himself dwell these spirits of evil, which allure him with the delusions of his aspiring mind. They approach him, as he stands on the highest step of his fortune, his favour, and his valour. The rebellion just crushed by him places him above the weak Duncan, who is powerless to help himself; the newly obtained rank of thane of Cawdor increases his influence, and suggests to him for consideration, how much more successfully he could have played the part of traitor, than the deposed chief, who bore the title before him; to this is then added the opportunity of Duncan's visit, and the influence of his wife. These are

natural promptings of such weight, that altogether, they www.libtool.com.cn form indeed the supernatural power, which Shakespeare has poetically embodied according to the tradition. Thus Macbeth's genius feels itself "rebuked" by Banquo, as Antony's was by Cæsar; envy and jealousy against him, the joint subduer of the rebellion, lie thus naturally within him, and are afterwards only aroused by the prophecy in favour of Banquo's descendants. His self-reliance told him (the witches needed not to tell him), that he had no cause to fear any of woman born, unless it be this Macduff, from whom he shrinks, even before those demons have warned him of him. They always do but rouse to watchfulness the slumbering thoughts of his soul, as they say of the armed head: they know his thoughts. As then Macduff's death is uppermost in his mind, so on their first appearance was that of Duncan; when they lay open to him the way to the throne, they do but "harp" then upon his own ambition, as now upon his foreboding fears of Macduff. Thus then these prophetesses make Macbeth by their first appearance no other than, according to his wife's delineation, he is already. As in Hamlet, the ghost of his father, or what is the same, that inward presentiment, which grows ever more and more in the son to tangible certainty, rouses up a sluggish will, so in Macbeth, the witches or the false images of his ambition tempt an already pre-disposed will and a character hitherto unsullied. He stands *after* their temptation at the same cross-way of action, at which his wife saw him before it overtook him. He hesitates, whether to call this apparition good or ill, which Banquo at once is inclined to regard as an "instrument of darkness"; the idea of murder "unfixes" indeed his hair, yet he reflects, that if

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chance will have him king, chance may crown him "without his stir", as it had made him thane of Cawdor. He proposes at the first to Banquo, that they should speak their free hearts to each other upon this apparition; this were a means and a step towards remaining pure.

But to this good purpose Banquo alone remained faithful, and not Macbeth. The former is opposed to the latter as a complemental character, and this contrast is displayed at once in the relation of both to the witches' temptation. Banquo has the same heroic courage, the same merit and the same claims as Macbeth, it is natural that the same ambitious thoughts should arise in the one as in the other. But in Banquo they arise in a calmer nature, and one susceptible of the finest discretion, and therefore they do not master him as they do Macbeth. Where the latter receives as a reward from his sovereign, favour, distinction, visit, title, and power, Banquo has only to thank him for an embrace, for a pressure to his heart. And for this the modest man replies: "There if I grow, the harvest is your own." The fruit even of this small favour he gives to the king. And then quietly, in the absence of his favoured rival, he extols to the king the qualities of Macbeth, while the latter envies him from the very first on account of the prophecy which favoured his (Banquo's) descendants in the same way as it did himself personally. Equally noble, as Banquo shews himself in this instance, is his calm self-possession during this very prophecy. He doubts at first whether his eyes do not deceive him, or whether the witches may not be something of those empty bubbles, which, according to tradition, the earth casts up as well as the water, while Macbeth is at once entranced and credulously

listens to their words. The latter could not have called out to them like Banquo: that he neither did "beg nor fear, their favours nor their hate." Macbeth has already scarcely an ear for Banquo's warning, that they may be the "instruments of darkness", who told them truths to win them to their harm, who sought to win them "with honest trifles, to betray them in deepest consequence". If Banquo is of calmer blood than Macbeth, he is however not bloodless. He has temptations to struggle against as well as the other, but he withstands them with more powerful self-government. He has tempting dreams which trouble him; he drives them away by prayer, that they may not come again; he does more than pray, he struggles against sleep itself that he may escape them. Waking, his spirit masters the "cursed thoughts", whilst in sleep, nature pays tribute to the blood, by giving way to these dreams. In his unrest he meets Macbeth. The guiltless man confesses his dreams, the guilty denies further thought on the weird-sisters; he who at first had himself wished for free interchange of thought, now avoids it. That Banquo should know what he knows, is oppressive to Macbeth, the unconscientious man feels burdened by the proximity of the conscientious one, the evil by the good, the envious by the successful. Banquo might have been his good angel; but avoiding intercourse with him, he falls under the influence of his evil genius, his wife. Banquo had shared with him the temptation of warlike greatness and distinction; that of a rise in power had passed him by; the temptation of good opportunity also was spared him, as well as finally the mightiest stimulant of all, the influence of an ambitious wife.

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The opportunity which next presented itself to Macbeth, was of such a nature, that it too held him wavering in the balance, though heavy weights were in either scale. The king passes a night in his dwelling. The royal guest enters trustfully and with careless pleasure beneath that roof where the wandering martlet had found an undisturbed abode. He is a virtuous monarch, beloved and valued by his people, he is his nearest kinsman and cousin, his prince, his panegyrist, his benefactor, who had just bestowed on him the dignity of the thane of Cawdor, the rank of the fallen rebel who with hypocrisy had turned traitor to the good sovereign; his favour, Duncan promises Macbeth, will still continue towards him; he acknowledges himself so indebted to him, that "more is due than more than all can pay"; even on that evening of "unusual pleasure" he makes rich presents to the wife and servants of his host with royal liberality! But unfortunately he had, in presence of Macbeth, declared his son to be his heir upon the throne; this excites in Macbeth more strongly the thought of shortening the course of fate, of putting spurs "to prick the sides of his intent" to leap over the impediment, without considering that such a leap was close upon a fall. He is so far advanced already, that he pronounces himself ready for the dreadful deed, if he could but be sure of the result. But in these things he knows, an "even-handed justice" rules, which even here "commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice to our own lips". Considerations of all kinds arise against his crime, while every motive spurred Hamlet on to his deed. Nevertheless his ambition still struggles in a scarcely equal strife with his conscience, and with that Hamlet-like habit of "thinking too precisely on the event."

In this struggle his wife's urgency determines him to take
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the evil course. And this she effects essentially by the incitement of his valour and by the ambitious incentive of his claim to glory and to the name of manliness, an ambition which all those supernatural examples and warnings could not stir up in Hamlet.

Shakespeare has taken the idea of Macbeth's wife from an allusion in Holinshed's chronicles to the wife of Donald, who instigates her husband to the murder of King Duff. She appears, in the first aspect, as a Clytemnestra in pride, cruelty, firmness, and unscrupulousness, a powerful woman, awakening in us more fear than hate, of frightfully determined will and thrice-steeled resolve. The complete antitype to her husband's irritable and imaginative nature, she is calm in judgment and cold in blood. No supernatural temptation approaches her, but only the substantial one in her husband's letter, no warning voice of conscience, no forebodings of terrible consequences alarm her, as they do Macbeth, *before* the deed; *while* it is being perpetrated, she remains circumspect, deliberate, ready for dissimulation; *after* it, she would have been able speedily to forget what had happened. She feels that to dwell on such deeds, as Macbeth does, would make her mad, she, therefore, dissuades from it, and is composed enough on her side to follow out this counsel. A will of uncommon instinctive firmness renders her in a remarkable manner mistress of herself; she knows, that by dissimulation, foresight, and cunning, she could commit and conceal the fatal deed in question; she scorns the bare idea that she could fail; she goes through her part so perfectly that no suspicion falls on her. Only in the first moment, when Duncan's arrival is men-

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tioned to her, when she sees a propitious fate in the opportunity thus afforded, she betrays in the joy of her heart somewhat of what is going on within her, by the exclamation: "Thou'rt mad to say it"; but this she never does again. Conscious of qualities, which fit her for such a work, she urges her irresolute husband to the fearful deed; she forces him to "screw his courage to the sticking place"; her husband contents her only in the moment, when he conceived the first idea that he would create for himself the opportunity which now offers itself unexpectedly; she urges him to snatch as a prey what might be the gift of destiny; and the natural eloquence and persuasiveness of courage, resolve, and unity of purpose, overcomes the silent, wavering, thoughtful man. In this eloquence Lady Macbeth may appear to us as an incarnate devil, divested of every trace of womanhood and humanity. Had she so sworn as he, she says to Macbeth, she would have dashed the brains out of her smiling babe, although she knew from experience, how tender was the love of the nursing mother. Nevertheless even at this most unnatural pitch of her passion and cruelty, we may discover, that the poet has not wholly deprived this woman of the milk of human kindness. In that early strain upon her being, this abnegation of her womanhood, she does violence indeed to her nature. For this work of unsexing herself, she calls upon hellish spirits, a trait otherwise foreign to her whole being. These are to fill her "top-full of direst cruelty", and to "stop up the access and passage to remorse, that no compunctious visitings of nature" should shake her purpose. Knowing her consort well, she arrogates to herself the manly part, for which she endeavours to screw up her nature, that she may herself

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carry out and perpetrate the murder. Macbeth, she says, was only to "look up clear and leave all the rest to *her*"; *she* makes the plan and talks of herself and him, both of whom are to have a share in the work; *she* drugs the servants and lays their daggers ready; she has found the potion which she used to make the attendants drunk, necessary to inspire herself with courage and firmness; she would even give the blow with her own hands, but then at the moment itself, her over-wrought nature gives way; those compunctious visitings of nature which she had banished from herself, shake her, when she traces in the sleeping king a resemblance to her father, and the woman must leave that business to the man, which needs more than man to execute it. So too subsequently, she is shaken by the touching utterance of his remorse, although she had invoked the spirits to "stop up the access" to such feelings. But when the danger of discovery alarms her, she quickly recovers her composure, foresight, and fearlessness, and can look down reproachfully upon the man of "infirm purpose". She has from the beginning, rather the security of a spectator in the game, she loses that security the moment she attempts to act in it, she recovers it as soon as she returns to her first position. Still she has had her part in the game, as it were even before it was designed. The dreams of ambition had indeed early been dreamed by both; the vague dreams, in the presence of temptation and opportunity, ripened in her soul more rapidly into actual purpose than in his. The courage necessary for these projects, and the firm resolve to carry them out, she finds in her boundless confidence in this strong man, to whom she trusts everything, to whom she thinks all greatness due, and on whose high qualities

she delights and leans. This is the peculiarity of her nature and her history, and it is just this which must so far reconcile us to her character and which prevents her from wholly forfeiting our pity. Almost every commentator has discerned in this character a better side, but few have succeeded in seeking it in the right place, and seeing it in its proper light. Hitherto her husband had been only a child of fortune and honour, she knows she may rely on him and that he is sufficient for all things and successful in them. She is far more filled with the idea of what he might and should be than he is himself; she knows him to be the worthiest to rule and she wishes to confer the crown upon his merit; his manly nature is her pride and her glory; when *he* sees only dangerous results, she, in her idea of him, is sure of the happiest success; she "feels the future in the instant", but in fearless expectation and unbroken splendour. In this she is far more a dependent wife than an independent masculine woman, for she wishes the golden circlet rather for him than for herself, her whole ambition is for him and through him, of herself and of elevation for herself she never speaks. She lives only in him and in his greatness; how triumphantly she receives him with that "Hail" (which flatters her pride so much), "thou that shall be king hereafter"! We see in this marriage a union of esteem, aye, of deep reverence, rather than one of sensitive affection. The poet has not left this unexplained. She has had children, but has reared none; this may have added another sting to Macbeth's jealousy of Banquo; but the most natural consequence is that the pair are drawn more personally together and are more given up to the gratification of themselves. Our Romanticists have made Lady Macbeth a heroine of

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virtue, and Goethe rightly condemned the foolish way in which they stamped her as a loving spouse and house-wife. Nevertheless, the connection between the two may from all we have said, be allowed to be thought hearty, and from their mode of intercourse even tender. The caressing words which Macbeth uses ("dearest chuck" &c.) are not those usually bestowed upon a Juno or a Clytemnestra; the woman, who in order to impel Macbeth to action and to secure safety in danger utters so many stinging and contemptuous expressions towards him, uses not one word of blame or reproach to him, when they are left alone at the close of the banquet-scene. If however from these traits it should not yet be clear that her womanliness was not extinguished but only suppressed, this would be all the more incontestably proved by the issue of events. When the deed is accomplished, she stands at first still, while Macbeth now begins to push on with bolder strides. But when none of the golden expectations are realized, which she expected as the result of the deed when instead of successful greatness, the ruin of the land and of her consort follow, her powers suddenly relax and sink. Supported by him, she could have long and for ever withstood the emotions of conscience, nature, and a harrowing imagination, but doubting him, she doubts herself also; she had, like ivy, twined her fresh greenness around the branches of the kingly tree, when the stem totters, she falls to the ground; her iron heart dissolves in the fire of this affliction and this mistaken expectation. It has been regretted, that the transition from her masculine strength to her feminine weakness has not been more fully depicted by the poet. This, however, was no gradual change, but a sudden over-

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throw. As in him she had forced the man beyond his nature, in herself she had raised the woman to an heroic strength; he began, like a true man, within the limits of reasonable human ambition, and then overstepped them in that "security," that self-dependent daring, which ruined him; she, on the contrary, began too high, beyond indeed the sphere of her sex, and all at once she sinks again to a mere woman. In the man, the boldness of crime, mixed with the obdurate pride of the mightiest of his race, was strong enough to increase after the first misdeed, and he endeavoured to win by obstinate perseverance the success withheld from him; in her this boldness dwindles to nothing, as soon as the issue disappoints her. Now, while *his* leaves slowly wither before the storm, she, who once advanced so boldly, shrinks silently back, a bare and leafless branch. That counsel which she urged upon Macbeth, not to be alone, sprung from the deepest self-knowledge; when she is divided from his pursuits and separated from his companionship, then is it, as Malcolm said, that

> "the grief, that does not speak,
> Whispers the o'er-fraught heart, and bids it break".

Still even now her character and the strength of her will are evident, her resistance in suffering shows itself now as before her activity in doing. By day she continues mistress of her emotions, but in the night "her fear-infected mind to the deaf pillow will discharge its secrets". According to the poet's poetic physiology and psychology, her unnaturally strained conscience and power of dissimulation avenges itself during sleep, and the somnambulist, self-betraying,

acts as it were all the secret guilty scenes over again. www.libtool.com.cn Once she thought, she could with a little water clear away the witnesses of that deed, but now, in the torture of her hardened heart she complains with groans of anguish, that the smell and stain of blood will never wash away. She ends her life with suicide.

This woman then, who by her devotion and identification with Macbeth is far more dangerous to her husband than she could have been by an independent masculine nature, uses those means in order to determine his fatal resolution, which she thinks the most effectual; she rouses, as we before said, his energy, she calls upon his ambition and touches him upon his manliness. When she reproaches him with want of love, it moves him not; when she confidently promises him a certain success, it rather makes him hesitate; but when she touches him upon his manliness, he is conquered at once. "Art thou afeard", she says to him,

> "To be the same in thine own act and valour,
> As thou art in desire? Would'st thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thy own esteem;
> Letting '*I dare not*' wait upon '*I would*',
> Like the poor cat i' the adage",

which wished to catch the fish, but not to wet its feet. Even here he answers her from the honourable position, which he had hitherto always maintained, with that noble principle of life, which well accords in sense with that saying of Hamlet, to which he should have stood firm:

> "I dare do all that may become a man,
> *Who dares do more, is none!*

Sarcastically drawing him from this position, she asks, "what beast was it then, that made you break this enterprise to me?" And while she forces him from this position, she adds:

> "When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> And to be *more* than what you were, *you would*
> *Be so much more the man*".

This was the spur, which, as he says of his ambition, "pricked the sides of his intent", and made him leap the bounds of manhood and humanity. Again and again his wife harps upon this string, and instead of a single tone, he answers with a full chord. Aye, after his first remorse during and following the murder of the king is overcome, her appeals are needed only once more at the apparition of Banquo's ghost; immediately after the murder indeed he out-does her designs. Even in his horror after the deed, she calls him "infirm of purpose", and says "'tis the eye of childhood, that fears a painted devil", that trembles before the sleeping or the dead; her hands are as bloody as his, but she would "shame to wear a heart so white". Directly afterwards, he acts without her help; he kills the servants, to whom the murder was to be imputed, a matter she had not thought of; she thinks, when she has laid the dagger beside them, that all is done, but *he*, when he sees the men and her terror, grows more clear-sighted to the danger, and is ready to commit a new murder for their safety, while *she* is on the point of fainting. He goes yet further; the curse of the evil deed, that it must for ever bring forth new evil, is being fulfilled; "things, bad begun", he will "make strong by ill". He feared the bad consequences, but now he creates them himself. He is seized with mistrust against

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the man, who shares with him the knowledge of those predictions; Banquo too is suspicious of him, but he keeps his suspicion in his own bosom; but what enrages Macbeth most of all against him, is his jealousy of the succession promised to Banquo's descendants. The result of the crime seems yet uncertain, if this prophecy stands good; ambition was not satisfied, so long as this drawback remained. Here already Macbeth rouses himself to that supernatural might, which boldly opposes itself to fate. If he believed the sayings of the weird-sisters, as he had cause to do, he must believe also that one, which favoured Banquo. He thinks, however, now indeed to force from fate his own good fortune and to ruin Banquo's. In solemn words (Act III. sc. 1.) he calls "fate into the list to champion him to the utterance". He instigates the murderers of Banquo and his son. It is very remarkable, that for this business he employs the very means, which had wrought most effectually upon himself: he appeals to the manliness of the murderers. He now spares his wife the crime of being accessory to Banquo's death; she too had thought on it, but he has accomplished it already, and that without her. The escape of Fleance is to remind him yet again of the infallibility of the prediction. But he now consoles himself with the thought, that this foe had "no teeth for the present". Thus fear of Banquo and an evil conscience towards one, who knew his secret, had united to cause this death. This fear and this conscience are once more to shake his resolute manliness, when the ghost of Banquo appears to him. This unhinges his nature, his wife silences the company, palliates and excuses his paroxysms with her old presence of mind, and reminds him of his weakness with the old

stinging reproof: "Are you a man?" "Aye," he answers, "and a bold one, that dare look on that which might appal the devil." She continues her bitter sarcasms at his want of manliness: "these flaws, and starts, would well become a woman's story, at a winter's fire." Upon this he grows so bold, as even to drink the health of the just vanished Banquo, and yet again the apparition shakes his iron nerves. He may assert: "What man dare, I dare!" and yet his manliness disappears at this awful sight. These are the last struggles of his conscience and of his fearful imaginings. Yet before long, he looked back amid the stings of remorse, almost enviously upon Duncan's peaceful sleep "after life's fitful fever"; he now sees himself "stept in so far in blood", that "returning were as tedious as go o'er". Hitherto he had shrunk from Banquo's suspicion and pursuit, now he keeps spies in every house, threatens the escaped princes, summons the absent Macduff, and orders the slaughter of his family. Hitherto the qualms of conscience in the man who had murdered sleep, had manifested themselves in that he had murdered his own sleep, that he had lost this refreshment of nature, and suffered from terrible dreams; now through all his cruel schemes, he will sleep calmly "in spite of thunder". The time had been when his lively fancy would have been excited by a "night-shriek", now "supp'd full of horrors"; he has almost "forgot the taste of fears". Formerly he pondered over his actions, and consideration and reflection preceded and accompanied his deeds; now he has "things in head, which must be acted, ere they can be scann'd"; he considers himself still young and unripe in deeds, until he has brought it to this, that the deed shall go with the

purpose, that the "firstlings of his heart shall be the firstlings of his hand", that all boasting "like a fool" shall be given up, and "be it thought and done" shall be his only motto. This extreme thirst for action had been brought upon him by the flight of Macduff. He had foreboded evil from him, he delayed his death, he hears from the weird-sisters, that actual danger lies in him; from henceforth he determines to lose no further deed by delay. In this over-straining of his nature, he is confirmed by the weird-sisters, who now work upon him under the direction of their queen. It is their aim to nourish in him this hardening in sin, this dependence upon human power, this contempt of divine law, which in those days was called *security*, a word which, in that sense, our language has subsequently lost. This denial of religious dependence, this absence of conscientious scruples, this boastful confidence upon human strength, the weird-sisters expressly call "mortals' chiefest enemy". Their equivocal prophecy confirms him in this security, their object being to make him hasten his fate, defy death, and carry his hopes beyond all moderation, mercy, and fear. When, therefore, he experiences the last temptations of the devil and sees his tragic end at hand, we perceive now, just as before under his wife's insinuations, this pride of manhood rising in him to the last. When this false "security" is first shaken by doubts, his former fear rises again, struggling with his manliness; but he conquers it again, — a coward in conscience, he is still valiant in will. As Birnam wood approaches, for a moment his determination fails, then, however, he rouses himself to defence with that madness, which his admirers call courageous fury. When Macduff says to him, that he was "from

his mother's womb untimely ripped", he yields to fear, and exclaims: "I'll not fight with thee." But a taunt in Macduff's words, as formerly in his wife's, and at once the hero revives, as a hero to die. Grand like that Hagen in the Nibelungen Lied, he compels admiration even while rising in cruelty; the impress of innate heroism is visible in him to the last, so that the greatness of his manly strength and the might of his resolution, almost outweigh and equal the magnitude of his guilt.

To lead Macbeth from a noble disposition and a fine nature, amid the temptations of ambition and pride, up to this point of security, is the aim of this play. At this point, Macbeth appears in perfect contrast to Hamlet. The "honest ghost" of his father had required of the latter a righteous deed, a ghost returned from purgatory had from human feelings called upon his human nature; Macbeth on the contrary is tempted in doubtful riddles by the deceitful powers of evil, beings destitute of every human feeling, to an unjust and wholly unnatural deed. Nature and reason spur Hamlet on; they restrain Macbeth. Hamlet urged to action, lingers in the hope that the result may arise of itself; Macbeth on the contrary, who is advised to wait, snatches at the result beforehand. Opportunity favours both, but one suffers it to escape, the other seizes it, — both alike dead to conscience. The one is stung by "all occasions", and loads himself with reproaches of cowardice, calling himself a coward, a villain, and an ass, nevertheless he remains below himself and his powers, while Macbeth is roused beyond himself by the demands of his wife upon his manliness. The one, once fallen into inaction, sinks deeper and deeper, the other, hurried on by his thirst for

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action, rises to greater defiance. Averse already to the path of blood, Hamlet remains lax and weak-hearted, while Macbeth strides boldly on in open defiance of the higher powers; the one, morbid in his avoidance of action, the other, as we have said, in his eagerness for it. At last, having reached that extreme point, Hamlet's indecision, his anguish of conscience, and his moral insecurity stand entirely opposed to that godless and flagitious "*security*", in which Macbeth, having entirely lost his early true-heartedness, appears almost devilish. From this point, there is no further comparison between the two. At this stage in his career, Macbeth has been often, and in detail, compared with Richard III. From this comparison of Macbeth, as he is at his end, with quite another extreme of character, we have the same sort of effect as arises out of the comparison of Macbeth as he is at the outset, with Hamlet. Both, Macbeth and Richard, are drawn into the path of crime by high-soaring ambition, as both similarly express it: "so far in blood, that sin will pluck on sin". But Richard, formed by nature for evil, commits it with cool calculation, instigated by himself, conspiring against all those who surround him; Macbeth, by nature mild and noble, is driven to it by instigations of a beloved wife, by a conspiring of all temptations and golden opportunities against him. Both are traitors, usurpers, tyrants, but Richard is so through dissimulation, hypocrisy, and policy, while Macbeth is nothing but a soldier; the one perishes by a deeper hypocrite, the other by a nobler hero. Both are surrounded with accessories in guilt, but Richard in his contempt of men does not care for Buckingham, the petty rival of a meaner race; Macbeth

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on the contrary has none of this contempt of men in him; he recognizes with involuntary respect the loftier genius, and the equal power in Banquo and Macduff. Both alike stifle conscience with the force of the will, but Richard is capable of being pleased and even merry in the midst of his bloody events, while Macbeth with all his success is not one moment happy. "All that is within him", it was said of him, "does condemn itself, for being there". With inward anguish he looks back at last upon all his fallen hopes, upon the lack of all that which should accompany old age, upon the want of friends and honour; this lack would have been wholly indifferent to Richard. Both are equally victims to the emotions of fear and conscience in the moment of final decision; they strike the messengers of evil, they contradict themselves in their distraction and confuse themselves in their haste, but Richard's is the behaviour of a criminal seeking to escape his judge, Macbeth's that of a warrior, boldly fighting for honour against charmed weapons. Both are alike in that flagitious security and in the valiant rage, with which they man themselves for a desperate cause; Steevens finely remarked, that it is a favourite moral of Shakespeare, that crime and a bad conscience make cowards of the bravest: both however, are an exception to this rule, and their warlike audacity and fearlessness increase with their guilt; yet Macbeth appears the more fearlessly calm of the two in meeting his last struggle, certain as he is of its evil issue.

With regard to poetic justice in the fates of Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff, there lies in the nature of all these a contrast to Macbeth's, a light upon which is thrown by that position, which Shakespeare has assigned to Hastings

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respecting Richard III. As in Macbeth, extraordinary might, scorn of man and God, security (in the religious sense of the word) from avenging and unearthly powers, and security in the ordinary sense from all dangerous rivals, obtained by using all lawful and unlawful means, as these are displayed in him and end in ruin; in the others, weakness, irresolution, feebleness, and the want of forethought, which neglects even lawful means of defence against danger, the security of credulousness and passiveness, are equally fatal; the right course lies in the medium, in Macduff, after experience has at length schooled him, and in the prudent Malcolm, who early learned its lessons. King Duncan is characterized in history as a man of greater weakness than became a king; treason was common under his rule; he was no warrior to suppress it, no physionomist to read it in the countenance; he had but just gained a painful experience from the treachery of the friendly thane of Cawdor, and at once, passing by the modest Banquo, he elevates Macbeth, thus pampering his ambition, to this very dignity, and suffers a cruel penalty for his own fault from the new thane, his own relation. The same want of foresight ruins Banquo. He had been initiated into the secret of the weird-sisters; pledged to openness towards Macbeth, he had opportunity of convincing himself of his obduracy and secrecy; he guesses at, and strongly suspects Macbeth's deed; yet he does nothing against him or in self-defence; in another manner to those cowardly impersonations of fear, the doctor, Seyton, Ross, and the spying ironical Lenox, he suppresses his thoughts and wilfully shuts his eyes; he falls, having done nothing in a region full of dangers. Macduff is not quite so culpable in this

respect; he is not, therefore, punished in his own person, but in the fate of his family, which makes him the martyr-hero by whom Macbeth was to fall. Macduff is described in the play as noble, wise, clear-sighted, choosing well his opportunity. This he proves himself. He is at first honestly inclined to believe that Duncan's attendants accomplished the murder of the king; that Macbeth slays them, startles him, but he carefully conceals his unproved suspicion. He goes not, however, to the coronation, he avoids seeing Macbeth, and at length, taught by prudence, he flees. Thus far circumspect in all things, he neglects to take his family with him, and his wife, warned in vain by his and Ross' example, and by the caution of a third, falls a victim to this same want of foresight. The stroke which now befalls his house and therefore himself, stirs up within this man the power which undertakes to measure itself against Macbeth. In his undisturbed nature, Macduff is what Macbeth once was: a mixture of mildness and power; and more than Macbeth, because he is without any element of ambition. When Donaldbain has fled from the shock, and Malcolm accuses himself before Macduff of every imaginable misdeed, not a shadow of ambition to raise himself into the usurper's place, steals over him; he bids farewell to Scotland and to hope. So noble, so blameless, so clement, we should think Macduff entirely wanting in that goad of sharp ambition necessary to make him a victorious opponent of Macbeth, and to enable him to stand his ground against that mighty and infuriated man; the poet, therefore, by the horrible extermination of his family, divests him of the milk of human kindness, and makes him by this means at once fitted to be the conqueror of Macbeth. This is wonder-

fully shewn by a couple of strokes in that scene between Macduff and Malcolm. When he hears the dreadful news, he silently draws his hat over his brows and conceals his sorrow. "My children too? My wife killed too?" are his only words, and then the self-reproach: "And I must be from thence"? Malcolm bids him seek comfort in revenge. He heeds him not. "He has no children!" these words of Macduff, Tieck inconsiderately referred to Malcolm.* And Malone, Horn, Simrock, who indeed apply them to Macbeth, endeavoured to find in them the expression of rage, because he, Macduff, could not therefore sufficiently revenge himself. The whole nobility of this character and its thorough contrast to Macbeth, would be lost by this reading. This is one of the best examples to show how the clever actor will always be a better interpreter of Shakespeare, than the most learned commentator. The most famous actors of Macduff in Garrick's time, Wilks and Ryan, saw in these words only the deepest expression of paternal agony, out of which Macduff arises only by degrees to composure and the desire for revenge. Nothing can be

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* It is most strange that Tieck neglected to bring forward the only thing, which he could say on behalf of his interpretation. Macbeth, according to the words of his lady, has had children. From this it now follows, not that he has children, but rather only that he *has had* them. But just in this case Macbeth *had* experienced, how painful is the loss of children, a feeling of which the words of Macduff would seem to deprive him. Did Shakespeare overlook this, as Goethe thought, unconcernedly, because in this place, he wanted one characteristic trait and in the other another? But we may just as well say: Macduff overlooked it in the greatness of his anguish, and he would not grant the father who had no living children and no present cares for them, the tender paternal heart which he himself possessed.

plainer than this. "Dispute it like a man", says Malcolm to him. He answers:

> "I shall do so;
> But I must also feel it as a man;
> I cannot but remember such things *were*
> That were most precious to me". —

Then once again he returns to his self-reproach, that they were all struck for his sake, the sinful one! Malcolm reminds him once more to make this "the whetstone of his sword". And even now Macduff feels himself only divided between his fatherly feelings and his desire for vengeance; he could "play the woman with his eyes, and braggart with his tongue". And now at length he yields to the thirst for revenge, which longs for action with the impatience of Macbeth, and is not to be appeased with words and delays.

Malcolm is represented in contrast to the thoughtless security of all the others. The dialogue between him and Macduff which is actually at full length in the chronicle, appeared in a remarkable manner to suit the poet and his plot. Full of suspicion, Malcolm had fled at the beginning, Macbeth ensnared and allured him, this has made him just as watchful and cautious, as his father was trustfully unsuspecting. Since then "modest wisdom had plucked him from over-credulous haste". He arms himself with suspicion even against Macduff. He mistrusts the apparent want of feeling with which Macduff had left his wife behind. He openly confesses his suspicion to him. "Let not," he says, "my jealousies be your dishonours, but mine own safeties." He even goes so far, in order to try Macduff, as to vilify himself and his character. We may object to this as unna-

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tural. Yet in the embittered and suspicious state of mind of the orphaned, oft-tempted, and betrayed young man, it is not inconsistent that he should go so far in dissimulation towards the very man, whom he would most gladly trust, and on whom his last hope is placed. In any case this gives the character a much stronger impression of the contrast aimed at. His enterprise against Macbeth is in the same way prudent, patient; the hewing down the boughs in Birnam wood is characteristic of him; and like the predictions in the Winter's Tale, those here also are very finely grounded in the circumstances and characters themselves.

Macbeth has always been a trial-piece for the best stages. The directors ought only to be careful in attempting any abridgments and improvements. This play is most closely and connectedly fashioned as a whole, and bears no omissions. Schiller has left out the scene of the murder of Macduff's family. What we have before said, shows why this is inadmissible. An instance of the horrors which Macbeth perpetrated, must be brought forward; the heavy cause, which planted the thirst for vengeance in Macduff's soul, is only comprehended when the eye has seen it. Coleridge has already defended Shakespeare from the reproach of unnecessary cruelty: "Leaving out Titus, which is not genuine, and the scene of the blinding of Gloster (in which also only the *ne palam coquat* of Horace is violated) I answer boldly: Not guilty." Even here Shakespeare has done all he could to lessen the necessary severity. On the death of the child we have before remarked. For the mother, who considers Macduff as a traitor to king Macbeth, he inspires us with little sympathy: her death takes place behind the scene. Besides this scene of horror, it has also

been decided, to cut out the comic character of the Porter. Coleridge and Collier are in favour of this omission, as they consider his soliloquy to be the unauthorized interpolation of an actor. It may be so. Yet at all events it is not inappropriate; there is an uncomfortable joviality, which by way of contrast is very suitable to the circumstances, when the drunken warder, whom Duncan's gifts and the festivities of the evening have left in a state of excitement, calls his post "hell's gate", in a speech in which every allusion bears a point. Garrick has been guilty of worse omissions than that of the customary omission of these scenes, and of still more awkward interpolations. Nevertheless he was the first to restore the piece to the public in an adequate form. Before him, Davenant had arranged it as a sort of opera with a highly laughable arrangement for the witches, and with the strangest additions. Garrick was obliged in his revival of the piece, in order to obtain a hearing for his new and different conception of the character, to write a humorous attack on himself, that he might take away the sting from the attacks of others. His acting has no doubt been handed down traditionally, as well as that of his Hamlet, which we may compare, according to Lichtenberg's relation, in some degree with that of the present day. When, even outside the theatre, he spoke the soliloquy where imagination pictures the dagger, his audience were transported with his burning gaze, his inimitable acting, and expressive language. Since his time, the part has remained an aim of all famous actors, of Kemble, Kean, and Macready; the first wrote a paper in illustration of this character. Mrs. Pritchard performed the part of Lady Macbeth with Garrick. Her conception also of this part

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seems to have remained the standard. She gave a fearful picture of audacity in crime, of obduracy, and remorseless insensibility. Her acting in the banquet-scene was celebrated as the perfection of her part, as also in the scene when she walks in sleep; her acting here was like the sudden gleam of a flash of lightening which reveals more sensibly the horrors of darkness. In 1785, Mrs. Siddons played this part in London, and she too was the admiration of all who saw her. She looked like a figure of ancient tragedy, simple, statue-like, grand, and powerfully energetic. Her acting, in those words, where she protests that she could have dashed out the brains of her smiling babe, is described as violently overdrawn and distorted. It is singular that this woman who has written down her observations on the character, appears to differ in her theory and practice. She surmised a suppressed spark of womanly nature in this character, and went so far as even to imagine her a fair beauty with much feminine loveliness. In this she was evidently nearer the mark than in her acting. She might, however, suppose the character more popular, when she acted it as she did. This mode, of making something arbitrary out of a given part, is however a piece of art, allowable at the best in parts, when the poet himself could make nothing out of them. To attempt it with Shakespeare is ever a bungling business. He has left nothing for the actor to do, but to comprehend him; but he has throughout given him sufficient work, if he would comprehend him fully.

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KING LEAR.

King Lear cannot have been written before 1603, because in that year there appeared a book by Harsnet, entitled "Discovery of Popish Impostors", out of which Shakespeare evidently borrowed the names of the different devils which Edgar mentions in his simulated madness. We know further, that Lear was acted at the Globe on the 26th December 1606; it must have been written between these two dates; and thus contemporaneous with Macbeth, we see our transition to this piece even chronologically justifiable. Not long after that performance, three editions in quarto appeared in one year (1608), a proof certainly that the play was a favourite, equally interesting to the refined critics and frequenters of the Shakespearian theatre, as to the public that had delighted in Titus and Tamburlaine.

The myth of King Lear and his daughters is related by Geoffrey of Monmouth, who places the death of this prince 800 years before Christ. From him it was copied by Holinshed. The story had been dramatized even before Shakespeare; a piece entitled "The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his Three Daughters" was reprinted in Steevens' Six Old Plays &c., having first appeared in 1594,

but having been written somewhat earlier. That Shakespeare may have made use of this rough and ill-arranged play, is only betrayed by a few trifling points. In it, the old king questions his daughters as to the degree of their filial love in order to practise a fatherly deception upon the youngest, to entrap her into the expected declaration of affection, that he might give her against her inclination in marriage to a British sovereign. Deceived in his expectation, he deprives her of her inheritance, and she becomes the wife of the king of France, who comes to England disgüised as a pilgrim, and falls in with her by chance. Goneril next drives the weak old king from his house, then both daughters contrive a plot for the murder of him and his faithful Perillus (Kent in Shakespeare); they each mutually petition the appointed murderer for the life of the other, and he spares both. They flee to France; in the disguise of sailors, they meet the king and Cordelia, who in the dress of peasants are making an excursion to the sea; Lear is then brought back in triumph, and his wicked daughters and their husbands are banished. We see at once from the romantic touches which are here interwoven, that the piece is much less tragic than Shakespeare's; the scene is laid in christian times; Goneril's complaint against her old, weak-minded, and guiltless father is here that he always scolded her, when she ordered a new-fashioned dress or gave a banquet; he goes weeping away from her, and comes with his finger in his eyes to Regan, who receives him on her knees and with flattery, whilst in her heart she plans his murder. Can it fail to strike us, that our poet in a more advanced state of theatrical taste, developed this story of filial ingratitude into a much more fearful picture, than the

older poet had done in the ruder period of the English stage?

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Shakespeare has heightened the horrors of this tragedy merely by enlarging the original plot. To the story of Lear, he has added the episode of Gloster, which is borrowed from Sidney's Arcadia (II. 10); the ruin of a second family, the snares laid by an unnatural son for a father and brother, a father incensed against a guiltless son, all these are added to the injustice which Lear commits against one of his children and suffers from the others. This episode, connected as it is by similarity of purport, Shakespeare has linked and united with the main action in the most spirited manner, weaving and combining the double action, as it were, into a single one; but he has not done this either, without greatly heightening its harshness and cruelty. By placing Gloster's bastard son in the service and love of the terrible sisters, he causes Goneril's attempt on her husband's life and the poisoning of her sister, he causes moreover Cordelia's execution and her father's death. These threefold and fourfold family-discords rest further on the broader ground of political intrigues. The degenerate daughters strive by secret designs to re-unite the divided kingdom of the old Lear, while, at the same time, it is threatened by France from without; the secret understanding between Cordelia and the English nobility, leads next to the cruel blinding of Gloster and in consequence of this to the death of Cornwall. If thus this play from the excess of wild and unnatural deeds is more bloody than any other of Shakespeare's tragedies, it becomes even more repulsive from the nature and manner, the form and appearance of its horrors. Even Coleridge, the steady upholder of Shakespeare, called the

blinding of Gloster, the actual tearing out of his eye upon
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the stage, a scene in which the tragic element is carried to the utmost limits, the *ne plus ultra* of dramatic effect. Not only the mode of Cordelia's death, but her death at all, has been considered unnecessarily cruel. An English ballad on the subject, written probably after our play appeared, makes Cordelia die a nobler death on the battle field. At the period of the Restoration, the play, even with this tragic catastrophe, would no longer have been found endurable. Tate and Colman revised it, and in this and other alterations for the stage, Edgar was made to fall in love with Cordelia, and the pleasant conclusion of comedy was given to the tragedy. Johnson and others concurred in this, and even in Garrick's time King Lear was always represented in this milder form, and the killing of Cordelia's destined executioner, and the frustration of his purpose by the old Lear, was received with the greatest applause.

That a piece of this kind should have been written by Shakespeare, and have found such decided approbation with his contemporaries, is not this a decided proof of the barbarism of his age? And further is it not an evidence, that Shakespeare, however highly we may estimate him, did not wholly escape the infection of this time? At least, is it not an evidence further, that he was only too ready to pander to the coarse taste of the period? We believe in none of these three things. That the age of Shakespeare was rich in manifold culture, is proved by an important literature; that this culture was yet defaced by many remnants of barbarism, is undeniable from the state of manners generally, and from isolated and not insignificant branches of that literature itself. Nevertheless we should be wrong

in calling an age barbarous, in which the individual could attain to such perfection of culture, as that which we admire in Shakespeare. That the nerves in those days were healthier and stronger, that the state of public feeling and the passing events were more tragic, that the estimation of blood and of human life was lower, all this did not interfere with the culture, but it decidedly favoured tragic poetry. Tragedy has ever flourished naturally or extraordinarily in the same proportion as public events have rendered the public mind susceptible for it; a peaceful, tranquil, stagnant period will never produce great tragedies. But had Shakespeare, when he wrote King Lear, fallen for a time at least into the comparative wildness of this vigorous age? Just as little as the man of finest feeling in our days, who, having given us proofs of the highest tenderness, of the softest humanity, of the most melting elegiac sentiment, as Shakespeare has in Romeo, in Hamlet, in Cymbeline, — just as little as this man of finest feeling and most delicate organization among us would have done, if he were to undertake and were able with poetic skill, to hold up to the wilder moments of the Present their own image reflected in the mirror of the Past. But when, as Coleridge said, that in Lear Shakespeare carried the tragic element to the extreme point, did he not at least do too much homage to the rude taste of the ruder portion of society, inasmuch as he derogated by this somewhat from the dignity of his art? *If* he had somewhat derogated from the dignity of his art, then certainly he would have deserved the reproach of having unjustly pandered to the rude taste of the masses. But have we not seen Shakespeare even in comedy use the burlesque caricatures of the low popular farces, and ennoble them by the spirited con-

nection into which he brought them with the finer forms
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of his comedies? And might not our poet just as well have sought for a way to use the horrors of the coarse tragedy in Marlowe's style, for a higher moral and artistic aim, -- making the wildness and atrocity of passion, carried to the utmost bounds, serve as the true aim and object of a work of art? Must not a mind of this magnitude have felt, that the strongest poetic genius finds alone the scope necessary for its extension, in the very representation of the strongest passions? Must he not have felt that there was good reason why the ancients took their subjects out of the old primitive heroic ages, where they could venture to invest the more grandly formed natures with mightier powers? And is it not an acknowledged fact, that Shakespeare attained the highest excellence of his art in this very description of such unrestrained humanity, as we find in Macbeth, in Hamlet, and especially in Lear? How often has Lear been called the grandest and noblest of all his dramas! How Schlegel was amazed at "the almost superhuman flight of genius" in this work, "where the mind loses itself just as much in the contemplation of all its heights and depths, as the first impression overpowers the feelings"! These and similar confessions of admiration have been made, partly without hesitating at the harsh matter, and partly in spite of it; but it may be a question, whether they are not merited also just as much *on account of* the colossal matter, which in horror and in the savageness of the events themselves exceeds all natural greatness, and on account of the extraordinary development of the whole subject.

The object of tragedy has, in all ages, formed a contrast to that of the epos. The epic poem was to depict the noble

deeds of men, who act in harmony with the beneficent plans and aims of Providence, and who are the instruments of fate and the favourites of the gods. Tragedy on the other hand, exhibits men everywhere at issue with fate; proud, overbearing, overstrong natures rebelling against the restraints of divine and human law, and arming thus against themselves the punishment of the gods. What we here call fate, is, however, no blind external force, to which man falls a sacrifice as an involuntary tool; fate in Shakespeare is nothing else, than man's own nature. Thus we have found it in Othello, in Hamlet, and in Macbeth. The passions of these men wove the web of their own fate. The higher these passions were carried, the more fascinated was our interest in them; the bolder the transgressions to which they led, so much the grander became the actions, so much the more entangled became the errors, so much the more hideous the horrors of the events, so much the more tragic the catastrophe; the nobler, on the other hand, was the original nature of these very passions, so much the more powerful was the impression of the crimes, and so much the deeper was our pity. Thus we see, throughout, that the depth of effect in the dramatic representation depended on the greatness, the power, the extent, and the depth of the passion depicted; but if this effect were to correspond with the subject represented in this manner, there must be presupposed in every case a corresponding elevation of the poetic genius, a summoning of his whole descriptive power, of the whole depth of his soul, of the full extent of his mind. Nothing is, therefore, more natural, than that we should see our poet continually advancing in the description of those fearful trials, delusions, and excesses of so noble

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a nature as Macbeth's, and in all other similar representations. In Lear this advance seems ever on the increase, in proportion as the theme is more comprehensive and vast. In Hamlet and Macbeth, in Othello and Timon, everything turns on one single principle character. In Lear and Cymbeline, Shakespeare takes a much wider subject. If in those tragedies, one single passion and its development was essentially treated, in Lear and Cymbeline whole ages and races are, as it were, represented. We are not here confined especially to individual characters; even in Lear, this is not really the case, and in Cymbeline far less so. Twofold or still more manifold actions are united; characters equally important and fascinating, move in greater number, in mutual relation; the actual matter gains greatly thereby in richness, extent, and compressed fulness; and we have only separately to select the enterprises of a Kent or an Oswald, to find what a mass of facts here even in the subordinate parts lies almost concealed in well-connected order, which at a first glance may be easily overlooked in the abundance of matter. Both these plays, on this account, are richer in events than all others, and approach more nearly to the character of the epic, than even the histories did; and they are, therefore, still more opposed to the ancient drama, than Shakespeare's other works. In this very extension of the events lies the cause, why these plays are less rich than others in explanatory sentences, why the actions here must themselves explain the essential, why the accurate consideration of events is just as important here as the psychological development of character.

But let us observe, by what a fine and gradual progression Shakespeare arrived at first at those strong, highly

tragic characters, endowed with such uncommon passions, and how he advanced from single figures of this kind to the delineation of them in groups, in the two plays, which are next to occupy us. If we first of all look back upon the earlier series of our poet's tragedies, we see, in Romeo, the most perfect of these early dramas, a beautiful and vehement passion as his subject, but one in no wise great nor manly; his Richard II. was a weakling; Richard III. only extraordinary in meanness; King John a nature with little independence of character. If the poet looked round in society and history for characters to supply him with that fruitful natural strength, out of which lofty, vehement, and demoniac passions could burst forth in wanton luxuriance, characters such as he required for his higher tragical plots, he found them as little in the civilized Present, as in the history of the latest Past. When no great wars force us out of the smooth flow of our peaceful existence, we see the tragic degeneration of passion only in exceptional cases, in the ruder strata of society; these cases are generally reproduced only on the stage of our courts of justice; they are repulsive to us; and the forced and unnatural effect in works of art, which introduce such wildness into the tameness of our ordinary life, has been perceived plainly or obscurely by every one in Schiller's Robbers. Such an exception was strikingly offered to Shakespeare in Othello; he shewed us this man of a wild stock in the midst of the civilized races of Europe; yet even here, the ruin which this wildness, tempered as it was, caused in civil society, seems to have been more offensive to most people, than even the refined cruelty of Iago, himself a member of this society. In Cæsar, on the contrary, Shakespeare fell upon

a much more favourable period and scene for tragic designs. An heroic people in a remote age, an age civilized indeed but warlike throughout, disturbed by civil wars and revolutions, this was the soil which our poet sought, and, therefore, he twice subsequently returned to the same ground. But even these times were too civilized for the representation of passion in its utmost strength, in its unbridled and untamed state. In Hamlet and Macbeth, Shakespeare for the first time grasped with a master's hand the heroic and mythic period of the Gallic and Germanic nations. In like manner the ancients sought their tragic fables beyond the civilized ages, in stories of pre-trojan date, and the fearful matter of the history of those houses of Laius and Tantalus was the source from which ancient tragedy drew its richest nourishment. Transported into such times, we delight in the historical record of these heroic forms, of this haughty colossal manhood, of these striving natures, of these demi-gods and titans; we find the wanton growth of impulse and passion natural to these races; we are less shocked at the abundance of cruelty, because we feel ourselves involuntarily elevated towards the greater strength, which in those days bore even heavier burdens and sufferings. And we are not even repelled and misled by the view, as if this species of manhood was in itself a myth and a fable, too far from the human nature known to us ever to have had reality; we know from the well-authenticated history of the Burgundian and Merovingian houses, that such times and such men *existed,* that family-horrors, as we read them in Lear, have abounded for centuries even among christian races, that the crimes of Tantalus in the old tragedy are not necessarily and from

their very nature, a myth and a fable. Into such times then, has Shakespeare transported us in the most tragic of his tragedies, and in nothing perhaps has the instinctive greatness and certainty of his genius displayed itself more than in this the cleverest and boldest of his conceptions. In Macbeth and Hamlet we showed, how he first brought us to the limits of those periods, as if he intended first to accustom an art-loving and refined public to this stronger food. He gave us in Hamlet a man, who had outgrown so rude an age, and in Macbeth another, who strove against the approaching improvement and amelioration of such a period, and retained the manners of the time. In Lear, the poet places us in the very centre of such an age, and shows us in action and movement a whole race of that barbaric strength of passion, in which almost without exception, the resistance of reason and conscience over the emotions of passion is powerless or dead. The same heathenish race he has once again represented in Cymbeline, but in a period more advanced; there in full contrast to Lear, he has brought before us those rare men, in whom the heroic power of self-command and moral energy displays the same superior strength, necessary to conquer the mighty passions peculiar to such times. It was intentionally then, that he depicted in Lear such full bursts of passion. Not by chance has he placed in this very play the barbarities of the Duke of Cornwall, we shall not find a second instance in the other dramas of the poet. The excessive rudeness and vehemence of Kent have not been given indifferently to every coarse fellow of every other age. The filial ingratitude in the hardened hearts of Lear's daughters, the unnatural breach of the most natural family-

ties have not been blindly transferred to other races at pleasure. The depraved natures, without a trace of conscience, have not been given to the greater number of the characters of other plays, as they are in this, nay the most abandoned individuals in his deepest tragedies, Richard and Iago, are not entirely devoid of this sting of conscience.

"Men are as the time is", says Edmund in our play; "to be tender-minded does not become a sword." Nor an iron age either, was the poet's opinion, an age in which impulses grow to ungovernable strength and crime to a gigantic enormity. That in this play we move in such an age, the spectator (since we possess the means of doing it) ought at once to be made aware in its representation on the stage by the first impression on the senses. Tieck has said of this piece, that the manner of dress and costume was a matter of indifference in it; he could have said nothing more mistaken. The delusion would be at once destroyed, if in Lear, mediæval houses, splendid furniture, and the elegant costume of Spanish knighthood were brought upon the stage. If on the contrary, we have narrow chambers of a rude architecture, wild scenes and barren views, stout gothic coarseness and barbarousness in form and dress, not without some mixture of oriental pomp, our eye would at once receive an impression of the scene, which would prepare us for the nature of the personages of the drama. Shakespeare, in whose time the stage possessed none of these advantages, found it himself necessary to make the character of the age evident to the spectator or the reader at the very commencement of the piece, by bold sketches of the scene placed in the lips of the actors themselves.

Edmund describes them to his brother by quoting a pretended prediction which proclaims, "death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state, menaces and maledictions against king and nobles; needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, and nuptial breaches." The old Gloster had sketched this theme to him before from experiences in actual life. He had found that "love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked between son and father." His own house "comes under the prediction; there's son against father; the king falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. We have seen", he adds "the best of our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders". This is in fact a sketch of the age, now to be depicted before us in a complete picture, where we are to be met by cruelty in its most horrid form, intrigues of the most devilish nature, ingratitude in its most glaring colour, rage and fury that know no restraint. It is a heathenish time, an especial weight is laid upon this; nature is the goddess of Lear as well as of Edmund; chance reigns above, power and force below. The best of this race know of no inner strength, of no noble will, of no calmness and self-command, of no moral principle, whereby the power of the blood can be broken, the impulse of passion controlled, and immoderate desires bridled. All, and especially the best, with fatalistic feeling attribute the acts of men to the influence of nature and the stars; eclipses of the sun and moon bring, according to Gloster's opinion, those frightful scourges of humanity; and to the true-hearted Kent, the different dispositions of Lear's daughters

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are a proof that not education, not inherited blood, but the blind stars "govern the conditions" of men. It is only the very worst of all of them, the free-thinking Edmund, who ridicules this convenient apology for our crimes and passions by imputing them to planetary influence, because he alone is conscious of inward strength of will and mind, although he turns it to profligate uses. If he, as it were on principle, gives the rein to his selfishness, it is, on the contrary, the rule of the race generally, to follow vague instincts and the bent of the inclination, and to give free course to the throng of unchained passions, without any scruple of mind or morality. It is the time of which Macbeth said: "if the death-blow were given, it were well." No sting of conscience pricks most of the evil-doers here either before, or during, or after the deed; no agonized reflection upon consequences restrains from crime; here is no Hamlet, no Macbeth, with excited fancy, with terrifying powers of imagination, with the tender feelers of an innate moral nature. These daughters of Lear, this Edmund, this Cornwall, this Oswald, frustrated in their designs, meet death without a symptom of remorse. Better natures, such as Lear and Gloster, when their faults bring on them natural punishments, fall from happiness to despair, and the one then becomes mad, and the other looks upon men as the sport of the gods. Just so Macbeth too, though at first willing to renounce the Future when in full view of a brillant Present, declares in the hour of his despair that this very life he had once thought so promising, is "a walking shadow, a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing." All human nature, in such a generation, goes blindly to extremes. Even goodness, where it does appear, fidelity,

uprightness, modesty, self-rule, everything is in the extreme. It is a humanity, as yet uncultivated, which knows of no religious ordinances, no moral laws, no ripeness of experience; a generation, near akin to the "bare, forked animal" of Edgar, cast rough out of nature's hand. That which, in this state of nature, first imposes a law and sets a limit, is relationship. The tie of blood everywhere first quenches the thirst for ruling and possessing, it destroys the selfishness of the individual. But here, self-love rends even these strongest ties of nature. A passionate father, on the point of sacrificing everything for his children, reaps apparent and real ingratitude from them, turns his wrath and persecution against dutifulness and truth, and bestows his benefits on flattery and falsehood, in consequence of which he is subjected to the most terrible ill-treatment. A tender father has begotten an adder in adultery, a natural son, who strives to destroy him, and through him his lawfully-born brother. Brother against brother, children against parents, and parents against children, husband against wife, these are incensed one against the other in the selfish spirit of persecution, a powerful picture of human brutality. The discords in these families form in a manner the central point of this tragedy, so that we are tempted to perceive at the first glance the ruling idea to be the exhibition of filial ingratitude. But in fact the idea of this work is far more comprehensive, and these family-discords are rather the body than the soul of the play. But they add to the horror of the matter; similar things, committed by stranger against stranger, would not have had the same fearful weight. These actions, heaped up as they are in the bosom of the closest relationship,

represent, says Schlegel, "a great rebellion in the moral world; the picture becomes gigantic and creates a horror, such as the idea would excite of the heavenly bodies escaping from their ordained orbits."

If we say rightly that to depict the shock of mighty passions against the natural and moral boundaries of humanity, is the true task of tragedy, we may perceive that in the piece before us this task appears, as it were, generalized; that, where other tragedies treat of separate passions, this one exhibits passion generally, so that, as every careful reader must have more or less felt, it might he called *the tragedy κατ' ἐξοχήν*. There is no other tragedy in which almost all the numerous acting characters are, as in this, equally the prey of violent mental emotions, vehement feelings, or insurmountable desires. To make this apparent at a glance, we have only to call to mind the chief characters in any striking situation. There is no picture of greater or more shameless covetousness than this Goneril, when in the presence of her husband she enviously contends with her widowed sister for the new lover, Edmund, unless it be the covetousness of this Edmund himself, who, after he has deprived father and brother of their possessions, seeks to rob the two sons-in-law of Lear of their dominions, and for this end, secretly betroths himself to both sisters. There is no picture of a fiercer temper and more quickly excited thirst for vengeance, than this Cornwall, when he tears out the eyes of a man with whom he had sought shelter, unless it be the tiger-like fury of his wife Regan, who goads him to the horrid deed. There is no livelier image of just wrath, of the anger which bursts forth in words and actions at

unrighteous deeds, than this Kent, who defies Lear and is maddened by the insolence of the steward, unless it be the involuntary ebullitions of rage in that servant of Cornwall, who kills his lord for tearing out Gloster's eyes. There is nothing which so keenly marks the empire of the passions in this whole race, as the moments when unnatural and monstrous actions stir up even soft and gentle natures into a disturbance of their whole being: such as there, where the good Gloster calls down vengeance on Regan, when she has driven her father out into the storm, "when wolves would not have howled for shelter in vain"; or there, where the noble Albany is scarcely able to keep his hands from striking Goneril when she has driven her father to madness, a man whose reverence even "the head-lugged bear would lick". But above all these single instances and these separate characters, the form of the aged Lear who gives the name to the tragedy, stands pre-eminent.

King Lear in the extremity of age and desolation looks back upon a time when he was "every inch a king", when enemies fled before his sword; and even in his madness the rays of his royal and heroic mind burst forth. In peaceful circumstances he wears a lordly form and a majesty of aspect that well becomes him; when he was excited, "when he stared, the subject quaked". If his rank and position allowed of no contradiction, still less would his temperament have borne it. He was always eccentric; he had "ever but slenderly known himself", his daughters say, that is, he had never learned to control himself; "the best and soundest of his time had been but rash" or passionate. This was his nature; it had become his habit through power and greatness, through the prosperity which had never left him

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and had never permitted a thought of misfortune and misery. Such a father fosters hypocrisy and flattery in his children only too commonly for his own punishment; this flattery again in its turn only increases still more his violence and irritability. Natural selfishness, even when of a good and affectionate kind, grows in such natures and degenerates under this family idolatry, and this perhaps all the more in this instance, the more the genuine filial love on the part of the youngest daughter came into collision with the pretended love of the elder sisters. If this haughtiness of the ruler both at home and abroad, a haughtiness which had never learned to bear the truth nor to suffer contradiction, except from the mouth of the fool whom the whip could keep within bounds, if this haughtiness were a natural imperfection, nourished by the habits of a long life, then it is conceivable that these faults would be only increased still more by the "unruly waywardness", the weakness, and sensitiveness of his "infirm years". If we imagine such a man still endowed with the whole strength of passion, which makes him not only the child but the very king of that heroic age, we shall require nothing further for the full understanding of his conduct in the opening scene, which has so often been censured. Goethe called this scene absurd; I consider it as true to nature as any other that Shakespeare has written. The enquiry concerning the degree of his daughter's love, the poet found ready to his hand and sacredly retained it according to his custom; he did not find it necessary to give it an air of greater probability, as the older play did; he left it to the spectator's imaginative power to reconcile this singular introduction to the dividing of his inheritance, by referring it to the manners of the

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time and to the disposition and age of the king. The old king wishes to resign his rank and possessions in favour of his children; in a character such as his, this act is one of great renunciation and affectionate trust. For this sacrifice he expected to receive beforehand expressions of gratitude; the selfishness which accompanied his affection produces in him the desire to enjoy the filial protestations of his daughters, while, as Coleridge says, the rooted habit of ruling changes this desire at once into an actual demand. Thereupon, from his favourite child, "the balm of his age", upon whose filial attendance he had especially reckoned, he receives in the public solemn assembly, a cold "nothing" in answer to his question, and ashamed and undeceived he gives vent to his "hideous rashness". The whole ungovernable nature of a man, who had never learned to master the ebullitions of his passion, bursts violently forth. He gives up his kingdom to the two elder sisters, in order, according to the old play, with fierce obstinacy to close the way to repentance and retractation; he banishes the remonstrating Kent, his most faithful servant; he casts off his child and loads her with sudden hate in the place of his old love; sharp-sighted in his rage, he easily frightens away her wooer Burgundy, and endeavours to dismiss the unselfish France; he gives her to him "dowered with his curse", and he calls down the heavy vengeance upon himself, which is to find its fulfilment; "so be my grave my peace, as here I give her father's heart from her!" The storm, which rages within him at this moment, he himself graphically describes at a later period, in a manner which stamps him as the most violent of a violent race; Cordelia's small fault, he says:

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> "Like an engine, wrench'd my frame of nature
> From the fix'd place; drew from my heart all love,
> And added to the gall".

It is a "poor judgment", with which, according to the declaration of the other daughters, he has cast off the youngest, but this does not make the scene absurd. It is the character of rash passion to cause violent mental shocks without sufficient grounds. The poet knew this well, and he has, therefore, contrasted this rash passion of Lear at the same moment with the just and well-founded rage of the brave Kent, who, even while his life is in danger, tells the king plainly of his injustice, and casts upon him the heavy reproach:

> "Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow
> Upon the foul disease".

This disease is now to seize the old hero: the punishment of his last folly follows close upon it, but the long-deferred strokes belong to a long catalogue of faults, which reach only a certain climax in the act of the division of his kingdom. Now that he has renounced his paternal authority, the long submission of his elder daughters to the humours of his old age, gives way at once to the abnegation of all filial piety, and their former hypocrisy and falsehood is changed into open ingratitude. Till now, they had flattered him like dogs, they had "said *ay* and *no* to everything he said"; too late he sees that from the beginning this was "no good divinity". Now the hitherto smiling countenances grow dark; they now seek to despoil him of the few possessions and outward marks of rank he had retained after giving them all the rest; they now reproach him to his face with

his childish old age and with the foolishness of his plan; they turn the rod against their father, shameless in words as they are wicked in deeds. At the first moment the two sisters display no characteristic difference; "as like as a crab is to a crab", says the fool; on a closer inspection it is surprising, what a wide and clearly defined contrast there is between the two. The elder, Goneril, with the "wolfish visage" and the dark "frontlet" of ill-humour, is a masculine woman, full of independent purposes and projects, whilst Regan appears more feminine, rather instigated by Goneril, more passive, and more dependent. Goneril's boundless unrestrained nature, which renders her a true child of that fearful age, shews itself in bloody undertakings, originating in her own brain, whilst Regan's evil nature appears rather in her urging on the atrocities of others, as when Kent is set in the stocks and Gloster's eyes are torn out. The worst of the two is married to a noble gentleman (Albany), whom she reviles as "a moral fool", whose mildness and repose seem to her "milky gentleness", and whose quiet power and resolute manliness, she only later finds reason to discover. The better sister has the worst husband in Cornwall, a man whose wrathful disposition allows of no impediment and bears no remonstrance. The first at the beginning appears to govern her husband, who recognizes her depth of foresight, and, until he penetrates her character, avoids discords with her; she pursues her aims independently, scarcely listens to him, scarcely deigns to answer him; whereas Regan is obsequious and dependent towards the gloomy, laconic, and powerful Cornwall, who is immoveable and resolute in his determination. At the very first cause, (Act I. sc. 1.) Goneril appears as the instigator and Regan

as her echo. She it is, who afterwards begins to put restraints upon the king, she first treats him disrespectfully, halves and dismisses his attendants, whilst Regan avoids her father with some remains of awe. But she fears her sister still more than her father; she rather suffers her father's messenger to be mistreated than Goneril's servant. Her sister knows her weakness; she does not consider it sufficient to write to her, she goes to her, follows her, to be sure of her co-operation in her measures. Regan cannot hurl forth vehement and hasty words like Goneril; she has not the same fierce eyes, her glance (though Lear in his madness indeed calls it a squint,) is more full of comfort, her nature is softer and more cordial, and Lear, it seems, hardly trusts himself, to penetrate her character closely; when, in his delusion, he sits in judgment upon her, he will have her heart anatomized. She utters inoffensively harsher things to her father than Goneril does, and yet her father hesitates to utter his curse upon her, as upon her sister, a curse even twice repeated against Goneril. The latter receives it with marble coldness, but Regan shudders, and fears to draw upon herself the like malediction. It is not until Goneril in her presence has entirely laid open her own unblushing cruelty and barbarity towards their old father, that Regan grows bolder also, and drives away the king's train of knights; she will have no one but himself. When Goneril afterwards insists that the old man shall taste the consequences of his obstinacy and folly, and forbids Gloster, in spite of the raging storm, to harbour him, she chimes in, with her usual dependent weakness. After the brood of serpents have got rid of the old father, there begins a domestic feud between the families. Goneril digs deeper mines, to which the mistreatment of

Lear has been only the prelude. She wishes to seize on the whole kingdom, she betroths herself to Edmund during her husband's life, she rejoices in Cornwall's death, poisons Regan, joins with Edmund in ordering Cordelia's execution, and finally attempts the life of her husband, whom she now fears, because he had discovered with horror her misdeeds. Here again Regan appears throughout less blameable and vile; she makes no engagement with Edmund till after Cornwall's death; she unsuspectingly confides letters for Edmund to Goneril's treacherous servant; she falls a victim to her sister's poison, being herself clear from all attempts of the kind; in every respect she is more contracted in her nature than her sister, whose "woman's will is of undistinguish'd space".

The unfolding of Lear's character under the persecutions of these daughters, is the true central point of the play, not only according to the course of the original story, but also according to our poet's apprehension of it; the thoroughly passionate nature of the man, who stands foremost as the peculiar representative of this singular age, is here depicted in all the fulness of its inordinate strength. The picture is painted in such strong colours, that it scarcely requires our explanation; we will therefore only direct our attention to the most prominent features, which display this tragic hero's want of self-government, the immensity of his sufferings, and the obstinacy of his actions. At the outset, when Lear perceives the first symptoms of neglect, he acknowledges them not to himself, and imputes them to his own suspicions; when his servants perceive them likewise, he grows irritable; when the time-serving Oswald forces them unequivocally on his notice, he is at

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once transported with rage, and forgets his dignity so far as to strike him. Without being remarkably irritated, we may believe, that Lear had allowed, in his earlier mood, many slights to have passed in silence. As is usual after sudden passion, his violence is followed by calmness and quiet. The old man is reserved and thoughtful; he begins indeed to perceive the folly of having resigned everything to his daughters; he is stung with remorse at having cast off Cordelia, and with longing for the daughter, with whom he would have been safe. The fool grieves over her banishment, this was the first sting of repentance which affected Lear; the fool's jests upon the folly of stripping himself of all, fix his thoughts far more upon the seriousness of this reproach than that its playful guise should have been able to amuse him. But this more contemplative mood is not long to last; the growing rancour at his ill-usage disturbed it already, indignation at the ingratitude of his daughters is to destroy it altogether. Goneril, after the ill-treatment of her servant, suddenly lets fall her mask. This one moment shatters his whole physical and mental strength. In this and in the first scene, when the whole power of Lear's passionate and boundless indignation is still unbroken, the actor must put forth all the bodily strength that he possesses. His first disappointment as to his daughter and himself, his strange reception of her words, his singular enquiry after her name, these are the first symptoms of Lear's subsequent insanity, as it is the calm immediately preceding the storm that bursts forth against Goneril, which only repeats the scene with Cordelia in a more exaggerated form. Goneril has not yet done anything, but asked him to lessen his train, and Albany assures him that he is guiltless, nay that he even

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forebodes not the cause of his irritation, when Lear utters the fearful curse upon his first-born, which has not its parallel in Œdipus nor in any tragedy on a similar subject; and he repeats it afterwards with fresh emphasis, just as he once more subsequently renews it before Regan. His next sensation is one of mingled rage and shame, that his daughters' ingratitude should have thus shaken his manhood as to make him weep, a remembrance which causes him deep pain even in his madness; his next thought is that he will see the sister burn with hatred against her sister, that he will lay aside the goodness of his nature, and violently take from Goneril her share of the inheritance, that he may shew himself to her again in his character of ruler and avenger, and, as he subsequently says "do such things as shall be the terrors of the earth". We see from these unmeasured intentions, which arise out of one first unsettled cause and proceed forthwith to extremity, how much mischief this mistaken man even now heaps upon himself, if even his former errors had not been to blame for the conduct of his daughters; had there been indeed a spark of humanity left in Goneril, he might have quenched it by this hasty curse. He comes in front of Gloster's castle; he sees his messenger Caius in the stocks; at once a convulsive burst of rage swells again in his bosom. He inquires for his second daughter, who avoids him; he desires to see her and her husband; Gloster excuses them on the plea of sickness and hints at Cornwall's "fiery quality", and this is one of the most characteristic passages, well adapted for bringing out Lear's disposition, where at this mere word, his rage foams and boils, not so much on account of the intractableness of his children, as that any one should dare to urge the

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excuse of a "fiery quality" *to him.* At this moment he seems to have attained the utmost limits of his bodily strength; the ferment in his temper now subsides, the furious outbursts grow weak. It would seem, as if he would compel his "rising heart" to calmness and self-command by reason and will, but in truth this same "rising heart" chokes his breath; his manhood is paralyzed; he cannot strain his sinews any more, he can only fear that they will break; that he has no more curse for Regan, has its ground partly in this exhaustion; his outbursts of wrath take the milder form of sarcasm; he sinks to softness, even to tears and entreaties. While before Goneril he had had such violent rage at his command, that for very shame he was angry at his tears, he now indeed must implore the gods to "touch him with noble anger", and his tears flow, although he abjures them. Before, at his first experience of Goneril's undutifulness, Lear had already called upon the gods for the patience which he knew he lacked, and had implored to be kept from madness, which in the aged overburdened man must be the natural result of the unnatural strain upon his mind; now he feels himself close upon that fearful end. A picture of dreadful sublimity and wild grandeur beyond all admiration, is now unrolled before us, when the helpless old man, cast out by his children into darkness, storm, and desolation, or driven by his own unbending obstinacy, wanders without shelter, with bare head, stripped of his last possession, transformed from a king into a beggar, thrown from the lap of luxury into the extremity of want, and into all the unchained horrors of nature, to all which the rising storm of inward misery makes him insensible and dead. The scenes, in which Lear, on the point of

madness, appears in company with Edgar who feigns madness, and with the fool who still endeavours with crushed spirit to follow his vocation, these scenes have not their equal on the stage; and far from being too horribly distorted, and too harsh in effect, they make everywhere a deep though not painful impression, if the silent acting of the persons around Lear is correct, if Edgar's aside-spoken remarks are uttered in suitable tones, if the fool's last words are properly prepared, words with which the poet indisputably intended to designate the faithful dependent's breaking heart. The king's madness bursts forth upon his alarming and dismal meeting with the mad Edgar,— a touch of nature, the truth of which one feels without the help of experience, although this too might be adduced. The poet has not allowed the king's disturbed imagination to fix itself, as with the insane generally, upon one definite idea. It may appear at first, as if this were his intention. When Lear is first upon the road to madness, his thoughts dwell upon the ingratitude of his children; at the same time the bitter feeling of necessity and poverty oppresses him, and he feels remorse that, in his prosperity, he had thought too little of the "poor naked wretches" who, like him now, with houseless heads and unfed sides "bide the pelting of this pitiless storm". In the moment of this consideration his madness breaks out, when he suddenly sees bodily before him this helpless being, the "thing itself", the naked man, to bring himself on a level with whom he strips off his clothes. Before and after the paroxysms, his fancy is besides busy with thoughts of revenge upon his daughters; the old stubbornness, the old passionate nature of the man displays itself further in this condition; he wishes to "have

a thousand with red burning spits come hizzing in" upon his daughters; he holds judgment upon them; he talks of bows and halberds, soldiers, press-money, parole, challenges, arms, and imprisonment. Nevertheless the poet allows not the ravings to dwell even upon this characteristic idea of vengeance. Had ways and means been given to Lear's desire for revenge, the satisfaction of these desires would have drawn his thoughts into another channel; he would, according to his principles, have revenged himself frantically, and thus have satisfied the violence of his nature; but as his active emotions must sink to passive ones, with the feeling of powerlessness and the bitterness that is allied to it, the vehemence of these emotions turns within, and flatters him with at least the semblance of revenge. Yet even now his susceptibility to violent emotions will not suffer Lear to rest upon these consoling images. His satisfaction in the idea of revenge passes only like a red thread through the midst of his ravings, but he continually starts away from it, he has lucid intervals, he mingles reason with folly; now he is dull to the reality of things around him, now he perverts them entirely, now he is led to observations on distant matters, and now to those suitable to the matter. At times it may seem, as if the poet only made use of Lear's wanderings, as he did of Hamlet's feigned insanity, to introduce general satirical allusions: as when he sees "the great image of authority" in the dreaded dog in office, when he applauds the flourishing state of sin, when he sees crime in power, punishing its own misdeeds in others, when he denounces bribery, and asserts that "none offend who have the power to seal the accuser's lips". But all this is, however, only the strong utterance of

a moral despair, strikingly characteristic of the man, who, broken by age and trouble as well as wrecked in fortune, power, and greatness, must in a moral respect also be disappointed of the world, in which he has to suffer much more than he thinks he deserves. The poet has placed him, finally, at the very extreme of physical, mental, and moral disorder, by the side of Gloster, who, at this same time, was saved from a similar fall. Gloster's pliant and gentler disposition was only bent under the equal weight of age and sorrow, Lear's strained and full nature on the contrary was, as it were, shattered, — a nature which, formed for exertion, was only at last, even in the relaxation consequent on the failure of its powers, even in its madness, to receive a new degree of tension; until at last repose returns with exhaustion, and healing from repose.

Kent and the fool adhere to Lear in his misery; the one brings about his reunion with Cordelia, the other strives by jesting, at first to divert his ill-humour and then to keep him from madness. Both are superior children of the age, as it is represented to us throughout the play, but still they are children of the age; opposite natures in a moral respect, when compared with Edmund and the like, yet not purely opposite as regards the character common to the race represented. They possess a mastery over nature and inclination; they put to shame the daughters of the old king by their faithful adherence and devotion; the worthy Kent suppresses his indignation and sense of injury, and continues to serve his outcast master; the fool mockingly praises him and rewards him with the offer of his own cap and bells for his true service to the neglected

and unhappy man; he himself cleaves just as much to Lear, carries on his jester's part with a heavy heart, care-worn, suppressing his own anguish with songs and jokes. But even in this mastery over self, both, however, appear as appertaining to this age; inconsiderately by their means, and their very nature, they augment the inward pangs and outward woes of Lear, instead of alleviating or obviating them. The fool's strokes at Lear's follies, are, from the first, beyond a joke; instead of distracting his thoughts, they drive him to dwell upon those which torture him; even when driven out in the night of the storm, the fool carries on his biting satire; and however well his jests may serve the æsthetic end of not allowing the spectator to dwell too painfully and continually upon the violent outbursts of Lear's madness, they are, on the other hand, psychologically considered, inappropriate and injudicious as a remedy against this very malady. It is just the same with Kent's uprightness. His just anger against Lear in the opening scene, shews him to be a truly faithful servant, but it only still more aggravates the contradictory spirit and the obstinacy of the passionate king. The contrast which Kent affords to that time-serving soul of baseness, the steward Oswald, whom no insolence and mistreatment can excite into bitterness and passion, places the power, truth, and fidelity of the former in the strongest light, but in this indeed he shows that he has "more man than wit" in him, he appears in his genuine and just wrath as unrestrained as Lear in his ungrounded fury, and he helps by his vehemence to increase the bitter discord between the latter and his daughters. He aids the king in his abandoned condition with restless activity, he sacrifices himself, and

dies at last worn out with excess of true devotion, but all this merely on account of his disguise is entirely unavailing for the comfort and support of the aged sovereign. Thus the final deliverance and restoration of the insane and wandering Lear is left to be the work of his daughter Cordelia. But before we come to this point, we will insert a few remarks here upon the episode of Gloster, in order that, in our discussion upon the winding up of the plot, we may compare the two analogous cases for the sake of greater perspicuity.

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The similar discord in Gloster's family has arisen from points in Gloster's character entirely opposite to those in Lear's. A good, mild, unexcitable man, of easy mind and manners, lax and superstitious, Gloster has created his own trouble, just as Lear has drawn down his upon himself. He has a natural son, through whom his breach of the marriage-vow is to be avenged; he has indeed added to this, all that in education and treatment could provoke the bastard against him. For nine years he kept him away from his house, and intends to send him away again; he is ashamed of him and owns this to a stranger with little delicacy in Edmund's presence. The secret machinations of this base-born second son are first of all directed against the legitimate first-born, Edgar, but they re-act upon the father, who credulously allows himself to become the bastard's tool. In Edmund, Shakespeare has repeated the main features of Richard III. and Iago; rather sketched, we might say, as if he left the character for granted. He has endowed him with outward beauty, which (to use Bacon's words) is just that with respect to his wickedness, which a pure garment is to ugliness; he invests him with

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the premeditated wickedness and bitterness of Richard, a bitterness awakened in Richard by disgust at his natural deformity, and in Edmund by annoyance at the defect of his birth and the family prejudices. Like Richard, Edmund aspires (and he indeed without declaring it,) after the prospect which offers itself with respect to the kingdom; he brings ruin on this account first into his own house, and then by his shameless connection with both Lear's daughters, into their two families; then, with Goneril's concurrence, upon Lear and Cordelia herself. With this far-stretching ambition, Edmund unites Iago's cold reason and selfish calculation, his realistic free-thinking, his indifference to any means that suit him, his hypocrisy which considers lack of dissimulation as mental weakness, his perseverance and skill in changing the modes by which he pursues his ends, ever just as opportunity serves. First he will befool his father by a dialogue between Edgar and himself; then Edgar's unsuspiciousness suggests to him to let him rather hear a conversation of their father's; then he uses Cornwall's unexpected arrival to frighten away Edgar. As in these instances, he strides forward throughout with the security of a master-spirit, careless in his open knavery, nay even straightforward in his artful intrigues. With frightful heartlessness he afterwards betrays to Cornwall his father's connection with France, in order to get the old man out of his way. He then serves the British cause so well as spy and warrior, that he compels even Albany's praise. Then however this success in arms over-elevates him; forgetting his prudence, he ventures to challenge truth and justice in a battle by ordeal and falls under the avenging sword of his brother. In the dying

man, one spark of satisfaction is still kindled, that he was yet beloved, and he is touched too late with some pity for Lear and Cordelia, though this is only in consequence of a casual mention of their names, and, as it were, in spite of his nature; he dies, like Lear's daughter, obdurate and unrepenting. — Such is the son by whom the old Gloster allows himself to be led astray, to rob the noble Edgar of his inheritance as Lear deprives Cordelia, and to pursue his life with cruel obstinacy. For this purpose he confides in Edmund, as Lear does in his elder daughters, and reaps the most shameless treachery for his true adherence to Lear. We cannot justify the putting out of Gloster's eyes *upon the stage*; although Shakespeare, by the singular circumstance of making a nameless and unknown servant take instant vengeance on the perpetrator of the deed, has given prompt satisfaction to the natural indignation consequent upon such an atrocity. The blinding indeed was Shakespeare's express intention, but this could certainly have been attained as well, if the action had been placed behind the scenes. He stumbled, Gloster himself says, when he saw; and Edgar perceives the judgment of Providence, in that "the dark and vicious place, where Edmund was begot, cost him his eyes." Poor and blind, Gloster now wanders about like Lear; led *by* the child whom he had cast off, as Lear was led *to* his banished one; in like despair, though it takes different ways. Just like Lear, he bethinks himself upon poverty for the first time in his own need, and preaches that community of goods, which he had never thought of when he possessed them. "Heavens", he says,

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"Let the superfluous, and lust-dieted man,
That cleaves your ordinance, that will not see
Because he doth not feel, feel your power quickly;
So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough"!

Just so, like Lear, he despairs of the world and records, like him, the triumph of the wicked, expressing it in that fearful sentence: —

"As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport"!

Even before his eyes were put out, when oppressed alone by his own and Lear's family troubles, Gloster called himself "almost mad"; subsequently, at the sight of Lear, he wishes for himself the same fate, that "his thoughts might be severed from his griefs". But his softer and more elastic nature prevents this; despair drives the less obdurate but equally abandoned one to suicide, which never entered the thoughts of the revengeful Lear; thus will he scorn the cruelty of fate and escape its arbitrary will. But from this step Edgar restrains him and becomes to him in his despair a spirit-healer and a ministering angel, just as Cordelia is for Lear.

We have now arrived at the splendid contrasts, which Shakespeare has placed by way of expiation, in opposition to the violent race with whom we have become acquainted; and by which he makes us emerge from these barbarous times. We see Edgar, Lear's god-son, (the poet forgot in this designation, that these were heathen-times,) the innocent and pure soul, so far from evil that he suspects none, stirred by no passionate blood, driven by no wild desire, like all the rest; he has inherited his father's mildness,

with a nature more calm, and a mind by far more versatile. Suddenly surprised by ill-fortune, like Lear and afterwards his father, believing that the latter had cruelly cast him off, a guiltless outlaw, unable to escape, and in danger of his life, since all ports are closed and his picture has been sent as a warrant for his apprehension, compelled to act the part of the helpless pauper, he rapidly resolves, with foresight, adroitness, and a skilful compliance with circumstances, to play the part of one of those Bedlam-beggars, who in wild attire and with a madness half feigned were accustomed to wander over England. When he first makes his appearance in this condition he tells us in a confused manner how "the foul fiend has led him through fire and through flame, through ford and whirlpool, over bog and quagmire"; how he "hath laid knives under his pillow, and halters in his pew; set ratsbane by his porridge; made him proud of heart to ride over four-inched bridges"; he hints that he has been tempted to suicide as his father was afterwards. This trait, as well as his feigned madness, might induce us to believe, that we have another Hamlet before us, a good soul, who would rather endure wrong than revenge it. But this he is not. There is nothing in the healthy youth of this sickly sentimental nature. As soon as he has seen Lear's greater misfortune, he manfully collects himself, showing himself in this the son of a new and better age, and he is ready as the stronger man to bear his smaller sorrow patiently. He warns himself to be ever circumspect, and to watch the storm of time like a wise pilot. A greater blow awaits him; he meets his blinded father, and gains the conviction of Edmund's treachery. Even this, instead of overwhelming him, rouses him, in contrast to his easily depressed father,

to fresh self-command and mastery over his grief and misery.
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He had just been saying that he, at the height of misery, had only hope remaining, and had not to fear the "lament able change from the best", when he meets a still more wretched man, his father, whose misery makes him even more miserable than he was. But this very moment raises him from the passive sufferer into the active helper, although he can scarcely contain himself for grief and pain. He is to his father, in himself alone, all that Kent, the fool, and Cordelia are to Lear. All that Kent is: for he is also a disguised and faithful though disgraced attendant; all that the fool is: for he carries on his vocation, "playing the fool to sorrow", although more discerning than the fool, he knows it to be a "bad trade, angering itself and others"; all that Cordelia is: for he heals the inward despair of his father, like a spiritual comforter. He is in this age of obstinate and rude characters, the versatile, odyssean spirit, which is never lacking in such heroic times, a man at once a sufferer and a hero, brave and most prudent in the midst of the dangers surrounding him; he grows greater at every step. To play this character, "every inch an actor" is required. He changes his part at least six different times. At first he is Edgar; then poor Tom; then, forgetting himself while his mind is occupied about his father, he falls somewhat out of his assumed part; after this, he describes the immeasurable depth of the pretended cliff, as if he stood shuddering on the edge of it; then he is the dweller on the seashore, where Gloster imagines himself to have fallen; then, after the meeting of his father with Lear, he is again another beggar, and before the steward, he becomes changed into a peasant; in the lists with Edmund he is an unknown cham-

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pion; and finally he is again himself. In these various characters, he is cunningly circumspect to the extreme; his father, on first meeting with poor Tom, is faintly reminded of his Edgar; then, and whenever the fear of recognition appears greater, his dissembling becomes stronger. But this dissembling is not, therefore, induced by a fear and irritability like Hamlet's; Edgar goes from his father's corpse, from Kent's death-struggle, from emotions the most violent, to do battle with Edmund and comes off victorious. Endowed with such self-command under such sorrows, we conceive that Edgar is able to perform the most important services for his father in his disguise; he sustains him physically and saves him mentally. The forsaken blind man intends to throw himself from the steep cliff, Edgar leads him, but he only "trifles with his despair, to cure it". He persuades him, when he thinks to have taken the leap, that a miracle has saved him, that some fiend had tempted him, that he is happy because "the clearest gods who make them honours of men's impossibilities" have preserved him. Gloster reflects on this. He "will henceforth bear affliction, till it do cry out itself, *enough, enough,* and, *die*"! Lear's misery is made known to him, it bows him anew to the earth, he implores the gods to take his life, that his "worser spirit" tempt him not again "to die before they please". "Well pray you, father"! says Edgar in his new character of a poor man "made tame by fortune's blows". Goneril's steward appears, and threatens Gloster with death; the old man welcomes his end, as the boon for which he had entreated the gods; but Edgar preserves him. Both are near the battle, Lear and Cordelia are taken prisoners; Gloster, once more driven from his last hope, desires to remain and wait for death.

"What, in ill thoughts again"? says his noble son reproachfully; "men must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither: ripeness is all". Again Gloster acknowledges the truth of Edgar's words. Not until his son makes himself known, relates his story and implores his blessing, does his stricken heart break in a conflict of grief and joy. But he dies resigned and smiling. Over his corpse and at the recognition of Edgar, the heart-strings of the noble Kent "began to crack", and at the relation of these touching sorrows, Albany is about to give way, and a ray of human feeling pierces the soul of the dying Edmund. We also, readers and spectators, go away from this accumulation of woe with emotions softened and satisfied.

And this state of mind is still more increased by the character and fate of Cordelia. She is one of the tenderest of Shakespeare's creations, hard to be understood, yet simple and clear to those who feel rightly. The actress, who cannot entirely forget mere acting, will never be fit for this part. Mrs. Barry, who played it in Garrick's time to the admiration of our Lichtenberg, was, according to that severe critic, endowed with a kind of holy beauty, with a gentle innocence and goodness, as little satirical as heroic. If the actress is not a person of the highest general talent, it necessarily requires one, it seems, of such a nature, that the unaffected grace and innocence of Cordelia may not be ruined on the stage by theatrical tricks. The dying Lear gives us a perfect and visible picture of her sweet feminine nature in those few words: "her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low: an excellent thing in woman!" Richer in love than in tongue, she possesses not the "glib and oily art, to speak and purpose not"; what she "well intends, she'll do't

before she speaks". The ready speech and flattery of her sisters she would have despised merely as superfluous; still more from a sense of truth — (silentium ambit veritatem. Baco.); most of all, because she had none of that craving and self-seeking, which makes them so eloquent. Feminine simplicity and modesty, a want or "tardiness in nature", as her future husband calls it, helps to chain her tongue in the opening scene, and makes her utter the fatal word which decides her fate. The natural shyness of such a being, to speak before a great assembly, the perfect truthfulness of her soul which directs her to retain half her love for her husband, these combine to cause this strange reticence; above all, a sickening contempt and scorn of her sisters, which she cannot longer suppress, co-operates in her decision. In the "milky gentleness" of her disposition, there is a drop of gall from her father's obstinacy mingled; by this delicate stroke, Shakespeare has linked her to the age and to the family character. Inconsiderate action and a certain obstinacy are undeniably exhibited at her first appearance, although they spring from the fairest grounds. When her father represents her in a hateful light and touches her honour, — when the king of France, a reader of character, divines her nature, — this warm dew, following the frost of her father's hatred, opens her heart, and she gains as quickly the love of a husband as she had the curse of her father. In the progress of the story she now proves how fully her intention was to fulfil her bounden duty to that father; she proves also how it belongs to her nature to do what she intends before she speaks. Foreseeing the result, she at once on reaching France, enters into communication with Kent and keeps spies at the courts of her sisters. She hears

of their heartless acts, of her father being cast out in the
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storm, and then all the beauty of her inmost soul is revealed. In such a night, she says, "her enemy's dog, though he had bit her, would have stood against her fire", — she is a being, such as Shakespeare in his Pericles has depicted the holy, pious Marina. When she received the letters, informing her of these indignities, her tears flowed; she tried to govern her grief, but it overcame her; she was moved, but not to rage, only to patience and sorrow; she was like sunshine and rain at once; the smiles upon her lip "seemed not to know what guests were in her eyes"; still less what guests the letters brought; in her true harmless manner she gives way entirely to the feeling which overcame her. And thus she acts even in a fatal manner, by now stepping forward for the restoration of her father. Henceforth she has only the one thought, to save him; filial feeling breaks now as strongly forth into action, as at first, when words were required, it had seemed to draw back. Hence it happens, that she commits a second and still greater imprudence than before, which makes her now a martyr to her filial love as before to her love of truth. In this unsuspiciousness, in this involuntary obedience to the promptings of sacred feelings, she resembles Desdemona. At that time, in her conviction of doing right, she had not weighed in what she did too little for her indeed deceived parent; she does not now weigh in what she does too much for him, — what, done otherwise, might have led to another end. Ethical justice is just in this play emphasized so strongly by the poet himself: *where* lies the justice of Cordelia's death? Why is Edgar to have a better fate, when he is just that to his father, which Cordelia is to Lear? But it is this very

difference in the fate of the two, which guides us to the meaning of the poet. It is precisely in the wise and prudent forethought evident in all his actions which places Edgar as a pure contrast to Cordelia. His means stand ever in well-considered relation to his aims; it is not so with Cordelia's. She attacks *England* with a French force, in order to restore her *father*. The whole responsibility of this step falls upon her. *She* has besought her husband with "important tears" to give her this army. He himself was not urgent respecting this war; he appears not (and this Tieck and Steevens would not understand, although the meaning is evident,) with Cordelia in England; he is occupied with other affairs of state. Cordelia has no need to tell *us*, that "no blown ambition incites her arms"; we believe it in her; but at the time when she ought to have said it to Albany, she omits it; she touches only upon the one thought of her filial love. When she has found her father in Dover, she resigns the command of her army to her general; this makes the attack against a divided and endangered kingdom more serious. The adverse and dissimilar brothers-in-law advance together against this danger, the noble Albany with the horrid Edmund. But this Albany also is far more circumspect than Cordelia. Actually in discord with Goneril and Edmund, he has, after Cornwall's death, the prospect of the sole sovereignty, when he shall have conquered and set aside Lear and Cordelia. Notwithstanding he declares in the presence of his allies that he separates the French invasion from Lear's cause, and this Cordelia had never declared. "The business of this war," says Albany, "toucheth us only as France invades our land, not bolds the king;" he will favour him and use the captives

according to their merits and *his own safety*. A declaration
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similarly explicit from Cordelia to Albany, might have set aside the war and changed the catastrophe. But just such an explanation, Cordelia, from her peculiar nature, neglects. Her last fault is like her first; what is understood of itself, she cares not to talk of; that of which her heart is fullest, she can least express. So long as she lived and warred, Albany would have to fear that she would subject the whole kingdom to France; this idea, however, or the possibility that a French army could conquer on English ground, Shakespeare's patriotic feeling never even allows him to admit. Cordelia, like Desdemona, falls a sacrifice to her own nature; but the circumstances that accompany her death, are of a much more reconciling kind. She is conquered in battle, but the higher conquest, which is all she thought of, she has attained, she has outwardly restored and inwardly saved her father. She had come with boundless thanks for Kent who had supported her father, with promises of all her treasures for the physician who should heal him: even these traits betray the overflowing of her mind with the one idea of her father's restoration, which leads her to forget every subordinate thought as to her own safety. When Lear hears of her arrival, deep shame allows him not to see her. The daughter stands beside him as he sleeps, overflowing with filial feelings, and with tender words. He awakes, and glad anxiety surprises her; now again she has no words to say. The awakened Lear speaks wanderingly, yet to the purpose; ashamed in the presence of Cordelia he feels himself as if in the fires of purgatory; when he is again master of his senses, he doubts anew; he knows her when restored to his senses and falls on his knees

before her; he is subdued into a tender mood, which in such a nature surprises us with a reconciliatory feeling. Was anything ever in any poetry more touching or on the stage more effective than this recognition? Lichtenberg declared, that the remembrance of this scene, once seen, would last as long as his life. To me it appears, that it alone makes ample amends for all the bitter subject of this tragedy; and indeed the whole of the fourth act of Lear has not its equal in dramatic poetry. When both are then brought as prisoners before Edmund, Cordelia acknowledges that "with best meaning they have incurred the worst"; but she feels herself strong for her own part "to out-frown fortune's frown". She asks her father, whether they "shall not see these sisters"; this perhaps might have led to their safety, but Lear himself, in the full happiness of having recovered her, thirsts for the solitude of a prison as for a blessed abode in paradise. The inner life in the altered man supersedes the outer. The old nature indeed is true to itself to the last minute. Even now he curses his daughters, as subsequently in a paroxysm of his former strength he slays Cordelia's executioner. Had he lived and triumphed with Cordelia, revenge might have governed him again, it might have robbed him of our sympathy and might not have permitted him to attain to that peace, to which the poet intends to lead him. The death of his child forcibly retains him in that peace and gentleness, in which he is to depart to a better life. His curse had once been: "so be my grave my peace, as here I give her father's heart from her!" It is fulfilled when he restores his heart to her. Over her corpse, the recognition of Kent, the death of his daughters, the recovery of his throne, are but as sounds which scarcely

reach his ear; no worldly joy can rebuild this "great decay". To Kent's contentment, and we must indeed say to our own, he follows his departed child, set free from "the rack of this rough world". In his purified nature he had said to the imprisoned Cordelia: "Upon such sacrifices, the gods themselves throw incense!" He recognized in her the martyr and saviour, — the precursor of a better time. This was Shakespeare's meaning in her death; if indeed like Desdemona she falls partly in consequence of her nature, she falls at the same time a sacrifice to the errors of the age and surrounding circumstances. "Thou hast one daughter," so it says in the play, "who redeems nature from the general curse, which twain have brought her to." As to these angel-forms in Shakespeare's plays, to those pure ones who fall guiltless sacrifices to Fate, death is but the entrance to their proper home, so in the spirit of this being, her death for her father and the sealing of her filial love with her blood, is no misfortune for her. What Kent said at the beginning, he makes true of himself as it was of Cordelia: her life was "held but as pawn to wage against the enemies" of her king and father; nor did they "fear to lose it, his safety being the motive".

The tragic end of a whole generation of a bloody race, is thus depicted in King Lear. Albany said to Goneril:

> "If that the heavens do not their visible spirits
> Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
> 'Twill come,
> Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
> Like monsters of the deep".

The gods *do* revenge these deeds, as we see, by making the monsters of the race destroy one another. Cornwall

falls by his own cruelty, Lear's daughters by suicide and fratricide, Edmund by the hand of his persecuted brother, Gloster and Lear in consequence of their own faults. When the last of these occurs, and Lear brings Cordelia's corpse in his arms, Kent and Edgar ask each other in full consciousness of these dread judgments of heaven, whether this is "the promised end", or the "image of that horror". The whole race, whom we have seen in action, lie dead around; only Edgar and Albany, the noble promisers of a new future, survive the period of wrath, of which it is said, at the conclusion of the piece, the "young shall never see so much" again. For the inward healing of the whole time is accomplished. The gods are acknowledged by Gloster; and Lear, who had lost sight of them in that stormy night, sees them again "throwing incense" upon the deeds of his daughter; Edgar recognizes the justice of heaven as fulfilled in father and brother; Kent gladly lays down his earthly life; even in Edmund a ray of improvement shines; Cordelia goes to her death of sacrifice, conquering Fate. From the past ages of the ancient and mediæval nations, the great epic myths have descended to us, — the Trojan legend and the Nibelungen Lied, which celebrate in similar manner the downfall of barbarous races, whose place is occupied by descendants of more advanced civilization; and out of such periods of Tantalus-like horror, those Iphigenias and Penelopes arise, who like Cordelia here, are the precursors of a better generation. With these tragic epics of old can this epic tragedy alone be compared. The drama has not space sufficient to depict the struggles of whole races and peoples, it must limit itself to the representation of a similar catastrophe in families. But in this

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narrower compass, the very task of the epos is accomplished. The poet, in this work, with this creation of his own, approaches the most comprehensive images of epic national poetry, as they have grown through the series of centuries; and Aristotle, could he have seen this, would now more than ever have awarded his praise to tragedy: that with smaller means it attained to the great object of the epos. Though Shakespeare at this time might have read the Homeric poems, he had no idea of emulating these magnificent myths in his drama. At the most, his great success was the result of a vague desire to strain the theme of his tragedies ever higher and higher in the presence of such poetic performances. That this work would admit of so bold a comparison, he imagined just as little, as that his Hamlet would be a mirror to generations of centuries to come. But if the uncalculating instinct of genius in our poet has anywhere or in any wise produced greater things than his conscious and far-seeing understanding planned, it is here. With what wonderful, and thoroughly inexplicable profoundness this instinct in this greatest tragic poet has wrought, compared with the grandest creations of epic poetry, we first perceive when we place Cymbeline by the side of Lear. It is indeed remarkable enough, that at the side of those grandest heroic epics of old times, both Greece and Germany possess a second epopee of a more domestic character and a more conciliatory purport, the Odyssey at the side of the Iliad, Gudrun at the side of the Nibelungen. In both there is the same theme, the fidelity of a married or betrothed wife, which, after many and severe trials, meets with its reward. Most remarkably the very same subject is treated of also in that song of Imogen

(Cymbeline), which not alone in its whole inward bearing, www.libtool.com.cn but even in its outward construction, appears as a companion-piece to Lear, as the Odyssey to the Iliad. Allowing it to be mere chance which places these three pair of poems in parallel reference to each other, it is still one of the most profound chances, in which history pleased to sport, and only as such it must awaken our keenest interest.

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CYMBELINE.

Cymbeline, in its style and versification has always been compared with the Winter's Tale, a play to which it also closely approaches in the date of its origin. Dr. Forman saw the Winter's Tale performed in May, 1611, and probably in this or in the preceding year Cymbeline also; critics are agreed in assigning the year 1609 as the date of its production. We too have nothing to say against this date, as the mention of the subjects of Troilus and Antony and a number of other reminiscences of the study of the ancients, indicate the period when the poet wrote most of his plays upon subjects of antiquity. This, however, does not prevent us from considering this play next after Lear, on account of its internal relation with this tragedy, just as little as the somewhat similar time, which separates Macbeth from Hamlet, hindered us from placing these works side by side.

The subject of Cymbeline, exactly like that of Lear, is formed by the combination of two different actions, derived from widely different sources, and these again appear on the more extended background of political and military events, as in Lear. With respect to the compass of the

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action, the richness of the matter, and the epic character gained thereby, we have before connected the two pieces. We then compared also the two plays with regard to their national and chronological character. Cymbeline, like Lear, belongs to the heathen times of the aboriginal Britons. But, in this play, we are not sent back to the dark ages that preceded our era, but we are transported to the bright period of Augustus Cæsar, where Roman civilization had already spread its improving influence as far as Britain. It is not a time as that of which Gloster said, the *best* of it was machination, hollowness, and treachery; but Leonatus boasts in Rome of his "accomplished countrymen"; they are,

> "Men more order'd, than when Julius Cæsar
> Smil'd at their lack of skill, but found their courage
> Worthy his frowning at: Their discipline
> (Now mingled with their courages) will make known
> To their approvers, they are people, such
> That mend upon the world".

In Lear we had throughout to do with a race, in which the natural growth of passion found no check, where, in the light trial of a moment the happiness of whole families was trifled away, and nature confounded by madness and despair could only recover a peaceful calm after being shattered; here, on the contrary, in the very opening scene which bears, even in external arrangement, an evident likeness to that in Lear, we are shewn the noble repose of virtue, which even when tempted to lawful passion, makes the calmest resistance. Then, throughout the whole play we meet with great trials and sorrows, which disturb indeed even the composed minds but do not annihilate them, whilst

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in Lear throughout, defencelessness encounters the slightest shocks of impulses and temptations. The more civilized age soon shews itself by its more civilized vices. Hypocrisy and falsehood, which in Lear's daughters and in Edmund played only a subordinate part compared to their bloody ambition, play here the chief part. The virtues of fidelity and truth, which in Kent were carried to a harsh extreme, are here tempered with the prudence of a more refined and educated race. We find here only the remains of that earlier wild age, as we there found only the beginnings of this gentler one. From the beginning to the end of the play we uniformly meet with this weaker degree of passion and the stronger power of prudence. At the very beginning we see a daughter, who has neglected her filial duties, in the presence of a hasty passionate father, as Cordelia before Lear, who looks to her for the only comfort of his age. The curse of this father falls upon her, as Lear's upon Cordelia; her lover Leonatus is banished, as is the case in Lear with the faithful pleader for Cordelia. But the striking contrast in the way in which this curse is uttered, at once shews the prevailing contrast of the two pieces. "Thou should'st repair my youth", says Cymbeline to his daughter, and "thou heapest a year's age on me." (How absurd, when editors proposed by changing *a year* to *many a year*, to strengthen this characteristically feeble expression, that is, to destroy the poet's intention!) And then follows his curse: "Let her languish a drop of blood a day", (and this is fulfilled by her separation, trial, and sorrow,) and let her "being aged, die of this folly" (her love to Posthumus), — a curse to which the cursed one will gladly say Amen. Thus the father's curse is here fulfilled in pure blessing, as

in Lear it is fulfilled in nothing but woe. Leonatus and Imogen bear their trials well and are rewarded; Cymbeline may well submit to have a year heaped on his age for the joy of becoming a "mother" to his lost sons, while Lear loses his forsaken and recovered daughter; while there, the corpses of those who frantically rushed to destruction lie one over the other, here, happiness in various forms descends on a circle of better men; while there at the conclusion, the horrors of the judgment-day seemed to break forth, here the piece closes with ecstasy, peace, reconciliation, feasts, and solemn thanks-givings.

In King Lear, two actions are woven into one, the similar nature of the two demanding such a combination and suggesting of itself one common idea. It is quite otherwise in Cymbeline. The parts of which it is composed, stand with reference to their purport, in no relation to each other. We distinguish three such parts. For the first, the dispute about the tribute and the war between Britain and Rome, Shakespeare found suggestions in Holinshed; Cymbeline who had been reigning since the 19th year of the Emperor Augustus, and his two sons Guiderius and Arviragus are there mentioned as historical characters. For the second action, the fate of these sons of Cymbeline, no source is known; it must have been Shakespeare's own ingenious invention. Belarius, a courtier and warrior, who has guiltlessly fallen into disgrace with Cymbeline, carries off the two princes, out of revenge, into a solitary wood, where we see them grow up, where one afterwards kills his step-brother Cloten, and both while unknown to their father, do him good service in the Roman war. The third portion, apparently a perfectly distinct and

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different matter, is borrowed from one of Boccaccio's tales, (II. 9) and from an English imitation of the same in a story entitled "Westward for Smelts", which according to Steevens existed in an edition of 1603, not seen again since; in some parts Shakespeare's treatment of this portion approaches nearer the Italian, in others the English narrative. In this tale, a husband lays a wager with a profligate upon the fidelity of his wife, he is convinced of her faithlessness by an artful device, and commissions his servant to kill her. Yielding to her entreaties the servant suffers her to live and pretends to his master that she is slain; she enters the service of a stranger, in male attire, and subsequently meets the deceiver again, (under different circumstances in all three narratives,) and clears her slandered honour. This story, which had been previously dramatized in a French miracle-play, Shakespeare connected with Cymbeline by making the slandered wife a daughter of Cymbeline's and her husband an adopted son of his, whom Imogen had independently married, although she was intended by her father and step-mother for her half-brother, Cloten.

Thus outwardly, a connection would be established between these different actions; but what inner relation could by any means exist between them, what ideal unity, such as we attribute to all Shakespeare's works, should link them together, this is hardly discoverable at a first glance. Even Coleridge missed in Cymbeline, compared with Lear, a certain prominent object. But this was wanting in many of Shakespeare's plays, without their internal connection and unity being injured by it; nay, it even seems, that just in such pieces, as for instance the

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Merchant of Venice, the exact idea and intention in which they are written, is all the more prominent. Thus is it also in Cymbeline. We have only to examine its several parts according to their internal nature and to refer to the motives, and we shall see at once persons and actions forming themselves like crystals into a fixed figure, we shall catch the idea which links them together, and, comparing the idea and the mode of carrying it out, we shall arrive at clearer views, and perceive a work of art whose compass widens and whose back-ground deepens in such a manner, that we can only compare it with the most excellent of all that Shakespeare has produced. Very few critics have ranked this play so high; but I know of none who have done it justice. Far from aiming at new and singular views, I am always glad when my judgment upon the separate works of our poet is in unison with that which time and common consent have confirmed. But in this one instance I must differ entirely from the customary estimation. This play has had, so to speak, ill-luck in having no greater success and favour. The wager of Posthumus on the fidelity of his wife, seems like the story of Helena in All's Well that Ends Well, to have repelled many readers, and to have made the piece distasteful. It has been rather seldom represented on the stage. The old commentators proscribed it. Johnson declared "the fiction foolish, the events impossible, the conduct absurd, the faults of the drama too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation." Even men, who have lately attempted to shield our poet from inconsiderate condemnation of this kind, passed over this piece in silence or judged it wrongly. Schlegel was satisfied to call it a most extraordinary com-

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bination; Ulrici designated it "essentially" as "a comedy of intrigue", and yet as "a comedy of fate" also; but he utterly erred, according to our opinion, when he attempted to trace its leading idea. The single beauties of the work force themselves indeed upon the thoughtful reader. Who could deny the romantic glow of Imogen's adventurous journey, who would not admire the charming character of this being, who can overlook the richness of imaginative and agreeable matter, or be blind to the moral grandeur with which the piece is designed? The common aim and centre of all these single beauties seemed alone difficult to discern, and admiration was repressed by objections and limited to separate passages, just as with Hamlet, so long as the key to the whole could not be found.

Let us then consider once more the purport of the two main actions according to their moving causes, in order that we may next examine more closely the acting personages, and through them approach the inner point of unity in our drama.

When the sons of Cymbeline were yet in their infancy, there dwelt at his court a faithful and famous warrior, Belarius, who by valuable services had deserved the favour and love of his prince. Suddenly Cymbeline's anger fell upon the guiltless man; calumny deprived him of the royal favour; two villains swore falsely that he had entered into a treacherous league with the Romans. Cymbeline banishes him and robs him of his possessions. The soldier, grown old in the service of the world, could not quietly suffer this punishment for his fidelity; he took the unmerited disgrace as a warrant for revenge, carried off the two sons of Cymbeline with their nurse, married

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her, and brought up the boys as his own children in a solitary cavern in a forest. Here the old warrior, who formerly had not "paid pious debts to Heaven", becomes a gentle hermit, and endeavours in this wilderness to educate two worthy royal youths for their country. Experience had taught him that "the gates of monarchs are arched so high" that they make men impious against God and nature, that amidst the worldly impulses of usury, ambition, false thirst for glory, in the high places of life, in courts, and in cities, no one can keep himself pure; that the art of the court in the world as it now is, cannot easily be renounced, but for the soul's good it were better to be unknown. Embittered by the corruption of the world, he thinks to do the greatest service to the ungrateful and weak king, by keeping the boys free and far from it, bringing them up in the pious worship of nature, warning them of the danger of intercourse with the world by images from nature, shewing them the sweetness of retired and humble life, and praising the beetle as safer than the eagle. The boys grow up in their solitude in the same simple-hearted goodness, as that which has kept their sister Imogen true to her pure feminine nature in the midst of the dangers of the courtly world; true, plain, innocent, despisers of wealth, and touched by no impure thoughts or desires. But as they ripen in years, their manly royal blood stirs within them, and urges them to leave the narrow bounds of the forest for the world, for war and action; they are held in bonds like the beetle by a thread, and they long to take the bold flight of the eagle; the cage becomes too narrow for them, in which they, like the prisoned bird, sing their bondage, they fear a void old age after an inactive life, in which they are not

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allowed like Belarius to look back upon a fruitful past; they chase only what flies without resistance before them; they have never known a noble strife with equal foes, upon which their fancy raves, they have never stood the trial of their valour; the truest instinct leads them to yearn for a life of temptations and trials in spite of its dangers, and it is the germ of the fairest promise of wisdom in them, that they feel the wisdom of Belarius to be quite suited to his age, yet very unfit for their untested youth. Inspired thus by this mixed spirit of gentleness and strength, of modesty and ambition, of the loveliest candour and the most obstinate daring, we find the two designated by their foster-father as the "sweetest companions in the world", and in their actions they prove themselves to be so. "They are as gentle", Belarius says,

> "As zephyrs, blowing below the violet,
> Not wagging his sweet head; and yet as rough,
> Their royal blood enchaf'd, as the rud'st wind,
> That by the top doth take the mountain-pine,
> And make him stoop to the vale".

Thus in the service of the graceful Fidele, they appear soft, thoughtful, tender, as women; the one puts off his "clouted brogues", not to disturb his sleep; the other mourns so deeply over his supposed death, that he cannot sing. But then, when the alarm of war approaches, they rush madly to the battle, and with the help of Belarius recover the lost fight, the three like three thousand in confidence and valour. On the first impression they seem both alike in character; on a closer inspection it is not so. The elder, Guiderius, the destined heir, is the more manly of the two. At the very beginning he is the more successful hunter.

When he meets the rude Cloten, without knowing him, when the latter provokes him "with language that would have made him spurn the sea if it could roar so at him", and threatens his life, he kills him without hesitation, confesses it, (to the envy of Arviragus) to his alarmed foster-father, and afterwards without fear or reflection to the royal step-father himself, although warned by Belarius, that this acknowledgment would bring upon him torture and death. Equally hasty and passionate Guiderius also shows himself when he is ready to rush into battle with the Romans, even without his father's blessing. In contrast to him, Arviragus appears throughout more tender and gentle, more communicative and richer in his choice of language. Guiderius is inclined to believe of him that he plays a solemn instrument of mourning, idly and boy-like, without a cause. When over the supposed corpse of Fidele he mentions the pretty legend that Robin Redbreasts covered unburied bodies with moss and flowers, Guiderius blames him for playing "in wench-like words with that which is so serious."

The story of the carrying off of the princes by Belarius happens long before the beginning of our play; it is slightly mentioned at first, and the interlocutors find it strange and incredible, that royal children should be so carelessly guarded, and so indolently sought after, that no trace of them should be found. But we now at once meet with a second incident happening to the king's third child before our eyes, and are thereby initiated so accurately into the circumstances and relations of the court, that in some degree we can comprehend how this unlikely event might before have happened. We see a king, utterly weak, good-natured,

easily excited though indolent, almost unaccountable from a lack of all self-will; ruled and prejudiced as he once had been by slanderers against Belarius, he is now just as much ruled by a hypocritical wife, with whom he had shortly before been united in his second marriage, and just as much prejudiced by her against his daughter Imogen and his foster-son Leonatus, and in favour of his step-son Cloten, a creature "too bad, for bad report". This distortion of the poor king's judgment works now as it did before. All around him are combined against him and his mis-leader. As formerly the nurse allowed herself to be bribed to the robbery, so now the courtiers are all at heart on the side of Leonatus and Imogen, although with their lips they play the parts of the grossest hypocrites towards Cloten whom they utterly despise. The queen persecutes Imogen and her faithful servant, even attempting poison, but the physician, who pretends to serve her, deceives her, making her and her means harmless. There is no one who behaves honourably to the king and his new family, but the good Imogen has the pity and sympathy of every one. If she also had resolved to fly with her Leonatus, it is evident that all means were ready and all ways open to allow her disappearance to be as complete as that of the king's sons before.

The hypocrisy and dissimulation of the courtiers, the web of backbitings, persecutions, crafty disobedience, false trust and true falsehood, which we perceive in Cymbeline's house, explains itself as soon as we examine the principal characters, that set the court in motion. The queen is described by the courtiers as a "crafty devil who coins plots hourly", as "a woman, that bears all down with her brain".

The deep design in all her proceedings, her cool unconscionableness, reveal themselves at once, when she feigns to her physician a long and constant interest in herbs and their properties, only that she may be able at last to prepare slow poisons without incurring suspicion. Her ambition and love of rule set her wickedness in motion, but the deepest hypocrisy is to conceal these her motives as well as their results. Nevertheless she cannot mislead the happy instinct of Imogen and her physician, the unsuspecting Pisanio is only half deceived, the weak king alone yields to the most unconditional trust. She stirs up the king's wrath against Posthumus and Imogen, she acts with hypocritical friendliness the part of pleader for the persecuted pair, "tickling where she wounds". Still later she pretends the greatest tenderness towards Imogen, when the king's anger at her stubbornness is greater; but this anger also is her work. To unite her rude son Cloten to Imogen, that she may secure the throne for him and dominion for herself, was but a first thought with her; she soon with feminine penetration perceives the firm bond between Imogen and Leonatus; she plots, therefore, against her life; she is glad to hear of her flight. To rule is her whole and sole aim; her own son is but the necessary tool for her schemes. She wishes, therefore, the death of the king himself; she even meditates upon a slow poison, under which he was to waste away, whilst she would nurse him to the last with a false appearance of the tenderest watchfulness and care. And yet, though alive, he stood so little in her way! She was all-powerful over him in the house and state. She set him against his beloved daughter, she banished his foster-son, in whom he might have had a support; she ventures even

to vex the king, and he "buys her injuries to be friends"; *she* it is who opposed the Roman tribute, although faith and gratitude demanded it of Cymbeline, who was personally indebted to Cæsar, and these feelings induce him subsequently to pay it willingly notwithstanding his victory. The king is inconsolable when, at the commencement of the war, his wife falls sick, so much was hers the master mind. When he discovers, that she loved not *him* but greatness, that she had had designs against his life, that upon the disappearance of her son, which rendered all these crimes unavailing, she had become mad and had died, he is obliged to confess that he would not have believed her crime, "had she not spoke it dying", and with an expression which equally characterizes her perfect hypocrisy and falsehood as much as his touching weakness, he says: "it had been vicious to have mistrusted her."

To this frightful picture of clever wickedness and dissimulation, her son Cloten appears as a contrast in straightforward insolence and rudeness incapable of concealment. In outward form like the royal Leonatus, if we except his head, he is inwardly a perfect contrast; compared with that master-piece of manliness he is an unfinished creature; compared with the poor foster-son so full of innate nobility, calm consciousness, and genuine self-reliance, he is a prince of the lowest and meanest character, full of the brutal arrogance, which even in high station assumes the appearance of clownish pride; a clod without a soul, whose sputtering and blustering speech at once expresses the emptiness of his head and the brutishness of his disposition. It was not possible to devise for the sweet Imogen a greater blockhead for a wooer. How often he consults his mirror,

how captivated he is with himself and his rank, how cleverly his mother urges him to bring his beloved one pleasing serenades, yet he must himself confess, that he does not understand the process of love; and we are convinced of this when he coarsely attempts to bribe Imogen's faithful ladies, when he addresses herself with his studied speeches, and wearies the patience of this gentlest creature. Too thick-headed for slandering, he discredits her Leonatus that he may make her dislike him, and is then requited by her confession, that she thinks him too base to be her husband's groom. From this moment his offended pride urges him to blind revenge; he attempts intrigues like his mother, and ever equally self-conceited and awkward, he endeavours to gain over Pisanio; he proposes to kill Leonatus, to subject Imogen to the lowest degradation, and then to cast her off. He knows that his mother governs Cymbeline, and therefore he dares everything. He fears not a personal encounter with Leonatus; he is too inexperienced to have an idea of danger or to have a standard of his own strength and that of another; having no judgment, he has no sense of fear. Besides hatred makes him blind, his stupid conceit urges him to utter impudent bravados, the flattery of his courtiers makes him believe in his own heroism. When he had spent whole nights in play with bad companions amid cursing and swearing, he broke occasionally the head of a partner with the bowls, and this the courtiers put up with, without demanding satisfaction, and when one of the company did demand it, he refused it on account of his superior rank. This nourished his rude behaviour as well as his conceit; once Posthumus himself avoided his sword; otherwise he would have met him with the same fool-hardiness as that

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with which he met the far younger Guiderius, by whom he falls. This character has been called obsolete; I know not whether, highly coloured as it is, it be not the lasting type of the man of privileges and of rank, the courtier who has grown up in nothingness and has been trained in self-conceit. His original we must seek among the ranks of the military and the squires; there at least Miss Seward, according to one of her letters, found it exactly. In a captain of her acquaintance, she found just the expressionless gloom of countenance, the uncertain walk, the volleys of words, the busy insignificance, the feverish outbursts of valour, the wilful moroseness, the capricious malice, and even the occasional gleams of reason under the clouds of folly,— qualities which are certainly quite in the nature of this character.

In the midst of a court thus constituted, by the side of these weak, wicked, and untutored rulers, and from the throng of hypocritical creatures who surround them, there rise two personages, upon whom the whole glory and worth of perfected humanity seems to have been shed. Nowhere in any of his plays, has Shakespeare so forcibly displayed forms so ideal upon the very threshold of the scene. The foster-son of Cymbeline, Leonatus Posthumus, is the son of one Sicilius, who had served with distinction King Tenantius, Cymbeline's father. Two elder brothers of Leonatus had fallen in the service of their country; the father, overwhelmed with grief, had followed them; the desolate widow bore Posthumus after his father's death and died at his birth. Thus more strongly recommended to the throne and the court than even Belarius by the merits of his family, Leonatus is still more so from his personal importance. He repaid his education with early ripeness, and in his early

youth stands out as a sample of perfect manhood. Without seeing yet for ourselves the actions of the young man, the actual proofs of his worth, in the very first scene we hear from the mouths of the courtiers his almost over-estimated value, and we have at least the speaking proof of the universal esteem in which he is held, — an esteem, that disarms envy itself. They say, he was

> "A sample to the youngest; to the more mature,
> A glass that feated them; and to the graver,
> A child that guided dotards".

They describe a perfect harmony in his character, while they call him without equal in inward worth and outward fairness. Not alone to the susceptible Imogen did he appear to possess the face of Jove, the thigh of Mars, the foot of Mercury, and "the brawns of Hercules", Iachimo also says, that he sat "'mongst men, like a descended God." The same man in the hour of his remorse calls him "the best of all amongst the rarest of good ones"; he compares his calmness to that of virtue itself; and even the wicked queen seems to acknowledge the wisdom, which inspires him with composure and patience. Thus every tongue praises this man, but that which exalts him most, is the choice of Imogen. For she is as a woman almost more perfect, than he as a man, although she esteems him far above herself. With exquisite modesty each gives the praise from himself to the other; "I, my poor self did exchange for you," says Leonatus to Imogen, "to your so infinite loss"; and she calls him, in presence of her father, "a man worth any woman", who "overbuys *her* almost the sum he pays!" She, as well as he, appears in all eyes as

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the phœnix of the sex, as the paragon of the age. As he is compared with the gods, she is called by that despiser of men Iachimo "a heavenly angel", and Belarius at the first glance deems her a divinity, a fairy, or an earthly paragon; corresponding to the godlike forms to which she compares Posthumus, she might herself be called a Hebe and a Psyche combined. The impression, which she makes on Belarius' sons, who unite the acute perception of the savage with the tender feeling and discernment of the highly cultivated, is that of a being full of enchanting grace and innocence. To the rude Cloten she appears to possess "the best" of all women, and Lucius, whom she serves as a page, declares, that

> "never master had
> A page so kind, so duteous, diligent,
> So tender over his occasions, true,
> So feat, so nurselike".

This rare couple have married in Jupiter's temple without the knowledge of Imogen's parents; the king's daughter, in the aversion of her whole nature to Cloten, bestowed herself upon the orphaned foster-brother, with whom she thought to adorn the throne of Britain; she "chose an eagle, and avoided a puttock." Like Romeo and Juliet, like Othello and Desdemona, they had contracted an independent marriage. But how different are the characters of those, who now take this step, under what different circumstances, and with what different results! From the features of these characters, from the traits of the story of their love, we at once infer that these far more fortified souls will steer their venturous fate quite differently to the vehement Romeo and the dark Othello.

No sudden storm of passion has driven Leonatus to Imogen, as Romeo to Juliet; they had grown up together, he was her "adorer" from conviction and long intercourse, it is a love of slow growth and long standing that unites them; their marriage was an act of self-defence against the ambition of the step-mother; Imogen, as heiress to the throne, is bound to choose a worthy consort; an orphan in the midst of her family, robbed of her brothers, she seeks discreetly a support for herself and for her country; in accepting Cloten she might have done rather that which filial duty required and less that which patriotism demanded. Neither saw any reason for concealing the marriage; the king, heartily offended at it, banishes the husband, and orders his daughter to confinement. No resistance, no thought of elopement, no despair, no pusillanimous despondency, no execration nor impatience, escapes from either of them. She yields to her father's anger, she bids her new-made consort "be gone", she consents to "abide the hourly shot of angry eyes", but her comfort is his life and her fidelity; she conscientiously obeys her holy filial duty to her father, but his rage can have no power against their union. Would it have been more difficult for the adored Leonatus to carry off his Imogen, than for Belarius long ago to carry off the king's sons? He thinks not of it. With the noblest calmness of mind he takes a tender but hasty farewell; as he is departing, the rude Cloten meets him, insults and challenges him; he could have slain him in self-defence in an honourable duel; he does it not; he does not suffer his patience to be disturbed, and passes him contemptuously, having "rather play'd than fought". In Italy he lives quietly with his friendly host in proud

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patience; he does nothing to reconcile or win the king; he waits till summer succeeds this winter, for he is secure of the indestructible honour of his wife for all future; he looks upon her as a priceless, unmerited gift of the gods, and trusts to them to preserve their gift for him. In a similar state of mind she also remains. However deep may be the pang of separation to her, she suffers in addition the less endurable pain, the wearisome urgency of her coarse wooer; she feels no bitterness; nay, she compensates for her vanished outward happiness by the inward blessedness of the sweetest thoughts, which link her for ever to her Leonatus.

How charmingly has the poet allowed us to cast a glance into this life of fancy and feeling! In the moment of farewell, when the greater grief makes her insensible to her father's wrath, she dwells, in self-forgetting sorrow, upon her departing husband; she forgot what she had intended to say and do. She would have given him "a kiss, set betwixt two charming words", and would have made him "swear the shes of Italy should not betray her interest"; she would have told him, at what time she "was in heaven" praying for him; at what hours he "could encounter her with orisons". When he is gone, she sends her faithful servant after him, whom *he* with like thoughtful care would have left with the deserted one; this servant is to hear and see the last of him, yet he could not satisfy her; she shows him how much farther her longing eyes would have followed him. When he is away, she is solely occupied with him, "her supreme crown of grief;" when company is announced, she exclaims: "Who may this be? Fye!" — she is happiest alone in her solitude. When his name is men-

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tioned, when tidings come of him, her colour changes with glad surprise. She bears his letters next her heart. Before she opens them, she prays with touching gladness for "good news", for his love, health, content, yet not content that they are asunder. Praying, as she would have told him, she goes to bed at midnight thinking of him and kissing his bracelet; at night she weeps as she remembers him "'twixt clock and clock".

Imogen has often and rightly been considered as the most lovely and artless of the female characters, which Shakespeare has depicted. Her appearance sheds warmth, fragrance, and brightness over the whole drama. More true and simple than Portia and Isabella, she is even more ideal. In harmonious union she blends exterior grace with moral beauty, and both with fresh straightforwardness of feeling and the utmost clearness of understanding. She is the sum and aggregate of fair womanhood, such as at last the poet conceived it. We may doubt, whether in all poetry there is a second creature so charming depicted with such perfect truth to nature. At the same time the future is as highly finished, as generally is possible only to the wider range of epic poetry. Imogen is, next to Hamlet, the most fully drawn character in Shakespeare's poetry; the traits of her nature are almost inexhaustible; the poet makes amends by this perfected portrait of a woman of this artless kind, for the many sketches of similar natures in the dramas of this period, which he has merely outlined. When he transports us into Imogen's bedchamber, it is as living, as if we sensibly breathed the atmosphere of it. Not alone he mentions and describes her outward beauty, but we see (on merely reading the play) the graceful move-

ments, which so well become her, we are acquainted with
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all her endowments: how "angel-like" she sings, how "neat her cookery" is, as if "Juno had been sick, and she her dieter", how gracefully she wears her garments, so that she "made great Juno angry". But her inward qualities far outweigh these outward ones. And to make this clear to our minds, is our main business, because she is the chief personage of the play, the one which leads us on the path to the understanding of the whole.

The characteristic feature of this nature, which displays itself again and again in all the strange and most various situations in which the poet has placed Imogen, is her mental freshness and healthiness. In the untroubled clearness of her mind, in the unspotted purity of her being, every outward circumstance is reflected, unruffled and undistorted, in the mirror of Imogen's soul, and at every occasion she acts from the purest instinct of a nature as sensible as it is practical. Rich in feeling, she is never morbidly sentimental, rich in fancy she is never fantastic, full of true, painful, earnest love, she is never touched by sickly passion. She is mistress of her soul under the most violent emotions, self-command accompanies her strongest feelings, and the most discreet actions follow her outbursts of vehement passion, even when bold resolutions are required. We have seen how untroubled and unhesitatingly she took the great step of her marriage, when she was once satisfied that it was unavoidable. We have seen how prudently she weighed her duty between father and husband, how quietly composed she yielded to the necessity of separation. With this same composure she bears the results of this separation. Exposed to the wrath of her father, to the falseness of her

step-mother, to the urgency of the rude Cloten, she endures all with that peace of mind, belonging to that happy female nature, which can keep unpleasant thoughts at a distance, and can forget the pressure of the Present by glad recollections of the Past. Her ladies and attendants, Pisanio, and the nobles of the court, lament her unhappy situation, she herself scarcely ever complains of it; not until she has fled from Cloten, does she perceive that his love-suit has been to her "as fearful as a siege". No harsh word against father or mother escapes her lips, nor before another, even a harsh word *respecting* them; for her father's sake, she is sorry, when the unnatural mother, who had aimed at her own life, is dead. She bears no resentment for injuries, nor do suffering and trouble press too heavily upon her. In this guileless nature, evil impressions are not too lasting, and she does not torment herself with too much reflection; she is led by the most enviable instinct, she has neither the superiority of a masculine mind like Portia, nor the timidity of Cordelia, nor the thoughtless inconsiderateness of Desdemona, nor the cheerfulness of Julia. Naturally cheerful, joyous, ingenuous, born to fortune, trained to endurance, she has nothing of that agitated passionateness, which foretels a tragic lot, which brings trouble upon itself of its own creating. We see her at the end of the play, when shaking off her long sufferings and cruel deceptions, she gives herself at once to the happiest sensations, how quickly she jests and is playful with her brothers, how brightly her eyes glance round "the counterchange severally in all"; — and we feel that this being, fit for every situation, improved by every trial, has been wonderfully gifted by nature to be equal to every occasion.

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Temptations are not wanting. The time comes when the slanderer (Iachimo) makes her doubt the constancy of her Posthumus, when the tempter attacks her own honour. It is not easy to awaken her suspicion against Posthumus. Upon Iachimo's first hints, she thinks of sickness; not until he is very explicit, does she believe herself forgotten; then, sunk in silent grief, she refuses to hear more. Iachimo urges her to take revenge, without saying what revenge he meant; but towards Posthumus, Imogen could have no revenge. Not indeed that her dove-like disposition felt no emotion of anger; no, when she suspects Pisanio of murder, she calls down upon him all the curses which the "madded Hecuba gave the Greeks", and adds her own to boot; but for Posthumus she had none. When after this, Iachimo explains his plan of vengeance, she quickly comprehends his intention, and recovers at once from the confusion of her thoughts; her first word is to recall Pisanio, whom Iachimo for his own ends had sent away; she begins with the rarest tact, and with the firmness of innocence, to take measures for her own defence, before she allows her angry heart to relieve itself by words of repulse and abhorrence. And again when Iachimo pretends that his real attempt was but feigned to try her, she believes him, him whom Posthumus had recommended to her as a man of honour, upon his sole word; without any remains of anger she takes the sting from her heart, and quickly recovers her composure and courtesy towards her guest and the friend of her husband. A deep insight into human nature is not common to women of this character; Imogen knows the queen, the deep dissembler, who is daily with her, and that for ever, once she has seen through her; but with the

stranger she persists in her unsuspecting harmlessness. She is somewhat slow in believing evil of Posthumus, but she is quick in believing good of him; she feels no offence at the trial, even if she had thought it designed by Posthumus, but she reflects indeed not at all about it; she believed him for one moment unfaithful, now that she knows that he is true to her, all is right again, and for her there is no ground for speculations.

We see that the trial of her fidelity rebounds powerlessly from her, the ramparts of her honour are easily defended; as *she*, thus far, would not have thought such an attack possible, it must henceforth seem impossible to the tempter himself. But the poet depicts a lasting siege of the forsaken being, and he shews us at the same time the palladium that makes her impregnable. We see her again in the evening after Iachimo's visit, reading till midnight, intending to rise again at four o' clock in the morning. She read the tale of Philomel, as far as the passage where she yields to the seducer Tereus. This story and the day's experience rest obscurely in her mind when she utters her short prayer, commending herself to the protection of the gods, beseeching them to guard her "from fairies, and the tempters of the night". She then sleeps calmly; her fancy is not excited; her healthy blood is not easily stirred by sensual emotions; even from the lawful caresses of her beloved one she had often shrunk with "rosy pudency". Pisanio esteems it as honourable in her that she undergoes

> "More goddess-like than wife-like, such assaults
> As would take in some virtue".

But she herself never would have had a thought that it was meritorious to ward off these assaults. And least of all, if it

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were the question of Cloten's assaults. And yet it is this man, whose "siege" at length forces her out of the calmness of her passive resistance, and drives her to a positive sally. Yet this is not by any attempt upon her fidelity. Only when he dares in her presence to abuse Posthumus with coarse words of shame, the gall which is not wanting in her composition, is stirred up, she loses patience and composure, forgets her feminine grace and bitterly repulses him with harsh revilings; for she cannot feign peace and friendship when once revolt sits in her heart. By this one act of self-forgetfulness she calls down upon herself new and severer trials. Cloten now forges plots against her honour and against the life of her Posthumus. She receives a deceptive hint, to meet her home-returning husband in Wales. Now, after this collision, after this open rupture with Cloten, she suddenly in her excited longing, forgets all consideration of her parents, and prepares, without any reflection, to leave the court; her impatient questions concerning the one object of her thoughts succeed each other rapidly, each one more pressing than the other, and the last ever the most urgent; her joy, her transport, her carelessness of the consequences of this desired meeting, are equally great. If we could not before discover the depth of her love in her tranquil composure, we must now recognize it in the excess of her agitated longing. We might be doubtful whether we had the same calmly peaceful being before us, if the prudence and forethought with which she prepares for the secret journey did not prove to us that she is even now the same discreet being as before.

From the height of the glad hope of meeting Leonatus again, she is to fall into the depth of anguish. She must

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hear that her husband thinks her faithless, and has ordered her servant to kill her. When she reads this order, the words "cut her throat". But she does not stand dumb and confounded, as Desdemona before Othello; she soon finds touching complaints and asseverations, which convince Pisanio of her innocence. She recollects Iachimo's slanders, and she now believes them true. To think that he may have slandered her also to Posthumus, as he had slandered Posthumus to her, goes far beyond her apprehension of the greatness of human wickedness. She can only explain the inhuman command of her husband, by thinking he has become untrue to her; obedient even to death, she offers herself willingly like "a lamb to the butcher". When Pisanio pities her, gives her hope that all may have arisen from misunderstanding and slander, her oppressed soul revives again quickly. Her reason knows of nothing to justify the cruelty, her heart with dark feelings wards off despair. Even now she feels no emotion of revenge or hatred; she has but the one thought of seeing him again and saving him, for she believes in his repentance. The good soul feels only pity for the persecutor, the injured only sorrow for the injurer. She reflects that in such evils "the traitor stands in worse case of woe" than those that are betrayed, that remorse will seize him, when he is "disedged by her that he now tires on"; that "his memory will then be panged by her" who for his sake had "put into contempt the suits of princely fellows", and that he will hereafter find that this was no act of common passage, but a strain of rareness. The reader will feel with what exquisite art the poet, under given circumstances and states of feeling, clothes a fault into the most attractive virtue? how

in this moment, when Imogen expostulates with the beloved offender, there lies the utmost sweetness in this self-praise, because of the wounded and purest self-reliance, the injured yet deepest sensibility, the disdained yet most devoted love which is expressed in it?

In this state of despair, she is ever alike collected and courageous, ready to seize on every means for bringing about a reunion with him, even adventuring "peril to her modesty, though not death on it"! On Pisanio's advice, she is ready to seek her husband in Rome, to leave the court, her parents, and England, and in male attire to enter the service of Lucius. The poet makes her assume the dress of a page, like Julia, Portia, Viola, Rosalind, Jessica, a favourite effect on the stage at that time, to which the custom of boys acting the female parts, invited. In this instance the disguise is especially charming, because Imogen is quite incapable of laying aside her feminine nature with her feminine attire. Pisanio tells her that she must give up "fear and niceness, the handmaids of all women, or more truly, woman its pretty self." In these words the feminine nature of Imogen is entirely described And this same charming nature she must now exchange for "a waggish courage"; she must be "ready in gibes, quick-answered, saucy, and as quarrellous as the weasel", as all those Rosalinds are. She undertakes this, but she cannot carry it out. It is well for her, that in her assumed manhood she only meets with her virgin-like brothers in their cave, and the "holy" Lucius, otherwise her modesty and delicacy would have soon betrayed her sex. Suddenly at last in the wide circle of the camp, when she sees her Posthumus again, in the unconscious pressure

of feeling, she forgets the man's part she had undertaken and inconsiderately betrays herself.

How enchanting is she in her brothers' cave, when she unexpectedly meets these "kind creatures", who are kindred to her in nature even more than in blood! Idylls, so charming as these scenes are, can scarcely have been written again; these scenes, said Schlegel, could inspire a worn-out imagination anew with poetry. She enters the empty cave, confused and exhausted, she eats, she prays for the provider and intends to leave money for her meat, when she is surprised by the hermits, who receive her with their natural delights in all human beings, who are soon enchanted with the attraction of her appearance, and take a still warmer interest in her, when with careful observation they have remarked how "grief and patience are rooted" in her soul. But she on her side also, feels herself no less powerfully attracted. Among such good creatures her grief would soon have been assuaged, aye, perhaps she might have forgotten her journey to Lucius and to Posthumus! Not that any feminine feeling had drawn her to the amiable youths! The poet has taken great care not to let us imagine this. The brothers indeed soon have an instinctive feeling, that this beautiful boy has more of woman's nature in him, than man's; when from a natural impulse she relieves them of all domestic matters, when she entreats them to go hunting, on the plea, that their daily custom shall not be interrupted, they say that she must be their housewife, and Guiderius declares that "were she a woman, he should woo her hand". But she, as a woman, does not respond to this. She has all at once found here, what she had never dreamt of in the world, — creatures, who in their

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untainted innocence even surpassed her Posthumus; how natural that on this occasion, the remembrance of Posthumus, without her expressing it, is no longer so clear as it was, that she reflects on his falsity, that she imagines the possibility, that the wish arises in her heart, of living a life of innocence here with these innocent beings, among whom she had found a substitute for her uncertain, aye, lost support! But nevertheless, her fidelity to Posthumus would not even here be tempted! As a woman, as Imogen, to leave him and belong to another, this thought never even now enters her pure faithful soul. "Pardon me", in these meaning words as ingenuous as they are innocent, the slumbering, nascent wish is clothed:

> "Pardon me, gods!
> *I'd change my sex* to be companion with them,
> Since Leonatus false".

This wish, to stay with the dwellers in the cave, preserving intact her sacred duty towards Posthumus, has its source in yet another feature in Imogen's character, connected with her healthy simplicity, with her natural view of a world abounding with all that is unnatural. She had remained true, plain, and innocent at the court, in the midst of intrigues and baseness. She could maintain herself so, essentially by the power alone of that womanly property of not allowing disagreeable external things to influence her. But in the secret depths of her soul, another impulse was also at work, that which alienates her from all the splendour of high life, although this had been represented to her as the real essence of life, and all beyond the court had been designated as savage. At the very catastrophe of

the banishment of Posthumus, she wishes herself "a neat-herd's daughter", and him the "neighbour shepherd's son"; she would have thought it happiness, if she had been "thief-stolen as her two brothers" were; she feels miserable with her longings amid the splendour of rank; those seemed to her blessed who, "how mean soe'er, could have their honest wills". Here in her brothers' cave, she now meets with beings, who prove to her that she has all along been deceived, that her inward impulse would have guided her better, that

> "The imperious seas breed monsters: for the dish,
> Poor tributary rivers as sweet fish".

Here in the cave she remembers the sentence that expresses her own innermost opinion: "Man and man should be brothers: but clay and clay differs in dignity, whose dust is both alike!" She fosters this opinion not only out of an innate inclination for a quiet life, such as is more suitable to women, not only from the sorrowful experience which she has had in courtly life, she fosters it also because she would far rather abandon the throne than her Posthumus. It is for this reason that the wish escapes her here in the cave, that these youths could be her brothers; then had "her prize been less, and so more equal ballasting to her Posthumus." As the royal blood in these brothers longed with the might of natural desire to escape out of lowliness and solitude into the life of the world, so her woman's blood on the contrary as naturally longed to escape out of the intrigues of the world so well known to her, into retirement and peace.

Thus, through that wish of Imogen's to remain in the

cave, we obtain a glimpse at the more remote back-ground www.libtool.com.cn of her nature; but we must not in so doing forget the nearer motive; the pang caused by Posthumus' unfaithfulness and cruelty had gnawed at her heart, and she reflected involuntarily on the chance that she might have lost him for ever. Grief and patience as the brothers perceived, "mingle their spurs together" in her; she belongs to him still, if he will belong to her; she estranges herself from him in thought, in case he should remain faithless; the same healthy nature influences her even after the worst experience; her heart might perhaps break under the certainty of his faithlessness, but she would not die of a broken heart on this account; nor even for his death. The poet shews her to us, awakening out of her swoon beside the corpse of Cloten, which she imagines to be that of Posthumus. She turns away from the sight with horror, and thinks she is still dreaming. Trembling with fear of the confirmation of that which her eyes have seen, she prays with averted eyes for mercy, if there be "a drop of pity left in heaven". She turns back again, and her dream will not vanish. Then her grief breaks forth, and her suspicion and execrations fall on Pisanio, who had given her the dangerous drink. Yet even now, after the extremity of horror which she believed she had seen, her pain is arrested, moderated, as if repressed by something; it is pain for one who has proved untrue; this sting remains, and the poet has not forgotten, even in the pathos of this most agonizing condition, not quite to obliterate the pain of this old wound by the pain of the new one. Thus Imogen even now resolves ever with the same strength of her good nature, to mourn over and bury the corpse of her

husband and then to yield herself perseveringly to her strange fate. And at last, when she is brought prisoner into her father's presence, among so many witnesses, the oppressed mind of the sufferer is yet unburdened enough, and her eyes resting upon father and brothers are clear and observant enough, to perceive among the prisoners her tempter Iachimo, with the ring of Posthumus on his finger, and thereby to bring on the unravelling of the strange threads of her destiny.

These threads were first entangled by Posthumus' romantic wager upon Imogen's fidelity. This is the point which robbed this piece of the favour of all sensitive readers. How was it possible that the poet could make such an indelicate situation the turning point of so great a poem? How indeed was it possible, and how could it be consistent with psychological truth, that this wager should be laid upon a woman of a nature so lovely and tender, and by a man who was declared to be the "glass" and "sample" to his generation? To these questions we have, first of all, to repeat an answer already often given: Shakespeare found this incident in the story which he handled, and he conscientiously retained it as a poetic symbol. Whether it was probable or not, he did all he could to make it possible and true. Leonatus had been in France on a previous occasion, and had there already had a similar dispute respecting his Imogen. At that time he was younger, more presumptuous, more impetuous, more contentious than now. He then extolled his beloved before the French ladies; he was ready to maintain his opinion by the ordeal of the sword according to knightly custom; the matter, however, was amicably adjusted. The banished Posthumus accidentally meets the Frenchman, who at that time had acted as mediator, at the

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house of his host Philario in Rome. The evening before his arrival, these men had disputed with some strangers at a banquet on a very similar subject, the superiority of their country-women; the conversation thus falls easily upon the earlier dispute, which Posthumus, though now grown calmer in his judgment, does not regard as so light a matter as the Frenchman. A taunt of Iachimo's levelled at his beloved irritates Posthumus for a moment, but he recovers his manly composure, until he learns more and more the Italian's character. Iachimo is a courtier and a worldling, whom Shakespeare endows with the affected language of his "water-flies", Osric and such like; in the novel, his character is rather that of a profligate of Borgia's time, than of a Roman in the days of the Emperors. His name sounds almost like a diminutive of Iago, and he resembles him in his way of thinking of men. He has no idea of greatness and virtue and no faith in them. When Posthumus is mentioned, he has a number of instances ready to explain his high reputation, only for the sake of avoiding the one ground, his real excellence, of which he has himself no idea. Harshly to disparage or slander individuals, to speak contemptuously of human nature generally, is not so much his nature, but it has become his habit; he esteems the female sex like a freebooter, whom success has always attended. He is annoyed by the high reputation of Posthumus and his boundless estimation of Imogen; still more by the confidence, with which he rests upon her virtue and fidelity. He offers his wager, and lays it rather against this confidence than against Imogen's reputation: he would attempt this, he protests, against any lady in the world. Unbelief in morals and propriety generates this mode of thinking in the low-minded man, and

petty venomous envy induces him to offer the wager; but in Posthumus on the contrary, it is his strong conviction of virtue and his faith in human nature, which make him first calmly and then angrily, oppose Iachimo's principles and assertions; it is the deep indignation of his moral nature, which inclines him to accept the offered wager. Excitable indeed in nothing, he is so just on this one point; and thus or similarly so, we think, any resolute man who had retained a moral and virtuous state would always express his impatience against loquacious vice. To the Frenchman this would have been but a blade of straw, for which he felt no inducement to fight; but to Posthumus it is a great point of honour to defend insulted humanity. Not that he enters with quixotic zeal into this knight-errantry; not that easily kindled he pressed for the wager; for a while he intentionally avoids it, although he does not conceal from Iachimo, that his presumption deserves not only repulse but chastisement. Not until the Italian actually taints the snow-white swan of Posthumus, and taunts him as though he must have cause to fear if he gave way, not until then does he wager upon his wife, whose fidelity he could trust for even more than this; *she* is to do her part to retrieve the honour of her sex, and then (this is the intention with which he accepts the wager) he will add to *her* repulse the deserved castigation, and punish Iachimo with the sword for his ill-opinion and his presumption. In this moral anger Posthumus is no less the same rare being, as in the rest of his conduct. His irritation on such noble grounds shews his previous calmness and discretion for the first time in its right light, and this his ever-tested moderation reminds us to consider again and again the reason

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which drives him exceptionally to exasperation in a transaction so indelicate. Let us remember that the equally calm and even calmer Imogen, who is as rarely or more rarely excited, is driven by one and the same occasion to the same indignation; when the abject Cloten sets himself above her Posthumus, and attempts to disparage him, as Iachimo has attempted to defame Imogen. Let us remember that this abnegation of "a lady's manners", her burst of indignation, her flight, shows no less self-forgetfulness in the woman, than the wager does in the man. For that a self-forgetfulness lies in both cases in both steps, we will not deny; the poet himself, beautiful and excusable as are the inducements in both instances, would neither deny nor conceal this, since he has so severely punished the rashness on both sides.

In this punishment, the faults of both co-operate, the wager of Posthumus is not alone to be blamed for the whole chain of their trials. Had Imogen, wearied out with Cloten's "siege", not at once set out to Wales upon the deceptive invitation, Pisanio must have announced his bloody commission on the spot; the verification of her alleged death (her disappearance) would have been wanting, Posthumus would have had time for remorse ere it was too late, all would have unravelled itself in a milder form. But Imogen herself assists in the apparent execution of the revenge which Posthumus, upon Iachimo's report, decreed against her, and which afterwards re-acts so heavily upon himself. The artful Italian returns to Rome, and enjoys a false triumph over the unsuspecting Briton. Base as he is, we must however beware of making him still baser. Want of faith in human goodness is not innate in him, but acquired from his never having met with virtuous men. A mere glance at

Imogen shews him what he had never seen; he feels at once that here weapons of no common kind would be required. Repulsed by her, and ashamed, he feels neither hatred nor ill-will against her, but admiration alone. If it were not for the stings of a base ambition to maintain the glory of being irresistible, if half his fortune and his life had not been at stake, he might indeed have forborne the deception which he now plays upon Posthumus. He utters the horrible slander against Imogen, yet not for the pleasure of slandering her; he speaks ambiguously, he neither lies unnecessarily, nor degrades her unnecessarily. When he has attained his object — his own safety, — the experience he has gained affects him, the virtue he has seen and tested awakens his conscience, the shame of his guilt oppresses him and makes him a coward in the fight with Britain, the speedy confession of his sin shews him crushed with remorse and worthy of pardon. But at that time, when he came to Posthumus with the report of his success, the latter was the more easily convinced, the cooler and calmer Iachimo appeared. There was no room for doubt after the proofs adduced; even the impartial Philario considers Iachimo as victor. Now there follows in Posthumus the fearful outburst of despair, the dark glimpse into his lost life of promise. Jealousy and wounded honour shake his manhood even to ungovernable fury, and give rise to the most inconsiderate projects of revenge. He here almost resembles Othello. As in him, there lies in Posthumus' nature none of that superficial, social cheerfulness, which is mixed with happy and sanguine light-mindedness; serious by nature, he was continually inclined to melancholy, even without cause. Like Othello, he had to look up to his beloved, and

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thought himself despised for his inferior birth. In both, notwithstanding their imposing calmness, there is a vein of passion, upon which Iago and Iachimo speculate. Like Othello with the handkerchief, Posthumus has apparent proof at hand in the bracelet. Like him, he is seized with a paroxysm of misanthropy and contempt; like him, his harmonious nature is thrown into a state of chaos, in which he appears far more unfortunate than guilty. Just like Othello, he loses himself in sensual hateful ideas, conjuring up a repulsive voluptuous picture of the rapid conquest of the "yellow Iachimo" over a being, whom he had thought "as chaste as unsunned snow". His hatred falls upon the whole female sex: every thing "that tends to vice in man" seems to him "the woman's part", every crime and sin to be inherited from her. Like Othello, he condemns the criminal to be the sacrifice for his stained honour, while his moral nature is ever in the same state of indignation as we before observed in him. How much gentler under similar circumstances is his wife, his Imogen, to him! When she thinks him faithless, she loses not her faith in the whole male sex, she only says that *his* falsity will "lay the *leaven* on all proper men"! She is reminded of revenge, but by others, not by herself, and she cannot comprehend the thought. She has only pity and no hatred for him; and even if her heart has somewhat cooled, she never could have wholly lost her faith in him; she would never have been capable of planning any evil against him.

This, however, does not place him below her. In the man, who can and will be nothing by halves, the difference of sex necessitates this fearful reaction upon an experience, which unsettles his trust in the world,— in every-

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thing. As soon as he has given to his faithful Pisanio the order for her death, his reflection returns. He now laments the fidelity, which had so rapidly executed his command. Othello killed Desdemona to prevent her from sinning further; here lies the delicate distinction between him and the more human, more gentle Leonatus. The latter curses his act, because, had the victim lived, she would have had time for repentance! Faith in her virtue was then only stifled for a moment in him, but was not dead. He is now seized with remorse, which urges him to take vengeance on himself. The same indignation, which had roused him against Iachimo, against Imogen, and against Pisanio, arms him now against himself; and it is just this severity against himself, that must atone for the moral irritation, which induced him to lay the wager and to impose the penalty on Imogen. Not in the recklessness of his first fury does he lay hands on himself, like Othello, but in calm composure, he inflicts upon himself a noble penance. He follows the Roman army to Britain, but not to fight against his country, which he has robbed of so good a queen, but to die fighting *for* it. And to die unknown, unlamented, in the mean disguise of a peasant, uninfluenced by the impulse of any empty subordinate aim. He will "shame the guise of the world and begin the fashion, less without and more within." The poet gives to this ideal of a grand manly character, even to this one, the same distinguishing feature, which he had given to his Henry V., — he gives to *his* virtue, as to that of Henry V., the simplest setting with little ornament as to a rarest jewel. The moral of this play is the proof of that of the other; it testifies to the poet's reverential estimation of men, who are despisers of show and are secretly noble.

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Posthumus silently conceals his great services on the battle-field, and unenvyingly ascribes them to Belarius and his sons; determined that all punishment shall fall on himself alone; he passes without a word over his greatest achievement, when with heroic self-conquest he spares the life of the malicious Iachimo, the origin of his misery, who lies vanquished at his feet; this noblest act of his favourite, Shakespeare has silently placed in a stage-direction! But his desire to die is not granted to him; he therefore mixes with the vanquished, and goes voluntarily into the prison. Not contented with the repentance which merely grieves for the misdeed, he is ever ready to die cheerfully and implores from the gods "the penitent instrument", — death. Even after the propitious vision, this one longing remains in him as strong as ever. And we must not imagine this calmness, this sparing of Iachimo, this self-punishment, to be only the valueless effect of an apathy, which had taken possession of him! When Iachimo confesses his guilt, his indignation bursts forth again so fiercely that he knows neither himself nor any one, he utters the most fearful imprecations against himself and Pisanio, aye, even in his convulsive rage he strikes the unrecognized Imogen and again thrusts her from him. Then, at the end of his sorrows, the recovered one lies on his breast, to "hang there like fruit till the tree die!" That both of them lose the throne by the discovery of Imogen's brothers, is their most refined justification before the world. Thus their love is proved to be entirely pure, and free from all outward secondary views. *Her* wish for a life of retirement is granted, and *his* similar aim after sterling goodness without show stands thus the final trial. "O Imogen," says Cym-

beline, pityingly, "by thy brother's return thou hast lost a kingdom!" "No," she replies, "I have got two worlds by it!"

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Hitherto, according to our first intention, we have closely examined the two actions of the play and the prominent characters; but the position and point of view, from which the poetic painter has taken his picture, has not yet been indicated, the master-key is still wanting, which can lay open to us at once the various component parts, as well as the way to one innermost centre, from which the plan of the whole structure can be easily recognized as one of artistic harmony.

From our explanation of the subject, it will easily be perceived, that it treats uniformly, in all its component parts, of two opposite ideas or moral qualities, truth in words and in deeds (fidelity), and untruth and faithlessness, all falseness in deed or perfidy, all falsifying in words or slander. To exemplify these ideas all the actions and characters of the play combine; and this is really as apparent as the leading thought in the most intelligible of Shakespeare's dramas can ever possibly be. At the very outset we are introduced into the world of falsehood, the court, and contrasted to this afterwards is the idyllic innocence of the sylvan solitude. The political action, the back-ground, on which the two main actions rest, may be reconciled with the point of view we have specified. Bound to fidelity towards Rome, Cymbeline is led to rebellion by his false wife and repents when he is his own master. The man, who in his very weakness is not false, is ensnared by the queen, that mistress of all deceitful arts, in a thickly woven net of falsehood and fatal intrigue, and is threatened with

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the loss of children and kingdom. False slanderers have once marked the faithful Belarius to Cymbeline as a traitor; outlawed and banished, but faithful even in his revenge, he carries off the king's sons from the soil of the false world, and brings them up to be true, upright men, incapable of a lie even in the face of danger. The falseness of the queen ensnares also Posthumus and Imogen. Fidelity and truth, and the soundness and simplicity of character united with these qualities, are their main characteristics. How sensitively Imogen expresses her sense of truth, when she speaks of having been misdirected by beggars! And there too, when she tells Lucius a false name for her dead lord, and offers with touching simplicity a prayer to the gods for their pardon of the harmless deceit. And Posthumus on his side, when in the most terrible distraction he assails himself, calling himself Imogen's murderer, he corrects the inaccuracy of his words, conscientiously true even in the midst of his rage:

> "Villain-like, I lie;
> That caused a lesser villain than myself,
> A sacrilegious thief, to do it".

As concerns the fidelity of both, the main purport of the play turns upon it and upon the calumny, which makes each doubt the fidelity of the other, and upon the noble endurance of their own fidelity towards the beloved one even though supposed to be faithless or dead. Between these two move the subordinate figures, who make still clearer the clear reference of even the lesser parts of the action; Cloten, who is too awkward for lies and slanders, too stupid for the intrigues of falsehood; the courtiers,

who make such vehement "asides"; the physician, who uses salutary falsehood towards the poisoner; and Pisanio, who, as the servant of two masters, so prudently weighs the duties of fidelity between the two when at variance.

Fidelity is the true cardinal virtue of an heroic age, it is this which in the national epic poetry of ancient times places those songs of fidelity, the Odyssey and Gudrun, in such natural juxta-position to the warlike sagas of the Iliad and the Nibelungen. This connection is entirely founded upon the nature of such times, and so far the remarkable concordance of theme in these poems is no mere blind chance. In times when every thing depends upon the estimation of greater military power and greater possessions, upon the thirst for glory and the desire for property, when house and dominion, possessions and existence are ever insecure, there is nothing nobler and nothing more valuable than a true and tried friend, than a true and trusty servant, and a true and constant wife. Nothing, therefore, among the characteristics of such an age, is more natural than the proverbial friendships of Greek antiquity, the tales of the true vassals in German heroic poetry, and the poems on the fidelity of Penelope and Gudrun. Whether Shakespeare knew this, or whether the dim gropings of genius and an instinctive feeling of the nature of heroic times dictated it, it is equally remarkable that he seized with such certainty this very relation both in Lear and Cymbeline, as if both these poems or their sources arose directly from the traditions of those ages. In Lear, the faithful attachment of the aged Kent is as beautiful as the friendship of Achilles to Patrocles in the Iliad. In Cymbeline, the ugly story of the wager is removed to the heroic times of the middle ages,

and though the colouring and character of such a period is handled with as little of that historical aptitude attainable in our own days, as in the Roman plays, the poet, (and this was more essential) has yet clothed the doubtful matter of the tale with such genuine and pure simplicity, that his Imogen may rank as an equal third among those old models of feminine fidelity.

Shakespeare's song of fidelity stands consequently in that position as to time, in which the virtue, which it extols, reaches its highest rank, in which it attains its greatest worth, because it must expect continual trials, temptations, and dangers, in which it is often in the peculiar position of being obliged, as it were, to maintain itself by its very opposite. If Penelope would continue honourably true to her consort, she must keep back her suitors with falsehood and deception; if Gudrun would keep faith with her betrothed, she must deceive her new wooer with false promises. Even this characteristic feature is not omitted in Shakespeare's drama. In Lear, he has made the true-hearted Kent carry out his virtue with a tragic consistency. Here in Cymbeline, he has sketched in Pisanio a very different picture of a fidelity just as instinctive, but far more circumspect. "Sly and constant", as the queen calls him, and as he himself wishes to be, Pisanio unites the cunning of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove. His singular position is throughout this, that he is truest, where he is most untrue. The queen and Cloten wish to turn him from his fidelity; he deceives them, and confesses to himself that to be true to them "were to prove false to him that is most true". He is commanded by Posthumus, on his allegiance, to slay Imogen. "Upon my love, and truth, and vows"? he exclaims;

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"if it be so to do good service, never let me be counted serviceable"! He divines at once that slander has caused Imogen to be suspected, nevertheless through sleepless nights, unresolved, he wavers sorrowfully between his duties. To serve his master with true obedience is more to him than life; yet he cannot kill the guiltless. He makes use of the order to entrap Imogen to Wales; there, according to circumstances, he has better opportunity for executing his cruel commission, or in other case he can make her disappearance serve to deceive his master into her alleged death. "He who dissembles", says Bacon in one of his maxims, "deprives himself of one of the most principal instruments for action; which is *Trust* and *Belief*"; but Pisanio on the contrary by dissimulation maintains his trust as an instrument for just action. As soon as he has had a glimpse into Imogen's mind, he is convinced that Posthumus has been deceived by slander,

> "Whose edge is sharper than the sword; whose tongue
> Outvenoms all the worms of Nile; whose breath
> Rides on the posting winds, and doth belie
> All corners of the world".

He now does that which Posthumus in his remorse required of him.

> "Every good servant does not all commands;
> No bond, but to do just ones"!

Thus he deceives his lord, and is in this again honest in that in which he is false, and "not true, to be true"; just as the physician says of himself that he is "the truer, so to be false with the queen". In the self-satisfaction and security with which Pisanio practises these deceptions,

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only that he may venture to be true where justice and a higher duty demand it, he does not err; he is heedless of the danger which threatens him at court; he silently endures the abhorrence of the mistaken Imogen, and the execrations of Posthumus; he is rewarded by his good conscience for having done the right.

If we closely examine this position of Pisanio, the ingenious purport of the play becomes ever more extended; it gains in universal significance and moral depth, beyond perhaps any other of Shakespeare's works; and if Lear may be regarded as a representation of passion generally, Cymbeline may be called a representation of the common course of the world, in which man is placed with his powers and impulses. It is a characteristic of Shakespeare's ideas and empirical system of morals, it is an ordinary tenet in his worldly wisdom, that cases and circumstances not unfrequently occur to men, in which virtue becomes vice and vice virtue, — as Pisanio here, in all his truth, cannot avoid returning false actions with falsehood and correcting false judgment with untruth, maintaining in this very falseness the highest fidelity. Our poet's conviction has been throughout, that no outward law can embody the rule of moral action in strict and ever available precepts, but that all depends on an inner law and feeling which ought to guide us in adding or taking away from the letter of duty according to case and circumstance, — that self-reliance and self-consciousness should be purified and developed within us, that we may be ever a living law and a true judge for ourselves in the doubtful perplexities of the moment. To that simple-natured Pisanio, a harmless concealment, a healthful dissimulation, a necessary falsehood, a necessary deception, according to

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the pressure of circumstances and the condition of the world around him, is not a sin. It is not possible to remain good, true, and faithful, among the wicked and the false, without ruining oneself; this experience Pisanio drew with simple tact, from his intercourse with men and his knowledge of them. To remain pure and inoffensive as a hermit in a bad world, would only be possible by separating from the world, and living *as* a hermit. In this situation, the poet has shewn us the two sons of Cymbeline. But even these are driven by the impetus of human nature into the dangers and temptations of life; they love not "the passive virtue, which procures innocence, but not merit" (Bacon); they risk the paternal blessing in this impulse for action, and their first collision with the world would have brought them into the most dangerous complications, had not Providence favourably interposed. The poet has shewn us, therefore, more perfect characters, who remained uninjured in the midst of the whirlpool of the world. We have seen how the moral purity of Imogen and Posthumus was regarded as blameless both at home and abroad. Yet even these perfect beings were to be defiled with the rancour of the world, their virtue was to be tempted and calumniated, their prudence shaken, their internal peace was to be destroyed with their external; even they are to discover, that it is not possible to keep oneself unspotted in the world. Even if in these exceptions of humanity, such an inner power were imaginable as would render them in themselves secure from all temptation to evil, yet the world without would expose them to it. The slanderer forces himself on Posthumus, he represents to him as false that on which he had placed his highest confidence, he robs him of his good and trustful

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nature; Posthumus now errs with the best intentions, exercising an over-hasty and inconsiderate justice, which, as he subsequently says, had it been employed against his *own* faults, he had "never lived to put on" this revenge. Imogen was deprived of her beloved, her patience was irritated, her longing desires overstrained; she flees in the hope of seeing her husband, of saving him, when she believes him faithless; both are excusable, even praiseworthy intentions, but they make deceptions, disguises, evasions, lies, endangered modesty, unavoidable; she must characteristically enough conceal and preserve her fidelity under the false, but characteristic name of Fidele. Imogen's spotless nature struggles against all this, but the pressure of circumstances forces it upon her. The poison of the world breathes on these purest mirrors of virtue, suspicion and mistrust so contrary to their nature seize them, trials befall them, and temptations in their worst form, armed with misfortune and despair, but they maintain inviolate their fidelity, against which all these strokes are aimed. And this it is, and it depends on this alone, which at last overcomes misfortune and wickedness: that we do not shape our own course after that of the world, that we do not let the vices of others tempt us to our own nor believe them excusable. By constancy, says Bacon, fate and fortune return like Proteus to their former being. Faithlessness, in revenge for faithlessness, as recommended by Iachimo to Imogen, would have for ever destroyed the love and happiness of both; the true constancy of both in spite of the supposed falsehood of each, surmounted the wicked report, and even the incurable evil, — the supposed death. And this constancy under such heavy trials acquires quite another purity, quite

another splendour *after* the sorrow and defilement, than *before* it. For the events of our play preach this lesson also, loudly and distinctly: that virtue when tried, even if it has wavered, has a much higher value than the unshaken, the untempted. This wisdom slumbers in the craving for the world exhibited by Cymbeline's boys; it lies deeply buried in the much-attacked wager of Posthumus; for a man would only stake the dearest being whom he possessed upon such a trial, and the tried one would only stand the test like Imogen, when it lies in the innermost conviction of both, that genuine virtue ought not to shrink from any trial, not even from the most painful. This lesson is taught also in the place, which Shakespeare has given to Cymbeline, whose name stands not by mere chance as the title of the drama. In the midst of all these tempting and tempted agents, stands the weak king, without self-reliance, the image of a subordinate character, the sport of every good or bad influence, tossed about by every temptation or suggestion, bent by every wind, but not like the tree at the same time strengthened. He is a mere cipher, receiving value only from the higher or lower figure placed just before it; we cannot impute the evil to him, to which those have instigated him, whom he esteems wise and good, any more than the good which happens without his choice and without his interference. If we consider again the opposition in which the poet has placed this character to that of the tried sufferers, our piece becomes, as it were, a poetic Theodicy; it justifies the impulse to evil which lies within us and the struggle with external evil imposed upon us, in this that by those opposite examples it renders perceptible, how goodness which has not overcome in the struggle with

evil is worthless, and that there can be no virtue without vice. The poet has brought down the gods themselves to the complaining shadows of Posthumus' parents and to the couch of the sleeping sufferer, in order to explain to them this meaning of our play, in order to announce expressly to them, that which Posthumus had already learnt by his own penetration and others by experience: that the gods decree evil for the trial of the good; that "some falls are means the happier to arise"; that "fortune brings in some boats that are not steered"; that God loves him best whom he crosses, "to make his gift, the more delayed, delighted"; that, consequently only tried virtue, ripened by its contact with evil is worthy of love; that the dearest of the world's sons are not exempt from its shocks and blows, but by resisting its temptations they fortify their inner worth. Shakespeare here allows the rules of the world to mix personally in the drama, as is usual in the epos, where the actors are in harmony with the divinity and his laws. This epic character, the happy termination of the epos, was necessarily given to this drama also. For they are friends and favourites of the gods who here act and err, because, even that which in calm security or uncertain passion, they do contrary to the maxims of morality, is done from moral motives or in moral indignation; so that the drama with a tragic ending, would have been an impeachment of the world's government. Hence, I do not think, that Shakespeare would have admitted the introduction of Jupiter to be a blunder, as Ulrici calls it, or that he needs Tieck's apology, that this scene was a fragment remaining of a youthful attempt at this play. Far rather does it appear to me, that the introduction of the divinity in this drama-

tized epos testifies to that same deep and remarkable instinct with which Shakespeare entered into the nature of poetry, its various branches and conditions, — an instinct, of which the preparation of the historical ground in the two last plays was another proof. The poet then used the advantage, which this introduction of Providence in a bodily form afforded him, allowing the history to go on in some points by means of unexpected incidents; the miraculous power thus introduced neutralizes the wonder of the incident, which Shakespeare otherwise nowhere permits himself to employ. Through this machinery of Providence, however, the free movement of the actors is never in the least impeded. And that which in the combination of the outward events might appear arbitrary, is more than counterbalanced by the inimitable unravelling of the wonderfully intricate knots at the conclusion of the play. This even found favour with Johnson; it is so rich in distinctness, that the poet seems to applaud himself for it, when he makes Cymbeline say:

> "This fierce abridgement,
> Hath to it circumstantial branches, which
> Distinction should be rich in".

A single passage will shew this, — that one, where Imogen, leaning upon Posthumus, "like harmless lightning throws her eye" on him, her brothers, and her father, "hitting each object with a joy, the counterchange severally in all." This passage alone imparts life and satisfaction to the scene when represented, and when read, makes us thoroughly conceive the necessity of *seeing* Shakespeare represented, and is a complete commentary upon it.

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TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

In the tragedies last discussed we have seen Shakespeare's genius at its highest point. If in our introductory remarks we placed Shakespeare as the tragic poet of modern times in the same rank that Homer occupied among the epic poets of antiquity, we thought this high appreciation justified by the grandeur of these very works, quite apart from Shakespeare's historical position as regards modern dramatic poetry. By leading us back in these plays to a race of men among whom passion has not been extinguished by refinement and over- refinement, Shakespeare has given to tragedy, in spite of its ideal character, somewhat of the naïve and original nature which is the essential property of the popular unartificial epos; by collecting his materials from all the periods and provinces of history, and maintaining in each, as far as possible, its nature and character, he has linked with this first attainment, a second utterly denied to this very epos; by ever raising its designs higher, extending them further, and grounding them deeper, he so widened the poetic limits of tragedy, that through him it first became possible in this branch of art to venture upon the richest subject, for the treatment of which the wide

range of the epos had formerly been considered indispensable. In this sense, Shakespeare might have ventured to rank himself with the father of poetry, with whom we have placed him in comparison, if he could, like us, have reviewed historically the relation of his modern tragedy to the old epos.

Now it seems to us not altogether impossible, that Shakespeare's consciousness of power actually incited him, to place himself immediately by the side of Homer in one of his works and indeed to oppose himself to him. Homer's Iliad was translated by Chapman about 1598, and published in separate parts. We have already taken occasion to mention this work with praise. With respect to a true rendering of the original, it would have almost the same importance at that day, as Voss's translation had in ours. With the same unlimited love and devotion as Voss, Chapman, contrary to the general opinion of those days, elevated the Greek bard far above all the poets; he maintained of him, contrary to the old proverb that he "never slept", that he was entirely harmonious and uniform throughout, that he neither deserved nor suited praise mixed with blame. Even our Goethe in his youth did not conceive the glory of Homer, being spoiled and attracted by the lighter reading of Virgil; may not such a praise have repelled Shakespeare also, to whom Chapman's translation could have been as little unknown as Voss's was to our Goethe and Schiller? And with Shakespeare the Virgilian ideal could not so easily be *supplanted* by the translation of Homer, as with our own great poets, either from its essential merits or from the material import of the poetry. For even so faithful a translation as Chapman's could not keep close to the strict

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form of the Greek epic; the period itself was not capable of being as susceptible to the great simplicity of the Homeric poems as we are. Chapman himself thought at times that he could improve upon the old poet by the insertion of a phrase or a conceit, and found it necessary to defend his naïve images here and there by imputing them to irony which was utterly foreign to Homer. The nature of the poetry, the form of the transposition, the mere character of the English language did not afford Chapman the victorious truthfulness of our Voss's translation; still more however the matter was a hindrance, which might have made Homer at that time, have the same imposing effect even upon a Shakespeare which he produced upon our German poets. From the nature of the people our sympathies will ever more incline us to Greek art and culture than to Roman, in England the case is reversed still and it was so then. At that time, the people learned from the stage the origin of the Britons from Trojan blood; this was readily believed, at a time when critical doubts were little esteemed; even our poet himself was pleased with the idea of the common origin of the Britons and Romans from the one Trojan source, — those two nations whose history and political nature bear so striking a resemblance to each other. Shakespeare himself, even though the form of the Homeric poem may have attracted him, would always have been provoked by its matter, to take the adverse side; we have often alleged how early he adopted the Virgilian view in the Trojan legend, and how deeply Trojan sympathies were rooted in him. If it be thought that the translation of Homer incited him to any poetic, perhaps indeed any rival work, (and this would have been as natural as that our own Goethe was spurred

by Homer to rival with him in epic pieces,) he would not, like Goethe, have been tempted to follow in his track, but rather, to take an opposite one. And we may well believe that this was really his intention in Troilus and Cressida.

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It is not of course possible actually to prove this. It might indeed be disputed, whether Shakespeare was acquainted with Chapman's translation at all. We think, however, the sum of our observations will incline to this conjecture, although we shall carefully avoid asserting it otherwise than as a conjecture.

Shakespeare's Troilus was printed in 1609, even before it was acted; this alone is indeed proof sufficient, that it was not written much earlier. An older piece about Troilus and Cressida, which was written by Chettle and Decker about 1599, is lost; probably Shakespeare made use of this work for his comedy; indeed Dyce supposes even, that in parts, especially near the end, this previous work of lesser poets still appears in our poet's play. The subject was much in favour in that lascivious age. We know of three ballads in the 16th century, which treated this same matter, one of which has been preserved and has been published by Halliwell. The common source of all these poems and plays is Chaucer's Troilus and Cressida, a poem in seven-lined stanzas, and one of the most popular stories down to the time of Elizabeth. The faithfulness of Troilus, the unfaithfulness of Cressida appear, according to Chaucer's intimation, to have become proverbial as early as his time, and the name of Pandarus has even been retained in the English language in the designation of a bawd. Chaucer found the complete sketch of his story in the old Trojan romances; but he names as his source a Latin original by one Lollius;

how it stands with regard to it, we know not; more certain www.libtool.com.cn is it, that the Filostrato of Boccaccio influenced his performance. Quite in the style of this Italian narrative, Chaucer's poem carries the simple story of Troilus' love through five long cantos, with a mixture of earnest pathos and naïve humour, so that we can hardly tell whether he means his "little tragedy" in jest or earnest. Troilus appears in it at first as a despiser of love, and then falls desperately in love with Cressida, whom Chaucer represents as an honourable and virtuous widow, whose name is venerated among the people; Pandarus acts as the go-between in their affairs, dexterous, busy, teazing, much in the character of a pander, although the story (we doubt also here, whether in earnest or irony,) makes Troilus solemnly declare that he considers the uncle's services nothing else than goodness, pity, and friendship. Cressida's departure from Troy, and her abandonment immediately afterwards of Troilus, seem to Chaucer rather a theme for sorrow than a matter of wantonness; he endeavours to excuse her faithlessness on the grounds of her helplessness, and the danger to which Troy was exposed; he says, he need not blame her further, as her name is so notorious already, that this is punishment sufficient for her guilt.

If Shakespeare had wished to handle this subject, as Chaucer did, for its own sake, he had in Troilus the choice of depicting wasted fidelity tragically, or of giving the matter a comic aspect, by making his foolish confidence the main point of his character, by so representing Cressida from the first, that he would have no occasion for wonder, as Chaucer had, at her sudden faithlessness, or rather at his own inadequate characterization, and by resting the con-

nection between the two upon the shallow and artificial
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mediation of Pandarus. Shakespeare has taken the subject in his play from this comic view, and in his masterly manner he has stamped upon the various circumstances the impression of a great psychological knowledge, which they entirely lack in Chaucer. The manager of the contract appears here, far more distinctly than in Chaucer, to be a practised master in the business. Worthless himself and therefore willingly busy for others, polite and cringing, foolish like a member of Polonius' family, inquisitive, chattering, an adept in double meanings, habituated to lies, bragging, and perjury, he understands thoroughly how to rouse and goad the passions by turns with praise and jealousy, fanning the flame even when already burning clear enough, making the fool more foolish, and the wanton still more wanton. For the crafty woman he does too much; he is too noisily officious for her; for the impatient Troilus he can hardly do enough. This youth of three and twenty, with the first down on his chin, is endowed by Shakespeare with the fanciful first love of boyhood, in which ardent sensuality and the madness of desire are hidden under boldness of spirit and romantic courage. He idealizes not only the beauty of his chosen one, but her manners also; he will stake his life that there is no spot in her heart, and he finds the alluring coquette "stubborn chaste against all suit"; he even idealizes the pressing pander as a "tetchy" man, who must "be woo'd to woo". In his choice he makes use of no trial or consideration. The best of tempers, honourable and straightforward, he speaks of himself as indeed he is:

"as true as truth's simplicity,
And simpler than the infancy of truth".

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Open and free in heart and hand, he gives what he has and shews what he thinks. To persist in his love with an "eternal and fixed soul", to be a pattern, a proverbial word for fidelity, this is his ambition; the moral of all his wit is: "plain and true"; that shall be his glory; that is, as he says himself, taking all together, — his "vice"! To this noble youth, Pandarus now leads the artful woman, whom only the crafty Ulysses can see through at a glance. Ulysses observes in a moment, what the poor Troilus had never discovered:

> There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
> Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
> At every joint and motive of her body.
> O these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
> That wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
> To every reader;

except alone to the good Troilus. The poet has endeavoured at first to deceive the reader as to Cressida's character as well as honest Troilus, or to keep him uncertain. She appears at first in company with her uncle, she displays a light but not unequal wit, she is, however, without depth, an adept at double-entendre, and indelicate in her expressions. She betrays almost at once, that she could say more in praise of Troilus than Pandarus does, that she, however, "holds off", in order to attract them more methodically, because she knows "men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is". In her intercourse with Troilus, she maintains her reserve in practice as before in theory, confessing and yielding and varying the plan of her coquettish allurements, although she is not to appear so much a coquette by profession as by nature, the prey of the first, as afterwards of the second opportunity, when the pander in consequence

has so easy a part to play. She was "won at the first glance", she tells Troilus, but confesses that it was "hard to *seem* won". She had held back, although she wished that "women had men's privilege of speaking first". She acknowledges that she loves him, "but not so much but she might master it"! And yet this is a lie, for her

> "thoughts were like unbridled children, grown
> Too headstrong for their mother"!

Thus she trifles with him, and in every concession she plants a sting; she tempts him by an ambiguous expression to kiss her, and then declares she had not meant it. She plays the same game subsequently with Diomedes, promises, draws back, gives him Troilus' sleeve, takes it away again, and all this to sharpen him like a whetstone; Diomedes, understanding all these arts and jests, declines them, and by this manner also attains his end. With Troilus they are better adapted, although superfluous. She wins him merely by her suspicious anger as to his challenging her truth; the very sign of an evil conscience in her, he takes for delicate sensitiveness. She enchants him, when she assures him that in simplicity "she'll war with him". She swears also to be unceasingly true to him, but she does so with ominous and equivocal expressions: "Time, force, and death", she says,

> "Do to this body what extremes you can;
> But the strong base and building of my love
> Is as the very centre of the earth,
> *Drawing all things to it!*"

With the same suspicious expression Pandarus praises the innate constancy of all her kindred: "they are burs, they'll stick where they are thrown"; that is, to one as well as to another.

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This humorous treatment justifies what we have said: Shakespeare has taken hold of the love-story of Troilus and Cressida from its comic side. But he has not, therefore, treated it for its own sake. He has connected it as Thersites (Act V. sc. 4.) remarks in the play itself, with a second action, with the proud withdrawal of Achilles and Ajax, and this second action so far surpasses the story of Troilus in importance, length, and force of handling, that the latter only appears like an episode in comparison. Every one will perceive that the prologue, which names the scene of the Trojan war as the argument of the piece, is far more descriptive of its purport than the epilogue spoken by Pandarus, which from its lesson upon pandering relates only to Troilus and Cressida, and which Steevens therefore considers to be only the idle addition of an actor. But even looking away from this second part of the play, we must perceive with regard to the story of Troilus itself, that it is of little worth in itself. It is very remarkable, but every reader will confess that this piece creates throughout no real effect on the mind. No one on reading the play will readily feel any sympathy or love for any character, any preference for any part, any pity for any suffering, any joy at any success; not even in the affair between Troilus and Cressida, which speaks to the heart more than any other incident in the piece. The wanton portions will not charm, the elegiac will not move; the character of Troilus just as he is, were he placed in other society, would attract our interest in no slight degree; and we might almost lament that a character drawn in so masterly a manner, is not designed with the intention of making it interesting in and for itself: but in

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such a connection this is not possible. His farewell to Cressida, sustained in the truest language of emotion, would touch us to the utmost, as soon as we could imagine it separated from the circumstances that belong to it; here, however, where throughout a concealed intention lurks in the background, we cannot venture to resign ourselves to psychical impressions. We feel throughout the play a wider bearing, a more remote object, and this alone prevents the immediate effect of the subject represented from appearing. The understanding is required to seek out this further aim of our comedy, and the sympathy of the heart is cooled. Here, as in Aristophanes the action turns not upon the emotions of the soul, but upon the views of the understanding, and accordingly the personages acting occupy the mind as symbols, rather than the heart. The comedy becomes a parody, we doubt if it is not even a satire, and it betrays so far an intention to rise above the earlier comic plays of the poet, in the same way as the later tragedies rose above the earlier. The editors of the first edition (in 1609) appeared desirous of indicating this higher value of the play. In a prefatory address to the reader, which is only to be found in some copies distributed before the representation of the play, great praise is bestowed upon all Shakespeare's comedies; but this *very* piece is distinguished above them all as superior in wit and intrinsic excellence. "It deserves such a labour", it says, "as well as the best comedy in Terence and Plautus; and believe this (it is prophetically added) that when the poet is gone and his comedies out of sale, you will scramble for them and set up a new English inquisition".

The aim of this dramatic farce was a parody of "the

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crown of all heroic tales", the Trojan myth; upon this point every one seems agreed. The question is, however, to what tradition this parodied representation relates, whether it regards Homer, or the travesties of the middle ages, which treated the story from the Trojan point of view? Shakespeare had undoubtedly before him, all that had reached England concerning the latter: Lydgate's "history, sege, and destruccyon of Troye", 1513., a free rhythmical translation of the well known Guido of Colonna, and besides this Caxton's translation of the "recueil des histoires de Troyes" by Raoul le Fevre, chaplain to Philip of Burgundy, (1471 and later) which was widely spread and was very popular in England down to the 18th century. From these romanticized stories of Troy, Shakespeare took his designation of places, the names of the gates, the transference of the epithet Ilium to Priam's castle &c. From thence he draws the characters of Margarelon and the sagittary or Centaur (Act V. sc. 5.); from thence the connection between Achilles and Polyxena, the relationship between Ajax and the Trojans, the description of Calchas as a deserter from the Trojans, which Chaucer has also; the circumstances of Hector's death are here related by Troilus and only referred to Hector by Shakespeare. The travesty of the ancient heroic age into the chivalry of the middle ages, lay in these sources, and Shakespeare transferred it to his comedy. From his adopting this mode of treatment, Coleridge was "half inclined to believe, that Shakespeare's main object was to translate the heroes of paganism into the not less rude but more intellectually vigorous warriors of Christian chivalry, to substantiate the graceful outlines of Homer into the flesh and blood of the romantic drama, and to give a

grand history-piece in the robust style of Albert Durer." Schlegel in sharing this view deprecated our fear, as if Shakespeare had intended to commit a crime against the venerable Homer; as if he had had before his eyes not the Iliad, but only those popular chivalric romances of the Trojan war which proceeded from Dares Phrygius.

We may, however, reasonably doubt, whether that which Coleridge assumed to be the object of this play, may not rather have been merely a *means* to that very object which Schlegel denies, — of practising not a crime, but a wanton satire against Homer. Taking Schlegel's words literally, it is not to be denied, that Shakespeare had Homer *before him*, that is that he made use of him, as well as of Caxton. It is remarkable, that Shakespeare has in this play avoided confining himself closely to all his sources equally. In language or speeches there is hardly any distinct reference to Homer, or to the works on Troy, or even to Chaucer, ready as it lay to hand. The conference of the Trojan chiefs concerning the restoration of Helen alone reminds us in its main features of a similar "Parliament" in Caxton, and the jests of Pandarus (Act IV. sc. 2.) faintly resemble an analogous passage in Chaucer. Otherwise all the more important actions follow accurately no single source; the separate features of the story and of the characters are disconnected, and are borrowed indifferently, if not intentionally, sometimes from one, sometimes from another. If we can cite certain passages, for which our comedy has to thank Chaucer and Caxton, we can adduce others also, which could be only derived from Homer himself. Almost all the prominent incidents in the Iliad are alluded to in some way, either hinted at, imitated, or

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detailed. At the very beginning there is the duel between Paris and Menelaus, the review of the heroes from the tower, Hector's farewell, the conference of the Grecian princes concerning the prolongation of the war, that of the Trojans about giving up Helen, the character of Thersites the reviler, the duel between Hector and Ajax, an allusion to the arrival of the new confederate Rhesus (Act II. sc. 3.), to the pursuit of Æneas by Diomedes (Act IV. sc. 1.), and even perhaps to that meeting of Diomedes with Glaucus, which is here transferred to Æneas. By far the greater number of these incidents are not in the Trojan books. The mention of the faction among the gods (Act III. sc. 3.) in favour or disfavour of men, can only be referred to Homer. What in our estimation entirely decides this question is that the action passing over the early events of the war begins in the middle, that the external purport of the play begins with the withdrawal of Achilles and ends with Hector's death, a limit at which Shakespeare could alone have arrived by reading the Iliad. In his contemporary plays Shakespeare speaks in Antony of the sevenfold shield of Ajax; he makes Coriolanus call his spear his ash; these are undoubtedly Homeric reminiscences. But far more than these exterior indications does the conception of the main characters prove Shakespeare's acquaintance with Homer. It would not be difficult to shew, that he has conceived the characters of Menelaus and Ajax very similarly to those in Chapman's version of Homer, whilst Ajax for example appears very different in the Trojan romances. The character of the reviler Thersites does not appear in Caxton; it was indeed known in England since 1537 by a rude burlesque interlude of that name, but he

does not appear here as the caricature of the Homeric Thersites, such as Shakespeare represents him. It was the pride of Chapman, that he wished to surpass the old translators of Homer in exact discrimination of the characters which were endowed by the poet with such different attributes; this attempt Shakespeare seemed to strive to carry still further, and indeed to surpass, by his skilful individualizing, by which he gave greater distinctness to the different classes of character in Homer, carrying this to the very limits, and sometimes even beyond the limits, which divided the characters from caricatures. In this task of thus stripping these personages of their ancient nobility, Shakespeare found himself obliged to display, as if by way of amends, a greater freshness of poetic splendour; and as his strength could not be confirmed here in the development of great characters and great mental concussions, it was obliged to shew itself in that part of the poem which addresses itself to the understanding, by that sententious wisdom, which in fulness of imagery, depth of thought, and abundance of tested maxims of experience, is unequalled in any other of Shakespeare's works, and forms indeed a noble contrast to the burlesque action. If Shakespeare was willing either in jest or earnest to contrast his own play with the Trojan books of Caxton and Lydgate, he did them an honour beyond their deserts in this effort, in which the poet might have ventured to contend with Homer, whose Nestor and Ulysses he destroyed on one side and formed anew on the other, thus giving him, as it were, a poetical reparation which excused the license he had taken.

But was such a license really aimed at? Had Shakespeare (taking Schlegel's words, before alluded to, meta-

phorically) while he had Homer before his eyes as his source, had he him also *in his mind,* when he made a parody of his tragi-comedy? I think, these are scarcely to be separated; although no crime, not even an injurious license was practised thereby. As to clothing and form, it could not have been Shakespeare's intention to travesty Homer; that had been done in the old books on Troy. From a party-view of the matter to wish to oppose him, would at least have been nothing new. Shakespeare had essentially to do *with the matter* of this great poetic theme, and this led him back first to the origin and foundation of the Trojan story; here was its weak side, that on which he could treat it humorously. For this end, all elaborations of the story were, truly speaking, equal, but Shakespeare must have felt, that he was most sharply opposed to Homer, on account merely of the genuine nature of the source. He, therefore, surveyed all these different sources from one point of view; he took matter from them all, ever according to his intention; he took the travestied form, which suited his object best, out of the books of Troy; the episodical matter, which he wanted especially for his parody, from Chaucer; but in the main action and in the limits in which he kept it, his drama adheres to the Homeric epos.

If we pass to the examination of the actions and personages of our comedy, we may be induced at the first glance to believe, that Shakespeare gave to the reviler Thersites, the part of the Chorus, which expresses the actual meaning of the piece most distinctly. His abusive tongue destroys the object indeed, by plunging in the deepest mire both the action and the actors. "All the argument," he says, "is a cuckold and a whore". In the course of

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things there is nothing but "patchery, jugglery, and knavery!" "A good quarrel, to draw emulous factions, and bleed to death upon! Now the dry *serpigo* on the subject! and war and lechery, confound all!" This is in a few words the opinion of Thersites. All the actors are in his sight "nothing but lechery, all incontinent varlets." Even Achilles has become idle and inactive, because queen Hecuba allures him with her daughter; the uncle Pandarus and the father Calchas make the same use of Cressida; thus too, if we are to believe Thersites, Agamemnon is a lover of quails (loose women) and Patroclus is as fond of them as a parrot of almonds; so Troilus wrestles with the victorious Diomedes for a Cressida, and Paris with Menelaus for a Helen. In his contempt for this originator of the campaign, Thersites uses even stronger and more venomous words to express his contempt for the whole affair: he would not mind being the most contemptible of creatures, "the louse of a lazar", but "to be Menelaus, he would conspire against destiny." Next to him, he hates Achilles and Ajax the most, because they possess that which most provokes his envy. His biting spirit makes him feel more nearly allied to the faction of the wits, and therefore he spares Nestor and Ulysses; but he deeply abhors those strong ones who quarrel about him, who make him their buffoon, and then reward him with blows for abusing his freedom. It gratifies him to mock this rude brutality; he calls them the "draught-oxen" of the crafty Ulysses and Nestor; of so little wit, that they could not "deliver a fly from a spider, without drawing their massy irons, and cutting the web"; if Hector were to knock out either of their brains, it were "as good crack a fusty nut with no

kernel." Envy and jealousy fill him with the poison and obscenity, with which he besmears everything; he calls upon "the devil, envy," to say Amen to the curses which he utters upon all. Anger makes him like the "porcupine", which turns its quills against everybody; envy like the "unsalted leaven", which makes all the dough mouldy, which places him on the lowest scale among the envy-divided Greeks. But for this very reason, *his* voice is not the decisive one, which could lead us to the poet's true meaning. We *can* only take this view of the action before Troy, when, placing ourselves on a level with Thersites, we give our vote for cowardice which mocks at bravery, for envy which depreciates greatness, for ugliness which robs everything of the splendour of beauty, for flat prose which ridicules every ideal motive, for downright badness which sees everything in its worst aspect. In him we hear the sarcastic spirit, which regards everything as utterly bad, and will neither see nor acknowledge the existence of what is good, noble, or beautiful. But on this bad principle, this principle of absolute meanness, Shakespeare has not designed his merry humorous play.

The question concerning the origin and object of the Trojan struggle has been brought under discussion by our poet in higher circles and has been treated far more fundamentally and poetically than by Thersites. That this origin was a main point with him, is shewn by his placing in the foreground the relation of Troilus and Diomedes to the abandoned Cressida, as a corresponding one to the similar and previously well-known relation of Paris and Menelaus to Helen. A stolen wife was the cause of the earliest national war between two quarters of the world. Two

owners strive for her, as Diomedes says to Paris, both alike foolishly, the one seeks her

> "Not making any scruple of her soilure,
> With such a hell of pain and world of charge",

the other defends her,

> "Not palating the taste of her dishonour,
> With such a costly loss of wealth and friends".

The noble Hector feels the ignominy of the matter, when in such eloquent words he defends the right of marriage, and Ulysses also, when his gall overflows on the subject of the disgrace, for which "they lose their heads to gild the horns" of Menelaus. But at the same time, the action has in the eyes of Hector as well as of Ulysses another, a better, a poetic side, in conference upon which the poet clothes his verse with dignity and seriousness. In the assembly of the Trojans (Act II. sc. 2.) Helenus and Hector discuss the restoration of Helen. The latter confessing his fear of evil consequences, calls "modest doubt the beacon of the wise", and surety "the wound of peace"; the former reminds him to listen to the grounds of reason. The wanton and interested alone, Paris and Troilus, will not hear of reason. Hector suggests that the cause of the war, Helen, is not worth contending about. Troilus rejoins, "what is aught, but as 'tis valued"? Hector more justly replies:

> "Value dwells not in particular will;
> It holds his estimate and dignity
> As well wherein 'tis precious of itself
> As in the prizer; 'tis mad idolatry,
> To make the service greater than the god".

Troilus, however, reminds him of the beauty of Helen, of

the value the Greeks set upon her, of the Trojans' own
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declaration, that she was "inestimable", of the national honour which was mixed up with the affair. And Hector, although the prophetess Cassandra has justified his fear of the result, although he has himself declared the chief reason for Helen's restoration to be the holy right of marriage, although he has truly said, that to persist in doing wrong makes it much more heavy, although he sees that the youthful and superficial defenders of the war speak only as influenced by lust or revenge, — Hector himself at the reproof of Troilus, gives up the cause of reason; he acknowledges that the general honour and dignity of Troy is at stake, that Helen's is a cause that spurs them on to great and valiant deeds. Thus Shakespeare recognizes the chivalric object of the strife, the romantic and poetic side of the action before Troy among the Trojan party, but no moral principle and right. Consequently the counterpart to Paris, which is here prominent, the violent Troilus, meets his tragi-comic end, and Hector falls a victim to his ambition for glory. This thread runs through the whole character of Hector. We see at the beginning the otherwise patient and tranquil man full of ambitious wrath, because his glory has undergone a slight fall by means of Ajax. On this account he is armed before sunrise, he strikes his servants, he scolds Andromache; we find him again at the end of the piece just the same. To make amends for that blot on his fame, he sends his challenge to the Greeks. He pays at length no further attention to the prophecies of Cassandra, to the entreaties of his wife and his father; with death before his eyes, he esteems his honour above his life.

The wiser Grecian princes regard the matter from a similar point of view as the Trojans. Ulysses even judges the object of the war more severely than Hector. Nevertheless he exhorts to continue the long and unfavourable struggle on the same ground of glory. The noblest undertakings, he declares, do not equal the projects formed; the gods protract the end, to "find persistive constancy in men"; this constancy is shewn best in misfortune, when

> "Distinction, with a broad and powerful fan,
> Puffing at all, winnows the light away".

On the smooth sea the shallow boat sails beside "the strong-ribbed bark", but it perishes in the storm, whilst the other, uninjured, cuts its way through the "liquid mountains". Herein, however, appears the poet's preference for Troy, that he makes the counsellors within the city unanimous at a similar exhortation to warlike deeds, whereas the Greeks are divided into parties, in which ambition, descending to petty envy, is warped from its chief aim. Viewed in a moral and just sense, the cause of the Greeks is not better than that of the Trojans; on the side of honour it is worse. Shakespeare has allowed the Homeric Achilles, who purchased lasting fame with a short life, to degenerate from a hero into a vain, morbidly proud, and effeminate mocker. Not on account of any dispute with Agamemnon, but for the sake of the promised Polyxena, he withdraws from the fight and from glory; he has no sympathy with the common honour, like Hector; he abandons the glory and honour of Greece to follow this love; he cares for nothing in the world but what affects him personally; he rouses himself, therefore,

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first after the death of Patroclus (this trait also Shakespeare takes from Homer), and even then only for a victory which brings him more ignominy than honour. The weak Ajax imitates him in haughtiness and inactivity, and withdraws as Achilles had done, in the decisive moment, after having won a little honour. Ulysses takes all possible pains to arouse in both the public spirit, the ambition, and the thirst for glory, which overflowed in Hector and Troilus. The finest speeches in the play, as well as the intrigues which lengthen out the action, have reference to this intention. To this we may trace that eloquent speech on the destroyed discipline and deference to rank (Act I. sc. 3.), and on the fever of envy which caused those divisions and weakness in the camp, wherein lay the strength of Troy. There is reference to it in the proposal to appoint Ajax for the single combat with Hector, and thereby to rouse Achilles. There is reference to it in the oft-recurring eulogy of the ascendancy of mental over bodily strength. There is reference to it in the shameless flattery with which they bait the stupid Ajax and feed his hungry, envious ambition. There is reference to it in the noble lesson (Act III. sc. 3.) impressed upon Achilles, and which was the purport of Ulysses' first speech, that steadfastness alone keeps honour bright. All this has little effect; the two strong-armed heroes have too little feeling for honour and glory, Hector and Troilus have too much; these latter mean well and do ill, the former mean ill and do well or rather they escape harm. On the side of the Greeks, Hector and Ulysses fare the best: because they possess at least public spirit and policy. Yet this also is only ordinary cunning which displays profound wisdom in the mysteries of state-policy, when the

question concerns mere espionage, a wisdom which in consequence attains its ends only in an equivocal manner.

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By this absence of a moral cause in both Greeks and Trojans, by this want of public-spirited honour especially among the Greeks universally, Shakespeare has placed the whole action and story in deep gloom, which is rendered only the more striking and apparent by the gleams of noble principles and wise reflections that fall upon it. Even in the description of the characters and in the bearing of the style throughout, the intention has been to disfigure. In this play according to Tyrwhitt there are more bombastic expressions than in six others; the revilings of Thersites are so richly adorned with the eloquence of abuse and rudeness, the blood-thirsty impatience of Ajax before the duel is so full of exaggerated bombast, that this alone would betray the intention to degrade the whole subject by a caricatured representation. The challenge of Hector delivered by Æneas in the style of Amadis, is so extravagant, that Agamemnon himself doubts whether it be in earnest or mockery. As to the characters, even those least defaced, as Hector and Agamemnon, are not free from a ludicrous air. All these grand personages throughout are deprived of the serious aspect and the solemn bearing, which distinguishes them in Homer; they do not always exchange the buskin for the sock, but they repeatedly alternate them; they wear their everyday-dress instead of that of festal pomp. The comic distortion of these characters is almost wholly attained by the one means, that they are more individualized than in the ancient epos; this alone would have destroyed the grandeur of the Homeric poem and its personages; it is the introduction of the particular, where we expected or were

accustomed to the general, and this is universally known to produce a comic effect. Shakespeare has only to shew us Patroclus imitating old Nestor, coughing and spitting, shaking in and out the rivets of his gorget with a "palsy-fumbling", in order to render despicable and ridiculous the venerable picture of the "faint defects of age" which even Homer does not conceal. The poet himself has correctly described his own mode of procedure in that of those mockers Patroclus and Achilles: sometimes they act Agamemnon's greatness in an exaggerated manner, sometimes Nestor's infirmities so strikingly, "as like as Vulcan and his wife;" all the "abilities, gifts, natures, shapes, achievements, and plots" of the princes, serve "as stuff for these two to make paradoxes". And in this similar treatment our comic poet keeps so strictly within the line of truth, that even there where he caricatures most, the striking resemblance to the Homeric characters is not to be denied, and the carrying out of these distinctive features corresponds closely to the outlines given by the ancient poet. We do not go so far as Godwin, who calls the Homeric Thersites a mere schoolboy's sketch compared to Shakespeare's, but it is true, that it is the image of Thersites in a concave mirror. The heroic stratagems of Ulysses are changed into very petty artifices, and his instinctive into conscious wisdom, but yet his character is hardly so much lowered as the sycophant son of Sisyphus in the tragedy of Euripides. We will not throughout maintain with Drake, that the Homeric characters are here "laid naked to the very heart and so keenly individualized, that we become more intimately acquainted with them than from Homer himself"; but it is true, that in single instances we stumble, as it were, upon a psychological

commentary. The hand is masterly with which in the delineation of Ajax, physical strength is exhibited, strengthened at the expense of mental power; the abundance of similes and images with which the rare but simple nature is described, is inexhaustible; the discernment is wonderful, with which all animal qualities are gathered together to form this man, at once both more and less than human: Mars' idiot, a purblind Argus, and a gouty Briareus.

If it be doubted, whether in this polemic comedy more has been accomplished than to give vent to a Virgilian sympathy, or to a humorous freedom with regard to Homer and the other Trojan legends, or whether there may be a deeper meaning in this negation of the Homeric point of view, in this removal of all grandeur from the myth, we can at least gather from the whole performance this proximate truth: that the noblest poetry without a strong moral principle is not what it is capable of being and what it ought to be. The collected works of Shakespeare, as we have now learned to know them, shew us that in his æsthetic system such a proposition would have ranked in the first place. And when we remember that even in the Grecian times, Plato himself from his philosophical and religious point of view found matter for censure morally with regard to Homer, we shall not wonder, if Shakespeare from his poetic starting point, arrived at similar though different objections to the Trojan traditions. The points of view, from which Aristophanes with such reverential awe considered the old poet, and that too on account of his moral and practical importance, lay too remote from Shakespeare for us to demand them from him. As the Trojan history lay before him, formed out of so many component parts, it seemed to him to be wanting

in the higher moral and thus at the same time in the connecting link, with which he ever sought to unite his poetry directly with life. And this he shewed in an exaggerated manner in his comic play, where he so parodied the same action, that joining throughout the commonest traditions, he heaped together all their darker parts, and deprived the actors of every honourable and virtuous motive. By this means, he naturally makes his own drama still more deficient in that connecting moral element. Certainly he would not have wished to reckon this play among those which hold up a mirror to the age; since it is not even calculated to make the simplest psychical effect. The piece, therefore, by its half-satirical character loses the common aim of the drama, if this were indeed at all intended; it is, however, not impossible, that the comedy was never originally designed with this aim, and was not indeed intended for representation. In this case this would be no reproach to the piece, so long as the new and unusual aim of the satirical or humorous drama were more certainly and acutely reached. But we doubt if any one will allow this to be the case. If a humorous and ironical parody of the Trojan war, that is, of the facts in themselves, were aimed at, we must acknowledge that Cervantes grasped his object more successfully when he directed his humorous romance against knight-errantry, a decaying institution, which yet, out of all time and place, continued in the advancing age, whereas Shakespeare brought forward a long forgotten state of things, which at that time did not even survive in the minds of the learned. But if the object aimed at were rather to satirize the poetic representations of this war, the defects of the play will become evident by another comparison. Aristo-

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phanes, raised in this way his comedy into a satire, but then he renounced from the beginning the beaten path of the drama; he avoided all subjects which could give grounds for conjecturing an imitation of the usual circumstances of life; he elevated his actions into bold allegories, and never left the spectator divided between the course of one action which excited the feelings, and another parallel action which challenged the intellectual and reflective powers. It is this division, which injures the Shakespearian piece, in which we are not, it is true, attracted by the subject represented (the loves of Troilus and Cressida) for its own sake; but still we are not free, on the other side, to acquire a clear conception of the satirical intention. In a similar manner (as may have been aimed at here also,) Aristophanes represented also literary personages and events from the same moral point of view, but he has not taken them out of remote ages, he has directed his sallies against the living, against poets as well as statesmen; and this should ever be the object of satire, because we war not against the defenceless and the dead. But it may have been, that the revived Homer at that day was considered a living author, and we will suppose, that this very revival may have tempted Shakespeare to expose the weakness of the ancient, far-famed poetry. But even then, the ground was not fairly won, and the scene of action was not clear and smooth. While he mixed together all the old sources of Trojan story, he threw down his glove before the most different combatants, before all who stood in the most different relation to the one cause, which was the object of his attack. If it were, as Schlegel was of opinion, the chivalric books on Troy which he attacked, these were objects too insignificant, and

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even then too obsolete for Shakespeare's assaults; if it were Homer, then these assaults themselves would necessarily appear to us, in the present day, obsolete. A fiction so unconscious and innocent, as the Homeric is, must ever remain, like everything childlike, unfit for satire; the morals and opinions of such an age can be judged by no other presuppositions and conditions, than those of the age itself, and Shakespeare had not the means nor the knowledge required for this. Shakespeare has founded his own poems in part upon a basis which, morally considered, was here and there still worse, than the actual basis of the Trojan story (which even Homer has nowhere placed in a brilliant light); and in simplifying, in separating, and ennobling his materials, he has not on the whole done otherwise than is there done; we might, therefore, indeed doubt, whether reviewed even from his own position, his attacks, if they refer to Homer and Homer alone, are just and right. It is however, doubtful, if any serious attack were intended; that is, we hesitate whether a humorous or satirical design lay at the bottom of the play, whether he may have written in jest or mockery, whether in jest or mockery of the facts or of their poetic forms, or whether all or which of these forms was the point aimed at. This uncertain character of the drama and the doubtful connection of the poet with doubtful sources, are the causes of our quitting this play with greater dissatisfaction, than any other of Shakespeare's. The warmest admirers of Shakespeare are undecided about it, and even Coleridge declared, that he scarcely knew what to say of it.

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JULIUS CÆSAR.

If our poet's pure susceptibility for the comprehension of the Homeric works was disturbed by youthful impressions and school-prejudices, and rendered impossible by imperfect knowledge and inadequate translations, his acquaintance with the Roman people and their political life and his free use of Plutarch in the three Roman histories, is on the other hand all the more remarkable: in these, the national spirit so congenial with the Roman history and the clear historic mind of the poet met each other half-way; and Shakespeare wrote these plays, in which his contemporaries saw the Romans "with the half-sword", truthfully represented in costume and spirit, with the same delight as in the last century we admired the colouring of the age in Goethe's Götz. Even in our own day we must acknowledge the truth of the poet's conception, which is even not disturbed by the oft-repeated objection, that Shakespeare has made English citizens and artisans of the Roman populace; for the masses when set in motion are everywhere alike, especially in two nations politically so similarly constituted, so that this blame is rather to be considered as praise. We cannot indeed in quite a literal sense coincide

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with those admirers, who on the other side have said, that in these plays the character, the fate, the patriotism, the renown, the real disposition, and the public life of the eternal city are revived before us; but it is nevertheless true, that the exact delineation and lively elaboration of the little that Shakespeare has been able to glean from Plutarch, characteristic of Roman life, is worth more than the closest description of the time derived from the severest antiquarian study.

Let us remember with what freedom and individuality Shakespeare has made use of his several authorities. When he had an older drama before him, he discarded for the most part the whole form and retained only the story and the name. Was it a poor novel of Italian origin, he could seldom use the web of the action, without first unweaving it, nor a character without creating it entirely afresh. We need only recollect the flat narratives, out of which he fashioned All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Cymbeline, and the Merchant of Venice, to perceive with what a bold and regardless manner he treated the motives of the actions and the actions themselves! Nay, even in the chronicles of his English histories, however conscientiously he observed the historical tradition, he was obliged, in order to put life into them, to lengthen them considerably and to introduce into them fictitious matter, not unfrequently even, to invent the explanatory motives of the actions. An entirely different and startling relation exists between our poet and his Plutarch, whom he had read in Thomas North's translation (1579). The simple, plain, and yet not unimaginative apprehension and representation of human affairs in this historian addressed

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itself so clearly both to his head and heart, that he here set bounds to his freedom, wholly renounced his arbitrary power, and closely followed the historical text. We doubt whether we shall find Shakespeare greater, when he invented everything regardless of his sources, or here where he took all as he found it,—whether we shall most admire in the one case his free power of creation, or in the other his submission and self-denial. Far from all pride of authorship and all pursuit after originality, he appears here before a classic biographer, never attempting to strive with nature, but rather reverentially to preserve her uninjured in the genuine form which he found before him. If the sense of truth and the modesty which we have found to be peculiar to the character of this poet, shine forth anywhere, it is surely here.

With regard first of all to Julius Cæsar, the component parts of our drama are borrowed from the biographies of Brutus and Cæsar in such a manner, that not only the historical action in its ordinary course, but also the single characteristic traits in incidents and speeches, nay, even single expressions and words are taken from Plutarch, even such as are not anecdotal or of an epigrammatic nature, even such as one unacquainted with Plutarch would consider in form and manner to be quite Shakespearian, and which have not unfrequently been quoted as his peculiar property, testifying to the poet's deep knowledge of human nature. From the triumph over Pompey (or rather over his sons), the silencing of the two tribunes, and the crown offered at the Lupercalean feast, until Cæsar's murder, and from thence to the battle of Philippi and the closing words of Antony, which are in part exactly as they were delivered, all in this play is essentially Plutarch. The omens of

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Cæsar's death, the warnings of the augur and of Artemidorus, the absence of the heart in the animal sacrificed, Calphurnia's dream, the peculiar traits of Cæsar's character, his superstition regarding the touch of barren women in the course, his remarks about thin people like Cassius; all the circumstances about the conspiracy where no oath was taken, the character of Ligarius, the withdrawal of Cicero, the whole relation of Portia to Brutus, her temptation, her words, his reply, her subsequent anxiety and death; the circumstances of Cæsar's death, the very arts and means of Decius Brutus to induce him to leave home, all the minutest particulars of his murder, the behaviour of Antony and its result, the murder of the poet Cinna; further on the contention between the republican friends respecting Lucius Pella and the refusal of the money, the dissension of the two concerning the decisive battle, their conversation about suicide, the appearance of Brutus' evil genius, the mistakes in the battle, its double issue, its repetition, the suicide of both friends and Cassius' death by the same sword with which he killed Cæsar, — all is taken from Plutarch's narrative, from which the poet had only to omit whatever destroyed the unity of the action. The characterization of Brutus and Cassius is in general true to Plutarch's description of them, the political moral of this whole historical drama is simply conceived and expressed, and is afterwards continued in Antony and Cleopatra.

This fidelity of Shakespeare to his source justifies us in saying, that he has but copied the historical text. It is at the same time wonderful, with what hidden and almost undiscernible power he has converted the text into a drama, and made one of the most effective plays possible. Nowhere

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else has Shakespeare executed his task with such simple skill, combining his dependence on history with the greatest freedom of a poetic plan, and making the truest history at once the freest drama. The parts seem to be only put together with the utmost ease, a few links taken out of the great chain of historical events, and the remainder united into a closer and more compact unity; but let any one, following this model work, attempt to take any other subject out of Plutarch, and arrange only a dramatic sketch from it, and he will become fully aware of the difficulty of this apparently most easy task. He will become aware what it is to concentrate his mind on one theme strictly adhered to, as is here the case, to refer persons and actions to one idea, to seek this idea out of the most general truths laid down in history, to employ moreover for the dramatic representation of this idea none but the actual historical personages, and so at length to arrange this for the stage with that practised skill or innate ability, that with an apparently artless transcript of history, such an ingenious independent theatrical effect can be obtained, as that which this play has at no time failed to produce. Indeed Leonard Digges informs us with what applause Julius Cæsar was acted in Shakespeare's time, whilst the tedious Catiline and Sejanus, which Ben Jonson had worked at with such diligence and labour, were coldly received. Immediately on its appearance the play roused the emulation of all the theatres; the renowned poets Munday, Drayton, Webster, and Middleton wrote a rival piece, "Cæsar's Fall", in 1602, Lord Stirling a "Julius Cæsar" in 1604, and a "Cæsar and Pompey" appeared in 1607. At the period of the Restoration, Cæsar was one of the few works of Shakespeare that

were sought out, represented, and criticized. In our own day, in Germany, we have seen it performed, seldom well, but always with applause. Separate scenes, like that between Casca and Cassius during the storm, produce an effect which can scarcely be imagined from merely reading them; the speech of Antony, heightened by the effect of external arrangement and the artifices of conversation, by proper pauses and interruptions, even with inferior acting, carries away the spectator as well as the populace represented; the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius is a trial-piece for great actors, which, according to Leonard Digges created even in his time the most rapturous applause, and even the last act, which has been often objected to, is capable of exciting the liveliest emotion, when well managed and acted with spirit.

The question as to the time of the origin of Julius Cæsar has only lately been correctly answered. In a poem by Drayton, Mortimeriados (1596), which in 1603 appeared in a new form under the title of "the Barons' War", there is a stanza in the third book of this edition which is very like the concluding words of Antony, and is not to be found in the first edition of the poem. The whole impression is, it must be admitted, that Drayton and not Shakespeare is to be considered the plagiarist, and this because the passage is so entirely identical with the feeling of the piece, that *it* could not have been borrowed by Shakespeare from another. Hence it appears that the play was composed before 1603, about the same time as Hamlet. Not alone is this confirmed by the frequent external references to Cæsar, which we find in Hamlet, but still more by the inner relations of the two plays. These are so remarkable that, if preponderating

reasons had not determined us not to separate the three Roman plays, we must have discussed Cæsar, for the sake of its internal relationship, close by the side of Hamlet and Macbeth, because it was conceived and written in the same train of thought as these two pieces. If we enter at once upon the connection of these two works with each other, we shall reach the object of our considerations upon Cæsar in the shortest way.

In Hamlet, the impassioned wavering hero looked with envy on the Roman character of Horatio, who, while he suffered everything, seemed to suffer nothing, who was the slave of no passion, taking with equal thanks the buffets and rewards of fortune, his "blood and judgment well co-mingled." If we transport this character from christian times into heathen ages, and from Denmark into the excited public life of Rome, we have the main features of Brutus who forms the chief character in Julius Cæsar. Of a phlegmatic temperament, calm and serious, indifferent to amusement and pleasure, unmoved by passion, "a lamb that carries anger, as the flint bears fire", Brutus is born to be a stoic, and practises the principles of that school which prescribes the passive use of life and enjoins the power of endurance. Of him, as of Horatio, it is said, that none knew better how to endure than he, and Messala and Cassius acknowledge this with admiration. He possesses all the virtues which constitute a noble nature; he has strengthened in himself all the virtues which practical life ripens and brings to perfection; he has won for his own all the virtues, which arise out of strength of will and the dominion of the mind over the passions. In his relations to his wife and servant he is tender and mild, amiable and full of kindly consideration; in all his relations

to society and to the state, he is unselfish, armed with probity, incapable of flattery, unbiassed by party-spirit, perfectly upright and careful for the common weal; in his relation to himself, in his condemnation of passion, he is discreet and circumspect, never rash in action or decision, but his resolution once taken he is invincible in spirit and action; firm and steady in carrying out his plans, and a stern ruler over inward emotions. Standing between the unmanly irresolute Hamlet and the manly overstrained Macbeth, the elements are

> "So mixed in him, that nature might stand up,
> And say to all the world, *This was a man!*"

That man, whose nature Macbeth also originally possessed, *that* man, who does nothing more and nothing less, than what becomes a man, and who proves his manhood above all by mastery over himself. Shakespeare has developed this distinctive feature in Brutus by great examples. He has endowed him with a nature as profound, and with feelings as powerful and as excitable as Hamlet and Macbeth, but the poet has concealed the uncommon intensity of these emotions under the veil of heroic calmness, and behind the accepted character of the determined politician. We scarcely perceive the uneasiness, which disturbs him within, in those passages, where at the beginning of the conspiracy and towards the conclusion of it, he envies the careless sleep of his boy Lucius. Little adapted for dissimulation, he tells the conspirators to perform their parts steadily like clever actors, and he sets them a good example. When they think their plans are betrayed by Popilius Lena, Cassius is about to kill himself, but Brutus calmly

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looks the suspected person in the face, and observes that he is not dangerous. He conceals the project from his wife, until he has heroic proof of her discretion. The early death of this beloved wife overwhelms him with "grief and blood ill-tempered", and makes him more ready to quarrel with Cassius than is his nature, but immediately after he is able to conceal Portia's death from Messala, that the tidings may not shake his courage. Over the body of Cassius nature demands her rights, but he puts off the debt of tears until another time, that his personal anguish may not endanger the public cause. All these striking features of a sharply drawn character are without display and are almost silently indicated in the piece; no more laconic characterization has Shakespeare ever made use of, than in this laconic Roman, who performs the greatest deeds with the utmost simplicity, and uses the fewest words over the grandest actions.

The play under consideration is a most striking variation on the theme of Hamlet and Macbeth, and gives us a new and remarkable proof of the depth and many-sidedness, with which Shakespeare thought out and elaborated any problem he had once seized upon. A deed of as great, nay greater weight than that demanded of Hamlet or planned by Macbeth, is laid on this pattern of a man, — the murder of a hero, who had increased the greatness of Rome as much as he had endangered her freedom. It is a deed of a nature doubtful in itself, which is required of him, not one decidedly right or decidedly wrong, like that to which Hamlet was called and to which Macbeth was tempted. The uncertainty, the doubt, the discord, lay in the other instances in the men themselves, here it lies in the thing

itself, and is only from thence transferred to an even, clear, and right-judging mind. www.libtool.com.cn Hamlet was urged to a just revenge, he was called to punish a wrong committed, he ventured not to take the first and only step, he scarcely desired the end, and the means still less. Macbeth feels himself tempted to murder and treachery, to the performance of a wrong yet not committed, he shudders at both end and means, but as soon as he is resolved, he takes with the first step all the ensuing ones, as soon as he is determined as to the end, he adopts the means also, grasping even more than is necessary. Brutus is persuaded by his friends to take part in a murder and conspiracy, as he himself calls it: for the restoration of freedom, his task is to prevent an injustice as yet only *apprehended* on Cæsar's part; he desires the end, but only the means most necessary for attaining it; he takes the first step, but not the second and third; whereas he should either not have taken the first, or he should also have taken the others. With him it is not a disturbance of nature in consequence of an unequal temperament, and thus resulting from this, a sin of omission, as with Hamlet; it is not a disorderly, exaggerated discord, and after its removal a crime, as with Macbeth, but after the quiet manly consideration of an equivocal task, it is a deed unrepented, but atoned for, which from the end in view and the means used was a fault, an error, and as such was revenged upon his own head.

If in Hamlet the aim of the poet was to treat the relation of the intellectual to the active nature in a thoroughly human sense, in the history of Julius Cæsar the tendency is rather political: to depict the collision of moral against political duties. The struggle between the humanity

of a noble and gentle nature and the political principles of an energetic character, between personal feelings and public duty, this is the soul of this play and the most interesting point of the situation, in which Brutus is placed. Considered in himself, Brutus is of much too moral and too pure a nature to be fit for the hard and often dirty work of politics, like the gross degenerate Faulconbridge or the sharp Cassius. At the first hint, when Cassius initiates him into his ideas of a conspiracy, he feels that he is drawn into a foreign element: "Into what dangers," he asks,

> "would you lead me, Cassius,
> That you would have me seek into myself
> For that which is not in me"?

His own inward voice calls him not to this deed. It is true the necessities of the time weigh upon him and prepare for him heavy sorrows; the rising ambition of Cæsar has made him reflective, thoughtful, and sorrowful, but as ever, he has kept the emotions of his soul concealed; to combat these sufferings or the cause of them, the strong sufferer is not disposed. When he assures Cassius, that he would not

> "repute himself a son of Rome,
> Under these hard conditions as this time
> Is like to lay upon us",

he probably thinks only of voluntary banishment. But this man, in himself little created for politics, is yet placed under a constitution, that allows no rest from politics, and he is brought up in principles which necessitate active life. He possesses, like Hamlet, a cultivated mind, and according to Plutarch as well as Shakespeare, he carries books about with him even in the camp; he is a lean thinker, as Cæsar

in Plutarch describes not only Cassius but Brutus also; but, www.libtool.com.cn according to his own testimony, which Shakespeare found in Plutarch, he could not endure the Ciceros, men whose cultivation advantaged nothing, whose finest principles were never living ones; and Shakespeare has represented him quite in this spirit. Next to his human duties, consonant with the ideas of all antiquity, stand his political duties, next to the virtue of the individual stands in equal rank the honour of the patriot. Consequently, immediately after those defensive words to Cassius, there follows the declaration:

> "What is it that you would impart to me?
> If it be aught toward the general good,
> Set honour in the one eye and death i' the other,
> And I will look on both indifferently:
> For, let the gods so speed me, as I love
> The name of honour more than I fear death".

To these his political principles Cassius now applies himself in order to draw him into a conspiracy against Cæsar. From this moment, his anxiety as to the condition of the time and state rises to a great internal struggle. He eats, he sleeps, he speaks no more; imaginations and cares torment him day and night; as he says,

> "Between the acting of a dreadful thing,
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:
> The genius and the mortal instruments,
> Are then in council; and the state of man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection".

We have seen Macbeth shaken by a similar revolution, by similar phantasms and fearful dreams, and he drove them

away as soon as possible; we have seen Hamlet disturbed and ruined by them; in Brutus, none but the actor can shew them to us, and he only very faintly; they are repressed by a strong mental power, which calmly weighs the principles of action in the disputed point, and decides with stern composure accordingly. When Brutus exclaims against the "dangerous brow of conspiracy", we see his whole nature opposed to it, but after he has once acknowledged it as necessary, he teaches the practice of its dangerous arts. He would gladly slay Cæsar's spirit and "not dismember Cæsar", but as his ruling ambition is contrary to the cause of freedom, his republican principles permit no hesitation. When pity for Cæsar is placed in the scale with pity for his country, there is not a doubt which has the preponderance. When the human relation between him and Cæsar, is opposed to the relation towards his country in which he is placed by the republican spirit inherited from Junius Brutus, it is irremediable but that the restoration of public freedom must be his first duty. The purest motives decide the inward struggle in favour of patriotism; even his bitterest foes acknowledge this. Cæsar must fall as a sacrifice to his country, its weal, and its freedom; necessity not hatred, justice not personal feeling arm those hands against him which Brutus, after the deed, would chide if he could. No impure motive, such as Cicero's ambition, is to be permitted. No unnecessary crime is to degrade the one unavoidable deed, the "even virtue of their enterprise", which Brutus will accomplish as a sacrificer, a "purger", and not as a murderer. In the moment of the consummation, the coldly resolute man is so sure of his good reasons, that he thinks even the son of Cæsar would be satisfied with them. In

presence of the Roman populace, with the same security and calmness, he calls down upon himself his own fate: "that, as he slew his best lover for the good of Rome, he has the same dagger for himself, when it shall please his country to need his death".

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Now in this inward struggle, and in the decision which Brutus arrived at, there lies a double error, which may be viewed both from a moral and a political side. Brutus appears in Shakespeare, and even in Plutarch, united in a closer friendship with Cæsar, than history proves to have been the case. His brother-in-law Cassius says to him:

> "When thou didst hate him worst, thou lovedst him better
> Than ever thou lov'dst Cassius".

His enemy Antony calls him "Cæsar's angel". The poet has rather strangely put in the mouth of the falling Cæsar, at sight of Brutus, the Latin words: *Et tu, Brute?* to give greater emphasis to the painful surprise of his fatherly friend, who would never have expected to have seen Brutus among the number of his murderers. Was it really suitable to the personal relations of this feeling and noble man, that he should imagine Cæsar's death to be the only means for restoring the freedom of the state? Do not the words of Antony fall upon him with fearful weight, that

> "when the noble Cæsar saw him stab,
> Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,
> Quite vanquished him: then burst his mighty heart".

Must he not have been struck dumb when the same Antony cast this reproach in his face, that while exclaiming "Hail, Cæsar!" and flattering him to his face, they had maliciously killed him? The stain of assassination adheres to

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Brutus, a crime which no political duty, *no* opposite duty whatever, can outweigh. This stain cleaves closer to the "lover" of Cæsar than to Cæsar's personal enemy, Cassius, and to him therefore, to Cæsar's good angel, the spirit of the murdered man subsequently appears, as *his* evil and revenge-announcing genius. If, from political grounds, the deed of Brutus is nobler, it is in a human respect more unnatural, than that of Cassius, in whom it is represented as less noble but more natural. Shakespeare has not allowed considerations such as these to escape from the laconic Brutus, but they are contained emphatically in the things themselves, especially in the contrast of Antony. What is this voluptuary, this man of loose morals, this epicurean, this racer and gambler, of whom it is presumed that at the best he will "take thought and die for Cæsar", perhaps also laugh at his death if he escapes, what is *he* compared to Brutus? In spirit and capacity indeed he is much more than the unsuspecting Brutus imagines, but in a moral point of view he is only an abandoned and unprincipled man. So far as we see him act in this play, his flattery of the murderers to their faces, places him on an equality with them, in their flattery of Cæsar; we cannot blame the art with which he yields to circumstances, compassing his worst ends with the air of the utmost honour, stirring up the people by his eloquence in spite of the order that he should say nothing against the murderers; — we cannot blame the cunning with which pretending to be a plain, blunt man he applauds the honourable republicans, whom he at the same time stamps as traitors, while he mockingly extols the superiority of the orator Brutus, having already annihilated his speech and his deed; we cannot, we say, blame this art and cunning

any more than the hypocritical artifices of those who allured Cæsar into the net. But how low does this man sink, when contrasted with Brutus' unselfishness, patriotism, mild forbearance, and saving of blood, we see the triumvir subsequently indifferent to the fate of his political enemies, altering to the prejudice of the people that will of Cæsar's, with which he had roused them to revolt, using Lepidus as a beast of burden, and himself silently submitting to the young Octavius? And yet we must confess that even this wretch, on the score of humanity, recommends himself to us beside the corpse of Cæsar more than even the noble Brutus. Like Brutus, he was the friend of Cæsar; to him also Cæsar had been just and faithful; his death touches him truly and sincerely; he testifies to this when he is alone, and when he is with the servant of Octavius; he ventures even to shew his sorrow to the murderers; his heart is truly "in the coffin there, with Cæsar", and only to this real and undissembled sorrow the great effects of his artful speech are due. However great from a political point of view, Brutus' patriotism and upright intentions may appear in spite of his murderous act, equally estimable, in a moral sense, is the sincere fidelity of Antony towards his deceased friend, who can help him no further, in spite of his faithless projects against the conspirators whom it is dangerous to oppose. The contrast which Shakespeare has instituted between Antony and Brutus is one of cutting acuteness, and there is even a double edge given to it, with regard to the political error of the action itself. When Brutus, after conquering his inward reluctance, decides for Cæsar's death, he tells us the *grounds* of this decision in a soliloquy (Act II. sc. 1.), which in its whole tone has much resemblance with the chief mono-

logue in Hamlet. To speak the truth, he knows not when
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Cæsar's "affections swayed more than his reason". He sees him standing only at the point which separates ambition from moderation, half striving, half forced to make that power, which circumstances have actually given him, lawful and hereditary. But because he sees the boldest ambition lurk behind Cæsar's hesitation, because he fears "the abuse of greatness, when it disjoins remorse from power", he would prevent these things. He must confess that "the quarrel will bear no colour for the thing he *now* is", he will, therefore "fashion" it thus: —

> "that, what he is, *augmented,*
> Would run to these and these extremities".

and therefore as "a serpent's egg", he must be killed "in the shell." But this indeed for a man as upright and conscientious as Brutus, must be considered as looking too deeply into an uncommitted fault; in the great exploit to which he aspires, an inherited ambition as refined, as popular, is at work, as in Cæsar's aspirations after dominion; and remorse is in him just as much disjoined from power, as he fears may be the case with Cæsar.* No man is constituted a

* It is not uninteresting to see how Shakespeare's great contemporary Bacon agreed with him concerning similar conflicting duties. In his Essay *de augmentis scientiarum*, he introduces the feast at which, in the absence of Brutus and Cassius, the question concerning the policy of the killing of a Tyrant is discussed. Some of the guests declared for it because "Servitude was the Extreme of Evils"; others on the contrary, because "Tyranny was better than a Civil war"; others declared that it was unworthy of the wise to rush into danger like fools. Amongst such disputed questions, he continues, this is the most frequent: whether for the good of one's country, or for a "great deal of good to ensue" it is allowable to depart from justice.

judge over thoughts. If it is lawful to condemn on suspicion and presumption, then the people too were right in tearing the poet Cinna to pieces on a presumption. Had Brutus waited for these "extremities", it is possible that fate might have touched Cæsar, that an involuntary revolution and not a planned conspiracy, not the conspiracy of a friend, might have overthrown him. Brutus might have been mistaken in Cæsar; this is indeed a mere possibility not to be proved; but that he erred in Antony, is certain, and this certainty makes the possibility of the other error the more probable. He considers Antony as a harmless voluptuary, as "Cæsar's arm", which could do nothing "when Cæsar's head were off"; he *knows*, that they shall "have him well to friend". In all these opinions about Antony, he is entirely deceived, although he had been thoroughly warned by Cassius: and yet he decreed Cæsar's death upon a suspicion. He solemnly promised Rome, that if the restoration of the republic were to follow, she should have her wish from Brutus' own hand. Uncertain whether this good would follow the restoration, he commits a certain crime; a necessary part of this crime, the removal of Antony, he leaves undone; and the consequence is, that through this very Antony the intended restoration is frustrated. In silence, before the battle of Philippi, he must hear from Antony the moral reproach of assassination; he must hear from Cassius the blame of having unseasonably

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This question Jason of Thessalia determined: "we may do a little wrong, that a great right may follow". But the reply to this is good: "Thou hast a guarantee for present right, but no warrant for the future. Men must pursue things which are just in present, and leave the future to the divine Providence".

spared the man, whose tongue had otherwise not thus offended.

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We have shewn that the nature of Brutus in itself would never have impelled him to such a deed of violence; it was too gentle and magnanimous. But in these very qualities was that love of honour rooted, which led him to listen to the call of patriotism that urged him on; in them was rooted the tractability, the want of obstinacy and selfishness, which rendered him accessible to counsel and reminder from without; and finally that unsuspiciousness which induced him to leave those counsels untested. He yielded too quickly to the man, who spoke from personal hatred to Cæsar; he accepted too trustingly the call of men who used him as a covering for their own moral nakedness; he read too credulously the papers they threw in his way, as the voice of the Roman people. This call of his country stirred him as strongly as Lady Macbeth's taunt of manhood had stung Macbeth. The calm man, like that impassioned one, accepted his task; not that, like Macbeth, he plunged into it madly, but he made a wrong choice between the impulses of his nature within and the call of honour without. He sinks under this error without acknowledging it. As this could not be *expressed* in any reflection of the man who had once fallen into the error, the poet has made it evident by a parallel, which indicates a wonderful depth of thought. In the episode concerning Portia, Shakespeare has closely copied Plutarch, almost without adding or omitting anything. And yet by the mere introduction of this, light is obtained in a wonderful manner, which by reflection reveals Brutus' concealed internal sensations after the deed. Portia is represented by the poet as the feminine, tender

counterpart of Brutus. Altogether womanly in her care and www.libtool.com.cn watchfulness over her husband, as Cato's daughter and as Brutus' wife, she feels a call to share the political plans of her consort, just as he, the descendant of the ancient Brutus, thinks he must not deny himself to the cause of freedom. By a self-inflicted wound, she proves her vocation, her courage, her ability to be silent and to bear, and her proof succeeds. She now presses into the counsels of her husband, takes her share in his grief and in his secret, and becomes a passive conspirator. But no sooner is this accomplished than her suppressed womanhood comes to light, as the subjugated humanity had done in Brutus when he would not have Antony slain. She over-rated her woman's strength when she forced herself into the conspiracy, as *he* in his sphere, over-rated his powers when he placed himself at the head of the conspirators. On the first failure of her expectations, Portia's heart breaks and she commits suicide. As quickly mastered by anxiety, Brutus flies from Rome with Cassius, after Antony's success, both of them like "madmen"; this separation drives Portia to despair, and her death re-acts upon Brutus' inward agitation, which in his usual manner he conceals to the last. The gloom, which overwhelms him from this time forth, re-acts again upon the evil issue of his cause; he betrays himself first of all in the severe manner with which he reprimands Cassius. The discord between the leaders cannot be hidden from the lookers-on and cannot have an encouraging effect; to spare his broken-hearted friend, Cassius too quickly abandons his opposition to the plan of battle, and the consequences are fatal. Powerfully as Brutus commands himself in the hour that decides their fate, differently as he rules his pas-

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sions and his inward agitation from Macbeth, yet is he, like him, distracted, absent, peevish, and forgetful. His evil genius appears to him, not torturing and tormenting him as Richard's did, only paralyzing his courage in the passing moment of its apparition, but returning again and announcing his last hour. Antony was right in supposing that both the republican leaders feigned courage, but did not possess it. The mistakes which caused the loss of the battle, historical as they are, seem used by the poet to shew the analogy between the crime and its punishment. Mistrust of good success had too quickly driven Cassius to self-destruction. "Mistrust, melancholy's child, showed to the apt thoughts of men, the things that are not; error, soon conceived, never comes to a happy birth, but kills the mother that engendered it". These are words, which may apply also to the mistrustful error which showed Brutus things in reference to Cæsar, that were not. By joining the conspiracy, the honourable man took a step for the sake of honour and patriotism which his moral principles would have forbidden; quite corresponding to this is his end. His philosophy taught him to bear the issue patiently, but when Cassius held before him the ignominy of being led in triumph by the conqueror, his feeling of honour led him to turn away from his moral principles at the instigation of this same Cassius, who first stimulated his feeling of honour against Cæsar; he resorts with passive courage to self-destruction, which he had once esteemed cowardly.

Shakespeare has scarcely created anything more splendid than the relation in which he has placed Cassius to Brutus. Closely as he has followed Plutarch, the poet has by slight alterations, skilfully placed this character, even more than

the historian has done, in the sharpest contrast to Brutus, — the clever, politic, revolutionist opposed to the man of noble soul and moral nature. Roman state-policy and a mode of reasoning peculiar to antiquity are displayed in every feature of this contrast of Cassius to Brutus, as well as in the delineation of the character itself: the nature and spirit of antiquity operated with exquisite freshness and readiness upon the unburdened brain of the poet, unfettered by the schools. It has never been sufficiently considered, what it was in those times to enter with this free intelligence into the republican mind of the old world, to handle the political characters, life, and public spirit of a remote age, learned from Plutarch alone, with that same thorough knowledge with which Shakespeare had handled his popular English historical plays, and the events of common private life. We grant that the richness of images in political matters does not stream forth as abundantly as in other things, and that this has had an effect on the very simple but noble and correct bearing of this play, yet every single word shews on all material points a thorough understanding of the historical and political circumstances treated of, and it would be difficult to point out a single misapprehension with respect to the general truths which are to be drawn from the Roman history of that day. It has been said, that Shakespeare from studying Plutarch, had entered even too deeply into the free political principles of the old world, and that he adopted liberal opinions and pure democratic ideas, not in harmony with those expressed in his earlier English historical plays. This is not the case. He has introduced into the one the monarchical features of the history, as into the other the republican, preserving the spirit

of each time and of each nationality; and in Julius Cæsar even, he stands between monarchy and republicanism, as they struggled together at that time with nearly equal strength, and he has done this with the same admirable impartiality that everywhere distinguishes him. If it be thought singular, that a poet under such absolute sovereigns as Elizabeth and James I., in whose immediate service he was, should attain to such political independence, to such freedom of ideas, to such warm sympathy with the falling Roman republic and its representatives, we must recollect, that precisely at that time in the closest proximity to England, among a people connected with that country by speech and origin, there arose after long struggling a young republic, supported by England against Spain, their common foe; that there, republican ideas and statesmen had formed themselves by slow degrees, and that as a natural result there sprung from these in England, the first minds who could comprehend free political institutions.

According to Plutarch, public opinion distinguished between Brutus and Cassius thus: — that it was said, that Brutus hated tyranny, Cassius tyrants; yet, adds the historian, the latter was inspired with a universal hatred of tyranny also. Thus has Shakespeare represented him. His Cassius is imbued with a thorough love of freedom and equality; he groans under the prospect of a monarchical time, more than the others; he does not bear this burden with thoughtful patience like Brutus, but his ingenious mind strives with natural opposition to throw it off; he seeks for men of the old time; the new, who are like timid sheep before the wolf, are an abhorrence to him. His principles of freedom are not crossed by moral maxims,

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which might lead him astray in his political attempts; altogether a pure political character, he esteems nothing so highly as his country and its freedom and honour. These principles, if they were not rooted in the temperament, spirit, and character of Cassius, would at all events have been more powerfully supported by them, than the same principles would have been by Brutus' more humane, more feeling nature. Of a choleric disposition, no laugher, no lover of music, no gambler, no light chatterer over drink, he is never distracted from his purpose by any lesser matter, but is ever deep in the consideration of serious things, he is a lean thinker, a great observer, looking closely into men and their doings; and as such he is feared by Cæsar, and he proves himself such by the side of Brutus. He has nothing of the attractiveness of urbane natures like Cæsar and Brutus; sure and firm, no backbiter, not one who sells his love, he is a trusty friend, but his hypochondriacal humour, his morose irritability, will attract no one to seek his society. He often contrasts himself with Brutus in this irritable and bitter state of mind. He speaks of the "rash humour which his mother gave him" as contrasted with his gentle friend; he confesses that he strives to obtain by art the equanimity which he does not possess by nature; he imputes the blame, which proceeds from Brutus' impartiality, to want of love, from which in his own case it would have proceeded, for he sees no ill in a friend, and no good in an enemy! On hearing of Portia's death, after his quarrel with Brutus, he exclaims: "How scap'd I killing, when I cross'd you so"? for with *him*, such irritation in the midst of so much sorrow would have taken away all self-command. Ill-humour and weariness of life oppress him, while Brutus

is armed with patience. And whilst the latter at first considers self-murder as the refuge of the coward, Cassius sees in it just that which "makes the weak most strong", because at any time,

> "life being weary of these worldly bars
> Never lacks power to dismiss itself".

Even on this old subject of dispute, Shakespeare testifies to his wonderful impartiality; he places in the lips of these contrasted characters, these opposite notions respecting suicide, its origin, and its justification, not deciding in favour of either, because this different mode of thinking belongs to different men, and because no general law can be made concerning an act, which the opinions and circumstances of the time may place in such a different light. In Hamlet and Cymbeline, the poet respected the Christian view, and here with equal warmth he makes Cassius utter the opinion of antiquity (ἢ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι τὸν εὐγενῆ χρή. Soph. Ajax.): "he would as lief not be, as live to be in awe of such as he himself." This love of equality, estimable and noble in its source, is mixed in Cassius with unworthy matter; but he is of a kind, fitter for a conspirator, because he turns his over-strained principles into over-strained purposes. With his hatred of tyrants there is mixed the envy of Cæsar belonging to the more meanly endowed man; he remembers that he had once saved the life of the emperor in a swimming match, that he had seen him sick and subject to human infirmities, and now he is to bow before this man as before a god, he is to see him "bestride the narrow world, like a Colossus", while "petty men walk under his huge legs". He seems inclined to measure rank by bodily

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strength rather than by power of mind; it amazes him, that Cæsar should "get the start of the majestic world", which he would fain award to his own art of swimming; with the disparaging feeling of mediocrity towards real greatness, he weighs only the similar meat upon which both feed, and compares their names, not their merits and endowments; and in this disparaging feeling lies the sharpest goad, which generally urges on the most dangerous conspirators. For this reason Cæsar keenly watches his hungry look, and the disposition which is never "at heart's ease", when it "beholds a greater" than itself. For this reason also Cassius is the natural originator of the conspiracy, and in all its plans and in all their councils, he shews himself a greater master of the art than Brutus. Even in gaining over the members, he betrays that knowledge of human nature, which Cæsar praised in him. He lures the noble Brutus with the common weal and the call of family-honour. The bitter Casca, who conceals his discontent under the garb of sarcasm, who, wholly dependent on others, serves Cæsar almost with the zeal of Antony and hangs upon his words like oracles, and yet, led by Cassius, is ready to go as far as any one in the cause of freedom, this Casca he lays hold of by his weak side, on the night of the storm. In this night and its horrors, he first feigns to see an image of Cæsar, who

> "thunders, lightens, opens graves, and roars,
> As doth the lion in the Capitol";

when he perceives that Casca's superstition is touched, he refers it to the work they "*have in hand*", which "like the complexion of the element", is most bloody, fiery, and

terrible. He advises that Cicero should be drawn into their party, and in order to have one more name of repute among them, he is disinclined to share the hesitation of Brutus. Throughout with eagle-eye he sees the right means for attaining his ends, and would seize them undeterred by scruples of morality; less irreproachable as a man than Brutus, he is as a statesman far more excellent. Full of circumspection, he is full of suspicion of his adversary; he is very far from that too great confidence in a good cause, which is the ruin of Brutus. He possesses the necessary acuteness of judgment and action, available only in times of revolution; he knows that it is useless mixing in politics, far less in revolutions, unless one is prepared to exchange the tender morality of domestic life for a ruder kind; he would treat tyranny according to its own baseness; he would carry on matters according to the utmost requirements of his own cause, but not with the utmost forbearance towards the enemy; he would not use unnecessary harshness, but he would omit none that was necessary; he would think just as ill of the tyrant, as the tyrant would of *his* adversary; he would, as far as in him lay, turn against him his cunning, his cruelty, and his power; he would go with the flood at the right time, and not like Brutus, when it was too late. The difference, therefore, between his nature and the character of Brutus comes out on every occasion: Brutus appears throughout just as humanely noble, as Cassius is politically superior; each lacks what is best in the other, and the possession of which would make each perfect. Antony, according to Cassius' opinion, ought to fall; even humanly considered, Brutus practised towards him an act less ungrateful than to Cæsar; politically, his death was an

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actual necessity, which might have changed the whole issue of their undertaking. Brutus tries to gain over Antony by presenting the nobler side of their act, Cassius, once he had agreed to spare him, attempts the same by means of dignities and honours. Brutus permits him to speak publicly in Cæsar's honour, which Plutarch also calls his second fault; Cassius addresses him with those bitter words of warning: "You know not what you do." Brutus has condemned Pella for taking bribes, and is in the right; Cassius took his part without exculpating him; "it is not meet," he says, "in such a time, that every nice offence should bear his comment", and he is no less in the right. Brutus condemns Cassius himself for "selling offices to undeservers," — *he* can and will "raise no money by vile means"; a golden resolution, but one which will not raise the gold indispensable for the work in hand. Brutus loves not Cassius' faults, but at such times it is certainly best to shut our eyes to the faults of the friend whom we need. Brutus quits an advantageous post to advance to Philippi; the older soldier Cassius dissuades it, and only consents to it, when influenced to trust all to the hazard of one battle. His judgment enables him to foresee the evil consequences; and when the flight of the eagles predicts the same results, he becomes superstitious, and under the pressure of circumstances abandons his Epicurean principles, as Brutus by his self-destruction renounces those of the Stoa. In all these instances Cassius gives way to Brutus when he ought not, as Brutus in the one first instance had given way to Cassius when, according to *his* nature, he ought not to have done so. On this most delicate point, Cassius who usually yielded to no influence, is untrue to himself, as

Brutus was in the one chief act; and just this one point, which is derogatory to Brutus on the score of humanity, raises Cassius in our estimation on this very score. The nobility of Brutus' nature so far prevails over this advocate for equality, that he bows before the virtue and absence of all ambition in the other, and confesses his own inferiority, which he would never have owned before the imperious Cæsar; so that, in this unusually sharp contrast, the less noble character of Cassius is embellished at this point, just as the finer character of Brutus is debased by that deed, and Cassius, at the same time, on account of this delicate deference and respect for Brutus becomes untrue to his political energy, and is obliged to act contrary to his own judgment. The union of two such dissimilar beings revenges itself on both; Brutus, by his political weakness, ruins the conspirators, who sought in him a cloak for their moral weakness; they ruined him by seducing him to commit the first deed, contrary to his nature. They perish, mistaken in their ends or in their means, or in both. But that we may not infer from this, that those who do not act, who hold back in circumstances of difficulty, are therefore the better, Shakespeare exhibits in the back-ground the nearly silent figure of Cicero as a contrast. The excellence of his characterization lies not in this, that Shakespeare makes him speak Greek, but that he makes him speak Greek on such an entirely popular occasion, and so speak, that those who understood, smiled at each other, and shook their heads, like time-servers. "He will never follow anything, that other men begin," says Brutus; yet he begins nothing himself. Nevertheless, with all his inactivity, he escapes ruin just as little as those active ones, but his death

is inglorious. The deed of the others, on the contrary (thus Shakespeare praises it in his play, and his play through it), will "in ages hence be acted over in states unborn and accents yet unknown", and the "knot of men" will be extolled, who gave their country liberty. And for this glorious remembrance, this his play has certainly not a little contributed; and as we believe not the less by the perfect impartiality with which it estimates the deed, by the strictly historical justice which the poet has observed respecting it, similar to that observed by Brutus in his speech concerning Cæsar, in which he "extenuated not his glory, wherein he was worthy; nor his offences enforced, for which he suffered death."

If Brutus erred more than Cassius in the means he employed in their undertaking, they both erred equally in the final aim of it. The restoration of the republic was no longer possible, the people had become unfit for freedom. Shakespeare has not subjected this historical view to any discussion, unsuitable to a drama; but he found it in Plutarch, and with thorough understanding adopted it with artistic representation for his work of art. Fortune, chance, Providence, says Plutarch, was against the republicans; it appeared as if the realm could no longer be governed by a plurality, but necessarily demanded one monarch. The gods had, therefore, given the people Cæsar as a mild physician, who was best fitted to restore them; this shewed itself, when immediately after his death, they lamented him and would never forgive his murderers: as Shakespeare expresses it: when it pleased them to need the death of Brutus. The poet has described this people exactly according to Plutarch's view of them. First they shouted

after Pompey, and when Cæsar came in triumph over Pompey's corpse, they shouted after Cæsar. Brutus kills Cæsar, und they shout after him also. They want immediately to raise statues to him, they wish to crown "Cæsar's better parts" in Brutus, — "Let him be Cæsar!" So incapable were they of separating the idea of a conqueror from a ruler. As soon as Antony advances, they begin to consider "whether a worse may not come in Cæsar's place"; that another *must* come in his place, seems to be no longer a question. With such a people, Brutus' noble thought of restoration was but a lovely dream, and Antony understood them better, when he exclaimed over the body of Cæsar:

> "What a fall was there, my countrymen!
> Then I, and you, and all of us fell down".

Had the spirit of freedom still existed in the people, it would been have possible according to Brutus' suggestion, to kill "Cæsar's spirit, and not dismember Cæsar;" as that was wanting, even his death could not restore freedom. Hence Cæsar's spirit is mighty after his death, and turns the swords of the republicans against themselves. What Shakespeare passed over in silence is, that these republicans themselves were only the remains of Pompey's party and had already served another ruler. What he did not forget to depict is, that in Casca, Decius Brutus, and others, monarchical feelings themselves moved these conspirators, as they did Antony, to form a sort of court around Cæsar.

The character of Cæsar in our play has been much blamed. He is declared to be unlike the idea conceived of him from his Commentaries; it is said, that he does nothing, and only utters a few pompous, thrasonical, grandiloquent

words; and it has been asked, — whether this be the Cæsar that "did awe the world?" The poet, if he intended to make the attempt of the republicans his main theme, could not have ventured to create too great an interest in Cæsar; it was necessary to keep him in the back-ground, and to present that view of him, which gave a reason for the conspiracy. According even to Plutarch, whose biography of Cæsar is acknowledged to be very imperfect, Cæsar's character altered much for the worse shortly before his death, and Shakespeare has represented him according to this suggestion. With what reverence Shakespeare viewed his character as a whole, we learn from several passages of his works, and even in this play from the way in which he allows his memory to be respected as soon as he is dead. In the descriptions of Cassius we look back upon the time, when the great man was natural, simple, undissembling, popular, and on an equal footing with others. Now he is spoiled by victory, success, power, and by the republican courtiers who surround him. He stands close on the borders between usurpation and discretion; he is master in reality, and is on the point of assuming the name and the right; he desires heirs to the throne; he hesitates to accept the crown which he would gladly possess; he is ambitious, and fears he may have betrayed this in his paroxysms of epilepsy; he exclaims against flatterers and cringers, and yet both please him. All around him treat him as a master, his wife, as a prince, the senate allow themselves to be called *his* senate; he assumes the appearance of a king even in his house, even with his wife he uses the language of a man who knows himself secure of power, and he maintains everywhere the proud strict bearing of a soldier, which is

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represented even in his statues. If one of the changes at which Plutarch hints, lay in this pride, this haughtiness, another lay in his superstition. In the suspicion and apprehension before the final step, he was seized, contrary to his usual nature and habit, with misgivings and superstitious fears, which affected likewise the hitherto free-minded Calphurnia. These conflicting feelings divide him, his forebodings excite him, his pride, his defiance of danger struggle against them, and restore his former confidence, which was natural to him, and which causes his ruin, just as a like confidence springing from another source, ruined Brutus. The actor must make his high-sounding language appear as the result of this discord of feeling. Sometimes they are only incidental words intended to characterize the hero in the shortest way. Generally they appear in the cases where Cæsar has to combat with his superstition, where he uses effort to take a higher stand in his words, than at the moment he actually feels. He speaks so much of having no fear, that by this very thing he betrays his fear. Even in the places where his words sound most boastful, where he compares himself with the north-star, there is more arrogance and ill-concealed pride at work than real boastfulness. It is intended there with a few words to show him at that point when his behaviour could most excite those free spirits against him. It was fully intended that he should take but a small part in the action; we must not, therefore, say with Scottowe, that he was merely brought on the stage to be killed. The poet has handled this historical piece like his English historical plays. He had in his eye the whole context of the Roman civil wars for this single drama, not as yet thinking of its continuation in Antony and Cleopatra.

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He casts a glance back upon the fall of Pompey and makes it evident, that Cæsar falls for the same reason as that for which he had made Pompey fall. In the triumph over him, men's minds rise up at first against Cæsar, the conspirators assemble in Pompey's porch, and Cæsar is slain in front of his statue. As his death arose out of the civil war, so civil war recommences at his death, and just as Antony predicts:

> "Cæsar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
> With Até by his side, come hot from hell,
> Shall in these confines, with a monarch's voice,
> Cry *Havock*, and let slip the dogs of war.

In this symbolic sense, Cæsar, after his death has a share in the action of the play, which does not bear his name without a reason. That curse of Antony's too falls back upon himself in Antony and Cleopatra, because he had destroyed those who had spared him and offered him friendship, and even there the manes of Pompey interfere with continuous power, giving this history also the back-ground of remoter histories, to which this drama is but an episode.

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ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

"A booke called Antony and Cleopatra" was entered in the Stationers' Company, in London, in 1608, as destined for publication by Edward Blount. As it was entered at the same time as the *book* Pericles, and as Shakespeare's play of that name was really printed in the following year, though by a different publisher, it is most likely that by the "booke of Antony and Cleopatra" the piece before us was meant; its origin, therefore, may be dated at 1607—8. Intimations in both, of the matter treated of in the other, single peculiarities of style, perhaps still more the poet's frame of mind at the time of its composition, place the piece close to Troilus and Cressida, which would confirm this date.

Shakespeare's close adherence to Plutarch's account of the life of Antony is the same in this play as in that of Julius Cæsar. The genius of the poet felt itself here also so congenial with the history, because it was akin to nature; quite unlike his precursors, such as Samuel Daniel (Cleopatra 1594) or his followers, such as May and Dryden (All for Love), who handled the same materials, he did not like them transplant the personal relations of the chief

characters out of history into the free realm of art; but here also he adhered closely to the historical world, and with a comprehensive glance surveyed the varied multiplicity of the historical events as a finished work of art. — He passed over only such incidents as the Parthian war, which had but slight reference to the central point of Antony's history, but he retained entire every relation between him and the other Roman magnates. Antony's character is, we can scarcely say, actually different from the portrait drawn of him by Plutarch, but it is so altered by its position, that the poet was at liberty to take it from his own point of view. Where there was an opportunity for psychical development, as in the reconciliation - scene between Octavius and Antony, and in the description of Antony's despair in the fourth act, Shakespeare enlarged the meagre historical notices with all poetic freedom and extension. For the most part, however, as in Julius Cæsar, he found his materials all ready even to the details. Antony's last days, his twice repeated challenge to Octavius, his success in Alexandria and the passing over of the fleet; his suspicion of treachery in Cleopatra, her alleged death, Eros' self-destruction, Antony's death and last words, Enobarbus' defection, the desertion of Alexas and Dercetas, the embassies of Euphronius and Thyreus, the favour accorded to the latter by Cleopatra, her capture, Dolabella's emotion, the treacheries of Seleucus, the death of the Queen and her attendants, all this is only history scenically represented.

Equal to Julius Cæsar in historical truth, this play is on the other hand not arranged with the same attention to dramatic clearness and unity as that is; other faults also

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seem to disturb somewhat the pure enjoyment of this drama. Coleridge indeed placed Antony in the highest class of Shakespeare's writings. He considered this play as a powerful rival to Lear and all the best dramas of our poet, he saw in it a gigantic power in its ripest prime, and contrasted it with Romeo and Juliet, because here the love of lust and passion is depicted, as there that of inclination and instinct. Among the historical plays of Shakespeare he declared it to be by far the most remarkable. This judgment, however, will not have found much support; we will try to place it in a more just and striking light. It is true, this play is full and rich; we can scarcely name another like it in these respects. The diction is very forced, often short and obscure, the crowd of matter creates a crowd of ideas; important affairs are disposed of in a few sentences, great events recorded in a few words, historical names and references presumed to be known are left unexplained in the play itself. By this in single instances it has suffered considerably in clearness. On the whole the progress is not more entangled than in Julius Cæsar, but it is more detailed, and therefore more difficult to comprehend. A wanton multiplicity of incidents and personages pass before our eyes; political and warlike occurrences run parallel with the most intimate affairs of domestic life and of the affections: the interest is fettered to the passion of a single pair, and yet the scene of it is the wide world from Parthia to Cape Misenum. For the historical character this is indeed highly expressive and striking, but it does no little damage to the dramatic clearness. Therefore it is, that perhaps no play of Shakespeare's is so difficult to retain in the memory as this. With this, one other cause is

combined, or at least it co-operates with it, why this drama is seldom brought on the stage, and is little admired in representation. By the too numerous and discordant interruptions, that psychical continuity is destroyed, which is necessary to the development of such a remarkable connection of the innermost soul as that between Antony and Cleopatra. Let the reader think over the purport of the various historical pieces of our poet; he will nowhere find the external actual material of history, impregnated with sensible or sensual connection of so much importance; let him look over the purely psychological dramas, and nowhere will he find a mental connection so incessantly crossed by external public affairs of such an opposite nature. This contrast is closely and profoundly connected with the plan and idea of the play. If Goethe understood the matter rightly, when he said, "here all declares with a thousand tongues, that enjoyment and activity exclude one another", we then perceive, that the poet felt it incumbent on him, to show the contradiction between the excited, busy, historical world, and the calm, sensual life of enjoyment. The way in which he understood and, as it were, explained the given history, deserves the highest praise of Coleridge and all others; it is a master-work full of deep thought, from which every writer of history may learn to extract the spirit out of chronicles. But whether the theme, æsthetically considered, might not have been better carried out, whether large dramatic groups might not have been cut out of the complete history, which would have satisfied better the Aristotelian requirement of being easily surveyed as a whole, whether many of the inferior characters unnecessary to the aim of the play might not have been omitted,

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and all the acting personages thus concentrated upon the main point of the piece as Shakespeare has everywhere accustomed us, — this remains a subject of doubt much easier, to be sure, for us to express, than it could have been for the poet to remove. If then we are willing to subscribe to Coleridge's opinion concerning the apprehension of the historical matter, and the description of character in the chief personages, we shall find it harder in an æsthetic view, to rank this drama so high as he does. Then too there arises an ethical objection, which will make most readers opponents to this piece, and to Coleridge's opinion of it. There is no great and noble character among the personages, no really elevating feature in the actions of this drama, either in its politics or its love-affairs. This play seems to vince to us how much we should lose in Shakespeare, if with his ever great knowledge of men and nature, there did not go hand in hand, on one side that æsthetic excellence (the ideal concentration of the actors and actions), and on the other side, that ethical excellence (the ideal elevation of the representation of manhood). The poet had to represent a debased period in Antony and Cleopatra; he did so, sufficiently for historical truth; but this ought not to have prevented him from casting a glance at a better state of human nature, which might comfort and elevate us amid so much degradation. If we recall to mind the historical plays, where Shakespeare had to depict for the most part degenerate and ruined races, we shall recollect that in Richard II. there was not wanting a Gaunt and a Carlisle to make amends, and even in Richard III. the few strokes that described the sons of Edward, are an agreeable compensation for the universal wickedness. Here., however,

there is nothing of the kind, and we may even say the opportunity for such a counterbalance has been obviously neglected: it would surely have been easy, in the character of Octavia at least, to keep in view before us some higher human nature, which by a few traits only might have *exhibited* her to us in action, such as she now is merely spoken of in words.

We will introduce an observation here, which will set this singular defect in Antony and Cleopatra in a still more remarkable light. It would appear as if Shakespeare about the time between 1607—10, had had, we will not say a period, but intervals in which he wrote his poetry in a manner altogether more careless, whether we consider it from an æsthetic, or from an ethical point of view. What might have been the cause of this we can scarcely guess. It is possible, that his disgust to theatrical matters in general seized him more strongly about this period; it may also be possible, that the traces of bodily exhaustion had already appeared in him, and that this may have been the cause of his drawing back, and the first intimation of his early death. Whether this be so, or whatever may have been the cause of the careless treatment of some works of this period, the thing itself seems incontestible.

We have seen how Shakespeare failed in Troilus, and that the play was not satisfactory either in dramatic treatment or as a critical satire; we will next explain, why all moral nobleness is wanting in Antony and Cleopatra, notwithstanding that the poet has placed the pair, who gave the name to the play, in the best light that was possible; in both pieces it is uncommonly difficult to separate irony from seriousness, appearance from reality. If we examine

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the characters of Cressida and Cleopatra, we shall fancy the poet wished to recur to the time of his earlier state of morals. Even in Coriolanus there is not a single character, in which we can take pure pleasure. Timon also is, artistically considered, a negligent unfinished work. The group would be increased by one play more (which would more than any other testify to the temporary indifference of the poet to his fame), if we were to admit, that Shakespeare applied himself about this date for the first time to Pericles, which, at all events, was at this time brought by him upon the stage in a new form. The courtezan household here and in Timon, together with the similar matter in Troilus and in Antony, constitutes a strange whole, which in a moral point of view is quite analogous to the æsthetic carelessness in the treatment of all these plays. It is here, that our Romanticists ought to have sought for facts, when they spoke of a bitterness and acerbity in the character of our poet. But even then they ought to have limited this observation to a passing discord in his temper. For quickly must the man have recollected his own doctrine in Troilus, that "perseverance alone keeps honour bright", and that time would wrap even his works in the mantle of forgetfulness, if he did not always keep pace with his better performances. He created, contemporaneously with these plays, his Posthumus and his Imogen, the most moral of all his creations, and soon after, we see him, in the Winter's Tale, labouring with the same severe morality as in Othello, and in the Tempest with the same cheerful serenity of mind, that delights us so much in his happiest pieces. It was but a few passing clouds, that cast a fleeting shadow over the ever brilliant sky of his poetry.

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As regards what is morally repulsive in Antony and Cleopatra, it is only fair to confess, that if an error has been committed, it is evidently in the choice of the subject; and that the poet, being unwilling to alter historical truth, has done all he could, nay, perhaps too much to ennoble the matter, and to make it worthy of a place in the realm of poetry. It is so much the more necessary to give emphasis to this remark, because, just from the point of view, from which we considered this group of plays, we might be led to do injustice to the poet. We might imagine he had put the characters of Antony and Cleopatra in a better light than he ought to have done, and clothed the voluptuaries with a certain lofty splendour, as if betraying a preference for them. But what he did in this respect, was done undoubtedly for æsthetic purposes, and not from lightness of morality. If Shakespeare had taken Antony accurately as he found him in Plutarch, he would never have been able to give him a tragic character, he could never have excited an interest in him precisely in his relations with Cleopatra. A man who had grown up in the wild companionship of a Curio and a Clodius, who had gone through the high school of debauchery in Greece and Asia, who had shocked every body in Rome under Cæsar's dictatorship by his vulgar conduct, who had made himself popular among the soldiers by drinking and encouraging their low amours, a man upon whom the hatred of the proscriptions under the rule of the triumvirate especially fell, who displayed a cannibal pleasure over Cicero's bloody head and hand, who afterwards renewed in the east the wanton life of his youth, and robbed in grand style to maintain the vilest brood of parasites and jugglers; — such a man, depicted finally as the prey of an

old and artful courtezan, could not possibly be made an object of dramatic interest. It is wonderful, how Shakespeare preserved the historical features of Antony's character so as on the one side not to make him unrecognizable, and yet how he contrived on the other hand to make of him an attractive personage.

We should like to designate the ennobling transformation, which the poet undertook, by one word: he refined the rough features of Mark Antony into the character of an Alcibiades. He passes silently over the youth of his hero, he took from him his tendency to cruelty, covered the misdeeds of the triumvirate with a veil, shewed only the best side of his rapacity, his lavish prodigality, spoke loudly of his warlike past, his victory over Brutus and Cassius, his heroic endurance of hunger and want after his defeat at Modena, and strove especially to make his hero interesting on the score of brilliant natural gifts. It is not to be disputed, that Shakespeare by these touches brought out the most attractive side of Antony. Even in the voluptuary and the profligate, there is an alluring charm in the ready versatility, the natural superiority, the variety of talent, the abundance of resources, in the natural aptness to fill any part. Antony was indeed a man thus variously endowed. The most contradictory features characterize him in Plutarch, as well as in Shakespeare. He is accustomed by turns to luxury and privation, to excess and want, to effeminacy and endurance, to epicurean extravagance and stoic forbearance; he is a soldier and a glutton; magnanimous over the corpse of Brutus, barbarous over that of Cicero; an image of rare unsteadiness, and rare fidelity; generous towards Enobarbus, pettily revengeful towards

Thyreus; open and almost without any suspiciousness towards Cleopatra; a deep deceiver and spy towards Brutus; not free from great and petty ambition (with respect to Cæsar and to Ventidius), and yet a seller of honour out of vile lust; the most agreeable of buffoons and jesters, and at the same time able to bear a joke, and to hear the whole truth, even the harsh truth, from dependents; decayed by effeminacy, though personally brave; at one time, as at Mutina, rising in misfortune; at another, as at the end of his career, quickly sinking under it; sometimes like a Roman gladiator, at others an oriental despot; sometimes disposed to rank himself with the common soldiers, at others tickled with the fancy to play the Persian king, or the hero Hercules, or the god Bacchus; such a man, however much he may be an image of fickleness, is also an image of a genial disposition, in which natural abilities and capacity must make amends for a lower degree of freedom of will.

We defer, until further on, to shew how the opinion upon Antony's character is to be established in Shakespeare's sense. Here there is more of Proteus, than in Prince Henry, more enigma and dissimulation (because it is natural and involuntary dissimulation), than in Hamlet; a nature easily known in itself, but very difficult to fathom in the last mainspring of its being. The poet has treated it in such full detail, he has brought it into such a great variety of situations, he has thought it out more deeply than most of his characters; but, at the same time, he has given so little immediate information towards the comprehension of the character, that it must chiefly be known by the facts, which is always the more difficult way. Viewed from his

many different sides, Shakespeare has caused this many-sided being to make the most varied impression on the most different men, an impression expressed in the most opposite manner in words and works: what impression the poet himself owned he has left us to guess. We will, therefore, first clear our way through the facts.

It is sufficiently evident, how well fitted was a man so gifted as Antony to be placed in the great conflict between activity and enjoyment, between the government of the world, and the being governed by a common, but powerful passion. If the active power conquers in such a nature, in such a position, the result will be an Alexandrian gift of political organization, impulsion, and new creation in all the ramifications of life, a ready understanding and furtherance of the most manifold arrangements of all practical and theoretical matters. If it turns to laxness and repose, there will then be the most extraordinary waste of external and internal riches on the meanest gratifications; a master of enjoyment will be formed, because that many-sidedness will now be displayed in the art of varying pleasures and spicing them with ever new ingenuity. Now, with regard to the active power of Antony, we have already seen in Julius Cæsar, the proofs of his diplomatic skill, his demagogic eloquence, his warlike readiness. In this sphere of life, however, he was placed beside a man, the young Octavius, who even then treated him, the elder in politics and war, with haughtiness; in whose vicinity his genius (that is, the practical, actively disposed part of his genius) felt itself oppressed, before whom his courage, his nobility, his magnanimity, bowed, although unwillingly. An inward misgiving warned the more profound Julius Cæsar against

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Cassius: it needed a soothsayer to warn this superficial one against Octavius; as Cæsar in his pride disclaims fear, so Antony pays no attention to the loud voice within him, when his presumption and self-conceit return, as soon as he is absent from Octavius. With regard, on the other side, to the repose and love of enjoyment in Antony, we find him, at the very beginning of our play, at the court of Cleopatra entangled in voluptuousness and luxury, and we have an opportunity of observing, how he moves in this sphere. Here we behold him placed beside a woman, who, in contrast to the sober communion of rule with Octavius, offered him an intoxication of delight, who rivalled him in the rarest attractions and perfections, in whose society his genius (of course that part of his genius devoted to enjoyment) felt itself stimulated, and shook its wings. If originally Antony's activity and laxness, "his taints and honours", as Mæcenas said at his death, "waged equal with him", this connection alone would have given preponderance to the bad side.

We will leave it undetermined, whether Shakespeare himself asserted this original balance of opposite gifts in Antony; from his words it might seem that he did; from the facts, the preponderance seems everywhere on the weak side. From the beginning, even in Julius Cæsar we see him everywhere needing a prop, a supporter, never able to stand alone. As first he is quite dependent on Cæsar. As soon as Cæsar has fallen, he sends for Octavius, who has already arrived unsummoned Immediately he becomes dependent on him. His wife Fulvia managed him arbitrarily; she appears to him "a great spirit". After her death, by the rising of Lucius Pompeius, he is unwillingly drawn

back into the political whirlpool; before he has decided, he tries to unite himself with Pompey; at the same time he tears himself away from Egypt, to try and join Octavius once more; he catches at the sister of his enemy as at a new staff, only to procure peace and repose, and scope for enjoyments. His imitation of Hercules or Bacchus refers to this trait; he leans against a tutelar god, who, according to Shakespeare and to Plutarch, turns from him, when he is to perish With a nature thus ever needing support, he encounters this paragon of female weakness, Cleopatra, like ivy leaning on ivy. He knows her nature, and is aware that it can yield him no support, but he is soon so entwined by the parasitical plant, — his senses, his inclinations, his humours are so entangled, that he, who should sustain the world as "a triple pillar", loses his own strength, nay, even the inclination to seek a *firm* support, and soon sinks with the creeping plant together upon the ground, and with the woman he becomes a woman.

Never were a pair of human beings more wonderfully formed for each other, than these. In outward form they appear as miracles, even to the unprejudiced. Not alone does the enraptured Cleopatra find that nature created her master-piece in Antony; and that to imagine him was "nature's piece 'gainst fancy", but even the displeased Philo calls him a Mars: and she again is compared by Enobarbus with the picture of "that Venus, where we see the fancy out-work nature". To both likewise, there is ascribed besides this beauty of form, that of motion, — the utmost loveliness and grace; everything is becoming and charming in both: *she* discovers that the violence of sadness and mirth, and the mingling of both, becomes him as "it does no man

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else"; and *he* "that to chide, to laugh, to weep, — everything becomes her". Enobarbus declared that "vilest things become themselves in her; the holy priests bless her, when she is riggish". Whoever will not understand Shakespeare's sonnets to his black and ugly beauty, must compare this picture of the brown "gipsy", for which the former might have sat. What enhances the rare charms of both is, that age could not wither them: she says of herself that she is

> "with Phœbus' amorous pinches black,
> And wrinkled deep in time":

in *him* white hairs are mixed with his brown ones; but even these setting suns have warmth for one another. Nay even because this is a last love, it makes those who are cooling more glowing, and the faithless more faithful, and Antony enthusiastically hopes when about to die, that they shall be an admired pair of lovers in Elysium, that "with their sprightly port they shall make ghosts gaze; that Dido and her Æneas shall want troops and all the haunt be theirs". Thus a perpetual charm for the eye, they were as attractive also for the ear. Shakespeare makes Cleopatra say of Antony, that "his voice was propertied as all the tuned spheres"; Plutarch says the same of Cleopatra. But whatever nature had made thus attractive to the senses, was increased by art and expenditure in every conceivable mode of charming. He laid the riches of the East at her feet, she expended her wealth with frantic extravagance in festivities for him. When she first met him on the Cydnus, lying in a splendid barge, surrounded by Cupids and Nereids, dressed with excessive pomp; or when she feasted and sported with him, laughed him into patience or out of patience, changed clothes

with him and wandered all night through the streets, or when she merrily angled with him and quickly varied her amusement, whilst music gave a charm to conversation, through all we see that variety and change was provided for every sense, and every thing combined to enchant. In this art of enjoyment the spirit of both is ever fresh and young; Cleopatra's especially is inexhaustible in invention, alternation, and diversion; "custom cannot stale her infinite variety": endless as her passion for pleasure, were the means she found to gratify it. If she could still charm "where most she satisfied", what must her attractions have been, when the first favour was still withheld. Long after she was quite sure of him, the artful courtezan spiced her multiform flatteries with acrimony, reproaches, and mockery, with the sting of jealousy, so that even her well-schooled attendants were alarmed at her bold game, and earnestly implored her "to cross him in nothing". This she knew was "the way to lose him"; she did not need the instructions of Antony's male flatterers, who mixed their praise with freedom and blame in order to avoid inspiring satiety and disgust. And so she held back at the beginning of their intimacy; there was a time, when he must implore to be allowed to stay with her; when she threw out the bait, but when he had, as it were, to beg permission to bite at it. When these seeming barriers were thrown down, both rushed together in rapture, as she says:

> "Eternity was in our lips and eyes;
> Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor,
> But was a race of heaven"!

Henceforth they testified to the world that in the art of the enjoyment of life and love, none "stood up so peerless"

as they: and Antony utters the resolve, that henceforth "not www.libtool.com.cn a minute of their lives should stretch without some pleasure", and to this is added the characteristic principle which is the soul of this life: "the earth alike feeds beast as man"; — the "nobleness of life", the difference between beast and man, is this very superiority in the delights of love!

At the commencement of our play, Antony is balancing between his political vocation, and his joy in Egypt: but his inclination is already perfectly decided. It is a torment to him to hear of Rome, he neglects the messages of Octavius, for all that he cares "Rome may in Tiber melt", and the wide arch of the rang'd empire may fall; — "here is his space". But he neglected the messengers of Octavius only from a passing emotion of shame, because Cleopatra taunted him with his subjection to Octavius; he then makes amends for his fault in diplomatic style without derogating from his dignity. The news from Rome arouse him. His wife Fulvia had taken the heroic step of stirring up a war against Octavius, to force him out of his eastern bondage: she played the man, whilst he played the woman; in Asia, Parthia was lost through his indolence; a new rival for the world's dominion was rising up in Sextus Pompeius. Antony hears these heavy news with composure and tranquillity; he still has feelings of shame and honour, and an abhorrence of disgrace; he still retains enough ambition to assert himself in the triumvirate with Octavius against the new rival; he rouses himself to break Cleopatra's chains, that he may not be quite lost in the delirium of love. The poet makes him waver still more; he adds to his former indecision the news of Fulvia's death. This opens to him a prospect of remaining with Cleopatra in peace, and certainly he had desired this

death; now on the contrary amid so many great recollections he longs for her back again, although he permits the hard Enobarbus to speak lightly and with congratulations of her death. His resolution remains firm to quit the enchantress, that greater mischief may not spring from his indolence; he wishes he had never seen her. His friend Enobarbus is in the same state of irresolution as himself; he thinks it a pity to cast the women here in Egypt away for nothing; "though between them and a great cause they should be esteemed nothing." Antony arms himself against Cleopatra's attacks and her artifices: he calmly explains his affairs to her; he shows that he also has not forgotten his old art of persuasion, he uses the death of Fulvia to make his going away easier and less suspicious. The call of honour and manly resolution so far triumphs that he actually goes, to the astonishment of Pompey, who had expected that his voluptuous life would be his ruin. And Antony really was so entangled already, that he departs with the promise to make all his plans dependent upon *her; she* is to decide for peace or war. He sends a message to assure her, that he will lay the whole of the East at her feet, and whilst the statesmanlike Octavius receives news every hour concerning the state of the political world, Antony establishes a chain of daily messages to Cleopatra in Egypt. The impression is that he goes away only to pacify the storm of disturbances, and to make way for the peaceful enjoyment of his pleasures in the East: as if his inroad into the world of action were only to ensure for him the world of enjoyment. And this is confirmed by the whole course of his affairs in the west.

The scene of his conference with Octavius (Act. II. sc. 2.)

is excellently managed. It is a counterpart to the meeting of the quarrelling Brutus and Cassius; we there have the conversation between two friends, who are indeed divided by difference of disposition, but only temporarily by temper and misunderstanding; here, we have another conference between cold and adverse diplomatists, who are for ever divided by a deep diversity of nature; and one of whom is oppressed, to his own evil consciousness, by the superiority of the other. Plutarch's declaration that Antony's genius always bowed to that of Octavius, could not be evidenced more finely than it is here. The attempt of the former to assert his dignity and equality is evident throughout, yet he entirely submits in the material points of the transaction; he confesses the point in dispute and "plays the penitent" although in a reserved manner; by this confession he will do no prejudice to his "greatness", and he calls his confessions by the more honourable name of "honesty"; gladly and without objection he falls in with the highly critical offer of Octavius' sister in marriage. In all this he is not premeditatedly false and deceitful, any more than when in the presence of Brutus he stood with deep emotion over Cæsar's corpse; then he acted, with involuntary tact, cleverly and boldly, according to the state of things; here, in presence of his all-powerful rival, he acts also, but not with tact, not cleverly, not boldly, but over-mastered by yielding weakness. And here there was no honourable motive for his acting a part, as his undissembled love for Cæsar had impelled him then, — here there was only a longing to return to his coquettish friend in Egypt. His blunt follower Enobarbus, whose plain truths Antony bears in private, but will not listen to before others, who follows everywhere the deep

dissembler, the hypocrite disguised even to himself, this man discovers immediately that this peace is only patched up for a time, until the two triumvirs have got rid of Pompey; he perceives as clearly, that Antony has only married Octavia for the sake of his interest, that this marriage will not loosen his connection with Cleopatra, but will be "the very strangler of his amity" with the Cœsarian family. Antony himself makes the blunt confession, that he only concluded this marriage for the sake of peace and tranquillity: his pleasure lies in Egypt. He had snatched himself thence in an effervescence of honourable feeling; but it was only an apparent victory over his passion. The relapse is all the more shocking, and the dissolution of his remaining strength the more certain and paralyzing now that an evil conscience reproaches him for the flagitious conduct, with which he breaks the ties of friendship and marriage, formed under the mask of repentance and honour.

He picks a quarrel with Octavius; he sends his sister, whose heart is painfully divided between husband and brother, coldly and heartlessly to Rome, deludes her with intentional falsehood, and dismisses her with the venomous words: "Let your best love draw to that point, which seeks best to preserve it." Not to him, therefore, who hastens, as soon as she has left him, back to Egypt! With extraordinary thoughtlessness he makes himself guilty of deceit, perjury, and adultery, thus offending his powerful rival; nay he even attacks the honour of the state and of the gods. He places his children with Cleopatra as monarchs in Egypt, and bestows upon them the kingdoms of the East; sitting publicly beside Cleopatra, in the habiliments of the goddess Isis, criminally sporting with every thing sacred.

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Here then is the tragic turning point of his fortune; here vengeance overtakes him. The very means by which he hoped to secure peace, caused discord, and led to his fall; warned in vain by Octavius he made "the cement" of their new love "the ram to batter the fortress of it". A double profligacy, a moral and a political one, lay at this turning point, in this political marriage and its results, and it drew down upon Antony his fate. The political profligacy belongs to the intellectual idea of the play, and consequently a greater emphasis is laid upon it. If Antony (and it is his rival who makes this remark) incurred moral responsibility alone, if he "only filled his vacancy with his voluptuousness", the natural consequences would "call on him for it"; but to "confound such time" and his high calling, makes him deserve

> "to be chid
> As we rate boys; who, being mature in knowledge
> Pawn their experience to their present pleasure
> And so rebel to judgment".

In these words the emphasis is laid chiefly on Antony's political sins, and the contrast aimed at between the active life of the world, and the corrupt seeking for enjoyment is brought out strongly. The relation of the idea of the play to that of Julius Cæsar, shews this still more clearly. In Brutus, public interests stood before his private ones, and this only too much; in Antony, on the contrary his public honour vanishes before his private pleasures; he gives himself entirely up to dependence on Cleopatra, and, not himself alone, but that part of the world which fell to his share; his sword becomes weak through his voluptuousness, and he imprecates curses and ruin on Rome, as Cleopatra

does on Egypt, if only his love may prosper. It pleased him to play the part of Hercules, but he plays it only in his connection with Omphale. In Brutus there was the noble struggle between the highest political and moral duties; but here (and this is the original fault in the subject) the struggle is between political duty and immoral passion, two powers, too dissimilar in themselves, the worst of which entirely conquers. The poet makes political ruin follow closely on Antony's political crime; immediately, stroke upon stroke. Octavius gets rid of Lepidus and Pompey, and suddenly appears as an all-powerful adversary before the helpless Antony, who has no one to fight on his side, but the coquettish woman. She "takes", as Enobarbus says, "from his heart, from his brain, and from his time, what should not then be spared"; crime and presumption ruin his understanding; his want of understanding ruins his fortune; he offers single combat, and a battle on land to Octavius at Pharsalia, which Octavius prudently declines; and he foolishly accepts Octavius' challenge to a sea-fight, in which his talents did not lie, and from which all skilful warriors endeavour to dissuade him: all but Cleopatra, who flees while the fight is still undecided, and whom he "like a doting mallard" follows. Experience, manhood, honour, never were so shamefully violated as here; "the greater cantle of the world is lost, with very ignorance;" kingdoms and provinces are "kissed away!" Thus the warriors think, who desert from Antony. He himself is so altered by shame, that he fancies the very earth is ashamed to bear him.

And yet, in this degradation, he thinks a tear of Cleopatra's "rates all that is won and lost", a kiss would repay him for every thing. He now would be content, if Octavius

would "let him breathe a private man in Athens". But www.libtool.com.cn his enjoyment and repose are to be embittered not only in the commerce of the world, but in their very spring. Military glory and dominion were lost in the battle of Actium; in Egypt the last traces of equanimity and the shadow of his fortune with Cleopatra is to disappear. We return, therefore, in the two last acts, exclusively to the personal relations between these two, in which, under all the varnish of happiness there was from the beginning a dark tinge of dissatisfaction, through all their harmony a creeping discord, through all their love mistrust and suspicion, in all their idleness "sweating labour", in all their enjoyments a root of discontent. And this for the simple reason, that in spite of all the ornament of exterior grace and the evident arts of pleasing, that inner adornment and worth of character was lacking, on which alone true love, true fidelity, and true happiness can be founded. Great princes before Antony, had trembled, "kissing" the charming hand of Cleopatra; Cæsar had been in her toils, Pompey had looked into her eyes; Antony knew this. She had angled for him with cunning skill in her declining days, he knew her to be artful beyond men's thoughts, and called her his "serpent": but he had allowed her to enchant him, to vanquish him, well knowing that he too was a conqueror in that warfare. So she knows him too, to be infirm of purpose, and a deep dissembler; she knows he did not love Fulvia; and therefore does not trust in his love for herself; she wished to separate him from his lawful spouse, and when the first is dead, he takes a second; if on one side he is "painted like a Mars" to her, "t' other way he's a Gorgon". Thus they both know each other to be unworthy of confidence,

and yet they trust each other and then find reason for
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upbraidings; they know of each other that faithlessness and changeableness are natural to them, but they entangle each other more and more with the tendrils of their passion in order that, though faithless to others, they may be the more true to one another; in the hour of trial, however, they have no faith in each other. The very trouble which they take to fix what they know to be untrue, works mutually to make them raise their fidelity even to passionateness, to frightful jealousy, in which they again nourish suspicion against each other's truth. The poet has woven a wonderful psychological web out of this rare, and yet most natural contradiction, and there is a great art and knowledge in the manner, in which he displays how the passion of both increases by this ever-recurring mistrust, how they ennoble an ignoble connection by this straining and strengthening of their fidelity, how their personal nobleness sometimes rises, sometimes sinks through this, and how, when they make the greatest sacrifice in their unblessed union, it drags them down to destruction. Cleopatra's mistrust of Antony is greatest when he is successful, his of her, when she is in misfortune. In the scenes of the first act she employs all her arts, and all the contrivances of her jealousy to keep him, but she yields willingly as soon as she perceives that he is bent on going. If her behaviour in these scenes was far from noble, it becomes utterly degraded on the news of Antony's re-marriage. She has none of the man's power to bear ill-news calmly, and to separate the messenger from his message; she curses the bringer of the news; she strikes him, tears his hair, and even threatens his life. Although every thing became her, this rage does not; the

goddess is suddenly changed into a fury, and does not
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become calm again until she discovers from the description of the modest, holy, widowed Octavia that she is no object of jealousy. The companion-scene to this is given by Antony when he surprises Cleopatra, in bestowing a calculated, slight mark of favour upon Octavius' ambassador, who promises her a favourable hearing, if she will kill or dismiss Antony. Octavius hoped thus to destroy his adversary, for he did not build much upon the constancy of women in good fortune, much less in trouble. This same opinion might have frightfully excited Antony's jealousy and suspicion. At the very moment, when she is about to secure favour for him and for herself from the conqueror, he furiously accuses her of unchastity; in this scene his conduct, and all that was royal in him, sinks into baseness, and the Gorgon in his nature appears. As he here ruins by his jealousy a prospect of deliverance, which she, in her own battle-field might perhaps have won for both, she by her jealousy had previously lost the battle of Actium, which perhaps, if left to himself, he might have won; to which, according to Plutarch, jealousy had driven her, that a reconciliation with Octavia might be prevented. The fate and life of both is at last decided by an involuntary repetition of Cleopatra's blameable flight at sea near Actium. This last event was caused by the state of destruction, to which misfortune had brought them both. Antony had lost his head at Actium; here, far more. He again challenges Octavius to fight with him, being foolish enough to think he would resign his better fortune to make a show with a gladiator. He flogs Octavius' ambassador. He dares, in desperation, a final battle, and incites his people with a night of revelling, thinking

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to animate them by a touching address, which only weakens them. He is brave and cast down, by turns, as his fading fortunes inspire hope or fear. He wins an unexpected victory by land, and here Shakespeare invests him with the ostentation, which Plutarch makes, as it were, the central point of his character; the striking contrast to Macbeth is evident, who in misfortune grows poor in words, as his deeds increase, while Antony perishes uttering high-sounding words. During the last flickerings of fortune he hears that his fleet has deserted; the effect of that first disgrace at Actium is repeated here. Without inquiry he ascribes it to Cleopatra's treachery, and thinks of revenge and death for her, supposing she has sold him to Octavius. The fury of jealousy possesses him again, and like his god Hercules, he feels upon him "the shirt of Nessus". He rages as if he were Othello, and had a Desdemona for his wife, although shortly before he had shewn how well he knows her. Cleopatra escapes from his wrath, and in order to bring him to himself, feigns herself dead. She too, who was once all caution, prudence, and discretion, now loses her senses. Too late she recollects, that her plan was too severe, and forebodes the consequences. After his first outbreak of jealousy she had pacified him with a word, because the weakling could not for a moment bear the thought of a separation from her: now the report of her death drove the desperate man after her, to earn forgiveness with tears. Not so quickly does *she* resolve to follow him, the really dead one; she has still plans of deliverance; she still hides some of her treasures from Cæsar, and boldly lies to his face while concealing them; it is not till she becomes certain that she is destined to adorn his triumph, that she puts herself to death. The

death of both, is according to the opinion of their enemies, the best in them. Nevertheless we cannot dwell upon it with elevated feelings. The fate of Brutus has revengingly befallen Antony; he utters many lofty words about his design, a Roman vanquished by a Roman; his page is to slay him, like Brutus; and the boy prefers falling on his own sword, *without one word,* thus shewing himself "thrice nobler" than he who now must kill himself, and strikes with no certain aim. In like manner Iras precedes her mistress, setting the example of self destruction, an action— by which Cleopatra also finds herself shamed. Her death, like her love, her jealousy, her life, is notoriously studied, calculated, prepared, planned; even the separation from life made an enjoyment; painlessly the asp sucks her breast, as a babe "that sucks the nurse, asleep". Charmion emulates her in this "noble weakness", when she, already poisoned, tremblingly stood, trimming up the diadem on her dead mistress.

In this our exposition of the issue of the pair, according to the play, every one must be aware that the strictest justice is satisfied in the events. According to the expressions it might indeed appear, as if too much light were cast upon Antony; as if the æsthetic aim, to elevate somewhat the principal character, had led to a conflict with the ethical truth. We might imagine, that Shakespeare in laying the foundation of this character, had contrary to his usual view of life, laid too much stress upon the passive being and natural disposition of man, instead of on activity, on the man in motion, on the use of innate gifts, since it sometimes seems as if Antony's hereditary good qualities were to be reckoned as meritorious virtues, while

his evil ones on the contrary were designated as pardonable weaknesses. It is necessary, therefore, for us to observe, in whose mouth the various opinions concerning him, are placed. We shall certainly not listen to Cleopatra, when she sees him stride over land and sea like a god, when she praises his power, his goodness, and above all his bounty, and when she says that of him, which is the most evident untruth, that his delights in which he perished, like dolphins showed their backs above the element they lived in. The weak Lepidus, who made the best of every thing, says of him, that "there are not evils enough to darken all his goodness". At his death, at the moment when even his conqueror Octavius is touched, the noble enemies Mæcenas and Agrippa express this mild judgment:

> "His taints and honours
> Waged equal with him. A rarer spirit never
> Did steer humanity: but you, gods, will give us
> Some faults to make us men".

Antony's sub-officers, among them Ventidius, designate the weaknesses of his petty ambition, and spare him. Others of his soldiers, like Philo, mention unreservedly the disgraceful situation of the triumvir, who has become the fool and the paramour of the gipsy. Pompey expects and wishes that

> "Sleep and feeding may prorogue his honour,
> Even till a Lethe'd dulness".

One of his dependents, Canidius, deserts him early, the other, Enobarbus, does not leave him until his tutelar god has forsaken him, the third, Eros, is true to him until death. Thus this man of many sides and many meanings

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makes a different impression upon every one; it may be asked, on whom he makes the most correct one. His enemy Octavius, who knows him best, does not judge him worst. He speaks of him as "the abstract of all faults that all men follow"; he accepts unwillingly but yieldingly that praise of Antony, that everything becomes him: that man's "composure must be rare indeed", whom the low pleasures to which he was addicted could not blemish. He glances discontentedly but forbearingly at the moral shadows, that fall upon him. But he finds his whole conduct unpardonable, when he looks upon his political vocation. If this lays open to us the main point of view in reference to Antony, in so far as we see him in relation to his standing in the world, Antony himself on the other hand furnishes, in a remarkable manner, the ultimatum concerning his personality, his character in itself; and in this we must recognize the poet's own judgment upon him. And this was surprisingly well comprehended in a nature not inaccessible to truth, which assumed involuntarily a dissembling exterior, and consequently appeared different to different people; which just as involuntarily accepted the glimpse of knowledge from without, and unintentionally displayed the result of this self-knowledge in various situations. In the first scene (Act I.) in his intoxication, he uttered the opinion, that refinement in the pleasures of love made the sole difference between man and beast; in the second scene, when he has come to himself and has been "eared" by bad news from Rome, he utters on the contrary what strongly condemns his pleasures: "we bring forth weeds, when our quiet winds lie still." When he has trifled away his fortune, and lost all the healthy tact and instinct of action

which was once peculiar to him, he indicates in his rage against Cleopatra his wretched fall by these bitter words:

> "When we, in our viciousness grow hard,
> (O misery on 't) the wise gods seal our eyes;
> In our own filth drop our clear judgments; make us
> Adore our errors; laugh at us, while we strut
> To our confusion".

And, at last, just before his death, looking upon his situation, he compares it with the evening-clouds, which deceive the eye first with one shape, then another, and then vanish into nothing. And by nothing more striking than this poetical image could the poet, in full accordance with Plutarch, comprise his judgment respecting the whole life of this man, who astonished and deceived the world with his splendid nothingness, with his seeming greatness, and seeming nobleness, in a thousand changing forms.

History came to the help of Shakespeare, inasmuch as it imposed upon him in the domain of the busy world, no over preponderating personality, which, as a contrast would have pressed too strongly on the effeminate Antony. His Octavius, therefore, is as skilfully made use of in an æsthetical view, as he is delineated in an historical sense. Schlegel has justly extolled Shakespeare for having even in Julius Cæsar perfectly seen through this character, without suffering himself to be led astray by the fortune and the glory of Augustus. We shall not be too enthusiastically disposed towards the activity of political life by this grave diplomatist and his conquest over his pleasure-seeking opponent, on whom his fantastic heroism and his excessive passionateness casts a poetic brilliancy. Octavius owes his success more to Antony's luxuriousness, idleness, and

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frenzy than to his own merits. Shakespeare makes Octavius himself acknowledge the intellectual superiority of Antony, when he says "his thoughts did kindle mine". But the use he made of his gifts shews advantageously in contrast to Antony. Protected by colder blood from the spur of voluptuousness, he has also with well principled sobriety defended himself from being overtaken by wine, this washing of the brain, by which "it grows fouler." These peculiarities of disposition and habit give him a natural superiority over Antony. Where the latter is genial and wanton, Octavius is full of petty carefulness, where the one idly, voluptuously, and madly puts off, neglects, and forgets every public duty, the other is all conscientiousness, economy, activity, and thoughtful quickness; and is prompted at least as much by the common interests of the state, as by personal ambition. He complains of Antony's levity, because it is incomprehensible to him, and contrary to his nature, although he might rejoice at it, as being advantageous to himself. So long as he needs him to set against Pompey, he is considerate towards him, and seriously tries to conciliate and to attach him to himself. When discord threatens, he cunningly and carefully avoids exposing himself to any reproaches, he could prove by his letters, with what difficulty he had been drawn into the new war, how mildly and calmly he had written. But as soon as Antony gives him threefold cause of offence, insulting his family, disgracing the state, and ruining entirely his renown, he sees that the aim of his autocratic ambition is reached; he now sacrifices his sister to his political objects, displays an unexampled activity, sets aside Pompey and Lepidus, startles with his haste the hitherto more hasty Antony,

suffers not himself to be led astray by false honour to accept his adventurous challenges, but follows up the beaten track of fortune with discreet circumspection, although with a full determination to destroy Antony, and to humble Cleopatra as much as possible.

The ways and means, by which the private affairs of the lovers are united with public matters and history, and by which the piece is made into a story, are as simple as they are masterly. By its connection and close relations with the East, by the contagion of the frugal West with Asiatic luxury, the Roman state perished, as well as its triumvir Antony. Shakespeare has shewn this dangerous influence in the case of the upright Enobarbus. This nature is that of a soldier of the old Roman times, hard, bold, dryly humorous, without ceremony or compliment, upright and true towards friend and foe, as well towards the pirate Menas, as towards the enchantress Cleopatra, and his commander Antony. His sound knowledge of human nature is sufficient to enable him to see through the whole inner web of his enigmatical master, but he is helpless in the presence of the artful Cleopatra. The witchery of her character lays hold of him, as far as his nature permits, as it does afterwards of Dolabella. He thinks her passion for Antony is composed of the finest elements of purest love; he is deceived by the pains she takes to retain the inconstant one; when she assures Thyreus, that her "hononr was not yielded, but conquered merely", this seems to him so earnest and true, that he questions his lord about it. Even to this plain, blunt nature the Eastern manners are as dangerous as to the better adapted Antony; in the society of eunuchs, of servants obedient to a glance, like Alexas,

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of those frivolous women Iras and Charmion, who thoroughly understand their vocation, even the roughest are injured. The rude soldier feels himself comfortable on the soft Egyptian couch; he also is soon, like his master, sorely divided in the choice between women and business, between resting and going: if love has no charms for him, the wines of Egypt have the more. This better Roman nature is struggling with the inward weakness, that has come over him, when Antony's good fortune is waning. He finds that "loyalty well held to fools makes faith mere folly", yet fidelity triumphs at last over prudence, he intends to conquer the conqueror of his master with honourable endurance, and to "earn a place in the story". But then Antony's misfortunes corrupt even this honest servant; Antony sends his treasures after him, when he had abandoned him; this magnanimity wounds the true heart, that had but lately left the long trodden path of honour; he now feels with shame, that in the book of history he can only rank in register as a "master-leaver", and a fugitive, and he kills himself.

To this example of the decline of Rome's ancient virtue is added the insurrection of Sextus Pompeius, through whom this piece is connected, by a fine thread, with Julius Cæsar. During the contentions of Cæsar's two heirs, the people's love awoke again for the dead Pompey, and is transferred to his son: the malcontents assemble round Sextus, who once again raised the standard of the republic, where "they would have one man but a man". But what manner of men arise here for the good cause, in the places of Brutus and Cassius! The young Pompey, a frank but thoughtless soul, the image of political levity, opposed to

the moderate Octavius, fights for the cause of freedom, in company with pirates, foolishly brave, without friends. He cannot wait for the consequences of the discord between Octavius and Antony, he knows that his insurrection even reunites them, but wantonly and vainly he thinks all the better of himself, because he is able to force Antony out of Egypt. This confidence rests on the predictions of hope, on the command of the sea, on the love of the people, on all the most deceitful things in the world. In the first words we hear him utter, he shews himself less pious than the pirates, in the last action in which we see him, less impious than they. Menas advises him, according to historical tradition, to kill the triumvirs on board his ship at a banquet. He would have been glad, had Menas done this without asking him; but being asked, he will not break his honour for his advantage. Menas opposes him, as Brutus opposed Cassius, with the reproach that he did not like the means necessary to the end. But what a falling off from such men as those, — from those republicans to these! As Pompey understands the cause of freedom, he is satisfied not that one man should be as good as another, but that he himself should be equal to the mightiest. And while he looks with half-envious glances at Antony's pleasures in the East, while he entertains the men who agree to give him a small part of their dominion, he shews what an adept he is in the revels and debaucheries, that are bringing Rome to ruin. There is nothing more admirable than the historical symbolism of this banquet-scene. First of all the weak "triple pillar" of the world, Lepidus, is carried off: they have made him drink "alms-drink", that is, the share of wine, which one man drinks instead of

another to relieve him, respecting which Warburton found a striking satire on his being taken into the triumvirate in order to divert envy from the others. At the same time Antony and Enobarbus intoxicate their senses with wine, performing Egyptian Bacchanals. And on the other side Pompey trifles away his fortune in an honest cheerful mood. Between them stands Octavius, observant, without interrupting the merriment: even *he* splits his words, but his mind is clear, and his senses sober, and he moralizes thus: "Our graver business frowns at this levity."

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CORIOLANUS.

We have no certain external means of settling the date of Coriolanus, only the style, and a few expressions and passages, which recall contemporary plays, may lead to some guesses, and these almost all combine to place the piece about the year 1610.

His fondness for the Roman state, whose mighty career Shakespeare contemplates in this play with the proud satisfaction of one belonging to it, seems to have induced the poet, after the completion of Antony and Cleopatra, to take up once more the better days of the first military greatness of this people, and to treat a more noble subject out of its history. As in Antony he had represented the imperial time and its degeneracy, in Cæsar the struggle of the republic with monarchy, in Coriolanus he brings before us within the republic the struggle between the aristocratic and the democratic elements. The play is filled with the striving of the two powers, tribunes and consuls, plebeians and patricians, senate and people; the complaints and reproaches customary between ruler and subjects, between official and privileged persons, and those who bear the burden and perform the labours, these are evenly balanced against each

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other. The opposition between these two powers is everywhere exhibited as founded on their nature; the implacable enmity between them is shewn as a necessary result of the imprudence, unreasonableness, and harshness of their contrast. The inconstancy in the people is contrasted with the obstinacy, the one-sidedness, the scorn in the representative of aristocracy, the dishonesty on the one side is opposed to the boundless ambition on the other, proud contempt to envious hatred, deep desire of revenge to the passing intoxication of retaliation, the lingering grudge to the superficial repentance. The incompatibility of the higher and stronger nature with the weaker and lower is described; for this is inevitable, unless on one side wise modesty condescends, and on the other grateful respect for merit elevates. The contrasts and contentions of these two political states and powers are so thoroughly treated of in our play, that this very struggle of the aristocratic and democratic principles has usually been considered as the spirit of it, as if the leading thought of the poet had been a purely political one. But it always seemed to us that these three Roman plays were so highly and generally estimated, just on account of the elevation of history to pure drama, the union of the political idea with a moral one, and the mixture of historical with psychological excellence. We are inclined to believe, that those political relations are inherent in the subject, and form with it that general foundation, on which the actual centre of the piece must first be sought. The internal connection of the three plays and their themes with one another, will quickly place this in a clear light. In Julius Cæsar the political subject was the struggle of the republic with monarchy; within this general subject of the great

historical action, we were, however, attracted by the sharp discord between a political and a moral duty, which affects the hero of the play and which is the kernel of the real *dramatic* action. In Antony and Cleopatra, the historical theme is the struggle of the active Roman spirit against the influx of oriental effeminacy, and here, we may say, the political and the moral centre coincided; Antony's individual hesitation between his active vocation in the world, and his pursuit of sensual enjoyment, is the first great symptom of the like state of the times. In Coriolanus, the political basis is the struggle between the aristocratic and democratic elements; in this struggle the hero finds himself placed in a situation, where he has to choose between his patriotism and his private feelings of hatred. Brutus renounced his friendship with Cæsar, the supposed enemy of his country, out of greater devotion to his country, being as noble in policy as he was mistaken in morals; Antony renounced friendships that were useful to his country, and formed others that were injurious, being both in policy and morals equally easy and negligent. Coriolanus renounces an enmity with the enemy of his people, to the ruin of his country, being politically and morally hardened in selfishness. The sort of characters which have to decide in these situations, and the prominent qualities in them, by means of which they decide in this way or in that, this is everywhere the actual centre towards which the poet worked, and his leading thought here, as we everywhere demonstrate, is of a moral psychological nature. Brutus' really difficult choice is decided by the fundamental firmness and uprightness of a truly manly mind; Antony's choice, which ought to be no choice, is, in strong contrast to Brutus, decided by

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the unmanly weakness and meanness of an effeminate voluptuary; Coriolanus again in double contrast to both, is guided by the lofty pride and high ambition of a manly character, in which an excess of selfishness unnaturally tends to unbending obstinacy which blunts itself. In Brutus, the noblest citizen contended with the noblest man, in Antony, the sensualist celebrated his triumph over the citizen summoned to action, in Coriolanus, the sensitive man and the good citizen is subdued by a heroism exaggerated by pride. A heroism, we say, because indeed the physical qualities and characteristics of Coriolanus surpass, as in heroic times, ordinary human greatness; an exaggerated heroism, we added, because, compared with similar descriptions of similar relations in the heroic ages, this stands prominent in the might of passion. Homer's enraged Meleager and Achilles, in like scorn and obstinacy, soften when they see fire carried into the friendly city or ships; Coriolanus is ready to throw the fire-brand with his own hand into his native city.

Even if we give up our usual plan of seeking in every one of Shakespeare's dramas a fundamental moral view, it is by no means unimportant in forming a judgment on this play, whether we take the political or the psychological thought as the basis for our consideration. If we take the political struggle between the two orders to be the main point, we shall readily arrive at wrong conclusions. To instance only one. — We see Coriolanus as the chief representative of the aristocracy, in strong opposition to the people and the tribunes; hence we naturally take up the view Hazlitt has expressed, that Shakespeare had a leaning to the arbitrary side of the question, to the aristo-

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cratical principle; because he does not dwell on the truths he tells of the nobles in the same proportion, as he does on those he tells of the people. Hazlitt has added excellent grounds for proving even the naturalness and need of this inclination in the poet. He showed that the poetic imagination is an exaggerating, exclusive, aristocratic faculty, that the principle of poetry is everywhere an anti-levelling principle, that the lion which attacks a flock of sheep is a far more poetical object than the flock, that we feel more admiration for the proud, arbitrary man, than for the humble crowd that bow before him, for the oppressor rather than for the oppressed. All this is very true, and seems to gain more force by its application to Coriolanus. But Shakespeare's poetry always so closely connected with morality, his imaginative power so linked with sound reason, his ideal so full of actual truth, seemed to us always to distinguish his from all other poetry exactly by this: that there is nothing exclusive in it, that candour and impartiality are the most prominent marks of the poet and his poetry, that if imagination even with him strives sometimes after effect, exists by contrasts, and admits no middle-course, yet in the very placing, describing, and colouring of the highest poetical contrasts, there appears ever for the moral judgment that golden mean of impartiality, which is the precious prerogative of the truly wise. Shakespeare has depicted the man of freedom, Brutus, nay, even the harder master-spirit of the revolution, Cassius, far nobler and with much more love, than the man of the aristocracy, Coriolanus. It will be allowed, that from the example of Brutus, many more would be won over to the cause of the people, than would be won over to aristocratic principles

by Coriolanus. If we regard Coriolanus, not merely in reference to the many, but if we weigh his character in itself and with itself, we must confess, after the closest consideration, that personified aristocracy is here represented in its noblest and in its worst side, with that impartiality which Shakespeare's nature could scarcely avoid. It may be replied, the people are not so depicted. Yet even on the nobles as a body, our poet has just as little thrown a favourable light at last; for it lies in the nature of things, that a multitude can never be compared with one, who is to be the subject of poetical representation, and who, on that very account, must stand alone, one single man distinguished from the many. But, it may be said, the representatives of the people, the tribunes also, are not thus impartially depicted. Yet where would have been the poetic harmony, if Shakespeare had made these prominent? where the truth, if he had given dignity and energy to a new power created in a tumult? where our sympathy in his hero, if he had placed a Marcus Brutus in opposition to him in the tribunate? In proportion as he had raised our interest in the tribunes, he would have withdrawn it from Coriolanus, who had already enough to do to bear his own burden of declension.

If we observe closely, we cannot even find that the people are here represented as so very bad. We must distinguish between the way in which they really act, and the way in which the mockers and despisers of the people represent them, we may then soon find, that the populace in Julius Cæsar appear much worse than in Coriolanus. Great attention is here paid to the character of the age. In Antony, where the people had ceased to be of any im-

portance, they no longer appear; in Cæsar, where their degeneracy ruined the republic, they are shewn in all their weakness; in Coriolanus, where they can oppose but not stop the progress of Rome's political career, they appear equally endowed with good and bad qualities. We must allow, that the populace are not flattered. The multitude are not alone blamed by Coriolanus as inconstant and variable, they make him conscious of their changeableness by their behaviour concerning his election. Not alone does Menenius say, that their imprudence "transports them by calamity thither where more attends them", but we find them actually on this road, and their leaders surpass them in that popular frenzy; what is inconvenient is not believed and is concealed from the people, and the messenger is flogged, who brings the unwelcome truth. It is true, they are not alone reproached by words with unjustly ascribing to the government what is perhaps the decree of Providence, that they curse the justice that overtakes the criminal, and persecute the great with hatred; we see them ourselves in action, now loving and now hating without a reason and, as it always happens in stirring times, scattering abroad the exciting common-places, which have much show and little truth. Coriolanus despises all the deed and capacity of the people, which "where it should find lions, finds hares", but the poet has actually shewn us their cowardice, and their love of plunder. On the other hand we must not be, like Coriolanus, unreasonable, and overlook the fact, that Shakespeare has introduced some better and braver among the people, who, when the general calls for volunteers, all shout and follow him, to his great joy and admiration. We must not omit to observe, that the

whole mass of the people acknowledge the merit of Coriolanus, that the zeal to admire and applaud the conqueror is universal, that his party among the people seems very great, that, even the inflamed and excited people acknowledge he is not avaricious, that he is not more proud than brave, that, with regard to his haughtiness, they take into consideration the power of nature in him, that they acknowledge, his merit surpasses their power to recompense. Menenius imagined that, if the nobles did not keep them in awe, they would destroy themselves, yet they acknowledge readily the wisdom of his fable, before which their wisdom yields. The friends of Coriolanus expected that the people, when left to themselves on his banishment would fall into confusion, but to their surprise, peace and union prevail. If fickleness be the attribute of the populace in all ages, there is an advantage even in this fault; which is quite opposed to the stiff obstinacy of the aristocrat; the populace become, through this quality, a manageable mass, which a wise man, like Menenius, can easily guide: if it be easily inflamed, it is also easily calmed again, and this quality of ready forgiveness, Menenius himself praises in the people. Their hostility against Coriolanus is excusable on account of his indifference and haughty contempt, on account of the scorn and enmity, with which the proud man intentionally challenges their hatred.

Here, in fact, the good and bad qualities of the multitude are weighed truly, and even with moderation. If, however, we would find out the poet's estimation of the democratic and aristocratic principles, we must, as we intimated above, compare the highest representative of

both principles, Coriolanus, with Brutus and Cassius, not the populace with Coriolanus, who is intended by the poet expressly and in accordance with history, to tower, like a hero, above them. We might compare this character with Marlowe's transcendant heroes, if Shakespeare's exaggeration were intended for genuine nature, and our admiration claimed in good faith, as is the case in similar descriptions of the old school of poetry, whereas with him, on the contrary, this outdoing of nature breaks to pieces of itself as something unnatural, and leaves in the observer a very mixed feeling. The poet has taken pains, to make the exceptional pride and greatness of his hero *possible*. He has given him a mother, glowing with patriotism, early left a widow, who has centered all her pride, her strength, and her love, on making her only and early distinguished son, the chief hero and ruler of his country. This Volumnia is a grand, but not an attractive woman, who considers her masculine disposition as an honourable characteristic, and who says, had she been the wife of Hercules, she would have undertaken six of his labours for him. She has "like a hen clucked him to the wars"; if she had been his wife, she would "freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour," than at home where he "would show most love"; she knows his wounds by heart, and old as she is, she is enthusiastic in proudly imagining his warlike exploits, and his return with "bloody brows". She tells him with the utmost satisfaction, that no son has so much to thank his mother for as he has. Never had he been an hour out of her sight. She trained him in and for dangers and ambition; she taught him early that misfortune tries courage; had she a dozen sons, she would rather, that "eleven should

die nobly for their country, than one voluptuously surfeit out of action." She can boast, that Coriolanus has "sucked his valiantness from her", and she looks with pride on the realization of her boldest imaginings. This pride her son has inherited from her, although she denies it, and in a certain degree, is justified in denying it. Her's was pride in her son; his, pride in himself; idolized by her, and by the friends of the family, Coriolanus' innate and cherished selfishness, through the delicate flattery of his well-meaning fosterer and friends, became great and aspiring haughtiness. Even his contempt for the people was first instilled into him by his mother; he was their enemy in his earliest youth, before he had ever come into collision with them. Volumnia educated her son in the conviction, that man was "no better than picture-like, if renown made it not stir"; in contrast to Antony, therefore, Coriolanus is instinctively brought up to the activity of public and military life; he

> "rewards
> His deeds with doing them, and is content
> To spend the time to end it";

it seems to him a thing not to be thought of, that he would sit in the sun and have "his head scratched", when the alarum were struck. He has been trained from childhood to an elevation above the ordinary and the vulgar; he has, says Volumnia, "affected the fine strains of honour, to imitate the *graces of the gods*". These overstrained claims on himself and others, springing from pride and begetting a greater pride, made him in time unfit for every thing, and ruinous to himself, because with them every good and every bad quality rose to a height, that

could not, as it were, support itself; he strove for a degree of merit, "that stifled itself by its own excess." No idle dream of honour impels him to seek for renown; he wishes *to be*, not to *seem* the first; in this sense he is an aristocrat in the simplest and noblest meaning of the word; with him the name and the rank are nothing, but everything, consistent with true pride, lies in real merit; it would not satisfy him, like Cæsar, to be rather the first in the smallest place in the world, than the second in the greatest; he wishes to be, not the first in rank, but the greatest in deeds in the whole earth.

What induced Shakespeare, to endow the hero of this play with this superhuman, demi-godlike greatness? History imposed upon the poet a catastrophe of the rarest kind. Coriolanus, after his banishment fights against his country, for which, before, he would have striven in the hardest battles, without requiring any reward; he enters into a league with his bitterest enemy, from a cold, unfeeling thirst for vengeance; then, at the certain peril of his life, he suddenly abandons this revenge at the entreaty of his mother. These contradictions, Shakespeare thought, could only be imputed to a man, who from nature and education had carried his virtues and his faults to extremes, which rendered the change of his different qualities into their opposites, natural. This is managed with an art and a delicacy, which can scarcely be suspected in the apparently coarse strokes of this delineation.

First his unmeasured thirst for glory, which in an heroic age can only seek its satisfaction in the praise bestowed on the highest valour. If valour be "the chiefest virtue," it is said of him, that he is then "singly counterpoised in the world."

Coriolanus so considered valour. Nowhere is his whole being so over-excited, as in battle; not his blows only, but his voice, his looks, are dreadful. He suffers none to approach him in this point, unless it be old Titus Lartius, who fighting on crutches, cannot hurt his glory. There is but one, who rivals him in valour, Tullus Aufidius; towards him his ambition rises into envy. If he were "anything but what he is", Coriolanus would wish to be Aufidius. He confesses, that he "sins in envying his nobility". He says,

> "Were half to half the world by the ears, and he
> Upon my party, I'd revolt, to make
> Only my wars with him"!

In this declaration, how delicately is a very characteristic stain cast on the valour of Coriolanus. He betrays by these words, that his personal renown is of more value to him, than his party, his cause, his country; he would fight as a hireling against Aufidius, no matter on which side! This is not the only point, on which Coriolanus' thirst for glory appears in a doubtful light. We may observe it heroically rise to a really noble contempt of his adversary and of danger, and then again see it silently veiled, aiming with cold and artful calculation, not despising small means any more than great ones. Wounded he meets Aufidius, he conceals his wounds in order to represent himself as fully equal to cope with him; the blood, that masks him, he says, is Volscian blood, the blood of Aufidius' slain countrymen; thus madly brave, he, the wounded man, stirs up to the highest the power and revenge of his strong enemy. To this is added the other characteristic point, that in the campaign he ranks himself *below* Cominius, sure of renown,

which always attends him, but clearly foreseeing, that the errors that may be committed, will be charged upon Cominius, and only tend to increase his glory.
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Next to his military virtues we will examine his political qualities. That a man of his disposition and education must be an aristocrat on principle, if not so by birth, is very evident. He dislikes the representation of the people by the tribunate, he opposes every innovation, which interferes with the sole rule of the senate, he is jealous against any concession as a proof of weakness, and as a wanton encouragement of rebellion; he is convinced that where two powers rule together, unless one has the upper-hand, confusion will introduce discord between them, and one will overturn the other. But with these strict aristocratic principles he would have ruled like a wise statesman, if regard had been had to his nature and he had been left in peace. The poet has endowed him with that knowledge of state-affairs, and those high political views, which seem peculiar to aristocratic bodies, in addition to the blamelessness of his private character. He possesses the first quality of a statesman, disinterestedness; even the populace allow, that he is not greedy of gain; in the war he will not take a greater share of booty than any of the others. He would not distribute corn gratis among the rebellious crowd, but neither would he oppress the people; so long as he was not offended, he would be towards the people, as Menenius says, "a bear that lives like a lamb". He is moreover free from all petty and punishable ambition. Dictatory as he is, he would never aim at tyrannical power; the scandal-loving tribunes themselves could not hope to have such a report of him as this believed. As he would not

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descend from the aristocratic sphere, so neither would he step beyond it. Jealous as he is of true honour, and true pre-eminence, the posts of external honour are indifferent to him. He does not smooth the road to honour like those who flatter the people, he strives to advance the labours of actual merit. He does not covet the consulate, any more than the chief command of the army. But here prudence may be mixed with modesty, and modesty with pretension; he feels that he deserves the consulate, but he is not willing to use the usual means of suing for it, he will rather be the slave of the people in his own way, than rule over them in theirs. But as, through the entreaties of his mother and his friends, he has once been induced to try for the consulate, he is bent upon obtaining it, as a point of honour, as the reward of his deservings. If on these points his aristocratic feelings are free from egotism and a petty love of place, they are also from petty conservatism, the usual principle of this class of politicians. He is not afraid of revolutions and cutting remedies, where in his wrath he has to pursue a party-aim; but even in calmness and in the leisure of consideration, he would not hesitate to apply "a dangerous physic" against an infirmity of the state, which will cause death without it. He utters in the calmest manner the excellent maxim, adverse to the petty principles of conservatism:

> "What custom wills, in all things should we do't,
> The dust of antique time would lie unswept,
> And mountainous error be too highly heaped
> For truth to over-peer".

With such principles, Coriolanus would have been a distinguished statesman, if he had employed the charm of his

superiority, to lead the people gently to goodness. Thus his www.libtool.com.cn mother teaches him. In war, she says, he is content to unite prudence and policy with honour, but he should also do so in peace; she can endure his absolute disposition, in which to her "he can never be too noble", but when extremities speak, "when fortune and friends are at stake, he should tame his proud heart, and let the mouth only speak"; "she has", she says, "a heart as little apt as his to be counselled, but yet a brain that leads her use of anger to better vantage;" this he should learn. He does indeed indifferently understand it, under new conditions, when the unsociability of his nature has not yet brought him into difficulties, and when great aims make him prudent and discreet. When he has to propitiate the people of Antium, he is at once loved and prized by them all! The senators stand bare-headed before him; Aufidius shares his power with him, and submits to his authority, the soldiers follow him in battle, as boys pursue butterflies; he is their god! But all these qualities suddenly disappear, when he is angry, when he experiences contradiction, especially from those whom he despises. When the people rebel in the famine, he will heap up mountains of their bodies; when, at his election to the consulate he has to suffer for his changeableness and the malice of the tribunes, he resents the peremptory *shall* of the popular leaders, while *his* absolute *will* never endured the smallest contradiction; now he will violently rob the people of their votes, and he rises in rebellion against those, whom he calls rebels. Then he allows himself to call the people, Hydra, cannibals, dogs, — thus betraying his real feelings towards them, and justifying those harsh assertions of aristocratic obstinacy and

blindness: that his party and station "may disdain the people with cause, and the people on the contrary insult them without all reason". All moderation and reasonableness, every wise judgment on the populace and mankind, every reflection that the state in fact only consists of the people, and that those, through whom all the objects of the state must be worked out, should not be lowered and degraded, but elevated, all the discretion and wisdom which make great public qualities only really great through the use made of them, all is entirely cancelled in the obstinate Coriolanus.

If Coriolanus' warlike ambition and aristocratic presumption of ruling rooted in the great, proud, exaggerated claims which he makes on himself, in the high opinion he had of himself, in the great merit which he knows he possessed, the passionateness by which he is hurried along, was so likewise. Brought up with haughty manners, accustomed to no contradiction, he can endure none; yet he himself seeks his glory in contradiction. Those who in this way are spoiled by fortune, who appear everywhere as conquerors, who rule over all, are usually least able to rule themselves, and to be master of their fortune. To oppose Coriolanus is the way to irritate him; when thus irritated, he cannot recover himself; when angry, he forgets "that ever he heard the name of death"; when moved he "will not spare to gird the gods, and to bemock the modest moon". When the tribunes compass his ruin, they endeavour to rouse him to fury, and to make not only his tongue, but his heart speak. In the excellent scene of his banishment (Act III. sc. 3.), the outbreak that they desired takes place in a great and violent degree. It is a masterstroke of character, that Coriolanus, ever one and the same,

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always strained to the utmost even in his calmer moments, does not exaggerate any thing in himself, in this outbreak of fury, that his excitement cannot force any of his principles, any of his antipathies, beyond what they are; he can say, that were he "as patient as the midnight sleep", his opinions would be the same as he now utters in his rage. On the contrary, when his irritation, his excitability is driven to the uttermost by his banishment, there follows the remarkable change from his vehemence into the opposite mood. He becomes then outwardly calm and still, whilst within him the dangerous resolves of his repressed anger ripen. While his mother in her feminine irritability gives vent to her hatred as long as the pain is new, "Juno-like" in her anger, so that they say she is mad; while even the gentle Virgilia feels the sting of indignation, he behaves with cool composure; he gives his mother back her precepts; he tells her that

> "fortune's blows
> When most struck home, being gentle wounded, craves
> A noble cunning".

Presently the mother grows calm, and makes a distinction between her country and the rabble, which he strives to destroy together, nay, in the very moment of discomposure, she seems to dread the desperate resolve of Coriolanus from his apparent serenity; she begs him to take Cominius with him for a while. But he evades him and departs in silent wrath;

> "Like to a lonely dragon, that his fen
> Makes feared, and talked of more than seen"

Just as here his passion, when at its height, glides into

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apparent calmness, so his pride, the soul and centre of his character, subsides into apparent modesty. The ideas of highest honour implanted in him, gave him betimes the greatest self-reliance; his valour and success raised this feeling to the extremity of pride and haughtiness. "Tickled with good success, such a nature disdains his own shadow;" must not Coriolanus despise all around him? When the nobles forsake him, and with powerful resistance refuse to listen to his call, his equals in rank must also hear his tone of contemptuous pride: they must "vail their own ignorance", if the tribunes are to maintain their power; they are, in that case, plebeians, and the others senators. The people are certainly to feel his haughtiness much more strongly. He is not content with shewing them his contempt, he challenges their hatred, and even impartial persons distinctly perceive, that he intentionally draws down upon himself the displeasure of the people as others flatter them for their love. The extremity of his pride is seen when he casts back upon his condemners the sentence of banishment: "I banish you," as if the one condemned weighed more than all the condemners in the world. And yet it may be asked whether this monstrous insolence indicates the actual pitch of Coriolanus' pride more than that modesty, with which he contemns and rejects all reward, all praise, and all flattery. That his modesty has its origin partly in sincere endeavours after self-approval, and that, therefore, he will not have his mother's praise although "she has a charter to extol her blood", this shews that his self-reliance is noble in principle and his pride justified in a great degree by his merits and his actions; nevertheless this feature bears also the stamp of excessive pride, there is mixed up with

it that highest arrogance which thinks itself superior to all praise, with which he avoids all acclamation, and every laudatory report, with which the man begs not to hear "his nothings monstered", while he believed as much as any in the gigantic greatness of his importance.

This peculiarity in Coriolanus of being unable to listen to flattery, is connected with another, that of being still less able to express it. He is true and plain; he has been "bred i' the wars, and is ill schooled in boulted language"; "meal and bran together he throws out without distinction;" he speaks the truth in spite of every danger; he can also listen to the truth, if it be without degradation and abuse; what he thinks, he utters, and what he says, he does; promise-breakers are hateful to him. He strives, therefore, to avoid applying for the consulship in the customary manner by humbly suing the people; he would not, they say, "flatter Neptune for his trident", how then should he flatter the people! And when the entreaties of his family and friends have induced him to play this unnatural part, he wears the "humble weeds with a proud heart", apes mockingly the popular arts, and tells the citizens, that he received his wounds, when "their brethren roared and ran away". When his mother, afterwards, with her powerful entreaties and representations, persuades him again to act the part of prudent dissimulation, the suppressed rage in his heart bursts forth at once in spite of all his solemn promises and resolutions. And yet afterwards among the Antiates when his plans of revenge and wrath against the Romans demand it, this extraordinary man can suddenly use the arts he never would condescend to employ, he can do violence to his nature, flatter the furtherers of his plans, and act towards

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his enemies out of thirst for vengeance, as he never could towards his friends out of public-spiritedness and patriotism.

The untractableness of his disposition, the inflexibility of his character, the stubbornness of his will, which display themselves in his proud demeanour, are, like this pride itself, partly founded in his nature and partly in the principles of his exaggerated aspirations. Seriousness, severity, unsociableness we must acknowledge to be in his disposition; the people themselves and Aufidius excuse much of his pride, on account of the unconquerable power of his natural disposition. The habits of the soldier helped to condense these qualities into a rigid, repelling unapproachableness; Aufidius says of his nature, that he could not move "from the casque to the cushion", that he was "no other than one thing", one-sided and obstinate, as Plutarch also characterizes him. The dark and never sociable man had never even shewn friendliness to his mother; he slights his nearest friends, not merely when he is the ally of Aufidius; even before this time, he accepts their idolatry coolly, and joins them without having much consideration for them, only honouring himself, hardened by the selfishness of talent, and the pride of merit. Plutarch says of him, that he had become so morose and intolerant, that he would yield to no living creature, which made him unfit for intercourse with any one; a rigid man by nature, who never gave way on any pretence, as if to lord it over every one and to submit to none were a proof of manliness, and not rather of sickly weakness; as if to force through every thing, and to have the upper-hand everywhere, were a sign of magnanimity. Shakespeare had this idea perfectly in his mind. In the

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last sentence it is intimated, as Shakespeare has closely observed and carried out, that Coriolanus had cultivated these natural dispositions even on principle, from the feeling of self-sufficiency. To tower above all in acts, in power, and in unbending will, to appear, as was said of him, like an oak, like a rock, to be shaken by no wind, is evidently the most significant mark of his aspiring pride. He could not have comprehended the lesson which Plutarch extracts from his example, that the Muse has imparted nothing finer to mankind than the taming of nature by moderation and wisdom; he could thus have had no idea of the mitigation of manners by education, and not even of giving way to the softer emotions of his own nature; he would have been afraid of betraying a weakness unbecoming his manhood. When these notions of proud, manly heroism are put to the highest trial, they have also their boldest expression. When mother, wife, and son stand up between him and his revenge, and "great nature cries *Deny not*", he prepares with a shudder to do the last violence to nature; "Out affection!" he exclaims:

> "All bond and privilege of nature, break!
> Let it be virtuous, to be obstinate. —
> . . . . Let the Volces
> Plough Rome, and harrow Italy; I'll never
> Be such a gosling to obey instinct; but stand
> As if a man were author of himself,
> And knew no other kin".

His proud self-will drives him to the assumption of a god-like power of self-determination, staking his will against every natural impulse and feeling. But under this violent strain, nature gives way; stifled instinct revenges itself,

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and while abjuring all natural emotions, he feels he is not of stronger earth than other men. And the man, who made it his pride to outdo humanity, pleases us best, when he condescends to be human.

This change does not take place in him by virtue of an arbitrary machinery. We may, on other occasions also, observe in him the traces of this suppressed humanity, and on these occasions we like him best. The son is said to be altogether like his father; we may, therefore, apply to him the incident related of the boy: how "he ran after a butterfly, and when he caught it, he let it go again; then after it again, and over and over he comes, and up again; catched it again, and tore it to pieces". Seldom is so much said in a short example. It exactly justifies Menenius' description of Coriolanus, "a bear that lives like a lamb", good-hearted when quiet, when excited, furious. Shakespeare did not omit to copy from Plutarch the anecdote (Act I. sc. 9.) of his meeting in Corioli with one who had formerly shewn him hospitality, and begging for his freedom, though in the fury of the battle he had not minded him; it testifies to the same sort of character. We would not, as others have done, call these mere fits of feeling in a god of stone, and deny to Coriolanus any enduring feeling; these features betray a fund of real good-nature in his character, and a share of the inalienable requirements of the heart, which in his over-strained notions of noble manhood he has only attempted to extinguish. This is seen in his domestic affections, the last vulnerable spot in the horny hide of his selfishness. Like Othello he is attached to a wife, whom from her very intercourse (Valeria) we know to be domestic, not remarkably intellectual, not to be seduced from her work, silent, reserved, but of the

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utmost feminine sweetness. The poet has given her a quiet but powerful influence over Coriolanus: to her alone he is gentle and tender; "my gracious silence" he calls her when she greets his triumph with tears; and when she comes with Volumnia to petition against the siege of Rome, he is first moved by "those doves' eyes, which can make gods forsworn", and he addresses her in words of real feeling. Filial piety goes hand in hand with this conjugal love. It is said among the people, that his love for his mother is equal to his pride, and that both are dearer to him than his country. According to a practice already familiar to us, the poet has prepared us for the decisive scene, where maternal influence prevails, by an example preceding it, so that one may explain the other. He shews her to us first, persuading him to present himself repentant before the tribunes. This is a harder task than the later one, where she attunes him to human feeling, whereas here she impels him to act contrary to his nature, to renounce his intention, to humble his spirit. He agrees to do what she asks, for her sake, but for his own he would rather be ground to dust than do it: he paints the scene, in self-despising language; overcome with shame he recalls his promise, but his mother pledges her honour for its performance. "To beg of thee," she says, "it is more my dishonour, than thou of them": this compels him to make the effort, which fails. The skill displayed in this scene is as great as in the later one, the real task which history placed before the poet. After the first proof of Volumnia's power over her son, it is easy to comprehend the second. In the first the consulship only was in question; here, the fate of Rome; there, his outward honour, here, his true glory; if he overthrows Rome, his mother tells him,

his name will be "dogged with curses", and the chronicle will add:

> "The man was noble,
> But with his last attempt he wip'd it out,
> . . . . His name remains
> To the ensuing age, abhorred".

On the first occasion she pledged her honour: here, with Virgilia, she pledges her life: he shall not assault his country without treading on their bodies. There, the mother's ambition spoke, here, his love for her country, which outweighs even the enthusiastic love of the mother; she rises to a magnanimous heroism, on the grand occasion which restores to *him* his human feelings. The appearance of his friend Menenius had given Coriolanus the first shock. The sight of his mother on her knees before him shews him how unnatural is his position towards his country. His boy's droll remark completes the shock: his own blood threatens to rise up against him in defence of his country.

We will take one more comprehensive retrospect. The mother had instilled into Coriolanus his bravery and desire of glory; these had led to pride; his pride had grown to excess, to a more than human strength of will and action. But the extreme in his nature, we have said, passed everywhere over into its opposite, his honourable bravery into a jealousy that took away the honourable aim, which his deeds should ever have had; his valuable political gifts were put to the most hurtful use; his fury and passion were changed into forced calmness, pride into modesty, truth and uprightness into dissimulation, unbending rigidity into softness of feeling and even fickleness. Coriolanus enters the house of Aufidius with reflections on the changes of the

world; how friendship breaks out into enmity for a doit, and hatred into friendship for some trick not worth an egg; so is it with him, he says himself, with him who had always so deeply despised the populace for their fickleness! On two great occasions in his history we see him fall from want of self-government, from overstrained passion and irritability, once on the occasion of his banishment, and again at his death. On both occasions a single word, the opprobrious epithet of traitor, brings on the fatal outbreak of his fury. This shews in a very remarkable manner the fine turning point, by which he missed the result of all his strivings. If this word were rightly bestowed on him, then no reproach could be thought of, which would so immediately shatter the noble work of Volumnia and overturn the object of all the proud endeavours of Coriolanus, as this. If he were a traitor, then his glory was turned into shame, his bravery misapplied, his pride dishonoured, his civic virtue changed into selfishness, his truth and fidelity into their reverse, his most honourable efforts covered with the coarsest stains. And it cannot be denied, that he became a traitor to Rome after he first heard this word of reproach, and he was one to the Antiates, when he heard it the second time. This mother, the giver and the shaper of his life, had brought him into both situations; she, therefore, meets her punishment with him. The first time, in a movement of motherly weakness, she had tempted him, contrary to a right instinct, into a false path, and thereby drawn down upon him the unmerited reproach of being a traitor, which he then hastened to deserve; this fault she and he also repaired, when in a noble spirit of patriotism, she allured him back from his mistaken search after vengeance, into the path of humanity, which

he trod with death before his eyes; the name of traitor suits him now, indeed, but rather to his glory than to his disgrace, and his death atones for his life.

We perceive, from the treatment of this character, that the poet elaborated it, not so much with love, as with great interest; it is not exactly a pleasant, but a powerful impression, which we carry away from the consideration of the play and of the character, which in fact fills up the whole of it. To explain this, we must remember, that not only earlier, but at that time, Shakespeare's warmest sympathies rested on that unobtrusive greatness and on that plain, unexaggerated nature which he has depicted in Prince Henry, and in Posthumus. As he had before contrasted his Percy with this form of character, he now did the same with Coriolanus, but far more remotely. And we may conceive, that just this sharp contrast and its representation, must have had a great charm for the poet, who with the most unbiassed mind perceived and acknowledged the peculiar alloy in every great character. But what a large and comprehensive mind is this, that with so much love now sketches the characters of a Brutus and a Posthumus, their severe virtue and calm composure, then represents the expressive pride of this hero Coriolanus in the most accurate and full development of a heart that discloses little, and then again, contrasts with this overstrained nature the weak characters of Antony and Timon, which lie in quite a different sphere, and which again he described with such mastery and penetration, as might seem to betray in the poet himself a preference for these forms of human nature.

A few words must suffice to shew the contrasts, in which

the other personages of the play stand towards this chief colossal figure.
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His adversary, Tullus Aufidius, emulates him in the strife for superiority, but it is in him of a far less noble kind. He abhors nothing so much as Coriolanus' glory; as he is forced to yield to him in every encounter, he gives up the hope of conquering with the same weapons; his emulation loses its honourable character; he is ready to use any means to ruin Coriolanus;

"Nor sleep, nor sanctuary,
Being naked, sick: nor fane, nor capitol,
The prayers of priests, nor times of sacrifice"

shall protect him. A like selfishness to that of Coriolanus appears here, but in a petty and degraded form. The fit of magnanimity in Tullus, when Coriolanus claims his hospitality, is a counterpart to the softer emotions of the Roman, but the vow that he will now contend with him in love, as he did before in hate, is worthless. His renouncing a share of his power to the new general is a similar trait to Coriolanus' indifference to posts of honour; but as in the latter, the claim to merited honours slumbers beneath his modesty, in Aufidius, regret and longing for the recovery of the honour he had possessed, soon breaks out and with it the old rivalry. He possesses the art of patient dissimulation, which Volumnia in vain wished for in her son, he is, therefore, a dangerous friend for the man, who cannot even tame his pride before his benefactor. Coriolanus consequently falls a sacrifice to Tullus' unworthy stratagem. The Volscian is irritated against Coriolanus because of his defeat, as Coriolanus is against Rome by his banishment; the courage

and disposition of both is poisoned, but the prevailing difference, which raises Coriolanus high above the other, is that *he* is of a nobler nature, that in his bitterness of feeling he is seized by an unnatural enmity against his country, but he returns to his better nature; whereas Tullus is naturally malicious, and is flattered by the need of his enemy thus fleeing to him for protection, he forms an unnatural friendship with him, and then returns to his deceitful spite in the conspiracy against Coriolanus.

The Roman enemies and friends of Coriolanus present other contrasts. Cominius appears as the modest man opposed to the proud one, as a character unenvying and free from ambition to that thirsting for fame, as one who readily acknowledges the worth of the other, and cheerfully gives way to his superior merits. The tribunes in their mean, intolerant, strutting pride of office, are striking contrasts to his grand pride of action. As upstarts they set up as high pretensions as Coriolanus, without his capacity; they are as violent and obstinate as *he* is, without his merit; they shew themselves in the settling of small matters as impatient and violent as he does in great things and from great motives; they place their petty ambition on the obeisance of the populace, whilst their eyes could not even reach to the height of his ambitious projects; opposed to his valour is their unwarlike disposition; opposed to his openness and straightforwardness are their dexterous intrigues, and their lying in wait for the expression of his pride and fury which will be his ruin; opposed to his bold abuse of the people is the aptness, with which they lead the populace as they please, and know how to keep themselves free from blame.

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The most striking personage next to Coriolanus is Menenius Agrippa. Except the well-known fable of the belly and the members, Shakespeare found nothing further concerning him in his English Plutarch, than the remark, that he was the pleasantest old man in the senate; from this hint he has formed the lively character, to whom he awards the benevolent office beside the rugged demi-god, of being contented to be a man amongst men. In all his individual qualities this contrast is carried out, although it seems as if unintentional. He has none of Coriolanus' thirst for fame, he rather rejoices in the fame of his friend, he idolizes him, and "it gives him an estate of seven years' health", when Coriolanus condescends to write to him; he calls himself "the book of his good acts, whence men have read his fame unparalleled, haply amplified"; even with the will to speak the truth of his hero, he involuntarily oversteps its bounds. It is easy to him to be his unselfish admirer, because his own talents lie in quite another direction. Age has broken his warlike strength, though his brave mind looks still out here and there, when in extremity he calls the nobles to help Coriolanus, and says he could himself "take up a brace of the best of the plebeians". But his true strength lies rather in mental superiority, his excellence is that of a clever orator. Shakespeare has given him the propitiatory office of a mediator in contrast to Coriolanus' blunt party-spirit, but he has wisely avoided giving him any power to act, because that would have thrown Coriolanus too much into the shade. Instead of energy and wisdom, he has given him zeal, and the experience belonging to age, figurative oratory, and prudent wholesome sense; his wit, and skill in persuasion

he mostly uses with those, who have none of their own. www.libtool.com.cn He is as expert in the office of mediator as Coriolanus is inexpert. He is the satyr in contrast to the god; instead of making lofty pretensions, he has a respect for human weakness; compared with that overstrained nature he is indolent and easy, and where the other is rigid and unbending, Menenius is yielding, good-humoured, sociable, and friendly; instead of gloomy seriousness he indulges in a broad, pleasant humour. He is a good sleeper, he likes his wine unmixed, behind his back they say of him that he is "something imperfect, in favouring the first complaint." There is not in him a vein of Coriolanus' pride, only a little conceit in his gift of speaking, which seldom fails to succeed with the people, which in a case of extreme difficulty he hopes to turn to good account with Coriolanus; and his vanity feels itself wounded, when the shallow tribunes think they "know" him, because he is open and honest. If his pride is little compared to the overgrown haughtiness of Coriolanus, Menenius' passionateness is in the same proportion. He can be hasty, and rage out with the goodnature of choleric old age and on trifling occasions, but in great matters, where Coriolanus loses his temper, he is patient, calm, full of the greatest discretion, and perfectly master of himself. He scarcely yields to Coriolanus in uprightness and truth, but he expresses himself in a more smooth manner, and people endure his satire, when it is as sharply and contemptuously uttered as in his fable, better than Coriolanus' boasting and arrogance. On a proper occasion he does not mind reviling the tribunes for their likeness to asses, and saying that their eloquence is "not worth the wagging of their beards"; but another time

he can patiently endure, that they should be called honourable persons. With these qualities he is a born mediator. He wishes at any cost to avoid a breach between the nobles and the people; when Coriolanus urges the annulling of the tribunate, he speaks for its preservation; he makes the concessions which the other objected to as weak and impolitic; when the tribunes and Coriolanus press for violent remedies for the "violent disease", he would patch up the mischief "with cloth of any colour"; when they interfere with his art of smoothing and settling, he does not lose his patience. He manages the furious Coriolanus according to his nature, sparing while he blames him, cursing his unkindness, and excusing and praising him in a breath. With Coriolanus he takes the part of the people, on account of their placability, and with the people that of Coriolanus; he helps Volumnia to soften the rigid man, he acts honourably as his advocate with the people, and says for him all that *he* ought to have said for himself; and after the happy results of his oratory, which the poet exhibits at the beginning, according to history, he gives a second instance of the way to manage the people properly, without any prejudicial concession. When Coriolanus is banished, he is civil and pliant towards the tribunes; when the exile advances towards Rome, he is maliciously cheerful, and in return for this he has to suffer the malice of the Volscian guards, when his eloquence has failed to persuade Coriolanus. In these last scenes the weaknesses of old age shew themselves more plainly, and in the midst of them his nobler nature appears more distinctly; this is excellently depicted and will give the actor enough to do. The struggle in Coriolanus between

proud indifference, and a heart breaking under the effect of his friends' first entreaties; in Menenius between confidence and renewed disappointment, and beneath the cloak of playfulness the inward struggle between friend and country, and the resolve of the cheerful old man, to end like a Roman; — these are contrasts and contradictions which it requires the utmost art to reconcile.

Shakespeare has followed Plutarch as faithfully in Coriolanus, as in Cæsar and Antony. The character was handed down to him, just as he has copied it. In his address to Tullus, when he applies to him for refuge, and in his speech to Volumnia, the passages from Plutarch are only, as it were, transformed into verse. The poet even retains all the faults of the historian. Plutarch makes Coriolanus canvass the people for the consulship, although the senate, at that time, chose both the consuls. The poet also suffered himself to be led into other mistakes by Plutarch, of which the biographer was innocent. Plutarch says of Coriolanus, he was a soldier, even to Cato's wish; Shakespeare makes Titus Lartius utter this expression, as if Cato had lived before his time. The poet has likewise alluded to Galen, and to the Roman theatres in this piece, just as in Lear he mentioned Nero and the Bethlem-beggars 800 years before Christ, in Henry VI. Machiavelli, in Hamlet Wittenberg, in Troilus the wrestler Milo and Aristotle, in the Winter's Tale the oracle of Delphi contemporary with Julio Romano. We have already intimated, that we must not attribute the anachronisms altogether to Shakespeare's ignorance. Not that we would deny the possibility of his ignorance in some cases. He must have known the time when Cato lived, from Plutarch's Cæsar.

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But it is possible, that as he found several republican Brutuses, so he may have concluded there were several severe Catos; it is certain, that he was not so early schooled in Eutropius, as we are; nor had he any chronological dictionary to refer to in order to set himself right in his dates. Nevertheless we ought to consider, how valuable to the poet was the brevity and suggestiveness of such an intimation, as he puts in the mouth of Titus Lartius; it is doubtful, whether, if the mistake had been pointed out to him, he would have corrected it, seeing it was so serviceable; nay, it is doubtful, whether it was a mistake at all, and not rather a license like Goethe's, when he made Faust mention Luther. There is a passage in Lear, which ought to make us cautious, — a passage, where the *observance* of chronology constitutes a much greater license, than the *neglect* of it, to which we have alluded; a passage, which looks like a capital stroke of satire addressed to all self-opiniated and pedantic censors (a set of people, not lacking even at the poet's time); the passage, where the poet says: "This prophecy Merlin shall make; *for I live before his time.*"

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TIMON OF ATHENS.

We have no more certain indication of the date of Timon of Athens, than of Coriolanus; but it is without doubt one of the poet's latest works. It is probable, that it was written not long after Antony and Cleopatra, since there is a passage in Plutarch's life of Antony, which may have given the poet the idea of this work. After the battle of Actium, Antony retired for a while from Alexandria, and dwelt alone on the sea-shore, resolved, as he said, to imitate Timon, since he, like him, had experienced the ingratitude and infidelity of friends, and therefore hated and mistrusted all men. To this intimation is annexed a short account of Timon, his friendly relations with Alcibiades, his intercourse with Apemantus, his fig-tree and two inscriptions upon him. What other materials the poet may have had besides these scanty suggestions, we know not with any certainty. Painter's collection of tales (Palace of Pleasure), with which he was acquainted, contributed somewhat (I. 28.). Probably the subject had been already dramatically treated; a very stupid play about Timon has been preserved and published by Dyce in the writings of the Shakespeare society; but Shakespeare could

have made little or no use of it. Still he may have seen it, and borrowed some passages such as the idea of the farewell-banquet, and the character of the faithful steward. We may gather, that he was indirectly acquainted with Lucian's Timon; the digging up of the gold, the parasites' pursuit of him, and his driving them away with stones and blows, the portioning off his servant, and even some resemblance in the imagery and speeches, leave scarcely any doubt of this. But the use of Roman names seems to prove that he did not borrow directly from Lucian, as Shakespeare would in that case have avoided them.

The impression made on most readers by Timon is that of great inequality. The versification is loose, and either unusually irregular or corrupted. Some portions of the piece are worked out with love, others appear to have been most carelessly treated. The many indifferent personages with no distinctly marked characters, make the scenes here and there disconnected. The intensity and depth of feeling, with which the subject, as a whole, is carried out, cannot be denied; but compared with this earnestness, the burlesque scenes, where the borrowing servants of Timon are turned off, are too sharply contrasted. The composition is arranged with the old attention to unity of idea, but in some points it is loose and, as it were, unfinished. With the story of Timon there is united a second action between Alcibiades and the senate, it is carried on in exact parallel, and in the same sense as the main action; but it does not hang well together in all its parts. In Act V. sc. 3. it is intimated, that Alcibiades has undertaken the war against Athens partly on Timon's account; but nothing further is said of this in the play. The reason of his rebellion is

given in Act III. sc. 5. He there pleads in vain for a friend, www.libtool.com.cn who has been condemned to death for killing a man in a duel; the poet handles with his usual triumphant impartiality the question of duelling, and places the views of justice, order, and age, in opposition to those of honour, passion, and youth, with the same decided indecision, as that in which he has left the question of self-murder an open matter; but the discussion concerns one entirely unknown; we learn nothing whatever of the man's person or home. Singularly enough all commentators pass over this circumstance without remark; although such another disconnected scene will not be found in the whole of Shakespeare. How these irregularities are to be accounted for, is a matter of dispute. Coleridge thought, that the original text of Shakespeare had been spoiled by actors. Knight considered the piece to be a revision of an older play, of which portions only were retained, so that Timon was to be looked upon as a companion-piece to Pericles. Delius regards the play as an unfinished work, the outlines of which were left incomplete for representation. We, on our side, however, content ourselves with the opinion we expressed in our remarks upon Antony, where we attributed the carelessness in a number of plays of this date to one common though unfathomable cause, — the state of the poet's mind. We must, however, add, that some of the peculiarities in this or other works of the same date, may arise also from the subject itself. Timon is a play with scarcely any real story. Shakespeare was led in his judicious manner by two mere hints to display the relation of Timon to Alcibiades and Apemantus; nevertheless we can easily conceive, that among these ancient materials, where he did

not feel himself quite at home, he would not hazard too much in his inventions, that he would be timorous in the creation of entirely new persons, and that hence we may explain the many nameless figures, which here, as in Antony and Coriolanus, are sometimes obliged to carry on the action.

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With what caution we strive to discuss these and the like questions in Shakespeare's works, we will prove by an expression of Coleridge's which has direct reference to the intrinsic matter of this play. His admiration of separate portions of this bitter satire was boundless; but he considered the work on the whole as a painful and disagreeable conception, because it presented an unfavourable picture of human nature, very different from what he was convinced was the poet's real opinion of the character of his fellow creatures. He imagined therefore, that he had taken up the subject under a temporary feeling of vexation and disappointment. This idea corresponds exactly with our view of the plays of this period. But we have already warned our readers in Antony not to attribute to the poet, that which necessarily results from the matter. The subject itself is misanthropy as a consequence of human wickedness; perhaps the *choice* of such a subject indicates a mind out of tune; but we find no traces of it in *the carrying out* of the plan when once formed. We should be more disposed to fear that in Antony, Shakespeare had judged the baseness of his hero too leniently, than that here he had too strongly condemned the baseness of mankind in general. There, indeed, we see no better specimens of humanity, but here they are not all thoroughly unfavourable. Timon's love for mankind at the beginning, as well as his hatred of them

later, is so mixed up with noble qualities, that the most beneficial effects result from both. When his fortune crumbles away and his friends forsake him, his servants though they have nothing more to hope from him, yet, having become acquainted with him in the days of his philanthropy, cling to him with sympathy; they are scattered, but determine to remain "fellows still", and the faithful comrades meet and share their money, so that, at the same time the curse of misanthropy and the blessing of philanthropy proceed from this house. When Timon afterwards in his retreat digs up a fresh treasure, and being beset with thieves for the sake of the money, describes to them, with the exaggeration of hatred, all the elements and heavenly bodies as thieves, curses them and wishes them success at the same time, bids them "love not themselves but rob one another", since they can steal nothing, "but thieves do lose it", this frenzy fills one of the thieves with such remorse, that he is inclined to relinquish his "profession"; even Timon's misanthropy scatters good seed and brings forth moderation out of excess. To these individual features which compensate for the unfavourable representation of humanity, we may add the declarations of the servants of those usurers and of Timon's creditors, who are ashamed of their masters and their commissions; the poet seems everywhere to have wished to shew a grain of incorruption in the lower classes, which was wholly stifled in the upper. The perfection of this contrast is the faithful steward, who manages Timon's affairs with honesty, strives with fidelity and prudence to rein in his prodigality, and patiently, with silent sorrow, bears to be blamed and refused a hearing. Timon's goodness attaches this servant

to him so strongly, that at last, in his poverty, he is ready to share his last penny with his master, and thereby revives a spark of human kindness in the hardened heart of the sworn misanthrope. The comforting assurance, that no good seed is ever lost, even though it may spring up as a weed, is expressed in all these contrasts, which, it seems to us, are full of compensation for the melancholy purport of this tragedy, betraying in the poet an abundance of inward tenderness, and an unshaken discretion and certainty in his view of the arrangements of Providence, which so often seem perplexed, and cause perplexity in us.

Shakespeare characterizes the intention of his drama at the very beginning, where he makes the poet describe his poem to Timon. "I have," he says,

"in this rough work, shap'd out a man,
Whom this beneath world doth embrace and hug
With amplest entertainment . . . .
I have upon a high and pleasant hill,
Feigned Fortune to be thron'd: The base o' the mount
Is ranked with all deserts, all kind of natures,
That labour on the bosom of this sphere
To propagate their states: amongst them all
One do I personate of Lord Timon's frame,
Whom Fortune with her ivory-hand winks to her;
Whose present grace to present slaves and servants
Translates his rivals. . . . .
All those which were his fellows but of late,
Follow his strides, his lobbies fill with tendance,
Rain sacrificial whisperings in his ear,
And make sacred even his stirrop. . . . . .
When Fortune,
Spurns down her late beloved, all his dependents,
Which labour'd after him to the mountain's top,
. . . . let him slip down,
Not one accompanying his declining foot".

The way in which Shakespeare has produced this picture

from the scanty anecdotes of Plutarch, is not less astonishing than the similar one in the closely allied story of the Merchant of Venice. Here as there the poet shews the omnipotence of gold. There among the different effects which this touchstone of the heart produces in different men, he has shewn us the usurer hardened to stone by avarice and greed; here on the contrary he depicts the prodigal whose fault on his change of fortune so poisons the innate goodness of his heart, that he becomes as hardened in disposition as it was natural in the other to play the miser. The two plays, viewed in connection, express more plainly than apart, the truth which Shakespeare so often picturesquely and eloquently instilled, that all extremes are hurtful. Timon's unjust censurer makes him the one just reproach, that he had never known "the middle of humanity", but only "the extremity of both ends"; his chief fault is that he does too much good; his prodigality is not greater than the superabundance of his love and beneficence, and when these are repaid with ingratitude, they are turned into an excess of misanthropy; in each case there is an entire absence of discrimination, examination, choice, and exception, among the objects of his benefits, his love, and his hatred. This eccentricity of character is natural to the prodigal; a certain shallowness of mind will be always inseparable from this quality, when it governs a man; whether Shakespeare besides this quality could have given to his Timon the depth of a true tragic character, which may force from us a serious interest in his person and in his fate, is a question, on the answer to which our estimation of the play will essentially depend. Goethe said, he could call Molière's Misanthrope tragic, whereas Shakespeare's Timon was

only a subject for comedy. It may be asked, whether this is one of Goethe's frequent whims about Shakespeare, or whether it is an opinion arising from correct observation.

The displays of Timon's prodigality certainly in themselves touch us but superficially. We see this man in his hall of audience, like a prince surrounded by characters and minds out of all classes and conditions; the smooth and slippery as well as the serious and honest do homage to *him*, the flatterer and censor by profession; near and intimate friends surround him; professors, artists are among his acquaintance; the state is indebted to him for military service, the senate as a body and as individuals owe him money. We see at once what collects this crowd. A courteous porter stands at his door, who invites every passer-by to enter; within, a costly banquet is prepared with delicacies to suit every taste, to which even the beggar Apemantus is welcome, if he chooses; the guests receive, besides the repast, valuable presents of horses and jewels, it is true, they also offer gifts to Timon, but these are only to excite his lavishness; he gives sevenfold the value of what he receives, beyond all customary recompense. He gives, however, without reflecting on his means, and without considering the characters of the recipients; once indeed he endows an honourable dependent, and advances a good man, but he promotes just as willingly a bad one; he gives jewels that are unpaid for, to people who tease him for arrears; a true friend in need, he helps his friend out of prison, and excuses the five borrowed talents, when the borrower had become a great heir, and this man afterwards refuses, in his benefactor's need, even to *lend* the *gift* to him. To make presents and to give, has become a habit of his royal disposition; "he

could", he says, "deal kingdoms to his friends, and ne'er be weary". When his steward warns him, he will not listen, when he urges, he sends him away; "his promises fly so beyond his state" that he gives great gifts out of an empty coffer, "what he speaks is all in debt, he owes for every word". This thoughtless generosity seems to the good steward, when in sad amazement he looks into Timon's heart, to be "a monument and wonder of good deeds evilly bestowed"; he laments that "the bounty, that makes gods, does still mar men"; when he looks upon the matter reasonably, he cannot but blame it as senseless, that this man will neither know how to maintain the expense, nor to leave it off; "that he will not hear till he feel". The folly of this wilful blindness increases, when we see how every warning is disregarded, under whatever form it may present itself. His parasitical poet presents it to him in the garb of flattery; Timon pays no attention: Apemantus expresses it in a blunt exaggerated manner, this he calls "railing on society"; the steward gives it him by his accounts, these he will not look at. Even when his creditors force the subject upon him, the steward can only obtain a hearing by speaking with tears to Timon's heart which is never closed, and by seeking a striking word to touch his spirit with sudden truth:

> "The world is but a word;
> Were it all yours to give it in a breath,
> How quickly were it gone"!

Even then it is tedious to Timon, that he should "sermon" him; he is not accustomed to listen to disagreeable truths; the delicate poison of flattery has spoiled him. A man of

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such refined habits as he is, would not be pleased with coarse flattery to his face, any more than Antony; he can listen to the reproaches of Apemantus, without turning him out as a troublesome guest; when the jeweller utters an extravagant compliment, he rejects it as mockery; from his guests he requires, that they should lay aside all ceremony; he will have them as friends, and not as people of "faint deeds and hollow welcomes", for whom "ceremony was devised at first". They, indeed, prove themselves by their ready submission to be no other than such people, and their society and the gradual habit of their tone, has given Timon something of the same shallowness. On his first appearance he is quite the spoiled favourite of an effeminate and immoral city, a Mæcenas, if not a prince in his deportment, noble, condescending, full of amiable consideration, refined in speech, brief, plain, select, but never deep. Amid the charms of cheerful society and the habits of enjoyment his mind is lowered, his consideration wasted, like Antony's. No lofty calling summons him to action, as is the case with Antony; his military services to Athens are considered as an excess of merit, not required in a man of his quality and in a private station. But even within his private sphere we nowhere see, at first, any trace of deep intellectual culture; he takes a superficial interest in the arts; there is little wit in his ordering of his feasts either in his friendly or in his misanthropical mood; he is an amiable, ordinary mortal and man of the world, who lives for the present moment; when misfortune approaches, he does not reflect on his own fault but makes human nature the object of his deepest hatred; his mind offers him no refuge, into

which he may retire; he sinks, unresistingly, from one extreme to the other. But then it is not to be denied, that trouble in him, as in Richard II., discovers depth of feeling and of spirit, which had not been guessed at before. A man of inaction, not naturally and by birth like Antonio (the Merchant of Venice), but by the habit of a life of ease, he has allowed his intellectual as well as his mental qualities to slumber. He was as unwilling to be the slave of his wealth, as the other; but Antonio at once frugal and generous, did not seek for the liberal use of his wealth any more than for his one tried friend; Timon on the contrary sent out his money before him, and wanted it to do all for him, all that it could do best and could do least; in his misfortunes he made use of it to send evil into the world he hated; in his prosperity, to buy him friends, the greatest need of his nature; while it could only buy flatterers for him. To gain friends by intellectual qualities and endowments, to choose disinterested friends, he did not understand. But what makes amends for this, is that he chose them with his heart, and that he gained them as much by his affectionate nature as by his liberality. If, up to this point, Timon appears to be a very superficial character, fit only for an ordinary domestic play, of a trivial character, Shakespeare has at this finest place given him all the depth, which makes him belong to the higher world of poetry. This depth lies in the close connection between Timon's liberal hand and his heart. The ancients used to unite the ideas of external and intrinsic liberality; in the middle ages the word "*Milde*" in German (mildness) combined the idea of philanthropy, liberality, and beneficence, as if these were

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inseparable qualities, as indeed they will always prove, when only one of them is unfeigned and undissembled. With this "mildness" in this sense, the inconceivable acuteness of Shakespeare's knowledge of mankind has endowed Timon. His wealth is throughout that of a good and noble disposition. Lavish of love, of untiring and ceaseless kindness, lavish of confidence even to credulity, lavish in his outward manners even to the most friendly sociability with the meanest persons, he is at the same time lavish of his money; he is a prodigal with his heart, as well as with his fortune; he is the very soul of human kindness, of unassuming and attractive manners, as with regard to his possessions he is disinterested, self-sacrificing, and unselfish to a fault. For he allows the sun of his liberality and kindness to shine upon the evil and the good; in the midst of the most corrupted city he retains the most unsuspecting faith in mankind; when misfortune overtakes him, he has the consciousness that he has been urged by mean prodigality, that he had given imprudently and not unworthily. Even his enemies call honesty his fault; the honest faithful servants of this rich household do honour to the master as well as to themselves. Though some vanity and ostentation may have insinuated themselves into Timon's benevolence, yet he gave and helped from principle, and a sense of duty; "we are born," he said, "to do benefits." Though flattery may have blunted his powers of discrimination, yet he sought not flatterers by his liberality, but true friends, and he thought he possessed true friends. He placed the social virtues of kindness and friendship at the summit of his ideal, and would with Aristotle have pronounced that man foolish, who could call a hermit happy; but he overlooked

the fact, that real friendship with the many is not possible.
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Venus and Cupid have no power over him*: their selfish joys may be more easily bought with the gold of the voluptuary, than the fidelity of friends. He looks upon his own property as belonging to his friends, and theirs, with the noblest self-deception, as at his service; when they express a wish, that he may, at some time, have need of them, he is affected even to tears; he wishes to be poorer, that he may come nearer to them; "what need we have any friends," he says, "if we should never have need of them?" Liberal himself, he thinks others the same; he is convinced that his prosperity can never change so long as he has friends, that he has only to "broach the vessels of his love", in order to see their wealth flow out to him. When the hour of need comes, he takes his wants as blessings, because by these he can now try friends. His words to Flavius shew that he thinks he has spent his money well, — words which most strikingly express the thorough nature of his liberality:

> "You shall perceive, how you
> Mistake my fortunes; I am wealthy in my friends".

Even when the first attempt to procure help from the senators has failed, his confidence is not yet shaken, he still distinguishes between these cold-blooded, hereditary usurers, and his nearer friends.

The thoughtless giver now attains the experience, which

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* Many foolish alterations have been made in Timon. Shadwell gave him a mistress, who would not desert him, a complete disfigurement of the character. Cumberland gave him a daughter, whose fortunes he ruined with his own, a degree of levity, which destroys the worth of his character.

he could not have believed possible; the false friends disperse in his hour of need; those whom his feasts had attracted, are repelled by his fasts. The sharp noses of the senatorial usurers first scent out his approaching bankruptcy; and they shake their heads, when he requests a loan. Ventidius, whom he had ransomed, having now become rich, refuses to lend what he had received as a present. Lucullus impudently excuses himself, and tries to corrupt Timon's servant, who indignantly tosses back the money offered him. Lucius, to whom Timon has been as a father, whose estate has been supported by him, who "ne'er drinks, but Timon's silver treads upon his lip", declares that unfortunately he has just given away all he can spare. Sempronius, who "was the first man that e'er received gift from him", on whom he had chiefly reckoned, pretends to be offended, because he was not first applied to. Flaminius calls the first of the three the "disease of a friend, and not himself!" The strangers call the second an ungrateful monster; Timon's servant says of the third that he is "a goodly villain", politic enough to cross the devil. These scenes, which Knight will not allow to be Shakespeare's, are evidently, from want of material, somewhat flat and burlesque, and better suited to comedy. But they help to shew how frightfully the harvest of ingratitude was to overwhelm the liberal sower. The blackest of crimes, that which places man below the beasts, is committed towards him whose generosity resembled that of the gods; it overtakes him from those, who had first sucked him dry, and whose gluttony is made by their ingratitude worse than robbery; it overtakes him, the unsuspecting one, who had never known that prudence rules the consciences of men,

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who had heard and spoken of bad men without ever having known them, it overtakes him through friends whom he unreservedly trusted, it overtakes him so *suddenly*, that "one winter's brush has shaken the leaves from their boughs, and left him open, bare for every storm that blows". Is it wonderful, that he cannot find words strong enough to express the monstrous mass of ingratitude he has experienced, that the image of man's unthankfulness possesses him like a fixed idea? He has bartered friendship for falsehood, society for abandonment, prodigality for avarice, he has found a curse in the midst of blessing, misery in the midst of happiness; the shipwreck of all his noble feelings reverses his whole nature. With a mind unfortified and of little strength he cannot over-come the injuries of fate; his spirit is drowned and lost in misfortune, which he has never been inured to bear; the mere man of the world, whose mind has hitherto been only seen with a smooth surface, is now roused by the storm of passion, which reverses all things. We have before us the most lively image of the transition from one extreme to another, the want of moderation peculiar to him in one instance is evident here in the other; in this point of view Coleridge styled Timon, the Lear of domestic and ordinary life. He who but now was surrounded and worshipped by all, is forsaken and despised; the social man flies from mankind whom he has found to be worse than wolves, to the animals in the solitude of the forest; he who had lived in abundance, among the most refined pleasures, now leads a forlorn life in the wilderness; the Mæcenas becomes an anchorite, the epicurean a cynic, the rich man becomes a poor cast-away, and that from principle and from his

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own oath, which he will not break, even when chance heaps new treasures upon him; he, who was once ever friendly and kind, now arms his tongue with frightful oaths and curses; the philanthropist is become a man-hater. Now he understands all the truths, which formerly he would not listen to; now he sees dogs and flatterers everywhere, when formerly he had seen none but friends; now he has learned mistrust, and can teach that which *his* credulous heart had once never known. This expansive nature has been brought by this change to an uncommon intensity. When he reflects on the exaltation of one creature above another, the rich above the poor, — when he speculates upon the universal obliquity of nature, in which nothing is "level but direct villainy", where the lower flatter the higher, — when his thoughts dwell on the unnaturalness of ingratitude or the almighty power of gold, — his soliloquies are uttered with an earnestness, which presents the most striking contrast to his former trivial conversation. When he invokes all the diseases of beasts and men to consume his friends, fire and ruin on house and city, plagues on the whole circle of the earth, when he vomits forth hatred against the whole human race, and wishes that his hate may grow as he grows in age; this is done in the boldest invectives ever expressed in poetry. When he strives to give actual effects to his rage, and his imprecations, he does it with an obstinacy of purpose, with a principle of condensed hatred of his kind, which lays open to us the depth of character in the now one-sided man, as his prodigality and philanthropy had formerly shewn the shallowness of his many-sided nature. Mankind henceforth are only instruments or objects of his hatred. After he has, in

digging for roots, found a new treasure, the society which he hates seek him out anew in his solitude; he makes a distinction between his visitors; the old flatterers and censors, Apemantus and the artists, whom he now knew to be pernicious, he drives away with blows and stones; to the senate and the city he offers his tree that they may hang themselves on it, others he supplies with gold, to corrupt humanity yet more. He makes his treasures the instrument of his present hatred, as they had been of his former love; they are to sow destructive discord among men, until they perish. He furnishes Alcibiades with gold for the army he is leading to the destruction of Athens, he wishes him, who was the best of his friends, success in the siege, and confusion after he has conquered. Besides civil war he invokes evil diseases on his hated native city; he gives the courtezans of Alcibiades gold, that they may live six months without following their trade, that they may adorn and strengthen themselves to be more pernicious. He gives to the thieves his gold, and his instructions to steal after the example of all nature animate and inanimate. He shares his gold with his faithful Flavius, but only on the condition, that he too shall be a man-hater. Even after his death the inscription on his tomb shall announce to mankind his hatred and his curse.

In the extremity of his obdurate and immoderate hatred, the humane poet has not forgotten the original nature of the man, nor neglected to make the traces of his former goodness discernible through all his fury and curses. This too contributes not a little to keep in view in this play a better human nature. When Alcibiades first disturbs his repose, he pours out his fury upon him, in all its strength.

Immediately afterwards there flows from his lips, which he
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desired only to open for cursing, an involuntary prayer for blessing. He wishes that bounteous "nature out of her fertile and conceptious womb" may rather engender unheard-of monsters, than bring forth "ingrateful man"; he bids her "dry up her unctuous morsels, vines, and marrows", and refuse to nourish the ingrates she had borne. Apemantus torments him, and against him rises the thorough consciousness of Timon's nobler nature; but even in discourse with him a kinder expression insinuates itself, proving that he thought better of women than men, not having had such evil experiences of them. The thieves come; he is kinder towards them, because at least they do not seem different to what they are; even with them, as we said above, his curse works a blessing. His steward's fidelity staggers him completely. He is forced to recognize one upright man, who demands exemption from his systematic hatred; he acknowledges for once that he has gone to an immoderate excess, he confesses his "exceptless rashness" and prays the "perpetual sober" gods to forgive him. But the weak man is unable to remain in this wholesome state of mind, which might have saved him; an obstinate consistency has taken hold of him, and at the same moment that he sees and confesses the fault of "exceptless" condemnation of humanity, he strengthens his resolution to avoid all exception but this one. He returns to his obdurate hatred, in which, however, such a nature as his could not long abide. "Philanthropy", says Ulrici "was his element; misanthropy suffocated him, he could not breathe in it long". It is usually understood, that he dies of a broken heart; to us, the intention of suicide seems evident in his last words. The two

inscriptions which Shakespeare found in Plutarch, he has condensed into one at the close of the play. The best he has put into the mouth of Alcibiades, who answers the hate-expressing inscription with one of philanthropic purport: "Thou hast taught Neptune to weep on thy low grave, on faults forgiven".

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Diogenes, in Lily's Alexander and Campaspe, sat to the poet for Timon's contrast, the cynic Apemantus; the quick striking epigrammatic answers to questions, which seem to be inserted here and there, too much for the sake of eliciting witty replies, are quite on this model. The description of this antique fool is so perfect in its way, that it is supposed Shakespeare must have seen the short sketch of a cynic, which in Lucian's Public Sale of Philosophers is put into the mouth of Diogenes. It is there said, that in order to belong to this sect a man must be bold and shameless, revile every one from the king to the beggar; thus he will draw all eyes upon him, and appear manly. His speech must be barbarous, his voice dissonant, and exactly like a dog's, his face rigid, his expression the same, and altogether he must be brutish and rough. Shame, equity, and moderation must be dispensed with, and blushes must be wholly banished from his countenance. He must haunt the most frequented places, but keep by himself in them, and insist on being without company, and hold no intercourse with friend or foe. All this is easy of attainment; it requires no education, no knowledge, and such stuff, and yet this is the shortest road to fame. — It would be as easy to suppose this to be the characterization of Apemantus, as Apemantus a copy drawn from this description; if Shakespeare did not know Lucian's works, the way in which he has caught the spirit

of antiquity, is the more admirable. The poet contrasts in
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Timon and Apemantus the cyrenaic and cynic systems, which divided antiquity between them; and he allows it evidently and strongly to be felt, that both, by representing happiness as the aim of human endeavours, set up a false standard; and that the being intent upon extreme principles will not, after all, lead to this false aim. The open and refined nature of Timon, who seeks happiness in nourishing and fostering, in accumulating and satisfying the wants of men, who considers culture and improvement which are the distinguishing privilege of our race to be inseparably connected with this, who sees in sociability the best means for this refinement of all external and internal gifts and enjoyments, is contrasted with this proletary of antiquity, this cynic philosopher, at the opposite extreme of Rousseau's Theory of Nature. Confused by the caprice of his principles he is extreme in frugality; born poor and needy, he makes the abnegation of all things his system; the renunciation of everything that makes man human, the degradation of human nature to brutish, the most entire self-denial, the avoidence of society and social meetings, these are the principles of his wisdom. In his one-sidedness, that poorest of all humours, he is opposed to all humanity; wine and the marrow of the earth have not made his spirit indolent, but water has drowned it from his youth; he despises art and artists; every enjoyment, dancing, and pomp is madness in his eyes; compared with the sensitiveness of Timon's soft heart, his is quite stiff and frozen. Born in poverty, he was destined to labour, to activity, and business more than Timon, who made his money work for him; but if it was a fault in the latter, that he imitated the gods in his enjoyment

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and bestowal of good things, the indolence and inactivity of Apemantus are much more culpable and contemptible. Timon would have helped him daily out of his beggary, if this, according to the uncorrupted opinion of our forefathers, had been considered as a disgrace by him; but he was proud of it, gloried in not being a prodigal like Timon, though abstinence was not meritorious in his case; in the literal sense of the words he made a virtue of necessity. If the beggarly pride of this man contrasts with Timon's modesty to the immeasurable advantage of the latter, much more does Timon's disinterestedness shine by comparison with the selfishness of Apemantus, whose prayer is only for himself, notwithstanding his pretence of self-abhorrence. For all this self-degrading, this intentional impoverishment and isolation, is only according to that suggestion of Lucian's, an affectation of originality, and a real vanity, to attract the eyes of mankind. Compared with this innate vanity how pardonable is that of the prodigal, generated and nourished by the thanks, the admiration, and the love of hundreds of hypocritical flatterers! If Apemantus was no flatterer except to misery, if he spoke truths and cutting truths to every one, why should his straightforwardness be judged better than Timon's genial and considerate love of society, since the cynic's candour had its origin in nothing but his beggarly pride and vanity. He stood on the lowest step, where there was none beneath for a flatterer to stand upon, from whence he therefore refused to flatter those above him; his plain-speaking flowed from the malice of a venomous, envious, and violent nature; by an instinctive acuteness it spied out every bad quality and experience, and refused to see the good; unlike Timon's endeavour to shew love and

kindness to all, his was a habit of blame and slander; his www.libtool.com.cn abuse had no other aim than to enrage men, "the office of a knave or a fool". Contrary to the proverb, anger was in him lasting and stinging; misanthropy, which in Timon arose out of the shattering of his faith in human nature, was in him a profession, the effect of innate inhumanity and of his vain and malicious disposition. If Timon carried his love and trust to excess, so did this man his hatred and mistrust. How clearly shines the uncorrupted nature of that most spoilt of mortals, still holding his belief in human virtue, how bright the splendour of his friendship-mania, compared with the suspicious disposition of this egotist, who believes in no integrity, who wonders that men dare trust themselves with men, who implores the gods to preserve him from the folly of trusting any one! He who possesses nothing, has attained to the hard-heartedness of the miser, who pretends to possess nothing; this completes the contrast between Apemantus and Timon. In the scene in which he finally appears in contrast to the latter, the poet has deeply and excellently shewn the superiority of the noble to the base nature, in spite of the errors, with which the latter can truly reproach the former. How great Timon appears in comparison with the cynic who now pretends more love for him, since he has become like him, although he can scarce conceal his rage and envy, because Timon is usurping his trade, and "affecting his manners". "Were I like thee," Timon says to him, "I'd throw away myself." He grants him his "beastly ambition" and wish to give the world to the beasts, and remain a beast with the beasts, and he only proves to him, that among the beasts he would be as utterly worthless as among men, that the order

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and inequality of power and endowments, which is so hateful to him in human society, would be found there likewise. For in this communistic nature, which would have all equals, the strength of resolution and endeavour is still more wasted, than in that spoiled child Timon. "Thou'dst courtier be again, wert thou not beggar," Apemantus says to him; the power of self-denial, which Timon displays on discovering the treasure, is quite beyond his comprehension! Neither can he comprehend Timon's change to misanthropy, because there is in him none of the philanthropy, which was Timon's nature; he would have comprehended, if the man, whom he had known but as a flattered superior, had fallen into the other extreme of the humble flatterer. He speaks from his own feelings, and hence it is that we feel the justice of the hypothetical characterization, which Timon flings at him: "Thou wert bred a dog!" he says:

> "Had'st thou been like us, — . . . . . .
> . . . . Thou would'st have plunged thyself,
> In general riot; melted down thy youth
> In different beds of lust; and never learn'd
> The icy precepts of respect . . . .
> . . . . But myself,
> Who had the world as my confectionary;
> . . . . I, to bear this,
> That never knew but better, is some burden:
> Thy nature did commence in sufferance, time
> Hath made thee hard in 't. Why shouldst thou hate men?
> They never flatter'd thee: what hast thou given? —
> If thou had'st not been born the worst of men,
> Thou had'st been a knave, and flatterer".

Among his many groundless revilings, Apemantus utters to Timon two cutting and opprobrious truths; both recoil upon himself with stronger meaning.

"Best state, contentless,
Hath a distracted and most wretched being,
Worse than the worst, content".

But this content Timon had possessed in his prosperity, only it could not stand by him in the overthrow of his fortunes; but the morose censurer Apemantus had never possessed it; yet, and this is the error of both these systems of life, it is not connected either with the fortune of possession, or abnegation. Again Apemantus says to him: "The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends." To this Timon might have answered, that Apemantus also had never known this middle, but only the extremity of one end.

Between these two eccentric ones Alcibiades is placed, as the man of practical life, which generally blunts extremes. He is by no means shewn in a very favourable light, lest he should prejudice the chief character. Shakespeare represents him without any ideality, as a man of coarse texture, who is in no way enthusiastic about the extreme ends of things; a complete soldier, who carries about with him the pleasures of peaceful life; who knows how to be poor, and to be rich; not the worst of Timon's friends, who, needy himself, yet willingly offers him money for his support, and though reviled by him, espouses his cause as his own. Prodigal of his blood, rich only in wounds, he has driven back the enemies of Athens, whilst the senators counted their money, and lent on usury. He is repaid with the same ingratitude, as Timon experienced from his friends; exactly like Timon's friends they refused him the smallest favour, notwithstanding his great services, and his passionate entreaties are met with a sentence of banish-

ment, as Timon was forsaken and cast off by his friends.
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The man of action becomes "worse than mad", on this maltreatment; his principles, which he had shewn in his defence of his friend the duellist, will not suffer him to bear contumelious treatment with patience; for this injustice received, he takes up arms in rebellion against the state, whilst Timon casts forth his hatred upon the whole human race, too wide a mark to be reached. Timon's hatred would have been confined to passiveness, had not the treasure he found, given him the means of fighting mankind with gold; Alcibiades avenges his mortification on the thankless city by arms. Where Timon nourishes universal hatred, Alcibiades punishes with severity, but with discrimination; on hearing that the walls, which he is about to overthrow, were not built by those who have injured him, he desists from the attempt; "all have not offended," they tell him; they offer him decimation, "if his revenges hunger for that food, which nature loaths." The warrior throws down his glove, to certify that he will only punish his enemies; reconciliation quickly follows his substantial revenge and active hatred, whilst Timon, in his enmity against humanity, does not think decimation satisfaction enough. This limitless fury necessarily recoils fatally on the impotent hater. Fate had restored to him in a wonderful manner, the means of taking the sweetest revenge on his false friends; he despised in obstinate bitterness, what prodigal chance had freely given into his prodigal hands, and died, desolate, a subject of malicious joy perhaps to his pretended friends, while the poor Alcibiades, with unpaid soldiers, preserving moderation in his aims and in his passions, punishes ingratitude, spares the penitent, and triumphs over all.

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THE TEMPEST.

"There can be little doubt," says Hazlitt in the introduction to his remarks on the Tempest, "that Shakespeare was the most universal genius, that ever lived. Either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, scene individable or poem unlimited, he is the only man. He has not only the same absolute command over our laughter and our tears, all the resources of passion, of wit, of thought, of observation, but he has the most unbounded range of fanciful invention, whether terrible or playful, the same insight into the world of imagination, that he has into the world of reality; and over all there presides the same truth of character and nature, and the same spirit of humanity." The pertinence of these observations becomes especially evident, when we, as now, step from the antique plays, into this fanciful world of mediæval superstition, out of the sober historic matter of Roman history, into the airy kingdom of elemental spirits. A greater contrast cannot be imagined; and yet this play and the Winter's Tale lie close beside two of those historical plays, and the poet is quite as much at home in these opposite spheres, as if he had never quitted them. In the

historical plays he occupied the realistic, political, historical mind of the English people; in these he addressed the credulous imaginativeness of the existing generation, from two opposite sides and out of two equally productive sources. This was the time of a general belief throughout Europe in witchcraft and magic; in England an interest in such things, even among men of the educated classes, was kept alive by a succession of works upon magic, witchcraft, and the spirit-world; and king James, in his Demonology (1603), having ranged himself among the writers on these subjects, may well have given food and fashion to a desire for knowledge in this direction. In conjunction with these wonders of the unseen world, the populace were attracted by the accounts and evidences of so many real wonders in the newly discovered quarter of the globe; Shakespeare, in this play, hints satirically at those marvels of nature in distant countries, which were believed in England on the evidence of lying travellers, and at the eagerness, with which they rushed to see the singular forms of new animals, that were exhibited to the curious. Shakespeare himself speculated, as it were, in his Tempest on this spirit of the time. He gives us a venerable magician and his spirit-world, a distant island with an extraordinary monster, adventures of travel, shipwreck, and storm, all in one piece; seamen, the sea smell, Robinson Crusoe-like solitude, foreign nature, and air surround us sensibly in all parts of this drama. To make the play more attractive, the poet connected with it an event, that had very recently engaged all the London world. In the year 1609, Sir George Somers sailed with nine ships for Virginia; a storm dispersed the vessels, part of them reached Virginia, part

returned to England in 1610, and brought the news of the probable wreck of the Admiral's ship (the Sea-Venture), which, however, had reached the Bermudas. In the year 1610, there appeared a small pamphlet, called "the Discovery of the Bermudas or Devil's Island", in which there was a description of the storm, which had driven the Admiral's ship out of its course. The ship had sprung a leak, the sailors exhausted with working the pumps had fallen asleep, having already taken leave of one another, when Somers saw land, and the vessel was luckily jammed in between two rocks; they found the island uninhabited, the air mild, the land remarkably fruitful; these islands had hitherto been thought enchanted; and, on account of their storms, which Shakespeare also alludes to, Sir Walter Raleigh (1596) had given them a bad name. We perceive sufficiently from these notices, that Shakespeare borrowed some of the incidents in his Tempest from these reports, and it is probable enough, that they gave rise to the whole composition. We know, except this, no other origin for "The Tempest". The beautiful Sydea of our Jacob Ayrer is probably founded on an English play, from which Shakespeare may have taken his idea of the connection between Prospero and Alonzo, Miranda and Ferdinand; but beyond this the pieces have no resemblance with each other. But Shakespeare needed nothing more to aid his invention in the composition of the play, which contains very little action, and in which (as Schlegel says) the denouement is evident from the very beginning.

The date of the Tempest is decided by its undeniable connection with Jourdan's pamphlet, and besides by the notice but lately discovered: that according to the extracts

from the accounts of the Court-Festivities (published by Cunningham in the writings of the Shakespeare society) it was acted before the king at Whitehall, 1st Nov. 1611. These dates quite set aside Hunter's assumption (Disquisition on the Tempest), that this piece was one of the earlier works of our poet, and even that it was the "Love's Labour Won" mentioned by Meres.

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The Tempest is one of those plays, which like the Midsummer-Night's Dream may be ranged under that branch of the drama, which includes Operas, Pastorals, and Masques, and it is, therefore, explicable that when, on the revival of the Theatre at the Restoration, the first curiosity of the public had been satiated with the older pieces of Shakespeare's time, and Davenant found it necessary to resort to spectacles and music to tickle the senses, and please a perverted taste, this play like Macbeth was turned by Dryden and Davenant into a kind of opera aiming at strong effect, and later, by Shadwell into a regular opera. Like all Shakespeare's plays of this kind, the action and characteristics are very simple: our remarks on the Tempest, therefore, may be very short.

We have alleged above, that Timon and the Tempest appear especially prominent in the group of plays, which are most deeply agitated by the overruling idea of the works of the third period, — the representation of the unnatural rupture of natural ties by oppression, falsehood, and ingratitude. It treats of the rebellion of kindred, of the usurpation of one brother against another, of the ungrateful brother against the beneficent one. Duke Prospero of Milan, absorbed in his studies, has committed the government of his states to his brother Antonio, "whom, next to his child, of all the world"

he loves best. His confidence created in Antonio, falsehood
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as boundless as the trust reposed in him, the habit of power and dominion led to ambition, and out of ambition grew treachery. He arranged everything in the state to further the objects of his ambition, filled all offices with his creatures, made a league with Prospero's enemy the king of Naples, made free Milan tributary to him, obtained the help of the king's brother Sebastian, and then overthrew his own brother, and exposed him with his infant heiress to perish on the sea. In addition to this unnatural conduct towards his brother, his prince, his niece, and his country, we see Antonio in the course of the play project another deed of unnatural treachery against his auxiliaries and his new liege-lord. To escape the tribute he urges Alonzo's brother to murder the king, the similar crime which he had committed against Prospero. Both Antonio and Sebastian we find are cruel, seizing the unsuitable moment of misfortune to make bitter reproaches to Alonzo, like incarnate mockers, as Coleridge says, "who indulge in scorn and contemptuous expressions, as a mode of getting rid of their own uneasy feelings of inferiority to the good". Antonio is the worst sinner of the two, who, as Prospero says at the end, had entertained ambition against his own flesh and blood, and "had expelled remorse and nature". He says of himself

"twenty consciences
That stand 'twixt me and Milan, candied be they
And melt, ere they molest"!

Compared to him, intriguer as he is, Sebastian is like "standing water", which Antonio "will teach how to flow", that he may not as

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"Ebbing men, indeed,
Most often do, so near the bottom run,
By their own fear, or sloth".

When their projects fail, and the fruit of their previous crimes is destroyed, Antonio stands petrified, Sebastian, who was at first troubled with remorse and stings of conscience, breathes again; Alonzo, after the first stroke, when he imagined his son to be lost, becomes silent, stupid, and repentant. He had gone to Tunis with his fleet, where he had given his daughter in marriage, against all advice, even against her own inclination; he has unnaturally sacrificed his own child by a political union; as a punishment for this, according to the view of Antonio and Sebastian, he is overtaken by the tempest, which by the destruction of his son and heir, also revenges on him his crime against Milan. When he receives from Ariel the wonderful announcement, that they are considered usurpers in the uninhabited island, and that perdition hangs over their heads, from which "nothing but heart's sorrow, and a clear life ensuing" can deliver them, Antonio and Sebastian want to "fight with the fiend", Alonzo alone is ripened by sorrow, and maintains his change of mind, when he desires the marriage of his son with the heiress of Milan, and penitently kneels before Miranda, now his daughter.

Prospero had been the innocent cause of his own ruin. In Milan he had entirely devoted himself to the liberal arts, wrapt in secret studies, dedicated to retirement, and to the bettering of his mind. By this renunciation and neglect of worldly things he had aroused the evil nature of his brother, so

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> "that now he was
> The ivy which had hid the princely trunk,
> And suck'd the verdure out on't".

His proneness to intellectual things had cost him a throne, the fruit of his twelve years of study in solitude is to win it back for him. Gonzalo, one of the ministers of the king of Naples, a talkative but eloquent old man, the excellent comforter of his unfortunate master, had become the preserver of the ejected Prospero: he had furnished him in the ship with necessaries, and what was far more, with his books of magic; true to his lord, as well as to the higher duties of humanity. Prospero holds him, therefore, in sacred remembrance as a man of unbounded honour. Cast upon an uninhabited island, his only refuge from despair was his little daughter, "for whom henceforth alone he liv'd". By practising his secret arts he had deprived her of the succession, he had kept up, on her account, some interest in the world, and was now about to employ the mighty development of his magic, not for his own restoration, but for hers. Before this comes to pass, before fortune puts his enemies in his power, he has had an opportunity on his island to make up, as it were, for the active duty which he had neglected; he maintains a double control over Caliban, the only dweller on the island, and over the host of spirits, whom he constrains to serve him. In this respect Prospero is, in some sense, a usurper; Caliban, who considered himself lord of the island, accuses him directly of this; and the lordship over the spirit world, according to the ideas of the time, was sinful presumption and unnatural ambition. Having been overtaken by misfortune in Milan, while studying these magic arts, he will now use his skill in them to

recover the possession of that which those studies had cost him, and to use them beneficially until the time for this arrives; then he will break his magic wand, and think only of his end. But in his new kingdom Prospero seems now for the first time to learn discipline and the art of government. Experience had taught him. He keeps all around him in strict subjection, his commands are dictatorial, and demand blind obedience and instant service. Not the monster Caliban alone fears his wrath; even his spirits serve him trembling; he uses harsh words to his favourite Ariel on the least opposition to his behests; he can even appear full of severity towards Ferdinand and Miranda. His misfortunes have made him careful and prudent, indignant and severe; but this severity does not detract from his goodness, his resentment does not disincline him to reconciliation, his desire for retribution, and his anger at the unnatural conduct of the princes do not prejudice his noble nature, nor lead him to abuse his power. Herein especially lies the silent charm of this character, (and to feel thoroughly the difference between poetry and poetry we must compare this, with the Magicians of Green and Marlowe, with Bacon and Faust,) that in spite of the mysterious omnipotence, the eminence with which this power invests him, he appears, by his mild and merciful use of it, only an ordinary well-intentioned man: a man, in whom judgment has to struggle with passion, whose better nature takes part against his wrath, and whose virtue conquers his revenge; a man, whose moral excellence is more powerful than his magic. He might have repaid usurpation with greater usurpation, he might have executed the murderous designs of Antonio and Sebastian against Alonzo,

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upon themselves, but he is in all respects the humane reverse of his inhuman enemies. He is satisfied when they are penitent, and will not repay unnatural conduct with the like; for malevolence he returns benevolence; he does not forget thanks for the long past service of Gonzalo, which he rewards with deeds and words; and even here a contrast appears to lie, for far removed as he is from all abuse of power, he is so also with regard to paternal authority, and he exercises none of the compulsion towards his Miranda, which Alonzo uses towards his Claribel.

The desire to unite his daughter with Ferdinand, and to make this marriage the instrument and aim of all his revenge, shews Prospero's kind but not weak nature to the best advantage; he does not, with excess of magnanimity, choose his brother's son, who is also with the fleet, though not brought forward either by Prospero or the poet; he chooses the son of Alonzo, who, as his enemy, has behaved towards him less unnaturally: Milan is thus, as Gonzalo gladly remarks, placed upon an equal footing with Naples. The rapid development of an involuntary love of paradisiacal innocence in Ferdinand and Miranda, a love so consistent with the plans of Prospero, is quite in concordance with the nature of the circumstances. Miranda is one of those exquisite feminine creations of the poet, whose excellence does not depend on peculiar prominent qualities, but on that tranquil harmony and purity, which we feel to be so agreeable and desirable in women; like Cordelia, Ophelia, Perdita, she is one of those quiet natures, whose mental worth is closed as within a bud, whose depth of character is hidden, like the fire of the diamond, until the occasion comes, which strips off the concealing husk, and reveals the

richness and splendour of the inner life. Reared in solitude
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she is like a blank leaf as regards all social gifts and conventional accomplishments; she is quiet, and of few words; but her fancy is full of inward life and playfulness, and her pure soul uninjured by intercourse with mankind. She could acquire few faults and few virtues, as opportunity for both was wanting. Thus the poet endowed her with modesty and pity, virtues which may be acquired in solitude without man, and form a soil in which every other virtue may be planted. Her father had often hinted to her, that she is greater than she imagines; she had neither curiosity to learn this, nor longing to be so. She only knows that she is the daughter of the poor Prospero, so that when he reveals her parent's princely rank, she involuntarily asks: "sir, are not you my father". Satisfied of this, she fancies herself, for a moment, in that better situation, and asks:

> "What foul play had we, that we came from thence,
> Or blessed was't we did"?

but her next thought is pity for the care she must have caused to her banished father. Her distinguishing virtue, as Prospero intimates, is pity; we perceive it at the very beginning during the Tempest, when she suffers, like a woman, with the sufferers: this makes her so desirous to see the sympathetic Gonzalo. It is very charming the way in which the poet has given several times to her silent glances the expression of pity, and only that expression. Prospero soothes her, during the tempest by saying: "There's no harm done"; and in answer to her incredulous look, he repeats "no harm"! Immediately after, he continues:

> "I have with such provision in mine art
> So safely ordered, that there is no soul", —

again her troubled look,

> "No, not so much perdition as an hair
> Betid".

And the same is implied in Prospero's words at the end of the first act. "Speak not for him"! — thus answering an imploring look of Miranda who had not spoken.

Thus she encounters Ferdinand, and it is not surprising that, at the first moment, they exchange glances. The king's son imagines himself the only soul saved; his father, Ariel tells him, is dead: he wanders about, needing help. Prospero harshly upbraids him with wishing to usurp the sovereignty of the island, then makes him feel his power and omniscience, checks his longing and "binds up his spirits as in a dream". Thus on account of his beauty, and his piteous condition he becomes immediately an object of attraction to Miranda; he is the first man she has ever seen, except Prospero; her father's unfriendly treatment of him wakes up her pity more strongly, — the pity for a guiltless one; for she is sure

> "There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple";

she will be surety for him; her good heart generates her trust and pity, and both her love, which she cannot hide for a moment. How natural that this encounter with a being, created (as he thought, who knew woman well) "of every creature's best", should suddenly extinguish in him every earlier impression, should take prisoner the heart of the orphaned, the captive Ferdinand! The difficulties which the father purposely raises between this

> "fair encounter
> Of two most rare affections",
> "lest too light winning
> Make the prize light",

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ripen in a few short hours into the purest attachment. www.libtool.com.cn He imposes menial work on Ferdinand, to try whether he loves; Ferdinand endures it for Miranda's sake; she offers to bear his burden for him. He tells his daughter, that Ferdinand is but a Caliban in comparison with other men; but he cannot mislead her modest inclination. He hears how she listens in silent ecstacy to the assurances of Ferdinand's love, and calls herself "a fool to weep at what she's glad of", — tears which, caused by that feature of modesty in her, arise partly out of the consciousness of her unworthiness. The father listens while she artlessly reveals her feelings, tells her name, contrary to his command, and gives her love, in opposition to his wish. By means of this inimitably tender thread, Shakespeare has imperceptibly connected this episode with the main idea of the play; the father "loses his daughter", she begins with disobedience to him, she falls away, and breaks the bands of nature and of blood, but in that only case, which nature and religion have hallowed, in that the daughter is to leave father and mother. Prospero, therefore, blesses the hasty bond, but with a second trial, if Ferdinand's love be pure and true, and with a solemn injunction to respect her innocence. Is this unnecessary with so etherial a creature as Miranda? is it not an ungenial shadow on a picture so tender? Yet Miranda, notwithstanding her artless childhood, has received from her father, who trained her for the world, and from a rough attempt of Caliban's, some idea of lawless and faithless love: we see this from expressions which we should scarcely have expected from her lips. Her father had imparted to her moral training and accomplishments, but, in the wilderness his last thought had heen the convention-

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alities of refined society; he might well imagine the dangers of youth and solitude in the tender meetings of the pair. The masque teaches us, that Cupid's arrows had been turned away from them, and there is a delicate meaning in their being discovered in the cave innocently playing at chess.

Being both wise and good, Prospero uses his paternal authority with love and severity; in like manner also, he uses his power over the spirits. While other poets, in those days, employed their magic dramas to give pleasure to the spectators by a variety of artful tricks, how sensibly Shakespeare (without neglecting the opportunity of introducing a pretty device) used his magic merely as a symbol of the most natural relations, as if witchcraft in poetry were to him as inadmissible, as it was thought in real life. When Ferdinand is separated from his companions by the magic arts of Ariel, it may also have been simply because he was the first to leap out of the ship, and, being stronger than the rest, as we hear, may have sought to save himself by swimming; when Ariel kept the other princes separate from the crew, it may be, because the former sprang overboard, but the latter did not; when Ariel bewitches the sailors with sleep, he says himself that their weariness had done half the work for him; when the princes are led astray by deceptive apparitions, and cast into despair, it may be that

> "their great guilt
> Like poison given to work a great time after,
> Now 'gins to bite their spirits".

Thus, we might strike the magic out of the play, and nature would remain. With the same delicate sym-

bolism are the wonderfully fantastic images of the spirit-world connected with the inner meaning of the play; and this seems to us even to surpass the skill, with which a firm character, consistency, and necessity are given to this ideal world, — nature, as it were, elevated above herself, the actual brought into the region of the possible, and reason never offended by the appearance of the supernatural. The spirits, which the poet has subjected to Prospero's authority, are those which, according to popular belief, rule the four elements; by their aid he darkens the sun, lashes the sea into storms, raises tempests, and opens graves. Sylphs, which melt into thin air, perform the masque at his command; sea-nymphs, water-spirits sing the chorus in Ariel's song of consolation before Ferdinand: goblins, spirits of earth, he calls those, whose business it is to torture Caliban with cramps and convulsions, in the form of hedgehogs and apes. If these separate functions of the subordinate spirits do not appear quite sharply defined in the play, it is the more evident, that Shakespeare intended to give to Prospero's favourite messenger Ariel the united power of all these elemental spirits. At one time he appears as a sea-nymph, swimming and careering on the sea; then as a fire-spirit, who sets the ship on fire and climbs like licking flames up the mast; then as a spirit of earth, busied for Prospero in the frozen veins of the earth; his ruling nature, however, as his name intimates, is that of a sylph, a spirit of the air. In this character he is called a bird and appears in the form of a harpy, he flies and rides on the winds and "curled clouds", fetches dew at night from the spirit-land Bermuda, vanishes invisible, and takes every visible form, deceives, leads astray, scatters, jeers, and frightens

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men by all sorts of apparitions, sounds, and deceptions. Grace, tenderness, speed, and especially freedom and lightness, the properties of his element, are peculiar to him. He was formerly in the service of the witch Sycorax, for whose "earthy and abhorred commands" he was too delicate; he slighted her behests, and she confined him "by help of her more potent ministers", in a cloven pine, a torment "to lay upon the damned" which the witch could not again undo; but after twelve years' painful imprisonment Prospero's magic power set him free. For this benefit, the restoration to freedom, the highest Ariel knew, he gave to Prospero a service more suitable to his gentle nature; whilst the other spirits hate the magician, yet are compelled to serve him, Ariel obeys him thankfully and truly, without lies, without mistakes, without a murmur; for this, his perfect freedom, his all, is promised him within a certain time, and of this time, for good service, one year is abated. But even to wait this abridged time, is painful to him; it is exquisitely conceived, and very beautiful, what a peculiarly melancholic character the poet has cast over the being and relations of this creature, divided as he is between a superior nature and the aspirings of higher feelings. Having the four elements combined in his composition, Ariel is by nature a spirit of a higher order; by his service and intercourse with a noble and beneficent man he has risen to half-human sympathies, although, according to the popular belief, these beings are indifferent, adverse, and vexatious towards the human creature. He can sympathize with the tormented consciences of the princes, whose nature he does not share; and although he "is nothing but air", he has imbibed somewhat of the loftier

feelings of love and gratitude albeit contrary to his nature. His lord will miss him when he has given him his freedom; but he, the airy creature, will feel no longing after his dear master, whom he only seems to love for the sake of his promised freedom. He asks for more, for speedier freedom, and Prospero must once in a month recount to the quickly forgetting spirit the benefit he has received of his hands, then the variable servant struggles with his fluctuating nature, and is again all obedience, fidelity, and promptness. It is an unnatural dominion, an unnatural bond between man and spirit, where corresponding nature and uniting sympathies are wanting; and yet this is the evident bearing of the circumstance on the action of the piece: this unnatural bond is made possible and tenable by suavity of manners, dignity, benefit, and gratitude, whereas, among men who are endowed with moral sense and reason the strongest ties of nature, those between brother and brother, are unnaturally broken.

With the same intrinsic bearing on the intention of the play the much and deservedly admired character of Caliban is introduced. Even Dryden wondered at the profound truth of this creature, for which no type is found in nature; Schlegel declared the delineation of him to be made with inconceivable consistency and depth, and not offensive to the feelings, although so hateful, because the honour of humanity is not offended by it; and this creation was always the one which suggested itself, when Shakespeare was commended for making the supernatural natural, the wonderful ordinary, because he not only shewed human nature as it *is* in actual occurrences, but also as it *would be* under temptations, to which it cannot be exposed. Caliban is the very opposite

to Ariel; opposite to the graceful creature both externally and internally, a tortoise in the mud, as the other was a bird in the air, an embryonic being defiled, as it were, by his earthy origin from the womb of savage nature. His mother was the witch Sycorax, who banished from Argier for "mischiefs manifold", grown into "a hoop with age and envy", had fled into this island. The devil was his father; the fruit of abominable parents, a prey to brutish impulses, reared in solitude, he was called by Schlegel with a perfect delineation, half demon and beast, half goblin and savage. A foul bulk, resisting all active employment, a mere animal having no sense but for good food, for flattery and stroking, for corporeal attractions and for the aerial music of the spirits, and for dreams which he pines for when awake; for the rest he is all wickedness and falsehood, cowardly too, and born to be a slave although he murmurs at subjection. Prospero found him on the island "gabbling like a thing most brutish", not knowing his own meaning; he treated him with humane care, took pains to tame him, gave him the elements of knowledge, and taught him to speak. But this humanity was thrown away upon him, education did not suit his nature; he used his speech only to curse his benefactor, he remained insensible to kindness, and could only be restrained by fear and chastisement: he learned, as a brute, to keep company with men, but not to love them; his vile race,

> "Had that in't which good natures
> Could not abide to be with".

Prospero obtained the mastery over him, and as Caliban complains, took the island from him, as that was the only

way to escape his violence; he justified the usurpation by endeavouring to humanize him. But he missed his aim like those English colonists in America, who in the most human manner laboured after the civilization of the Indians, — tribes which were felt by Brainerd and the like to be inexpressibly indolent and dull, devoid of gratitude, as well as of generosity, benevolence, and goodness, — a nature irreconcilable with genuine human nature. The beastly creature preferred the company of beastly men, to that of his benefactor; he stumbles on the drunkard, who had debased himself to a condition of greater irrationality, than the other was born to; the gift of his bottle attracts him more than Prospero's lessons, he takes the burly Stephano for his king, and joins with him in a conspiracy against Prospero, which is a burlesque imitation of the conspiracy of the princes. Not like Ariel with forgetful gratitude, but with hardened clumsy ingratitude and hatred, he conspires against his benefactor, not feeling the value of the benefit; he takes the stranger for his lord, kissing his feet, claiming and renouncing the sovereignty at the same moment, as Antonio had done with Alonzo. We may forgive this wild creature, who had less to attract him to men than Ariel; but how can we forgive Antonio and Sebastian! And yet, even this monster acknowledges, at last, the folly of his behaviour, and promises amendment. What a light is by this reflected on Antonio, who remains hardened in sullen spite to the last!

It is not impossible, that Shakespeare in this piece, and especially in regard to this Caliban (whose name is a mere anagram of Cannibal) meant to answer the great question of the day, concerning the justifiableness of European

usurpation over the wild aborigines of the new world; he felt a warm interest in the English colonization, in the creation of new nations, during the reign of James, Southampton was a prominent character in the Virginia Company, and shared with Sandys and Wyatt the merit of first founding the political freedom of the colonists. If it were indeed the poet's intention to give this historical back-ground to the story of Antonio's usurpation, it is a further evidence of his wide views of history and of his unbiassed mind, entirely free, as it was, from all false sentimentality. He shows the scrupulous philosophers, who doubted the lawfulness of colonization, the evils of policy and morality *at home*, where deeds quite as unnatural are practised, as could have been done there. He perceived that what happened in the new world at that time was necessary, that with the extension of mankind, superiority of spiritual and moral power would ever inundate the realms of rudeness and barbarism, streaming, as it were, into an empty space. Shakespeare has still further displayed the pure healthiness of his political and historical wisdom, in a scene of this play, in composing which he has evidently had before him a chapter of Montaigne's Essays (I. 10.) in Florio's translation (1603). He lets old Gonzalo, not in earnest, but in playful conversation, describe the system of the communists, socialists, and peace-congresses, and Alonzo give his opinion upon it. We will only quote the passage; it were a pity, to add a single word.

Gonzalo. I' the commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things: for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; no use of service,
Of riches, or of poverty; no contracts,

Successions, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none:
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil:
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No occupation; all men idle, all;
And women too; but innocent and pure:
No sovereignty: —

Seb. And yet he would be king on't.

Ant. The latter end of his commonwealth forgets
The beginning.

Gon. All things in common, nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavour; treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth
Of its own kind, all foizon, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.

Seb. No marrying 'mong his subjects?

Ant. None, man; all idle; whores and knaves.

Gon. I would with such perfection govern, Sir,
To excel the golden age.

Alonzo. Pr'ythee, no more: *thou dost talk nothing to me!*

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THE WINTER'S TALE.

According to a notice discovered by Malone, the Winter's Tale was first licensed for representation by Sir George Buck, who entered upon his office of Master of the Revels in October 1610; on the 15th of May 1611 Dr. Forman saw the play at the Globe; it must, therefore, have been produced between these dates, at the same time as the Tempest. It was acted at Whitehall on the 5th November 1611, four days after the Tempest. In the story, from which Shakespeare took the matter of the Winter's Tale, the exposure of Perdita on the sea, is very like the exposure of Miranda and her father, described in the Tempest; the dramatist made an alteration in this part, to avoid repetition; Collier takes this as a proof, that the Tempest was written first; but it can only indicate, that the plan of both pieces was sketched at about the same time. The contemporaneous appearance of the two is further confirmed by a sarcasm of Ben Jonson's (in his Bartholomew Fair 1614) which alludes to both.*

* The often quoted passage in the Induction is as follows: — "if there be never a *Servant-monster* i' the fayre, who can helpe it, he sayes; nor a nest of *Antiques?* He is loth to make Nature afraid in his *playes*, like those that beget *Tales*, *Tempests*, and such like *Drolleries*".

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Shakespeare's source for the Winter's Tale is Greene's "History of Dorastus and Fawnia," which appeared first in 1588, under the title Pandosto, but our poet used a later edition, probably that of 1609. Shakespeare in many passages borrowed words and whole speeches from this narrative; he changed the names of the personages, but kept, on the whole, close to the story, yet altering and enlarging it on some essential points. In Greene's narrative, the adventures of Dorastus and Faunia (Florizel and Perdita) are the main object, to which the earlier part only serves as an introduction. The king of Bohemia (Pandosto) is here the jealous husband; the king of Sicily (Egistus) is the visitor, whose royal hostess (Bellaria) is commanded by her spouse to do him all honour. Her new-born child is cast into the sea, and abandoned to the winds and waves by the jealous king of Bohemia, whose son dies, as in Shakespeare, according to the oracle, which is similar in purport here to that in the Winter's Tale; but the queen is really, and not merely apparently, taken from her husband by death. In Greene's narrative, the real matter only now begins. Dorastus is designed by his father for a Danish princess, but he is cold to all love. To be revenged for this, Cupid leads him, when engaged in hawking, to Faunia. The love of these two is only described by Shakespeare in its progress; in the other its origin is fully dwelt upon, in the manner of the Italian pastorals; the struggle between passion and the claims of rank is the main point; the triumph of love is the aim of the narrative. The pair escape on board a ship, before the king knows of the engagement; a servant of the Prince's, Capnio, answering to Shakespeare's Autolycus, brings the shepherd on board,

who is to discover the love-affair and to shew Faunia's trinkets to the king; a storm, not Camillo as in Shakespeare, drives the fugitives to Bohemia. Here Faunia's father falls in love with her, a situation, only slightly hinted at in Shakespeare; when all is explained, Pandosto (Leontes), overcome with melancholy on account of this love for his daughter and his former jealousy, is driven to self-destruction.

Shakespeare has done with this narrative, as he usually did with his bad originals, he has done away with some indelicacy in the matter, and some unnatural things in the form; he has given a better foundation to the characters and course of events; but to impart an intrinsic value to the subject as a whole, to bring a double action into unity, and to give to the play the character of a regular drama by mere arrangements of matter and alteration of motive, was not possible. The wildness of the fiction, the improbability and contingency of the events; the gap in the time, which divides the two actions between two generations, could not be repaired by any art. Shakespeare, therefore, began upon his theme in quite an opposite direction. He increased still more the marvellous and miraculous in the given subject, he disregarded more and more the requirements of the real and probable, and treated time, place, and circumstances with the utmost arbitrariness. He added the character of Antigonus and his death by the bear, Paulina and her second marriage in old age, the pretended death, the long forbearance and preservation of Hermione, Autolycus and his cunning tricks, and he increased thereby the improbable circumstances and strange incidents. He overleaped all limits, mixing up together Russian emperors and the Delphic oracle and Julio Romano, chivalry and heathen-

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dom, ancient forms of religion and whitsuntide pastorals; Greene had already taught him to pay no attention to probability with regard to place, since in his narrative reference had already been made to the *sea-shore* in Bohemia and to the *Island* of Delphos. Added to this there are mistakes in the style of those of Cervantes, where the theft of Sancho Panza's ass is forgotten. Prince Florizel, who (in Act IV. sc. 3.) appears in *Shepherd's clothes*, exchanges immediately afterwards his *court-garments* with Autolycus in the same scene; the old shepherd (Act III. sc. 3.) knows at once, whence does not appear, that the slaughtered Antigonus was an old man. Ben Jonson and Dryden have made all this of far too much consequence, even while laughing at it; Pope has even doubted the genuineness of the play. The scenic effect, the excellent characterization of certain personages, the beauty of the language of the play were acknowledged, but the poet was continually upbraided for those very marvels, which we think he did not introduce as any thing else. Three times in the piece, and once for all in the title, he dwelt as emphatically as possible on the fictitious character of the play, which is wholly founded on the incredible and improbable. If we *will* dispute with him, it must be on the one point only, whether tales be admissible on the stage or not, not about mistakes here and there, which, if that admissibility be allowed, may well have been purposed by the poet. Shakespeare could have answered this question as to the fitness of this style by pointing to the stage, where this play always met with success both in Garrick's unsuitable abridgment (under the title of Florizel and Perdita) and later in Mrs. Siddons' time in its proper form. He would have granted that a

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dramatized fiction is still only a fiction, and as such is not a piece that will ever be ranked among the highest kinds of dramatic art. He would allow, that the liberties taken had already unfitted the play for so high a place. While Shakespeare has at other times permitted in his dramas, the existence of a twofold action, connected by a common idea, he did not require in the instance before us, to sever the wasp-like body of Greene's story, nor could he have entirely concentrated the two actions; he could but connect them indistinctly by a leading idea in both, although the manner in which he has outwardly connected them is a delicate and spirited piece of art, — uniting, as he has done, tragedy and comedy, making the one elevate the other, and thus enriching the stage with a tragi-comic pastoral, a combination wholly unknown even to the good Polonius. The poet perhaps would have moreover confessed, with reference to the censures respecting this play, that this very union of tragedy and comedy, of the grave character in the first part with the light machinery of the second, is out of true proportion. Notwithstanding, much has been done even in this point to remove the reproach of superficial treatment. Shakespeare, in conformity with the character of the tale, has transplanted from Greene's narrative into his drama the dominion of fate; the Delphic oracle decides the tragic catastrophe of the first part, and prepares for the happy conclusion in the second. That which seems accidental in the occurrences, such as the wonderful finding of Perdita in her infancy by the shepherd, when grown up by Florizel, is attributed to the arrangement of Providence and thus falls in more naturally with the pragmatically ordered portions of the action. But even this machinery

of Providence is limited, as in Cymbeline, to such occur-
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rences as the above, where men, properly speaking, have no part. Everywhere else we might strike out the direct interference of fate, and the events would remain explicable according to nature. In Greene's story, the boy Mamillius dies, in accordance with the oracle, in Shakespeare's, not only for that reason, but because the early ripe child, too tender a vessel for his high thoughts, takes the ignominy of his mother too much to heart. Greene makes Hermione die that Leontes may have no other heirs, Shakespeare keeps the guiltless wife alive, and her part is so contrived, that the prediction of the oracle can be fulfilled by her resignation. According to Greene, the winds and waves carry the child, exposed to their fury, to the country of the king, whom Leontes believes to be its father; according to Shakespeare, Antigonus believing in Hermione's guilt, takes it there intentionally. According to Greene, it is a storm that drives Florizel and Perdita to her father's kingdom, according to Shakespeare, they go thither by the advice of Camillo. And so we find throughout that the poet, in spite of his intention to represent a fiction, has everywhere avoided any useless display of arbitrary power.

According to what we have said above, we have to describe not only two actions, but two pieces in one. The subject of the first, the tragic portion, is the jealousy of Leontes. Coleridge thought fit to read this play in immediate connection with Othello, whose jealousy is in every respect the reverse of that of Leontes. It is so in fact, although we understand the contrast differently to Coleridge. The jealousy of Leontes, and of Othello also, is not founded on the sensitive faculty alone; in Othello it is deeply con-

nected with his feelings of honour; in Leontes with tyranny, as Shakespeare says; we should define it more clearly, if we were to say, with wilfulness. Shakespeare has in both instances shewn us the origin of this passion out of a mere nothing, and its frightful consequences: the destruction of the whole happiness of life in the one, and the happiness of half a life in the other, from the madness of a moment. The pervading difference is, that Othello, little disposed to jealousy by nature, is made susceptible of it by circumstances and situations, he is driven to it by a cunning whisperer and deceiver; whereas Leontes, by nature prone to it, has no outward circumstances to induce it, and is his own suggester. The difference of situation in the two is striking: Othello is led to doubt the friend of whom he is jealous, by facts not to be denied; he is made to perceive that in his wife, her own father had reasons for being deceived; the Moor is doubtful of himself and of his own qualities, and he conceives a mistrust of himself and of the world, which was rooted in his whole situation; all this heaped together the smouldering fire of his jealousy, which the false Iago blew into a flame. But Leontes' situation is quite different: he has no causes of jealousy against his wife, none against his friend; the resemblance to himself of his eldest and of his new-born child is a fact that he must himself acknowledge, as against his suspicion; his self-reliance, his royal rank prevent in him that penetrating feeling of Othello, who thinks himself despised; all those around him, the courtiers, Camillo, Antigonus, Paulina, loudly and firmly testify against his delusion; but there is that within himself more dangerous than the slanderer at Othello's side. After his conscience has been once infected,

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after Hermione's friendly invitation and its rejoinder have aroused his suspicion, he is the slave, not of love, not of passion, not of feeling, but of his own imagination; dwelling on his own imaginings he gives way to the most extraordinary brooding over improbable and impossible things; until he is satisfied of the infallibility of his convictions, and confirmed in the obstinacy which characterizes the weak judgment of all wilful persons. This obstinacy, this hard-headedness embitters his disposition, and far from feeling, like Othello, pain for his loss, Leontes indulges in hatred and persecution, and increases both through his dread of intrigues, which exist only in his own imagination. The contrast between this wilfulness, this presumed certainty and superior judgment, and the unsuspecting short-sightedness of Othello is perfect, and masterly in both is the progress of the delusion, built on quite different foundations. In contrast with the taciturn Othello, Leontes, in keeping with his moody and suspicious nature, is a great talker, in whom thoughts and quick fancies throng, mingle, and suddenly spring from one object to another.

The idea of his wife's faithlessness arises in Leontes from the quick result of her entreaty to Polixenes to prolong his stay a little. The contingent motives to suspicion are by far not so important as those, which Othello thought he had. She tells him, he asks coldly; she proves to him, that she understands how to entreat better, she speaks to their guest with open, innocent heartiness, and gives her hand to him in the same spirit; this actually is the whole ground for Leontes' jealousy. Now he remembers, that Hermione had once made him wait months for her consent; he examines, with suspicion, the features of his son. He sees her

hold up her mouth to kiss Polixenes, he sees them exchange meaning smiles, in his very presence. He is convinced it is not an approaching transgression, but a crime of long standing; he knows it; he is certain of it; it is a fact to him, that no woman can be kept from unfaithfulness: "contempt and clamour," he fears, "will be his knell." For such determined people nothing is worse than contradiction: it only makes them more clear-sighted and more obstinate. When Camillo positively and with reproaches refuses to agree to his accusations of Hermione, he insists that they have whispered together, leaned cheek to cheek, kissed "with inside lip", stopped "the career of laughter with a sigh, — a note infallible of breaking honesty". "Is this nothing", he says,

> "Why then the world, and all that's in 't, is nothing;
> The covering sky is nothing; Bohemia nothing".

When Camillo makes question of it, he bids him "go rot"; rather than allow it possible that he should be mistaken, rather than have his belief, his phantom disturbed, he will pronounce the old, honoured, experienced, noble Camillo, who had been as a father-confessor to him, to be blind, deaf, indiscreet, cowardly, dishonourable, time-serving; his well-meaning courtiers to be cold, and indifferent, and he will fly into a rage with Antigonus for not believing him. Camillo promises to poison Polixenes, inducing him by this deception to promise, that he will continue to be friendly to his guest, and attempt nothing against the honour of Hermione. The weak Leontes breaks one promise before he has crossed the threshold, the other when Camillo has fled with Polixenes. For now a greater suspicion seizes him: — that they are all conspiring against him, and aiming at his life; he now

passes sleepless nights, fear still further poisons his disposition, and he tries the queen for her life, not regarding her approaching delivery. What is still worse: this flight has increased tenfold his blind wilfulness, the over-cunning one sighs for "lesser knowledge", his sharpness has succeeded, and he laments it. Hermione's noble presence makes no alteration in his impressions; he insists, that his child is a bastard;

> "If I mistake
> In those foundations, which I build upon,
> The centre is not big enough to bear
> A school-boy's top".

The queen is delivered; unfortunately the over-hasty Paulina brings the child into the presence of Leontes, with angry reproaches; in his rage at this he will have the child burned; then Antigonus is to expose it. His obstinacy and wilfulness go hand in hand with this hard-heartedness and tyranny; these gross mistakes in judgment are followed by the last and greatest mistakes of his obstinacy. He has sent messengers to the oracle in order to satisfy the incredulity of the people; for himself he needs no oracle! He will observe right and justice towards his wife, for he is perfectly satisfied that he is right. Now the oracle is read in open court, and contrary to oracular decrees in general, it plainly and clearly testifies to Hermione's innocence. And now his wilfulness goes so far as to tax even the oracle with falsehood. He is immediately overtaken by the death of his son, as the first actual fulfilment of the Delphic sentence, and now his obstinacy begins to yield.

Shakespeare has given Leontes a wife, and a monitress,

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who are both better fitted to guide him to the false origin of his delusion, than Desdemona and Emilia were with respect to Othello. Hermione is soft "as childhood and grace"; she is also full of dignity and majesty. She unites to Desdemona's goodness a discretion, thoughtfulness, and eloquence, which the other did not possess. Desdemona consented unreflectingly to a secret marriage with the Moor, to whom she had offered herself; Hermione, on the legitimate proposal of Leontes, had required some months for consideration; then, however, she was his for ever. This calm reflection, this resolution after reflection, her strong feeling of honour and duty, and the consciousness of her moral nobility, penetrate the whole character of Hermione, and render it a strong contrast to Desdemona's. When she becomes aware of the suspicion of the king, she does not, like Desdemona, utter in her confusion things that may seem to criminate herself; her *husband* shrinks from uttering the word, that would brand her whole life and character, but *she* does not, like Desdemona, shrink from it, because she is too conscious of her purity to fear that she could stain herself by it; notwithstanding her mental agitation, her answers are calm, even proud; she is sorrowfully firm in her resignation. She, like Desdemona, keeps back her tears, but not like her from surprise and offence, they are contrary tò her pious, resigned character, which makes her look upon this unexpected occurrence as sent for her good. She even bids her women spare their tears, until they find she has deserved her imprisonment. To speak before the court of justice as Hermione did, would have been hard for Desdemona; it was not her way to look her situation in the face; frightful presentiments arise in the depths of her soul, but she banishes them from

her thoughts; Hermione, on the contrary, prepares for the www.libtool.com.cn worst, reconciles herself to the idea of losing her life, which, like her sorrow after the experience she has just had, she esteems but lightly, — yet she, the Russian emperor's daughter, defends her honour with persuasive eloquence, lest her disgrace should descend upon her child. This outward honour would have been the last thing the sensitive Desdemona would have thought about; she had enjoyed too early, too bright a happiness, and she could not calmly have resigned both happiness and life. But then she had not witnessed the exposure of her child, she had not had time to reflect on the lost love of her husband, she had not been separated, as one infected, from her other child, and robbed of all regard. This had roused in Hermione the self-respect of the woman, the emperor's daughter, and made her hear the accusation with dignity and magnanimity, and submit with patience to her fate. This calm and noble bearing which would have shaken Othello in his delusion made no impression upon her husband.

On the contrary, the violent reproaches, with which Paulina, on the other side, overwhelms him, make a bad impression on Leontes. Nothing excites our anger more than the obstinate delusion of a reasonable creature, the wilful blindness of caprice. Hence the propriety of Kent's outburst before Lear, of Emilia against Othello, of this Paulina against Leontes; they express our own feelings. This wife of Antigonus is a masculine woman, who sometimes snatches the reins out of the hands of her husband, who lets her run on, because he knows she will not stumble. Her warnings and reproaches to the king and his silent courtiers are not amiable, when she advises them, as they

value their eyes, to lay no hands upon her; yet what she says to him, is true, that she is "as honest as he is mad". She is harsh and blunt in speech, but brave in action; we like her from the moment, that she uses all the privileges of her sex for her noble mistress, risks all favour, and despises all danger. She may, however, justly be blamed for stirring up the king by her rage to murder his child, which her husband, Antigonus, in his weakness, swears to expose; through this she loses her husband, and he loses his life. When the queen has fainted on hearing the news of Mamillius' death, Paulina intentionally drives the king to despair in the extremest outburst of her anger, by the announcement of her death. This is the moment when the tragedy is finished, and where the first ray gleams out of the darkness, promising the dawn of a better fate. In this change from tragedy to comedy, there is a transition, a blending in the poetic colouring, as if the poet had studied the painter's art.

The moment that Leontes with the reckless obstinacy of a truly tragic character pours contempt upon the oracle, this nature changes in him suddenly, and turns to its opposite. In the disposition of his head and heart, this character combined excitability and exaggeration with weakness, and this made the revolution in his nature possible. When at the highest pitch of his fury he commands that the child should be burnt, and then, yielding to the entreaties of those around him, allows it to be only exposed to perish, his over-excited rage gives way: he feels this to be the case himself, when he says:

"I am a feather for each wind that blows".

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The first stroke which confirms the truth of the oracle, shakes him in a moment; he quickly repents of the blasphemy; he rapidly glances at all the circumstances as they are; Camillo comes out cleared from his suspicions, he confesses in open court his attempt on the life of Polixenes, and when Paulina declares him to be a tyrant forsaken by the gods, and given up to despair, he does not think she speaks too strongly. He is reconciled afterwards with Polixenes; he recalls Camillo; once a day he will visit the grave of his wife, and shed tears there "so long as nature will bear up with this exercise." At first he felt, that his fancied conjugal disgrace would bring him to his grave, but soon after he made a characteristic remark, which proved he did not belong to those tragic natures, easily broken down by misfortunes.

> "Should all despair
> That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
> Would hang themselves".

He found, however, in the very universality of the evil, comfort to keep him from despair. He retains this tough nature after the death of his wife and son, and under the decree of the oracle, which deprived him of all hope of heirs. Camillo declared of him, at a later period, that "no sorrow ever lived so long" as that of Leontes, "it would have killed itself sooner"; but in this self-tormenting nature, sorrow maintains itself, as life does. — Paulina keeps alive his repentance, and induces him to remain unmarried, helping him, later, to overcome a transient temptation, when Perdita reminds him of Hermione. Paulina too, whose tragic vein displays itself in the vehemence, with which she stirs up the dangerous humour of the king,

changes, at the same moment that the king does. When he is cut to the heart by her fierce invectives, she suddenly perceives, that she "has shewed too much the rashness of a woman". With this confession she leaves it off. She looks upon herself, henceforth, as a priestess, as the fulfiller of the oracular decree. Hermione is saved; Paulina only feigns that she is dead; the queen has the pious resignation, which we have already observed to be a fundamental principle in her, to keep apart from her husband for 16 years, that there might be no temptation to challenge the fate, which denied an heir to Leontes, until the child, which he exposed to perish, were found again: this renunciation in all three, in Leontes, Hermione, and Paulina, disarms the anger of the gods, and keeps alive the hope of the child's recovery.

While the poet thus among the chief personages, at the moment of the catastrophe, has mixed the tragic element with a happier disposition of things, which suddenly scatters the gathering storm of fate; he has also represented this same change of things in the outward images, and in the character of the events in the last scene of the 3rd act, which comprises the close of the tragedy and the commencement of the comedy. The scene changes from the halls of the royal city, stained with deeds offensive to the gods, to the sea-shore of Bohemia. Antigonus, a contrast to Camillo, executes the cruel command of the king; he does what he never should have done, in obedience to the oath which he never should have sworn, when dreams have made the hitherto sensible man superstitious, and suspicious concerning Hermione; a suspicion, which would never have reached his Paulina, even in a dream; he lays down the little lost

one (Perdita) in the wild place, at the beginning of a storm, and for this act, he and all his instruments perish. While Antigonus is slain by a bear, and his ship wrecked in the storm, the babe rocked to sleep by the tempest is found, as the storm dies away, by the honest shepherd, who is to bring her up; the grave tragic personages, who were the sole actors in the first part, wherein scarce a jest or a pun is to be found, are now exchanged for idyllic, innocent, merry beings, who predominate in the second part. Here where the good and bad incidents meet, the tone of the story changes; with better deeds, comes better fortune: the two shepherds in their simplicity say to each other:

> "Thou meet'st with things dying; I with things new born";

and at the close:

> "'T is a lucky day; and we'll do good deeds on't".

We pass over a period of sixteen years, and find Perdita grown up. How changed the scene is! A sheep-shearing, with shepherds, guests of high and low degree, princes and patrons; a fair, a dance of shepherds, songs, flowers, and wreaths; a pleasant autumn-day full of life and joy, and then, in the midst of all, an event that threatens another tragedy. But how different are the persons, who act in this scene. Perdita is grown up an innocent shepherdess,

> "Pure as the fann'd snow,
> That's bolted by the northern blast twice o'er",

lovely and gentle, whom all that she wears becomes, who, if she founded sects, would have all mankind her proselytes. The most precious mental qualities unite in her in a rare combination. She is modest and retiring, she cares little, although

a wealthy shepherd's daughter, for dress and ornaments, and at the feast which they are celebrating, she cannot play the hostess without blushing. The unsophisticated child of nature, she cannot endure false colours in men, nor even in flowers. She loves not "piedness" in flowers, nor even improved trees; and though she cannot answer the objections which Polixenes raises against this taste, she adheres to it, like a woman, and for what Shakespeare calls "women's reasons". For herself she has no desire to leave her garden of nature for the artificial world, although the love of Florizel offers her the smiling prospect of it, although she herself feels, that she could adorn her place there as well as here. For all she does, "smacks of something greater"; when she has "most goddess-like pranked up" herself in gay attire like Flora, the royal blood within her stirs, and she feels "her robe does change her disposition", and that she speaks more loftily. Yet she does not let her modest mind dwell lightly on this prospect; her heart forebodes an evil end to their love; she timidly foresees that his love, or her life must end, but, wrapped in the happy present, she looks with calm resignation towards the future. The poet has endowed her with the resigned nature of her mother Hermione, and the strength with which this resignation arms her, will prove itself in the hour of trial. Florizel's good falcon, an ominous bird, had led him first to her father's ground. He, on his side, has inherited from his father a mode of thinking, which the king once declared, when he was in Sicily, but had forgotten in his old age, that to be

"Clerklike, experienced, no less adorns
Our gentry, than our parents' noble names,
In whose succession we are gentle".

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He wooes the shepherd's child with purest intentions; swears to her a faithful oath, that he will abandon power, knowledge, beauty, even his inheritance to belong to her; and he too proves, how sacred he esteems his oath. Here then lies the delicate point, that unites the second part of the Winter's Tale with the first. Here is a love incompatible from a parental and conventional point of view, as in the first part there was a suspected love inadmissible on conjugal and moral grounds. Polixenes does not condemn, like Leontes, blindly and inconsiderately; he goes and convinces himself, and tries the intentions of the delinquents. He finds them blameless, — the maiden even bewitching, only that the son fails somewhat in respect of filial piety in spite of the thrice repeated well-meant warning of his father. Hereupon the father, like Leontes, is overhasty in his rage; he will not endure the sight of his son, he threatens the lives of the shepherd and his daughter; he recalls the sentence, but holds them responsible for the breaking off of the connection, and by this constrains them to flee. The slight reference and resemblance to the previous action is evident here also. Leontes had sinned against Florizel's father, therefore Heaven left him without an heir. Polixenes threatens to sin against Leontes' daughter, and therefore Heaven threatens that he shall likewise lose his heir. And this through the virtue of the children, which procures a better fate for all. The most extraordinary features of character are here indicated by a few strokes. Perdita convinced from the first, that there could not be a happy ending to her love, was not much shocked by the burst of rage in the father at first so friendly; her self-respect is touched;

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> "once or twice
> She was about to speak, and tell him plainly,
> The self-same sun, that shines upon his court,
> Hides not his visage from the cottage",

but she refrained, for being now awakened from this dream of hers, she 'll "queen it no inch further, but milk her ewes and weep." These traits shew us, how admirably Shakespeare has bestowed on the kingly shepherdess-daughter, not the external manners of rank belonging to her mother, but her mother's nature. Proud and self-respecting like her, she is called upon to defend herself publicly, she has the same desire to speak, but not the same cultivated gift of eloquence; and closely united with her self-respect, she has, like Hermione, a power of self-denial and pious resignation to fate. She has also the same power of bearing misfortune with firmness. Florizel will not give her up. He is driven to the most desperate resolves, ready to be with Perdita —

> "the slaves of chance, and flies
> Of every wind that blows".

for he calls this despair, honesty. Camillo, the medicine of both houses, preserver of both parents and children (whose union with the other preserver, Paulina, has therefore a suitable sense, notwithstanding her age, unsuitable for marriage), Camillo turns him aside from this despondency into "a course more promising", — to Sicily. Otherwise he predicts the alteration of their love by affliction. This Perdita quickly contradicts:

> "Affliction may subdue the cheek,
> But not take in the mind".

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Camillo is astonished at the remark, but Florizel bears testimony to it, and then Camillo with admiration, says that "she seems a mistress to most that teach." Then appears her exquisite modesty, which even sorrow could not change, as she answers:

> "Your pardon, sir, for this;
> I'll blush you thanks".

We see at once, that these are not the colours and scenes, the personages and circumstances of tragedy. But the instruments, which fate employs, to unfold the hitherto complicated plot, display the comic character more distinctly still. The shepherds, father and son, speak for themselves; Autolycus, who by his tricks brings both these persons, together with their secret, on board the vessel which is escaping, becomes thereby the cause of the happy ending; he is (the gods being propitious) the comic representative of fate, as Antigonus in the first part was the tragic. According to his name, a son of Mercury, a pick-pocket like him, the very pattern of rogues, like the hero of a Spanish Picaro-romance, he is an entirely new character in the whole range of Shakespeare's personages. Driven about among mankind in all directions by fate, he at one time served prince Florizel, then whipped out of the court he became "ape-bearer", bailiff, strolling-player, — then he married a tinker's wife, now he is a pedlar, of the best humour, of great impertinence, one who knows men well, a denier of the life to come, with an open ear, a quick eye, and a nimble hand, accustomed to play all parts and therefore one of those master-themes for the actor, which Shakespeare so loved to delineate. Hardened as he is in knavery,

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he retained his adherence to Florizel. Influenced by this and by a spice of knavery towards the king; he conceals the prince's flight; and then brings the shepherds on board, that they may not obstruct his escape. The rest of his tricks, by favour of the propitious stars, turns out for the best; he does "good against his will". The mistaken honesty of Antigonus had led him to death, the deceit of Autolycus conducts the complicated destinies of both the royal houses to a happy development, and the cheat himself to a fortunate end. The gallows were his due, but, as everything turns out well and happily, his fate is a better one than he deserves.

Shakespeare has written little that can compare with the fourth act of the Winter's Tale for variety, liveliness, and beauty. But the fifth act rises still higher in the magic scene of the re-animation of Hermione, and the description of the recognition that precedes it. The poet has wisely placed this event behind the scenes, otherwise the play would have been too full of powerful scenes. "The dignity of this act," it is said, "was worth the audience of kings and princes; but the actors too, who should play these scenes worthily, ought to be kings." The mere relation of this meeting is in itself a rare master-piece of prose description.

To those who read these two last plays, the Winter's Tale and the Tempest in succession, it must appear incontestible, that Shakespeare in the free handling of this tale, as is distinctly intimated in the prologue to the fourth act, which we have already quoted, wished purposely to brave the narrow-minded upholders of the unities of time and place. It was, therefore, undoubtedly on purpose also,

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that he elaborated these two plays contemporaneously; for in the Tempest he observed the unities with even greater strictness, than they are preserved in the classic tragedies. The scene lies throughout in front of Prospero's cell, or in its immediate vicinity; the time is limited to three or four hours; as in the Winter's Tale the character of the tale is three times put prominently forward, so, in the Tempest this period is three times forcibly enunciated, and Steevens thought it very probable, that Shakespeare wished to prove once for all that the unities would not be a difficulty even to him. And he shewed this in a piece of an entirely romantic cast, rich in wonders, like the Winter's Tale. But in the very plays, where Shakespeare observed this regularity or approached it, the unnatural effect of it becomes most striking. This has been already remarked by others, in the Tempest. The unnatural hurrying on of the action is immediately observable, when the poet does not allow us to have the power of imagining a more lengthened period, such as the nature of the incidents may require; time is wanting for the change of feelings, which Miranda must experience, if we circumscribe their beginning and ending within the limits of three hours. This is much more evident, when we examine other plays with this view. If, for example, we strike out one or two speeches in the last four acts of Othello, we may limit the progress of Othello's jealousy, and the events connected with it, to two days and nights. But how unnatural would it be, that a passion of such strength and greatness should arise, grow, and end in twenty-four hours. Such a procrustean treatment of the action might well appear to Shakespeare a deadly sin against poetry; he did not consider the lengthening of the

time a fault, because it was a necessity, to which the rule of unity only illusively gave way. How little he cared for the illusion in this respect, he has shewn, not in Othello, but in a great many of his other plays, most markedly. In spite of an apparently connected and short period in the action, he has very often freely scattered indications (as, in Othello the hints about the correspondence between Iago and Rodrigo), by which the action, though it passes quickly before the eye, is extended for the ear, for the imagination, to the time which it would naturally require; he has introduced a greater depth of time behind the narrow dramatic fore-ground, so that as in perspective, — space, — so here time extends in the back-ground according to the requirements of the action. These are not the only means, which the genius of Shakespeare has resorted to, in order to give his scenic representations the utmost possible fulness, compatible with the narrow space allotted to the drama; he tried by shifts of another kind too to attain this same end; and among them some not less strikingly opposed to other rules of prosaic reason, than the above. To give only one instance. It often happens, that the scenes represented on the stage, and the description of them given in words and speeches afterwards, do not entirely agree, — a contrast to the epos, where they generally correspond word for word. The most striking example of this is in Cymbeline, where Iachimo relates his wager with Posthumus, with circumstances quite different to the scenic representation of it. It would be foolish, to say these discrepancies of time and matter were inadvertencies; the player, who acted the character of Iachimo, must have remarked the variation, and it is not to be supposed, that he would have failed to

point it out to the poet composing for him, who nevertheless would not have altered it. For these variations are of the greatest use to the poet, limited as he is in time and place, because they enable him to complete what has been seen, by what is heard; as in Cymbeline we gain a better insight into the circumstances, which made this singular wager possible.

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HENRY VIII.

In the series of Shakespeare's later works we have met with several observations, which seem to betray to us, that there were moments in his later years, when his mental interest in his own writings declined, perhaps in consequence of physical debility. The unrefreshing character of the ethical subjects of some of the dramas of this latter period, the tardy revision of such a worthless play as Pericles, the æsthetic defects in Antony, the unfinished form of Timon, the mistake as to material and aim in Troilus, all this might indeed prepare us for the time, when the poet, having so early discontinued his activity as an actor, would also renounce his vocation as a poet. It has been lately conjectured, that we may lay hold, as it were, of this very moment in the production of the historical play of Henry VIII., in which Shakespeare it is supposed, at the very close of his dramatic career, left his old companions a mere sketch to be carried out in the dramatic celebration of a court festivity, an end, which this same historical play must have served even in the former century. The drama, overloaded with pomp and show, is a masque written for some occasion, like the Tempest and the

Midsummer-Night's Dream; it was formerly believed to
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have originated on the occasion of the coronation of king James and his queen Anne (24th July 1603); the later opinion to which we refer (Gentleman's Magazine 34. 115 et seq.), supposes that the marriage of the princess Elizabeth (Feb. 1612) was the cause, which may have induced Burbadge's company to obtain Shakespeare's ground-work for the play, which they elaborated into this masque, a form, for which the poet himself would hardly have designed his historical drama. If the play really came from Shakespeare's hand at this period of his closing dramatic career, it would be a strange sport of fate, that this last of his productions should soon, like a sad and farewell celebration of this event, cause a tragic holocaust. When on June 29th 1613, (according to a notice by Sir Henry Wotton) the play was represented by Burbadge's company under the title of "All is True", a title to which the epilogue alludes, the theatre caught fire from the discharge of some small canons, and the Globe, for so many years the scene of the poet's fame, was burnt to the ground.

A long time ago, Roderick, in Edward's Canons of Criticism, hesitated at some peculiarities in the versification of Henry VIII.; but never since then has the genuineness of the play been doubted, at the most the prologue and epilogue were denied as the work of the poet's pen. Indeed the strictly logical design of the four main characters suffered no doubt to arise, as no other poet of the time could have sketched their psychological outline with such sharpness, however much assistance the historical sources (Cavendish's Life of Wolsey, as copied in the chronicles), and two previous dramatic works upon Wolsey by Chettle and

his companions, might have afforded. First of all in the character of the Duke of Buckingham, we look once again upon the age of the great armed nobility, with their pretensions and rebellions, which were the soul of the history under the houses of York and Lancaster, although in our present play, the physiognomy of the age appears wholly changed, compared to the character of that earlier epoch. The noise of arms has ceased, the prominent personages are men of education, mind, and well-won merit; the duke himself has kept up with the change of the time; he is not merely an ambitious man of the sword; he is learned, wise in council, rich in mind, and a fascinating orator. Nevertheless we see him standing in the midst of a number of other nobles, partly related to him, Norfolk, Surrey, Abergavenny, who conspire to maintain the old authority of the nobles, to whom the greatness of the upstart Wolsey is a thorn in their eye, who regard it as insufferable that "a beggar's book outworths a noble's blood", that the scarlet-robe should assume the importance of their rank, and that difference in persons should be at an end. In proud passion, in the restless haste of personal contempt, Buckingham seeks to lay a snare for the Cardinal, and falls himself into the net. He imputed to the priest, grasping and treasonous plans, he pryed too artfully and over-shot his mark; but he himself was not unversed in bold ambitious projects, which his clever adversary knew how to turn against him as crimes. He was the next heir to the throne in the Beaufort branch of the Lancastrian house, if the king died without issue. As the son of that Buckingham, who assisted Richard III. to the throne, and afterwards rebelled against him, he delighted in these remembrances of the

history of his house; he plays wantonly with his aspiring thoughts, and speculates upon the lack of a male heir, which caused Henry so much doubt and jealousy; he gains the love of the commonalty; he listens readily to the prophecies of silly prophets, who flatter his dreams of greatness; he expresses himself imprudently once when threatened with imprisonment:

> "If I for this had been committed,
> As to the Tower I thought, — I would have played
> The part, my father meant to act upon
> The usurper Richard: who, being at Salisbury,
> Made suit to come in his presence; which, if granted,
> As he made semblance of his duty, would
> Have put his knife into him".

This is stated by his surveyor, bribed by Wolsey, and it brings the man to the scaffold, who erred rather from foolish indiscretion, than from actual criminal intentions. When he is fallen, he collects himself after his sentence; he dies composed and noble, forgiving, without hatred, already "half in heaven", completely devoid of all pride of rank in that moment, which so impressively calls to remembrance the vanity of such distinctions.

In contrast to him stands Wolsey, who, born in a lower rank, had by his own mental power raised himself to the highest positions in the church and state, to the place nearest the king and the Pope. King Henry had indeed inherited his love for this man from his father, he regarded him as one who could not err, and for such a one the cardinal knew how to make himself pass; he overloaded him with benefits and advantages, raised him to the first dignity in the kingdom, and permitted him proudly and imperiously

to overlook the highest nobility of the land. Fortune, favour and merit increased to raise the immoderate ambition of this "great child of honour", to advance his pride beyond measure, to quench in him every appearance of restraint and humility, to feed his covetousness and love of pomp, and to spread around him royal splendour. Ambition urges him to strive after ever greater dignities, greater positions again stir up his ambition into a brighter flame. The means to his ends become indifferent to him; he has never known truth; dissimulation is his slave, behind whom he conceals the malice of his heart; munificence without bounds, advancement, and favour, chain his servants inviolably to him; bribery gains over to him the confidants of his enemies, whom he pursues with all the cunning of revenge. Half fox, half wolf, he swallows greedily the treasures of the land, oppresses the commons with enormous taxes, and when the people rebel, he assumes the appearance of having himself diminished them. With cold arrogance he disregards the blame urged against him on this occasion, and treats it as the envious rancour of the weak and the malicious, who cannot measure his merits. He makes a systematic opposition against the nobles. No peer is uninjured by him; he ruins the class in the mass, when by arbitrary designation of the persons who are to accompany the king to the festive meeting with the king of France, and by the immense splendour which they were to display there, he consumes the fortune of many families. And when the powerful Buckingham is aimed at, he surrounds him with spies and hirelings, and plans his future fall, while he removes his nearest and most powerful relatives to positions remote from the court. Thus striding with proud head over

the highest of the land, he attempts it even with the king. www.libtool.com.cn He had become accustomed to rank himself with princes; his servants were audacious enough to declare, that their master would sooner be waited on than any other subject, if not than the king; he made use of the formula "*Ego et rex meus*", when he wrote to foreign courts. To occupy the papal chair, to obtain a rank even superior to his king's, this is the ultimate end of his ambition. He has seized upon the higher ecclesiastical positions in the land; he next strives, without the king's knowledge, to become the papal legate; it is the Pope himself, who stirs up his ambition. To obtain the Papacy, he imprudently accumulates upon himself the treasures of the country. For this object he tries to bring his king into alliance with France. He has in vain sought the archbishopric of Toledo from the Emperor, he must thus rest on his adversary France. To this end that resplendent feast at the meeting of the two kings must be kept in the vale of Arde, and Buckingham, and the opponents to this alliance, must be put out of the way. This is not yet the extremest point, to which his revenge against the emperor and his wish to unite with France, drives him. He undertakes to ruin the queen herself; she is the Emperor's aunt, and his enemy moreover already from her character. She has lived twenty years with the king in the happiest concord, but he, taking a wide range as ever, by means of a French ecclesiastic throws out scruples as to the lawfulness of the marriage, and what these cannot effect, the king's sensuality accomplishes. The separation is effected, in order that the king, according to the cardinal's intention, may marry the duchess of Alençon, the French king's sister. If all these aims had

been obtained, if Henry VIII. had entered into so close a connection with France, if Wolsey had ascended the papal chair, we may readily believe, that he would have played the part towards Henry VIII., which Thomas à Becket in the see of Canterbury acted towards his king, or that under the peaceful influence of this powerful man, who even in his present position fettered the kingdom by his secret dealings, catholicism would have been anew established in England. But the cardinal had estimated everything, except the king's sensual passion. The scruple concerning the legitimacy of his marriage had no sooner been instilled into him and the prospect of a new marriage presented to him, than he quickly cast his eyes on the beautiful Anne Bullen. His conscience now became urgent, the cardinal's delay was insupportable to him, the hesitation of the papal church irritating; and this is, thus Wolsey subsequently perceives too late, "the weight that pulled him down". When, having ventured beyond his depth in a sea of glory, when his high-blown pride has broken under him, and he has sunk, he returns to the true value of the man within him; he acknowledges, that too much honour is a heavy burden for a man, who aspires to heaven, and he warns Cromwell of the sin of ambition, by which the angels fell. He casts off at once the burden of the world and of sin, he recovers the strength of his soul in poverty, and true happiness in misery, and in an edifying return to true self-knowledge, which the poet, resting on the testimony of history (Campian, Hist. of Ireland) bestows upon him, according to which this man of duplicity, severity, and malice, was never happy but in his fall, gaining more honour in the hour of his death, than by all the pomp of his life.

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In the king Henry VIII. the poet had to paint a portrait, which must be flattered and must yet be like; he must not shake the moral respect or excite the kingly jealousy of James I., and yet he would not be untrue to history, which presented to his view a repulsive despotic character, not even indemnified by the fearful magnitude of the crime of a Richard III. Shakespeare pourtrayed him, without misrepresenting or disguising his cruelty, his sensuality, his caprice, his semi-refinement united with natural coarseness, but he kept them in the back-ground; and there is great field for an actor, between the vague generality, with which this portrait is sketched, and the few features of complete individual peculiarity, which the poet has admitted, and indeed the character of Henry VIII. originally played by Lowin, and from his conception of it transmitted through Davenant to Betterton, has always been a favourite part for the English actor. His dependence upon flatterers together with his jealous desire to rule alone; the ease, with which he is deceived together with his resentful bitterness when he sees himself deluded, and his deceitful dissimulation in suppressing malice and revenge; his caprice together with his impetuosity; his unwieldy clumsy appearance together with a certain mental refinement; his lack of feeling together with isolated traits of good-nature; his sensuality under the transparent mask of religion and conscience; his manner condescending even to vulgarity; all these are so many delicate contrasts, in which the player has to hit the fine line of contact. Held in magic fetters by so great a man as Wolsey, surrounded throughout by devoted instruments, and humoured in every wish and every caprice by the most yielding and devoted wife, the king appears as one of the princes who

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"kiss obedience,
So much they love it, but to stubborn spirits
They swell, and grow as terrible as storms,

and who are implacable when crossed; he is jealous, even to bloody severity, of every threatened self-exaltation in a subject, as in Buckingham. He is the slave of his nature, and of all the passion and self-will, which belong to it. This is indeed most generally the source of all tyranny; in Henry VIII., it is at the same time the source of his homely condescending manner. He does not like to be troubled by any restraint; a ceremonious company of nobles, if it be more than a game with his brother-in-law, would not please him; his ostentatious cardinal would be offensive to him, if his assemblies were less worldly; his companions are for the most part upstarts out of the lower classes, scholars rather than soldiers, because he was himself trained more in learning than in arms, more adroit at a pastoral masque than at a tournament. Throughout, therefore, the king is peaceful, citizen-like, and familiar; he has no hesitation in taking a Cranmer for the godfather of his daughter, all the less so, because it is a mark of disdain towards his distinguished adversaries. For whenever this natural bias for the equalization of men and the disregard of rank concurs with his provoked self-will and hostile opposition, we observe that the highest authority on earth, the papacy, stands for nothing with him; when it concerns his blind passion, he regards the love of a blameless wife as little as her royal descent, in order to unite himself to a woman of a lower order.

The two female characters between whom Henry is placed, betray the same masterly manner of dramatic

delineation, although one is a mere sketch. Katharine is a touching model of womanly virtue and gentleness, of conjugal devotion and love, and of christian patience in defenceless suffering. She is surrounded by the most virtuous company; her enemy is compelled to praise in her a "disposition gentle" and a "wisdom o'ertopping woman's power." She has never done evil, which must seek concealment; she was incapable of calumny and injury. Only when a natural instinct provokes her against an artful intriguer, to whom, while led away by his ambition, virtue is a folly, and when she has to take poor subjects under her protection against oppression, then only does her virtue impart to her a sting, which however never transgresses the limits of womanly refinement. She loves her husband "with that excellence, that angels love good men with"; almost bigoted in her love she dreams of no joy beyond his pleasure; he himself testifies to her that she was never opposed to his wishes, that she was of wife-like government, commanding in obeying; all his caprices she bore with the most saint-like patience. To see herself divorced from him after twenty years of happiness, is a load of sorrow, which only the noblest of women can bear with dignity and resignation; to descend from the high position of queen is moreover painful to the royal Spaniard. But she is ready to lead a life of seclusion in homely simplicity, and to bless her faithless cruel husband even to the hour of death. Her soul had remained beautiful upon the throne, in her outward degradation it was more beautiful still; she goes to the grave reconciled with her true enemy and destroyer. Johnson has ranked her death-scene as above any scene in any other poet: so much was

he impressed with its profound effect, unaided by romantic contrivanee, and apart from all unnatural bursts of poetic lamentation and the ebullitions of stormy sorrow. *One* womanly weakness the poet (in obedience to history) has imputed to her even to the brink of the grave: even in the hour of death, and after she has indeed seen heaven open, she clings to the royal honour which belongs to her. The poet indicates in Anne Bullen the counterpart to this weakness. He has pourtrayed this "fresh-fish", the rising queen, only from a distance, he has rather declared than exhibited her beauty, her loveliness, and chastity, her completeness in mind and feature; he does not attempt to enlist us excessively in her favour, when he exhibits her so merry in the society of a Sands; moreover all place greater stress upon the blessing which is to descend from her, than upon herself. The introductory scene makes us believe, that she is as free from ambitious views as she asserts; her conversation indeed with the court-lady convinces us as little as the former, that she could not reconcile herself to splendid honours, when they were laid upon her. We see her not as queen, but we see her self-love flattered so far, that we can well divine that, raised out of her lowly position, she would play the part of queen as well as Katharine did that of a domestic woman.

No one in this short explanation of the main characters of Henry VIII. will mistake the certain hand of our poet. It is otherwise, when we approach closer to the development of the action and attentively consider the poetic diction. The impression of the whole becomes then at once strange and unrefreshing; the mere external threads seem to be lacking which ought to link the actions to each other; the

interest of the feelings becomes strangely divided, it is www.libtool.com.cn continually drawn into new directions, and is nowhere satisfied. At first it clings to Buckingham and his designs against Wolsey; but with the second act, he leaves the stage; then Wolsey attracts our attention in an increased degree, and he too disappears in the third act; in the mean while our sympathies are more and more strongly drawn to Katharine, who then likewise leaves the stage in the fourth act; and after we have been thus shattered through four acts by circumstances of a purely tragic character, the fifth act closes with a merry festivity, for which we are in no wise prepared, crowning the king's base passion with victory, in which we could take no warm interest. In the course of the play, the marriage of the king and Anne Bullen is only casually linked with the person of the cardinal, who seemed outwardly as if he ought to form the connecting central point of the action, and the enmity between Cranmer and Gardiner is not at all related to this; both circumstances again apparently stand in no relation to each other. The birth and christening of Elizabeth follows at the conclusion as a new by-work, linked to the preceding merely by a natural but not æsthetic sequence, and connected with the character of Cranmer only by the christening spoons, which the god-father has to give to the infant. And in this same way, as we stumble at the loose development of the action, we become doubtful also of the poetic diction, as soon as we compare it with any other of Shakespeare's plays. The English critic before quoted perceived only in single scenes (Act I. sc. 1. 2. Act II. sc. 3. 4. Act III. sc. 2. Act V. sc. 1. 2.) that freshness of life and nature, that perfect freedom from all the conventional language of the

stage or of books, those concise expressions, that bold and rapid turn of thought, that impatient activity of mind and imagination, which so perceptibly distinguish Shakespeare's language; and even in these scenes we fancy we can feel a certain gloss of varnish, weakening these peculiarities of Shakespeare's diction; in the remaining parts, where whole scenes appear as unnecessary stop-gaps, there often prevails a languid expression of shallow conversation, which seems in scarcely one trait to remind of Shakespeare, though all the more frequently of Beaumont's and Fletcher's style of writing. Fletcher's rhythmic manner is strikingly conspicuous throughout in these very passages of the play; verses with double endings are much more constant in the whole play, than in almost any other of Shakespeare's works; in the parts that appear genuine, they stand in the proportion of two weak to seven strong endings, but in the less genuine the proportion is of 1 to 2, or 2 to 3; the spondaic double endings, so characteristic of Fletcher's versification, are met with in many passages consecutively. All these peculiarities determined our English critic in the supposition, that the play had been consigned by Shakespeare in a mere sketch to Fletcher, whose influence in the completion of the work would at once explain the want of moral and æsthetic consistency and coherence in the drama.

It is striking, and it seems to us of a deciding importance, that this result of philological enquiry, fully accords with the result of the utterly opposite æsthetical test of the unity of idea in this historical play. I have indeed earlier believed, that the key to the play might he found in Cranmer's prophetic speech at the christening of Elizabeth, which in

broad touches predicts the blessed fruits of the queen's future
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government: the establishment of peace, the security of protestantism, and the consideration of merit before birth and blood, and I have thought that the essential idea of the drama might be referred to the glorification of the house of Tudor, by an historical abstraction of the main merit and value of the rule of this house. I was induced to admit, that the real action, the victory of protestantism, which the poet had for this aim placed as the central point of his play of Henry VIII., he could not have ventured to represent on the stage in any deep view or detailed treatment; that this might have compelled him (and this history moreover justified) to make the casual outward causes, which have had this great result for England, the subject of representation in his drama, which in many passages, it seems unintentionally, hints at the experience, that great results often arise from the smallest and most unexpected causes. But in this attempt to obtain for the play a unity of idea as its foundation, I have not been able to conceal from myself, that even supposing the justice of such an interpretation, the whole play would evaporate into a formal dramatic spiritualizing of the subject. The action represented would in this case be only the symbolic precursor to the real aim of the piece, which would not lie in the central point of the play, but in its conclusion, in that prophesying of a period and a condition, lying far behind the present, in which the scene is placed, — in a speech, for which and for the cause of which, few indeed of the facts of the play had prepared in any tangible manner. It seems, therefore, in every way more just, simply to confess the lack of dramatic unity and of an ethical focus in the play, and

to explain it in the manner of the considerations we have just alleged.

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There are not a few Englishmen, who have maintained the co-operation of Shakespeare and Fletcher upon another work also. We mentioned before a small series of doubtful dramas, which were printed partly under Shakespeare's name, and which, in Germany especially, were considered to be youthful works, if not indeed master-pieces from our poet's pen. This doubt has been long ago laid aside in England. With regard alone to the Two Noble Kinsmen, which appeared in 1634 under the joint names of Shakespeare and Fletcher, men such as Spalding, Coleridge, Dyce, and Ingleby are of opinion, that no inconsiderable part of the play could have been composed by any other than by Shakespeare alone. As Dyce (Works of Beaumont and Fletcher. 1, LXXX et seq.) conceives the matter, Shakespeare's share in the play to a certain extent might be readily allowed, and yet again wholly denied. Nothing is more probable than that Shakespeare, being in the pay of his theatre, was compelled to appropriate foreign plays for representation by a remodelling of even a lighter kind, than we perceive in Titus and Pericles. Nothing would be more possible than that he may have adopted in this manner (according to Dyce's opinion) an older play of the same purport as that of the Two Noble Kinsmen, which was performed in 1594, at the Newington theatre, and that subsequently Fletcher, making use of Shakespeare's additions, may have remodelled this same older piece into the form in which it stands in the editions of his works. But that Shakespeare ever could have taken a hearty interest in this subject, is to be denied

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with the greatest certainty from one single consideration: for never have his sound ethics had to do with such conventional points of honour in the style of the dramatic Romanticists of Spain, as those upon which the relation between Palamon and Arcitas, the two noble cousins (the central point of the whole play) turns. And grounds just as decisive, might readily withhold us from even attempting to divine Shakespeare's outward share in this work, — the labour of so many hands. His pen has generally been perceived most distinctly in such scenes as consist essentially in narrative and description; even Dyce, among the passages which appeared to him to be indisputably Shakespearian, has selected one, which is purely descriptive, for the sake of description itself; but in Shakespeare's whole dramas, with scarcely the exception *of one single* instance, this very manner of description is never and nowhere to be found! We are, therefore, of Staunton's opinion, who would as little impute to Shakespeare a share in this as in any other of the plays falsely awarded to him. It seems a settled matter, that the great man wrote no more for the stage after his return to Stratford in 1612. With the Winter's Tale and the Tempest, he closed his great career, and buried fathom-deep, like Prospero, his poetic wand. Happy the successor who may one day again dig up this treasure.

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SHAKESPEARE.

Now that we have studied Shakespeare's works in succession and scanned the separate features one by one, it remains for us to take a retrospective view, and to bring forward and contemplate as a whole the portrait of the poet and his poetry.

The points of view from which this many-sided poet, his gifts, his character, his art, may be studied, are countless; — endless is the material out of which the threads of such a universal examination may be spun. These threads are already immeasurable in extent, if we consider alone all the striking things, which intelligent judges of Shakespeare have before said. In this matter it is difficult to be both new and brief. But the more difficult it is, so much the more meritorious and to the purpose is it, to limit oneself to a few, well-chosen, and profitable points of consideration.

The points of sight, from which *we* intend to make our observations, have been already mentioned in the introduction to this work. We there pronounced the two-fold judgment, which awards to Shakespeare both from an artistic and a moral point of view, the highest honour, that could be conferred upon a poet:

Firstly, That in the range of modern dramatic poetry he occupies the place of the revealing genius of this branch of art and of its laws, as Homer does in the history of epic poetry; and

Secondly, That, as the rarest judge of men and human affairs, he is a teacher of indisputable authority, and the most worthy to be chosen as a guide through the world, and through life.

From these two positions we will start in the following remarks, and endeavour continually to return to them.

High as the recognition of Shakespeare's poetic genius has lately risen, it will yet appear extremely paradoxical to many, if beside Homer, whose fame has now for nearly 3000 years survived all changes of taste, we rank a poet scarcely known to the races of the Latin tongue, to half the civilized world, concerning whom opinion in the course of three centuries has so greatly changed, and even now is so divided among the English themselves. As in his time Johnson was of opinion, that Shakespeare often did not know his own intention, that he owed his greatest beauties to mere lucky hits, so in the present day Birch and Courtenay, undeterred by the indication of deep contrivance in his dramas, deny all fixed plan in Shakespeare's works, and have even doubted, if he ever made his personages speak designedly in accordance with their characters. They have solemnly protested against the worship of his genius, and thought it blasphemy in Coleridge to call him superhuman. *Tastelessness*, or want of the sense of beauty; *irregularity*, or want of a spirit of arrangement; the realistic drawing from nature in his works, or the *want of artistic ideality*, were

formerly, and are still the standing objections firmly made to Shakespeare, as if deficiency in these necessary qualities, without which a real disciple of art cannot be imagined, were a matter of course in a poet, who, as an actor, lived for the multitude and for their vulgar fancies, and wrote in a rough and uncultivated age. We will go over all these points in succession, since, if a defence be not required, an explanation is at least necessary.

First, as concerns our poet's sense of beauty, we will not deny, that we ourselves have found marks of a perverted and uncultivated taste in his indelicacies, his laboured play upon words, and his odd conceits, or in the cutting off of heads, and putting out of eyes on the stage, or in those strange anachronisms; also in the number and style of metaphorical images, which characterize Shakespeare's poetical conversations. One general remark in reference to these must precede all other explanations. These censures universally refer only to isolated scenes, or to the "outward parts" of style and diction, and though we have neither concealed nor excused errors of this kind, yet looking upon them as exceptions and trifles, we have upon principle not laid more stress upon them, than was due with reference to so great a whole. All beauty depends upon symmetry and proportion. An overgrowth, which sucks out the strength of a flowering plant, and destroys its shape, may be in the oak the harmless sport of exuberance and even an ornament to its form; bushes which would be a wilderness in a garden, may enhance the beauty of the grander scenes of nature. Irregularity, when isolated and taken out of its place, will always be ugly; while in its proper connection, it may add to the charm by variety. Those

good men of Polonius' school, who cannot see beyond their
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beards, who never get beyond such particular details, as "that is a foolish figure", — "that's an ill phrase, a vile phrase", — "that's good, this is too long" — such as these, Hamlet sends "to the barber's with their beards" and their art-criticisms; they are out of place with such a poet as Shakespeare. All the experience we have gained, warns us against following their steps. The whole history of Shakespearian criticism for the last century is nothing but the discovery of the mistakes of those, who for a century before thought to have discovered the faults of the poet. If for the next century we would only see Shakespeare acted, instead of reading him alone as we have hitherto done, perhaps all that appeared to us unsuitable would stand forth, if not as beauties of art, yet as truths of nature. For numbers of the errors of taste in Shakespeare have turned out to be striking touches of character; the æsthetic deformities imputed to Shakespeare's poetry proved the moral deformities of certain of his characters, and what had been denounced as a fault, was found to be an excellence.

Thus it is almost everywhere with those obscenities and naïvités, with that forced wit and those conceits, that enigmatical depth of speech and expression. In single instances among his early works, many disfigurements of this kind cannot perhaps be justified. But we must not suffer ourselves to be disgusted with the poet on this account, any more than with Homer for the naïve epithets, at which the refined age smiles. To lay aside the exterior garb of the time in speech and manners is beyond any man's power. We know, with what coarseness not long before Shakespeare, the most learned priests entered into

controversy, and the greatest man of the age exchanged writings with the English king! We know, that noble ladies of those times far exceeded in indecency of language, what the poet puts into the mouth of his boldest characters. We know, that burlesque wit was then common property and the general taste of society in popular literature. We know, that those conceits were naturalized through the master of Italian art, in the highest court-circles and among the learned. It is, therefore, *no* wonder, that in Shakespeare's Italianizing period we can collect a number of these strange conceits; it *is* rather a wonder, that he was the first to give a shock to this affectation of poetical diction by the use of a healthy popular language; and this very naturalness of expression has not a little contributed to raise the poetic estimation of Shakespeare among the Germanic nations with their increasing feeling for nature and beauty. It was a wonder, that Shakespeare was so soon able so far to rise above the indecencies of his dramatic contemporaries and the bad taste of the Italian court-style, that in his works the mean and absurd is never inserted for its own sake, that in his riper plays the freedoms and follies of language are confined to the tongues and circumstances, to which they are natural. It is only a certain class of women, in whom he permits great freedom of speech, and Johnson never said anything more untrue, than that "neither his gentlemen nor his ladies have much delicacy, nor are sufficiently distinguishable from his clowns by any appearance of refined manners." It is only a certain class of men, who indulge in witticisms and puns; and if it has been said of the poet, that a quibble was the will o' the wisp, which always led him into the marsh, it is true of

his witlings, but not of himself nor of any of those, who with him call those people fools, who "defy the matter for a tricksy word". No indelicate expressions, no trifling witticisms can be pointed out in Antonio and Posthumus, Brutus and Cassius, Coriolanus and Othello, or any of his earnest and active heroes; the witty among them condescend sometimes to the wanton conversation of their more daring friends, others are so inaccessible to it, that even a third person dare not attempt it in their presence. And just so the conceits, the obscurities, and extravagances of language are always in characteristic places. Where confused thoughts oppose, cross, and perplex each other, it is because the thinking powers of the speaker are themselves lame or dull; where the meaning struggles for expression, it is because the speaker hovers over the abyss of mental excitement, in which the plummet of reason can find no firm ground; where the verse is heavy and the figure grand, the sense will be weighty, and rarely is it that as in the descriptive poems, great words are wasted on small thoughts, deep thought on shallow subjects, swelling figures on mean things, and rarely is it that the harmony between matter and expression is injured. The accomplished actor would be able to avail himself of all these peculiarities of manner for the purposes of characterization, to a much greater extent than would be thought possible by the reader; we can only suggest this mode of consideration; to carry it out in detail, would be the task of an intelligent commentator, and it *is* essentially the task of the actor. This way of accounting for these peculiarities must be the apology for them, even when they are, in themselves, repulsive to taste; for where the choice lies between taste

and truth, Homer would not have hesitated any more than
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Shakespeare. Those, however, who from a childish nicety would find fault with this truth of nature, the poet would have set to rights, as Bacon did the fastidious persons, who turned away from what was naked and ugly in natural science: testifying that the sun of art shines on the cloaca as well as the palace, without being soiled by it, that what is worthy of existence may also be worthy of art, and that the stage is not an empty show-place for human pride, but a market for the commerce of life, as it is.

The few blemishes belonging to the poetic style of the times, which adhere to Shakespeare, vanish into nothing in the whole healthy body, that arose in its own strength out of this diseased state: it is the same with those remains of stage-customs, which bear witness to the cruel and blood-thirsty mind of the age. We have neither denied nor palliated these harsh passages; we may wish them away in some places, and must without hesitation omit them on the stage, but we have not been able to conceal from ourselves, that it was an advantage to Shakespeare, as it was to Homer, to work for a public of iron nerves. We have shewn, that this very peculiarity also is made subservient to the poet's art of characterization, and that such passages are not found in plays, that represent peaceful and cheerful circumstances. We refer to the remark, that even in this respect Shakespeare far outstepped his contemporaries, and his early works, as Goethe and Schiller did theirs; from Titus Andronicus, where he indulged in this practice, to Lear in which he only used it freely for the grandest ends, what an advance is made! In our remarks upon Lear, we have already attempted to explain, that Shakespeare, in this and similar

horrible subjects, did not descend to the taste of the people, but that he took hold of his generation by their weakness and strength, and elevated them to the great schemes of his art. If we would take in at a glance, his position with respect to the audience for which he wrote, we must compare it with that in which Lope de Vega, a great popular favourite, stood in reference to his public, in a similarly flourishing period of the Spanish theatre. There indeed the theatre was a sort of coterie, thoroughly unlike the free competition and artistic rivalry of the more refined London stage. There the theatre of the small, new metropolis, did not rise above that of a provincial town; the populace, the women governed the stage, rough artisans settled the applause and the disapprobation, and ruled art as the gallery of the parliament rules politics. But such was not the public to which the prologue in Henry VIII. appeals; such a public he despised, and chastised with hard strokes. Lope de Vega, on the contrary, was an orator for such hearers, he imputed it to this very tribunal, that he had returned to the rude fashion of magic pieces, and such barbarisms, which he himself called monsters; he confessed, that he had written in contempt of the classics and of reason. But never would Shakespeare have made such a confession: he lived for the patrons of art of his acquaintance; he wrote for great actors; emulating nature he grasped the loftiest conceptions of art, and promised to his verse immortality and future fame.

Among Shakespeare's faults of taste have been placed also his mistakes in the delineation of different ages. Even here he is judged by isolated instances. It is true, he has put the names of Roman gods in the mouths of the Druids of

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Britain, and given to the Romans, bells; he has intermixed the features of the heroic and feudal ages, and described battles with cannon in King John's time, because the people desired to see the English army on the stage, as it was in their own day. Thus far he conformed to the views of the people; this did not necessarily represent his own view; he comprehended the requirements of dramatic effect, which even Goethe and Schiller durst not disregard; he gave to the times he depicted the features of that actually present, by which alone the matter could reach the heart. But however severely we may criticize these single errors, none of them can be compared in bad taste, with Raphael making Apollo play the fiddle on Parnassus; and yet Raphael is the painter of the finest taste in the world! But, what is more, these mistakes are never in essentials; Shakespeare has never given to other times and places the intellectual features of his own time, and thereby rendered their nature unrecognizable; he has never done like Lope and Calderon, who modernized all past times and made every people Spanish; he has never, like Corneille and Racine, travestied antiquity and the middle ages in their Gallic classicism; he has never intrinsically missed the spirit of the time, as was done by that master of historic accommodation, our own Goethe in the Achilleis.. On the contrary there was *first* manifested in this first of the pure teutonic poets of modern times, that many-sidedness and susceptibility which are peculiar to the German race, that objectivity which in apprehending times and subjects artistically, always yields them their rights; a gift which Handel, at a later period, in his oratorios, was again the first to preserve, and which descended from him into our poetry, through Klopstock, Herder, and

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Goethe. In his English and Roman, his medioeval and heroic pieces, Shakespeare has always preserved the intrinsic character of the times, as truly as that of those individuals of his own age and nation, whose thoughts he thinks and whose language he speaks. And this is all the more remarkable, the stronger the individualism of the poet, whom we recognize as we do Handel, in every single passage, and who nevertheless in the main entirely disappears before the subject he is treating.

Finally, many complaints have been made of Shakespeare's use of metaphorical images, of their impropriety, their confusion, or their excessive accumulation. It may be said, the excuse of the object of characterization is not applicable here; they are characteristic of Shakespeare, not of his personages It is more correct to say, that this is the characteristic of all poetry: it is the only means poetry possesses of transforming the thought, the instrument of the understanding, into an image, and of making it the instrument of the imagination. Aristotle has styled metaphor the chief ornament of composition, and the unteachable work of poetic genius; and to try the taste of our poet by this test is truly not a demand that need be avoided. We ourselves have mentioned some false metaphors in Shakespeare's early works (in Henry VI.); in his later pieces we should seek such in vain. The man who expresses himself by the mouth of his Lavatch as so easily affected by every "stinking metaphor", need not fear in this respect the finest nose. We have only to prove this by counting, and we shall find a hundred fragrant flowers of metaphor for one scentless, — a thousand, for one narcotic. The *complication* and joining together of contradictory meta-

phors has also been found fault with. But the cases will be rare, in which Shakespeare has repeated that fault in Hamlet's soliloquy, if it be a fault, where in one sentence he speaks of a *sea* of troubles, against which one takes up *arms*; yet even by such disparate images the meaning is not confused, but rather made clearer. For thought and image are usually so corresponding and so remarkably interwoven in Shakespeare, that, by dropping the image, the significance of the thought would also be lost. Dryden remarks, that by melting many of his metaphors, silver would remain in the crucible, but we think, on the other hand, the gold would have evaporated. With more plausibility the *accumulation* of the metaphors might be objected to. No rule is more correct than the old one of Aristotle, that in the use of metaphorical language, moderation is to be observed, that there may not be too many enigmas, or that the weight of the single images may not oppress or destroy the sense of the whole. But the question is here, whether *we* as critics have the greater taste or Shakespeare as a poet. We are too much accustomed to a low strain of dramatic eloquence by the rhymed prose of the French drama, and even of our greatest German poets. An expression such as that of Goethe's, which we find in Tasso: "we have nothing, with which we may compare it", would have been regarded by Shakespeare as a declaration of poetic bankruptcy. We cannot agree with Dryden, who comparing our poet with the simple dialogue of the ancients, thought his compositions savoured too much of the buskin. Among the ancients, the buskin in itself, the mask, the heroic characters, the whole matter and its representation, the pompous style of the chorus, raised the spectators far above the

level of common nature, and if the ground of reality were not to be entirely lost, it was necessary to keep the dialogue as simple as possible. But in Shakespeare, who had not the old mythic heroes for subjects, who made a law for himself never to forsake actual nature in his subjects and characters, — in Shakespeare it was a master-stroke of poetical instinct, that he elevated his style not indeed to the poetic brilliancy of the ode, but yet above the calm flow of the epos, and that in the choicest language he reminded his hearers every minute, that his play represented reality, but was not reality.

If, however, we would truly make proof of the poet's taste, we must penetrate through all this exterior, which we may call the clothing or body of art, to its real soul; then even if we cling to single passages, we shall still meet everywhere with a degree of æsthetic and moral refinement, to which in the more polished times after Shakespeare, but very few poets attained. Hear him, as a critic, pronounce those rules of art in Hamlet, and tell us who could have thought on the subject with more refinement! Consider him as lyric poet in the three forms he has introduced in Romeo, and shew us a piece more spirited and tasteful in this style! Try his knowledge of human nature in the progress he has made in the estimate of women, and shew us one to be compared with him in delicate knowledge of the sex! Advance from thence to his delineation of the manly character, and count among the most delicately organized, even amongst women, those who could only imitate, only find out the delicate line of distinction between false and true heroism in Coriolanus! Try the characters, the actions, the sentences, the whole range of thought in his works; in this

grand code of life-pictures and wisdom, nothing is trivial, scarcely anything to be called antiquated in the lapse of these 300 years; — and endeavour to conceive the purport of this sentence! Or, trace the peculiar dramatic activity of his mind. Name to us the poet who approached and managed his sources with such fine feeling as Shakespeare has! Compare with the painful uncertainty with which Goethe was often conscious of having mis-chosen his materials, the bold security with which Shakespeare seizes the most intricate and manages the most untractable matter, the bold security with which he ventures and accomplishes what no other would have begun, and elicits beauties out of materials that in other hands would be revolting! Observe the happy instinct with which, as if he had been schooled by a Lessing, he avoided in his dramas all the descriptive matter with which a Calderon systematically disfigured his works, whilst the isolated description of queen Mab, makes us immediately sensible how foreign to Shakespeare is this kind of poetic ornament! Or observe his use of the marvellous, and shew us the modern poet, who, with such artistic skill as he, clothed such deep symbolism in such a plastic form! Whoever has weighed these separate sides, will see the folly of supposing, that the man, who appears so refined in every thing great and real, should have missed the little and the external like an idiot, and not rather have despised them as a genius; and he will cast back the reproach of being paradoxical on the petty critics, who destroy our enjoyment of the poet by their trivial censures. All the objections we have mentioned vanish, however, into insignificance, when for the sake of arriving at a right jndgment of Shakespeare's taste, we examine the whole

structure and organization of his works of art. On this point, and on the higher question concerning Shakespeare's art-ideal, we must refer the question to his sense of beauty, if we would have it effectually answered.

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One reproach, which affects not single parts alone, but the whole of Shakespeare's art, and which if well-founded would be more dangerous to our parallel between Shakespeare and Homer, is the assumed *carelessness* of the dramatist to *laws and rules*. If it be impossible to be a true artist without taste, it is still less possible without attention to laws to be the revealing, i. e. the law-giving genius of any particular province of art, such as we claim Shakespeare to be.

Our whole consideration of Shakespeare was designed throughout to prove unity and regularity of art arrangement in the separate plays. We began by asserting that our poet has complied in a new manner with the artistic demands of the oldest æsthetics, that his art agreed perfectly with that essential law of Aristotle, which all ages, and lastly our great German poets in rare harmony, have acknowledged to be ever binding, that it only claims spiritualization and enlargement of this law, such as is suitable to the changed nature of the times, and the materials for poetry. We will now endeavour to collect together the results of this examination, to prove that these have not been vague assertions.

The most obvious difference between the ancient and the modern drama is its less and greater extension. The polymythic dramas of antiquity, met with no cultivation:

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tragedy received its purest form in the hands of the poets, who limited it to one single action, and this again to its main point, the catastrophe. This manner of proceeding we explained on formal and material grounds. The ancient drama arose beside the perfected Homeric epos; it would have been difficult to rival this in the richness of extended actions; the opposite of this, action condensed as much as possible, was therefore aimed at. The materials with which ancient poetry wrought, still further required this method. The history of the world was still young and brief, the heroic myths were soon exhausted; tragic writers, therefore, were obliged to handle the same materials; it was impossible for them to please by novelty of subject; their merit lay in perfecting the form; this led to limiting the action to one chief point, and to striving to manifest their art by drawing their utmost from this one dramatic moment. It was thus that ancient tragedy received its narrow, uniform, stereotyped form. But what still better explains the limitation of the action within these narrow bounds, was the great simplicity of the men of heroic times, represented in their tragedies, whose nature more physically strong than spiritually rich did not require a deep fulness of characterization. As soon as the sphere of history became enlarged, as soon as a war like the Peloponnesian, and the opposition of schools of philosophy unfolded the many styles of human character, there arose in the tragedies of Euripides, and still more in the comedies, which took the existing world for their subject, the need of more action, motive, and character, and consequently of greater expansion.

All this which caused the simple form of the old drama, turned completely round in modern times, and naturally

caused the very opposite effect. Two thousand years lie between Shakespeare, and the flourishing period of the ancient tragedy. In this interval, christianity laid open unknown depths of mind: the teutonic race in their dispersion filled wide spaces of the earth, the crusades opened the way to the East, later voyages of discovery revealed the West and the whole form of the globe, new spheres of knowledge presented themselves, whole nations and periods of time arose and passed away, a thousand forms of public and private, of religious and political life had come and gone, the circle of views, ideas, experiences, and interests was immensely enlarged, the mind thereby made deeper and more expanded, wants increased, passions more multiplied and refined, the conflict of human endeavours more numerous and intricate, the resources of the mind immeasurable, all in a way quite foreign to the childish times of antiquity. This abundance of external and internal material streamed into the sphere of art on all sides; poetry could not resist it without injury, and even ruin. The epos of the middle ages strove to seize on this abundance of matter for itself. But it was far from having the advantages of the Homeric poem, whose historic ground was the well-known Trojan war, the shattering of a world, but a small and comprehensive one. The epos of the Germans and French on the contrary, being undertaken in uncivilized times, and with immense matter, remained unformed and undeveloped. Poetry first received a more artistic form in Italy, when music, painting, and architecture arose; at this time the drama was recognized throughout Europe as the poetic form most suitable to modern times and races, in which the epos found no more rhapsodists

and hearers, and who in their dispersed activity would be
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attracted to art by stronger allurements. As it occupied the *place* of the epic poem, and did not merely, like the ancient drama, stand *side by side* with it, it inherited, with the office of replacing it, the task of shewing itself capable of managing, like the epopee, any matter however extended. The materials presented to it were not common property, like the many well-known myths of antiquity, handed down in a ready-made poetical form; but they were those rudiments of the religious dramas, those mysteries founded on vast actions, those romances and ballads which called forth those epic dramas in the style of Pericles, they were those historical subjects, which even before Shakespeare's time demanded a whole cycle of pieces for the mastering of the huge matter. To avoid this mass of material never entered the mind of either Hans Sachs, Lope de Vega, or Marlowe. Each of these in his own way amplified the drama in accordance with his comprehensive matter into more comprehensive forms. The things of the world had become complicated and manifold; the variety of men, their nature, their passions, their situations, their mutually contending powers, would not submit, when dramatically represented, to be limited to a simple catastrophe; a wider horizon must be drawn, the actions must be represented throughout their course, the motives of action must be more deeply searched for; art received the office of confining the utmost fulness of matter in a corresponding form, the extension of which, according to Aristotle's law, must however not exclude an easy survey.

The economy of the Greek drama was by no means the only result of the application of Aristotle's law. Aristotle

himself was very far from setting up the form and extent of the dramas of his day, as a rule for all time. He declared distinctly that the compass of the drama must be regulated by habit and taste. It even appears, that the shortness of the ancient tragedy was not in his opinion its advantage. He knew well, that the richness of episodes gave rather a superiority to the epos, and that it was the fault of the uniform and monotonous structure of the tragedy, if it wearied or failed. He, therefore, enjoined for the drama, not the compass then *in use*, but the *natural* extent prescribed by the action itself. "The space", he says, "in which in a string of events, the change from fortune to misfortune or the reverse can, by necessity or probability, take place, this space gives the proper limit to the drama." If in this sentence the practice of modern play-writers receives its justification, still more does it in what follows. "As concerns the natural limit of the action, the more extended will prove always the more beautiful, so long as it is easily surveyed." Shakespeare's practice is exactly correspondent to this rule. In Antony only, he seems to have transgressed this law of an easy survey. Whoever knows Shakespeare's plays by their performance, will make this complaint of no other. But with this rule before his eyes Shakespeare always went to the very verge of these limits. He chose his matter as rich and full as possible, he extended its form according to its requirements, but no further; it will never be found in any of his dramas, that the thought is exhausted before the end, that there is any superfluous expansion in the form, or any needless abundance in the matter; it has never yet been shewn, that even a Schiller or a Goethe could have given his plays

a more compressed form, without injuring the purport. For the task of arranging the most extensive materials possible in the most extended form, without overstepping its fair proportions, is one which no one has accomplished as Shakespeare has done. Therein lies a great part of his æsthetic greatness. No poet in the same space has represented so much with so little; none has so widely expanded this space within the given poetical form. In this Shakespeare did not suffer himself to be perplexed by the example of the ancient tragedy. He felt that the peculiar poetic material of the new world would perish in these old forms, and therefore it was better to mould them afresh. He knew it with certainty (and no æsthetics will ever get further) that the task of the poet was to represent the very substance of his times, to reflect the age in his poetry and to give it form and stamp; he created, therefore, for the enlarged sphere of life, an enlarged sphere of art; he sought for this purpose, not a ready-made rule, but the inner law of the given matter, a spirit in the things, which in the formation of the work of art fashioned itself like a crystal into beautiful shapes. For there is no higher worth in a poetical work, than the agreement of the form with the nature of the subject represented, according to its own indwelling laws, not according to external rule. If we judge Shakespeare or Homer by the supposition of such a conventional rule, we may equally deny them taste and law; measured, however, by that higher standard, Shakespeare's conformity to an inner law outstrips all those regular dramatists, who learned from Aristotle not the spirit of regularity, but mechanical imitation.

The most essential law, which Aristotle has prescribed

to the drama is unity of action. As to the famous unity of
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time and place, the first is not mentioned at all, the latter only as a custom. Indeed they are by no means observed throughout the ancient dramas. We know that in Ajax and in the Eumenides, the place changes, that the limitation of time to one day has been overstepped by Sophocles, by Euripides, and also by Æschylus, whose Agamemnon returns from Troy with telegraphic speed. But above all it is in the comedies of Aristophanes that free play has been made with time and place, notwithstanding the presence of the chorus, which has often been considered the cause of unity of time and place. Its use in ancient tragedy is rather to be explained simply by the limitation of the dramatic action to the catastrophe; it belongs to the very idea of a catastrophe, that it is limited to a definite and short time. The modern drama, on the other hand, which describes the complete course of the action, could not without a striking departure from nature be limited to one place and to a short time: this must have been made very evident in our closing remarks on the Winter's Tale. Those who require unity of time in the drama, must also for the sake of consistency require the natural size in painting. But as little as reducing the size destroys the illusion in painting, does lengthening the time in the drama. Even the oldest of critics, such as Gildon, have allowed this, and Johnson has strongly defended Shakespeare's procedure in this respect. Yet these men were terrified then at their own boldness. They ventured not to take the side of their feelings against their understanding; they had not moreover the opportunity of comparing and measuring the worth of the irregular plays of Shakespeare and that of the curtailed dramas of the

French Aristotelian school, by *their effect* and fate in the history of literature: these appearing as show-pieces for the moment, but those receiving an historical development, which seems to be rather at its beginning, than at its end. For us, who in the present day can take a wider survey of this, the question of place and time is wholly obsolete*.

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The unity of action, on the other hand, is an ever-binding law. The action of a drama, according to Aristotle, should be one and undivided, so that none of its parts could be transposed or omitted, without injuring or destroying the whole; for that, which by its presence or absence conduces nothing to the illustration of the whole, is no (necessary) part of that whole. This law is so natural, that even the commonest stage-pieces adhere to it: their regularity arises out of timid habit, and bears the character of triviality and poverty. Where the drama, in its beginnings especially, attempted more, it has in this respect sinned more. Numberless pieces of Shakespeare's Spanish and English contemporaries do not stand before this law. In the first part of Shakespeare's Henry VI., we pointed out one of those plays, which Aristotle calls episodical, and which he places in the lowest rank; in Pericles one, where the false unity of person stands in the stead of unity of action; in the two last parts of Henry VI., plays, where unity cannot be reduced

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* We should not have brought forward this question again here, had not the discovery of a law said to have been observed by Shakespeare in reference to the unity of time, been announced with great stress in a paper in Blackwood's Magazine, and in an Essay by N. J. Halpin on the dramatic unities of Shakespeare. The matter follows entirely the direction of our closing remarks on the Winter's Tale, and we lay no greater weight on it, than is laid there.

to Aristotle's rule. In his riper works, on the contrary, where the action is only one, the whole arrangement is in unity, according to the directions of Aristotle; we can remove small portions, as in an organic body without injury, but cannot take away large members without disfiguring the whole. And not in this unity only, but also in the entirety of the action, its progress and management, Shakespeare has hit upon the right method in his practice, as Aristotle, with fortunate judgment, in his criticism. Aristotle's maxims about the complication and extrication of the action, are as finely applicable to the richest composition of Shakespeare, as to the simplest plays of antiquity. Everything that happens within or beyond the tragedy, until the approach of the change of fortune, is complication; all that comes after this middle point, is the solution, the denouement. Among the ancients, the catastrophe is the middle point, the chief matter; the conclusion is commonly given in narration, the complicating circumstance lies very much behind the scene. The opposite practice of the modern drama, which places all the antecedents of the action within the play, increases considerably the difficulty of the author's theme, which requires that the line of the action should be drawn, as it were, in the form of a regular arch, that its rise and fall, its complication and development, should stand in symmetrical proportion, that the catastrophe, the moment when the change of fortune happens, should be at once the centre and zenith of the action. If we apply this touch-stone, the most delicate scale of taste and regularity, to Shakespeare, and at the same time to the greatest dramatists of later times, we shall see at once, how much the regular and cultivated might have learned from the so-called

irregular barbarian. In Othello, the words which express that his happiness is at its height (excellent wretch &c. III. 3.) stand in the exact centre of the piece. In Hamlet the turning point of character coincides with the death of Polonius, which happens in the middle of the piece. In Macbeth, the death of Banquo is the turning point of his fortune, when his fatal "security" manifests itself; the ghost appears to Macbeth exactly in the middle of the piece. In Lear everything is at its height on the outbreak of his despair, in the centre of the drama. So, in King John, at the murder of Arthur, in Richard II., at his despair of himself. At such moments in these and other plays, even the passages may be alleged, where, as if in order to indicate the very centre of the piece, the catastrophe is pointed out in express words. Whoever will follow out the examination of the different plays, in accordance with these suggestions, will find everywhere the circular line of the action, drawn with an enviable certainty, and this observation will perhaps surprise even the most careful reader by revealing hidden beauties and artistic symmetry of design.

Nevertheless we have found, contrary to this law of the unity of action, a number of Shakespeare's plays containing a twofold action: so that in them there is either no unity of action, or another law of unity must be found, than Aristotle's. We have already pointed out this other law in individual pieces; we will in this place, without losing ourselves in æsthetic theories, try to explain *why* Shakespeare did not so much forsake as enlarge the Aristotelian law of unity, and why it was *necessary* either to forsake or enlarge it.

The danger of the ancient drama was its uniformity, of

that Aristotle was himself conscious. He therefore gave a preference to complicated myths; he wished that the properties of the different kinds of tragedy, which he instanced (the complicated and the simple, the pathetic and the ethic), should be always combined as much as possible; and in this desire also he wrote the law more for the modern drama, than for the ancient. The simple, pathetic, or ethic drama, where as in Ajax and Philoctetes, there is rather the development of a character than of an action, could not please so much as the complicated myth, in which the main ingredients were sudden changes of fortune, recognitions, and discoveries, the external complications of events rather than the internal passions and guilt of the characters, ingredients, which Aristotle considered therefore, to be integral parts of tragedy. This kind received thereby somewhat of the character of intrigue-pieces, in which naturally the chief weight lies upon the action. Hence it is, that Aristotle calls the putting together of the action, the most important point in tragedy. "For," says he, "tragedy is not an imitation of men, but of actions and of life, of happiness and misfortune. For even the happiness lies in the actions; and the aim of tragedy is an action, not a particular condition of men. These receive their particular condition by their character, but their good fortune or the reverse, by their actions. They do not, therefore, act to exhibit their characters, but they develop their characters only by their actions. So that action and plot is the aim of tragedy. And the aim is the chief in everything. Without action there could be no tragedy, but without characters there could. And the tragedies of most moderns *are* without characters. The chief thing, there-

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fore, and, as it were, the soul of tragedy is the action, the second the characters. It is the same in painting. For if a man produced a daub with the most splendid colouring, he would not please so much as he who drew a picture with only white chalk."

These propositions go directly to the root of the difference between the old and the new drama, and penetrate to its inmost foundations.

In the wholly different circumstances of civilization in modern times, we consider the separation of action and character in life itself, as impossible as in art is the assertion, that a tragedy could exist without characters, but not without action. The threads out of which actions are formed, amid the working together of nature and disposition, instinct and sentiment, unknown impulse and known intention, actions which re-act upon changes in the actor's modes of thought and feeling, which again call forth other changed actions, — these threads, like warp and woof, run so closely into one web, that we cannot say of any one thing, it is the chief, that we cannot take out one part without the rest falling to pieces. Character and action, as in nature, penetrate each other so completely in Shakespeare's art which is so true to nature, that between the value and importance of both, there is, in all his pieces, the closest connection. If the characters are rough as in the Taming of the Shrew, or superficial as in the Midsummer-Night's Dream, so will the actions be harsh in one instance and marrowless in the other; the deeds in Lear are not more cruel, than the characters are wild; the misunderstandings between Othello and Desdemona not more unhappy, than their ignorance of themselves. How little character and action can be separated is

best proved, when we reverse the maxim, that tragedy is possible without characters, but not without action: it is then alike true and false as before. In every dramatic action there must appear a sort of characterization, however weak; and again no character could be dramatically developed without action. There may be a disproportion between a lively action, and feeble characters which carry it on, or between strongly-drawn characters and a meaner action which takes place amongst them; if we were obliged to choose between the two disproportions, we should undoubtedly, now-a-days, choose differently from Aristotle, perhaps the north differently from the south. The comparison Aristotle borrowed from painting does not fit the point; the contra-position, which he should have chosen, is this: — whether a succession of characteristic portraits without action would please better than an historical picture, an action, without expression in the actors. To apply this to the drama: the question is, which would deserve the preference, a character-piece with little action, like Lessing's Nathan, or the best intrigue-piece of the Spanish stage, without much distinction in the form of character. The Germanic taste would unhesitatingly choose the first. If then we were *obliged* to admit a separation between character and action, we should rather call character the most important to the drama, because it is the source of action. However, we will as little call Aristotle's æsthetic view a mistake, as Shakespeare's opposite practice. There is truth and right judgment on both sides, when we take into consideration the nature of the times. Among the ancients, the description of characters was in fact the least essential. The heroes of old tragedy act without much

intellectual impulse, and without a conscious aim; they execute flagitious deeds without reflection, and if, after the deed, the Erinnys awakes the conscience, even then there is little consciousness perceptible in them; a determinate aim and principle of action from innate disposition of mind, had no place among those races of mankind. Hence they could introduce masks on the stage, by means of which one main expression governed the countenance of the actor, either because it was intended in a grand style of art, to prevent the one chief impression from being disturbed by petty passing emotions, by the light play of passion, or by individual features, or because the inner nature of man did not yet lie so open, as that one could know its deeper folds. We moderns, however, who through long descended tradition and extended intercourse, have gradually become cognizant of the great outlines of human nature, are disposed to penetrate into the secret emotions of the heart, and into the more delicate destinctions of character: we spy, therefore, into the hidden play of passion and desire to search out its expression even in concealment; we abandon the grand harmonious plastic effect of the old drama, where the form and features of the actor received by means of mask and buskin a conformity of style, as it were, with the architecture, and with it made one common impression of typical solidity; — this effect then, we abandon for the sake of surpassing the old drama in psychological fulness and depth, in multiplicity and variety of action and character. With us, among whom intention influences our earliest actions, among whom the natural force of inclination is governed by intellectual cultivation, among whom the machinery is prepared from

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the first that sets every deed in motion by mental levers, among whom great passions must overcome the pressure of conventionality, among whom the origin of an action is more remarkable than the action itself, and the *origin* of a character more remarkable than all, — with us no one would have ventured to make the catastrophe the chief point of a dramatic action nor the action itself the chief thing in the drama, but — if we must separate them — the character must have this place. The origin, the growth of characters and actions, of actions by characters, has therefore become, with Shakespeare, the essential task. Hence with him the character easily appears preponderant over the action. We have found this particularly striking, wherever Shakespeare has to handle traditional fictions of the most extravagant kind.

The ancients possessed those beautiful myths, which Aristotle recommended them to respect in their main substance, but they did not adhere to the finest of them in their tragedies, so faithfully as Shakespeare did to the strange traditions in the Merchant of Venice, and Cymbeline. Thus far the action seems to have been to him the chief inviolable thing; but we have shewn (I. p. 325), that he rather treated it as an arbitrary worthless symbol, while he drew the character and its motives of action so entirely out of his own mind, with such firmness, truth, and consistency, that one easily sees how much more important he considered the cause of the action to be, than the action itself. Let us test the matter in another way. The story of an old tragedy, Iphigenia in Aulis and Tauris for example, related for its own sake, without characteristic, or motive, is beautiful and valuable, only on account of the ingenious

contrast of the two sacrifices; but Shakespeare's fictions are often strange in themselves, and receive their value only from their characteristic foundation.

Hence then, a Shakespearian theory of poetry in contrast, but not in contradiction to the Aristotelian, would consider, if there must be a separation, *character* to be the most important part of the drama, and *action* only secondary. And hence it is that Shakespeare's characters have always been his greatest glory; if on other points there are discordant opinions, all agree to praise him on this. His mastery of character and motives not only at all times attracted the best actors, but soon also the dullest censors, and transformed pedants into enthusiasts. Pope called it a sort of injury to designate Shakespeare's characters by so inapplicable a name as copies of nature; the critics, emulating each other in bold comparisons, called the poet the instrument, the rival, the completer, the outdoer of nature; and indeed it would have been injustice to compare his characters with those of any other poet, but Homer alone. For only of his can we assert, what is universally true of Shakespeare's, that they are not gathered out of a casual contact with a narrow circle of society, but sought for and obtained out of the whole of humanity; that they are not borrowed from other poetry, that they do not belong to the family of poetical but real beings, that they are not designs from pictures, not even designs from nature, but nature itself. Every individual of these characters stands, intellectually, as firmly circumscribed as the figures of Homer are plastically modelled; all surplus and deficiency are so avoided, that addition or omission is equally impossible without changing the effect and with it the character; the intricate

blending of characters with their passions and impulses is so perfect, that a separation is impossible without destruction, so that Voltaire and Rymer could make actions and characters ludicrous, merely by the petty artifice of concealing the motive. Every feature, however undesigned it might appear, harmonizes with wonderful truth, with the whole picture of the single characters; every speech is in unison with the whole being; scarcely have we once dared to point out a passage, which seemed out of tune with the rest; to point out even this exception was only possible, because the truest and liveliest delineation is so completely the rule. Here is no stage-language or manners, no standing parts, nothing that can be called ideal or favourite stage characters, no heroes of theatre or romance: in this active world there is nothing fantastic, nothing unsound, nothing exaggerated nor empty; neither the poet, nor the actor speaks in them, but creative nature alone, which seems to dwell in and to animate these dead images. These forms change, as they do in life, from the deepest to the shallowest, from the most deformed to the most noble, in many-coloured variety: a prodigal dispenses these riches; but the impression is, that he is as inexhaustible as nature herself. And as it is in nature, not one of these figures resembles another in features; there are groups which have a family-likeness, but not two individuals resembling one another; they become known to us one after the other fragmentarily, as we experience with living acquaintance; they make, here and there, different impressions on different people, and are interpreted by each according to his own feelings. In Antony we saw plainly, that the poet makes this man to be differently judged of by different natures even in the play itself. Hence

it would be an idle undertaking to endeavour in the explanation of Shakespeare's characters, to balance the different opinions of men, or arbitrarily to insist upon our own; each can only announce his own view, and must then learn, whose opinion stands best the test of time, and of the experience of life. For returning to these characters at another time, our own greater ripeness and enlarged experience will lay open to us ever new features in them, of which we ourselves were not previously aware. Even the deepest among them cannot be quite exhausted, but by men who have made analogous experiences in their own lives. Whoever has not been wrecked on the shore of life with principles and ideals, who has not bled with inward sorrow, has not suppressed holy feelings, and stumbled over the enigmas of the world, will only half understand Hamlet; whoever has not experienced the disparagement of merit, will not comprehend Othello and Iago; whoever has lived through these days of constant collision between human and political duties, will comprehend Brutus quite differently than before. And whoever has felt these experiences most deeply, whoever has born the sharpest pains of consciousness, will understand Shakespeare's characters like one of the initiated; to such a one they will be ever new, ever more admirable, ever more intense in their significance; like the remarkable men of history and real life, he will make out of them a school of life, having nothing of the danger of almost all modern poetry, which is apt to lead us astray, and to give us heroes of romance instead of true men.

But although Shakespeare's characters are true pictures of nature, they are not nature only, without the assistance of art. They are neither mere abstractions and ideals, nor

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common chance personifications, such as life brings indifferently before us; but they stand in the free, true, real, artistic medium between both. People have often opposed them to the typical characters of the Greek drama, as delineations of perfect individuality; but the contradictory opinions in this respect suffice to prove, that this definition needs an essential amplification. If Pope, for example, said that Shakespeare's characters were individuals, like those in real life; Johnson on the contrary remarked that the characters of other poets are individuals, but that Shakespeare's commonly represent classes; again, if Ulrici called them mere Englishmen of the 16th century, we thought we could distinguish among them Romans, even of different ages. If on the contrary a third person found these Romans not individually Romish enough, another replied very justly, the first object of the poet was to depict men. These contrarieties shew clearly, that truth lies in the middle course. If instead of comparing Shakespeare's characters with the sketches of the old dramatists, we compare them more correctly with the finished portraits of Homer, we shall at once perceive the relation between them. Homer's characters are no more merely typical than Shakespeare's are merely individual. The Homeric are individuals, only that these natures of an heroic age must be in every respect more simple and devoid of all mental resources, and that the epos will not bear the familiar style of the drama; the Shakesperian are typical characters, only that the lively manner of dramatic representation, and the intellectual nature of modern times necessitated greater individualization. Shakespeare has never drawn any thing special without generalizing it at the same time; he has

never represented anything typical, without furnishing it
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with the special features of the individual. If we mean by special characters only the ideal masks of the Greeks, or the abstract personifications of passion, into which the French remodelled them, or the superficial figures of the Spanish comedy, then, Shakespeare has created nothing but individuals; if we mean by individuals chance personifications of common life, such as the humorous romances of the English described later, then he has only depicted typical characters. The paradox is true: when a character with him is most a portrait, then it is at the same time, most the representation of a whole class of men. Nowhere are the peculiarities so numerous as in Falstaff, Othello, and Hamlet, and yet these are essentially typical characters, indeed Hamlet has been called, with at least partial truth, the type of men in general. This artistic blending of the general and the particular lies in this, that Shakespeare has nowhere depicted men of exceptional natures and properties belonging to any fixed time or place, his characters are above all men stirred by the emotions and passions common to human nature in all ages; and consequently they as well as the Homeric characters can be comprehended by all time, however strange the English colouring of the 16th century and that of the heroic ages of Greece may make them to us. Individual as they are, yet are they always artistically generalized, even if only by elevating them: Shakespeare's representations of the passionate, the prodigal, the hypocrite, are not portraits of this or that individual, but examples of these passions, elevated out of particular into general truth, of which in real life we may find a thousand diminished copies, but

never the original in the exact proportions given by the poet. Let us compare in Aristotle's Ethics the complete abstract pattern of intemperance and high-mindedness with the characters of Lear and Coriolanus, (in the latter of whom we have only to observe the exaggeration of high-mindedness into haughtiness,) and we shall be surprised to find how completely the abstract ideal image, the spirit of the character, is merely embodied by Shakespeare without accidental ingredient, although all seems only the purest reality. So entirely is every part, every peculiarity, referred to the general idea of the character, to a ruling motive. So entirely is every manifestation by word or deed related to a mental principle in the agent, to an animating power, to a specially developed organ, a predominant quality, which stands out as the main impulse, the nature, the law, the essence, the idea of the character; so entirely is every thing unessential and accidental, every thing which is not in close connection with that chief property, excluded. The characters move as in reality, but we recognize the elements of their composition in distinct separation; they are full of life as in nature, but mentally transparent, and they have been excellently compared to clocks in glass-cases, where the mechanism, which sets them in motion, is visible.

After this digression concerning Shakespeare's characters, we resume the thread of our remarks. Whilst Aristotle regarded the action as the most important thing in the drama, and accordingly declared unity of action to be the chief law of dramatic economy, Shakespeare on the other hand considered the main point to be character and action united, or character alone, consequently if he would agree with Aristotle in spirit and sense, he must place *his*

main law, unity of character, either on an equality with, or in the stead of the law of unity of action. This he has done. Unity of character is, as we lately remarked, the essence, the idea of character. The same idea, then, which in a Shakespearian play penetrates the chief character, rules also the whole action; the same thing, which gives unity to the character, gives it also to the play; Shakespeare reached this enlarged law, the unity of idea, through the nature of the thing itself. When he penetrated to the root of a given action, to its intrinsic necessity, to its main condition, to its starting point, he always found these resting in the nature of the acting character; this he laid hold of, and from this point of unity he remodelled the fiction he had adopted with a wonderful poetic instinct, thus grasping at once the living principle of the character, the action, and the drama. Beyond this there was nothing more to do: no future genius will ever be able to discover a deeper law of dramatic composition, as little as any epic poet will ever be able to surpass in structure the works of Homer. With this idea, with this germ, which incloses within it the dramatic action, Shakespeare acted like a wise gardener, of whom it is hard to say, whether his art is experience of nature, or his natural treatment, art. He puts these germs, each after its own kind, in the soil that suits them best, gives them with respect to sun and wind, the most favourable situation, plants in their vicinity the things that hurt them least, and which improve and adorn the view, shuns no toil, and spares no pruning, delights in the natural fruit, and yet gladly "marries the gentler scion to the wild stock". This is what all our separate deductions have pointed out; that the structure of every Shakespearian drama is carried

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out in a strict proportion with as much instinctive feeling as artistic insight; that there exists a harmonious relation between the whole and its parts, between the situation and the requirements of the historical soil, between both of these and the action, between the whole and the characters, their motives, and their passions; farther, that the characters are so arranged and chosen, that one serves as a foil to another, thereby depicting their motives more distinctly, and thereby again placing the action and the idea of the piece in a stronger light. By this arrangement and relation of all the parts to one intellectual centre, every thing extraneous, arbitrary, and unessential, falls away from the action, every thing episodical and apparently distant and foreign is brought together and united, so that the junction of all peculiarities, however far apart they may have lain, makes at last a connected concordant whole, so that the most violent deviations from the main road, always lead eventually to the same goal, that even in the contrasts there appears similarity, and in the varieties, unison, that the most anomalous parts, even the comic interludes in the serious dramas, aim at one and the same effect. Starting from this unity of idea, Shakespeare may have allowed himself to deviate from the law of unity of action and to combine several actions. His work of art advances from an external to an internal law. There is even in painting no requirement more indispensable, than unity of action. Nevertheless we admire more than many other creations of his art, those pictures of Titian's, where the chief action is accompanied by a second which stands in a symbolic relation, in *unity of spirit* with the first; the outward eye must wander, but the inward will be fixed in a far higher sense on the one soul of the picture.

Nothing is more false, than the uniting of two heterogeneous actions, such as we see in the plays of the Ben Jonson school: they are repugnant to the feelings before we know why; wo watch, as it were, for the progress of a melody, which is suddenly crossed by another quite incongruous with it. But Shakespeare's method of harmonizing a second action with the first, of developing in his double actions, different but equally essential parts of one idea, together or in opposition, so that their inner connection constitutes their unity, this is a great and astonishing enrichment of art. This method serves at the same time to complete the illusion of the work of art. For the more the single parts in the drama seem disparate, the more will that variety and freedom of movement be attained, which conceals the artist's intention; the work of art is like an animated organism; no machinery reveals the creative artist, the body of action appears, as it were, in an entirely arbitrary motion, and its law lies hid within like an invisible soul.

Only the artistic ability, with which the arranging hand in Shakespeare's compositions is concealed, can explain why it remained so long undiscovered, and that it required a master like Goethe, to show its inner conformity to rule. Even after it was shewn, there was a disinclination to believe it, because this new view militated so strongly against the ruling prejudice. Hazlitt was on the track of this regularity in Cymbeline, but he seemed to shrink from the conviction, that the poet had intentionally created the concordance of the actions in his dramas, and that he had not rather produced them unconsciously merely from the force of natural association of feelings. People were so fettered by the idea of Shakespeare's natural genius,

that Ben Jonson's impartial testimony to the assistance of art in his works, received as little attention as Goethe's intimation and Coleridge's assertion, that the poet's judgment and regularity were as great as his unconscious productiveness. The question, whether Shakespeare's works are rather the results of the happiest instinct, or of a wonderful power of conscious intellect, is so closely connected with the maintaining of his assumed irregularity, that we must dedicate a few words to it, in this place. It is true, that the first impression of Shakespeare's works, on the youthful reader especially, who does not immediately perceive the deep traces of mind, is that of an entirely instinctive production. Shakespeare was a sensualist of a thoroughly intuitive nature. He was, perhaps even more than Goethe, "devoted to the holy spirit of the senses" and averse to one-sided abstraction and philosophic speculation. Nature and humanity were his book of revelation, and experience the source of his wisdom. His sense must have been the soundest that ever man possessed; his eye a smooth mirror, his ear an echo, which repeated all sounds and images with the utmost fidelity. When he speaks of music, of pictures, of inanimate nature, he is as perfectly at home in these regions as in history and social life. With this healthy keenness of sense, he must have united a desire of knowledge to which nothing was indifferent, a watchfulness that nothing could escape, an openness of feeling that left nothing untouched, a memory which retained every impression, and was ready for use on all subjects far off, or near. And with the same soundness, with which all objects were received by his senses, they were transmitted by these to his creative genius. He was in the

happy case of the popular poet of the earliest times, his memory was not overloaded, his senses were not weakened by much knowledge, his mind was uninjured by learning, everything in him arose, at first hand, from nature and experience. For this reason every sensation is so prompt, every thought so striking, every image so descriptive; for this reason his sayings are like swords, which cut the knots of intricate truths, they are like the words of Solomon, upon the most pungent problems, not only poetical, but practical solutions of questions; his sentences were once formally weighed in a learned session at Eton by Dr. Hales, with those of the ancients, and found even more substantial than theirs. Shakespeare, like his Perdita, might consider himself lucky in being devoid of learning, at least of overburdensome learning, since even without it he was a master for most teachers. If then what he adopted and received was in this way so lively and ready, we should be inclined to conclude, that his power of production also was as ready, and as little disturbed by consciousness and planned labour, as the poems of a Homer. But here lies a great difference, in the nature of the materials, in the nature of the times, and in the nature of the different forms of poetry. Shakespeare's materials were like the time, and like human nature, penetrated with intellectual elements, which could not be understood without conscious power of mind. The mysteries of mind are not self-evident and recognized, they require a knowledge of the inner life, and a constant exercise of the mental eye. The Homeric poems were originally rhapsodies, which required the arranging hand of later times, to give them with conscious intention that unity, which in the Odyssey, as in Shakespeare's

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poems, is rather to be called a unity of idea, than of action; the drama on the contrary is the work of one head, which must apply the arranging hand himself. In this species, moreover, there lies everything, that makes unconscious production almost impossible. Let it be granted, that Shakespeare wrote his first works from the mere impulse of poetic instinct, that he never even doubted after their creation, nor even examined, whether they were good or not, yet the circumstance alone of his dramas being represented led necessarily, in the course of time, to consciousness. The actors worked with him and he with them, whose whole business it was to account to themselves for every line of their parts, to whom Shakespeare himself prescribed to play their parts with constant consideration of the preceding and of the whole. Could it be conceived, that his creative eye alone had not only penetrated, but formed the matter; could it even be thought possible, which is far more incredible, that the combination of the parts, the parallelism of the characters, the convergence of the episodes, the form and structure of the artistic work, had succeeded without his will or knowledge, as it were in his sleep; that he was altogether the unconscious vessel of pure revelation, — yet the consideration and conversation about the play thus produced, must have more and more awakened consciousness and introduced reflection into the poet's work; he must have had *to learn* the technicality of art, the neglect of which was so severely revenged on Goethe, even if, like Goethe, he had struggled against it. We think, however, that a consciousness in his work was by nature neither remote from nor foreign to the mind of Shakespeare. Just read the passages in Timon, and in the Midsummer-Night's

Dream, where he speaks of the nature of poets and poetry, and say, was he a poet to whom art was a mystery, and its technicality a sealed letter. He produced in the same way as his Posthumus, of whom he himself says, when the latter is describing his wife as a work of art: his tongue made the picture and then put a mind in it. Thus he did himself; and this in a wonderful medium between a strong creative impulse and conscious meditation, with the rarest union of judgment and instinct, of nature and mind. And what is most astonishing is, not that what he had perceived, obtained with him a most sensible and reasonable utterance, without passing through reflection and consciousness, but that this utterance maintained itself in all its power and freshness, in spite of this passage (*Durchgang*), that the keenness of perception, as well as the ease of the mental elaboration, permits none of the tedium of labour to be visible. The ripening and the birth took place rapidly without the waiting for the nine months of the human embryonic life, much less for the nine years of the Horatian file. This working together of instinct and mind in Shakespeare, is not exactly wonderful in itself, but only so from this power and strength; in a less degree it takes place in all continued occupation among men of a healthy nature; and those are the most luminous moments of success in any work, when the thinking mind is in unison with the instinctive feeling of the acting man. In this unison genius really displays itself, not in the sole rule of an irregular instinct or in the state of a pretended inspiration. For genius does not manifest itself in the predominance of any single power, nor is it in itself a definite faculty, but it is the harmonious combination, the united totality of all human faculties. And if in Shakespeare's works we admire

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his imaginative power not without his understanding, both these not without his sense of beauty, all of them not without his moral sense; and if we attribute all together to his genius, we must comprehend under this head, the union of all these faculties, and not consider it as an isolated power, which excludes judgment and reflection, and whose works do not submit to plan and rule. Much rather is the idea of rule essentially inherent to that of genius, and that whole conception of a genius acting without law is the invention of pedants, which has had the sad effect of begetting that mass of false geniuses, who are morally without law, and æsthetically work without law, as if to entitle themselves to the name, according to this convenient definition. If we call Shakespeare's intuition that of a genius, because his outer and inner sense perceived objects most truly, and penetrated beyond their casual excrescences and deficiencies to their essence, their inner truth, that is to say, their law; so on the other hand his poetry is that of a genius, because while he reproduced his objects in artistic representation, he also developed the represented matter in the same way from elementary conditions, from its laws and germs, and because every particular thing is placed as of itself in correct relation to this law, and takes its proper position. So surely as in his observations, he referred from given effects to the necessary causes, as surely did he advance in his productions from the cause he had discovered to all its ramifications, but always in the regular order of cause and effect, as if nature had entrusted to him the secret of her organization and her working powers. But this highest regularity which governs Shakespeare's plays, was not to be divined and could not be acquired by the slight juggle of a dreamy

fancy. It presupposes a conscious penetration into the depths of human nature, a candid spirit, which disposes of all the faculties of the inner life, which knows and understands the motions of the human heart, which has pondered deeply and comprehensively upon the domain of human powers and passions; without this contemplative meditation such regularity is not possible, nor such an embodiment of the spiritual, such a spiritualization of the sensual, as characterizes Shakespeare's and all true poetry. The knightly romances of the middle ages shew plainly enough, what can be accomplished by mere divination in psychological problems: they are, therefore, worthless and formless. The poets of these tales were wanting in genius, in that unfallen spirit (*ungefallene Geist*), which contains within it the original harmony with man's true nature, which consequently knows how to recognize and describe the operations of the soul and the passions, and which, while describing them, necessarily comprehends in itself the law-giving and regulating power, and can dispense with conventional, external rules, which are, as Lessing says, like a crutch for the healthy and sound. These conventional rules may be learned, but the law of genius is born with it. The rules of the French drama may be acquired; they enable even moderate talents to produce works of understanding, but true genius can neither imitate, nor be imitated. He would be very much mistaken, who thought he could write works like Shakespeare's, because he knew the laws of their production. For even the judgment that made these works so regular, is only one of the faculties that altogether constitute genius. Shakespeare lies equally removed from those of his dramatic countrymen, who composed irregular works with

merely natural talent, and from those Frenchmen, who with intellectual dexterity wrought according to an arbitrary rule; these separate ways seldom lead beyond the point, where true art only begins. When a regularly formed work of art has been accomplished, consciously as it was by Lessing, it is further requisite, that this regularity should be as much as possible concealed, that the intellectual contents should be wrapped up in sensible forms. If we ascribe the regularity of a work of art chiefly to conscious treatment, still that specific faculty of *poetic* genius, of representing every thing plastically, in sensible representation with living imagery, is an essentially natural gift, an involuntary want and an instinctive force and impulse of the poet's mind. By means of this gift, the work of art bears the stamp of that unstudied ease, which gives it the appearance of artlessness; the intentional vanishes at the first impression, as, on the contrary, on closer inspection the apparently unintentional vanishes before the underlying regularity. As in genius itself the opposition between spirit and nature is removed, so in its works the real appearance, and the ideal truth, image, and thought, the spiritual contents and the sentient form, are reconciled and adjusted.

But passing from the regularity in Shakespeare's works to the consideration of their *conformity to art*, where, in these works so admired for their truth to nature, where is the *ideality* which makes the true poet, the elevation above the horizon of reality, which we require in the true work of art?

It is essentially the casualties and deficiencies of the real world, its imperfections and deformities, which have generated in the human mind the need of art; on the

ground of this need, art received its law and vocation to free us from all the baseness, unmeaningness, and ugliness, which cleave to actual life, to elevate us to the serene height of a fairer existence, and, imitating nature, to ennoble it. This law was not at all unfamiliar to the people of Shakespeare's time. His contemporary Bacon gave to poetry this great vocation: as the world of the senses is of lower value, than the human soul, so poetry must grant to men, what history denies: it must satisfy the mind with the appearance of things, as the satisfying reality is not to be had, and thus prove, that the human soul delights in a more perfect order and a nobler greatness, than are to be found in nature. Shakespeare himself appears to have attained to the same views. He is everywhere of Aristotle's opinion, that art consists in the imitation of nature, or as he would have said, in the emulative imitation of nature. Thus we have seen in Antony, that he knew the twofold instance of nature outdoing all the ideal of art, and of art triumphantly defying nature. For he would have shared Goethe's opinion, that the ideal of art coincides with the ideas and types of nature; he would not, like Schiller, besides and beyond this ideal developed out of nature, have admitted another transcendental ideal lying beyond the world of the senses.

But if Shakespeare theoretically held this correct view of art, how does his practice agree with it? Have we not ourselves said, that the interest in moral and psychological truth is always higher with him, than the interest in outer æsthetic beauty? Did we not thereby place ourselves in the ranks of those, who admire nothing in Shakespeare but nature, reality, — the realistic principle? Did he not, in

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this striving after truth to nature, often sink to the level of the Dutch painting, entirely forgetting that province of art, which lies in developing the beautiful and the noble, out of the deformed and the mean? Did he not in representing the bad which is discordant and ugly in itself, far overstep the line of beauty? Is not the combination of the noble with the mean, the mixing of jest and earnest, alone sufficient to characterize the common reality of nature in his plays? And did he not too much betray in all this the age, when to expose the nakedness of nature even to its utmost ugliness was the universal business of popular poetry, of that clownish literature of burlesques and satires peculiar to the 16th and 17th centuries, and in higher regions even the business of a Machiavelli and a Spinoza?

In what then is it, (we repeat the question,) in which the ideal vein of the poet could manifest itself?

We would answer this question otherwise than some have done, Ulrici for example, who considered that Shakespeare's only method of giving his works an ideal stamp, lay in the unity of idea in the composition. We believe the ideal vein of a great poet betrays itself as little in single expedients, as his vein of genius in the predominance of a single faculty; we would reply, this ideal vein manifests itself in nothing less than everything.

It shews itself first in the diction, as we have previously remarked, in the use of metaphorical language, and in the nature and object of this. In the double nature of metaphors, in this combination of similar objects, in the blending of the twofold in one, there lies of itself a more powerful and elevated expression, such as is suitable to

the description of mighty passions; the figurative impulse of poetic fancy finds utterance in them, because they contain within the smallest medium of poetry, that embodiment of the spiritual, which is on a large scale the highest aim of all art.

In the second place, the representation essentially contributes to the ideal effect of a Shakespearian drama; by means of this we first perceive the whole power of the poet. However natural the scenic representation of a play may be, it will always raise the spectator above the prose of reality. For no other art works with such united powers and means on human fancy. All other arts take away somewhat from the life of the object represented, in their attempt to imitate life. Painting takes away the full form, sculpture the colour, both, the motion; the epos changes acts into words, music changes words into tones, it is the drama only that uses all the means at once, — form, colour, tone, word, look, motion, and action; it gives the full effect of what is represented, and takes away only the narrow boundaries of time and space. The result of this effect can only be laboriously supplied in reading by recollection and imagination; we remain with feelings, considerations, and doubts, suspended at isolated parts, and with difficulty arrive at the total impression of the whole we have read, much less to an idea of the impression, which a representation is able to produce. In representation, on the contrary, single impressions do not take root, they pass away before they can fix; the few inequalities, which arrest us in reading, do no harm to the force and beauty of the body of the drama, when in full movement. During the performance we are not, as in reading, forced to dwell upon the words,

but on that which the play represents, the action. It is just www.libtool.com.cn this, which brings out the ideal effect. For in the man in action all his combined powers are called into play, deeds claim the man's whole being, and bring his best or strongest parts to their height; his sensitiveness and thought, his will, and all the energy and properties of his nature, converge as in a point to the aim of his action, the man moves in his entirety, and this is of itself a poetical moment, one which every deed even in real life bears within itself. The more naturally this is represented by the performer, the greater will be the charm of the performance, the more strongly will the force and depth of the effect, as well as the ideal splendour of the drama stand out, and for this no degree of thought and explanation can compensate.

The ideal in Shakespeare's dramas shews itself further, it is true, in that point also which Ulrici laid stress upon, in the unity of composition, in the close relation of all parts and episodes, of all characters and actions, to the one fundamental idea of the poet's plan; a quality on which especially the spiritualization of the matter rests, which is the essential mark of the ideal nature of a poetic work.

This ideality shews itself, also, in the high moral spirit, which in Shakespeare's plays, controls the complications of fate and the issues of human actions, in that spirit, which develops before us that higher order, which Bacon required in poetry, indicating the eternal and uncorrupted justice in human things, the finger of God, which our dull eyes do not perceive in reality.

Shakespeare's idealizing spirit shews itself also, where it will be most disputed, in his characters. Here the poet indeed clings most firmly to reality, because here the motives

of the actions were to be grounded, their roots to be planted; and this he thought he could not make true enough to nature, because with the truth of the motive, the value of the work of art stands and falls. But, however much Shakespeare's characters appear to be simply natural, we have shewn above, that as soon as we place them beside life, their ideal character, their typical greatness, the normal idea of the given form of character, comes to view: they may appear merely as simple copies from originals, even of a subordinate or doubtful nature, yet they are always, according to the Aristotelian law, embellished, or at least placed in a strong or favourable light. If we examine his tragic figures, in which the Aristotelian requirement of mixed characters excludes all ideal perfection, in which the inner discord, the turning away from the good and beautiful is the theme to be represented, we shall still discover even in the self-destroying passion a greatness, and in the aberration a human nobility, which compels our admiration. In the worst of his villains there is still a power of self-command, or an intellectual superiority, or a steady consistency and a grandeur in misfortune, which gives even to the vicious, a better or at least a strong and uncommon side. If we look at his burlesque characters, which appear compounded of folly and caricature; they are always given as shadows to bring the fairer side of human nature into the light; but even considered in themselves they give, like the best genre-pictures an artistic satisfaction, not only by the reflection of the pleasant humour with which the poet depicts them, but also by the inner self-satisfaction and happy determination in these figures, which affect us agreeably wherever we meet them.

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But let us leave our comparison of Shakespeare's characters with life, and compare them with the best that the dramatic art of modern times has produced, and then we shall see with astonishment not only what a quintessence of nature, but even of ideal beauty dwells in these forms. Just ask the actor: in every drama of the modern poets there are weak parts, which a good performer dislikes to take; Shakespeare has hardly any such. Compare any of his unimportant characters, that picture for example of weakness, unfaithfulness, and varying inclination, Proteus, with Goethe's Clavigo, Weislingen, or Ferdinand, and even the weakling becomes a strong character; place Antony beside these, and the effeminate man becomes a hero; in all poetry this can only be compared with the characters of Homer, with whom even Paris is a hero. But if we turn to his most ideal characters, to his Henry and Posthumus, in whom, not without conflict, the highest degree of human virtue and intellectual excellence is attained; they are not, indeed, like those heroes of the French stage, or the flowery creations of Schiller's images of merely fancied existence, they are realistic ideals, but on that very account truly ideal characters, consistent with truth, whose rare eminence in Shakespeare's group of characters is raised, even by the rareness of their number, into a far higher light, than the excellence of those empty personifications of abstract ideals. Yet even these do not represent the highest of Shakespeare's characters: these must be sought among his women. No poet has at once so truly depicted and so highly exalted the female sex, as Shakespeare. Nowhere has he condescended to represent those female characters which were the favourites of our greatest modern poets, those beings mid-way

between criminals and martyrs, between courtezans and goddesses; nowhere has he multiplied the immoral among the sex with that predilection, nor surrounded their weakness with that attraction, which is prevalent amongst us; he has never repeated his Cleopatra and Cressida, and even in once representing them, he has not clothed the charming temptress with tempting charms. Where he has depicted women, who from an easy intellectual adroitness distinguish themselves by a free and fearless tongue, he has surrounded these Rosalinds and Portias with a wall of unapproachable chastity. He leads them, disguised in male attire into ticklish and trying situations, and into rude contacts, and even then the freest among them come out of these situations with perfect innocence and purity. It is in the naïve female characters of his third period, those which would have been as difficult for Goethe to design, as Goethe's females of the naïve cast were for Schiller, that the beauty of the feminine, nay, even of the human ideal of that period, is most perfect. In them is seen that completeness of nature, by which we understand that which makes us men so much oftener look up admiringly towards women, than ever we could feel ourselves tempted to look down upon them. No single prevailing quality disturbs the balance of their nature; the qualities of spirit and soul mingle together in perfect harmony; the original indivisibility of nature, her highest idea, appears in its completeness, — the concord of head and heart, of inclination and will; the unconsciousness of themselves and their prerogatives, the certainty with which they are wholly and ever what they are, the self-reliance with which they permit nothing from without to trouble their course, the unconcern with which, disturbed by no consi-

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rations, they give way to their feelings, the way in which they are entirely occupied with the subjects that for the moment affect them, this admirable totality gives to these creatures their endless charm. Compare these beings, who are untouched by all the feminine tricks of coquetry and affectation, and all the little devices of vanity, with the vague characters of Schiller, with the vapid figures of even Goethe, in both of whom the pressure of conventional life stifles the germ of fresh nature which springs forth in healthy strength in all Shakespeare's women, — and then learn what is true ideality, whether of art, or of moral life.

In all this, however, the final verdict respecting the ideality of Shakespeare's dramas has not yet been pronounced. That can, unquestionably, only be felt and observed in the whole, not in this or that isolated part. The single character can properly only be a means to the aim of the whole, and the ideal may be so far latent within it, without this being prejudicial to the work of art. In the statues of antiquity the ideal lies in the single form, because this form is at once the complete work of art. In a compound work of poetry we seek the artistic hand first in the symmetry and combination of the whole, and in the definite bearing of its contents. We cannot then blame the distorted, the mean, and the bad in separate parts, when they serve to place the higher, healthier, better, in a fairer light. The poet can shew us in his characters a declension from the line of beauty, truth, and goodness, an overstepping or a falling short of it, provided he himself with his arranging hand keeps closely to this intellectual direction, to this line, provided he measures by this line the value of the characters, their fates, and the origin and issue of the action.

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The ideal, the necessary, the moral, and the true may even appear only in the results of what happens, and may in proper tragedy be always of a negative kind, yet the poet has already fulfilled his task in that poetic-moral background, that ideal heaven over his real world; the ideal, then, rests finally, not or not only in the quality of the characters, and not in the nature of the action, but where also the unity of Shakespeare's dramas lies, in the idea.

But however true all this, which we have endeavoured to clear up, may be, yet something remains behind in our feelings, which refuses to be satisfied with what we have said. The realistic element in Shakespeare is so evident, when we compare him with the Greek drama, that no protest however striking, can remove the impression of this sharp contrast. Such general impressions have indeed extraordinarily deceived even the great masters of art. Goethe had long seen an unnatural ideality in Homer, until he found it disappear more and more before the wonderfully real truth of the poet; Schiller on the contrary at first saw nothing but realism in Shakespeare and felt repelled by his harsh truth; but afterwards he became more and more persuaded of his ideality, which seemed to bring him near, in his view, to the old drama. The mass of real matter is so great in Shakespeare, that it is difficult to penetrate to his spirit, which essentially requires the representation by great actors under intelligent direction to bring it to light: this is it, which in this question will always lead to great errors of judgment. But even, if we constrain ourselves to see ancient tragedy in the most realistic, and Shakespeare in the most idealistic light, still we shall always find it very difficult to compare our dramatists with Homer, in regard to the

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equal balance of real and ideal elements,—a merit in the epic poet which our Goethe and Schiller never ceased to admire.

When the ideal of modern art is in question, we shall always be tempted to injustice, if we do not carefully weigh the different conditions, under which ancient and modern times fostered the arts. Ancient art, arising out of a pure, uncorrupt primitive existence, and among men in intimate communion with nature, carried out, as it were, in those wonderful forms of Grecian sculpture the creations of nature, elevating and amplifying her when she had reached the limit of her formations. That race of men succeeded in discovering the laws of perfect beauty at once in nature and in the human mind, and in stamping them upon physically dead, but spiritually ever living forms. The best which this art accomplished, and which dramatic poetry side by side with it produced, has the advantage of a sort of necessity, truth, and beauty, for which every art in modern times has striven in vain, since we have for ever outstepped the youth of the world, and its easy conditions of existence, into a life rendered hard by a thousand cares for subsistence, and by painful struggles with material obstructions and mental difficulties. We will return to the poems of such times for the same reasons that incline us also to their history: it is easier to enjoy Athens' greatness under Pericles, than the Periclean age of England under Elizabeth, only because the greatness of the first is more simple; if both poets are equally familiar to us, we shall rather pass from Shakespeare to the Orestes of Æschylus, than the reverse, because in the lighter, youthful, innocent conditions of art as of life, it is easier and pleasanter to linger, than in the complicated ones. We put forward these propositions not in any degree

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to embitter our admiration for modern art, encumbered with difficulties as it is, the mere conquest of which is a high merit; — but only to intimate, that our pleasure in it has not for a moment made us partial or forgetful of our admiration of ancient art, which will ever remain the purest source of all art-culture so long as the taste and civilization of the world do not go wholly astray But since in modern times human nature is immensely dilated, society enlarged in all directions, and religious, literary, and political culture has laid open immeasurable spaces and depths, it no longer sufficed to reflect in art a merely approximate national culture, narrow, easily comprehended, working only in one direction, and soon reaching a certain height, it was necessary to master the whole wide world and its history, all its external and internal matter; and *to hold up the mirror to nature* is perhaps a more difficult task for art now-a-days, than it was in ancient times to emulate her noblest works.

However in antiquity also, the real truth of nature, the reflected image of life, was always (at least in that branch of art, which received the highest finish in Homer's epos), the first condition of poetry; in this requirement Homer would agree with Shakespeare, and with Lope de Vega, and with the most genuine realistic poet of modern times, our own Goethe. The only difference is, that in those times life in itself cast a fairer image upon the mirror. The heroic world, the great subject of Greek poetry, is cognizant only of men who rest upon themselves alone, who, unconfined by political and conventional bonds, are a law to themselves; such an age is itself poetic from the youthfulness and simplicity of manners. In modern times, and in our northern climate especially, the human body and frame lost

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its original beauty by outward covering and the inward disguise of hypocrisy, and by manifold deviations from pure nature; the wants of life among us furrow the form and features, and efface the fair type of nature; they favour on the other hand the development of the individual, they elaborate the mind and its resources in a more complete manner, and generate energy of character. Hence it is that all ideal of art among the Germanic races, besides its contrast to ancient art, bears another special stamp quite distinct from the southern Romanic art even of modern times, such as is quite characteristic of Shakespeare's drama. Southern art, whether music, painting, or poetry, has ever preferred beauty of outward form, the appearances that touch and please the senses, smoothness of melody, soothing sounds in verse, regular forms; — northern art, on the contrary, was forced by the deficiencies of external nature to cultivate the inner and spiritual, the significant in import, the heart in musical composition, sound sense in versification, truth in psychological expression. In these qualities northern music and painting surpassed the south, and a master, like Titian, reconciled in this respect north and south, while Handel, like Shakespeare, first became great, when he gave up the Italian for the German taste. This direction of art rendered unavoidable the introduction of all moral and spiritual elements, of which numberless Spanish and Italian poems have a very moderate share; and this combination compensates to all northern art by an intrinsic worth, for the loss of that external attractiveness, of which it deprives it: this it is, which determines the balance between a Shakespeare and an Ariosto so decidedly in favour of the first. The notions of beauty demand, according to this, an essen-

tial discrimination. In nature we may find a woman beautiful, although she may possess no regular beauty of feature; the play of soul, the appearance of inward beauty makes amends for, nay, even surpasses the cold beauty of form in which no mind shines through. So a tree bursting into blossom is indisputably a charming sight to every one, although not even to be represented pictorially. The soul, the life of the tree manifests itself at its highest point, in the moment of blossom, in the first appearance of fruit, and this living natural beauty delights us more than beauty of art. More at least *for the moment*, although hardly for a continuance. For to the essence of this living beauty of nature, transitoriness necessarily belongs. We could no more endure the long continuance of the loveliest play of soul in the human countenance from the over-strained attention necessary, than we could the brilliant abundance of full-bloom in a tree. But beauty of feature in itself, the beauty of a finely grown tree in its unpretending form, wins us exactly by its continuance and uniform aspect, and is therefore artistically purer and more valuable. In the longer epic therefore, we could not bear the imitation of that living and intellectual beauty; it requires plastic beauty and a severe well sustained style; in the drama, on the other hand, which passes before us transiently, in the short time occupied by the representation, in which, according to its idealistic nature, the spiritual is designed to be manifested, imitating life by life and not in dead letter or form, — in the drama, that inner-spiritual, that living beauty is quite in its proper place. And this is the reason, why Shakespeare's interest in moral and psychological truth is always greater than his interest in exterior æsthetic beauty, why his poetic

ideas were always of a moral psychological nature, why his art-ideal is essentially of a spiritual nature. Through this art-ideal, in which truth, goodness, and beauty go hand in hand, Shakespeare belongs wholly to the Germanic race, and the northern style of taste. But, leaving off the comparison of Shakespeare with the ancient poets, the place which he fills within the region of northern artistic taste, with regard to his ideality, is most discernible, when we examine him in general beside the art productions of modern times.

It might have been expected, that the more the purely poetic circumstances of antiquity were lost in the intricate relations of modern times, the more must the latter have felt the need of elevating themselves by their art-productions, out of prosaic reality. This need the middle-ages seem indeed to have felt. The chivalric epic poetry of romances moves wholly in ideal, supernatural spheres, and the allegories and idylls, which succeeded to these, retained this idealistic character in another way. The remoteness of these poems from the actual world, and from every-day humanity, is universal. The wonderful and fantastic, the supernatural in all forms, giants, knights-errant, magicians, martyrs, performers of miracles, saints, confessors of all kinds, are the known subjects of these works. In these wholly ideal matters, reality was then introduced in a way which art ought to have utterly avoided. Into these romantic poems of the middle-ages there entered the well known notions and representations of a peculiar kind of honour, love, and truth, a peculiar feudal service and love-service, which rested wholly on the conventional customs of courtly chivalry, on the arbitrary tempers and incidental

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manners of the time, even on that which art should strip from reality, in order to arrive at general truth. This strange mixing of the marvellous and the conventional with every thing flat and stationary that cleaves to it, has been retained by the whole of the south even after the close of the middle-ages, by the Italian epic poets no less than by the dramatists of Spain. The Spanish drama turns entirely upon an excitable and punctilious feeling of honour, and its whimsical conflicts with love and loyalty, or it took up the extravagant material of the romances of chivalry, overloaded itself with improbabilities, impossibilities, and confusion, and became, as Cervantes said, a mirror not of life, but of adventures. This is true even of the religious drama in Spain, in which the marvellous found uncontrolled entrance, which prolonged the childhood of the stage, even after it had reached its maturity, and even in later times led the profound genius of a Calderon into errors.

Against this art-character of the middle-ages among the Romanic races of the south, the taste and disposition of the Germanic stock of the north in modern times reacted, after the humanistic and reformatory movements in the Netherlands, Germany, and England. This time offers as strong a contrast to the middle-ages, in art as in religion and politics. To combine this art, under the designation of romantic, with the mediæval southern a t in contradistinction to the ancient, is as immense a fault as it would be to unite the plastic art of Greece with the old symbolic art of the east. With the same right, with which we sometimes call Shakespeare a romantic poet, because he has dramatized some tales of chivalry, we might call Homer so also, because of the adventures in his Odyssey.

Modern art, which in opposition to the Romanic ought to be designated as Germanic, northern, protestant, exhibits rather its distinctive, sharply-defined, and essential character in this, that it equally avoided the degeneracy of romantic art in both directions, in the supernatural and the conventional of chivalry, and went back, as a natural reaction, to the principle of truth to nature, which was entirely neglected in the middle-ages. This reaction, as is the case with all reactions, overdid itself in two directions. The rude literature of the 16th century, the genre-painting of the Netherlands, and similar branches of art, fell back from the supernatural even *below* nature; the anti-conventional striving of Shakespeare's and Goethe's contemporaries degenerated into rudeness and free-thinking; the vague characters of moral poetry changed into the eccentric ones of the original English novels; extravagant adventures took the place of common domestic prose in the tales and plays of ordinary life. Art, which had strayed among formless ideals, had to be brought back to what was comprehensible in nature in order to recover a sure standard of judgment: perfect truth was now considered all-important; the least and lowest was not considered unworthy of artistic treatment, and mere technical facility of imitation became the test of talent. In this way modern art arrived at the opposite extreme of naked truth to nature in contrast to the supernatural, and in the stead of knightly customs it placed the conventionalities of the citizen-life of the Germanic middle classes.

This then is Shakespeare's artistic greatness, that standing at the boundary line which divides two periods, at the point of transition from mediæval to modern, from

southern to northern art, he kept the medium between these two extremes, excluded both the extravagant and the conventional, the vague and the narrow, the supernatural and the vulgar, the hyper-real and the hyper-ideal, and returned to the normal place of all art, where reality and ideality closely blend. The romantic taste found its latest refuge in the Spanish drama; the same year (1588), that Lope de Vega began his ample career in this direction, Shakespeare arose in England, and gave another aim to dramatic art. Protestantism gave him the freedom necessary to overcome the pressure of religious ordinances and despotism; he was able to banish mysteries and moralities, the whole religious circle of romantic poetry, miracles and miracle-workers, out of the realms of art; he passed by with intentional indifference all false religious heroism, as well as all idyllic quietism. Where he used the marvellous, he did so in a purely symbolic sense, and founded it upon truth and nature. He did not revel wildly with the strange materials of the Spanish plays of chivalry and magic, but he rested on history and the ground of real life, far from the careless genius of Lope, with whose creative impulse he united the prudence of an instinctively philosophic spirit. If the romantic art differs essentially from ancient art by singularity of motive, by close intricacies in facts, by the conventionalities, which cover the simple truth of nature with their capriciousness, Shakespeare in all these respects comes essentially near to the art of antiquity. In his plays there are neither miracles nor whimsical motives. He knew nothing of the conventionalities of the Spanish drama, all the interest in his plays is of a general human value. Where, as in King John, loyalty is the subject, it is

mingled with all the truly human emotions and duties of
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patriotism and morals. Where he depicts fidelity, it is not of that conventional kind dependent on office, situation, and political relations, but free, resting on duty and inclination. Love, with him has nothing to do with a traditional devotedness to woman, and does not lead to continual conflicts with regard to differencies of station; when in his plays, persons of unequal rank fall in love with each other, natural right always takes precedence of conventional prejudices, and those who object to such unions, as Polixenes and Bertram, do so rather from general human motives, than from consideration of their high position. Thus far, he seldom interferes with modern points of honour; the idea of honour with him is identified with that of merit, glory, valour, and manly worth. When Henry V. receives the dauphin's balls, he is too full of true self-respect to consider it an affront; he arms himself to punish the overweening audacity of his rival, not to avenge his own insulted honour. When Posthumus sees Imogen's honour aspersed, he wants her to defend it herself by deeds, and then he will punish Iachimo in a duel, and not by a kind of ordeal will he obtain an imaginary satisfaction for his injured honour. Shakespeare everywhere avows the pure human principles of antiquity, and puts morally the truly human and natural in the place of the mistaken ethical notions of the time, just as æsthetically he introduced it in the place of the supernatural and conventional of romantic art. And just so, he avoids on the other hand the vulgar and conventional of northern genre-poetry. He has only once (in the Merry Wives of Windsor) descended to the representation of ordinary domestic life, the world of mediocrity, and even

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this once he has given a counter-balance to this sphere of life in the adventurous nature of his hero. He has nowhere entered upon a delineation of originals and humorists delighting in unusual freaks and whims, as was begun by the Ben Jonson school, and carried on in the humorous novels of the English; *his* caricatured oddities, his pedants and bullies are public property. He has nowhere depicted the dramatic burlesque, the low vulgar nature for its own sake, like Holberg, but only in contrast to other characters. This is the case even in the description of his Launce or the Carter in Henry IV., where he has descended lowest, we will even allow lower, than would be advisable in any other artist.

Thus viewed in complete contrast to the extremes of southern Romanic, and northern Germanic art, Shakespeare, in a moral sense, always holds the just medium between the supernatural and the unnatural of life, occupying the place of real, inartificial humanity, and in an æsthetic sense, the medium between extravagance and chance, the place of general truth. In an ethical point of view, we saw him (therefore, at the close of our first volume) taking the lead in the direction of Germanic art, which does not credulously acquiesce in the customs of the age and the manners of the day, but rather strives after an original purity of life, and endeavours to restore the true nature of human relations, which is lost amid the arbitrary laws of convention. Schiller's declaration, that poet's are the guardians of (pure) nature or the searchers for it if lost, is the peculiar manifesto of modern Germanic art; it is only true of the ancient and modern poetry of a Homer or a Shakespeare; the romantic poets of the middle-

ages were, in this sense, neither guardians nor searchers of
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nature. In an æsthetic point of view, on the other hand, we see Shakespeare everywhere with his generalizing views, putting forward those subjects to which a general truth is inherent; it did not satisfy him, that his poetry possessed a substantial matter, with which its outward form was in harmony, it was essential to him, that this matter should be purely human, true, and necessary. With this matter of general value, as independent as possible of time, place, and taste, purified from every thing accidental and arbitrary, Shakespeare's poetry possesses the *True;* with his inimitable gift of description and representation, of making truth sensible and comprehensible, and clothing it with the appearance of reality, it possesses the *Beautiful,* which we cannot imagine apart from the appearance; so far is the true identical with the beautiful, the idea with the ideal. The poet, who gives form and appearance to the abstract and true, and he who, on the other hand, spiritualizes common reality, animates matter, generalizes the particular, and makes the incidental obedient to laws, both of these meet in the same operation, in the representation of the beautiful, in the union of the real and the ideal.

Thus then Shakespeare, viewed in reference to this combining of real and ideal elements, appears so many-sided, that we should in vain attempt to exhaust his poetic merits by any exclusive description. Goethe has said, that all synonymes, with which we distinguish art-character, Hellenic and Romanic, antique and modern, southern and northern, objective and subjective, naïve and sentimental, natural and artificial &c. lead back to the question as to the superiority of realistic or ideal treatment. And in fact we may demon-

strate in Shakespeare, that he combines in himself these two fundamental qualities, and therefore cannot be characterized exclusively by any of the other designations. There are in general very few poets that can be distinguished altogether by one of these contrasts, the balance will always lean to one side, as in Shakespeare it is always undeniably in favour of the realistic; but in no other than in him, is the weight and the counterpoise so great, that in the gravity of the one, the other may easily be quite overlooked. Regarded from different sides he is sometimes the one, sometimes the other, but in reality neither, because he is both at once. Compared with the romantic poets of the middle-ages he is antique, with the ancients he is modern, with French dramatists he is the poet of nature, with his English contemporaries he is the poet of civilization; compared with the Spaniards he is realistic, and with the English humorists he is ideal. At one time his poetry appears to us to have flowed forth unvoluntarily like the popular songs, at another time to be art-poetry composed with full consciousness. If Schiller declared the sign of the poet of nature to be, that his work succeeded as by a lucky hit, not requiring amelioration, then Shakespeare seems to be of this class; but when we see how happily he improved his successful hit in Hamlet, we acknowledge him to be an artist, who handles his subjects as an intelligent critic. According to Schiller the natural (naïve) poet is more rarely mistaken in his matter, than the sentimental. Shakespeare seldom erred in this, but when he did, his mistake was changed into a master-stroke; he possessed that compact nature which Goethe envied, always setting the right before him, and seizing the right means. If we consider how Shake-

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speare takes all his materials from the world and from experience, we shall find him a poet of nature; but if we observe, on the other hand, how he gives the precious blood of his own breast for the nourishment of his children, he is a sentimental poet. If common matter (always following Schiller's distinctions) is dangerous to the natural poet, spiritual enthusiasm to the sentimental, then Shakespeare has avoided both dangers; in the former, spirit is often wanting, in the latter, subject; laxness is the usual fault of the natural poet, exaggeration of the sentimental poet: who would accuse Shakespeare of either? He unites the virtues, and avoids the faults of both styles. If poetry is with the poet of nature a happy possession, with the sentimental it is a meritorious acquisition, it is in Shakespeare a possession continually increased by new acquisition. Schiller calls the drama the representative form of all art-poetry. This form almost exclusively occupied our poet, who was almost exclusively the poet of nature. Even the results prove, that Shakespeare combined both styles; master-pieces of the natural style, says Schiller, will be followed by imitations, which are flat copies of vulgar nature, the master-pieces of the sentimental style will call forth fantastic productions: in England and Germany Shakespeare has, at all times, been followed by both of them. He appears, everywhere, happily placed between these various sides of poetic nature, not actually belonging to either. The great grasp of his mind shews him to be a poet peculiarly belonging to modern times; but if we regard the purity, naturalness, and simplicity of his art, he is like a poet of antiquity. He has given proofs, that in the lyric and didactic styles, in which the moderns distinguished

themselves, he was a match for them, but he concentrated himself on the highest object of poetry, on actions, like the ancients. But if we look beyond the poetry to the poet, no modern poet appears to have possessed a higher subjectivity, than Shakespeare; yet in his poetry, he is as objective, and as completely resigns his personality, as the ancients did. He has a wealth of feelings and thoughts, such as the most accomplished poet of later times could not shew, but the way, in which he avoids displaying the treassures of his wisdom, is quite an ancient mode of self-denial; he felt the truth and beauty of things without boasting of the beauty and truth of his feelings, he sought to recognize what was great, never to appear great himself. Like the ancients he kept himself free from all pathological sympathies, from poetical partiality for certain favourite figures and objects; consequently he took up, willingly, as the old dramatists did, materials that had been already used, to which he merely put the finishing touches, as the master-hand does to the rough-hewn statue. Thus he succeeded in gathering out of the shapeless materials of modern times and northern races, effects, which Goethe would willingly have proved to be unattainable. Art, with him, does not look as if it were, what Goethe declared it to be in the north, a mere hot-house plant; it appears in his hands, of natural growth and flourishing in tropical abundance. Goethe feigned himself inclined to declare all modern art worthless, but the worth of Shakespeare's poetry stood so gigantically before him, that it made him despond. And, in fact, Shakespeare is not merely the combination of our two greatest poets, but he even surpasses them when combined, not only in matter, but in artistic nature. The

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extent of his matter is so immense that the poetic experience of the two Germans united, notwithstanding the superior culture of the age, is not to be compared with it. We shall find Shakespeare not only more intuitive and realistic than Schiller, but even than Goethe, if we consider his successful command of the world of history; we shall find him not only more ideal than Goethe, but even than Schiller, if we take into consideration his much deeper spiritualization, and his poetic comprehension of history, or when we fall back upon his moral philosophy and his human ideal. Let us finally try in Shakespeare this union of real and ideal nature, wherein Schiller recognized the highest pitch to which human nature can attain, by what follows: In almost all ages and countries the twin poets are found together, each of whom has a prevalent share in one of the opposite elements of art, the sensual and spiritual, the real and ideal; in Germany alone we had in the last century Haller and Hagedorn, Klopstock and Wieland, Lessing and Herder, in this contrast, and finally Schiller and Goethe in full consciousness of it; but Shakespeare combined these two qualities so completely, that it is only in his imitators that his double nature separates; he himself has, neither in his age, nor in his country, found any contrast in either direction.

After these considerations it will appear less and less strange, that we give to Shakespeare, in the history of the modern drama, the same place, that Homer holds in the history of the epos, that we look upon him as the sublime spring from which all the streams of dramatic poetry ought to

be derived, without vainly endeavouring to carry their flow higher, than the fountain-head. It remains for us to shew, by a few remarks, that Shakespeare in the times he lived in, and the country and locality in which he wrote, was not without a singularly favourable union of circumstances, which make this prominent position still more explicable. The times, very far from being a hindrance to a great poet, were actually from lucky local and national conditions, the most propitious that modern times could offer. In a few instances they might be prejudicial to Shakespeare's poetry, but on the whole he had cause to bless his happy star. For all the conditions for making great times, and begetting and nourishing great men, lay around him, and no one will pass over this lightly, who knows that even genius is not elevated above the conditions of the age, and that even the best seed requires good ground to grow in.

Every thing seemed to combine to make England in the time of Elizabeth the chief inheritor of the treasures of cultivation, that Europe had won in the rich times of its regeneration in the 15th and 16th centuries. These times and their performances were the wondrous antitype of all that our striving and fermenting present presents as its own property. With us everything thrives, that can be accomplished without great men, without distinguished talents, and without a thoroughly penetrative culture and intellectual concentration; that can be done by the working together of many moderate powers; or that can be effected by the exercise of a one-sided mind, all that depends on technical readiness and mechanical skill. Everything that advances the externals of life, the comfort of existence, the facility of intercourse, the increase of wants, and the possibility of

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satisfying them; larger and larger circles of society are formed, who are to share in possession, in rights, in all that which people call fortune and civilization. But when the question is of leading minds, who in state-affairs can recognize the present necessity and by satisfying it, guide aright the bewildered instinct, who in the church by the weight of great characters seize the inimical powers of the mind by their roots, and only attempt to expel them, who in art and literature are inspired to hold up a noble pattern, which may allure disordered souls and vulgar passions to worthy aims, who in war display surpassing talents, winning the admiration of men, — then we find ourselves amid the many contending powers of the age in an immense and fearful desert. How different was the frame of those times, which knew nothing of the comforts of external life, nothing of the little arts, with which people develop little gifts in little coteries, in order contentedly to carry off a little renown, — those times, where there is needed great merit, shining gifts, useful inventions, and fruitful discoveries, if a man would overcome the difficulties of intercourse, and the adverseness of time and place, where men, therefore, were thrown back on themselves, obliged to draw all their strength from within, and standing alone, to exert themselves for achievements, which no other could accomplish in their stead. Hence arose, in remarkable abundance in all parts of the world, those great characters and creative geniuses, swelling with individual strength, whose outbursts of spirit now testified to a youthfulness and luxuriance of sap, now to a sincerity, modesty, and depth of unostentatious culture, which merits the admiration of all time. When, amid the stream of men of learning in Italy, anti-

quity was revived so that the spirit of Plato walked abroad and inspired new scholars; when, in the Netherlands humanistic learning struck its roots, and the great work of school-reform began, when Germany was shaken out of sleep by her reformer, who gave a shock to the might of Rome, and purified religion and morals; when the bold navigators of Genoa and Portugal opened the way to the Indies, and cast a light upon the extent of the earth; when the Spanish conquerors, as if in sport, laid new kingdoms at the feet of their sovereigns; when Charles V. and Philip II. united the civilized and the uncivilized world, when Macchiavelli created anew history and state-policy, and politicians arose in his school who laid open to the human mind, a long disused region of activity; when Copernicus and Galileo penetrated into the mysteries of the heavens; when Italy snatched from Greece the monopoly of the plastic arts and Palestrina became a reformer in music, and Ariosto gave to his generation a new conception of poetry, — in all this we behold a primitive world of creative power, where the eminence of one genius disappears, or becomes common amid the abundance of the like all round him. These were the times, of which Bacon proudly said, their symbol was, in opposition to the known sayings of the ancients, the *plus ultra*, the *imitabile fulmen*, and, what surpasses all admiration, even the *imitabile cœlum*, since ships, like the heavenly bodies, compassed the earth, and in even more intricate pathways.

But the immense excitement of the 150 years from the fall of Constantinople to Shakespeare's prime, proved in its fruits and results of essential advantage to the Germanic races, to their states and their intellectual progress, — races

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which in contrast to the middle-ages were to give laws and form to this later era. Italy had at that time exhausted all the luxury of her inward powers, and Spain all the exuberance of her outward strength, and neither had arrived at a true national prosperity; in Italy the burden of ecclesiastical and secular despotism crushed all efforts of mind without profit to people or state; in Spain, on the other hand, it crushed those of national power without advantage to mental culture. But in the northern Germanic lands all the fruitful results of this period crowded together, and here, under the influence of free religion, free political schemes were developed, and a civilization which promised long continuance. Again in the circle of these Germanic lands, everything seemed to turn in favour of England alone. Germany was too exclusively occupied with the work of religion, for state and art and knowledge not to suffer from it; the Netherlands were involved in too unequal a struggle, for the full ripeness of the state not to be somewhat delayed. But in England all that former times had prepared in scattered places and peoples appeared to be united under Elizabeth. Whilst in Italy and Germany, the growth of literature and political power, the works of peace and war, were at variance, and the one excluded the other, in England they were linked together. It was for this, that Bacon extolled the happiness of Elizabeth in the same sense as in the play of Henry VIII., as a princess, under whose rule the prosperity of the country appeared all the more brilliant, in contrast to the misery and misfortune of its neighbours, under whom the blessings of peace and the honours of war were united, when England stood like the wall of Europe against the ascendency of Spain, when English armies were victorious in Ireland and

fought in Belgium, France, and Scotland, when fleets waged war on the coasts of Spain, and voyages were undertaken round the world, to India, and to the north-west passage. Elizabeth gathered around her men, such as England, according to Bacon's testimony, had not before produced; she herself maintained her position in such society, not with that facility, says Bacon, with which in the barbarous ages men were as easy to rule as herds of cattle, but with the highest gifts of mind and character, without which in this highly cultivated age it was impossible to become distinguished. Among these men was Bacon himself, who, through the confused chaos of mediæval alchymy, designed the method which in our own day has been carried out in natural science; among them too were Spenser and Sidney who enchanted with their language and poetry, a Raleigh who carried off the palm both in arms and learning, a statesmen like Burleigh, an historian like Camden, a merchant like Gresham, naval heroes like Howard and Drake, not to speak of many of a second rank. In many of these minds, as in our Shakespeare, we perceive the delight they felt in belonging to such an exciting period, which suffered no stagnation of life, and to such a happy state, in which no public disgrace crippled individuals, and no religious despotism oppressed their minds. The conflict with scholastic philosophy and religious fanaticism was not indeed over, yet Shakespeare as well as Bacon came at a precious moment of mental freedom, *after* the struggle with catholicism and its issue, and *before* that with the fanaticism of the other party, the Puritans; and he could raise his head free from the prejudices, which 300 years have not healed. Shakespeare could thus in his poetry even at that

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time, give to the age that which we first received from the great work of our German poets of the last century: — the basis of a natural mode of feeling, thought, and life, upon which art prospers in its purest form. In many respects the age itself was in this beneficial to the poet. It maintained a happy medium between crudeness and vitiated taste; life was not insipid and colourless as it is now-a-days; men still ventured to appear what they were, there was still poetry in reality. Our German poets, in an age of rouge and powder, of hoops and wigs, of stiff manners, rigid proprieties, narrow society, and cold impulses, had indescribable trouble in struggling out of this dulness and deformity, which they had first to conquer in themselves, before they could discern and contend for what was better. In Shakespeare's time, nature had not yet become extinct; the age was just halting on the threshold of these distorted views of false civilization, and if our poet had indeed to combat against the first approaches of the disease, he was yet entirely sound and free from it himself. He had the immense advantage of being one with his age and not at variance with it; when he sought materials for his poetry, he need not, like our painters, dive into past worlds, restore lost creeds, worship fallen gods, and imitate foreign works of art, — from his national soil he drew the power, which makes his poetry unrivalled. The poets of the middle-ages lived in too strong a hierarchical rule, to be able with their limited knowledge of history to succeed in placing their own minds on the same level with the spirit of the age; hence in those times they grappled with ideas too great for them, which they could not bring into form, and the feeling of inability is stamped on all mediæval poetry. It was quite

otherwise in the little insular England, where the dawning self-reliance of the people of itself drew the poet to live in and with and for his nation, and to reflect the image of the age in his works. It is the reverse in the present day, when the acquaintance with every art and nation has conquered all time and space for the poet, and has brought the materials of all ages into too close contact with him, for him to link his poems and aspirations so intimately with a national life. And the result was this, that often our best German poems found only a small number of readers, because the tenor of the age and the people was no longer identical with the poet, because he willingly renounced them. But it was not so with Shakespeare and his countryman Bacon; with willing modesty they regarded themselves only as a part in the great whole of their highly advanced age, and in his proudest controversy with the errors of the time, Bacon declared that his works were rather the fruit of his age, than of his genius.

This freshness of the intellectual instinct among the teutonic races in the age generally, this prime of the national life of England in particular, explains to us therefore, how at a time, when there was no poet in the other teutonic families and when in England itself an unpopular Italian poetry was in vogue, Shakespeare was able for the first time to raise the Germanic taste and to ennoble a national branch of art. That the distinct transition from the southern taste in poetry to the teutonic took place precisely in England, is as little a matter of chance, as that it was precisely in the drama, that England afforded such important services. The English people are a combination of French Normans and German Saxons, the language itself is com-

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pounded from both elements; in the middle-ages, its entire poetry went hand in hand with Italian art; since Shakespeare, it follows the teutonic taste of modern times. How Shakespeare, in his lyrical and descriptive poems, did homage to the formal mannerism of the Italian poetry, how in his early dramas he adhered to it, and subsequently relinquished it, we have before amply pointed out. The assurance with which he gave up that false mannerism, and thereby marked the great turning-point in the direction of taste from the Italian to the more modern, is only to be compared with the decision, with which in the great confusion of styles, amid the continuance of the epos in Italy, the prevalence of pastoral poetry throughout Europe, the taste for frivolous tales, the imitation of the classics, emanating from France, he seized the drama as the only style suited to the spirit of the age, and without wavering irresolutely here and there as Goethe, he suffered the bias of the time to determine his direction and career, and the splendour of the Atalantan apple could not allure him from it. We call the drama the normal species of poetry for this later age, not only because, as we before said, something to elevate and attract the senses was necessary for a public, who hear no more rhapsodies and can no longer be satisfied with mere hearing, but especially because the stage was the only place, where all ranks were gathered round art, because this species alone took poetry from the learned and aristocratic circles and placed it before the most wide-spread public, where greatness better thrives, because it restored poetry to the whole people; this is the decisive token in any matter of its suitability to the spirit of the age. To have perceived this, is a merit, which

indeed Hans Sachs and Lope de Vega, the one before, the other contemporary with Shakespeare, may claim; but to have made laws for the drama and to have given it a higher value, is Shakespeare's own greatness. The age favoured him in this from another side also. He appeared at that auspicious moment, in which the drama had in England already obtained acceptance and love, when the sympathy of the people was most alive, and when, on the other hand, the public were not yet corrupted and excited by over-sensibility, and when the opera, which deteriorated the drama, was not yet in existence. He took that in hand, which most actively engaged the spirit of the people, and he carried it through progressive steps to a consummation, beyond which there was nothing possible, but retrogression.

Thus favoured by the age, the drama, as we before said, with regard to locality also, was in its right place in England, where it could spring into life complete like an armed Pallas; the advantage of concentration, which England at that time drew from the general circumstances of the period, was brought to bear in a remarkable manner upon this branch of art. France and Italy in their chivalric epic poems had exhausted their national poetic powers, France had furnished the matter for these epics, Italy had added in the 16th century the finished form. When in poetry the transition from the epos to the drama took place, Italy made only feeble attempts in the 16th century to revive the Latin comedy; France, following in the footsteps of the classics, created an artificial tragedy, which Italy subsequently imitated. Both countries have had a national epos, which led in Italy to the revival of the old rhapsodists, but they have had no

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popular drama of great perfection. Spain and England, on the other hand, have no independent epos, but only chivalric romances borrowed from France and Italy. Their romances and ballads never formed themselves into larger epopees, they remained separate, and appear as the first rhapsodical opening of the drama; in Spain, in a great measure, they gave the drama its matter and even its colouring. In both countries, as an equivalent for the lacking epos, a popular stage was formed, such as other nations of modern times have never possessed. Between these two countries, Germany held a middle course. It had a popular epos, but it remained uncultivated; it had a drama, but it was only developed slowly, by fits and starts, amid interruptions, and with no concentration as to time and place, and therefore it never attained to the brilliant perfection of the Spanish and English theatres. The 16th century witnessed a certain degree of theatrical progress in Nürnberg, the 17th in Silesia, the 18th throughout Germany; the formation of the stage extends here over three centuries; in Spain on the contrary the popular cultivation of the drama is concentrated within one century, and in England, circling round Shakespeare, within even fifty years. In Germany it sought doubtfully after a place of nurture and found none, in Spain it left the provincial cities for the little Madrid, only lately chosen as the capital, in England it was concentrated within the one great capital, where it had to fight for its existence in that hard contest, which called forth its highest powers. Judge then, how natural it was, that England, if not the birth-place of the drama, should be that of dramatic legislature. Yet this instance even of favourable concentration is still not the

last. Both in philosophy and poetry every thing conspired, as it were, throughout this prosperous period, in favour of two great minds, Shakespeare and Bacon; all competitors vanished from their side, and they could give forth laws for art and science, which it is incumbent even upon present ages to fulfil. As the revived philosophy, which in the former century in Germany was divided among many, but in England at that time was the possession of a single man, so poetry also found one exclusive heir, compared with whom those later born could claim but little.

That Shakespeare's appearance upon a soil so admirably prepared was neither marvellous nor accidental, is evidenced even by the corresponding appearance of such a contemporary as Bacon. Scarcely can anything be said of Shakespeare's position generally with regard to mediæval poetry, which does not also bear upon the position of the renovator Bacon, with regard to mediæval philosophy. Neither knew nor mentioned the other, although Bacon was almost called upon to have done so in his remarks upon the theatre of his day. It may be presumed, that Shakespeare liked Bacon but little, if he knew his writings and life, that he liked not his ostentation, which without on the whole interfering with his modesty, recurred too often in many instances; that he liked not the fault-finding, which his ill-health might have caused, nor the narrow-mindedness, with which he pronounced the histrionic art to be infamous, although he allowed, that the ancients regarded the drama as a school for virtue, nor the theoretic precepts of worldly wisdom, which he gave forth, nor lastly the practical career, which he lived. Before his mind, however, if he had fathomed it, he must have bent in reverence. For just as Shakespeare

was an interpreter of the secrets of history and of human
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nature, Bacon was an interpreter of lifeless nature. Just as Shakespeare went from instance to instance in his judgment of moral actions, and never founded a law on a single experience, so did Bacon in natural science avoid leaping from one sensual experience to general principles; he spoke of this with blame as anticipating nature, and thus Shakespeare would have called the conventionalities in the poetry of the southern races an anticipation of human nature. In the scholastic science of the middle-ages, as in the chivalric poetry of the romantic period, approbation and not truth was sought for, and with one accord Shakespeare's poetry and Bacon's science were equally opposed to this. As Shakespeare balanced the one-sided errors of the imagination by reason, reality, and nature, so Bacon led philosophy away from the one-sided errors of reason to experience; both, with one stroke, renovated the two branches of science and poetry by this renewed bond with nature; both, disregarding all by-ways, staked everything upon this "victory in the race between art and nature." Just as Bacon with his new philosophy is linked with the natural science of Greece and Rome and then with the latter period of philosophy in western Europe, so Shakespeare's drama stands in relation to the comedies of Plautus and to the stage of his own day; between the two, there lay a vast wilderness of time, as unfruitful for the drama, as for philosophy. But while they thus led back to nature, Bacon was yet as little of an empiric in the common sense, as Shakespeare was a poet of nature; Bacon prophesied that if hereafter his commendation of experience should prevail, great danger to science would arise from the other

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extreme, and Shakespeare even in his own day could perceive the same with respect to his poetry; Bacon, therefore, insisted on the closest union between experience and reason, just as Shakespeare effected that between reality and imagination. While they thus bid adieu to the formalities of ancient art and science, Shakespeare to conceits and taffeta-phrases, Bacon to logic and syllogisms, yet at times it occurred, that the one fell back into the subtleties of the old school and the other into the constrained wit of the Italian style. Bacon felt himself quite an original in that which was his peculiar merit, and so was Shakespeare; the one in the method of science he had laid down, and in his suggestions for its execution, the other in the poetical works he had executed, and in the suggestions of their new law. Bacon, looking back to the waymarks he had left for others, said with pride, that his words required a century for their demonstration and several for their execution; and so too it has demanded two centuries to understand Shakespeare, but very little has ever been executed in his sense. And at the same time we have mentioned, what deep modesty was interwoven in both with their self-reliance, so that the words, which Bacon liked to quote, hold good for the two works: — "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation." Both reached this height from the one starting point, that Shakespeare despised the million, and Bacon feared with Phocion the applause of the multitude. Both are alike in the rare impartiality, with which they avoided everything one-sided; in Bacon we find indeed youthful exercises, in which he endeavoured in severe contrasts to contemplate a series of things from two points of view. Both, therefore, have an equal hatred of sects and

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parties, Bacon of sophists and dogmatic philosophers, Shakespeare of Puritans and zealots. Both, therefore, are equally free from prejudices and from astrological superstition in dreams and omens. Bacon says of the alchymists and magicians in natural science, that they stand in similar relation to true knowledge, as the deeds of Amadis to those of Cæsar, and so does Shakespeare's true poetry stand in relation to the fantastic romance of Amadis. Just as Bacon banished religion from science, so did Shakespeare from art; and when the former complained, that the teachers of religion were against natural philosophy, they were equally against the stage. From Bacon's example it seems clear, that Shakespeare left religious matters unnoticed on the same grounds as himself, and took the path of morality in worldly things: in both, this has been equally misconstrued, and Le Maistre has proved Bacon's lack of christianity, as Birch that of Shakespeare. Shakespeare would perhaps have looked down just as contemptuously on the ancients and their arts, as Bacon did on their philosophy and natural science, and both on the same grounds: they boasted of the greater age of the world, of more enlarged knowledge of heaven, earth, and mankind. Neither stooped before authorities, and an injustice similar to that which Bacon committed against Aristotle, Shakespeare *perhaps* has done to Homer. In both, a similar combination of different mental powers was at work; and as Shakespeare was often involuntarily philosophical in his profoundness, Bacon was not seldom surprised into the imagination of the poet. Just as Bacon, although he declared knowledge in itself to be much more valuable than the use of invention, insisted throughout generally

and dispassionately upon the practical use of philosophy, so Shakespeare's poetry, independent as was his sense of art, aimed throughout at bearing upon the moral life. Bacon himself was of the same opinion; he was not far from declaring history to be the best teacher of politics, and poetry the best instructor in morals. Both were alike deeply moved by the picture of a ruling Nemesis, whom they saw grand and powerful striding through history and life, dragging the mightiest and most prosperous as a sacrifice to her altar, as the victims of their own inward nature and destiny. In Bacon's works we find a multitude of moral sayings and maxims of experience, from which the most striking mottos might be drawn for every Shakespearian play, aye, for every one of his principal characters, (we have already brought forward not a few proofs of this,) testifying to a remarkable harmony in their mutual comprehension of human nature. Both, in their systems of morality rendering homage to Aristotle, whose ethics Shakespeare, from a passage in Troilus, may have read, arrived at the same end as he did: — that virtue lies in a just medium between two extremes. Shakespeare would have also agreed with *him* in this, that Bacon declared excess to be "the fault of youth, as defect is of age"; he accounted "defect the worst, because excess contains some sparks of magnanimity, and like a bird, claims kindred of the heavens, while defect, only like a base worm, crawls upon the earth." In these maxims lie at once, as it were, the whole theory of Shakespeare's dramatic forms and of his moral philosophy.

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From our last position we pass on to a few discussions upon *the moral spirit* of Shakespeare's works. Upon this point also so many objections have been raised, that it might appear almost more paradoxical to regard the poet as a moral guide, than as a poetical law-giver. Not to mention, how often in this respect also, single expressions and speeches have been the stumbling-block, Johnson has reproached our dramatist in the severest manner with the fault, "to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men": that he has sacrificed virtue to convenience; that he seems to write without any moral purpose, that he makes no just distribution of good or evil, and carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong. Nor are these wholly obsolete views. As late as 1848 a work appeared by Birch upon Shakespeare's religion and philosophy, turning against "that German mysticism", which sets up Shakespeare as an article of faith, while he rather ought with one consent to be called graceless and faithless; a book in which it is endeavoured to be proved that Shakespeare surpassed Marlowe and Greene in free-thinking, atheism, and profanity, and had learned Lucretian frivolity and a derision of religion from Boccaccio and the like. In plain words the poet is here made responsible for the language of his characters. Because Aaron denies God and Autolycus immortality, Shakespeare denies them also; because Henry V. addresses to Falstaff the words of Christ: I know thee not! Shakespeare is a blasphemer; and when Timon in his frantic misanthropy exclaims: "Spare not the babe — think it a bastard"! Shakespeare has alluded to Herod's murder of the infants and has called Christ a bastard! We may decide for ourselves, whether

stupidity or the perfidy of priestlike zeal dictated this book, which would have been too bad even for puritanical times; for Gosson and his like are here surpassed.

Blindness such as this adjusts itself. We do not therefore direct these remarks to oppose it, but only to make the importance of our testimony so much the more sensible, that even these zealots, in spite of their blindness, must bear witness to the moral spirit of Shakespeare's works. Even Birch himself cannot help acknowledging that there lies within our poet a deep benevolence and that natural love, which in healthy natures outweighs other passions; that just so, countless times in his characters, he brings out this natural goodness of the human heart in contrast to its natural evil; that he builds a system of morality upon nature and reason, a system independent of religious considerations, because he believed the laws of morality to be written plainly enough on the tablet of the human heart. And just so did Johnson confess, that a system of social duty may be selected from Shakespeare; but he thought, that its principles only occasionally escaped him. Had he conscientiously examined the matter, it would have happened to him with respect to morals even more than with respect to æsthetics, as before with Alcibiades, who, when he had penetrated through the ugly exterior of his Socrates and had raised the veil from his inner life, discovered a fulness of unsuspected beauty.

It is true, Shakespeare never aims at preaching morals by express and direct precept. He does it for the most part indirectly by the mouth of the least prejudiced, by the spectators rather than by the actors in his plays. And this moreover only in tragedy, where dazzling passions vacillate

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between vice and virtue, and where it was necessary to prevent a misconception; in comedy, where he endeavoured rather to amuse than to exert the mind, it would have been prejudicial to the design of his art, had he added severe lectures to the picture of folly, which is in itself represented in a ridiculous aspect. If Shakespeare thus, taking Johnson's words literally, seems to write with no moral aim, this very appearance is the triumph of his art. For art is not intended to proclaim moral truth by direct teaching, but by living acting impulses, by illustration and example. This touching of the heart is far more adapted than the cold language to the head, to teach us to feel delight and disgust in right and wrong, and to develop in us that true self-love, which strives to make the good and the beautiful its own. There is no more fruitless branch in all literature, than moral philosophy; except perhaps those dramatic moralities, into whose frigid defects poetry will always sink, whenever it aims at direct moral teaching, and degrades itself as the medium of this. For it follows upon this, that all action, the true object of art, disappears, and that in all characters and speeches we look for examples and traits of morality, such as men like Birch desire, who lament the decline of the mysteries and moralities under Shakespeare's worldly art. *This method* of morality was far from Shakespeare's object; yet *morality* was as much his object as poetry itself. If they had told him of the new theories, which would emancipate poetry from morality, he would not have understood them, because *his* poetry was designed to represent the substance of active life, because this substance being of a wholly moral nature, morality is consequently utterly inseparable from true poetry. If they had pointed out

to him the manner of southern poetry, which aspired after formal and outward beauty, he would have turned away from this attractive shallowness, as he indeed involuntarily did even in his descriptive poems. If they had held before him the modern poems, which Goethe styled the "literature of despondency," in which vice celebrates its triumphs, he would have cast them from him with æsthetic as well as moral abhorrence, — *he* who called evil a deformity "and virtue, beauty". Shakespeare's poetry is moral, his poetic impulse therefore, is inseparably interwoven with his ethical feelings, because he took life as a whole and was himself a whole man, in whom the moral, æsthetic, and intellectual qualities were separated by no speculative analysis; and his art is therefore so great, because out of this whole, he absorbed into *himself* more of the moral element of life, than any other has done, not even excepting the ancients. To knit poetry to life by this moral cement, to sacrifice the outer beauty even to the higher morality when the mirror was to be held up to life, to exhibit to the age in this mirror no æsthetic flattering picture, but a moral picture of unvarnished truth, this is throughout the express aim of Shakespeare's poetry; and he followed it with such deep earnestness, that to this we must look for the reason, why his poetry influenced so wholly differently to that of our own Schiller and Goethe, which excited rather to poetry and poetry alone, than to a hearty sympathy with the world.

The relation of Shakespeare's poetry to morality and to moral influence upon men, is most perfect; in this respect, from Aristotle to Schiller, nothing higher has been asked of poetry, than that which Shakespeare rendered. If Bacon felt the lack of a science of human passions, he rightly

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thought, that historians and poets supplied this science, and he might well have searched for this science before all in his neighbour Shakespeare; for no other poetry has taught as his has done by reminders and warnings, that the taming of the passions is the aim of human civilization. If it would not cripple its own effect upon this aim, it might not venture to teach express morals; for the mere knowledge of good and evil has little influence upon human passions. One noble impulse does more towards the ennobling of men, than a hundred good precepts, and a bad passion is best subdued by the excitement of a better. If the most desirable end in the moral perfection of men be this, that impulse and passion within us should not be abandoned to the blind constraint of nature, but also not to the severe direction of imperative law, that the sharp contrast between an iron duty done for duty's sake and the sweet incentives of nature should be softened, that the oppression of the senses by excessive mental control and the loss of inward freedom by the blind dominion of inclination should be equally checked, that passion should be moderated by reason; and, on the other hand, that that recognized as reasonable should be elevated into an impulse, so that the power of passion should remain, not unemployed but harmless, that thus the man should arrive at that completeness, in which reason and passion, sense and mind, should be united in the well-regulated inner precincts of the soul in one allied, never-conflicting activity, — then will poetry ever be the most effective guide to this end: for "serious maxims frighten a man away from that which he endures in sport", and therefore Schiller exhorted the poet, thus to lay hold of men's minds. If art is to reach this end, it matters not, that this

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ideal combination of those powers, which are generally at variance within us, should be represented as complete in the characters, but only that in the course and issue of the actions represented, this balance should always stand out as the healthful aim of human efforts; in other words, that the poet in the back-ground of his work should keep his own mind fixed upon their union. Of no poet perhaps can this high praise be pronounced with such certainty as of Shakespeare. He battled like Goethe for nature, for the natural rights of the heart, against the pedantry of propriety, and puritanical austerity, and mental error; he battled, on the other hand, like Schiller for freedom of mind, for moderation and discipline, against the common enemy of man, the excess of the passions; nowhere has he depicted, like Schiller, the heroes of a superhuman sense of duty, but equally, nowhere has he wantonly speculated upon the sensuality and levity of men. No man has been so well acquainted with human passions, has represented them so apparently without expedient and effort, has known so thoroughly how to awaken and check them in the spectator, has so taught by the mastering of the passions represented to master those of life. Successfully to depict a strong passion, demands experience and knowledge of the passion itself. But to combine with this possession that high self-command and inward balance, which maintains itself free from real influence in the delineation, this it is which alone is the token of an ideal mind, created for poetry. Never do we find in Shakespeare, that his hand is affected by the passion of which he writes, a thing so common among many modern poets, who are only the product of their own passions. And when he gives the rein to the wildest passion,

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it is a grand and beautiful sight, how he himself is not carried away by it, but how he, knowing its breed and race, masters it to the yoke of his art, makes the unbridled still wilder by call and whip, and at the same time understands how to tame and guide it by a glance. He is never Icarus with him, for whom he forges the wings; he is never Phaëthon with him, to whom he lends the steed; but towards his unruly children he is ever Phœbus in love and Jupiter in punishment.

Possessing this property of perfect self-command, our poet never falls into the fault of even our great modern poets, of investing passion or weakness with attractions which might captivate us and lead us morally astray; far rather it was his natural talent as it was his aim, in accordance with Aristotle's law, to make his dramas tend to the purification of the passions. According to Aristotle's well-known precept the action of the tragedy ought to be of that nature, that it should excite fear and sympathy, and by this means should purify these and similar emotions of the mind. This law Shakespeare satisfied in a manner utterly removed from all trivialities, in a manner never to be surpassed. He would have deprecated the idea of comparing, as Bacon did, the poet's control of passion and the emotions of terror in the tragedy, with the administration of reward and punishment in the state; his aim was never, in this clumsy manner, to excite the fear of the spectator and his disgust at the excess of passion, essentially by emphasizing the outward misfortunes, which this excess involves; the nobler fear which *he* aimed at, is awakened in the spectator long before the issue, even throughout the giddy path of senseless passion, throughout the objective development of the blindly excited powers of our mind: this suspense of fear is

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intended to heighten our feelings and tender sensibility as to the choice of the right way; we are intended as spectators to learn from the drama to note more quickly, more sensitively, the beginning of the false way, that we may walk more circumspectly in our own drama of life; the passion thus expending itself before us is designed like an alarum at once to awaken watchfulness of our own souls. And thus when the poet claims our compassion, he does not aim merely at an impulse of tender emotion and sympathy with those, who suffer under the punishment of their self-created fate; much rather does he intend to unite with the fear of the dangerous course of passion, at once that sympathy with the bold, the great, the estimable in this course, with all that, which Bacon discovered in the strong outburst of passion to be kindred with heaven. That this excitement of fear and sympathy would operate indeed for the purifying of our passions, is certainly indisputable. The objectivity, with which the picture of human passion is placed before us in the drama, which leads us to contemplate the latent and dark powers within us, and brings them actively and intelligently before our minds, must necessarily produce an elevation of our consciousness as well as of our self-reliance, and with this a raising and purifying of the soul is necessarily linked, provided we are at all susceptible of impression of so noble a kind. Only see any Shakespearian drama even tolerably represented, and upon every sound mind it will make this highest impression of a work of art, that aimed at by the Aristotelian law, and which Schiller has so well developed in carrying out that law; it transports us to that intermediate state between doing and suffering, in which, unconstrained, we are affected by both; in which

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we maintain the freedom of determining for ourselves as we will, in which we are not weakened as by pleasures of the senses nor overstrained as by those of the mind, but feel ourselves entirely masters of our own powers, and able to pass from it to every work equally skilful, with a lofty equanimity of mind. In such a frame of mind will every riper drama of Shakespeare's leave us, and the strongest of his works will affect the strongest men the most. Looking down from the watch-tower of his art, life appears more easy and capable of conquest; and if the great truth of his delineations shews us the actual world not in poetic sunshine, but overcast with manifold clouds, the poet has also given us the means and the position, by which we may find new beauties and charms even in these stormy elements of life.

If this moral influence lie in Shakespeare's poetry, if it be so imbued with morality, that a kind of system of worldly wisdom can be drawn from it, it may be asked: how amid the numberless, endlessly contradictory characteristic expressions of his figures, can his own opinion be with certainty discovered?

We might reply, that the opinions, which are most frequently on the lips of his purer characters and are repeated at every opportunity, point out the basis of the poet's mode of thought, and because they are so predominant in his mind, they must be most his own. But in saying this, we should not go far enough; it is indeed difficult to reach the very root of his more important characters on account of their combination of qualities, but much more difficult to fathom himself, who, as it were, is again combined out of all these characters united. It is more essential for us to consider the ideal characters which

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Shakespeare has sustained in a medium between the strong tragic and the weak comic figures of his pieces; and the suggestions we have given with respect to Henry, Posthumus, Orlando, and the like, must not be lost sight of in this investigation. But the main path lies in the consideration of the dramatic styles and their relation to each other, and then in the moral justice which is displayed in the development of the actions. We have in Shakespeare not a teacher before us, who endeavoured simply to solve the enigmas of the world, but the world itself with its riddles is reflected to our view; only chance is stripped away from her, the moving spring of the actions and the necessity of the fate which they evolve, are discovered to us; we must watch the mechanism thus displayed; and pondering upon it, we learn to understand the mind of the master-regulator.

The ancients who represented in their tragedies only the hero-world, and in their comedies the real and the present, obtained by this contrast a very pure division of *the forms of the drama*. Their tragedy knows no sort of comic element. The exclusion of the serious from the comedy shewed itself on the other hand more impracticable, because art everywhere requires to be raised above the vulgar. Even in Aristophanes a sublime lyric and the solemn seriousness of political precept appears amid the comic action; but it was the comedies of Menander, which first blended the cheerful with the serious emotions of life. *These* became in the hands of Terence and Plautus the school of the new drama. For this in truth developed itself rather out of the burlesque comedies of the people, than

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out of the Mysteries, and the comedies of Plautus helped throughout in its formation. Tragedy and its development came chronologically after comedy; it thus sprung up from the ground of comedy, from actual life, and not as among the ancients side by side with an heroic epos. Real life with all its vicissitudes of good and ill, joy and sorrow, jest and earnest, was introduced into the drama of every kind; the names became confused; in Spain everything was uniformly called comedy; in England the distinction of tragedy, comedy, and history was customary, according as the issue was good or bad, the story true or invented. Shakespeare must soon have perceived, that these distinctions were neither real nor in accordance with the rules of art; in Love's Labour's Lost he ridiculed the deciding mark of the issue, and through Polonius, the attempts to define the different styles by their matter. His view appeared to be, that every subject requires its own form, and every piece so far forms with him a style of its own; therefore is it, that he has so often disregarded the line of demarcation between comedy, pastorals, masques, and histories. Whilst he thus took life alone as a guide, gave to every event its own right and law, and suffered the matter itself to dictate the course, the form, and the tone, he was met throughout by one radical difference between the luxuriant and stunted growth of passion and active power in men, and this led him universally to adhere to the traditional notions of comedy and tragedy. But between the two he admitted a middle kind of *spectacle* (*das Schauspiel*), a special form of the drama, known to every age and people, but for which the German tongue alone has a distinct appellation. These principal styles he blended together according to necessity;

and this procedure was itself a necessity, resulting from the laws of his art. For if moral ideas are to be the leading points of the drama, and these can only be rendered perceptible to the senses by characters and their contrasts, it follows that these very contrasts will lead in tragedy to comic elements, and in comedy to tragic ones. Shakespeare too admitted this combination of jest and earnest in consequence of his pure human nature, which took equal interest in everything, and which, in the very exclusion of one-sided barriers, saw perfection in the utmost possible variety. He admitted this combination moreover in consequence of his genuine Germanic nature: for our race, unlike the ancients and those of southern birth, has rarely loved the sudden change in scenic representations, of allowing the amusement of burlesque and masque to succeed tragic convulsions; we like not this obliterating of the one glaring impression by another, but rather the blending together of the tones. In this method it matters only, that this change of means, effects, and tones, should be in reality blended, and that no ill-timed discords should disturb the harmony of the drama. In this respect Johnson has already vindicated the conduct of our poet with intelligence and skill. He met the objection against this blending, namely that the action would be robbed of the power of motion by the interruption of passion, simply by this, that he appealed to daily experience to testify how groundless the objection was. Clumsy actors can certainly so abuse the grave-diggers in Hamlet and the fool in Lear, as to destroy the tragic impression. The intelligent, on the contrary, will draw precious advantage from these parts, softening the impression of horror and resolving the discord

of the comic contrast into a refreshing harmony. We have
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pointed out in detail, wherein the ground lies, that the comic characters and episodes in the serious drama and the reverse, have nowhere in Shakespeare anything disturbing and inharmonious: because they always stand in close relation to the idea of the piece, because they are brought forward as contrasts or as faint reflections of the ruling passion, because as foil, counterpart, or distorted image, they serve for shading and colouring the main picture. Shakespeare *took* this practice from the first most popular and unconscious beginnings of comedy. Even in its crudest commencement the popular comedy had with a happy instinct assigned here and there to the fool the part of the comic chorus. Thus in the Spanish drama, the parodying of the main action was quite in vogue; and the Grazioso has throughout the talent and the task given him to penetrate, like Shakespeare's clowns, unconcernedly in his simplicity, all that which the principal characters in their passionate excitement neither see, hear, nor feel. No one who knows this, will therefore find anything extravagant or imaginary in our explanation of these comic episodes in Shakespeare. Moreover we repeat, that in this practice of combination, Shakespeare maintains throughout a moderation full of tact. In tragedy and tragic history Shakespeare never introduced comic episodes, but only single characters in passing scenes, and even these of late in less number; burlesque parodies of serious actions only appear in comedy; and the combination of tragic and comic situations only in those plays, which we designate as *Schauspiele*, and in such comedies, as verge closely on the seriousness of the *Schauspiel*.

We have already before shewn, how simple the classification of Shakespeare's dramatic styles is, and how it at once leads to his fundamental views concerning moral things. We there said, that the poet sees man at his height, when he has attained to that even balance of nature, upon which is founded the man's noble feeling of his worth and vocation, that true self-love, which is the root of all good. Such characters, we remarked, he introduces in dramas (*Schauspiele*) which possess the serious turn of the tragedy and the cheerful conclusion of the comedy. This kind of drama was known even by Aristotle. He spoke of it contemptuously, as we also in the present day are wont to do, because indeed too often by the over-honest and upright justness, with which it leads the good to happiness and the bad to harm, it favours the weakness of those weak ones, to please whom even Shakespeare's Romeo has been converted into a drama of this kind. Aristotle and Shakespeare have no name for this form of drama; the one calls it tragedy, and designates it as belonging to the tendency of the comedy; the other calls it comedy, but the characters and arrangement are tragic, and the catastrophe threatens to become so also. The Tempest, the Merchant of Venice, Henry IV. and V., Cymbeline, Measure for Measure, all belong to this class, and a series of comedies besides in their serious parts, comedies in which, not tragic events and characters terminate tragically, nor the ridiculous ridiculously,' but the serious seriously. It is certainly not, as Aristotle remarked, the enjoyment belonging to the tragedy or comedy, which this style aims at; but this does not prevent this species of drama from being regarded among us as a middle style, whose

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title is in no wise to be denied. Who would not regard even Goethe's Iphigenia, Schiller's Tell, the Orestiads, or Cymbeline, as most legitimate works of art. This style is certainly more easily liable than others to degenerate, but even this cannot exclude it from its right of competition. From the exact distribution of justice, the way is readily opened for too strong a contrast between good and evil; this form of drama is that, in which the misère of citizen-life has liked best to insinuate itself; it changes easily to the pathetic, in which the innocent suffers without the support of mental power, or it sets up pictures of infallible virtue, in whom we perceive an adherence to duty in action, which seems to spring from insensibility. These faults and platitudes do not, however, necessarily belong to this form of drama; Shakespeare at least is entirely a stranger to them. He has not placed his Henry and Posthumus in such a pure moral atmosphere, that others cannot breathe in it, nor on a height, whose distance discourages us; he has depicted their moral nature in conflict, victory, and defeat, so that their weakness brings them near to us, and their strength draws us up to them; they show us not only, as the tragic characters do, that right action *is possible*, but also *actual*.

Between the erring natures of tragedy and comedy a middle class of beings appears here, characters out of the tragic sphere, with strong passions, but endowed with that inner self-command, which softens the severe collisions of tragedy, which gives not up to passion, which overcomes errors within and without, and disarms the threatenings of fate. It is extraordinarily ingenious, how Shakespeare has exhibited his characters of this stamp, his Henry in covenant with the Deity, his Posthumus under the protection

of the gods, how he has so arranged it at least, that the saving hand of a genius watches over them, as Portia over Antonio, the Duke over Angelo, Helena over Bertram; they bear in themselves the natural attractions, which gain such clear-seeing protecting angels for friends, whilst the tragic characters are abandoned by God, by their fellow-creatures, and by themselves. If we were to designate the task of art to be that of leading to that purity and harmony of nature, the just limitation of the strong impulses in men, then, the forms of tragedy and comedy in their delineation of the contrary, do this more in a negative, and the drama (*das Schauspiel*) more in a positive manner; and we see not, why this should not be just as admissible. In this form it only matters that when lower types of character are employed, it should approach nearer to comedy, when higher natures are introduced, it should rank closer to tragedy. This line of distinction Shakespeare has maintained with irreproachable nicety and assurance.

In the tragic characters, on the contrary, that happy equipoise of human nature and of its fundamental impulses is disturbed and broken; the just self-love of the man rises into egotism, ambition, and all those uncontrolled passions, which lead to an unhappy end. Wherever tragedy has most surely grasped its aim, it has always depicted such an overbearing race of men, which set themselves up in bold defiance against the powers of heaven, exaggerate reliance upon human strength, suffer themselves in the fearful consequences of passion to be hurried on to a disregard of divine and human laws, men, who demand more scope for their pretensions in society, than is compatible with the rights of others, and therefore are wrecked by the force of

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natural reactions, thus preparing their outward fate by their inward nature. These titanic natures belong especially to the heroic ages of the world, to the period anterior to political civilization, and therefore Shakespeare also transported thither his most tragic plays; the rest of his tragedies lie almost all in the times of civil wars, when, for the moment at least, social barriers are loosened, and original power and unfettered passion obtain freer play. Among the ancients also, those are the mightiest tragic characters, which have, as it were, out-grown the human standard and provoke the jealousy of the gods. Yet with them, the instances are not rare, in which the tragic hero does not really overstep the bounds of morality, in which the catastrophe grows out of the intricacies of events and the action is woven like an intrigue of fate, in which great, patriotic, and moral duties, struggle in the man with equally legitimate impulses. An action of this kind Shakespeare has only once depicted in Julius Cæsar; they are most fascinating, but as rare in the nature of things as in the group of Shakespeare's plays. The far more usual ground of tragic events, is, as with him, to be sought for in a man's own breast. The disunion and the conflict between the good and evil nature, the blind impulse of passion and the stubborn strength of the will thus incited by it, these are the powers at work in the tragedies of our poet, and in those of real life itself. It was just on this point, that tragedy attracted our own Schiller the most; because it depicts this inner struggle of the reason with the man's sensual part, by which we alone arrive at a consciousness of our moral nature. In all Shakespeare's tragedies, the subject is ever the degenerating of a more or

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less noble nature under the preponderance of a great passion; the consequences of these excesses bring sorrow and misfortune on the hero, and in this pathos his better contrary nature rises, too late yet to ward off the ruin, but not too late to atone for the past by a purification of his nature; often too, so that a spiritual power rises in the tragic character, not in opposition to but in connection with the ruling passion, and by its self-revenging consequence, by a strength of character which bends not before misfortune, inspires us even with esteem for the erring one. In the most various gradations, Shakespeare has carried out this tragic course. In Lear the whole judgment is overwhelmed by intemperate passion, it returns in his affliction, and the nature is purified at the last. The intemperance of weakness works in Richard II., just as in Lear, that of strength. Coriolanus' self-recollection is overthrown by his pride, aroused by his noble nature he chooses voluntary suffering, and thus atones for his error by an heroic conquest of his scarcely conquerable nature. In Othello, moderation is overlooked in one false step, which revenges itself by fearful results, but in his misfortune the Moor rises full of honour even in his error, and atones for it by his self-punishment. In Brutus the choice lies between duty and duty; sorrow for mistaken aims is, therefore, easily endured by the steadfast nature. Timon's reason, wasted in merry living, is awakened at the outburst of self-created misfortune. In Macbeth, the fall of his noble nature is followed by pangs of conscience, his power of defiance then rises, and the violence of his spirit affects us even in its wildness. It is the same with Richard III., whose better nature we must look for in Henry VI., where

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he performed self-sacrificing deeds for his house. The utterly different characters of King John and Antony are the least tragic ones, because in both the better nature is most feebly aroused. The most remarkable play, however, in a tragic point of view, regarded from this side also, is Hamlet, because the common subject of tragedy, such as we have just pointed out, is here exactly reversed in a manner equally bold and deep; the poet shews that preponderance of the mental powers is as false as that of the sensual. In Hamlet, the mind is watchful against the incentives to vengeance and ambition, the sensual physical impulse is here represented as duty, conscience and mind by their union with inactivity are exhibited as error; it is this, which gives vent to Hamlet's vein of evil, and carries him most significantly rather from suffering into error, than from error into suffering, and we feel satisfied, when at last passion gains power in him and the mind is utterly relaxed. In all these characters, from Coriolanus down to Richard, there is originally a good disposition; the youthful excess, the striving of passion, inclines them to what is dangerous and demon-like. Aristotle's law of mixed characters is fulfilled, although in a wholly independent manner. According to Aristotle, the tragic turn of fortune ought not to be the consequence of wickedness, but that of one false step on the part of a man, who possesses no great moral nor civil excellence, who is thriving and respectable, and has more of a noble than a base nature. Shakespeare has never suffered himself to be fettered in this way. He has invested his tragic heroes, when in high positions, often with great moral excellencies, and has entangled them often in great crimes. The ancients avoided the representation of

great conscious guilt, and wisely, because those mental levers and expedients, necessary to the refinements of crime, were less known; but for us, the aberration of a nature originally noble, the rapid descent from virtue to vice in Shakespeare's plays, has just for this reason an engrossing interest, because his art is equal to the task of fully developing such an inward course. The representation of real crimes is a perilous rock for poetry, because the wholly base and the wholly weak, are not capable of an æsthetic charm. But Shakespeare has skilfully avoided this rock also. His base characters are all strong, his weak ones are all never really base. Even where weakness and crime are most closely united, as in Antony, an original power yet shines through, and the extreme art, with which Shakespeare keeps within this limit, evidences in no small degree the profound instinct of art, which qualified this man to be the law-giver of the new drama.

Comedy with Shakespeare is in contrast to tragedy, directed against the weaknesses of men; passion, natural affection, instead of degenerating in youthful luxuriancy, becomes worn out and blighted under the power of self-love and vain imagination. While in the one is depicted the inflexibility of strong natures, which strive even against overwhelming circumstances and powers, in the other, on the contrary, at least in the comedy of intrigue, the circumstances and outward events are sometimes the lever of the whole action, and a poetical charm is sought for in mistakes, recognitions, improbabilities, instead of in the development of deep characters. This form, the pride of the Spanish stage, is scarcely to be found in Shakespeare. The theme of his comedy, which with him essentially is only a comic

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representation of character (*Character-Lustspiel*) is the littleness of a narrow nature, poverty of mind and passion, and not rarely, in direct contrast to his tragedy, the preponderance of the erring mental element over the natural passions. The comic epopee and the humorous romance (Reineke Fuchs, Don Quixote, and others) are always, when they are most successful, opposed to the one-sided prominence of mind, to everything fantastic and whimsical; the comedy might scarcely venture so much as these narrative works, since being a visible representation, it might not deviate so far from the ground of reality. Nevertheless Shakespeare's comedy in its characteristic tendency is decidedly enough placed as if in the most direct contrast to his tragedy. If selfishness and egotism give the reins to passion, self-love appears, on the other hand, vain and self-sufficient as it is, not so much in crime as in folly, not so much by errors of impulse as of the head, by whims and fancies, prejudicial to the healthy nature, by false steps not of passion, but of reason, not of morality, but of intelligence; the comic challenges our better knowledge, the tragic our better conscience. This skilful contrast is but to be seen in Angelo. In him at first constrained powers of reason had smothered passion, and so far he is rather a comic character, which by an easy turn could be brought to a comic end; as soon as passion prevails over his mind, he becomes a tragic character. In Orsino the mind is feeble in imagination, so that no genuine passion can gain ground; so to excess is Malvolio. In Love's Labour's Lost, the mind dares to crush nature, in Benedick vanity presumes to resist the female sex, in Falstaff it leads him to consider himself an object of love; in all the caricatures of Shakespeare the vain effort is

predominant of making show pass for reality. In conformity with this purport of comedy, the scene must lie, not in heroic warlike times, nor in vast political relations, but in the domestic circle, rather in the present relations of polished and conventional society, where the mutual dependence of men checks the growth of wild passion and refines the affections. The deeper side of life is out of place here, where the laughing exterior and the superficial emotions of men are more concerned. Aristotle therefore assigned to tragedy noble men as to rank and character, and to comedy inferior ones; Shakespeare's age demanded princes for tragedy, peasantry for pastoral plays, and the middle *class* of citizens for comedy. These outward distinctions Shakespeare disregarded, but all the characters in his comedies, as we have before pointed out, belong to a middle *stamp*. That they may not prove dull and flat, that this narrower scale of humanity may not become indifferent to us, the poet has carefully employed two effectual expedients. He has contented himself but rarely with the pure sphere of the comic, he has carried his comedy to the very verge of the serious drama (*Schauspiel*) or even of tragedy, and has interspersed it with circumstances of the most valuable kind. If Goethe, from a many-sided nature, consented reluctantly to the direct course of the tragedy, Shakespeare from that completeness of nature which shrinks from a one-sided contemplation of life, yielded yet more unwillingly to the one-sided development of any strict form. The other expedient is, that he places burlesque figures side by side with the nobler characters of his comedy, by which means they are elevated and brought closer to us. Without the introduction of Armado and Malvolio, Orsino and Navarre

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would commend themselves less to our notice. Those characters are genre-pictures, but there is in them a high degree of truth, so that they are attractive in the midst of their ugliness, like the comic masks of the ancients. They are, therefore, in no wise without an interest of their own: Shakespeare extracted a fascination even from them. The dull contentment, the self-sufficiency, the self-complacency, of those inwardly and outwardly poor, who are not yet artificially infected with the dangerous aspirations of the higher classes, this is in itself poetical, and acquires in Shakespeare's comedy a still stronger interest by the contrast with the loftier meditations and efforts of their intellectual companions, which in reality lie parallel in inner folly with the exterior of those very caricatures. For whilst those more refined err with more conscious mind, and at last stand ashamed before the ruin of their vain pretensions and fancies, with disappointed expectations, the people of this class, like the clowns in the Midsummer-Night's Dream, are raised in the self-satisfaction and assurance of their actions above all disappointment in success, and are therefore insensible to the mischievous joy of others; with them nothing fails, neither their aims nor their humour. Just in this, however, lies the true ground of the comic, and it is for this reason, that in spite of all our present refinement, the comic power of these characters survives all changes of taste: these types of folly and absurdity are completely dyed with the comic colours of nature, indelible for all ages. In the delineation of this world of beings, Shakespeare appears in all his amiability. These harmless weaknesses excite his mirth and the child-like humour of his kindly heart. With forbearing mildness he passes by these bubbles of folly; his

comedy is rarely a bird of prey, pouncing on the ridiculous, and tearing its victim to pieces, but it is here like the lark, which sings in harmless joy in the serene firmament. The cold reason and the cold heart, which belong to sarcasm and satire, are utterly wanting in Shakespeare. Only when absurdity becomes dangerous, does his merry humour find its limit. When he considers the manifold imperfections of the age, the immoralities of the multitude of the most obnoxious kind, the laxity of court-manners, the unnatural fashions and dress, the puritanical wolf in sheep's clothing, then he lays aside his tolerant many-sidedness and cuts deeply to remove the corrupt evil from the body of the age. This predominant mildness was the fruit of his healthy nature, which never suffered itself to become embittered by the evils of the world. If it has been complained, that Shakespeare's art lacked that inward cheerfulness, which can free the mind from the burden of reality, the ground for this complaint lies essentially in the form of the tragedy, which by the weak in general is not endured. No one would accuse his comedies of a want of cheerfulness. They possess it to such an extent, that even the pedants of the former century over-estimated them on account of it. Johnson considered that Shakespeare had a predilection for comedy; that in tragedy he often wrote with much trouble and little success, but that in comedy he seemed to write without labour that which no labour could improve. He considered that in tragedy he was always "struggling after some occasion to be comic, but that in comedy he seemed to repose, to luxuriate, as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature", that tragedy with him seemed to be skill, but comedy instinct. This is in no wise so. Much rather do his comedies give by

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far the most imperfect idea of Shakespeare's poetic, aye, even perhaps of his comic power, for some single comic characters in his tragedies throw such light on events by their brilliant and deep wit, that they far surpass the figures in his comedies. But then Shakespeare much more rarely indeed seeks occasion in his tragedies to descend to comedy, than he does in comedy to rise to the seriousness of tragedy. And in general, no one would wish to exchange the shallowness of his comedies with the depth of his tragedies. Moreover in these different views, there lies only an evidence of the poet's versatile ability for all things. He has equal sympathy with jest and earnest, he hates with his Rosalind those, who are in extremity of either laughing or melancholy, he has a tear of feeling for the dark, and the gladdest laugh for the bright side of the world, and he controls with equal power our emotions of joy and sorrow.

If now from the opposition of the forms of character, which are peculiar to the drama (*Schauspiel*), to the comedy, and to the tragedy, an essential post is to be gained in arriving at Shakespeare's opinion with respect to the course of human action, we shall approach still nearer to this, by considering the issue of the plays, or the administration of the so-called *poetic*, but much rather *moral justice*. The comedy affords us less insight to this, on account indeed of the lesser importance of its contents. Yet even here the natural law is strictly adhered to, that as in tragedy the moral, so here the rational, shall triumph in the issue; not folly in the one and vice in the other; the issue of an unaccountable folly may be harmless; with regard to the accountable and obnoxious it will always prove confounding; the catastrophe passes not from happiness to misfortune, but

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from vanity to disappointment; the judgment receives satisfaction by the adjusting of the perverted. If in the tragedy, fear and sympathetic pity hold us in suspense, in the comedy, on the contrary, we are swayed alternately by the hope of the return of the actors from their erring ways, and by sympathetic joy at the appearance of this return. This joy we should certainly truly feel with the characters which attract our interest, for example, with Orsino and Benedick, but in the deceit of mischievous folly, it turns to the side of those who would have been deceived. Thus as in comedy the demands of the understanding are satisfied, so in tragedy are those of moral justice From the chronicles of history Shakespeare conveyed into his poetry the idea and image of a just ruling Nemesis, so familiar in his age; Bacon, who only at times saw this Nemesis prominently distinguished in history, demanded straightways of poetry, that she should in this take the place of history, that in her kingdom the images of things should conform themselves to the will of the mind and not, as in reality, that the mind should accommodate itself to the things. And no demand is more just than this. For if the encroachments of passion are glorified in poetry, if unmerited sufferings remain unexpiated, if the moral comes not forth victorious out of the ruin of vice, and the face of eternal justice remains veiled, then the work of art excites only pain and vexation instead of satisfaction, whether it be a Klinger, who with his rude bizarrerie theoretically as well as practically fights for the triumph of crime, or a Schiller, who in a strange blunder assigns the lot of annihilation to the beautiful on earth. How far removed was Shakespeare from the bewildered nature of so many of our contemporaries, who, in this anni-

hilation of the beautiful reflect their own deformity! Not indeed that with a pedantic distribution of an accurately defined justice he degraded virtue and vice to a calculation of loss and gain; if poetic justice is thus to be understood, that for a fixed crime a fixed punishment is assigned, and for this or that virtue a reward, then we have ourselves shewn, that Shakespeare administered it not. Only with him throughout do the fates of his characters exactly accord with their nature and their actions. Bacon was struck by the wonderful instances in experience, in which God's justice is even here made manifest; whoever also has the opportunity of looking at once into the inner and outer life of men, will indeed not so rarely detect the track of this Nemesis; this exceptional appearance in the actual world is the rule in Shakespeare's poetical one. It is not the stars which with him determine the fate of men, but their works; justice lies throughout just at the point, where it is most fruitful for the poetic representation; that the cause of the descending fate is prepared by the man himself, that the end lies in the beginning, that the cup mixed by himself is placed at the lips of the evil-doer, and even here retribution happens for that, which is here done. Scarcely ever does the poet, as is the case with our great German dramatists, hold out fair hopes of justice to come; at the most only in his subordinate figures; with the main characters throughout, their own nature proves even here their own judgment. In certain mysterious instances Shakespeare has not deprived us of that consolation of religion; in Cymbeline most expressly the inexplicable severity of providence is shewn to be protecting love; with the lot of the innocent victims in some of his tragedies, faith in a future compensation

must reconcile us; but wherever the poet had to develop a complete life, we shall find he has himself administered complete justice. Rightly to understand this, we must try to apprehend throughout his vast mind, which was so far from narrow pedantry. Often has he taken punishment for granted and left it unnoticed, often has he placed it deep within, but the reader, who once knows him, will not misunderstand this. That bastard John, in Much Ado about Nothing, escapes by flight; the fate of Aufidius and Volumnia is left in obscurity, – but who would go astray in explanation of this? No sudden punishment meets Henry IV. for his usurpation; but it agrees well with the nature of this character, that the Nemesis strikes him not with the sword, but makes him empty by degrees the cup of sickness and remorse. Yet this would not be the complaint against Shakespeare, that he inflicts too little and too gentle punishment, but that it is too hard and too equal. Not criminals alone go to ruin with him, but those also who committed only pardonable faults, and others, whose whole offence was that they came into dangerous collision with dangerous natures. This liberty Shakespeare has certainly taken on some few occasions, namely to practise an injustice, only however on subordinate characters, which may tend to the exercise of a justice all the more severe on the principal characters. He has besides permitted Banquo, Duncan, Hastings, and Cordelia to perish, only for the sake of the error of imprudence. Yet from Shakespeare's moral system which tends to an active use of life, that lesson would result, which Bacon enforced with so much emphasis, that men must expand their thoughts and look circumspectly around them, if they

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would truly advance their happiness, that, as it says in Troilus,

> "omission to do what is necessary,
> Seals a commission to a blank of danger".

But then this unhappy nature, that indolent imprudence, meet in Shakespeare with misfortune certainly, but not with punishment; honour may be closely allied with misfortune; and this procedure of the poet expresses stronger than everything his aversion of the theory, which places happiness as the aim of life. Death befalls those careless ones; but if the basest criminal meets in Shakespeare with nothing worse, must not this be an unjust awarding of the issue? But then, death is to the poet just the means to a determined end; we must not look at *what* the issue is, but *how* it is, and what the circumstances are which accompany it. As in Shakespeare, actions would be measured according to circumstances, so their end is in proportion to the strivings of the actors, and to the inner consciousness of the falling. Here lies the plain secret of Shakespeare's poetical justice. Death indeed in Lear befalls the many without distinction, but Cordelia dies in the glory of a blessed deliverer, Lear in expiation, Gloster smiling, Kent with joy, the others lie caught in their own snares, robbed of their aims, the worldly souls forfeiting the world, which was all to them. How differently does Macbeth fall by the hand of a hero, whom he had always feared, and Richard by the snares of a sycophant, whom he had always despised! It does not then depend on the very letter of the issue, but on the manner in which the issue is endured, whether men meet death cursed or blessed, thwarted in their

base aims or attaining lofty ones, with noble consciousness or with stinging conscience, in heavenly sereneness or in hellish despair. Thus regarded, the tragic issues follow not one line, but graduate from Richard to Cordelia in the richest diversity. And the sublime moral lesson which lies in the exercise of this justice, is this, that death is in itself no evil, that life is in itself no blessing, that outward prosperity is no happiness, but that inner consciousness alone; that the greatest reward of virtue is virtue itself, and the greatest punishment of vice is vice itself. Therefore the truly noble, such as Posthumus and Imogen, reap no outward happiness as a reward at last, it is rather taken from them, — and Henry V. yields his honours from himself to God; all their reward is the voice within, and the self-consciousness of having maintained the dignity of man.

If now, provided with this clue, which we have drawn from the nature of the dramatic forms and of Shakespeare's moral justice, we enquire finally respecting that, which Johnson and Pope designated his moral system, we would premise, that in doing so, a proper and complete system of ethics must be out of the question. We only bring prominently forward some great and highly simple points of view, which obtrude themselves in the actions represented just as often as in express precepts in his works, as the poet's fundamental opinion concerning the things of life. Upon these perhaps a complete system of morals might be constructed, but our intention has nowhere been, to spin out the threads to the vast extent that the material in Shakespeare's works would permit, for this would be an endless

task. We desire to impute nothing to the poet, which does not seem to ourselves to lie in him; not that we have imagined, that he has actually considered every smallest thought which we have sought to consider after him; only that we hope he would acknowledge if he lived, that he might have thought the thoughts which we have appended here and there to his own, according to the characteristics of his mind and to the design of his works. And so we are satisfied in this subject also, to set forth those *characteristics of his moral views*, which seem to us indisputably his property, and that too of his consciousness.

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Pope has strikingly designated Shakespeare's moral system as one of an entirely worldly character, which the poet places in opposition to the notions obtained from revelation, and which he considers sufficient to take the place of these. He felt that he does not exempt men from the fear of the consequences of immorality, but that he insists upon this strongly; and that, whilst he sets aside religious considerations, he has extolled the love of humanity more than any other writer. This is so just, that even a Birch must acknowledge it. The unhesitating security, with which Shakespeare took this purely human course, is, in the age in which he lived, most admirable. His poetic contemporaries around him lapsed into free-thinking, and at last in devout repentance laid aside their art with their morals; on the other side the zealots raged against the stage; through all this *he* passed unbiassed, boldly turning his back against the enemies to enlightened progress, wholly untouched by the breath of senseless frivolity. Many grounds may be found for Shakespeare's conduct in not only not seeking a reference to religion in his works, but

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in systematically avoiding it even when opportunity offered. Like Bacon he would fain avoid every stumbling-stone; he considered the stage moreover as no substitute for the pulpit; had he done so, the clergy of that day and of the present would have blamed him still more harshly, though now they rage against him that he did not do so. Much more deeply however may another impression in this respect have decidedly influenced his mind. Shortly before Shakespeare's time England had gone through those fearful persecution of Catholics and Protestants, those executions for the sake of the faith, the destruction, and purification of opinions; all round him the enmity of a sectarian spirit prevailed; he saw the ascetic moroseness of the Puritans and their fanaticism on the increase, and he said as if in prophecy (Timon Act III. sc. 3.), that they bore their "virtuous copies to be wicked, like those that, under hot ardent zeal, would set whole realms on fire". This state of things alienated all men from the ascetic exaggerations of religion, and urged others into scepticism; the same experiences, which *after* the English Reformation made Cherburg a freethinker, urged Bacon and Raleigh also at this time to deistical, or as the zealots say, to atheistical views. And thus Shakespeare, startled by these same experiences, liked best, when he needed moral advice, to dive into the revelation which God has written in the human heart. That therefore, which religion enjoins as to faith and opinion, he wholly discarded from his works, as he had only to do with action; but in action the religious and divine in man is nothing else than the moral. In that sense, in which Schiller praises christianity, that it sets aside rigid law and places free inclination in its stead, Shakespeare's moral system is a

christian one. It is not so in the strict sense, in which it is written, that unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other, but it is so in that in which, making allowance for the changing circumstances of life, the Gospel teaches: — "be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves": and the apostle: "he that giveth in marriage doeth well: but he that giveth not in marriage doeth better". Shakespeare's ethics are essentially human, and he can in this respect be placed on a level with the ancients, whom we read with humanistic aims. If Bacon thought truly, that man can draw some notions of good and evil from the "light of nature", from that law of conscience, which is a sure spark and remnant of the original purity of man, Shakespeare would, as Pope justly said, have held these notions for sufficient to regulate us honourably in this life *. This "deity in our bosom", Shakespeare has bestowed with intentional distinctness even upon his most abandoned villains, and that too, when they deny it; to nourish this spark and not to quench it, is the loud sermon of all his works.

Shakespeare's moral view starts from the simple point, that man is born with powers of activity, which he is to use, and with powers of self-determination and self-government, which are to guide aright this use of the powers of action. *Whence* we are, and *whither* we go, these are the questions, which the poet, as well as the historian, yields

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* Sofort nun wende dich nach innen,
Das Centrum findest du da drinnen,
Woran kein Edler zweifeln mag.
Wirst keine Regel da vermissen,
Denn das selbständige Gewissen
Ist Sonne deinem Sittentag.
Goethe.

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to philosophy and religion. "Men must *endure* their going hence even as their coming hither; ripeness is all." "Why am I? make that demand to the Creator; it suffices me thou art." These two sentences accurately designate this point of view. In this whence and whither the man is passive, but in the course of life, active; and here lies his tangible vocation, without having satisfied which, he cannot be matured for a higher degree of existence. Shakespeare reflected upon the powers at work in nature and mankind, and saw clearly the aim of the immense motion lying in the motion itself. This led him to those maxims he so much enforced: that nature only lends man his talents and gives them not, only bestows them in order that he may use them and render them back again. In his moral system, therefore, everything bears upon the incentive to activity; life appeared to him too short, to waste it in speculations and inaction; in Hamlet especially this lesson is taught with the severest emphasis. The most versatile endowments are in this man a useless disordered mass, because the electric spark of energy is not struck into them, because with careful deliberation and overstrained sensibility he has smothered the instinct of active power, that first-born of human gifts; the speculative enquirer, who makes the thought and not the act the measure of things, becomes thus at variance with the guiding-stars of nature, with conscience and reason itself; they suffer from excess of use, as his power of action does from the defect of it; in the verdict upon his actions, to which these inner powers are called, conscience and reason err with him in the examination and trial of his case, and a false judgment checks and misleads his will; the most impressive warning which Shakespeare

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could cast against the sophistry of the sceptic, that by freshness of action he might bring him back to soundness of mind. Just in the same sense does the poet in his comedies also, call us away from ascetic mortifications, from vain studies, from all the quietism of contemplation, from the empty pastime of puns and wit, in Richard II. from the propensity to idleness and play, in Timon from idle luxury and idle charity, from all this he calls us back to action, since it becomes the gods alone to be mere spectators in this life; above all he punishes in Antony the sinful waste of great and distinguished powers. In all the four plays, which we have here especially denoted, the poet has in the same sense and manner most expressly laid down his opinion as to the superiority of the active nature. Those energetic men, Fortinbras, Bolingbroke, Alcibiades, and Octavius are here given parts in contrast to the different inactive ones; it is not, that their characters gain for them all their happiness and success, perchance through a great superiority of nature; but in spite of their inferior talents, their energy in itself stands out above the inactivity of the others, no matter how beautiful the source out of which this passiveness flows, nor how base that from which this activity proceeds. Thus Heaven assists not the pious but indolent Richard II. in spite of his religious trust, but it helps indeed the pious Helena, who helps herself. In the same spirit the excess of love with all its sweetness, is despised, when it draws the man away from his strength, because "he wears his honour in a box unseen, that spends his manly marrow" in the arms of love.

And just so, because work is not a curse, but a blessing,

the poet's feeling goes against the tranquillity of the idyl; the sons of Cymbeline, who live in the most charming innocence, question with a true human instinct, whether repose is the best life. Far rather is Shakespeare on the contrary an eloquent commender of want and hardness, which he esteems as the "mother of hardiness", the test of the soul, and out of which he would have us draw the spirit of good. Therefore he held nothing more unmanly than to despond in misfortune and to leave the helm amid storm and broken masts. Therefore in war lay the delights of his strong nature; genuine ambition is no sin in Henry V., proud war directly makes "ambition, virtue"; the danger of resting in idleness makes war desirable in exchange for peace, whose wealth and peace induces "the imposthume that inward breaks", bringing evil and death to the age. Warlike valour is, therefore, extolled even in its exaggeration in Coriolanus, even in its criminality in Macbeth, even in its union with usurpation in John, still more when coupled with heroic calmness in Othello, with patriotic love in Faulconbridge, with that high idea of honour in Percy, with moderation and confidence in God in Henry V. Manly honour and valour are with Shakespeare one and the same idea; energy especially as among the ancients he regarded as the manly virtue (virtus). From this reason, therefore, Shakespeare has nowhere dealt with the subjects, so familiar in German poetry: he has scorned to bring sentimentality and sensibility into a system or into attractive representation, to depict the isolated life of mind and heart, the images of feigned and artificial sentiments, the shrivelled forms of private and hot-house life, unless it be as caricatures, which pass by the

noblest aims of existence. Throughout he points rather at
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the great stage of life, and values action for the sex and for mankind in general, beyond the contemplative life, the principle of Alexander before that of Diogenes, because it tends to larger ideas. The opinion of the active Englishman surpasses in this respect (and Bacon also is in this of one mind with Shakespeare,) the opinion even of Aristotle, the man of active antiquity, who conceded the highest rank to contemplative rather than to active life. The great world-life of history possessed not for Shakespeare too much restlessness and hostile commotion, for it to drive him as it did Goethe, to escape it in science and nature; he had interest enough in it, not to grow weary in its contemplation, power enough to raise himself above its evils, perception enough to hear the harmony in its discords. Finally, moreover from this opinion of Shakespeare's as to man's vocation to active life, springs his aversion to those systems of happiness, which is excellently expressed, not strictly in words, but in the whole spirit of Timon. For all these doctrines of the ancients respecting the highest good, aim at personal good and not at the common good, to which Bacon as well as Shakespeare directed man as to the only worthy aim of his activity. The hermit, who separates himself wholly from the things of the world, would have been called happy by Shakespeare as little as by Aristotle and Bacon, nor according to this highest conception of man, would he even have been called a man.

If the first impression, which Shakespeare drew from the contemplation of the motions of life, was the conviction of our obligation to use our inherent power of action, the second was, as we have pointed out, the perception of the

necessity, that this power should be guided aright by reason and conscience. It is certainly not without design, that Shakespeare has placed in the lips of just the most detestable of his characters, Iago and Edmund, strikingly distinct precepts: that it lies in our own free will, that we are thus or thus, and that it is not practicable to impute our base actions to causes lying without us; that fatalistic view, which disputes man's free will, the poet grants to the sceptic alone, who is exactly at variance with those true guides. The sayings of Iago, according to whom reason is given us to keep passion and sensuality in check, are quite the same respecting the contrast of mind and desire, as those which occupy the poet personally so frequently in his sonnets and descriptive poems; free self-determination is esteemed by him as the most distinguishing gift of our race; mind and conscience are to be the rulers in the community of our inward being, who are to restrain the storms of passion; even a monster like Richard must acknowledge this power of conscience in bridling the strong and presumptuous, and even the aerial spirit, Ariel, is capable of mastering the fleeting inclination by the power of the will. This may sound trivial; but the simple is always the true. Schiller, who, endowed with just as much philosophical and poetic spirit as moral character, pondered on the problem of human being, reached no other point than this, that as all mankind waver to and fro between nature and cultivation, in individual men the struggle between freedom and natural impulse and the striving after the due balance of these, is the highest thing that affects us. In this sense, we have seen, the struggles and collisions of the dramatic actions in Shakespeare are all designed; in this spirit his

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greater or lesser sympathies with this or that form of character are expressed. He is attracted by the fine nature of the womanly soul, in which morality is innate, and in which those antagonistic powers are peacefully united. In men, he has rarely or not at all depicted this instinctive virtue, the kindly nature, in which goodness springs rather from simplicity. For most of all he liked even in women, but above all in men, that purity of morals, which has passed through struggles and temptations, not the virtue of habit but of principle, not instinctive but tested, the product of the reason and of volition. He would not, like Aristotle and Bacon, have believed virtue inherent in us either *from* nature or *against* nature; inherent in us is alone the capacity for receiving it, and for developing it in us by culture or habit. He despised not the school of habit, as little as those philosophers did; he knew, that custom and use "almost can change the stamp of nature, and master the devil, or throw him out with wondrous potency". But higher in value to him was the virtue of principle, which sets before itself noble aims in life. For such aims affect the ennobling of the soul, not partially but at once, they do not cultivate in us single virtues, but they make us pre-disposed for all, they develop in us that feeling of self-reliance and honour, which makes Henry and Posthumus inaccessible to all lower temptations. Thus the instinctive virtue of Cymbeline's sons had also its charm for the poet, but like them Shakespeare strives to rise out of the state of nature that knows no vice, as he does out of the opposite condition of continual evil (a time like Lear's), when the mind has no power over the passions, into that state of culture and reason, in which tested and approved virtue

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raises the man above the sin around him, and creates a golden age in his soul. For evil will be only then wholly overcome, when it is known and looked at in the face, and evil desires will be conquered, only when their syren-song has been resisted; for he cannot be a perfect man, who has not been "tried and tutor'd in the world."

From these maxims upon the active and guiding powers within us the great truth develops itself, that if activity and action alone give strength and fulness to life, moderation alone can add the charm and the lasting fruit. As natural as it was to the old tragedists, when they, rooted firmly in the idea of the envy of the gods at the happiness of men, extolled the middle state and a moderate prosperity, so was it natural to Shakespeare, since in his tragedies throughout he has to do with the consequences of overgrown passion, to commend moral moderation and the middle state and disposition of the soul, as the happiest which falls to the lot of man. This doctrine thoroughly pervades the works of our poet, and it is of that kind in him, that it makes the difference between a middle-course and a half-way course most keenly perceptible throughout, from the confounding of which in the present day we often hear scornful objections raised against the ancient wisdom, which pronounced the middle-course to be the best. And it is indeed only too true, that in practice, the weak man, who is regarded as an example of the middle-course, exhibits indifference as the result of an even-balance, and a wavering between extremes that of a middle-path; but that which Shakespeare teaches is, to confirm energy by moderation, and to seek in the medium no resting-place of inactivity, but the necessary rallying point of the active powers. He

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sees the good not in the steep ascent, nor in the precipice, but in the even path through life, and this path he shows us with that unhesitating assurance, which gives confidence and courage to the soul. He seeks the medium not in suppressing the power which lies in passion, but in restraining it by the yoke of work, not in the weakness of passiveness, but in the sparing of the powers, the use of which is indeed his first law. What indecision and a half-way course is, Shakespeare has shewn in York, what moderation and a middle-course is, he has exhibited in Posthumus, who is strong even to the heroic control of his passionate and excited nature, and in Henry, in whom the middle-course is not mediocrity, but modesty in greatness. It is just this favourite of our poet, who knows best the wise reflection, which underlies this principle of a moderate habit of life: that when that which is done, is not done wisely and circumspectly, the power of action is in danger of being itself ruined. For "violent fires soon burn out themselves"; "to climb steep hills, requires slow pace at first"; therefore this Henry searches carefully for just motives and a safe beginning for his noble exploits, to which indeed a hot ambition spurs him on; according to an expressive image of Bacon's: Argus before the resolution to act, Briareus after it. This is the same man, who from this very sense of moderation so wisely took care not to deaden in himself the feeling of cheerfulness, not to refuse to action that "sweet recreation", the lack of which induces a sickly swarm of evils, to avoid that universal plodding, which

> "prisons up
> The nimble spirit in the arteries,
> As motion and long-during action tires
> The sinewy vigour of the traveller".

It is the same man, who naturally passionate, indeed, has become master of his passions, less by nature as Horatio, than by merit and power of will; who by the happy "mixture of the elements" attained to that firmly resting central point of the moral being, which lies in moderation and the true medium, and which is secure against all the false hovering round extremes. In this true medium Bacon and Aristotle sought for virtue, and nothing is more consolatory, than to see Shakespeare of one mind in this with these great men, above all in these times, when following in the track of Byron, a wild set of young writers with wild outcry set up this doctrine as their standard, that nothing is nobler in man than passion and desire, that which to our poet was the badge of animal nature. This man, who had a hundredfold more mind and passion to lavish, than hundreds of our modern regenerators, has throughout wisely admonished, to be sparing with it, that it may be ready for action; he knew, before the thousand-fold experience of the effervescent minds of the present day taught it, that

"fire that mounts the liquor till't run o'er,
In seeming to augment it, wastes it".

In numberless passages in his works, therefore, he calls us away from excess, because "the sweetest honey is loathsome in his own deliciousness", because he saw surfeiting changed to fasting, too great freedom to restraint, wildness in joy or sorrow destroying itself, rash haste outrunning its aim, exaggerated grief endangering life, and exaggerated jest recoiling on the jester. He showed in Hamlet, how hesitating deliberation and fleeting sensibility mislead in action, in Coriolanus, how the highest endowments by being

overstrained degenerate into contrary ones, in Angelo, how
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suppression of the senses, in Antony, how suppression of the mind, avenges itself, in Romeo, how excess of love is blighted, in Timon, how excess of hatred becomes powerless. How thoroughly penetrated Shakespeare was with this principle of wise moderation, is shown perhaps most strongly in this, that he ventured even to oppose the christian laws, which demand an overstraining of human nature; for he approved not, that the limits of duty should be extended beyond the intention of nature. He taught, therefore, the wise and human medium between the christian and heathen precepts of love and hatred of our enemies. We are "not to heat a furnace for our foe, so hot that it do singe ourselves"; we are to be satisfied with repentance, because otherwise we are "nor of heaven nor earth"; we are to avoid making enemies, but when we have them, we should so act, that they may shun us; we should be able for our enemies, but "rather in power than use". That it is possible to do too much in good things, is an express doctrine of Shakespeare's both by word and example, which follows well upon this his modified doctrine respecting the love of our enemies. Thus excessive liberality ruins Timon, whilst moderate liberality keeps Antonio in honour; the genuine ambition, which makes Henry V. great, overthrows Percy, in whom it rises too high. Exaggerated virtue brings Angelo to ruin; and when in those near him the excess of punishment proves harmful, and cannot hinder sin, then mercy, the most god-like gift that man possesses, is also exhibited in its excess as the producer of sin.

With these last propositions, that opinion is closely connected, which has become very familiar to us from

Shakespeare: that in itself nothing is altogether good or evil, that nothing upon earth is so base, that it has not its good quality, and nothing so good, that it cannot degenerate into abuse. Virtue misemployed, we have seen in Romeo becomes vice, and vice is at times ennobled by the mode of action. Thus we have seen Jessica innocently violate child-like piety, and Desdemona truth; Isabel practises feigned sin, and Lorenzo pious deceptions without scruple; they depart from the straight line of virtue, not because they follow the jesuitical moral, that the aim sanctifies the means, but because the acutest conscience and consciousness, the will to do right and to prevent wrong, directs their actions undoubtedly aright. Thus in Pisanio, truth and falsehood alternate, according to the position of things, from the same point of conscience, that although the duty of service lies in his office, the servant is not to do every service, but only what is right. Thus even Hamlet's too great conscientiousness is not a crime, but a fault, and somewhat of the lack of it in Faulconbridge is not a virtue, but a praiseworthy quality, because in the great political world another law prevails, than in the domestic, and because the circumstances throughout change the character of the actions. In Shakespeare's opinion (and here also he is one with Bacon and Aristotle) there is no positive law of religion or morals, which could form the rule of moral action in precepts ever binding and suitable for all cases; not the *what* alone, but the *how* also, determines the worth of actions; the acting man depends, like the physician and the pilot, upon circumstances and not merely upon himself and upon stated rules; morality like politics is a matter so complicate with relations, conditions of life, and motives, that it is im-

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possible to bring it to final principles, and in the manifold collisions of duties, the balancing between man and man, between public and private duty, between case and case, is inevitable.

If, however, Shakespeare pointed out to us a middle line of action between defect and excess, which can so easily be missed, if he left it to ourselves to find our way in the complex circumstances of life, does he deserve to be called so excellent a moral teacher and guide through the world, as we have designated him? We believe that he does deserve it on account of this very procedure. The line of straight-forward action is only one among innumerable crooked ones; it is hard to find it in life, as it is hard to define it tangibly in theory. Virtue is a middle-course, as Aristotle made perceptible, not with respect to a matter, but with respect to ourselves, not objectively definable as the medium between two numbers 2 and 10, but only subjectively to be defined as between him who consumes the weight of 2 mina (*μνᾶ*), and him who consumes that of 10; the just medium is not 6 once for all, because this were too much for a boy, and too little for a Milon. This aim of the middle-course in right action is but one, and it is difficult to find, the wrong are numberless and easy. Now to conceal this truth, to represent to us the way through life as easy, and to deceive us respecting our powers as well as our vocation, is not expedient; least of all for the teacher, who wishes to lead plastic minds to a conscious virtue based upon principle. Shakespeare, however, speaks only for such an object and to such minds. There are classes, whose morality is best provided for by the positive letter of religion and of law; but for such as these Shakespeare's writings are in themselves inaccessi-

ble; they are only readable and comprehensible to the cultivated, of whom it can be required, that they should appropriate to themselves the healthful measure of life, and that self-reliance, in which the guiding and inherent powers of conscience and reason united with the will, are, when consciously apprehended, worthy aims of life. But even for the cultivated also, Shakespeare's doctrine may not always be without danger. How should it alone escape the possibility but just mentioned, that even from the best we may gather the worst, that in the most fragrant flower, to use the poet's own image, "poison has residence". But the condition on which his doctrine is entirely harmless, is this, that it should be fully and completely received, and without any expunging and separating. Then it is not alone without danger, but it is also more unmistakeable and more infallible, and therefore more worthy of our confidence, than any system of morality can be. For to the poet alone is it possible, to teach by actions instead of words, by living examples instead of cold doctrine, by the eye instead of the ear, unrelentingly to exhibit the consequences of actions, concisely and distinctly to place before us the immeasurable sphere of vast experience, to open to us those immense volumes of fate, as Goethe extols in Shakespeare, and thus to work on mind and soul with a power, and to sharpen reason and conscience in a manner, which far surpasses the ability of the religious orator and the philosophical writer.

By one great example that can stand for all, we would endeavour to make clear, how necessary it is to conceive Shakespeare's moral system and his moral being as a whole, if we would not light entirely upon a false track, and how

easy it is, to select a part from him, in which we deviate
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into direct contrast from the intention, aim, and nature of the great master. The doctrine, that nothing is good in and for itself, that there is no rule in which we do not meet with exceptions, misleads most easily to that bold leap of the freethinker, to make exception the rule, which is essentially the great history of the mental and political revolutions of the present day. This possible perversion of the Shakespearian doctrine is besides considerably assisted by the decidedly hostile bearing of the poet towards all conventionalities; this bias against the arbitrary and injudicious in the customs of the age, is interpreted very easily into a bias against all existing forms. Whoever struggles like Shakespeare against all prejudices of blood and position, who sets aside, as he did, all political rules of faith, opposes the accumulation of honours upon undeserving heads, personally overleaps the barriers of unequal rank, disclaims religious fanaticism, and states unscrupulously his opinions at that time highly heretical, respecting suicide, duelling, and the honourable interment of the suicide; whoever like him makes the proudest aristocrat (Coriolanus) declaim against customs and the heap of mountainous errors, — whoever, we say, thus holds open the breach of progress, as Shakespeare has done, we might readily fear respecting him, that he would give a helping hand to the idealists and dreamers of the present day, who, appealing to his example, strive to make even the impossible possible, to overthrow the heights of truth by mountains of error, to destroy the charming variety of the world by a universal equalization, and with religious and political prejudice to strike out church and state from the ideas of human kind.

But indeed, how totally different is the picture of the poet, if, instead of setting forth one side in this distorted manner, we consider him in his entire nature! Fatal as that doctrine, that in itself nothing is either good or bad, may be in the hands of the fanatic, who knows not and wishes not to know the world, but strives to give form to his self-created phantoms, — with Shakespeare it is perfectly harmless, because he not only knows the world, but his healthful heart is unembittered by its evils, and because he desired not to have it better, than men can make both it and themselves. In him the imagination of the poet is ever linked with the sober judgment of the man of the world, the labour of experience with the freshness of the soul, the reason of age with the youth of the heart; these unhappily in the prime of German poetry were irreconcilable contrasts, but not so in Shakespeare! The autonomy and egotism of individual self would have been an abhorrence to him, while it opposes with strong will all law in politics and morals, and disregards the bonds of religion and state, which have kept society together for centuries. For in his opinion the practical wisdom of man would have no higher aim, than to carry into society the utmost possible nature and freedom, but for that very reason, that he might maintain sacredly and inviolably the natural laws of society, respect existing forms, yet at the same time penetrate into their rational substance with sound criticism, not forgetting nature in civilization, nor equally civilization in nature.

How impartially unbiassed, how free from *every* prejudice does Shakespeare therefore appear, in spite of his anti-conventional tendency, in spite of his noble freedom and independence in all questions of that political, social,

and religious life, which is most exposed to the storm of revolutionary minds and morals! That Shakespeare thought freely and clearly upon religious things, an attentive reader can never doubt from his writings; it is a quality, which raises him far above the narrow-mindedness in religious matters so peculiar to many in the present day. He was a man of much too clear a mind, in an age which had not outgrown coarse superstition, to do homage even to the more refined. Prophecies are with him under the law of nature and miracles below the line of reason, even in the lips of his priests. He trifles so wantonly with hell and the devil, that it offends even the divines of the present day, who regard Lancelot's hit at the christian propaganda and the profane allusions in general, as striking proofs of Shakespeare's heathenism. It is strange, that it is his friar Laurence, who administers the sweet milk of philosophy and not that of religion, and that his anchorites are all practical worldly people. It may strike us, that his pious Richard and Henry VI., are very weak people and unrefreshing characters. It is the despair of the pious among Shakespeare's admirers, that he sends all his villains to the grave without contrition and his noble characters without religious edification, that the requiem over Imogen speaks of the evils of this world and not of the glory of that to come, that the friar-duke Claudio comforts with the nothingness of this life and not with the promise of the future, that his loving couples go to the grave without the prospect of the meeting again, — except precisely Antony and Cleopatra, heathens and voluptuaries! Should we not rightly conclude from these traits, that Shakespeare was as much without religion as others of his dramatic contempo-

raries? But Shakespeare was indeed much too much of a poet, to undervalue religious belief; he was, it must be admitted, on the other side much too free-thinking, to display any one fixed form of religious views in his poems, otherwise than as a single side in man or a characteristic attribute. He appears also here in that wonderful medium between narrow-mindedness and extreme. He was no fanatic and no infidel, no atheist and no mystic, no Brownist and no politician, he was as much attracted by a good Roman Catholic as by an honest Lutheran; he delineated heathens, free-thinkers, rationalists, and pietists, Brutus, Faulconbridge, Percy, and Katharine, all with equal delight, if only they were worthy men. In contrast to the above-mentioned traits is a similar series of utterly opposite ones, which exhibit the poet to us always in the same impartiality, so conspicuous in him throughout. If he allows biblical passages to be harmlessly perverted in the lips of his clowns, it was at any rate better than the gloomy use, which the Puritans made of them, a frightful picture of which he holds before us in Richard III., who clothes his villany with mangled passages from Scripture. If he harshly treats the servants of religion, who with their practices and devices make worldly things their god, he has still placed others like Carlisle in a great and illustrious light. If he contemns piety, which makes a man weak and dull for the world, he has, however, exhibited in the most brilliant colours, that faith and confidence in God, which produces strong deeds, in Siward, Posthumus, and Henry V. If he permits bad and good to die in passion without remembrance of religion, yet the pious Katharine and the repentant Wolsey die not without their consolations. "Readiness and ripeness is

everything" with the noble Hamlet and Edgar; the words tell us, that Shakespeare too surrendered his conviction before the great riddle of the future, and from the belief in immortality drew the soundest conclusion, that all hinges upon a right use of this life.

And just as here in religious things, Shakespeare thought according to the human principle, that true freedom is neither to encroach upon one's own, nor still less upon the freedom of others, just as, magnanimous and many-sided, he honoured every genuine conviction, even though it were not his own, and held strongly to one ruling creed, even if he apprehended not all its articles, so he acted also in politics. His ground, with regard to the state, was as human as that with regard to religion. He would not, that the freedom of man in the moral kingdom, where he is his own ruler, should be endangered by the state. In the conflict of political and moral duties, he has left undecided in Brutus, Faulconbridge, and Salisbury, to which *he* would give the preference, that is, he has even there taken the men themselves as the deciding point according to their nature, and has only desired, that if Brutus should decide politically, he should also act politically, and if Salisbury should determime morally, that he should also not immorally consent to treachery and alliance with the enemies of the land. In Pisanio and Hubert, however, he has shewn, that in the service of lords and princes, the service of God before everything, should not be forgotten. But however high Shakespeare might have estimated the free right of the individual, he would never have fallen into the vain cosmopolitism of the German poets of the former century, much less into the utopian ideas of the world-republic,

which would seek www.libtool.com.cn to rise above the conditions of space, and which even in those days were not indeed wholly unknown. But working for the general good was to him so dear, that with this aim he would have us regard death and honour with equal courage; in the soul and substance of the state, there was for him a deep mystery worthy of consideration, and its operation seemed to him "more divine than breath or pen can give expressure to"; he was in this quite a son of his people, because nothing ranked higher with him, than his country and its power and honour. How the joy of patriotism shines forth in his playfulness respecting the French foe, in his representation of the popular heroes, the Bastard, Talbot, and Percy, in his protestant self-reliance against the papacy, in his statesmanlike glance upon the position of his sea-walled island, and in the element in which its greatness lay! And yet, how far-seeing, on the other hand, does his historical instinct appear, when we see him grasping and understanding the nature of the times and people, far enough removed from wishing to mould all circumstances into one political form! In what impartiality does he appear in the Roman plays, with regard to the democratic, the aristocratic, the monarchical nature both in the state and in men! Coleridge has before remarked, that whilst among Shakespeare's contemporaries, Massinger showed republican tendencies, and Beaumont and Fletcher exaggerated the principle of divine right, Shakespeare has nowhere testified his adherence to any fixed political party. He evidences in the Roman plays, that he esteems and appreciates all existing political forms, but was not insensible to the deterioration of all. In these plays Shakespeare expressed so natural and at the same time so judi-

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cious a sense of political freedom, based entirely on historical experience, such as belonged not to those times throughout and in all ages will most rarely be met with. Hume considered that political freedom was never the question with Shakespeare. It certainly was not in the style of modern political cant. But to write a piece so imbued with democratical principles as Cæsar, to place in the mouth of the tyrant Henry VIII. lessons against all undue exercise of power, to question in Richard II. the right of inviolability, this indeed, at a time, when James I. called kings earthly gods, was to speak of political freedom. Whoever has any knowledge of English history, whoever knows what feelings agitated the minds of the people, when James II. was dethroned, what different moods divided the national leaders, what sentiments among the loyal Tories strove with the judgment that a change of sovereign was necessary, what views among the free-minded Whigs decided them without scruple to take resolute measures ,— whoever is acquainted with this, will perceive in reading the history-plays of Richard II. and King John, that with wonderful richness and depth all is here prefigured, which in such crises of honour, humanity, and patriotism swayed the English nation on both sides. This is of more value, than the language of empty revolutionary boasting, with which the poets of more modern times alone recognize the stamp of candour; this could not, nor would not have been spoken by Shakespeare, who had so forcibly represented the fearful tragedy of the York and Lancastrian struggles. We must read in Richard II. with what earnestness he *insists upon* the sacredness of property, and in Troilus and Othello with what rigour he maintains the strict observance of family,

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that we may understand, how infinite is the gap which separates Shakespeare from the political free-thinkers of the present day, when in the most civilized lands we are obliged to defend with all the weapons of reason and political power the right of family and property, which even savages protect in their communities. Shakespeare has indeed sympathy with the lower classes who are poor and destitute, and he makes the mighty of the earth, who have forgotten poverty, remember it in their own adversity, but whither the equalization and prosperity of communism would lead, he has made most plain in Cade's revolution. No man has fought more strongly against rank and class-prejudice, than Shakespeare, but how could his liberal principles have been pleased with the doctrines of those, who would have done away with the prejudices of the rich and cultivated, only to replace them with the interests and prejudices of the poor and uncultivated. How would this man, who allures so eloquently to the course of honour, have approved, if in annulling rank, degrees of merit, and distinction, we extinguish every impulse to greatness, and by the removal of all degrees "shake the ladder to all high designs". If indeed no surreptitious honour and false power were longer to oppress mankind, how would the poet have acknowledged the most fearful force of all, the power of barbarity? In consequence of these modern doctrines of equality he would have apprehended, that everything would resolve itself into power;

> "Power into will, will into appetite;
> And appetite, an universal wolf,
> So doubly seconded with will and power,
> Must make perforce an universal prey,
> And, last, eat up himself".

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Or if this were not the final lot, which awaited mankind from these aspirations after equality, if love between nations and endless peace were not that "nothing" of impossibility, as Alonso expresses it in the Tempest, but could be an actual fruit of these efforts after equality, then the poet would have believed with this time the old age and decrepitude of the world to have arrived, in which it were worthless to the active to live.

Thus conservative is this free-minded poet in religious and political things. If we look upon his personal, moral character, if we pass from his doctrines and characteristics to his own nature and example, we find the interval still wider, that separates him from all the frivolity, the false prejudice, the hollow mediocrity, the vain love of originality, the exciting discontent, which are the marks of the free-thinking of the present day, marks of so many who are Shakespeare's most jealous admirers, although he is not their pattern, but their doom. If we would sum up this character, the simplest means in this case would be that specified above, to extract the sentiments of his writings, and to fix our minds upon those among them, which recur most frequently, and so to conclude from these, what occupied him most deeply. Whoever will do this, will find to his surprise, that the relative majority of these passages expresses quite the same character, as that at which we arrived from the comparison with Henry V. at the close of the first volume; from the consideration of the whole of his works and their universal impression, and from the enumeration of these single passages, the same result appears, and the one procedure is a proof of the other. By far the purest and most beautiful of his wise sayings are

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grouped into two concurring series, which positively and negatively express one radical essence, that on the one side is directed against all the varieties of conventional life, against all empty show and hollow ostentation, the insipid and superficial use of life, — that on the other urges after the essence of things, after simple plainness, after truth and humility. On the one side, his stinging wit is pointed against light-minded youth, whose judgments are mere fathers of their garments, and whose constancies expire before their fashions; against the favourites of the drossy age, the sweet gentlemen of the court, who regard keeping their word as *mauvais ton*, and whose accomplishments lie in hand-kissing and "picking on's teeth"; against the coxcombs, who smell like an apothecary's shop; against all the perversity, which conceals the truth of nature with false hair and rouge; then against the rogues and time-servers, who "turn their halcyon-beaks with every gale"; against the whole age, to whom "a sentence is but a cheveril-glove"; against the self-conceited, whose voice sounds to themselves like supernatural music; against the gibing spirit, whose "influence is begot of that loose grace, which shallow laughing hearers give to fools"; and just as much against the silent oracles, who by empty silence hope to gain the reputation of wisdom; against the blasé feelings, which arise from wasted understanding and morals; against the love of originality in the whimsical and the bullying; against the diplomatists, who "unloose the gordian knot of policy, familiar as their garter", and against the politicians, who could "circumvent God". From the store of passages of this character, the tone of which alternates from the merriest humour to the bitterest sarcasm, this one point

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makes the fullest impression upon us, that this was no
man, who cared for the glitter and variety of the worl
The opposite sayings, which recall from all that is nam
outward-show, and ornament, to substance, reality, a
truth, form the most serious and sublime contrast to th
sallies. From those shallow sons of the age, the youths
fashion, his eye turns with delight to the bastards of th
age, those hearty fellows of rough exterior, those unc
diamonds like Faulconbridge, and from the sweet gentle-
men who rhyme themselves into ladies' favours, he pass
gladly to the healthy, unsusceptible youths like Orlando an
Sebastian. In contrast to those court-natures, with wh
good faith is a mockery, how he stickles for neglected trut
how strikingly he sees in truth the only weapon wi
which to scorn the devil, how serious and strong is h
language and expression, when from all ambiguity a
deceit he calls us back to plain truth and simple fait
which knows nothing of artifice, when he warns us ab
all and before all, to be true to ourselves, because it follo
from this, that we cannot be false to another. How warm
he speaks against "the seeming truth, which cunning tim
put on to entrap the wisest!" How forcibly and frequen
he teaches, not to measure things by a glittering appe
ance, but by their inner worth! To him it is

> "The fool-multitude, that choose by show,
> Not learning more than the fond eye doth teach,
> . . . . but like the martlet
> Builds in the weather on the outward wall
> Even, — the force and road of casualty".

and he, therefore, is in his sight not a man of judgme
who sets value upon the applause of the multitude. In h

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aversion to all show and falsity lies the foundation also of his zeal against all hollow ostentation and self-elevation, against pride, which is its own trumpet, against the vain, who praise themselves otherwise than in the deed, and thus "devour the deed in the praise". Much rather to him are those honourable, who, for the sake of a good deed shrink not from the show of evil; with this self-denial he has invested his most pious women, Isabella and Helena. Unostentatious virtue and extreme humility joined to the most splendid endowments, this was what charmed him; the resignation, which renounces a merited reward, the self-consciousness, which needs not outward acknowledgment, these seemed to him amid all human virtues to deserve the highest praise, or more justly to create the highest self-contentment; this doing and acting for the sake of itself, without regard to reward and commendation, was to him the great contrast to the insipid conduct of the world, which rests on vanity, show, and folly. And with this feeling, he was equally far from forfeiting his principles, and falling into the extreme of Coriolanus; in depicting this man's love of truth and contempt of applause and reward, he has too strikingly cast into the shade the pride and self-exaltation of merit, to allow us to think, that his own self-reliance could have risen to this more exaggerated height. Much more is the impression forced upon us in all his maxims and representations, that the poet in his personality himself possessed that modesty which he taught, that his was that golden soul of the full-fraught man of plain and uncoined constancy, to which in the lips of his Henry he always gave the pre-eminence, that in him a

love of truth predominated, which surpassed every other quality.
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Must not this quality in the poet of simple true nature, rise yet infinitely in value, if we consider at the same time his boundless many-sidedness, in which he seems apparently diverted by everything, the victim of every impression? But these apparently opposite sides hinge exactly one upon the other; his many-sidedness depends essentially on his impartiality, and his impartiality concurs essentially with his sense of truth. Never has a man stood so equally open to the most different sides of life, never has any one suffered subjects of every kind to affect him with such equal force, nor received from them such unbiassed, genuine, and true impressions, that he might do justice to everything. And just this is the quality, which every scholar in his sphere, whatever may be his qualification, *may* learn from this master, and which he *must* learn from him, if he will do honour to the teacher and not carry away fruit from the school, the seed of which has indeed not been sown there. Learn the spirit of truth from this poet, and "laugh at the devil"! The one great temptation at least, which can alone make his doctrine and his example harmful, his disciple will then and only then certainly avoid, — the temptation to place aught in his teacher's mouth, which he has not said, to divide that which he requires to be left entire, to commit an abuse with a part of his truths, which the whole truth, which he taught, would prevent. For then we shall before everything learn that great art from him, which with good resolution is not so difficult to learn, and in the age in which we live, is most salutary to learn, that art, namely, to *unlearn* all pretension, to lay aside the ruling passion for cen-

suring God in his economy, not to despise and condemn
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the conditions of the world, but first of all to understand, to be acquainted with every thing before passing sentence upon it, and thus to approach nearer to that impartiality and many-sidedness of judgment, which we call first and last Shakespeare's most valuable quality. We will not repeat, how, free from all sectarian spirit and all party-feeling, he knew how to grasp and to honour in religion every conviction, in the state every form suitable to the age, among men every complete character true to itself, among the vocations of life, every one which earnestly pursues its aim. He read in all ages, in all nations, in all relations of life, and, as it were, everything in his own tongue, and with appreciation for every kind of mould and nature. Human forms of character were familiar to him from the demi-god to the distorted original, all inclinations and vocations he seemed to know from his own experience; for he is whatever he chooses to be: a lion-hearted warrior and a child harmlessly at play, a genius and an idiot, equally acquainted with human strength and weakness, his head in the clouds and his feet upon the earth. It is for this reason, that the most different men have delighted in him and been amazed at him, even those by nature the furthest removed from him, for every one has found a side in him, which speaks to himself; there seems indeed scarcely aught in human nature, which does not find an analogy in him. In Germany the most sober-minded, such as Lichtenberg, and the most fantastic, such as the Romanticists, honour him equally; master-minds have despondingly admired him and novices have thought by imitation to surpass him. The sectarian spirit, alone, which has strayed in one-

sided directions, finds it hardest to agree with this man of
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many-sidedness: platonic enthusiasm, sickly sensibility, the intellectual barrenness of a Voltaire, or the zeal of the religious, — adversaries, whom every one would wish to possess. Otherwise this poet with his mighty power constrains all to be his adherents, for he is master of all our feeling, of the emotions of our souls and of our thoughts, and Goethe stood lost before this power and repose, and despairing before this versatility, in which Shakespeare "had exhausted the whole human nature in all directions and in all its heights and depths", and by this had discouraged his successor, even this great mind, from venturing competition with his "unfathomable and unattainable excellencies". And this same many-sidedness, which his works declare, must have been also the characteristic of Shakespeare himself. His portrait we have seen in Henry, who was equally qualified for enjoyment and activity, for jest and earnest, for war and peace, for vehemence and self-command, for folly and noble effort; adapted for every business and every society at the right time and in the right place; with kings a king, and with beggars their equal, familiar and proud, selfish and humble, in the variety of his being evading nothing but monotonous habit. Thus must Shakespeare have been. His favourite characters are ever those, which unite the most contradictory qualities, a Hamlet with his rich endowments, a Posthumus so strong and tender, a Portia so pious and determined, so womanlike in her resignation, so active and so rigorous. And nothing seems more opposed to Shakespeare, than the characters in whom any one-sidedness predominates, a cold calculating man like Iago, a sentimentalist like Cassio; and furthest

from him lies perhaps that dogmatical Leontes, who is shut out from all truth by his one-sided narrow-mindedness. That which moreover takes from this many-sidedness of Shakespeare all idea of distraction and disunion, that which causes this oceanic mind, as Coleridge called him, ever to appear as one and the same element, that which makes him at once *παν* and *ὅλος*, which gives to his versatility at once the greatest compactness and entirety, that is that property, which we have often pointed out in him, according to which all his powers are so equally balanced, and are united in the most beautiful bond. As we found in an intellectual point of view that mind, judgment, fancy, contemplativeness, and practical understanding, the rarest wit which perceives analogy in the most remote object, and the greatest profoundness which pierces into the deepest ground of things, were ever in unison, so is it also with his moral qualities in themselves and in their relation to the intellectual. His heart is as fresh as his head is healthy, his feelings as genuine and deep as his judgment is rich and tried, his inclination is in such harmony with his will, and his moral efforts with his understanding, that, as from an æsthetic point of view, the ideal and beautiful in his art concur with the truth of his sensual and spiritual intention, so from an ethical point of view, the good and the moral coincides with this same truth, so that ever in increased degree the same one, entire, normal being steps forth, whose peculiarity, as Hudson said, lies in his lack of peculiarities, in his generic properties, in the united perfection and in the equal balancing of his powers. For those who, among us, daily fall lamentable victims to one-sidedness, caprice, and narrow-mindedness, Shakespeare is a contrast

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of the highest value; to him it would have been utterly impossible to dissever human gifts and powers; in his art he knew no ideal, that was irreconcilable with the actual, he scorned the beautiful, which would divert from the good, and refused the truth, which contradicted the beautiful and the good. So that the most complete characteristic of the poet and of his poetry, of its many-sidedness and its unity, lies perhaps in the following verse, which is written in his 105th sonnet in a narrower application, but is capable of being understood in this wider one:

> "Fair, kind, and true, is all my argument,
> Fair, kind, and true, varying to other words;
> And in this change is my invention spent,
> Three themes in one, which wondrous scope affords".

In virtue of this rare union of that universality, which the Germans gladly boast of, with that totality which is the nature of the Englishman, Shakespeare stands as a link between the two nations, and is an equally great example and model for both, for each people from a different side, because he possesses that which on both sides expresses a want of the national nature. He impresses the Germans on the side of his totality, with which he casts all their own poetry into the shade. That which most invests Shakespeare's writings with this character of completeness, is the natural inclination of the poet for the active side of life. It was this nature which fettered Bacon as well as Shakespeare to his age and nation; and it was this again, which led them both to their activity in art and science, aye, placed before them practical aims and objects. The want of such conceivable aims, based on present national circumstances, has left the entire German poetry of the last century without

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a point of concentration; their poets found no settled political life and nationality, no prevailing tendency of taste and style of poetry; each strove, therefore, to create and to form art and life according to his own ideal, since no complete and real national existence guided him in a definite course; the near result was lost in these wide-spreading efforts; and the greatest of their poets confessed, that he had only known what he would and should do, but divided and distracted, he had in nothing reached the true aim, and only in the works of other masters had found himself satisfied with *what they had done*. It is, therefore, easily accounted for, that the nation, blessed indeed with so immense a mass of poetic productions, always felt a want unsatisfied, which it replaced by Shakespeare's works, and that it maintains the ambitious belief, that the man may yet stand forth in the history of poetry, who shall be called the German Shakespeare. Let us, in the mean while, rejoice in unembittered joy in the English Shakespeare, even in the chance of no German succeeding him. Let us, even as a nation, learn modesty from him, not to grieve because a foreigner, — he is at least certainly of our own stock, — has won the prize from our own poetry; let us, on the other hand, contend with England for the glory of understanding him and thus naturalizing him amongst us. We must acknowledge it without envy and jealousy: this poet is utterly free from all the hereditary faults of German poetry, and possesses, at the same time, virtues, which German poetry has never possessed. How our poetry of the past century reeled to and fro between the extremes of a sickly sensibility and weakness and a strong-minded — as we then called it — power of genius (*Kraftgenialität*), and as we ought to have called it, ima-

ginary power and rude nature; of these strange deformities, from which our greatest masters were not wholly free, there is only a trace in one Shakespearian (and this moreover doubtful) youthful production. How our poetry alternated between a singular aspiring after originality on the one side, and after a versatile imitation of the originals of all ages and nations on the other; our most famous men have stood in relation to some period of civilization, Klopstock to the Northern and Oriental, Wieland to the chivalric Byzantine, Goethe by turns to all; from leaps like these, Shakespeare and the English stage were completely preserved by the national life around them. Our poetry, at the commencement of its regeneration in the past century and still more of late, has ever suffered from an inclination to all possible, natural, and forced extravagances, but Shakespeare knew nothing of these passionate paroxysms, of which our poets feigned themselves the prey; nothing of the mental weaknesses, which lead them to singularities of all kinds, to nonsense, and to delicious excitement; nothing of the tormenting problems of civilization and science, which has made our poetry so full of doctrines, abstractions, and practical tendencies; nothing of the pain of unsatisfied knowledge and unlimited sensibilities, which disturbed the most eminent minds among us; nothing of the irreconcilable enmity between the ideal and the actual life, which subverted our finest talents. He had to experience the struggle of sceptical years as much as any, his Hamlet is a warrant for this; but his healthful nature delighted not, as so many amongst us, in a voluntary defeat in the struggle; he was even in his youth a man, and his poetry has therefore nothing of the youthful character in it, which our own hardly laid

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aside in their best productions; he wrote for men, and to men only is he wholly intelligible. However much in the spirit of our German poetry, he strove to free himself from the vain conventionalities of life, nowhere do we see him even tempted to reject the good with the bad, and, as is customary with us, to carry the experiments of an ideal witticism at random into actual life. However much he fashioned himself out of the limits of narrow-hearted nationality for universal humanity, contemptible would those cosmopolitan principles have been to him, which the heads of our nation embraced. He had imbibed a political and patriotic spirit from history, the most valuable study for the poet, but one which ours, with the single exception of Schiller, left untouched; in its domain Shakespeare on the contrary did all, that Bacon demanded even from the historian: he carries the mind into the past and makes it, as it were, old; he investigates the movements of the ages, the characters of the persons, the uncertainty of counsels, the course of actions, the soul of pretexts, the secrets of governments, and with candour and truth he renders them intelligible. If we compare Shakespeare with every single one of our mightiest German poets, we may maintain, that the highest predicates pronounced upon them, are just with reference to him, but their faults and one-sidedness he has avoided. As Klopstock first ennobled German poetry by his personal bearing, we may say the same indeed of Shakespeare with regard to dramatic poetry in England; Schiller denominated Klopstock the poet of dignity, for he raised the language of poetry, he insisted upon the closest union between poetry and morality, and ever gave work to the

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mind; all this applies also to Shakespeare, but he never lost himself in Klopstock's religious extravagances, nor did he, like him, overstrain the mind with exertion, but he maintains it in constant freshness and power. Schiller denominated Wieland in contrast to Klopstock the poet of grace. Shakespeare is this as much as he is the poet of dignity. But never like Wieland does he weaken either the mind or the moral power. He has nowhere, as Wieland has not rarely done, covered the bare stump of vice with flowers, and thrown a veil of grace over the deformity of evil; wherever he has made the foul and the base open to all, he has not chosen attractive vessels, and when he has done so, he has rendered them not easy to appropriate; his wantonness is clothed in such wit, that the lascivious taste is not a match for it; and whoever seeks after such spoil in the works of Boccaccio or Wieland, will never read Shakespeare's. Wieland is also among the poets of Germany, the poet of a middle course, as we have declared Shakespeare to be. But Shakespeare never alternated like Wieland between enthusiasm and soberness, between naturalism and epicureanism, but he adhered firmly to the point of medium between these extremes; and he did not, like Wieland, consider all in man created as an instrument for pleasure, but as an instrument for activity. On this point, Lessing's character approaches nearest to Shakespeare's, and on that also of his perfectly manly bearing; but Lessing was born for science and criticism, and he lacked the poetic ἀκμη, which was Shakespeare's richest possession. If we place Shakespeare by the side of Schiller and Goethe, we see easily

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how, with respect to mind and morals, he concentrated both natures in his own. Out of numberless points of comparison we will select only a few at random. With Goethe's comprehensive knowledge of human nature, Shakespeare united Schiller's unshaken reverence for mankind, which Goethe lost. Goethe lost it in individual intercourse, by a life distracted by manifold small activity, by his dislike and ignorance of the great world, of politics, and history; it was just in this world, that Shakespeare moved, and felt himself at ease in it, and maintained in it his reverence for human nature, because, even in Goethe's opinion, there are always the greatest objects at stake, where mankind operates in combination. Shakespeare carries us, therefore, in the spirit of Schiller ever upwards to the heights of active life, which Goethe always lost sight of, the nearer he endeavoured to lead us to the heights of civilization. If from Goethe's many-sided pursuits and universal interest in all things, a comprehensive *mind* was formed, from Shakespeare's interest in the active world, we may believe, a character was at the same time moulded. If Schiller's moral dignity elicited the esteem even of him who loves him less as a poet, and Goethe's elegance allured the love, even of him who morally esteems him less, with Shakespeare we are in the happy position, to be able always at once to esteem and love, aye, to be obliged to do so. Goethe himself has thus characterized the highest point of contrast between himself and Schiller: — that Schiller was excited by the idea of freedom, but that he stood on the side of nature; in Shakespeare this contrast is not to be found. Compared with Goethe, he gives us the impression

of freedom, compared with Schiller that of nature, but also on the other hand, compared even with Goethe, he gives us the impression of nature, and with Schiller that of freedom; just as much is he a picture of natural perfections as of free mental effort, endowed by nature like Goethe, and requiting her favours by his own free endeavours like Schiller. Schiller denominated this to be the perfect work of civilization: — to place the *sensual power* in the richest contact with the world, and to increase its susceptibility to the highest degree, and to maintain the *mental power* independent and absolute, and to raise its activity and power of decision to the utmost: this is most peculiarly the characteristic of Shakespeare's mind. He has at once shown us, like Goethe, the compass of receptive nature, and like Schiller, the power of the productive mind. He has neither neglected, as Schiller reproached Goethe with having done, to convert the gifts of nature into a true possession of the mind, nor has he, as Goethe blamed Schiller, endangered instinct by the activity of the mind. Nature had liberally endowed him, but he traded with the talent she had lent him, and the profit he was justified in calling his property; poetry, as Schiller pursued it, was to Goethe indeed too serious a business, but Shakespeare carried it on with more intense labour than either. No wonder, therefore, if Goethe stood satisfied before the performances of this master, as he did not before his own works, and if he looked up to him with reverence "as a being of a higher kind"; a greater testimony has never been given to a genius, than that the greatest poet who has followed Shakespeare during three centuries, should have said of him, that he feared to founder upon him.

Thus it is then no wonder, that Shakespeare influenced so powerfully in Germany, that in spite of the interval of time, he has worked more effectually than living poets, that among the unprejudiced he has overcome national jealousy, and that weighed even with those favourites of Germany, Goethe and Schiller, whose greatness and importance the nation truly has in no wise overlooked, he has stepped beyond them. In the very beginning of these notable influences upon Germany, Shakespeare appears again in one line with Homer. Both have first awakened the better day of German poetry, and have given the strongest and most lasting impulse to its greatest masters, — Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller. Since this period, Shakespeare's works have ever made greater conquests among the Germanic races from western America to eastern Europe. For to these races he especially belongs in virtue of his general nature, which exhibits him never nationally as a hard Englishman, never religiously as the narrow follower of a creed, never, as regards his poetical taste, as a one-sided Saxon. Only in the Romanic nations, where the narrow national conventionalities of art, and yet far more Roman Catholicism and all that is connected with it, impedes access to Shakespeare's works, is their circulation at a stand-still. But this limitation to the Germanic race is no sign of the limited views of the poet, or of too great a peculiarity in his ideal of art. The nature of times and nations is indeed of that kind, that they reject these reciprocal productions of literature; Homer also was unknown during 1000 years of the middle ages, and Calderon and Dante never penetrated further towards the north, than

Shakespeare towards the south. But the Teutonic race is great enough in soul and body, to dare independently to oppose its taste to the southern and ancient, and its civilization has moreover so boundless a prospect of extension and duration, that at all events no inferior lot of activity is measured out to our Shakespeare, than to the greatest poets among the Greek and Latin races.

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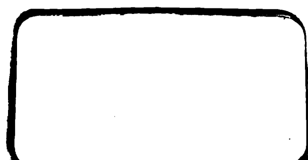

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