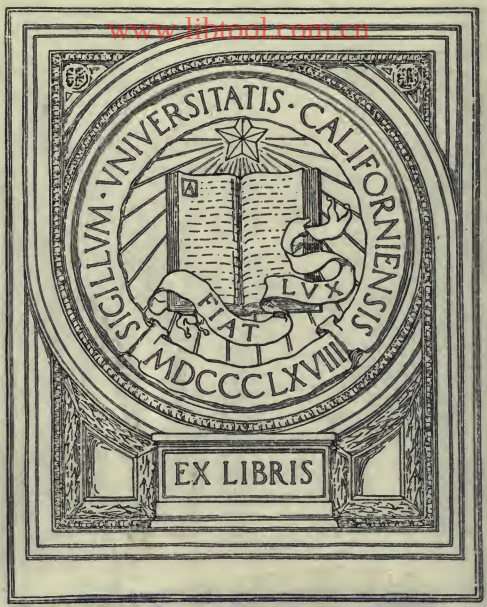

# THE TRUE OPHELIA:
## AND OTHER STUDIES

"The rough, uncultured man delights in seeing something happen before his eyes. The man of refinement finds pleasure in those experiences that give rise to thought and reflection."

*Goethe.*

# THE TRUE OPHELIA: AND OTHER STUDIES OF SHAKESPEARE'S WOMEN. By AN ACTRESS



"Good alone is good without a name."
*All's Well that Ends Well*



SIDGWICK AND JACKSON, LIMITED
LONDON AND TORONTO MCMXIII

TO

MY BELOVEDEST

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# THE TRUE OPHELIA

I NEVER wanted to play Ophelia. I had seen her played too often, for one reason, and I had not the slightest personal sympathy with her character, for another. Her "mad" scenes are the only opportunity she has of any acting; before then she is a quite negligible quantity, as anyone on the stage will tell you.

At the best, Ophelia appeared to me as a pretty, fragile, stupid, weak little inanity, of no character whatever; her very madness only touching on account of her unprotected helplessness.

It has long been a mystery to the many what such an intellectual and full-grown man as Hamlet could find to love and admire in so insipid a little creature. On the other hand, multitudes have denied that he ever was *seriously* in love with her at all, in spite of his own avowals, both verbal and on paper.

Certainly most actors show some spasmodic symptoms of erotic emotion in the one scene

they have together, when, however, if her beauty thus moves him, her feeble behaviour, or her attitude of mind, is considered quite enough to exasperate him justly to the most aggressive frenzy.



Many actresses have tried hard to make Ophelia really interesting, one by wearing black garments instead of the traditional white ones in the "mad scenes"; another by foaming at the mouth in the "mad scenes," and yet another by uttering piercing shrieks—in the "mad scenes," of course. Ophelia is an utter nonentity until then, and no one seems to have considered the possibility of her being of any significance before that distressing event.

Yet, in spite of these efforts to materialise the vagueness of her individuality—a word really too strong to be used in connection with her—she seems as much out of the emotional scheme of the individual Hamlet as if her mad scenes were only interpolated as a "turn," to rest the minds of the audience from the philosophical and grimmer scenes of the play. Indeed it would not be impossible to cut her part out altogether—sacrificing a good "ranting" scene for Hamlet, to be sure, but he has so many that it might well be spared. A stranger to the play would be no wiser concerning the

omissions. Nor would Ophelia lose by being merely referred to, and her personality left to the imagination.

The actresses who have "succeeded" in the part have done so sheerly by means of their own delightful personalities. They looked so beautiful, moved so gracefully, spoke in such sweet tones and wept with such pathos. But they would have been *exactly the same* had they been playing a "sympathetic" village idiot, weeping over a dead canary!

One wonders who was the originator of the traditional nonentity. Some delightful beauty, maybe, whose rendering has seemingly been left unquestioned.

It is strange that in the struggle for originality no one has ever attempted to play the character as Shakespeare — or Bacon — has created it; with "business" entirely in keeping with the text, and in an atmosphere of sequential thought and feeling. If one did attempt it, she was too insignificant to have succeeded in making any impression officially, beyond perhaps gaining the reputation in the company of being a "crank."

Thus considering Ophelia with a mixture of indifference and contemptuous pity, it so happened that circumstances arose which demanded that I should study her for

myself. Having seen some eight or nine productions of the play, I did not feel exactly a stranger to the young woman; nevertheless the sense of duty took me, naturally enough, to some lunatic asylums. Then I settled down to fix the lines in my memory, and discovered "Ophelia."



. . . . . .

A young girl, obviously motherless, and without sisters, adored by an only and elder brother, and the pet of her father. Of all Shakespeare's heroines she is the most reserved, *shy and virginal*. Beautiful and sensitive, sympathetic and intelligent, as fresh as a scarce-opened flower-bud, and utterly inexperienced in the ways of the world—and men. Modest, generous in mind and trustful as a child, she has an unsuspected depth of nature which is revealed as her tragedy unfolds. She is the lily-bud in the bouquet of Shakespearean heroines, and the youngest of them all. Juliet, to be sure, may be less in years, but she has ripened early beneath a Southern sun and is a passionate red rose; nor, with such a plain-spoken old nurse, is she ignorant of worldly matters. It is somewhat startling, indeed, to find her sounding Romeo on his "bent of love"—

" If that thy bent of love be honourable; thy purpose marriage "—

within four hours of their first meeting.

The virginal soul of the fair Ophelia, slipping slowly but irrevocably into the golden ecstasy of first love, is so happy in the strange, exquisite joy of loving ideally, and being so beloved, that practical, mundane matters of propriety, wedding-cake and other things have not yet entered her mind. Nor has any doubt as to the honesty of her lover's love occurred to her. He has never given her the slightest occasion to suspect him. Her sympathetic intelligence and gentle beauty, her very innocence of worldly matters have attracted Hamlet, accustomed to court intrigues, and he too—always of a dreamy, inactive nature—is happy enough to let their innocent and sincere romance continue as long as possible. He is glad in just being with her, instructing her, doubtless, in many abstract questions, looking into her eyes and adoring her. Each has perfect faith in the other.

He is not by nature a sensual man, and is at that time feeling keenly the death of his " dear father " and the unpleasantly hasty remarriage of his mother with his father's brother, a man he does not like or trust. He

knew well enough, at the back of his head, that there would be many serious obstacles to a union with Ophelia, and he was not yet ready to go out and look for trouble. He never was a man of action; the only and fatal occasion when he endeavoured to be one, proved conclusively that such was not his *métier* (Act III., scene 4), for he merely succeeded in killing the wrong man, Polonius!



It is a matter of significance that Ophelia is *not* present at the first Court scene. Doubtless her father lived in or very near the palace, and Hamlet had many opportunities of seeing and meeting her, but she is never represented as being one of the "Court ladies." According to the text, we first see her in "A Room in Polonius' House"—viz. in her own home. Generally, in touring companies, the poor creature finds herself dragged through taut curtain ropes on to a strip of stage. There, often with scarce a yard between the cloth behind her and the footlights at her feet, she has to endure a peculiarly difficult scene, and convey silently to the audience a very great and important "impression" of her sensitive and virginal soul. In this scene is struck the first note of the tragedy that is to cause Hamlet the most poignant suffering and blast her own young life.

We see her (Act I., scene 3) for the first time (and last) free from pain or sorrow, happy and loving, and touched only with distress at the departure of her beloved brother. The affection and confidence between the two is very marked, and how well Laertes appreciates the depth and sensitiveness of his sister's character is proved by the extreme delicacy and tenderness with which he words his tactful warning of the false position in which she may find herself in regard to Hamlet :

LAERTES. " For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favour,
Hold it a fashion, and a toy in blood ;
A violet in the youth of primy nature,
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute ;
No more ! "

OPH. " No more but so ? "

she asks, smilingly, conscious of knowing a good deal more about the depth of Hamlet's affection than her brother does.

LAERTES. " *Think* it no more ;
For nature, crescent, does not grow alone
In thews and bulk ; but, as this temple waxes,
The inward service of the mind and soul
Grows wide withal. *Perhaps* he loves you *now* ;
And *now* no soil nor cautel doth besmirch

The virtue of his will : *but you must fear,*
His greatness weighed, his will is not his own ;
For he himself is subject to his birth :
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself ; for on his choice depends
The safety and the health of the whole state ;
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed
Unto the voice and yielding of that body,
Whereof he is the head : then, if he says he loves you,
It fits your wisdom so far to believe it,
As he in his particular act and place
May give his saying deed ; which is no further
Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.
Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain,
If with too credent ear you list his songs ;
Or lose your heart ; or your chaste treasure open
To his unmaster'd importunity.
Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister ;
And keep you in the rear of your affection,
Out of the shot and danger of desire.
The chariest maid is prodigal enough,
If she unmask her beauty to the moon :
Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes :
The canker galls the infants of the spring,
Too oft before their buttons be disclosed ;
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
Contagious blastments are most imminent.
Be wary, then : best safety lies in fear :
Youth to itself rebels, though none else near."

The beautiful utterances touch her by their justness, but in her heart she is absolutely

confident of Hamlet's love and honour, and she herself has not as yet arrived at the stage of love where the poison of the sunbeam-feathered shaft subtly begins to work.

Serenely, therefore, she answers her beloved brother:

"I shall the effect of this good lesson keep
As watchman to my heart."

Then she dimples into a smile, as she roguishly adds:

"But, good my brother,
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;
Whilst, like a puff'd and reckless libertine
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede."

Miss Ophelia is no fool, and hits him neatly, as his half laugh and hasty "O fear me not" should convey.

At this juncture Polonius enters—the "tedious old fool," as Hamlet later calls him. It is strangely curious to contrast the fine and wise words he utters to his son with the tactless, coarse vulgarity with which he presently attacks his delicate little blossom of a daughter, desecrating and destroying for ever the beauty

of her love dream and the bloom of her unconscious innocence. Laertes in his loving warning conveys his fear, *not* that she may be light and wanton, but that, if she seriously loves Hamlet, her tender and sincere nature will suffer deeply through an unhappy love.



To Polonius' first question Ophelia, utterly unsuspicious of the verbal brutality to follow, frankly replies. Mark well what follows:

POL. "Marry, well bethought:
'*Tis told me*, he hath very oft of late
Given private time to you; *and you yourself*
*Have of your audience been most free and bounteous*:
If it be so, (as so 'tis put on me,
*And that in way of caution*), I must tell you
You do not understand yourself so clearly.
As it behoves my daughter, *and your honour*:
What is between you? give me up the truth."
OPH. "He hath, my lord, of late, made many tenders
Of his affection to me."
POL. "Affection? puh! you speak like a green girl,
Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.
Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?"

What gross insinuations concerning her wondrous love idyll! The poor child, who believed that no one knew the delicious, sacred secret of his love, learns thus bluntly that they are both being made the subject of vulgar and malicious gossip. It takes a long while for the

lily type of young girl to become used to certain material facts of life, and then it is only by enshrining them as most holy sacraments. Therefore the shock of such a discovery and the manner of it, is terrible to her. That she is publicly talked about as making herself "so cheap" that it is considered necessary to caution her father, for fear—— Horrible!



Polonius answers her with such cocksure contempt for the vows of Hamlet that the beautiful confidence she had thrilled with so lately is shaken by her realisation of her own ignorance of the hearts and ways of men. White to the lips, all the joyousness faded out of her young face, she utters slowly, dazed with the shock of shame and new-born doubt, the words which from hence-forward may be said to sum up the state of her mind:

"*I do not know*, my lord, *what I should think.*"

From gross tactlessness Polonius cheerfully proceeds to outrageous insults:

POL. "Marry, I'll teach you: think yourself a baby;
That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,
Which are not sterling. *Tender yourself more dearly*;
*Or* (not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
Wronging it thus) *you'll tender me a fool.*"

This stings the miserable girl into a quick remonstrance, *not on her own behalf*, but that of Hamlet :

> " My lord, he hath importun'd me with love,
> In *honourable* fashion !"

But the coarse old man airily brushes her defence of Hamlet aside, continuing to vilify his motives, and at the same time exonerating him from blame. *False vows and snares are* she is informed, *perfectly permissible to young men.*

POL. " Ay, fashion you may call it ; go to, go to."
OPH. " And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven."
POL. " Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. I do know
When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows ; these blazes, daughter,
Giving more light than heat—extinct in both,
Even in their promise, as it is a making—
You must not take for fire. From this time
Be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence :
*Set your entreatments at a higher rate,*
*Than a command to parley.* For lord Hamlet,
Believe so much in him, that he is young ;
And with a larger tether may he walk,
Than may be given you ; in few, Ophelia,
*Do not believe his vows* ; for they are brokers
Not of that die which their investments shew,

But *mere implorators of unholy suits,*
*Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds,*
*The better to beguile.* This is for all—
I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,
Have you so slander any moment's leisure,
As to give words or talk with the lord Hamlet.
Look to't, I charge you ; come your ways."
OPH. " I shall obey, my lord."

Poor child ! This is the beginning of the tragedy of their mutual misunderstanding and doubt. The poison now is beginning to work ; she realises that she loves him very deeply, and feels that she would die of shame if he really held her in such light and dishonourable regard as her father avows he does. She buckles on the armour of her maiden pride, and determines to prove to him that she is not so light and accessible as he—or they—may fancy.

" I shall obey, my lord ! "

she says quietly. But in her heart is the passionate prayer that he will yet prove himself the true lover she has believed him to be.

. . . . . .

The next appearance of Ophelia is again in her own home (Act II., scene 1). One must consider a moment what has happened since Polonius forbade her to speak to, or even to see,

Hamlet. She has been brooding alone, over her sewing, the love-poison stealthily rankling in her veins. Wounded in her love, in her pride; and her heart and head at war with each other—



"*I do not know, my lord, what I should think.*"

Poor, unhappy little girl, lacking in initiative from her very inexperience and ignorance. Meantime, strange things have occurred to Hamlet, the involuntary cause of her distress. Since their last meeting he has suffered the double shock of seeing the ghost of his father, and learning from him of his murder, and the treachery of Claudius. He is also deeply moved at his father's grief at the disloyalty, if not worse, of his Queen, knowing how dearly she was loved by him:

"O most pernicious woman!"

Wrung by misery, and racked with helpless horror, Hamlet now if ever needs the sympathetic and intelligent companionship of his "soul's idol," his "celestial, most beautified Ophelia," the one pure honest thing in an intriguing court. He seeks her—and finds the door shut in his face, without the least warning or explanation. He writes to her, again and

again, but his letters remain unanswered. This, from the one creature in whom he has had the most loving faith! Gods! are *all* women mere wantons, insincere and fickle? The shock is a severe one; his mind is corroded with bitterness, but such is the fierceness of his love, and so thoroughly awakened is his desire to see her, that, regardless of etiquette, his own dignity, of every possible consequence in short, he desperately effects an entrance into Ophelia's own apartment.



There, rendered inarticulate by grief and emotion (and she dumb from alarm, shame and surprise at his wild appearance), he can find no words in which to reproach her. She has been too recently his soul's idol for him to turn his tongue to bitter epithets; and fearing his own passion, maybe, he silently drags himself away, still unenlightened as to the cause of the change in her. And she hastens to the only creature she has to look to for support and guidance.

Act II., scene 1. *Enter* OPHELIA, white and trembling, still "not knowing what to think."

POL. "How now, Ophelia? what's the matter?"
OPH. "O my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted!"
POL. "With what, in the name of heaven?"
OPH. "My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,

Lord Hamlet—with his doublet all unbraced ;
No hat upon his head ; his stockings foul'd,
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ankle ;
Pale as his shirt ; his knees knocking each other ;
And with a look so piteous in purport,
As if he had been loosed out of hell,
To speak of horrors—he comes before me."
POL. " Mad for thy love ? "



Poor Ophelia ! In her cry of anguish lies her tragedy :

" *My lord, I do not know !* "

How can she ? Has not Polonius denied the possibility of his caring *seriously* ? Has Hamlet himself said a word to enlighten her on the subject, one way or the other ? She answers first the question which touches her most nearly, and adds in reply to the suggestion of madness :

" But, truly, I do fear it."
POL. " What said he ? "
OPH. " He took me by the wrist, and held me hard ;
Then goes he to the length of all his arm ;
And, with his hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face,
As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so ;
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,—
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound,

As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being : that done, he lets me go :
And, with his head over his shoulder turned,
He seemed to find his way without his eyes ;
For out o' doors he went without their helps ;
And, to the last, bended their light on me."

POL. " Come, go with me : I will go seek the king.
This is the very ecstasy of love ;
Whose violent property foredoes itself,
And leads the will to desperate undertakings,
As oft as any passion under heaven,
That does afflict our natures. I am sorry—
What, have you given him any hard words of late ? "

OPH. " No, my good lord ; but, as you did command,
I did repel his letters, and denied
His access to me."

POL. " That hath made him mad.
I am sorry that with better heed and judgment,
I had not quoted him : I fear'd he did but trifle,
And meant to wreck thee ; but, beshrew my jealousy !
It seems, it is as proper to our age
To cast beyond ourselves in our opinions,
As it is common for the younger sort
To lack discretion. Come, go we to the king :
This must be known ; which being kept close, might move
More grief to hide, than hate to utter love.
Come."

Ophelia, sick with love and doubt, recognising too that something is most seriously amiss with her beloved, drinks in Polonius' diagnosis with

eager hope that after all it may be correct and her doubt-tortured soul may find happiness again in the certainty that Hamlet really loves her, in all honour.

This scene, by the way, is not always played, as it only concerns Ophelia, they say; and the play being so long all *unimportant* scenes are omitted.

. . . . . .

Act II., scene 3. In the meantime Hamlet, cut to the quick at the seeming betrayal of his faith, the most callous slighting of his love, hardens his heart, and steeps his soul in astringent bitterness.

First his beloved and "seeming virtuous" mother, and now this adored and seeming trustworthy maiden. Well, let women go, and a curse on them! But love cannot be thus lightly dismissed, and the celestial element having vanished has left him just a piqued cynical man of flesh and blood—and other human drawbacks—passionately enamoured of a girl he thinks he has just reason to despise.

How dangerous to Ophelia is the state of his mind is obvious in his sombre, outrageous warning to Polonius:

HAM. "*Have you a daughter?*"
POL. "*I have, my lord.*"

HAM. "*Let her not walk i' the sun. Conception is a blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive—friend, look to it!*"

Hamlet has not the slightest suspicion that Ophelia has been told he is vowing love and fidelity to her simply to trap her into love for him, that he may betray her. Ophelia is utterly unaware of the shocks Hamlet has experienced, and the discoveries he has made (concerning his father, mother and uncle), since their last meeting. And naturally a very young and virginal girl has no idea of how love may affect a man. The whole essence of tragedy is the inevitable result of ignorance and cross-purposes, and, thanks to the gross tactlessness of Polonius, Hamlet's love history alone was enough to blight the life of any man.

Polonius, having informed the King and Queen that he has a daughter, proceeds to read to them a letter from Hamlet to her, in proof of his suggestion that Hamlet's admitted "lunacy" may be caused by the sufferings of love. A wonderful letter, in which the lover asks for nothing, not even a reply, but is just content to adore:

"To the Celestial, and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia,—in her excellent white bosom, these, etc.

"Doubt thou the stars are fire;
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love.

"O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers; I have not art to reckon my groans; but that I love thee best, O, most best, believe it. Adieu.

"Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him, HAMLET."

The result of this interview is that when next seen Ophelia is under the patronage of the Queen. Thus, in Act III., scene 1, we see her again, torn between passionate hope and intense anxiety. Reserved and shy in her bearing, she has learned her bitter lesson too well to give anyone the chance of again terming her "too free and bounteous" of her society, or of cautioning her father on her behalf. And in her mind she is pondering on how to give Hamlet an opportunity of reconciliation, without laying herself open to any possible suspicion of unmaidenly desire for him! That ugly scene with her father has tainted her spontaneous *naïveté* and rendered her self-conscious. She feels obliged to shield herself behind a mask of indifference.

She colours deeply at the design by which the King and Polonius plot that she shall "as

'twere by accident " meet Hamlet and he shall " affront " her. That is how the text expresses it, and he certainly conforms to the King's expectations! Shrinkingly she sends an appealing glance at Polonius, but finds no help in that quarter. Wistfully, she resigns herself to play a part, hoping always that it may be for the best. From her girdle is hanging a " little book," the gift, maybe, of Hamlet. With unconscious irony Polonius bids her " read on it," " that show of such an exercise may colour your loneliness." Then she withdraws, since Hamlet is at hand, in order that she may appear at the proper moment. She has not seen Hamlet since that agonisingly emotional, silent meeting in her room. She has still the fear that Hamlet may hold her lightly because she did not think to conceal her affection for him, and her pleasure in his princely company. With a heart beating in her throat, longing for his accustomed love words, and an awakened maiden pride shrinkingly on guard for fear of betraying the woman-love which parting has developed in her, no wonder the poor child feels stupid with emotion and self-consciousness. And thus begins one of the most poignant and pitiful love scenes ever written, in which either, all unconsciously, gives the other sensitive and loving soul such stabs that one almost expects to see the pain

spurting from their hearts, in jets of crimson blood. It must be borne in mind that Hamlet has not the faintest idea of the insults to which Ophelia has been subjected, on his account; nor of the base motives imputed to him. Tremblingly she appears, her eyes bent on her —his—book, and the atmosphere grows tense as he beholds her. A rush of tender longing floods his heart, in spite of himself. She *looks* so gentle, pure, and fair.



"Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered!"

he murmurs.

She glances up at him, for a grave, tremulous moment, then bends her head in flushing acquiescence, tongue-tied by deep feeling. There is a second's silence, during which his eyes are piercing her with mingled love and bitterness; his sufferings have inclined him to be cruel. Feeling that he is waiting for her to speak, she makes a clumsy, banal effort:

"Good my lord,
How does your honour for this many a day?"

she asks, in a tone betraying the tenseness of the situation. The significant "many" succeeds in delicately emphasising the most long-seeming time of their estrangement, but he

does not read her meaning and respond as she had hoped. He remembers his own slighted sufferings, his own humiliated pride during these many days, and hardens.

With a slight inclination, he replies with ironical politeness to what he considers, under the circumstances, to be an impudently heartless question :

" I humbly thank you . . . well, well, well ! "

*These women !* There follows another taut pause; neither can leave the other. Desperately, Ophelia, her whole soul yearning to him, tries a pitiful little *ruse* to force a demand for an explanation from him, some reference to their love ; at least some definite understanding. She has forgotten about the King and Polonius long ago. Slowly she slips a miniature of himself on a fine gold chain from her neck and bosom, and advances a step, tentatively, towards him. Surely these souvenirs of tender moments will move him from this dreadful mocking coldness.

" My lord,"

she murmurs, her eyes on the trinket in her hands,

" I have remembrances of yours
That I have longed long to redeliver ! "

Surely that will make him exclaim, and demand some explanation. But he is standing rigid-faced, wounded to the quick at her unnecessary cruelty.



"I pray you, now receive them,"

she continues, moving a step nearer to him.

Surely, he thinks, quivering with pain, and blind to her artless art, she might have spared him this. However, if she is so deliberately heartless, he will show her that two can play that game. He looks at her and her offering with cutting indifference, and in such a tone replies:

"No, not I,
I never gave you aught."

This bare-faced denial stings the simple Ophelia into her old frank self. He obviously no longer loves her, but her pride will help her guard her dignity. Nevertheless, the denial of those dear moments she has still been cherishing humiliates her bitterly. *She* is loyal to her feelings, if he is not.

"My honour'd lord, you know right well you did!"

she rings out, with right noble spirit.

"And with them *words of so sweet breath composed,*
As made the things more rich!"

A sob of reproachful pain has crept into her voice as she utters this ; then, her maiden pride in arms, though undisguisedly hurt, she speaks more firmly what she *now means* :



> " their perfume lost,
> Take these again, for to the noble mind,
> Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
> There, my lord."

As she stands there with outstretched hands, glowing like a tall young lily in a sunset, with her face of pain and eyes full of indignant sincerity, a passionate hope flashes across Hamlet. She may not be false after all !

" *Ha, ha !* "

he exclaims, catching her outstretched hands in fierce eagerness,

" *Are you honest ?* "

Alas ! his movement is so violent, his eyes so tragic in their hunger, and—alas ! again—his question so clumsily expressed, that she misunderstands this sudden *volte-face*, and shrinks away from him. He marks it, and drops her hands quickly ; the devil of cynical doubt repossesses him twofold, and he flings her the bitter query, " Are you fair ? " well

knowing that she is too fair for a despised lover's peace of mind.

Considering how many people, acquainted with the minds of both, are unable to understand what Hamlet is driving at in this scene, and therefore conclude that he is just raving as a madman, the behaviour of the generally regarded little " bleater " is remarkable. Ignorant of the nerve-shaking trials he has undergone, knowing that he is considered to be *mad*, she answers him with considerable presence of mind and dignity.



But Hamlet is in a dangerous mood, desperately bitter, and ready to stab from sheer diabolical grief. And Ophelia, slighted and insulted now by him of all men, is quivering with grief also. The whole scene is a great symphony of pain.

After a moment's silence he blurts out what he has been trying hard to ignore :

" I did love you—*once*,"

adding the last word brutally, in determination to love no more, and be no longer enslaved to her fair image.

Motionless she stands, her young face very weary now ; her eyes looking into an empty future. The delicate shoulders wince slightly

under that " once " ; very gently she answers, almost in a whisper :

OPH. " Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so."
HAM. " You should not have believed me ; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. *I loved you not !* "

For a second she answers nothing, nor does she move beyond a little shiver and the faintest sway backward. It is as though she has received a sword-thrust through the very core of her heart. She whitens to the lips, her head droops very slightly, her eyes almost close. *Now he has spoken definitely.* In a soft, dead voice, she speaks :

" I was the more deceived."

The quietness of her bearing moves Hamlet deeply in spite of himself. With quick, soft steps he approaches her, and raises a tress of her hair passionately to his lips. He has a presentiment that his love idyll is shattered, but if she can never be his, he cannot endure the thought that any other man may one day possess her.

" Get thee to a nunnery,"

he implores, her hair still twined about his fingers.

"Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I myself am indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me."

The ring of misery in his voice is so poignant that all her disdained love and sympathy thrill towards him, regardless of her pride. Swiftly, with a little gasping sob, she drops her cheek against the hand so near it, and kisses it clingingly. The action and contact shocks him with an indescribable, fierce emotion, and with a cry he snatches his hand away, pouring out wildly, as he shrinks back from her, his accusations against himself and men in general, while she fades again into a corpse-like stillness at this last rebuff. Again he implores her to believe no man, but go her ways to a nunnery, and who knows that they might not have yet met on a mutual understanding, had not ill-luck sent the spying Polonius blundering into notice for an instant. Hamlet catches sight of him; then the hideous suspicion flashes across him that Ophelia has only been set to play upon him, in the character of decoy. She is silently realising that a convent is most like to be the refuge of her broken heart, when, with an ugly expression on his face, he asks her casually:

"Where's your father?"

Then she slowly recollects what she had utterly forgotten—her father's plot.

Crimsoning, and almost voiceless, unaware that Hamlet has just seen him, she unwillingly falters the reply she has been instructed to make:



"At home, my lord."

Then the storm literally bursts about her head, for Hamlet positively shrieks his next words in his desperate fury at what he believes to be her second and shameful betrayal of him:

HAM. "Let the doors be shut upon him; that he may play the fool nowhere but in's own house. Farewell."

OPH. "O, help him, you sweet heavens!"

HAM. "If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough, what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go; and quickly too. Farewell."

OPH. "Heavenly powers, restore him!"

HAM. "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to; I'll no more of't; it hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages; those that are married already, all but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go."

The girl cowers a moment before him, the reports of his madness being now seemingly verified by his wild voice and gestures. But if she is startled for an instant, the next she is utterly pitiful at the affliction of the man she loves so deeply, and, woman-like, forgets her danger, to pray to God to guard and restore him. And again *they part in mutual misunderstanding*! Exhausted physically, but mentally strung up by the terribly emotional ordeal through which they have just passed, she seems to have a presentiment of looming tragedy, as she utters her last speech very quietly, in dead tones, broken only here and there by a little dry sob of pain.



OPH. " Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown ;
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword ;
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,
The observed of all observers ! quite, quite down !
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh ;
That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth,
Blasted with ecstasy : O, woe is me !
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see ! "

Truly a life spent with a broken heart within convent walls may well be an appalling vision to

one on the threshold of it. And she wearily seeks her own chamber to react the last scene again and again in the endeavour to find some reason for it. Hope dies hard in a young and loving heart. He has said that he loved her not; yes, but might not that be only his madness speaking? But is he really mad, or only terribly grieved and embittered about something? About what? And thus, in spite of his assertion, she still does "not know what she should think," and racks her wits for gleams of hope unceasingly, growing more sick the while with the poison of love.



In spite of the very trying interview she has so recently had with Hamlet, the Queen presently commands the attendance of her protégée at the Court theatricals. Poor little Ophelia! Her character is developing very quickly under suffering. Next, we see her in public for the first time, and bearing herself with perfect maidenly dignity, in a peculiarly false and unpleasant position (Act III., scene 2). She has long since learnt that Hamlet's love —or base passion—for her, is no secret. And the first thing that Hamlet does is to show her very marked and compromising attentions. Like most men who hate a woman they love, he cannot keep away from her if she is present. But he endeavours to balance matters by being

ironical, bitter, and even something less excusable! The behaviour of Ophelia under these difficult circumstances is absolutely perfect. She hides her pain and her love well, but when the play begins she never takes her eyes off Hamlet, praying passionately in her soul that she may pierce his mystery. As the play proceeds, the atmosphere grows tense to her sensitive temperament. Little by little, she perceives Hamlet's fixed intention of provoking the King and Queen, and once endeavours by a touch to warn him, but he pays no heed. Strung up with apprehension, she gazes appealingly at Horatio beside her to restrain his friend; for *she* knows how ungovernably wild he can become. But Horatio is also markedly intent upon the proceedings. Then the motive of Hamlet's behaviour breaks in on her, and she is in possession of his terrible secret. At the *denouément* she flies to her chamber, terribly wrought up, whirled by horror, compassion for Hamlet, the desire to comfort him and a hundred other conflicting emotions, including even a wild hope. If only she had known before, how tender and gentle she would have been, perhaps even now it is not too late—and here someone rushes in to tell her that Hamlet has just killed her father!

. . . . . .

One can imagine the overwrought girl's first uncomprehending stare, and then the slow sagging of every nerve in brain and body. Then the toneless laughter as she realises her double loss and the hopelessness of every aspect of life. Above all, the grim irony of this blow, just as she was making ready to hope anew. And the utter loneliness, and lack of meaning in life; it is a wreck; nothing can mend it! And the pain of realising it all.



Her intense suffering on account of the double loss is occasionally alleviated by a reaction of mind in which she realises the insignificance of everything in creation, and the uselessness of lamentation. Sometimes, although her heart is aching heavily she cannot quite recall why. She longs for the touch and sound of Hamlet, her lover, and threshes her brain incessantly to gather how he really held her, and why he did not take the opportunity of coming to some definite understanding the day she kissed his hand so imploringly? Crazing problem! Sometimes she has lucid flashes, which her brains are too weary to sustain coherently; then she is conscious of a great secret, to reveal which would explain and perhaps excuse Hamlet's mad actions, and right some wrongs!

All of this is obvious in the description

Horatio gives of her to the Queen, who, now that she is crushed and helpless, refuses to see her former protégée (Act IV., scene 5).

It is usually cut, in representation, as merely referring to Ophelia, and therefore of no importance to the play.



*Enter* OPHELIA. She is in simple white garments and wears a white veil over her head, Madonna-wise, giving one the first impression of a nun, as she appears. Her face is drawn and very wistful; her eyes wide, dark and sleepless. Her lips are crimson with the burning of her grief, and in her pain her fingers quiver at one thing or another unceasingly. She wears, as a rosary, the chain that Hamlet refused to recognise, in the links of which she has stuck purple pansies for beads, and at the end there still hangs his portrait. She carries some flowers, the touch of which, when she is conscious of them, has a curiously soothing effect upon her obvious suffering. Her general bearing is very gentle; her voice soft and curiously far away in tone, and when she looks at people they seem, nevertheless, to be invisible to her. She responds almost mechanically to courteous and kind tones, and in her most excited moments there is but the suggestion of the terrified, forlorn and helpless child about her. Above all, her grief is so

deafening, her memories and thoughts so vivid, that they shut out all present impressions.

Aching for a sight of Hamlet, for whom she searches constantly, her face falls when she finds he is not here, either. To whom better should she turn for information, and if possible for comfort, than to his mother, who tacitly encouraged her affection for her son.

"Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?"

she asks wearily. But her welcome is a cold one, and, unheeding the Queen's uneasy exclamation, she replies to her own unvoiced question, by chanting significantly a well-known ballad:

"How should I your true love know,
From another one?
By his *cockle hat* and *staff*,
And his *sandal shoon*!"

Great crimes were often expiated by the long *pilgrimage* to the Holy Land! He had *killed her father*. To the Queen's interruption she has but to continue the song, which reveals the trend of her mind:

"He"

—it is of her father that she is thinking—

"is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone.

At his head a green grass turf
At his heels a stone
Oho . . ."

A song apt enough surely !

" White his shroud as the mountain snow,
Larded with sweet flowers,
Which bewept to the grave did go,
With true love showers ! "

The King, who has just entered, greets her courteously.

Although wrapt in her thoughts, she responds in the same manner mechanically, still pursuing the trend of them. Hamlet . . . her father's murderer . . . Hamlet, the loving and gentle . . . a murderer ! What a metamorphosis ! Well——

" They say the *owl* was a *baker's daughter* ! "

she utters aloud.

" Lord ! We know what we *are*, but we know not what we may *be*."

Then, vaguely conscious that someone has greeted her, she says :

" God be at your table ! "

But her thought of Hamlet naturally has plunged her into the old problem as to what she should think on the subject of his intentions

concerning herself. Wearily she turns from it and murmurs aloud, thinking bitterly of the maiden who was too fond and trustful :

" Pray you, let us have no more words of this, but when they ask you what it means,"



a bitter, sad little laugh escapes her,

" say you this :

And she sings the probably well-known " moral " ballad of the impulsive girl who loved not wisely but too well. And that was how her lover valued her love ! And perhaps Hamlet thought *her* " too free and bounteous," too willing to love him, and despised her ! Where is he now ? Will he suffer for his crime ? She shudders in horror of herself for loving the man who killed her dear father ; horrible, unnatural daughter !

" I hope all will be well,"

she says, the sobs gathering in her throat, and drooping like a flower under the growing weight of pain.

" We must be patient . . . but . . . I cannot choose but weep, to think they lay him in the cold ground."

Her grief melting into an overwhelming rush of tears, she sinks down on to one knee, her head bowed low in her hands ; an infinitely pathetic little figure.

The sight and sound is more than honest Horatio can bear; with tears in his own eyes, he approaches and, bending over her, endeavours tenderly to soothe her as one might a little child. Under his gentle hand her sobs die down a little. . . .

"My brother shall know of this,"

she says wistfully, unconsciously reminded of him by Horatio's protective presence. He raises her gently to her feet, her sobs becoming gradually less and less. Like a flower to a sunbeam, the crushed and lonely girl responds to his genuine sympathy. Unconsciously she turns her tear-wet face towards him for a kiss, which he gently bestows upon her temple. With a last sigh of the departing storm, she speaks again.

"And so I thank you . . . for your . . . good counsel,"

she says to him vaguely, thanking him really for his sympathy, which has soothed her grief as good counsel smooths away a difficulty.

Out of pain for the moment, smiling but shy, and obviously absent-minded, she curtsies gracefully, calls for her coach and bids,

"Good night, ladies; good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night!"

Then she floats out lightly, looking ethereally happy and at peace.

Shortly afterwards Laertes, her brother, arrives, full of grievous resentment over his father's murder and unceremonious burial, but ignorant of the wreck of his little sister's heart and mind. She re-enters, unaware of his return, moving as if in a dream, wide-eyed, and singing in a soft, thrilling, mournful voice :



> " They bore him bare-faced on the bier,
> And on his grave rain'd many a tear."

She pauses there, remembering that with her father died her last hopes of love, and were buried with him.

> " Fare you well, my love,"

she murmurs sadly.

(" Dove," says the text, without any reason ; an old misprint, surely.)

Laertes, who has moved towards her in swift and loving greeting, is frozen with dismay when he finds that her eyes are looking blankly at him with no sign of recognition whatever.

> " Had'st thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge,
> It could not move thus,"

he groans, turning away and burying his face in his hands.

But Ophelia, unheeding, stands dreaming of her murdered love, and fingering the flowers, to which she has added in the interim. Then she notices the unhappy man, and his obvious grief appeals to her faintly.



"You must sing,"

she counsels;

"you must sing
A-down, a-down, and you call him a-down-a!"

she chants, with a little nod of sympathetic encouragement; then, beating time to her rhythm, she hums it again.

"O, how the wheel becomes it!"

she exclaims, with a soft little laugh, as she moves away. Then her eyes fall upon the King, and her gaze concentrates upon him. Recognition and more creeps into them; *she recollects the scene of the play*. Trembling with excitement, her eyes dark with horror and reproach, she shrinks back, towards Laertes, exclaiming:

"It is the . . . false steward, who stole his master's . . ."

—she points straight at the Queen, but cannot find the word she seeks—"daughter," she utters finally, for want of the other word,

" wife." Her hand sinks, and the consciousness dies out of her eyes as she gazes fixedly before her, her fingers playing nervously amongst the flowers. Their delicate contact soothes her again, and attracts her attention.



In the meantime, Laertes, looking at the flushing Queen and uneasy King, gains a suspicion of the truth.

" This nothing's more than matter,"

he mutters to himself.

Ophelia is now humming softly and caressing her flowers.

" There's rosemary, that's for remembrance,"

she tells him, sweetly confidential; then her glance goes back into the past, to Hamlet.

" Pray, love, remember ! "

she whispers wistfully, slipping the rosemary into her bosom, where her memory of him is engraven on her heart.

" And there is pansies,"

she continues, pointing to the purple blossoms that wreathe her head,

" that's for—thoughts ! "

" A document in madness,"

comments Laertes,

"thoughts and remembrances *fitted*!"



Ophelia has now come across fennel and columbine and rue in her posy, and, maid-like, is well versed in the language of flowers. Taking those which signify dissemblance and ingratitude, she offers them to the man who has shown, towards his brother, both. Sombrely she speaks:

" There's fennel for you, and columbine!"

She looks at the Queen thoughtfully a moment, then continues pitifully:

" There's rue for you; and here's some for me."

She nods in sympathetic significance: is not Hamlet dear to them both?

" We may call it herb of grace o' Sundays,"

she adds, as a touch of comfort, for six days of repentance may earn a rest on the seventh.

" O!"

she glances at the King, as the Queen turns weeping away,

"you must wear your rue with a difference!"

Then she perceives a daisy amongst the other flowers, and greets it tenderly.

"There's a daisy!"

She turns towards Laertes, and addresses him courteously:

"I would give you some violets, but . . . they withered all when . . ."

her voice trembles,

". . . my father . . . died!"

She stops, suddenly struck by a whirlwind of recollection. Died? How? This stranger must not know *how*, nor who murdered him! She is looking now in a wild, pathetic fear at Laertes, lest he should suspect. Then she cautiously assumes ease.

"They say he made a good end,"

she states, with emphatic nonchalance,

"—a *good* end!"

To prove it, she makes an effort to sing brightly, as she turns away:

"For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy!"

However, a paroxysm of grief and despair overwhelms her, and with a voice full of tears

she chants the dirge instead, with all the poignant anguish of her soul:

" And will he not come again ?
And will he not come again ?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy death-bed,
He never will come again.
His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll :
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan . . .
God 'a' mercy on his soul ! "



And dimly she feels she can do nothing—nothing but pray for that soul. Pray. That brings to her mind again words stamped there by Hamlet. " To a nunnery, go ! " Gazing with tense sombreness before her, she mechanically lifts her veil over her head, as on her first entrance, murmuring still :

" God 'a' mercy on his soul,"

as she fingers the blossoms on her chain-rosary for prayer-beads. But instead of a cross she touches, at the end there, Hamlet's portrait. She lifts it up, gazes on it in silence for an anguished second, then shelters it against her breast, and, raising her eyes to heaven in piteous appeal, adds in a murmur of infinite pathos :

" And on *all* Christian souls, I pray God ! "

Wrapt in her prayer, she seems to become more and more remote from her surroundings. Laertes makes one final effort to recall himself to her memory, stretching out his hands to her in loving entreaty as she glides by. She hesitates a moment, a flicker of recognition dawning in her eyes, which fades again immediately.



" God be wi' you ! "

she says gently, and like an echo from the ear, so she appears to fade from their sight, leaving but a trail of scattered blossoms behind her.

. . . . . .

And Hamlet ? In the graveyard what a horrible shock awaits him ! (Act V., scene 1). What irony of circumstances ! All unconsciously he watches a grave being dug for his love, and " soul's idol," and jests over it ! When, shortly afterwards, he sees Laertes in the funeral cortege, he is still unsuspicious of the blow Fate is about to deal him. Only when he hears Laertes utter the words,

" A ministering angel shall *my sister* be,"

does the terrible significance of this burial strike home to him.

" What ! The fair *Ophelia* ! "

he gasps, his shaking hand tight on Horatio's arm, his lips grey with the anguish of their love tragedy. The pain is so overwhelming that he grows delirious under it, and forgetting all else he attacks Laertes furiously.



Oh ! the great cry of remorseful grief that should clang out in his

> " I *loved* Ophelia ! Forty thousand *brothers*
> Could not, with all their quantity of love,
> Make up *my* sum ! "

And now, alas ! it is *too late*. He treated her infamously, never giving her a chance of explaining matters, and now it is too late !

Afterwards, in his conciliation with Laertes, he twice pointedly makes a significant reference, showing how, on Ophelia's account, he regarded him :

> " That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house
> And hurt—my *brother*."

And also :

> " I will this *brother's* wager frankly play."

. . . . . .

How could a little " bleater," with but an *irrelevant* " mad scene " to recommend her, suffer and cause so much pain ?

And is the real Ophelia, loving and intelligent, that Shakespeare has drawn, not a worthy love for Hamlet the *Dane*, even if she were too young and inexperienced for the "Prince of Denmark"?

# The Insignificant Mother of Juliet

# THE INSIGNIFICANT MOTHER OF JULIET

I WONDER, when reading urgent appeals for funds in order to erect and endow a National Theatre by way of a suitable memorial to our Divine William, whether his plays would be therein presented as written by him, or according to the fancy of the particular star producing them, as is the present custom!

That it is often inadvisable to give a play in its entirety is beyond question, but one doubts —very much doubts—whether Sir A. W. Pinero or Mr Henry Arthur Jones, for example, would submit to such maltreatment of some of their characters as is often suffered by those of Mr W. Shakespeare. A fine play owes a great deal to psychological balance, a fact which many actor-managers ignore. No dramatist has ever been more magnificently staged, that is certain; but when he wrote his masterpieces, we are given to understand, scenery in the modern sense of the word was not yet invented in England. Therefore, William Shakespeare, having to work without the glamour which it

produces, frankly annexed plots, and poured his own genius into Characterisation, Cause and Effect. Nevertheless, strangely enough, many causes and many characters are simply cut down or ignored, without any legitimate reason, weakening in consequence many a subtle motive and point intended by the author.

Obvious characters are over-emphasised, as are obvious incidents, and others of equal value in their own sphere are so nonentified that the perfect psychological development of the play is destroyed. To be sure the hero or heroine (not often both together) *and the scenery* are left to us ; the latter usually much obscuring the personality of the performers. By the pains Shakespeare took with " les autres " it would appear that he had respect for the intelligence of his public. The modern manager would seem to hold agreement with the caustic Heine's line :

" And the Public has long ears ! "

for which opinion the submitting public has only itself to thank.

The play of *Romeo and Juliet* affords an excellent example of nonentification. The characterisation of the whole piece is wonderful. Many names stand out, and we are all familiar

with the adjective that qualifies each one—viz. merry Mercutio, fiery Tybalt, worthy Friar, the garrulous Nurse, the genial Capulet, etc., and excellent exponents of each of these parts can be called to mind. But even inquiry amongst ladies of the dramatic profession itself fails to elicit any memory of a fine Lady Capulet. It is, on the contrary, a part that no successful actress would dream of playing in its present form, and it is usually allotted to inexperience. To such insignificance has the character been reduced, that her first big scene is cut, or, on the rare occasions when it is played, her lines are given to her husband to speak! In the other big scene she is tolerated only as a "feeder."

Now again and again it has been remarked that, although Juliet's lines are most beautiful, her character is unconvincing, and not particularly fine. Why is she so sly and deceitful, it is urged. Why does she not face "a row" and own up to her insignificantly disagreeable mother that she is married to Romeo? She does not lack courage elsewhere; on the contrary; and confession would have averted the tragedy. That is not the weak spot of the play; it is the weak spot of the representation. Shakespeare has intentionally made Lady Capulet the strongest character in the play!

Indeed, she ranks as one of the most powerful "heavy" rôles in his feminine repertory. That is a statement difficult to believe on the face of things, is it not? Well, let us run through the part together, using our wits, and gliding in imagination along the lines the author himself has laid down for us.



At the first glance one thing immediately strikes us. There are practically no directions as to facial expression, gestures or meanings to be conveyed. Shakespeare was too trusting! The modern dramatists, warned probably by the result of this confidence, take peculiar pains to be extremely explicit, and thus their created personalities cannot excusefully be ignored. And now to the lady.

Let us carefully note the state of things in general at the commencement of the play.

The Capulets and the Montagues are two noble and powerful houses between whom there exists an "ancient feud." Each house has its staunch partisans and dependents, and, as in those days a policeman was not to be found at every street corner to keep order, their antagonistic rivalry occasionally found open expression. The nobles of the Middle Ages were naturally haughty and ambitious, and if by chance one were constitutionally lacking in the aggressive forms of these qualities, other members of his

house were sure amply to supply his deficiencies, and keep the traditional enmity pleasantly green. Shakespeare shows us the two present heads of their houses as excellent citizens, and in no way "looking for trouble" over the "ancient" enmity. Old Capulet is a sensible, genial old gentleman; a thorough man of the world. He has a quick, fiery temper when thwarted, especially by a youngster who owes him deference. Old Montague is a grave, worthy gentleman, an excellent, affectionate father. He has more to lose than Capulet in brawling, since he has a "hopeful heir" to guard. Both gentlemen live on the defensive only. Therefore it is "merry" Mercutio, merely a friend of the family, who, uninvited, takes it upon himself, to cock-a-hoop for the Montagues, and a brawling nephew, the "fiery" Tybalt, who undertakes to supply, unasked, the aggressive hatred that old Capulet so obviously lacks.

The Montagues, however, have a far more arrogant and deadly enemy than Tybalt, and that is—*Lady Capulet*!

Of a jealous nature, dominant and fierce, her haughty spirit resents bitterly the social and moral precedence of her sweet and gentle rival, accorded tacitly to her in that she is the mother of the son and *heir of Montague*. This fact rankles poisonously in the breast of the mother

of a mere daughter, and explains her vindictiveness towards Romeo. Shakespeare has made a wonderful contrast in the disposition of these two mothers, the one as swift and cruel as a hawk, the other as soft and tender as a dove. This hatred of Lady Capulet has a very serious influence on the fate of her own and only child, as we have only to follow the text closely to appreciate.



The play opens with a fray caused by the servants of each house for no other reason than "because"; this is not entirely insignificant.

"*Enter old* CAPULET *in his gown*; *and* LADY CAPULET.
CAP. "What noise is this? Give me my long sword, ho!"

His blood is stirred, and he is ready to fight, if any fighting is about, on at least defensive principles. Is his haughty lady alarmed or distressed? Not at all; she has but a gibe for him:

LADY C. "A crutch, a crutch! why call you for a sword?"

But since the old gentleman has caught the cries, "Down with the Capulets!" he naturally feels he must take a hand.

*Enter old* MONTAGUE, with his frightened wife clinging to him.

He, too, hears the shouts of the crowd, and also his hereditary foe demanding a sword! His inference is not surprising, and he very naturally feels that he must join in—on defensive lines. He is disgusted with his "enemy."



MON. "Thou villain Capulet!"—(*To his wife*) "Hold me not. Let me go!"

Lady Montague is much too fearful to do so, however, and she but clings the closer.

LADY M. "Thou shalt not stir one foot to seek a foe!"

she cries anxiously. Lady Capulet flashes a maliciously scornful glance at her, under which she shrinks a little, and then, fortunately,

"*Enter* PRINCE ESCALUS *and his train.*"

Having curtly reprimanded the brawler, and declared that who next disturbed the streets would forfeit their lives, he marches indignantly away. His train disperses the crowd and follows him, leaving only old Montague, his wife and his nephew Benvolio. Whereupon Montague asks him in sincere vexation:

"Who set this *ancient* quarrel new abroach?"

By which it would appear that there had not

been a brawl of any significance for some good time past. As Benvolio is unable to answer, old Montague can do no more than growl his disapproval. In the meantime, his gentle wife, leaning on his arm all the while, speaks out on what has been in her anxious mind: the safety of her adored son.



"O where is Romeo? Saw you him to-day?"

Remembering the cruel eyes of Lady Capulet, she shivers, and adds:

"Right glad I am *he* was not at this fray!"

Benvolio reports on Romeo, and the affectionate father is immediately absorbed in this congenial topic. As he and his wife are in obvious concord, there is no need for her to speak again. With what a difference of tone are the notes of these mothers struck, the one an insistent discord, and the other in such tender harmony.

If old Montague had no comment beyond just a grunt to make concerning his "foe," Capulet begins the very next scene (Act I., scene 2) with equal lack of rancour:

> CAP. "But Montague is bound as well as I
> In penalty alike; and 'tis not hard, I think,
> For men so old as we to keep the peace."

—and thenceforth dismisses the subject.

And now for Lady Capulet in her domestic *milieu* (Act I., scene 3). Her manner is serenely brusque, her voice incisive and domineering.

LADY C. "Nurse, where's my daughter? Call her forth to me."



And Juliet enters.

JULIET. "Madam, I am here. What is your will?"
LADY C. "This is the matter.—Nurse, give leave awhile;
We must talk in secret;—Nurse, come back again!"

She has the manners of a tyrant. There is no atmosphere of maternal tenderness about this lady. She springs so important an event as marriage abruptly upon her only daughter as though she were suggesting a change in a dinner menu.

LADY C. "Tell me, daughter Juliet,
How stands your disposition to be married?"

To which Juliet, honestly taken aback for the moment, replies:

JULIET. "It is an honour that I dream not of!"
LADY C. "Well, think of marriage now! . . .
. . . Thus, then *in brief*,
The valiant Paris seeks you for his love."

Surely the lack of sentiment and tact she displays on such a delicate occasion is repellent.

Perhaps it would seem even more so, did not the poet outrun the dramatist a moment afterwards :

LADY C. " What say you ? can you love the gentleman ?
This night you shall behold him at our feast ;
Read o'er the volume of young Paris' face
And find delight writ there with beauty's pen :
Examine every married lineament,
And see how one another lends content ;
And what obscured in this fair volume lies,
Find written in the margin of his eyes.
This precious book of love, this unbound lover,
To beautify him, only lacks a cover."



Here, however, the poet, off at this tangent, pauses for breath, and is overtaken by the conscientious dramatist, who insists upon the practical mind of the lady being brought once more into play.

"That book in many's eyes doth share the glory,
That in *gold* clasps locks in the golden story,
So shall you *share all that he doth possess*,
By having him, making yourself no less.
*Speak briefly* ; can you like of Paris' love ? "

Thus the dramatist has her in control once more.

Juliet's answer is touching in her ignorance

and her abject obedience to this dominant mother:

> "*I'll look to like*, if *looking* liking move.
> *But no more deep will I endart mine eye*
> *Than your consent gives strength to make it fly.*"



Juliet was evidently trained not to consider even her soul her own.

We next see Lady Capulet as hostess of the fête in the hall of Capulet's house (Act I., scene 5), but we do not hear her. On this occasion undeniable evidence of the state of Capulet's mind towards his rival is given, and it is wonderfully characteristic of the worthy, quick-tempered old gentleman. Brawler Tybalt—who is in no way a "worthy gentleman"—penetrates Romeo's disguise, and straightway endeavours to make serious mischief.

CAP. "Why, how now, kinsman? wherefore storm you so?"
TYB. "Uncle, this is Montague, our foe;
A villain, that is hither come in spite,
To scorn at our solemnity this night."
CAP. "Young Romeo is't?"
TYB. "'Tis he, that villain Romeo."
CAP. "Content thee, gentle coz, *let him alone.*
*He bears him like a portly gentleman*;
And, to say truth, *Verona brags of him,*
*To be a virtuous and well-governed youth*:

*I would not, for the wealth of all this town,*
*Here in my house, do him disparagement* :
Therefore be patient, take no note of him,
It is my will ; the which if you respect,
Show a fair presence, and put off these frowns,
An ill-beseeming semblance for a feast."
TYB. " It fits, when such a villain is a guest ;
I'll not endure him."



This arouses the good old man's hot and very human ire :

CAP. " He shall be endured :
What, goodman boy ! I say, he shall ; go to !
Am I the master here, or you ? Go to.
You'll not endure him !—God shall mend my soul—
You'll make a mutiny among my guests !
You will set cock-a-hoop ! you'll be the man ! "
TYB. " Why, uncle, 'tis a shame."
CAP. " Go to, go to,
You are a saucy boy :—Is't so indeed ?—
This trick may chance to scathe you ; I know what ;
You must contrary me ! marry, 'tis time—
Well said, my hearts !—You are a princox ; go ;—
Be quiet, or—More light, more light !—for shame !
I'll make you quiet ;—What !—Cheerly, my hearts."

And he continues (interspersing the scorn he is pouring upon the presumptuous Tybalt with a host's genial exclamations to the guests passing within earshot), till that individual is effectively sent packing, with a very lively flea

in his ear! We observe that Lady Capulet is *not* informed of the incident; her lord knows better.

Now let us pass over those scenes chiefly concerning Romeo and Juliet, until we come to that point of the play in which is commenced the second and fatal brawl (Act III., scene 1). Benvolio, an honest, brave and wise gentleman, appears in company with "merry Mercutio" and endeavours to avoid trouble.

> "I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire,
> The day is hot; the Capulets abroad,
> And, if we meet, we shall not 'scape a brawl;
> For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring."

The contrast of his character with that of Mercutio is very interesting, and it must be admitted that both Mercutio and the now approaching Tybalt receive only that for which they positively clamour.

Mercutio gives Tybalt all possible opportunity, but the much-praised Romeo is the resentful Tybalt's quarry. Romeo, who has just come from his marriage with Juliet, enters, but is much too happily enwrapt in his precious secret to heed the impertinences of Tybalt. Whereupon Mercutio undertakes to "cock-a-hoop" unasked, on his behalf, and challenges Tybalt, who takes him on, *faute de mieux*. Romeo

endeavours to part them, and Tybalt, taking a dishonourable opportunity, wounds Mercutio fatally. Grieved and enraged at his friend's death, Romeo feels that he can no longer honourably refuse to avenge him. Tybalt falls and dies without a word—for which *Dieu merci.* Romeo, now realising the calamity, is besought to escape, since the penalty is death, if he be taken. Confusion reigns, citizens enter excitedly, seeking for Tybalt as the slayer of Mercutio, and find him also slain. Then, in the midst of this tumult,



*Enter* PRINCE, *attended*; MONTAGUE, CAPULET, *their wives and others.*

"Where are the vile beginners of this fray?"

demands the Prince, in masterful anger. The trusty Benvolio answers briefly to the point:

"O noble prince, I can discover all
The unlucky manage of this fatal brawl:
There lies the man, slain by young Romeo,
That slew thy kinsman, brave Mercutio."

In a flash Lady Capulet grasps the situation and seizes this so ardently longed-for opportunity of annihilating her terrified rival. Raising a frantic outcry she rushes to the corpse of Tybalt, throwing herself on her knees beside it.

The most loving mother could not appear more grief distracted :

" Tybalt, my cousin !—O my brother's child !
Unhappy sight ! ah me, the blood is spill'd
Of my dear kinsman !—*Prince, as thou art true,*
*For blood of ours, shed blood of Montague* !
O cousin, cousin ! "



Curtly the distressed Prince demands particulars, which Benvolio supplies, but his solemn assertion in no way daunts the determination of Lady Capulet.

" This is the truth or let Benvolio die ! "

he exclaims, in conclusion. Springing to her feet she cries out fiercely :

" He is a kinsman to the Montague ;
Affection makes him false, he speaks not true :
Some twenty of them fought in this black strife,
And all those twenty could but kill one life."

Then, sweeping towards the Prince, she demands in a challenge :

" *I beg for justice,* which thou, prince, *must give* !
Romeo slew Tybalt, *Romeo must not live* ! "

She shoots a basilisk glance at Lady Montague, who has fallen on her knees with an agonised

cry of entreaty. But Lady Capulet is dominating the situation; she demands that the Prince should keep his word, and destroy Romeo, and everyone else is dumb with conflicting and arrested emotion.



The Prince makes an effort on Romeo's behalf:

"Romeo slew him, he slew Mercutio;
Who now the price of his dear blood doth owe?"

Quickly the stricken father grasps at the straw:

"Not Romeo, prince, he was Mercutio's friend;
His fault concludes but what the law should end,
The life of Tybalt."

But Lady Capulet stands motionless with blazing, relentless eyes fixed demandingly on the Prince, that he shall fulfil his threat. He *must* punish; nevertheless, at a certain risk he modifies his former penalty:

PRINCE. "And for that offence
Immediately we do exile him hence."

Lady Montague falls senseless with a little sob; Lady Capulet is staggered at the escape of her victim, and in the moment of her discomfiture the Prince regains dominion, concludes his speech and departs, leaving Lady

Capulet speechless with rage and balked vengeance, and a general sense of calamity in the air. Then everyone bursts into excited but subdued comment and agitation; Lady Montague is carried away by her husband and people, and Capulet is endeavouring to calm his furious wife, who, by the way, is quite oblivious of Tybalt's corpse, now being collected on a bier, which is then borne off, followed by his relations, and . . . *Curtain.*



Thus ends the great dramatic scene of the play—the fine *finale of which is usually cut*! Here I beg to point out a fact of great significance in the construction of this tragedy; *it is Lady Capulet, only, who ever demands the death of Romeo, and is apparently determined to effect it by fair means or foul.* Old Capulet does not utter one word in that terrific scene. She, however, does not hesitate even to give Benvolio the lie and assert that "some twenty," egged on by Romeo, fought against Tybalt. However illogical, she sticks at nothing. Yet this is the woman who has been made into a mere nonentity by actor-managers—and others.

In her next scene (Act III., scene 5) we find her as relentlessly fierce against Romeo as ever, so bent upon achieving his death, indeed, that her horrified daughter finds any confession of her marriage to him impossible.

It has often seemed to me that Juliet makes attempts to put out cautious feelers to such a confession, but is so ruthlessly routed that she is driven in her apprehension to shelter herself in otherwise unpardonable *double ententes*. As has already been pointed out, Juliet has been brought up to consider herself the absolute chattel of her arrogant mother, and "habit," we are told, "is second nature." Between the mind of the daughter long accustomed to subservience and the new-found heart of the new-made bride is a desperate conflict, which renders magnificent scope for subtle acting in this scene.

*Enter* LADY CAPULET, serenely aggressive, to Juliet, who, having parted from her husband but a few minutes previously, is overwhelmed with grief.

LADY C. "Why, how now, Juliet?"
JULIET. "Madam, I am not well."
LADY C. "Evermore weeping for your cousin's death?
What, wilt thou wash him from his grave with tears?
And if thou couldst, thou couldst not make him live;
Therefore, have done: some grief shows much of love!
But much of grief shows still some want of wit."

The subtle humour of the author in this speech is delightful. It is not yet twenty-four hours since she herself was enacting distracted grief

beside Tybalt's body. Finding, however, that it did not avail in obtaining the death of Romeo, she has not troubled to keep up even the faintest semblance of it—in the bosom of her family, at any rate.



Juliet is glad enough of any excuse for her tears, and becomes mildly argumentative:

JULIET. "Yet let me weep for such a feeling loss."
LADY C. "So shall you feel the loss, but not the friend
Which you weep for."
JULIET. "Feeling so the loss,
I cannot choose but ever weep the friend."

But Lady Capulet is apparently bored with the subject of Tybalt, and comes to the point which she has at heart. Naturally, also, she takes it for granted that she is mistress of her daughter's mind.

LADY C. "Well, girl, thou weep'st not so much for his death,
As that the villain lives which slaughtered him."

Juliet, struck a moment breathless at this crude reference, murmurs coldly in timid resentment:

"What villain, madam?"

Lady Capulet, with a contemptuous lift of her eyebrows, replies:

"*That same villain, Romeo!*"

and begins to meddle with Judith's belongings, rearranging them to her own fancy.

" Villain and he are many miles asunder ;
God pardon him ! I do, with all my heart."



murmurs Juliet *aside*. Then, looking tentatively at her mother, she ventures to draw her on the subject of Romeo.

" *And yet,*"

she says slowly,

" *no man like he doth grieve my heart* ! "

and waits breathlessly for Lady Capulet's reply. An average woman would have asked why, and sought to know her daughter's reasons, but she again assumes she knows them, and assures the girl with vindictive conviction :

" That is *because the traitor murderer lives* ! "

Juliet, stung to the soul, replies as recklessly as she dares :

" Ay, madam, from the reach of these my hands !
Would none but I might venge my cousin's death ! "

Beyond the possibility of suspecting that anyone would venture to differ from her own

opinion of the object of her detestation, Lady Capulet is pleasantly surprised at this show of sympathetic spirit in her hitherto baby daughter. It moves her to reveal her murderous intentions concerning Romeo.



" Then weep no more. I'll send to one in Mantua,—
Where that same banished runagate doth live,—
*Shall give him such an unaccustom'd dram*
*That he shall soon keep Tybalt company* :
And then, I hope, thou wilt be satisfied."

Whereupon, having caught sight of Juliet's gown on the floor beside a chair, her attention is luckily taken in picking it up and righting it. Meantime, Juliet is almost paralysed at this revelation of the danger in which her husband stands. With white lips and wide eyes, she gasps out passionately :

" Indeed, I never shall be satisfied
With Romeo till I behold him——"

But the strange break in her voice swings Lady Capulet round with a flashing frown, her penetrating, impatient eyes fixed in such resentful perplexity upon her that the latter, alas ! knowing her mother capable of anything in her passion, adds, to allay any suspicion—" dead ! " Then, as Lady Capulet turns away with an im-

patient grunt, a horrified revulsion of feeling sweeps over Juliet. She dares one more hint.

" Is my poor heart *so* for a *kinsman* vexed ? "

she asks piteously.



Lady Capulet is obtuse to the suggestion that her daughter's grief and emotion may be due to something more than the death of a mere kinsman. She is growing contemptuously weary of the hysterical exhibition, and, approaching Juliet, is about to say so, when the girl rises and exlaims with curious conviction :

" Madam, if you could but find out a man
To bear a poison, I would temper it ;
That Romeo should, upon receipt thereof,
Soon sleep in quiet. Oh how my heart abhors
To hear him named,"

she adds, turning away to the window and leaning her head exhaustedly against the sash,

" and cannot come to him ! "

Lady Capulet is about to exclaim angrily, when Juliet is cowed again into equivocation :

" To wreak the love I bore my cousin Tybalt
Upon his body that hath slaughter'd him ! "

She pays heavily, alas ! for these defalcations, for the Fates take her at her word. When

she sees him again she does indeed " behold him dead " ; and of a poison, too !

Lady Capulet, obviously bored by her daughter's tears, dismisses the subject curtly:



" Find thou the means, and I'll find such a man ! "

Then seating herself definitely in a large chair she opens her real errand :

" But now, I'll tell thee joyful tidings, girl."

Realising the utter impossibility of obtaining any of the loving mother-sympathy she instinctively craves, and the madness of attempting further a confession of her secret, Juliet answers her wearily :

" And joy comes well in such a needy time.
What are they, I beseech your ladyship ? "
LADY C. " Well, well, thou hast a careful father, child ;
One who, to put thee from thy heaviness,
Hath sorted out a sudden day of joy,
That thou expect'st not, nor I look'd for."
JULIET. " Madam, in happy time, what day is that ? "

Her pride flattered at the excellent match, Lady Capulet, as usual, utterly ignores her child's individuality, and announces with complacent but arrogant finality :

" Marry, my child, early next Thursday morn,
The gallant, young, and noble gentleman,

The county Paris, at St Peter's Church,
Shall happily make thee there a joyful bride."

Faced with this danger, *Romeo's wife* leaps to the surface, and is aflame for a moment with that fine latent spirit which recently flashed out so magnificently when, filled with generous shame, she defended his name :

" Blister'd be thy tongue
For such a wish ! he was not born to shame :
Upon his brow shame is asham'd to sit ;
For 'tis a throne where honour may be crown'd
Sole monarch of the universal earth.
O, what a beast was I to chide at him ! "
(Act III., scene 2.)

Erect she stands now, with steady, shining eyes, as she rings out firmly :

" Now, by St Peter's Church—and Peter too,
He shall *not* make me there a joyful bride ! "

The filial habit is very strong, however, and the amazed, cold eyes of her mother quickly bring her to a conciliatory tone :

" I wonder at this haste ; that I must wed
Ere he, that should be husband, comes to woo.
I pray you, tell my lord and father, madam,
I will not marry yet."

Then, with beating heart, she throws out her last tentative hint, a clue for them to follow by degrees :

" *and when I do, I swear,*
*It shall be Romeo*, whom you know I hate,
*Rather than Paris* :—(*Aside*) These are news indeed ! "

Lady Capulet is utterly taken aback by this startling rebellion. For a second, she can find no word to say, and the atmosphere is taut. Then, hearing Capulet's voice without, she remarks ironically :

" Here comes your father ; tell him so yourself,
And see how he will take it at your hands ! "

Juliet well knows the storm about to burst, and shrinks defiantly against the sacred window from which Romeo bade her farewell but a few minutes since, seeking courage from its association. Her wifely spirit is of too recent being, too undeveloped, to flame steadily as yet, and she is besides overwhelmingly out-matched.

Old Capulet appears, in high feather, cheerily chiding her on her recent grief, and concluding with the ominous inquiry :

" How now, wife,
Have you deliver'd to her our decree ? "

With venomous irony Juliet's mother replies :

" Ay, sir ! But she will none, she gives you thanks ! "

Then she bursts out vindictively :

" *I would the fool were married to her grave.*"



Old Capulet, hot tempered and unaccustomed to having his " decrees " thwarted, most especially by his little daughter, grows scornfully indignant, and Juliet's conciliating answer but enrages him the more.

" Fie, fie, are you mad ? "

demands her mother, when old Capulet pauses at last for breath and a fresh supply of abusive epithets. The girl is half inclined to blurt out the truth to her father, knowing him to be —in calm moments—free from vindictiveness and just. But, alas ! he is too furious to listen to her prayer to " speak a word." Finally the desperate girl makes a final and pathetic attempt to gain her mother's ear.

" O, sweet my mother ! "

she cries, a most rare address,

" cast me not away.
Delay this marriage for a month, a week ;
Or, if you do not, make the bridal bed
In that dim monument, where Tybalt lies."

To which the lady answers viperishly :

" Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word :
Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee."



—and with her immediate exit concludes the " great " scene between mother and daughter, surely a unique one, in its treatment of such a relationship.

Later on, when Juliet feigns obedience to her father's wishes, Lady Capulet, curiously enough, has not one word to say to her. She speaks merely to oppose the date of the wedding, which, however, her husband carries (Act IV., scene 2). Shortly afterwards (scene 3), she looks in upon Juliet, who, with her nurse, is preparing for the ceremony, with but the brusque question :

" What, are you busy, ho ? need you my help ? "

This, on the eve of an only child's bridal ! Being assured that her assistance is not needed she parts curtly from the girl thus :

" Good night.
Get thee to bed and rest, for thou hast need of it."

And utterly ignoring Juliet's pale little upturned face and wistful eyes, thus leaves her.

When, however, she discovers Juliet dead, her lament runs—quaintly—thus :

" But one, poor one, one poor and loving child,
*But one thing to rejoice and solace in,*
And cruel death hath catched it from my sight."
(Act IV., scene 5.)



—bemoaning thereby her own personal inconvenience in her loss.

Very different is this to the grief of Capulet.

" Despised, distressed, hated, martyr'd, killed ! "

That is how he feels and sorrows for his daughter.

At the end of the play, when Juliet is found fresh dead in the monument, the sentiment invoked by Lady Capulet is again a purely selfish one :

" O me ! this sight of death is as a bell
*That warns my old age to a sepulchre.*"
(Act V., scene 5.)

She succeeded in her ambition, however, and did indeed annihilate her rival, the sweet and gentle mother of Romeo. The grievously stricken Montague announces it thus :

" Alas, my liege, my wife is dead to-night.
Grief of my son's exile hath stopped her breath."

Doubly bereaved, this devoted father and husband is the most tragic figure in the play, left thus desolate in his old age.

So much, then, for the character of Lady Capulet as written down by the gifted author. And really, may one not dare venture to believe that he knew what he was doing in so portraying her?—maybe even better than do the managers who have so tender a care for the fragile intelligence of the public that they carefully guard it from any strain whatever?

Would our modern dramatists permit such mutilation of their psychological schemes, I wonder—especially in a National Theatre erected in their honour?

And incidentally it may be remarked that one is constantly hearing of the Decline of the British Drama!

When will there be founded a Society for the Protection of Shakespeare?

The Frailty Whose Name was Gertrude

## THE FRAILTY WHOSE NAME WAS GERTRUDE



Alas! why did no manager, some dozen years ago or so, think of persuading Ellen Terry to play, not Queen Gertrude, nor yet "her husband's brother's wife," but simply the mother of Hamlet? Just as Miss Genevieve Ward, with her haughty, fierce individuality, would have made a wonderful and convincing Lady Capulet, the mother of Juliet (as the author has written her down), so would the intensely feminine and gentle personality of Miss Terry have made of her an ideal representative of the beautiful "wretched Queen." Provided, of course, that she assumed the character that Shakespeare has drawn for us, and did not play it simply on the surface, according to custom.

Of no particular importance to the play, it would seem, save as a picturesque item, and useful for Hamlet to rave at in the "Closet Scene," Gertrude has become a nonentity who, nevertheless, has received a good deal more than her fair share of calumny. As if the

accusations that Hamlet hurls at her were not damnable enough for any creature to endure, question must needs be raised as to her complicity in the murder of her late husband, Hamlet's father. "Guilty or Not Guilty?" Maybe some early players considered that the possibility of her being a murderess added a pleasant piquancy to the pretty picture that her son drew and labelled with her name. Maybe, also, this suspicion was originally responsible for the general feeling that the Queen must have a contralto voice, for silvery tones, as we all know, are for youth or innocence only, fuller sounds being suggestive of a dangerous mind and uncomfortable conscience.



Be that as it may, the Queen is considered a good little part of its kind, thanks to the becoming garments, the "Closet Scene" and the "Willow" speech. Memory recalls many representatives, all of whom managed at the moment to appeal both to eye and ear more or less effectively; but to the comprehension, never! All aimed at effect—superficial effect; at appearing comely, and what is termed "queenly": walking and seating themselves with "stately dignity," tactfully managing the heavy trailing robes, and always conducting themselves in each separate emotion in a complacent manner becoming to the "First

Perfect Lady in the Kingdom." Those who do not consider her as an actual accomplice to the murder display their most virtuous contralto accents. The believers in her guilt use their deepest tones and many side glances, particularly during the famous "Play Scene," and, later, make a special point of terrified conscience-stricken inquiry on the "As kill a king?" But beyond the cheap effect, the reading is worthless, since it is wholly unconvincing to any but the very ignorant, and leads nowhere. However, the conventional thing is to play for safety; in other words, to please the eye and ear on each separate occasion, however inconsistently. We all fall into it, sheep-like. It is probably owing to the beautiful modesty of our natures that we never question the psychological correctness of these superficial poses. Guilty or not guilty, we are all very condescending, gracious, dignified and sonorous, especially at the opening of the "Closet Scene"; we all sink into, or work up, the most heart-rending sobs and groans (they are effective) as it proceeds, making our exit in abject penitence, apparently converted by the outrageous abuse of Hamlet; and we all chant the "Willow" speech, later on, in our most melodious intonations, with the object of impressing the audience as favourably as possible *with ourselves.*

'*Drowned, drowned!*' She is overcome by her emotion and weeps on the shoulder of the King, who puts his arm round her and comforts her." That is the "business" at this point, and, as a matter of fact, it is her most genuine and representative moment.



Something went wrong with the beautiful modesty of my particular nature early in the season; something declined flatly to accept the conventional renderings, finding it impossible to fit in the character—or perhaps one should say the emotions—sequentially, and forced upon me the disconcerting conclusion that sweep, glance, pose and vocalise as effectively as one may, it was really all cheap and shallow, for one knew nothing of the mind and motives of this much-abused mother. Thereupon a copy of *Hamlet* began to bristle with restless questions and comments. "Her words are sympathetic and her actions contemptible," is jotted in the margin of the "Closet Scene," and also the disrespectful observation: "She doesn't seem to have enough strength of character to stick to the same attitude of mind for five minutes together. Is she knave or fool?" "She undertakes to lecture Hamlet indignantly, yet a minute later she is whining piteously beneath his verbal trouncing; such a one, too, as it is inconceivable any mother would put up

with for one moment." "She always has such lovely lines to speak, and yet she's such a little cat," is another comment upon her refusal to speak with the distracted Ophelia. Was she indeed a bold, bad, intriguing woman, sensual and ambitious? Was she a crafty, sly adulteress, an inhuman monster, and fit complement to the "smiling villain Claudius"? On the fly-leaf questions are raised thick and fast: "Did she love her first or second husband best? Was she really only seeming-virtuous or did she marry the usurper under compulsion? Or was she prompted by love of power to seize the opportunity of remaining queen? Was she deliberately treacherous to Hamlet, or rather ashamed of her disloyalty to him? Did she command or supplicate his filial obedience? If she were ignorant of the murder of her first husband, how did the revelation affect her regard for her second husband? When did she learn it; at the 'Play Scene,' or during the interview with Hamlet, when, by the way, he only refers to it by 'As kill a king, and marry with his brother'? Above all, abject as she is at the end of his ravings at her, *does she act upon his precepts*?" "What must one play for? Pity, sympathy, or disgust?"

And this at least may be answered at once by impartial study and a maturer experience.

"Do not play for anything; just get in touch with the drawn character as nearly as possible, grasp the atmosphere surrounding it, realise causes, and then 'leave her to heaven.'" Conveying cause is automatically bound to create true effect, and to create it legitimately upon the comprehension, as well as upon the mere imagination. We have been undoubtedly influenced in our opinion of Queen Gertrude, not by any impartial study of her circumstances, but by the atrocious statements made by her grief-frantic son. He was obviously extremely fond and extremely jealous. Devoted to his father, Hamlet was jealous on his behalf—that his beloved wife should so soon transfer her affections to his brother. He was jealous and angry that his uncle should intrude and claim his mother's affection, not only from his father, but from himself. He was jealous and furious that this intruder into the family intimacy should, himself, have love rights. In short, long before he has any suspicion that his father had died by foul play, he is in the throes of as deadly a jealousy as could fatally poison an otherwise noble and sensitive nature.

Thus it is that the passive personality of Gertrude is of great psychological value to the scheme of this poignant tragedy of misunderstanding, jealousy and murder. It is so usual

for a Hamlet to regard Ophelia and the Queen simply as puppets for him to play at, and "strike fiery off indeed"; the "business" arranged for them, if any, is arranged to suit him; their very inflections are often ruled simply for his convenience. He himself is entirely oblivious of the fact that both of them in the play exert a very powerful influence upon his mind and actions. With another kind of queen, *Hamlet* would be another kind of play altogether. But it will be interesting to gather, from the text, definitely and suggestively, the personalities of Hamlet, his father, his mother and his uncle, together with an idea of how things stood at the time of the king's death.

. . . . . .

According to Horatio, King Hamlet looked well in armour.

> "... that fair and warlike form,"
> (Act I., scene 1.)

says Horatio, and later refers to,

> "... our valiant Hamlet,
> For so this side of our known world esteem'd him."
> (*Ibid.*)

King Hamlet was evidently often in harness on war business; the very fact that his ghost

appears in armour is significant. From Horatio we learn also that his beard was

> " . . . a sable silver'd."
>
> (Act I., scene 2.)



Yet again Horatio bears testimony :

> " I saw him once ; he was a goodly king,"
>
> (*Ibid.*)

and Hamlet answers :

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

Hamlet's description of his father, in the " Closet Scene," is probably somewhat exaggerated, but there was no doubt a certain foundation of truth to it :

> " See, what a grace is seated on this brow ;
> Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
> An eye like Mars, to threaten and command.
> . . . . . .
> A combination and a form, indeed,
> Where every god did seem to set his seal
> To give the world assurance of a man ;
> This was your husband."
>
> (Act III., scene 4.)

A handsome, warlike and worthy king indeed, and, it would seem, positively " stuff'd with

all the virtues." His own ghost admits as much:

"O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there!
From me, whose love was of that dignity,
That it went hand in hand even with the vow
I made to her in marriage; and to decline
Upon a wretch, whose natural gifts were poor
To those of mine."

(Act III., scene 4.)



Yet it is remarkable, to say the least of it, that the royal spectre, after he has revealed the manner of his death, does not suggest any definite action, nor give any useful state advice; in fact, he leaves politics, in which presumably he had the greatest interest, severely alone. He spends the precious time in harping on the remarriage of his queen instead. It would seem that fierce, withering jealousy had really brought him from his grave. He does not appear to resent the usurpation of his kingdom at all; it is the usurpation of his wife that stings him quick. His first command is to

"Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!"

His last injunction, however, is:

"Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest."

(Act I., scene 5.)

He has no word of sympathy for the disappointment and postponed " hopes " of Hamlet. He does not, apparently, resent the putting aside of his son and heir. Had the august gentleman been a widower, the chances are that his ghost would not have walked. So much for the *beautiful* Gertrude !



Let us now see how she is drawn for us. The beautiful queen of a devoted court, and the cherished, clinging wife of a most devoted and worthy monarch ; so worthy and virtuous that it is more than probable, alas ! that she found him a little dull ; so careful of her that it is just possible she somehow felt a trifle uneasy under the burden of gratitude. There seems—alas ! again—little doubt that she found her suave and smiling brother-in-law very attractive. She is surely the most dependent of Shakespeare's women, the most passive. Even Ophelia has independent moments of thought, young and utterly inexperienced as she is ; but the Queen, a middle-aged matron, seems to be entirely without initiative. She was probably one of those gentle souls who are always swayed by the last speaker. " *The beauteous majesty of Denmark,*" Ophelia calls her, and it must certainly have been rather on her beauty than on her mentality that her husband doted. Claudius' passion for her was by no means assumed.

" . . . Since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, *and my queen.*"
(Act III., scene 3.)

—he soliloquises, and it is this very passion that is the primal cause of Hamlet's enmity. Claudius generally addresses her as "sweet Gertrude," "dear Gertrude," and "my sweet queen"; Polonius refers to her as "my dear majesty, your queen here."

Hamlet, in recalling the relations between his parents, muses thus :

" . . . so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? Why, she would *hang on him,*
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on."
(Act I., scene 2.)

In the "Closet Scene" the ghost himself urges Hamlet to

" step between her and her fighting soul,"

since,

" Conceit in *weakest* bodies strongest works."

That she was not intriguing guiltily with Claudius during her husband's lifetime is testi-

fied to by his ghost's own word, for on his first appearance to his son he charges him thus :

" But, howsoever thou pursu'st this act,
*Taint not thy mind*, nor let thy soul contrive
*Against thy mother* aught : leave her to heaven,
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
To prick and sting her."

(Act I., scene 5.)

The prick and sting of thorns is scarcely an adequate expression of the remorse suffered by a murderess or an adulteress, or both. His feeling against his wife is very slight in comparison with his passionate jealousy of Claudius; his sense of justice evidently was strong, and he is indeed " an honest ghost," as Hamlet affirms. Her tenderness and solicitude for Hamlet is everywhere patent ; she has no scene in which he is not the direct or indirect object. Claudius confides to Laertes, during their mutual conspiracy against Hamlet :

" . . . The queen, *his mother*,
*Lives almost by his looks* ; and for myself,
My virtue, or my plague, be it either which,
*She's so conjunctive to my life and soul*,
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,
*I* could not *but by her*."

(Act IV., scene 7.)

Is it not amazing that this middle-aged, beautiful but passive piece of apparent insipidity should have so strong a hold on the imagination and passions of two such capable and dissimilar men! Had King Hamlet been a widower, who knows but that not only his ghost might not have walked, but that he might also have died comfortably and unassisted? O woman!



And now for him whom Prince Hamlet termed,

"O villain, villain, *smiling*, damned villain,"

and a good deal more beside. A fascinating smile is a powerful weapon, by no means to be despised. Of his actual appearance we can gather little, for Hamlet's description of him as a

"mildew'd ear, blasting his wholesome brother,"

is somewhat vague, not to say prejudiced. Nevertheless, there is the suggestion that the younger brother was less finely proportioned. But what he lacked in manly beauty was compensated by that smile of his and his quick wits. We have the "honest ghost's" word for it, and therewith the secret of the Queen's ensnarement. Mark what he says, for it much exonerates the soft and gentle Gertrude. Under the circumstances one can excuse the rancour with which

he labels his brother, wondering only that he leaves out what one might have thought an even more important qualification—"murderous."

> " . . . That incestuous, that adulterate beast,
> *With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,*
> (O wicked wit and gifts, that *have the power*
> *So to seduce* ! ) *won* to his shameful lust
> *The will* of my most seeming-virtuous queen ! "
> (Act I., scene 5.)

To win anything implies a struggle, which proves to us that the Queen tried hard to withstand the witchcraft of his wit, and his "traitorous gifts," which were probably rather mental than material. There is, of course, a suggestion that Claudius was partial to carousing ; this is the prejudiced statement of Hamlet, for nowhere are we shown Claudius influenced by wine, or even with a thirst. The only time that he drinks is in the last scene, when he does so to inspire confidence, and as an act of good faith, what time he intends to poison Hamlet with the same drink, should the other method not prove successful. Certain it is that he had a large following ; most probable it is that he held high office at Court. We have seen that he owns to ambition, and doubtless was not only keenly interested in politics, but a clever, experienced man with a thorough grasp of them.

As for Hamlet, that most fascinating, most pathetic and most human of all Shakespeare's creations, so much more the son of his mother than of his father; inheriting from the latter morbid jealousy and much noble instinct, and from his mother much of her personal beauty and charm, together with her sensitive, affectionate and unstable will; endowed by his Creator with a mind which may be termed a positive granary of philosophy, so much food does it supply for human thought; continuously giving vent to such exquisitely human and wise reflections, and always doing the crudest thing; so "proud and revengeful" and so sensitive, lonely, wistful and bitter; suffering so acutely, and in such a maze of doubt, suspicion and misunderstanding; we find it almost impossible to blame him in anything, however foolish or rash; we only feel for him, give him our aching pity, and most of us, by the same unreasonable token, our love. Expressed by any other but Shakespeare, who has made him a genius in the art of verbal expression, it is extremely likely that his character as expressed in action would win from us but little sympathy or admiration. He is most himself and least his author in that much-referred-to "Closet Scene," when his language and behaviour to his mother are beyond excuse. Yet, when we arrive so far, we shall see how the

author has arranged that this very violence shall act against himself! It is from the lips of Ophelia that we have his personality most in detail:



"The courtier's, scholar's, soldier's eye, tongue, sword,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form;
. . . . . .
That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth."
(Act III., scene 1.)

But there! She is a partial observer; indeed she sees something that no one else, in or out of the play, seems to have noticed, and that is a soldier-like quality in Hamlet. According to his mother's naïve exclamation he seems to have been a little less slim than consistent with beauty and manly training, but a heavy heart makes the foot less light, and suggests greater weight. Poor Hamlet; no one injured his beloved mother so much as he himself did, and it is through him alone that her reputation suffers to this day.

And now just a glance at the political situation at the time of King Hamlet's murder. We get it clearly expressed in Act I, scene 1:

HORATIO. "Our last king,
Whose image even but now appear'd to us,
Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,

Thereto prick'd on by a most emulate pride,
Dar'd to the combat ; in which our valiant Hamlet
(For so this side of our known world esteem'd him)
Did slay this Fortinbras ; who, by a seal'd compact,
Well ratified by law and heraldry,
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands,
Which he stood seiz'd of, to the conqueror :
Against the which, a moiety competent
Was gaged by our king ; which had return'd
To the inheritance of Fortinbras,
Had he been vanquisher : as, by the same covenant
And carriage of the article design'd,
Has fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
Of unimproved metal hot and full,
Hath in the skirts of Norway, here and there,
Shark'd up a list of lawless resolutes,
For food and diet, to some enterprise,
That hath a stomach in't : which is no other
(As it doth well appear unto our state)
But to recover of us, by strong hand,
And terms compulsory, those foresaid lands,
So by his father lost : and this, I take it,
Is the main motive of our preparations ;
The source of this our watch ; and the chief head
Of this post-haste and romage in the land."



Thus we are shown that war trouble is again at hand.

Having gathered together some material to work from, let us now look at things from "Sweet Gertrude's" point of view.

One fine day, as she sits working quietly at

something pretty, musing maybe over the virtues of her worthy husband, and the smile and subtle eyes of her fascinating brother-in-law, there is suddenly broken to her the news that her royal lord cannot be awoken from his afternoon's slumber, and that, in short, he will awake no more. The palace is in panic and confusion ; the city paralysed at the unexpected shock. Young Hamlet is away at Wittenberg, the Queen has no knowledge whatever of state-craft. Into the frightened muddle steps a man, calm, capable and collected ; who inspires confidence ; who is of royal blood ; who has a perfect knowledge and grip of affairs, and by his wise advice and tactful actions is able to restore confidence in the palace and to the people. Nevertheless, young Fortinbras is daily approaching nearer, and hot war is inevitable. Never was the late valiant king, so familiar a figure in his armour, needed so much. His son Hamlet, a popular and delightful personality, is, nevertheless, no warrior. He lacks the qualities necessary for leaders of men, and also knows practically nothing of state affairs. The Queen is loved and admired, but as a ruler she has no weight or knowledge whatever. There is only one man fit to defend and rule the nation, and that is Claudius. They are loth to depose the Queen ; they are reluctant to put Hamlet aside.

Then some worthy man, probably Polonius, inspired more or less directly by Claudius, makes suggestion of a brilliant compromise. If her "sweet" majesty would unite with her brother-in-law, it would be more natural for him to assume the crown and save the state, while Prince Hamlet's succession should be *secured*; by which time he would probably be better fitted for the duties. Could anything be more plausible? Claudius seizes nothing; to do that would provoke outcry. He merely proves himself indispensable, modest and devoted. He is at the service of the state, and falls, with virtuous dignity, into its suggestion. He has planned for this for months. The Queen, now husbandless and unprotected, clinging and helpless by nature and environment, knowing the instability of character which unfits her son for the throne, especially at such an anxious crisis, submits *faute de mieux* to the representations of the council. Claudius having now the chance to woo her, does so with such ardent and earnest fervour that her willing affection is finally won in spite of sundry pricking thoughts of King Hamlet. She determines, since she has no choice, to make the best of everything. The marriage must be celebrated as soon as possible in order to give Claudius legitimate authority in the political transactions accumulating

daily. Into this state of affairs arrives Hamlet, heart-broken at the news of his beloved father's sudden death. He finds himself warmly welcomed, but treated as a precious cipher! His memory freshly stored with evidences of the love existing between his father and mother, it is with extreme horror and shock he sees now equal evidences of the affection (and on one side most certainly love) existing between his mother (his father's adored wife) and his uncle! Finding himself powerless, the only thing left to him is to return to Wittenberg, even at the sacrifice of his own affections. Spared from having to look upon this outrageous thing daily, his mind may in time become used to the idea. Aching and lonely, it is about now that his friendship with fresh and sympathetic Ophelia begins to deepen into something more precious. However, it has not yet become too difficult to part temporarily from her, especially as it was possible for letters to be exchanged between them. Here, then, is the state of matters at the beginning of the play.

In the First Scene of the First Act we find that warlike preparations are in full blast:

MAR. "Good now, sit down, and tell me, he that knows,
Why this same strict and most observant watch
So nightly toils the subject of the land;

And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,
And foreign mart for implements of war ;
Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week ;
What might be toward, that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint labourer with the day ? "
(Act I., scene 1.)

Considering that Horatio has quite recently come from Wittenberg, and Marcellus is an officer who has not left Elsinore at all, it is somewhat absurd that he should inquire of Horatio, the newly arrived, what was taking place under his own nose. The explanation obviously belongs to Marcellus, but managers are so often given to meddling and transferring speeches from one character to another, in order to make a better " part " for some particular actor, that no doubt some early " editor " became confused.

In the Second Scene we are shown the newly married King and Queen. It would seem to be the first Court function since the marriage, for Claudius is at pains to gather up threads, enucleate his position, and dispense gracious actions.

KING. Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
The memory be green ; and that us it befitted
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom

To be contracted in one brow of woe ;
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature,
That we with wisest sorrow think on him,
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
The imperial jointress to this warlike state,
Have we, as 'twere, with defeated joy,—
With one auspicious, and one dropping eye ;
With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,—
Taken to wife : *nor have we herein barr'd*
*Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone*
*With this affair along* :—For all, our thanks.
Now follows that you know ;—young Fortinbras,
Holding a weak supposal of our worth ;
Or thinking, by our late dear brother's death,
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,
Colleagued with the dream of his advantage,
He hath not fail'd to pester us with message,
Importing the surrender of those lands,
Lost by his father, with all bonds of law,
To our most valiant brother.—So much for him.
Now for ourself, and for this time of meeting.
Thus much the business is : We have here writ
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras,—
Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears
Of this his nephew's purpose,—to suppress
His farther gait herein ; in that the levies,
The lists, and full proportions, are all made
Out of his subject ;—and we here despatch
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltimand,
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,

Giving to you no farther personal power
To business with the king, more than the scope
Of these dilated articles allow.
Farewell; and let your haste commend your duty.
COR. AND VOL. In that, and all things, will we show our duty.

KING. We doubt it nothing; heartily farewell.
[*Exeunt* VOLTIMAND *and* CORNELIUS.
And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?
You told us of some suit; what is't, Laertes?
You cannot speak of reason to the Dane,
And lose your voice: What would'st thou beg, Laertes,
That shall not be my offer, not my asking?
The head is not more native to the heart,
The hand more instrumental to the mouth,
Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.
What would'st thou have, Laertes?"

(Act I., scene 2.)

The Queen, seated at his side, looks beautiful and gracious, but there is a certain wistfulness in her eyes. She still suffers prickings of conscience at the memory of her late husband; he was so devoted to and so jealous of her. Had he been able to foresee—— But no more of this! Then there is the grief-stricken face of her beloved son, who has taken this marriage so badly, and silently refuses to listen to reason. She feels unhappy enough to appreciate deeply Claudius' loving and sympathetic care.

Claudius having disposed of Laertes and other matters, turns heartily to Hamlet:

"But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son,"

HAM. (*Aside*). "A little more than kin, and less than kind."



KING. "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?"

A tactless question where of all quarters tact is most necessary. Hamlet is the only figure in mourning present; all else are in festival garb—too bright and gay under the recent circumstances.

HAM. "Not so, my lord."

He glances around him with bitter significance.

"I am too much i' the sun."

Wincing inwardly, and fearful that the bitter, if veiled, sarcasm of Hamlet may disturb the proceedings, Gertrude, always eager to conciliate these two instinctive enemies, speaks out, directly and caressingly, to the point:

"Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not, for ever, with thy vailed lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust:
Thou know'st 'tis common, all that live must die,
Passing through nature to eternity."

Beautifully expressed, to which the sorrowful Hamlet responds gently enough :

" Ay, madam, it is common."

Unfortunately she pushes her inquiries too far, and spoils everything :

" If it be,
Why seems it so particular with thee ? "

Morbidly sensitive, his injured spirit rebels against the unlucky word " seems," until Claudius pours oil on the troubled waters, sympathising and rebuking so gently and so adroitly that to resent it outwardly Hamlet would put himself too flagrantly in the wrong. Weary, contemptuous, bitter, Hamlet endures the gentle lecture, and expressions of love. Soon he will be quit of them. But the King continues :

" . . . For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg,
It is most retrogade to our desire :
And we beseech you, bend you to remain
Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son."

Before Hamlet can open his lips to protest, his mother, reading the coming refusal in his eyes, makes of it a personal favour. She ap-

proaches him gently and, placing her hand softly on his arm, lifts so wistful and tender a face to him that his own softens slowly in response. The hint of tears shimmers in her eyes and quivers in her voice, as she pleads with him to remain.



"Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet:
I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg."

For a moment he cannot reply; but the supplication of those sweet eyes is too much for him, and against his will, and perhaps better judgment, he consents to stay. Lifting her hand to his lips he answers quietly:

"I shall in all my best obey you, madam."

Alas! that he had not gone back to Wittenberg before that fatal day. Under the circumstances, it would have been the very best thing he could have done.

Claudius, delighted with this answer, and the avoidance of any public clashing with his stepson, leads off his queen in high feather, presumably to a banquet, whither the courtiers attend them; and Hamlet, left alone, now that he is no longer under the spell of his mother's personality, commences to abuse her.

Of the subsequent revelations of the ghost,

Hamlet confides to his mother nothing; nor yet any word of his affection for Ophelia, and the cruel misunderstanding that arises between them. The gentle lady sees her son growing daily more grief-wrung and moody, more irritable and savagely cynical, for no apparent reason than his father's death, and a sense of jealousy; both of which emotions should be growing less keen by use and time. She has an open unsuspicious nature, and is no subtle plotter. We see her next in Act II., scene 2, with the King, speaking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, with naïve frankness, never commanding or requesting obedience, but always begging it. Even Rosencrantz comments, gracefully enough, on this. The subject is of course Hamlet, as is usual with his mother, who "lives almost by his looks."

"Good gentlemen, he hath much talk'd of you;
And sure I am, two men there are not living
To whom he more adheres. *If it will please you*
To show us so much gentry and good will,
As to expend your time with us a while,
For the supply and profit of our hope,
*Your visitation shall receive such thanks*
*As fits a king's remembrance.*"

How Hamlet would have writhed had he heard this transparent hint of reward! Arch-

courtiers, both the gentlemen suitably express their willingness to "lay their service freely" at her feet.

> "Thanks, Guildenstern, and gentle Rosencrantz.
> And *I beseech you* instantly to visit
> My too-much-changed son."

Poor mother! She seems to feel that anyone rather than herself can win the confidence of her son. On the withdrawal of these courtiers, comes Polonius, bursting with news.

> "I do think . . . that I have found
> The very cause of Hamlet's lunacy,"

he announces. Eager to hear, yet pale with anxiety, for instinct tells her that he cherishes resentment against herself, she sighs:

> "I doubt it is no other but the main,
> His father's death, and our *o'erhasty* marriage."

She listens to the prattling of the worthy Polonius, and his assertions of what has already begun to be whispered about, but not openly expressed, above all in her hearing:

> ". . . Your noble son is mad."

She gives a little cry of distress, accompanied by a gesture of inquiry.

"Mad call I it,"

he continues cheerfully.

"For to define true madness,
What is't, but to be nothing else but mad?
But let that go."
"More matter, with less art,"

she cries in anguish. The King puts his arm sympathetically around her, while Polonius chatters on. At last he comes to the point:

"I have a daughter . . .
Who, in her duty and obedience, mark,
Hath given me this."

The Queen is listening now in strained eagerness. As the old man begins to read the letter slowly, she breaks in impatiently, yet with a dawning hope:

"Came this from Hamlet to her?"

But the irritating old gentleman will take his own time, and proceeds to read at his leisure the most beautiful and concise love letter ever written.

As he reads, the strained tension of the mind and body of the Queen slowly relaxes, her brow clears, and her eyes brighten as the hope increases that this indeed, and not herself, may

be the cause. A love affair appeals at once to her woman's heart, and she is determined that Hamlet shall be made happy, if she have any say in the matter, and she intends to do her best to help him.



"Do you think 'tis this?"

the King asks her when Polonius has unfolded the whole matter to them.

"It may be very likely,"

she answers hopefully, her heart lightened of much heaviness at this new outlook, and her conscience easier.

Polonius suggests that Hamlet shall meet Ophelia, and the Queen has nothing to say against this little love plot.

"But look, where sadly the poor wretch comes reading,"

she murmurs, in the tenderest sympathy, and is about to go and meet him. But busybody Polonius prevents her:

"Away, I do beseech you, both away!
*I'll* board him presently."

And the Queen, leaning on her husband's arm, leaves the old man, feeling happier than

she has done for many a day. Poor Gertrude!

In the next Act we see her still all loving concern for Hamlet. Ophelia is beside her, and she is full of kindly sympathy for the girl to whom her son has protested his love so earnestly. As she is about to leave them, she turns gently to Ophelia:



> "For your part, Ophelia, I do wish
> That your good beauties be the happy cause
> Of Hamlet's wildness":

she holds the young face between her two hands a moment, looking into the clear eyes, then she stoops and kisses her—this girl may hold the health and happiness of her beloved son in her keeping—and continues earnestly:

> "... so shall I hope your virtues
> Will bring him to his wonted way again,
> To both your honours."

And thus hopefully she retires from the scene. Little did she dream that he would be the cause of that fair girl's destruction.

Alas! her built-up hope is dashed. She is told that Hamlet has shown no love for Ophelia! And, moreover, he has shown himself more erratic, savagely sarcastic and generally outrageous than ever. Already it is considered

necessary for everybody to humour him, and her heart is full of fear, for the ugly murmur "madness" is now about everywhere. She refuses to lend an ear to it; he is grief-distracted, but no more. Her distress over Hamlet's health has of late absorbed her mind to the exclusion of any direct scruples of conscience. The King is her support and her comfort; in her distress she would be utterly lost without him; he is so patient with Hamlet, and with her grief, that she is devotedly appreciative of his love.



However, she knows that Hamlet has arranged an entertainment for that evening, and has requested their presence. To her, it seems a good sign that he should busy himself with any pastime, and she doubtless builds more hopes on it. As he has constantly avoided her as well as Claudius since he yielded to her persuasion to remain in Denmark (would that he had not!), the fact that he has requested their presence seems of itself to imply conciliation. Therefore she dons her fairest gown, and looks, as she enters the great hall, more like her former cheerful self than she has done for many a day.

As the Court group themselves in readiness for the performance (Act III., scene 2), Gertrude, who has been waiting to meet

Hamlet's eye, does so, and ask him sweetly to—

"Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me."

But that, with the aim he has in view, is impossible! 

"No, good mother,"

he replies tersely. Then, turning, he perceives Ophelia, and adds:

"Here's metal more attractive!"

and, seating himself at the girl's feet, comments bitterly a moment later on the cheerful looks of his mother!

In all good faith and innocence, Gertrude follows the play. The likeness between her own recent situation and that of the counterfeit queen saddens her, and she cannot but feel that it was unkindly thoughtless of Hamlet, to say the least of it, to choose such a subject. Into this feeling cuts his cruel voice:

"Madam, how like you the play?"

With her experience of how circumstances can overrule personal intentions, she replies gently:

"The lady doth protest too much, methinks."

She is too sunk in her own musing to notice the uneasiness of the King. Even had she done so, she would have believed it merely to be resentment against Hamlet for his tactlessness, in that it might distress herself. When, a few moments later, the guilty man, realising that his crime is suspected, if not actually known, starts angrily to his feet, she is honestly astonished and concerned, following him out of the hall in affectionate anxiety.



The King points out to her that Hamlet's pranks are too broad to bear with, that it is impossible to put up with them any longer. He suggests that she shall speak to him seriously. Gertrude realises that Hamlet's insults to Claudius cannot continue, and she undertakes to talk with him and try to bring him to reason. Poor mother! And she did so hope things were going to improve. "In most great affliction," she sends Guildenstern to tell Hamlet that she desires to speak with him in her own room before he goes to bed. Next follows the "Closet Scene," to which reference has so often been made. Wearily she enters, with a heart of lead. Hamlet will have no cause to complain of her cheerful looks now; he has effectually effaced them. Her rich and flowing mantle, the beautiful crown set upon the filmy wimple, the heavy glittering rings upon her

slight fingers, all donned to do honour to Hamlet's invitation, mock now her face of grieved motherhood.

Polonius is with her (Act III., scene 4).



POL. "He will come straight. Look you lay home to him:
Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with,
And that your grace hath screen'd and stood between
Much heat and him. I'll silence me e'en here.
Pray you, be round with him."

"I'll warrant you;
Fear me not!"

she replies, intending to be as severe as she can be, for she realises the gravity of the situation. Hamlet's voice is heard in the distance.

"Withdraw,"

she adds,

"I hear him coming!"

While Polonius arranges himself behind the arras, where in the dim torchlight he is not likely to be detected, she slips the heavy trailing mantle off her shoulders on to the great seat beside her, lays aside the glittering crown that presses on her aching brows, and clears her small hands of their rich burdens. It is no queen that Hamlet finds awaiting him, but

just a sad, tired woman, honestly indignant, and pained and worried almost beyond endurance. In reality she is too tired and too nerve-racked to have faced a scene. Her brain trips her in her first utterance, in answer to Hamlet's blustering question :



" How now, mother, what's the matter ? "

QUEEN. "Hamlet, thou hast thy *father* much offended!"

she commences in wounded protest.

Like lightning he seizes the opening she has given him, and answers bitingly :

HAM. " Mother, *you* have *my father* much offended ! "

Angry and tired of this everlasting useless harping on this subject, she replies irritably :

" Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue."

Like an impudent child he retorts on her a parody :

" Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue ! "

Amazed at this childish impertinence, so unlike the courteous scholar and her loving son, she exclaims :

" Why, how now, Hamlet ? "

and for answer gets the rude inquiry :

" What's the matter now ? "

" Have you forgot me ? "

she asks, her voice trembling with outraged dignity.

His reply is brutal :



" No, by the rood, not so ;
You are the queen, *your husband's brother's wife* ;
And—*would it were not so !*—you are my mother ! "

Cut to the quick, and feeling it hopeless for her to attempt to bring him to a gentler frame of mind, she turns away with a sob of something like despair in her throat. She must leave him to stronger rebuke, she is too weak to deal with him.

" Nay, then,"

she exclaims,

" I'll set those to you that *can* speak."

Quickly he grips her by the arm and swings her round again.

" Come, come, and sit you down,"

he cries, pushing her into the chair near, and still holding her tightly,

" You shall not budge ;
You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you ! "

His appearance and tones are so wild that a horrible thought beats on her brain: they call him mad, and what if it be true? His looks terrify her; his fingers are upon her arm like a vice.



"What wilt thou do?"

she cries in terror,

"thou wilt not *murder* me?
Help, help, ho!"

Foolish Polonius, behind the arras, shouts also for assistance, and Hamlet, strung up to fury at the thought of more espionage, rushes furiously towards the sound. With a hoarse shriek of fear, Gertrude strives to catch his arm, but he evades her, and plunges his rapier rapidly through the draperies, and through the body of the old man.

"O me! what hast thou done?"

moans the Queen, dazed with terror.

"Nay, I know not,"

Hamlet answers, with a reckless laugh,

"Is it the king?"

Hopeful hatred burns in the question. But the Queen is plunged in horror.

" O, what a rash and bloody deed is this ! "

she whispers, her face ashen, her lips bloodless, her eyes wide. " He *is* mad, he is *mad* ! He is a murderer ; he is dangerous ! How can I save him ? What must I do ? " These thoughts whirl through and through her shocked and aching mind, without hope or solution. Savagely Hamlet turns on her :

" . . . Almost as bad, good mother,"

he sneers,

" As *kill* a king, and marry with his brother."

" As kill a king ? "

she echoes, in dazed bewilderment. Who has been killing a king ? What has killing kings to do with Hamlet's action now ?

" Ay, lady, 'twas my word,"

he answers. Then, drawing aside the arras, he drags forward the body of the wretched father of Ophelia. Wringing her hands, she gazes upon it, while Hamlet, suddenly realising the situation, bursts into a peal of sardonic laughter. However, it is too late now, and he thus addresses it :

" Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell !
I took thee for thy better : take thy fortune ;
Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger."

Then, turning to the Queen:

"Leave wringing of your hands!"

he cries, and as she raises her head to speak, he continues quickly, dragging her roughly back to the chair,



"Peace! sit you down.
And let me wring your heart; for so I shall,
If it be made of penetrable stuff;
If damned custom hath not brazed it so,
That it be proof and bulwark against sense."

"What have I done?"

she asks, passionately piteous,

"that thou dar'st wag thy tongue
In noise so rude against me?"

For, after all, at the worst, she has done no more than act in accordance with everyone's wishes.

HAM. "Such an act,
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty;
Calls virtue hypocrite; takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love
And sets a blister there; makes marriage vows
As false as dicers' oaths! O, such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul; and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words: heaven's face doth glow;

Yea, this solidity and compound mass,
With tristful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act."

After the shock she has just suffered, with the corpse even now present, the poor soul's senses seem tottering; she cannot trust the evidence of her senses.

"Ah me, what act,"

she murmurs,

"That roars so loud and thunders in the index?"

As Hamlet starts upon the everlasting theme, a shiver passes over her, and she sinks despairingly into the chair. Better let him have his say out once and for all. *He must be humoured.* Her head leans wearily on her hand, her face is drawn and haggard; now and again she raises it, protesting, in wounded dignity, but in spite of his outrageous expressions it is rather the misery of his soul she hears. What he says are the undoubted ravings of a madman—who else could speak in such a way to a woman, and that woman his mother?—but what he feels—that cuts her to the heart. Had she known it would affect him like this!—and the tears roll down her face. He is loyal to his beloved father's memory, more loyal far than she has

been. She might have waited longer, or at least—— But she didn't, and the result of this weakness has ruined the reason of her beloved son.



QUEEN. "Ah me, what act,
That roars so loud, and thunders in the index?"
HAM. "Look here, upon this picture, and on this:
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See, what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself:
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;
A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
A combination, and a form, indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man:
This was your husband—Look you, now, what follows:
Here is your husband, like a mildew'd ear,
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?
You cannot call it, love: for at your age,
The hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgment; and what judgment
Would step from this to this? Sense, sure, you have,
Else could you not have motion. But, sure, that sense
Is apoplex'd: for madness would not err;
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd
But it reserved some quantity of choice,
To serve in such a difference. What devil was
That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?

Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope.
O shame! where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax,
And melt in her own fire: proclaim no shame,
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge;
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
And reason panders will."

"O Hamlet,"

she exclaims, unable to endure it longer,

"speak no more.
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct!"

But Hamlet is unmollified; he has lashed himself up into a torture of jealousy, and outdoes himself.

"O, speak to me no more!"

she cries, for even her endurance has a limit.

"These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears;
No more, sweet Hamlet."

Unable to keep quiet, he at least changes his tone:

"A murderer and a villain,"

he exclaims. She protests quickly with a gesture, but Hamlet runs on unheedingly :

" A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord ; a vice of kings ;
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,
And put it in his pocket."

" No more ! "

she cries firmly, as she rises, but he heeds not.

" A king of shreds and patches,"

—but suddenly he staggers back, staring beyond her, with fixed and fearful eyes, at the ghost that has suddenly here appeared to him.

" Save me, and hover o'er me with your wings,
You heavenly guards ! "

he mutters, crossing himself with shaking fingers.

" What would your gracious figure ? "

Shivering at this new and uncanny development, his mother stands motionlessly watching him. His condition is obvious to her.

" Alas, he's mad ! "

she reminds herself, and remains rigid with terror and amazement, feeling nevertheless

that, for her sick son's sake, she must control herself as well as she can, but as if her own brain was on the verge of giving way.

HAM. "Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by
The important acting of *your dread command*? [1]
O, say!"
GHOST. "Do not forget: this visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
But, look! amazement on thy mother sits;
O, step between her and her fighting soul;
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works;
Speak to her, Hamlet."
HAM. "How is it with you, lady?"

asks Hamlet.

Motherly anxiety wells out. With most tender concern she asks him:

QUEEN. "Alas, how is't with *you*?
That you do bend your eye on vacancy,
And with th' incorporal air do hold discourse?
Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep;
And, as the sleeping soldiers in th' alarm,
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements
Starts up and stands on end. O gentle son,"

she implores him lovingly, her arms around him,

"Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper
Sprinkle cool patience."

[1] "Let not the royal bed of Denmark" (Act I., scene 5).

Then seeing that his eyes are still staring at something :

QUEEN. " Whereon do you look ? "
HAM. " On him, on him ! Look you, how pale he glares !

His form and cause conjoin'd, preaching to stones,
Would make them capable. Do not look upon me,
Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern effects ; then, what I have to do
Will want true colour ; tears, perchance, for blood."
QUEEN. " *To whom* do you speak this ? "

she asks, her blood beginning to freeze in her veins. It is not amusing to be alone in a dimly lit room with a corpse, a murderer, and an invisible " Something " which one is told is the spirit of one's late and jealous husband.

Almost beside herself with nerves, she nevertheless endeavours to reassure *him*. A malady recognised is more possible of cure than one unsuspected.

" This is the very coinage of your brain,"

she cries,

" This bodiless creation *ecstasy*
Is very cunning in."

But Hamlet indignantly refuses the suggestion. The overwrought woman is almost

fainting from exhaustion. What a scene has she been through—she, who has been cherished and guarded and shielded from shocks all her life. The whole of her is aching to be taken into her husband's arms, and soothed and tenderly caressed. She is firmly convinced that Hamlet is mad and incurable. She listens passively, achingly, to his voice; she is too worn out to heed his words; her tears rain down her face.



"Mother, for love of grace,
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,
That not your trespass, but my madness, speaks:
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place;
Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven:
Repent what's past; avoid what is to come;
And do not spread the compost on the weeds,
To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue;
For in the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg:
Yea, curb and woe, for leave to do him good."

"O, Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain!"

she murmurs, quite broken down with grief and emotion. He has never talked *with* her sincerely, and let her explain, or even speak with him. He has simply raved *at* her. Quieter now, he, nevertheless, is still pouring out words, under which she stands weeping silently. He bids her good-night, yet will not let her go.

" Assume a virtue, if you have it not.
That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,
Of habit's devil, is angel yet in this :
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock, or livery,
That aptly is put on : refrain to-night :
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence : the next more easy !
For use almost can change the stamp of nature,
And either curb the devil, or throw him out
With wondrous potency. Once more, good night."

Again he detains her, and again, and even then again, with his one word more !

" What shall I do ? "

she whispers resignedly — limp and broken-hearted—and receives more insults showered upon her, ere she can at last escape.

Ham. " Not this, by no means, that I bid you do :
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed :
Pinch wanton on your cheek ; call you his mouse :
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
Or padding in your neck with his damned fingers,
Make you to ravel all this matter out,
That I essentially am not in madness,
But mad in craft. 'Twere good, you let him know :
For who, that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,
Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,
Such dear concernings hide ? who would do so ?

No, in despite of sense and secrecy,
Unpeg the basket on the house's top,
Let the birds fly ; and, like the famous ape,
To try conclusions, in the basket creep,
And break your own neck down."



What gentle women will endure is amazing!

But in the very next scene (Act IV., scene 1), and presumably five minutes later, we see Gertrude, her face wet with tears, almost spent with sobbing, come straight from Hamlet to Claudius. It is obvious that she has not taken his ravings seriously, but simply as the exaggerations of a mad-sick and jealous mind. He has defeated his own object.

KING. " There's matter in these sighs ; these profound heaves
You must translate ; 'tis fit we understand them :
Where is your son ? "
QUEEN. " Bestow this place on us a little while—
(ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN *go out.*)
Ay, my lord, what have I seen to-night ! "
KING. " What, Gertrude ? How does Hamlet ? "

Straightway she goes to his arms, and against his shoulder confides her grief and Hamlet's crime.

QUEEN. " *Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend*
*Which is the mightier : in his lawless fit,*

Behind the arras hearing something stir,
Whips out his rapier, cries, A rat ! A rat !
And, *in his brainish apprehension*, kills
The unseen good old man."

She does her best to ameliorate the deed :



" O'er whom *his very Madness*, like some ore,
Among a mineral of metals base,
Shows itself pure ; *he weeps for what is done.*"

Now Claudius has some tangible ground on which to injure Hamlet ; but Gertrude's love for her son, it would seem, makes him ready to spare her feelings. Hamlet must be destroyed, but out of the country, for that will distress his mother less.

It is a fatiguing tragedy ; sorrows and troubles steadily accumulate—for Hamlet, for Claudius, for Ophelia, for Gertrude. Aged many years, through the stress of that terrible evening, when she saw a friend of long-standing murdered by her son before her eyes, and herself beheld him bereft of reason ; since, too, they had hustled the corpse as secretly as possible to the grave, and given out a more or less plausible account of how he had come by his death, Gertrude has yet another thorn to prick and sting her. The fair young Ophelia is grief broken at her father's murder, and the

cruelty of Hamlet. She herself has read the letters written by her son to this girl, but she seems to have been too passive to have troubled about Ophelia, once she was given to understand that Hamlet did not love her. She has always avoided trouble, and never been able to deny herself anything that passively appealed to her. Weakness has ever been her besetting sin; insipid enough, but nevertheless endowed with far-reaching consequences. Even now, when the unhappy girl is asking to see her, Gertrude shrinks from the painful duty and would evade it. But honest and wise Horatio will not let her do so, and she perforce assents (Act IV., scene 5). The thorns are stinging her constantly now; and no doubt Hamlet succeeded in making her feel that she was mixed up in guilt, although through no particular fault of her own. One thing is certain, caution and tact are very necessary in dealing with Ophelia, as Horatio implies, and it is on this account she consents to see her. It is important to note that the guilt to which she now refers is obviously in respect of recent matters, and cannot be connected justly with anything to do with the late king.

"To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss:

So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt."

Her mind seems apprehensive rather of calamities present and in the future, than of anything in the past. During the scene with Ophelia she sits helpless, pitiful, but shrinking; grateful for the entrance of the King. On Ophelia's exit, he practically explains the feelings of the Queen and his own.



" When sorrows come, they come not single spies
But in battalions! First, her father slain;
Next, your son gone; and he most violent author
Of his own just remove: the people muddied,
Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers
For good Polonius' death; and we have done but greenly,
In hugger-mugger to inter him. Poor Ophelia
Divided from herself, and her fair judgment;
Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts.
Last, and as much containing as all these,
Her brother is in secret come from France;
Feeds on his wonder, keeps himself in clouds,
And wants not buzzers to infect his ear
With pestilent speeches of his father's death;
Wherein necessity, of matter beggar'd,
Will nothing stick our person to arraign
In ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this,
Like to a murdering piece, in many places
Gives me superfluous death!" (*A noise within*)

Not one word nor hint ever passes between these two suggestive of the Queen's knowledge of King Hamlet's murder. Up to the very last moment she appears to have the most touching confidence in Claudius. He does all the talking that matters, she never makes any significant utterance. Her maternal instinct braces her up on that one terrible occasion with Hamlet,[1] and one feels instinctively that the reaction practically prostrates her. She is pathetic in the encounter now between Laertes and her husband. Trembling at the approaching riot, she is nevertheless, like many weak and clinging women, more able to be brave for those she loves than on her own behalf. Thus, when Laertes, armed, at the head of a rabble, breaks in upon them with less than little ceremony, shouting—

"O thou vile king! Give me my father!"

—it is "sweet Gertrude" who faces him with royal instinct and the gentle command:

"Calmly, good Laertes!"

She even endeavours to hold back the enraged man. Strung up and frightened as she is, she

[1] When she endeavours to calm Hamlet:
"This is the very coinage of your brain," etc. (Act III., scene 4.)

shows more spirit here, in her anxiety for her husband, than anywhere else. In the ensuing scene with Ophelia, the weary woman receives a fresh stab, for Ophelia, who has Hamlet's secret at the back of her "jangled reason," seems also on the verge of denouncing their marriage, and it sounds like an echo of Hamlet. No woman could feel happy at the thought of her action being regarded publicly from Hamlet's point of view. It is certainly strange that Gertrude should not have done anything practical for the lonely girl, the daughter of so old a friend and servant. But then it is palpable that Gertrude is not practical and entirely lacks average initiative; she is, as she repeatedly proves, a passive character, not an active one. And now she is as unaware that Claudius is conspiring against the life of her son as she is that he has poisoned her husband. It must be remembered that Hamlet did not definitely tell her so. He only dropped the suggestion in casual sarcasm, *en passant*, as it were, and it has made no serious impression upon her. She does not even mention it to Claudius, although she goes straight from Hamlet to him. Had she been guilty, they must have discussed Hamlet's discovery, and how to refute it. Alone, the King admits his murder, but the Queen appears absolutely ignorant of it. She

is persecuted by Hamlet's jealousy, and that is her trouble.

The next appearance of Gertrude upon the scene is to announce the pitiful quenching of Ophelia and her grief, in the exquisite "Willow" speech, to which reference has already been made.



*Enter* QUEEN.

KING. "How now, sweet queen?"
QUEEN. "One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow.—Your sister's drown'd, Laertes."
LAER. "Drown'd! O, where?"
QUEEN. "There is a willow grows ascaunt the brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them:
There on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;
When down her weedy trophies, and herself,
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide:
And, mermaid-like, a while they bore her up:
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes;
Like one incapable of her own distress,
And like a creature native and indued
Unto that element; but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death."

LAER. "Alas, then, she is drown'd?"
QUEEN. "Drown'd, drown'd."
(Act IV., scene 7.)

—clinging in conclusion to her husband for support and comfort.



At the burial of Ophelia (Act V., scene 1) we see her sorrowful and gentle, uttering beautiful and tender words, as she lets fall her flowery tears into the grave of Ophelia:

"Sweets to the sweet; farewell!
I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife:
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
And not have strew'd thy grave."

The sudden and fierce intrusion of Hamlet upon the funeral ceremony cannot but come as a shock to her. However, she endeavours loyally to soothe and excuse Hamlet from the consequences of his fury. His avowal of his love for Ophelia is utterly unexpected, and moves her to surprise and pity, but Laertes has cause to feel very differently.

"For love of God, forbear him!"

she implores him, and urges Hamlet's affliction to excuse her son.

"This is mere madness."

Hamlet, spent by his furious anguish, has buried his face in his hands. Soothed unconsciously by her soft voice, he now raises it and, speaking in quite another tone, leaves them. It is very unlikely, however, that he realises that his mother is absolutely convinced that he is subject to attacks of genuine madness.

Hamlet is still as hot as ever in his jealousy, or endeavours to lash himself up to the pitch, maybe. It is curious to note, however, that not until now, the second scene of the fifth act, does he speak definitely of his "hopes." But now to Horatio he thus unburdens himself concerning Claudius :

"He that hath kill'd my king, and whor'd my mother ;
*Popp'd in between th' election and my hopes. . . .*"
(Act V., scene 2.)

However, as his general behaviour is much more reasonable, his poor mother once more feels eagerly hopeful that the worst is over. Again she appears, a pathetic figure, on the throne in the great hall (Act V., scene 2). Aged in appearance, but gracious and still comely, clad in her fairest garments, she is there to witness a fencing-bout between her son and Laertes. Her loving, wistful eyes never leave her unhappy son, and though always consciously dreadful of the possibility of Hamlet creating

a scene, she does her best to look at ease and cheerful. All goes well, and the spectators are warmed with vivid attention. Gertrude evinces natural if somewhat prosaic interest, and ventures a direct overture of friendliness. Signing to the page to bring her the great goblet, from which the King has but a moment ago *apparently* drunk, she takes it in her hands.



" The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet ! "

she exclaims, with loving significance, and drinks with a heart the lighter for Hamlet's courteous response. The first and last times are the only occasions on which he addresses her without rancour and bitter looks ! The King, who has been speaking to Osric, turns just as she hands back the cup that the page may offer it to Hamlet. Thinking she is about to take it, he whispers a quick and anxious warning :

" Gertrude, do not drink ! "

She turns apologetically :

" I have, my lord."

Wondering at the strange expression on his face, she adds :

" I pray you pardon me ! "

Hamlet, however, is addressing her :

" I dare not drink yet, madam ; by and by."

Charmed with his gentleness, she ventures to improve on the occasion, it would seem, and it is a happy little touch that at this moment Hamlet does not pain her. Back he steps to the encounter, and Gertrude, made really happy, settles herself to watch it. But she begins to feel strangely faint ; she finds herself sinking backwards, but pulls herself together, glancing at the King. There is a moment's pause in the fencing, during which he swiftly turns his eyes upon her. Upon his white face she sees so strange a look that suddenly a horrible suspicion dawns upon her. Why did he tell her not to drink ? Hamlet and Laertes fall to again furiously. *Why?* Ah ! She struggles to her feet, but sinks back again. Young Osric notices it, and calls the attention of her ladies to her. A second later Hamlet, having succeeded in wounding Laertes, inquires concernedly, during the momentary pause :

" How does the Queen ? "

At the sound of his voice she makes a desperate effort.

" She swoons to see thee bleed,"

answers the King hastily. But struggling to her feet she gasps :

" No, no ! "



She motions to the page :

" The drink, the drink ! "

He hastily hands it to her, and she grasps it tightly in her trembling fingers, the goblet she had offered her beloved son but a few moments since.

" Oh, my dear Hamlet ! "

she gasps, dashing the goblet to the ground.

" The drink, the drink ! "

Her stricken eyes plunge significantly into those of the petrified Claudius, and she understands—and reveals his plot.

" I am poison'd ! "

she cries hoarsely, and, with a shudder, collapses lifeless backwards on to her throne. With a groan of horror, Hamlet rushes up to his mother.

" O villainy ! Ho ! let the door be lock'd :
Treachery ! seek it out ! "

Frightened women huddle whimpering to-

gether; frightened men run to and fro. The King has snatched a rapier from Osric, and is standing at bay against the throne. Horatio is guarding the exit. In the same moment suddenly Laertes falls.



"It is here, Hamlet!"

he gasps.

Eyes are now turned upon the King, who, during the distracted attention, has endeavoured to edge near a door.

"The point envenom'd too!"

exclaims Hamlet in horror.

"Then, venom, do thy work!"

Rushing at Claudius, who meets him desperately, he furiously beats down his guard, and stabs him through and through, as one might a dangerous animal, amidst the shrieks of the women and cries of the men, who fly in terror from the scene.

However, Gertrude is concluded; the rest touches her not. As a matter of fact, she is usually made to end extremely tamely, *and is hustled away by her ladies* to die "*off*"! Naturally! We have closely followed her lines, and the author's own evidence. Surely that will win for her the verdict—

Not Guilty!"

# The Lady of Undaunted Mettle

## THE LADY OF UNDAUNTED METTLE



It might well be imagined that a lady of the reputation of Lady Macbeth would be perfectly capable of holding her own, even against a modern producer. But were this indeed the case, surely that aloof lady would never submit to the undignified treatment to which she is subjected at the end of the scene of the discovery of Duncan's murder (Act II., scene 3).

There, finding herself overcome by faintness, she calls for help, and is unceremoniously hustled, not *carried*, out. As at least three people (usually several more) are eager to assist her, it is difficult to understand why they do not carry her off neatly, instead of shoving and dragging her from the stage. Queen Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, suffers the same clumsy indignity, although the stage direction distinctly states that she dies on the stage. Why therefore should she be hauled off? One corpse more or less can make no possible difference. But, as she is only a woman, she is got off the stage apparently to afford more room for the masculine corpses, in spite of the fact that her death is as important a note as any of the other

ones. In *Macbeth* the lady does not always seem to be allowed the fullest scope possible, in spite of the fact that she is the dominant spirit of every one of her scenes, and Macbeth has almost two acts without her, in which he can shine to his heart's content. The character of Lady Macbeth is perhaps more overshadowed by tradition than any other of Shakespeare's heroines. This traditional reading, however, is a comparatively modern one, originated, of course, by the great Mrs Siddons. It is almost impossible to think of the one without the name of the other immediately flashing through one's mind, and the popular public idea of Lady Macbeth is that of a woman of majestic, not to say massive, appearance ("a fine woman, egad!"), with flashing determined glance, and sonorous accents. Yet be it distinctly understood that such was not Mrs Siddons' own idea of the character. She herself pictured the lady as slight and fair, but, not being physically able to suggest such a type, she very naturally made the most of her own personal advantages, to such powerful effect that the profound (if unsubtle) impression she made upon her time has come down, crystallised into tradition, to us. The capital of Lady Macbeth is, of course, the "Sleep Walking Scene," just as that of England is London, or of France, Paris, or of

Ophelia the "mad scenes." Nevertheless, it is difficult to call to mind any part written so continually on the top-note as is this one. The "Sleep Walking Scene" is certainly very effective, but the preceding ones require the greater art and mentality. Lady Macbeth thinks and calculates the whole time that she is on the stage. It would be difficult to mention any other feminine character in Shakespeare depending so entirely on her mentality. Anyone, even an intelligent amateur, can manage to be effective in the "Sleep Walk," but to play up to the scope provided by the preceding scenes takes all one knows (whoever one may be), and a bit over. It is stated in the play that she walked in her sleep. It is stated, in *Hamlet*, that Hamlet was very mad. But for anyone merely to state a thing, in a play or out of it, is not conclusive proof that it is actually so. Nevertheless "tradition" lays down the law of the fixed eye and—the snore! The latter touch is often omitted, but never—if it be possible to sustain it—the glassy stare. And yet—— But let us begin at the beginning, and see if that "Sleep Walking Scene" need exact any more commendation as a *tour de force* than the preceding scenes. Let us dream ourselves a little into the proud, fierce, pathetically futile soul of this woman, whom her literary creator

has shown us so aloof, so isolated in spirit, from any social circle that he has never even suggested to us her Christian name.

. . . . . .

A massive interior; an entrance heavily curtained with stuff whose original hue has faded to dreary drab. The walls are also hung round with it, and studded at intervals with groups of weapons and armour-pieces. The light is afternoon of the early year, when the sun has struggled free of gloom that he may shake out his beams a breathing space before he sets in angry, fitful splendour. The sensation is monotony, with a faintly stirring undercurrent of rebellion. Winter's chains have galled beyond all patience, and the pricking of dawning spring incites revolt. Beside the fire on the open hearth is a low, spacious seat, upon which a woman sits brooding. Her elbow is on her knee; her chin rests on her hand. She is clad in a thick tawny yellow trailing gown, clasped about her by a metal girdle studded with great transparent yellow-brown stones. Her face is the colour of ivory; her nose proudly cut, with somewhat wide and flexible nostrils; her lips are reserved and fine, and of vivid vermilion. Her hair falls over either shoulder in a thick, long plait of sheeny, sandy yellow, echoing in a higher octave the

note of her gown. Her low brow is shaded by a veil of darker tint, bound round her temples by a golden circlet, and flowing down behind her almost to the ground. From beneath tawny lashes her eyes, as grey as smoky steel, gaze out straight before her, their sombre glance plunged to the hilt in sinister memories and stagnant musings. She looks like a dreaming panther as she crouches there, motionless, save for the slow swaying of one small brown-shod foot.



My lady has many bitter recollections, and much dreary solitude in which to think upon them. Sometimes, a mocking vision, she sees herself again a haughty, vivid maiden, steeped in brilliant dreams of fame and daring mastery. Maybe, sometimes, she sees once more the flash of steel and hungry flames, and hears the clash of arms, and shouts and shrieks, and all the hideous turmoil which reft her of her first husband, child and home. Report will have it that it was the king who was to blame in this; whether he sent men thither to destroy, or idly withheld the aid that he was pledged to send, is now unsure, but sure it is the lady loved him not thenceforward. Had she but been born a man!

Years have swung by since then; she has once more a stalwart lord, oftener in the field than by

her side, but mother, alas! she is no more. And life is dull, alone, here shut away with fools and clowns, from city and court and the gay great doings of men. Had Fate but set her fortunes there, what triumphs might she not, weaponed by her wits and will, have conquered.

Upon her reverie breaks a dim sound of hoofs in the court below; she listens a moment in bored conjecture, then straightens up, the smokiness rolling swiftly from the steel of her eyes.

Quickly she rises, and hastens out to learn the wherefore of the unexpected noise. There is an echo of voices from the end of the gallery without; then again silence, followed by her slow re-entry, reading a letter. She is murmuring it at her entry, but as she approaches into the room her voice becomes gradually more distinct, and as she gains the seat the opening words are heard. She is right in the present now, alert, and responsive to the welcome break in her ennui. She reads with absorbant interest and wonder, yet always veiled with perfect self-possession:

"They met me . . . with 'Hail!'" . . .

She hesitates a moment, simply to decipher an unexpected word, when suddenly its whole significance leaps at her, and to its pæanic

utterance she becomes tautly vibrant, with gleaming eyes and fiercely smiling mouth. So might a panther look that scents unhoped-for opportunity.

> "*King!* . . . *that shall be!*
> This have I thought good. . . ."



She reads mechanically, seeking details but finding none.

She stands a moment wrapt in thrilled anticipation. Then all her lifelong hungry dream will not have been in vain. The grey-stone walls of limitation, that seemed to her eternal prisonment, now melt away, disclosing a radiant vista of possibilities before her dazzled senses. But *how*, and *how soon*, could this thing be? With this strange prophecy to sustain her longing, she would do all within her power to hasten the event. Come, wits! To work! Let us survey the means and ways. Her ambition fired by the prophetic spark, she feels the pricking blood surge through her veins once more. Nevertheless she reins her heart to a more measured beating, and her wits to concentrated calculation:

> "Glamis thou art, *and Cawdor*! . . . and shalt *be*
> What thou art promised!"

The faint sunlight dies out and leaves a grey-

ness; she shivers slightly, half in unconscious response and half in impatience of delay.

"Yet do I fear thy nature,"

she mutters, seating herself musingly.



"Thou art too full o' the milk of human kindness,
To catch the . . . *nearest* . . . way!"

Her face hardens as the old rancour against Duncan wells up in her heart. It ebbs again quickly, and she turns again to her analysis of Macbeth's nature:

"Thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambition; but without
The illness should attend it."

The last sentence she has spoken through her teeth. Control of self, well she knows, must be the dominant quality of ambition. Not only to mask one's feelings and desires from the eyes of others, but to mask them, if inconvenient, from one's very self.

"What thou wouldst highly,
That thou wouldst holily; wouldst not play false,
And *yet* . . . *wouldst wrongly win*!"

A little sound of contemptuous amusement escapes her; she is piecing together her observa-

tions of the man's character, and building up his soul upon them with brutal logic.

"Thou'dst *have*, great Glamis,
That which cries 'Thus'"—



(she has whipped out a little dagger from her girdle with a significant gesture)—

"'must thou do, if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost *fear to do*
Than wishest should be *un*done.'"

Again the little angry laugh of contempt as she slips the weapon back in its place. A fever seems in her blood, her eyes glisten, and again she shivers slightly. Gods! will his anæmic conscience clog and cripple all her glorious possibilities? Will his cowardice ruin all her aspirations?

The amber beams of the setting sun burst out again, filling the place with warm splendour. It colours her imagination, and she sees this redoubtable warrior, her lover-husband, absent now so long from her, resplendent in royal attire and honours. He loves her well, too. Rising, she exclaims passionately:

"Hie thee hither!
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valour of my tongue

All that impedes thee from the golden round
Which Fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crowned withal."

A footstep without, and the entering messenger finds a cold, carven lady, with eyes of stony grey and languid voice.



"What is your tidings?"

Breathless, he blurts it tersely out, dropping on one knee:

"The king comes here to-night."

Her heart almost ceases to beat, but she betrays no sign. Quietly, however, she moistens her dried lips, and with a touch of satire she remarks:

"Thou'rt—mad—to say it."

The fellow flushes: she has delicately implied that he is drunk.

"Is not thy master with him?"

she continues,

"Who, were't so,
Would have informed for preparation."

—dignified rebuke, calculated to draw further

details without appearing too interested. It does so.

" So please you, it is true : our thane is coming :
One of my fellows had the speed of him,
Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more
Than would make up his message."



She softens graciously at this, as becomes a loyal subject, fluttered at the honour shown her by her sovereign.

" Give him tending ;
He brings great news ! "

The man springs to his feet and hastens out. She glides to the curtains, sees that he is gone and she is quite alone. Swiftly she moves forward again, and with a sweeping gesture of her hands, which clench as they meet outstretched before her, she stands, with naked exultant soul ! Caught ! The panther has sprung upon and gripped its prey—to destroy at leisure.

" The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements,"

she murmurs huskily. How the woman reveals her passionate self when she is in solitude ! It is the reaction of months of acute monotony

upon an active nature ; the sudden flashing of vital hope upon dull, corroding impotency. This startlingly unexpected coinciding of her wishes to her thoughts strikes her as a spurring omen. Drunk with exaltation, she pours out her invocation to those who have predicted her future destiny.



> " Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here ;
> And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
> Of direst cruelty ! "

Yet, strangely, even in the midst of this delirious incantation, her intuitively cautious mind gauges her own weak points, has regard for her particular idiosyncrasy, endeavours to secure herself against them. What a commingling of abandonment and caution rings in the strange utterance !

> " Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> The effect and it ! Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief ! Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell,
> That *my keen knife see not the wound it makes,*

Nor"

—quaint afterthought—

"heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, 'Hold, hold!'"



Her voice has dropped to a self-aside during the last two lines—for what has heaven to do with murdering ministers? But, ere she has a moment to reflect on these flaws of purpose, Macbeth himself strides hastily on the scene. At the clank of his well-known step, his "dearest partner" turns swiftly towards him.

"Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!"

She springs to meet him: the panther to her mate. Never has he seen her thus moved; so glowing and eager. He strains her to his breast and kisses her lips passionately. Then with a slight laugh she pushes his face aside and murmurs thrillingly in his ear:

"*Greater than both* (by the All Hail) hereafter!
Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant Present, and I feel e'en *now*
The Future—in the Instant."

His eyes are absorbing her; she, his woman of ice and flame, of steel-blade eyes and voice of running waters.

" My dearest love ! "

Again he catches her to his breast and devours her face with hungry kisses. Her habitual control is returning, and unconsciously dominates him to a sense of present business :



" Duncan comes here to-night."

With deliberate significance she asks him, almost at his ear :

" And when *goes* hence ? "

Catching her drift, he loosens his hold of her with an embarrassed air, and answers slowly, with a feeble attempt at nonchalance :

" To-morrow, as he purposes."

But her keen eyes have noted his consciousness, and his mind is revealed to her in an intuitive flash.

" O, never
Shall sun that morrow see ! "

she murmurs, and notes his start of guilt. Before he can protest, she continues, in triumphant mockery, touched with some contempt :

" Your face, my thane, is as a book "

—she deepens now to warning—

" where men

May read . . . strange matters. To beguile the time,
Look like the time ; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't."

He is watching her, amazed at her clear mastery of the situation, and can find naught to say, either in confirmation or denial. Only he feels that his vague ponderings have become crystallised, and the future is indeed materialising into the Instant. She needs no words from him, however.



" He that's coming must be provided for,"

she says practically. Then, putting her hands on his shoulders, adds tensely :

" And you shall put
This night's great business into my despatch,
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely *sovereign sway* and *masterdom*."

Already he vacillates and looks away ; this is Instant, with a vengeance.

" We will speak further,"

he mutters uneasily.

Covering his mouth with her hand, caressingly enough, she whispers :

" Only look *up clear* !
To alter favour ever is to fear."

And away she goes to interview the cook and the housekeeper, appearing to their eyes for all the world like a phlegmatic, practical woman. At the doorway, however, she turns for a parting injunction to him :



" Leave all the rest to me ! "

The curtains close behind her, and he is left alone, vibrating responsively enough to her ardent ambition, but already racked by fearful hesitations.

. . . . . .

*Within the Castle Gate.*—An hour or so later, and a fast blackening night. On the rising wind is borne the sound of a trumpet blast, and yet another. The watchers on the walls hasten to give the tidings of the king's vicinity. Into the courtyard pour the serving-men with torches, and women and maids hustle each other in seeking decorous sites of view. Another blast, this time lusty and clear, and the trampling of horses in rapidly diminishing distance. The trumpet from the castle walls blares forth in welcome ; there is a rustle and hum of expectation amongst the waiting throng, and then a hearty shouting rends the air. The king and his train have ridden through the gates. Ready hands assist his alighting, and

he exchanges a few words with Banquo as they stretch their cramped limbs.

Then, through the deep shadowed doorway of the castle sweeps a stately vision into the torch-lit square. Over her gown she has donned a long mantle of ceremony, of light biscuit-colour, lined with deep amber, and magnificently embroidered round the edges. She wears a creamy, transparent veil, edged with a golden fringe, and her fillet is of dull twisted gold. Her face is serene, and her eyes are lowered; her head droops humbly as she sinks to the ground in a profound curtsy, nor does she raise her eyes until she replies softly to Duncan's words. There is no display of jewels nor extravagance about her: her beauty lies in dignified restraint and exquisite simplicity. Supple yet inflexible creature of velvet and steel, now that she is "screwed to the sticking place," she will not flinch. To see her there, she is the "innocent flower" indeed!

A few moments later the courtyard is deserted and dark again, and the risen wind is wailing eerily.

. . . . . .

In the room where the lady has been inspired with murderous projects, Macbeth now paces restlessly to and fro. Frequent shouts of carousal ring out from an adjacent chamber in

which the king and his officers are supping and drinking generously. Macbeth is on the rack of conscience, his better nature and his common-sense struggle desperately against temptation and disappointment. At the moment when the witches had hailed him "King hereafter," it was but the pleasant confirmation of a probable possibility, since he was a royal kinsman, and his goodly reputation and experience might lay claim to regal nomination, above young Malcolm's untried youth. But when, shortly afterwards, Duncan publicly announces that "we will establish our estate upon our eldest, Malcolm," a doubly unexpected check is put upon his ambitious future. At that moment, he mentally declines to relinquish his moral claims.

> "... That is a step
> On which I must fall down, *or else o'erleap,*
> *For in my way it lies* !"

In fine, the murder he had intended was that of Malcolm, to whom he was far less bound. His wife had since pointed out a quicker way to the crown, concurring with an exceptionally handy opportunity.

But his better self now urges the treachery and ingratitude of murdering *Duncan*; he still intends to *murder*, but would have preferred

the victim to have been Malcolm. Down he throws himself into the seat, weary and fearful.

> " I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent "—



(aptly coincidental, the curtains at this utterance part, revealing his fatal " spur," who enters stealthily, pausing there to see that no one has marked her entry or is within sound)—

> " but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself,
> And falls on the other. . . ."

As she comes forward he notices and questions her anxiously :

> " How now ? What news ? "

She starts slightly.

> " He has almost supped : why have you left the chamber ? "

Stupid man ! a breach of etiquette—to say nothing of the suspicious look it may have later.

MACBETH. " Hath he asked for me ? "
LADY M. " *Know* you not he has ? "

There is a tremor of irritation in her tone. But Macbeth makes no movement. Stolidly

he stands there still; then, moistening his lips, pronounces sullenly:

"We will proceed no further in this business!"



In a second she has sprung round towards him with such a fierce snarl of interrogation that he shrinks back, instinctively hurrying out his reasons with a feeble attempt at virtuous bluster. But she is dangerously quiet now, and stands looking at him with blade-like eyes. She has the temper of a fiend, though rarely roused, and both know it. If she loses her self-control, he will conquer; but if she keeps her head, God help all!

Softly she speaks, each icy word of deadly insult dropping from her lips with such calculation that it almost paralyses him.

"Was the hope *drunk*
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now to look so green and *pale*
At what it *did so freely*?"

She laughs softly in maddening mockery as she turns away with:

"From this time,
Such I account thy love!"

Oh, the contemptuous flick of her fingers, inflection of her nostril, droop of her lip! It

stabs home, and he winces, but ere he can protest, she demands, with provocative deliberation, scorn sparkling in her eyes :



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

But the reference to the ornament she so ardently desires has let a personal thrill into her voice in spite of herself, and she finishes with something like a sob of anger. This sound of weakness has unfrozen him and given him a momentary advantage.

" Pr'ythee, peace ! "

he cries, at bay.

" I dare do all that may become a man ;
Who dares do more is none."

" What beast was't, then ? "

she blurts out fiercely,

" That made thee break this enterprise to me ? "

forgetting that it was she who had read aloud to him his face's secret book. Swiftly she

sweeps on to woman's logic, passionately persuasive:

" 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."

Still he responds not, and her fury blazes out in a further torrent of scorn.

" Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would *make both* ;
They have made themselves, and *that, their fitness*, now
Does *un*make you ! "

She swings herself back into control for a superb and final effort and, facing him rigidly, says in low and tensely vibrant tones :

" I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me :
*I would*, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from its boneless gums,
*And dashed the brains out*—had I *so sworn* as you
Have done to this ! "

He is staring at her as if half hypnotised, as she ends on a low hiss. Her eyes are plunged into his, her lips are white with controlled passion, and having dominated herself, she has now definitely conquered him.

His last feeble protest flutters huskily from his lips :

" If we should fail ? "

" We fail ! "



she answers, with terse finality. Again there is that flicker of her nostril. Does he usually shirk a battle for fear he may not win it ? Does he not take the risk ?

" But screw your courage to the *sticking* place,
And we'll *not* fail ! "

She glides to the doorway to ensure their privacy ; and then, her face over his shoulder, unfolds her scheme. Precious time has been squandered on this momentous wrestling, none the less fierce, ye gods ! for the ever-present fear of eavesdroppers. Macbeth, wholly subdued, awaits gloomily her instructions and receives them.

Crisply and clearly, she unfolds the plan of action ; masterly, precise, and flawless :

" When Duncan is asleep—
Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
Soundly invite him—his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince,
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason

A limbeck only : when in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lie, as in a death,
*What cannot you and I . . . perform . . .* upon
*The unguarded Duncan? What not put upon . . .*
*His spongy officers . . . who shall bear the guilt*
*Of our great quell!*"



This is her most splendidly fiendish moment. Surely her invocation has been answered, and her womanhood, nay, all her humanity, has vanished. Brutal as was her utterance concerning her babe, it might have been voiced in blind fury; but there is appallingly clear mentality in this. Does he recoil in horror from this loathsome scheme? No! She had indeed read him "as a book"! "Rather thou dost *fear to do*, Than *wishest should be undone*!" Verily, "she has breathed her spirit in his ear," and, since all appears so admirably safe, kindled him to enthusiasm.

Out he bursts into delighted, if somewhat tactless, admiration.

> "Bring forth men-children only;
> For thy *undaunted mettle* should compose
> Nothing but males!"

Is it but fancy, or have those steel-grey eyes grown smoky for the space of half-a-second? Who knows but this reference to maternity

did not subtly dissolve the inhuman "unsexing" spell she had craved, and which appears, so far, to have been granted?

But Macbeth rambles on, weakly paraphrasing her own strong conclusion, and adding a detail of his own:

> "Will it not be received,
> *When we have marked with blood those sleepy two*
> Of his own chamber, and *used their daggers*,
> That they have done't?"

What superb haughtiness is in her answer; truly she has the spirit of an empress!

> "Who *dares* receive it *other*?
> As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar
> Upon his death?"

And thus his last qualm is appeased. Wretched man! in vain his conscience calls and warns him. Having a clear knowledge of decency and infamy, he deliberately chooses the latter.

> "I am settled, and bend up
> Each corporal agent to this *terrible feat.*
> Away, and mock the time with fairest show!
> *False* face must hide what the *false heart* doth know!"

In the meantime, the sounds of revelry have become more frequent, and obviously the

banquet is at its close. Swiftly Lady Macbeth hastens to direct proceedings, and a few minutes later the trustful and refreshed Duncan is led with affectionate ceremony to his last sleep.



Darkness and silence now reign over all, but for the wailing of the wind, with which is mingled the mournful howling of a dog.

. . . . . .

*A Court within Macbeth's Castle.*—A few minutes previously Macbeth has slunk through a half-closed door. A woman glides softly out from a portal on the opposite side. She is gowned in dark woollen stuff, bound round her waist by a leather girdle in such a manner that, though long, it trails not; an equally long mantle, of still darker hue, almost envelops her. She carries herself erect with resolution; and her eyes are very bright. Strangely enough, she looks for the first time like a human creature of flesh and blood. First seen she appeared a remote casket of thought; later, she became superhuman, diabolic; but here at the crisis she seems just flesh and blood, and her first words prove it:

"That which hath made them drunk, hath made me bold;
What hath quenched them, hath given me fire!"

So she has found that her nerves needed material bracing! It is directly pointed, for at the first slight night-sound she starts violently:

"Hark!—Peace!"



In a moment she has melted into a shadowy corner, her cloak spread bat-like as she clings to the wall. All being still, she emerges again cautiously.

"It was the owl that shrieked; the fatal bellman
Which gives the stern'st good night."

To the gaping door she creeps; listening anxiously:

"He is about it!
The doors are open, and the surfeited grooms
Do mock their charge with snores: I have drugged their possets,
That death and nature do contend about them
Whether they live or die."

Suddenly a muffled voice is heard calling,

"Who's there? What ho!"

She becomes taut, with narrowed eyes, electrified by a horrible unthought-of possibility:

"Alack! *I am afraid they have awaked*
*And 'tis not done*! The *attempt*, and not the deed
Confounds us. Hark! I laid their daggers ready;
He could not miss them!"

Her anxiety is agonising, and her emotions quite unmasked, as usual, when alone.

"Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't,"



she mutters. So the "murdering ministers" have let slip a "compunctious visiting of nature" on her! One remembers also her request that her

"keen knife *see not the wound* it makes!"

No doubt her spirit was willing enough to do it, but that intense antipathy to the sight of blood is a very powerful weakness of her flesh.

Through the door steals Macbeth at last, unstrung and ghastly, shocking her as she hastens to him.

"My husband!"

she whispers, noting his slack face and horror-stricken eyes, and fearing his failure.

He looks at her a moment almost vacantly, then mutters:

"I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?"

Seeing him in a condition threatening an entire collapse of nerves, she stifles her own

fears, braces herself up and becomes a practical woman.

"I heard the owl scream, and the cricket cry,"



she answers curtly,

"Did not *you* speak?"
MAC. (*Vacantly*). "When?"
LADY M. (*Sharply.*) "Now!"
MAC. "As I descended?"
LADY M. "Ay!"
MAC. "Hark! . . . Who lies i' the second chamber?"
LADY M. "Donalbain."

She is growing terribly uneasy, when suddenly he breaks out, shudderingly:

"This is a sorry sight."

Quickly and coldly she replied:

"A foolish thought to say a sorry sight."

But she has not perceived that upon which he is gazing. On he maunders, unchecked by her matter-of-fact curtness.

MAC. "There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cried
'Murder!'
That they did wake each other; I stood and heard them:

But they did say their prayers, and address'd them
Again to sleep."
LADY M. "There are two lodg'd together."
MAC. "One cried 'God bless us!' and 'Amen,' the other,
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
Listening their fear, I could not say 'Amen!'
When they did say 'God bless us!'
But wherefore could I not pronounce 'Amen'?
I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'
Stuck in my throat."



It has been slowly dawning on her that another unlooked-for element has arisen; the possibility of an enemy *within* the gates—self-betrayal, and reaction of feeling—and the idea staggers her for a second.

"These deeds *must not be thought*
After *these* ways!"

she exclaims fiercely, and to herself the significance bursts forth involuntarily, betwixt shut teeth:

"*So*, it will make us mad."

Still he raves mutteringly on, until her nerves seem rasped beyond endurance in the groping suspense.

MAC. "Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep,' the innocent sleep,

Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast."

LADY M. "What do you mean?"

MAC. "Still it cried, 'Sleep no more!' to all the house:
'Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!'"

LADY M. "*Who was it* that thus cried?"



she asks imploringly, this woman who, lacking futile sentiment and imagination, has nevertheless a practical grasp of present dangers.

"Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength to think
So brainsickly of things."

So abject is his misery that she approaches him, about to grasp his hand reassuringly, when she now sees "that sorry sight." She recoils in quick revulsion from his blood-spattered fingers.

"Go, get some water,
And wash this *filthy* witness from your hand!"

Mechanically he turns, when she perceives with horror that his other hand still grasps the daggers. Exasperated, she whispers furiously:

"Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
*They must lie there.* Go, carry them, and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood."

Their safety seems to be crumbling, and detection appears inevitable. She is strung up to what might seem her highest pitch, and all her wits are needed to save them from shameful discovery. 

But he fails her utterly in this crucial moment. Sinking upon a mounting-stone, he says with sullen finality :

> " I'll go no more !
> I am afraid to *think* what I have done ;
> *Look on't again I dare not* ! "

She stands a moment petrified and grey ; deserted.

> " Infirm of purpose ! "

she utters poignantly. She is suffering a terrible struggle between flesh and spirit, her will commanding, her sick flesh shrinking pitiably. Then her face sets stonily ; with quick, definite movements she flings her cloak back over her shoulders, twists up each loose sleeve secure above the elbow, and her pendent plaits firm about her throat. That done :

> " Give *me* the daggers ! "

she commands. Gripping them, she turns to go. But her pace lags perceptibly.

" The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures ; . . . 'tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil."

With these urgings she goads herself on, clinching her resolution desperately :



" If he do bleed,
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal ;
For it must seem *their* guilt,"

she murmurs, ere she disappears into the black slit of the doorway.

A few moments later she reappears, sunken-eyed, sunken-cheeked, grey-lipped, but with indomitable bearing.

" *My* hands are of your colour, but I shame
To wear a heart so white ! "

she taunts him, in frayed voice.

But the look, feel and smell of these blood-spattered hands are too much for frail flesh, and, straight stretched though she stands, with head back and teeth clenched, she is shaken a second with convulsive plexic spasms. Suddenly a thunderous knocking crashes through the silence. This new peril helps to pull her together ; she wipes her hands hastily on the corner of her dark cloak, and endeavours to

spur her flabby mate to action. Magnificently she rises to face each fresh emergency:

"I hear a knocking
At the south entry: retire we to our chamber.
A little water clears us of this deed:
How easy is it then? . . . Your constancy
Hath left you unattended. . . . Hark, more knocking!"

There he still sits vacantly, with slack jaws. In an agony of entreaty she half drags him to his feet:

"Get on your night-gown, lest occasion call us,
And show us to be watchers!"

Again the knocking thunders out rousingly, and she is becoming almost beside herself at his inertness:

"Be not lost so poorly in your thoughts."

There is a sob of supplication in her voice as, exhausted, she drags him slowly and by sheer force from danger to the shelter of their chamber.

. . . . . .

Dawn has broken, and living creatures are again astir. Macduff and Lennox have appeared, to seek the king according to command. Out of the night, and face to face now with

physical danger, Macbeth recovers his presence of mind amazingly. With what ingenious distress he accompanies Lennox to view the murdered man, when Macduff cries out the tragic discovery!



Into this frenzied outburst, punctuated by the clanging bell, breaks the lady. In sober grey, with cold, pale face and dominant eyes, she inquires with protesting dignity the cause of this crazy disturbance. This clear voice and regnant personality acts as a curb to the confused commotion, which is threatening to become utterly demoralised, as with panic-stricken, masterless animals.

Subtly she thus "holds" the clamouring crowd in Macbeth's absence, appearing, on his return, to be stunned at his confirmation of the dreadful happening. Close beside him, veiledly alert in every wit, she stands like a carven statue, unmoved even in the very perilous moment when, referring to the grooms, Macbeth exclaims :

> "O, yet I do repent me of my fury
> That I did kill them,"

and Macduff and everyone cry out in horrorful and threatening protest :

> "Wherefore did you so ?"

A double murder on mere suspicion needed explanation indeed. But Macbeth in his exoneration becomes too graphic in his painting of the bleeding Duncan. That is the climax of her endurance.



"Help me hence, ho!"

she gasps, and is swiftly caught by quick Macduff as she falls unconscious. Banquo aids in sympathetic admonition; and a distinctly fortunate diversion is created as the "innocent flower," crushed presumably by grief and horror, is borne away.

. . . . . .

Act III. An interval, of what duration? Long enough for both of them to have realised that their flaming hopes burn but the ashes of their ambition, and that both are damned souls. Behold their approach in royal circumstance. He is already aged in looks, and careworn, but she is straight as ever, as calm-masked, but perchance even a trifle more remote than formerly; her eyes more often smoky-grey and sphinx-like in repose, but clearing swiftly when she utters gracious words.

Her personality controls an atmosphere without effort or appearance; she is an instinctive ruler; her very presence is full of latent power. Beneath the serene exterior, however, is an ever-

gnawing fear for her husband. See her as she re-enters later, with a serving-man. Greatly uneasy, she casually inquires :

" Is Banquo gone from court ? "
SERV. " Ay, madam, but returns again to-night ! "

A knell strikes in her heart, nevertheless she tranquilly bids him :

" Say to the king, I would attend his leisure
For a few words ! "

Alas ! although she is the very prop of her husband, she is no longer his guide. He follows his impulses, usually honourless now, without consulting her, and it is left to her brains to shield him as much as possible from their consequences. Listlessly she sinks on to a seat, and lets slip the mask, revealing a new and tragic outlook. The smooth face grows lined and weary, the proud figure relaxes, and the relentless truth that she has tried in vain to ignore pierces her last guard deep into her inner consciousness.

" Naught's had ; all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content :
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
Than, by destruction, dwell in doubtful joy."

O the sombre bitterness of this self-revelation! Nevertheless, at the entrance of Macbeth she dons her tranquil aspect as if by magic, addressing him with the tender remonstrance of a beloved woman and uttering sound enough philosophy.



LADY M. "How now, my lord? Why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making:
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died
With them they think on? *Things without remedy*
Should be without regard: *what's done, is done*!"
MAC. "We have scotched the snake, not killed it:
She'll close, and be herself; whilst our poor malice
Remains in danger of her former tooth.
But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will *eat our meal in fear, and sleep*
*In the affliction of these terrible dreams*
*That shake us nightly*!"

Well resolved, but, alack! the very next second he is chin-deep in despondency.

"*Better be with the dead*
Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave:
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.
Treason has done his worst; nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, *nothing can touch him further.*"

Always in this terror of mind, and without the pride and strength that sustain his wife, his wretchedness touches her all the more that she in secret thinks as he does. Also she knows that it was her mad prompting that compelled him to the deed, when he was struggling to avoid it. Unshed tears glitter in her eyes, and with a voice full of tenderness she endeavours to win him from his gloom. It is her one real womanly moment:

"Come on;
Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks;
Be bright and jovial among your guests to-night."

He responds quickly to the wistful touch.

MAC. "So shall I, love."

His arm is now around her.

"And so, I pray be you."

This relaxation on her part strikes him as a fitting moment to sound her concerning the deed he has even now plotted.

"Let your remembrance apply to Banquo;
Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue;
*Unsafe the while that we*
*Must lave our honours in these flattering streams*;
And make our faces wizards to our hearts,
Disguising what they are!"

This hinted insecurity does not move her, but her vague fear that he is meditating some fresh crime against Banquo is quick to protest warningly :



" *You must leave this !* "

MAC. " Oh, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife !
Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, live,"

he cries. With weary impatience she retorts :

" But in them nature's copy's not eterne."

MAC. " There's comfort yet ; they are assailable ! "

To her uneasy look, he continues, knowing she cannot now prevent the deed :

" Then be thou jocund. Ere the bat hath flown
His cloistered flight . . .
There shall be done a deed of dreadful note."

As he speaks, her suspicion becomes certainty that he is about foul play.

" What's to be done ? "

she cries, fear-stricken. Noting her lack of usual composure, he takes her in his arms—the weaker vessel—deeming it wiser not to inform her.

MAC. " Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed."

Convinced now that this deed, which she guesses, is beyond prevention, realising that she is henceforth powerless to influence this man of irresponsible nerves, she clings shadowily about him, *despair* in her eyes, as though she would fain save him from the hell before him, but knows her strength but gossamer to hold him.



*The Banquet Hall.*—Thronged with gallant lords and fine ladies, a festive scene, o'erglamoured by the light of many torches. On a slight dais stands the king; the queen is seated on a throne beside him. She is clad in deep remote blue with the glimmer of moonlight upon it, and wears a spacious falling cloak of a yet darker tone that holds the depths of infinity. It is lined with rich, dull red. For gems, glowing rubies, that stud her girdle, great hanging necklace, clasps and rings.

She may have no imagination, this fire and marble woman, but she has magnificent simplicity. Her head is proudly poised upon her neck, and she unconsciously carries herself as if her shoulders were its pedestal. For all her apparent aloofness, she notes the smooth conduct of the feast, and of the guests, ever ready tactfully to resolve any discord back to harmony. Her heart sinks when she perceives her husband in conversation with two

low-bred strangers, and marks his moody dissatisfaction.

Sweetly the clear voice recalls him to his duties, with just a touch of playful protest:



"My royal lord,
You do not give the cheer! The feast is sold
That is not often vouched, while 'tis a making,
'Tis given with welcome; to feed were best at home;
From thence, the sauce to meat is ceremony;
Meeting were bare without it."

Who, hearing the easy words, can guess the quivering anxiety of those heart-strings? Warned thus, quickly he plays his graciousness.

"Sweet Remembrancer!
Now good digestion wait on appetite,
And health on both."

Then, according to his plan of dissimulation, he dares to speak flatteringly of his murdered victim, ay, and rather

"challenge for unkindness
Than pity for mischance!"

A challenge grimly answered! There is a slight contraction of his lady's eyes as she watches him, wondering what rash words may follow. But his face grows livid with consterna-

tion and horror, and well may the startled courtiers ask:

"What moves your highness?"



Making a feeble mental effort:

"*Which of you have done this?*"

he gasps hoarsely.

"What, my good lord?"

they answer innocently.

But the effort has flickered out, and, as usual, he is conquered by his fears:

"Thou canst not say I did it: never shake
Thy gory locks at me."

His voice has risen to a hoarse scream, as he recoils far from the table.

"Gentlemen, rise; his highness is not well,"

cries Ross to the amazed onlookers.

But with soft swiftness the lady is on her feet, and calmly the clear voice rings out, with the bracing chill of thin ice in it:

"Sit, worthy friends!"

Quiet and unalarmed, she approaches them, with exquisitely modulated explanation:

"My lord is often thus,
And hath been from his youth. Pray you, keep seat!"



With a sign to the servants she sets checked hospitalities in continuance, while she extenuates his attack:

"The fit is momentary; upon a thought
He will again be well. If much you note him
You shall offend him, and extend his passion.
Feed, and regard him not!"

With a smile and gracious gesture she crosses to where he is cowering by the throne, and hisses hotly in his ear:

"*Are you a man?*"

"Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appal the devil!"

he answers half-hysterically.

Gods! how can she best pit her will against this fresh madness, this degrading exhibition, and save appearance?—slash it, with scathing anger and scornful mockery, and *yet appear to spying eyes no more than distressfully and gently persuasive*!

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



His eyes are again fixed on the ghastly shade which is looming apparent to his sight.

" Pr'ythee, see there ! "

he gasps, pointing to it and grasping her in terror, as he glares on the phantom.

" Behold, look ! lo ! how say you ?
Why, what care I ? If thou canst nod, speak too.
If charnel-houses and our graves must send
Those that we bury back, our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites."

His pitiable and public cowardice sears her horribly.

" What ! *Quite* unmanned in folly ! "

she exclaims, below her breath.

" If I stand here, I saw him ! "

he asserts, trembling.

" Fie, for shame ! "

she whispers cuttingly, and leaves him.

Curious eyes are being turned over shoulders, and tongues are wagging. She must engage and silence them, stand between him and them. Again her unperturbed demeanour baffles them as with gracious smiles she joins them, playing the suave hostess and diverting their attention. Then, once more, gently yet crisply, she recalls him to present necessities.

> "My worthy lord!
> Your noble friends do lack you!"

He responds rationally enough, and returns to the table, enabling the racked woman smilingly to resume her own seat, and quietly sign to her young page for a cup of much-needed wine.

Her martyrdom, however, is by no means over. Again the avenging phantom shapes to Macbeth's sight, and he shrieks in fright, uttering words only too significant for such listeners. Straight and unmoved, she mitigates them unconcernedly:

> "Think of this, good peers,
> But as a thing of custom; 'tis no other;
> Only *it spoils the pleasure* of the time!"

What a gentle apology!

Nevertheless her nerves are stretched to

snapping pitch, worn as she is by constant sleeplessness. Still he raves on. Sharply she rebukes him as a nurse might chide a hysterical child:



"You have displac'd the mirth, broke the good meeting
With most admired disorder!"

Passionately he replies:

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

Bewildered and curious they cry:

"*What* sights, my lord?"

This question is too dangerous; already too much has been revealed, and she feels herself at snapping tension. Ere he can answer she breaks in swiftly:

"I pray you, speak not; he grows worse and worse;
Question enrages him: at once, good night!"

Willing enough, they disperse, and are about to do so with sympathetic and ceremonious

leave-taking: a quick note of anguish rings an infinitesimal second in her cry:

> "Stand not upon the order of your going,
> But *go at once!*"



But she is perfectly masked with courteous smile again the next second as she bids

> "A kind good night to all!"

Alone with him at last, she draws herself up tensely in a long suppressed shriek. Her hands at her temples touch the damnèd circle, "the ornament of life," and she hurls it wide from her. Spent, she staggers to the steps of the throne, but disdains to sink beneath defeat. With a Fate-defying effort she gains the seat, and there relaxes gradually, although determined to fight to the bitter end. Her human nerves are sagging badly, but her will is still adamantine; her shoulders and fingers are limp, nevertheless she sits upright with firm head; her lids half veil her eyes. There she sits in splendid isolation, a queen without a mate, and with desperation on her soul. There, by the table, he crouches, demoralised and muttering, muttering. Seizing a goblet of wine, he drains it, seeming thereby to regain some self-possession.

" What is the night ? "

he asks wearily. In a dead voice she speaks :

" Almost at odds with morning, which is which."

A silence follows, lasting a few moments. She is drearily fingering her great ruby girdle, which lies along one open hand in her lap, and is waiting, waiting. . . .

" How say'st thou,"

he breaks out harshly, on a fresh train of thought,

" that *Macduff* denies his person
At our great bidding ? "

" Did you send to him, sir ? "

asks the frayed voice. Emptied as she is of physical vitality, and now motionless, her mind is still practical.

" I *hear* it by the way,"

he admits,

" but I will send."

His present victim not yet buried, this butchering man is hot now on another one ! She feels what is in his mind, and slowly raises her horrorful eyes, gazing at him piercingly.

" There's not one of them but in his house
I keep a servant fee'd. I will to-morrow,
And betimes I will, to the weird sisters."

A slight shudder of recollection runs through her, and she drops her gaze, perceiving then the red trail of the jewel across her hand. Soft and swift she slips her hand away, her eyes now staring blankly before her in intensifying despair as she listens with strained, grey face to his mad and reckless resolutions. She has already experienced her absolute powerlessness to influence or check him.

MAC. "More shall they speak; for now I am bent to know
By the *worst* means, the worst. For mine own good
*All causes shall give way*! I am *in blood*
Stepped in so far, that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er:
Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,
Which must be *acted ere* they may be *scanned*!"

Useless to say anything to such a madman. Pitifully (yet *practically*!) she murmurs with dry lips:

"You lack the season of all natures, Sleep."

He seizes on the suggestion feverishly:

"Come, we'll to sleep. My strange and self abuse
Is the *initiate* fear, that wants *hard use*!"

Monstrous outlook!

She sits a second, irresponsive, gathering her

forces for the effort to move. Then she swings herself to her feet and sweeps superbly down the slight steps. As her foot touches the floor, however, she crashes to the ground, in blank unconsciousness, looking, as she lies there amidst her sombre draperies, like a lost soul, drowned in blood, and floating upon eternity.



Dazed, he gazes down upon her, muttering at last, in extenuation of this collapse :

"We are yet but young in deed."

We never see her in her normal mind again.

. . . . . .

In a moonlit room are seated two dark-garbed persons, conversing earnestly; an elderly dame and an old man.

DOCTOR. "I have two nights watched with you, but can perceive *no truth* in your report. When was it she last walked ?"

GENTLEWOMAN. "Since his Majesty went into the field I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon it, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all the while in a most fast sleep."

DOCTOR. "A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of watching. In this slumbery agitation, besides her walking and other actual performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say ?"

He has just questioned the truth of her report, and the gentlewoman is not inclined to lay herself open for another snub. Dryly she replies:



"That, sir, which I will not report after her."

The old man's curiosity is aroused, and he persists:

"You may, to me; and 'tis most meet you should."

GENTLEWOMAN. "Neither to you nor any one; *having no witness to confirm my speech.*"

With dignity she has risen, and now is about to leave him, when from the entrance she perceives the subject of their discussion approaching:

"Lo you, *here she comes*! This is her very guise."

She retires quickly back into the room, joined hastily by the doctor.

". . . and upon my life, fast asleep,"

she whispers breathlessly.

"Observe her; stand close."

Shrinking aside they watch intently the ghostly figure now appearing in the doorway, moving with peculiar rhythm, neither quick nor slow,

but as though mechanically propelled. In her hand she carries a small lamp, which she sets down easily on a table near. Her face is drawn and grey, save for a hectic flush on the cheek bones, and burning lips. Her haggard eyes are deep as night, and appear almost as black, so distended are the pupils. Their gaze, although not stony nor entirely fixed, seems to penetrate utterly the Present, and to be able to see only into the Past or Future. Every movement is so easy as to convey the impression that it has been repeated actually or mentally many, many times, and when she speaks, it is as if it were a mental voice materialising, and emanating from helpless lips. She is obviously bent on concealment and absolutely unconscious of revelation. Mechanically she paces to and fro, rubbing one hand with the other. Dully she murmurs :

LADY M. " Yet here's a spot ! "
DOCTOR. (*Whispers.*) " Hark, she speaks !
LADY M. " Out, damned spot ! out, I say ! "

She is grimly determined and absorbed, persevering two or three moments, until suddenly she stops, and listens intently.

" One, two ! "

Time to strike the signal bell.

" Why, then 'tis time to do't ! "

She pauses, gazing into an appalling vision.

"Hell is murky!"

she mutters darkly. Weariness overwhelms her, and the impossibility of struggling against the Inevitable. Her eyes close; for a moment or two she stands motionless, and then begins turning her head restlessly from side to side as though it lay upon a sleepless pillow. Suddenly her eyes open wide to a vivid memory, in which she lives so often.



"Fie, my lord, fie! a *soldier* and *afraid*?"

she cries, with the spirit of the old scorn in her ghost voice.

"What need we fear who knows it, *when none can call our power to account*?"

Then silently, and with stealthy caution, she reacts part of a past scene. Twisting her hair about her neck, she goes with invisible daggers to a long settee, on which she stands looking a moment. Then after quick actions of her hand there, she appears to lay the weapons softly down. Advancing again, she looks at her palms in sick disgust, and shudders convulsively as she mutters:

"Yet who would have thought the old man to have *had so much blood in him*?"

DOCTOR. "Do you mark that?"

whispers the Doctor tensely in the ear of the woman, who has dropped her face in her hands.

Again the lady speaks, still rubbing her hands the while, but looking aside:



"The thane of Fife had a wife; *where* is she *now*?"

This is a crime of which she is entirely guiltless, and great tears of remorseful shame well up in her hot eyes. With a heavy sigh she drops her head—and glares in fresh horror at her hands.

"What, will these hands ne'er be clean?"

There is a note of anguished *doubt* in her voice now; her teeth clench, her eyes fill with fear, and she seems as if she would rub the very flesh off in desperation. Exhausted, she ceases for a moment, and then appears to be watching someone intently. Sharply she exclaims, in hushed warning:

"No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that! You mar all with this starting."

As if crushed beneath the weight of this man's stupid cowardice, she has dropped her face in her hands with spent breath. She looks up slowly, a moment later, horror-curdled. Her whole face is quivering, her body shuddering in revolt, and she holds her hands far from

her, as though she implored heaven to cut them away.

"Here's the *smell* of the blood *still*!"



she gasps in anguish. Then, piercing her misty caution, rings out her poignant *despair*:

"All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand!"

And two or three long moans break forth in uncontrolled waves of agony from the depths of her tortured soul. Branded eternally with this loathly stain! Even her uneasy hearers are moved to pity.

DOCTOR. "What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged."

GENTLEWOMAN. "I would not have such a heart in my bosom, for the dignity of the whole body."

Up and down again feverishly she goes, her pace slackening by degrees, as though her agony had wrung her limp. One would think she was about to sink into a blessed reactive mental stupor, as she now stands swaying softly to and fro.

"Wash your hands, put on your night-gown; look not so pale,"

she murmurs, with closed, sunken eyes. Her breathing becomes steadier, her hands slip limply to her sides. Surely her scorpion'd mind will find a few moments' unconsciousness at last.



But no; habit lashes her alert a moment later. Her eyes open heavily; her voice is hoarse and almost sobbing with strain and fatigue.

"I tell you *yet* again,"

she says,

"Banquo's *buried.* He *cannot come out on's grave!* He . . . can . . . *not* . . . *come* . . . *out* . . . *on's* . . . *grave!*"

How many weary nights has she been torn out of sleep to tell him that! Another familiar sound is now drumming in her memory. She is startled and keyed up again.

"To bed; to bed; there's knocking at the gate! Come, come, come! give me your hand!"

She appears to be endeavouring to drag along a great weight, and stands straining, scarce able to move, while beads of perspiration spring from her brow.

"What's done, cannot be undone,"

she utters sombrely. Once more she tries to move the invisible resister, dragging him at last

painfully away with her, with spent sobs of exhaustion, and implorant mutterings of

"To bed, to bed; come, *come*, to bed!"

. . . . . .



All through this scene she has given the impression that, had one aroused her, she would have been mistress of herself on the instant, facing the situation with cold and haughty dignity. Excepting those few quite demoralised moments when she *smelt the blood on her hands* she neither flinches nor groans, however appalling the outlook, all through the play. She is a magnificent example of Endurance, Dignity and Presence of Mind. A murderess, swept away on impulse at extraordinary temptation, she fully recognised her *mistake*. What she lacked in sentiment, she made up for in mentality. She endeavoured to make the best of a false step, and not whine over the irreparable. Unfortunately Macbeth nullified every effort, and ruined all, through his cowardice and lust for murder. Having influenced him to the initial crime, she shows her remorse for having done so. She devotes herself entirely to him, and shields him heroically on every occasion; she sticks unflinchingly to him. No woman ever mingled infamous and noble qualities to such a strange degree. One

can only wonder if the evil minds of the Witches were not occultly accountable in some mysterious way, afflicting her with a malignant temporary insanity. Shakespeare does not show us Lady Macbeth revelling in any material power or glory as queen. He does draw her as the most lonely of women, however. Every other of his ladies has her companion ; and her scenes with various friends. Rosalind has her Celia, Portia her Nerissa, Juliet her Nurse, and so on. Lady Macbeth never " meets " a woman at all, and, beyond a superficial exchange of compliments with the king, converses with nobody but her husband. When he is away, we are given no suggestion of any society, or occupation, for her. We are given no inkling of any taste of hers—unless it be *vaguely* for " Masterdom " and Ambition—to what end ? She is a lonely mystery of a soul. She thinks ; her brain is sensitive and quick ; she seems particularly vivid when alone and self-communing. With her husband she is guarded, never speaking but to the purpose, and most significantly silent when words would be useless, as, for instance, when he hints to her of his plot against Banquo, and when he speaks of Macduff after the " Banquet Scene." One cannot argue with a madman ! And to outsiders she wears an impenetrable mask

of reserve, cold but gracious—graceful but dignified.

When she appears, she has a succession of "great" scenes, one on the top of another, any one of which would suffice for the *pièce de résistance* of an act! And the first two scenes are therefore rendered most difficult to "work" in order to do full justice to one speech without repeating the same note in the following one, or "letting it down."

It is well to mark the difference between desperation and despair. In the former one strives for a *possible chance*, be there ten or one hundred against it, and endures actively. In despair, one *knows* there is not any chance at all, and only passive endurance or destruction is left. We saw Lady Macbeth's physical resistance overwhelmed, in spite of her self-control. She stood unconquered in mind, until physically *beaten* down. In her last scene we see her self-control give way and become momentarily demoralised at the thought—with her physical antipathy to blood—of living for ever blood-tainted, by its smell and stain. It is most likely that the horror of the idea did demoralise her nerves sufficiently to make her revolt against Fate and lay violent hands upon herself. A woman with such power of endurance would take a great deal of natural and

definite cause to kill, and we are expressly told that her disease was out of the "province" of a physician. "Fiend" as she may seem, one thing is certain; to "play" her is a "liberal education."

Portia

# PORTIA



## THE LADY OF THE MOST CHILDISH SOPHISM

"Shylock's . . . Christian antagonists who, *by dint of the most childish sophisms*, despoiled him of his goods."[1]

BRANDES.

THAT there is something very unsatisfactory in the working of the famous "Trial Scene" of *The Merchant of Venice* is undeniable. One has only to stand on the stage during its progression, night after night, with an unbiased mind, to feel aware that the act does not swing up to its climax with the usual Shakespearean ease. Then, also, the whole undoing of the flinty Jew turns, as everyone knows, upon "a most childish sophism"—namely, the question of "a jot of blood." The most fascinating of her sex has recently owned in public to feeling quite ashamed of the noble and adorable Portia's condescension to so mean a "quibble." The aforementioned one and only impersonator of Portia has also declared it to be her own belief that the fair advocate, after vainly consulting with Bellario, makes her appearance at the court in the wild hope that some unforeseen occurrence may inspire her woman's wit with

some way out of the difficulty. She therefore commences proceedings in the determination to win the Jew by her pleading for mercy, if possible, and otherwise to trust to luck! Thus the "jot of blood" quibble is just a sudden inspiration, which immediately puts the Jew out of action.



Never an actress with the part to handle but goes through the inevitable problem, "Was the 'jot of blood' a spontaneous idea or did Portia come into court with that ingenious obstacle up her sleeve, as a result of her consultation with Bellario?" And it will surely be conceded that practically the whole of the English civilised world is under the impression that Shylock's downfall was due to that "jot of blood" difficulty, and to that alone. Every actress has palpably come to the conclusion that it was at least Portia's own idea, whether it occurred spontaneously during the trial, or had been previously discussed with the learned Bellario, a point which really does not particularly signify. Apart from this "childish sophism," however, it is the construction of the climax, conducted by Portia, which is unusually clumsy and difficult. The actress finds herself with three long speeches one upon the other, any one of which is elevated enough to be the definite climax of the scene; and, to make it worse, the

famous "jot of blood" speech is the first. Naturally the other two come but as anti-climax!

Tradition compels one to give the first speech for all that it is worth, and are we not glued, in all main points, to tradition? Tradition also burdens Nerissa with large law books, probably with a view to "dressing the part" of lawyer's clerk, and it has often struck me as strange that she also should be seized with a spontaneous inspiration as to the contents of the volumes, even to the point of finding on the spot the very Act Portia is *about to quote*, and indeed reads out from the folio handed to her by her faithful companion! Surely an extra-ordinary case of telepathy, and one worthy of greater note. Or can it be possible that here—as in so many cases—tradition has become "an outward sign with no earthly meaning," as a schoolboy defined an article in the catechism?

For both Brandes, a literary authority, and the most fascinating of her sex, a dramatic authority, agree that Portia gained her case "by dint of the most childish sophism" and "by a mean and paltry quibble unworthy of so noble a character"; and to the public at large this is understood to be by "the jot of blood" and that only! Is not that so? Why

is it so ? How does the strange idea hold that the law point on which this *cause célèbre* was won was simply that insignificant though picturesque detail of the " blood jot." How is it that heavily learned individuals like Herr Brandes can refer to such a result as being obtained by " childish sophisms " ?



The " Trial Scene " is a *chef-d'œuvre* of art, yet Shakespeare's brilliant conduct of the case appears overlooked simply on account of that melodramatic bit of sensationalism. Doubtless he expected that to stagger and dazzle the masses, but did he expect patronising head-shakes from *les autres* ? Perhaps that was left to future generations only.

To begin with, Shakespeare himself leaves us in no doubt as to Portia's state of mind when she enters the court. By " us " is not meant those who, seated in audience, are seeing the play for the first time ; from thence one would prefer to see the subtle unfolding of her methods, maybe to grasp her intention and wonder if Shylock will betray himself or evade her. I mean therefore those who are *actively* studying the part, from and on Shakespeare's own lines, and have not dazed themselves by studying every " explanation and reading, etc." but his own. Let us just take from Portia's entrance.

She is preceded by Nerissa with the *law volumes*. What is more, both of them know why they are bringing that particular folio, for it contains the goal at which Portia intends to arrive. But to attain it triumphantly it is necessary that Portia shall make Shylock publicly incriminate himself, and betray his murderous motive. To cut a pound of flesh was not *direct* murder, it might even be possible to survive the operation, and Shylock was demanding only that to which Antonio has given him a legal right—the flesh.

"*I stand here for law.*"

First of all, Portia endeavours, in her famous "Mercy" speech, to appeal to the better nature of the Jew, but all in vain. He demands the *law* and takes up his stand on his *bond*. Portia braces herself up; since he is merciless she will be so too. A thought strikes her here, it would seem, for after having already decided on her plan of action, and previously stated to the Duke that she is "informed thoroughly of the cause," she demands to see the bond again for a moment. She gives no sign as to what is in her mind, however, but begins to "play" the situation. She admits all is on the side of Shylock, and—to lull Shylock to perfect security, that he may fall more completely into

trap she intends for him—urges on the preparations on his behalf with a decision that disarms the Jew of caution and fills him with intense delight. He is on the point of legally triumphing, and gratifying his bitterest hatred and spite ; it is the hour of his life—



" A Daniel come to judgment ! Yea, a Daniel !
O wise young judge, how I do honour thee ! "

Swiftly the critical moment approaches.

" Therefore lay bare your bosom,"

says Portia calmly to Antonio, whose friends are almost beside themselves and hardly held in check by the presence of the Duke, yet in sort hypnotised by the slim figure of the passionless advocate.

" Are there balances here to weigh the flesh ? "

Groans and hisses are heard around, and the soldiers on guard clank their weapons tactfully as a warning.

In the same casual but firm tones comes the observation—it scarcely sounds more to the Jew, now insolent in his triumph—

" Have by some surgeon, Shylock, on your charge,
To stop his wounds, lest he do bleed *to death.*"

Heavens ! she has uttered these words on which hangs her whole case in such a manner that they are impressed on the minds of the court unconsciously, and have not awakened the caution of the Jew. She has veiled the significance of her demand.



In proud insolence, secure now of his victim, Shylock replies :

" Is it so nominated in the bond ? "

knowing well that it is not.

Portia subtly underlines the impression she has intended. With a gesture that restrains the angry murmurs all around, she answers him :

" It is not so express'd : but what of that ?
'Twere good you do so much for charity."

And in the most acute but hidden suspense she awaits his next words. Nerissa, too, may be seen leaning forward, anxiously listening for the crucial reply, by which Shylock may evade the law, or *put his neck into a noose.*

With triumphant malignity he responds incisively :

" I cannot find it ; *'tis not in the bond.*"

A howl of execration goes up around ; motion-

less Portia now draws a breath and her eyes flash a message to Nerissa, who opens the folio before her, finds a passage, marks it and becomes passive again. They are secure now of victory. Portia has led him publicly to refuse a surgeon to secure Antonio against very probable death; it is therefore obvious that it is at his life the alien is striking. The cunning Jew, in his reiteration of his plea for "justice" and his "bond," has overreached himself, and from that moment Portia can afford to play with him, and them all.

She no longer urges the point, but proceeds with the case:

"You, merchant, have you anything to say?"

Antonio has, and so have other people, so much so that Shylock pointedly remarks:

"We trifle time: I pray thee, pursue sentence."

Portia quotes bond and law with the utmost precision, dwelling with significance upon "*the law's*" allowance. Everyone is worked up to fury, when, at the critical moment, that *calm* yet dominant voice penetrates the general hubbub:

"Tarry a little, there is something else.
This bond doth give thee here *no jot of blood*;
*The words expressly* are 'a pound of flesh.'"

Now the delighted court begins to see her intention, and understands her own stickling for "the law." It listens in breathless excitement to her exposition of it.



"Take then thy bond,"

she continues, but warns him that, if he infringes on his rights, the law and justice that he so vehemently demands shall be meted out to him, "more than thou desirest!" A human touch, indeed! So far she has been a law machine, but now she can afford to be an individual. She urges him to take his bond but to beware of the grievous penalty attached to its infringement. Shylock, staggered, makes an effort to extricate himself, and with a wonderfully characteristic touch demands,

"Pay the bond *thrice*;
And let the Christian go."

Portia, however, is trifling no longer. She is showing him that two can play at holding to the letter of the law, a possibility which Shylock had not considered. She refuses him even the bare principal; so far the "childish sophism" certainly balks the Jew of obtaining his vengeance, and he is about to depart empty. But now Shakespeare makes Portia lawfully triumph

in the real great "smashing" speech that follows, in which she entangles him absolutely and legally in the net of his own making the proving of which she has so subtly brought about.



"Tarry, Jew!
The law hath yet another hold on you!
It is enact'd in the laws of Venice."

Nerissa swiftly passes her the law folio, and from it she reads:

"If it be *proved* against an *alien*
That by direct *or indirect* attempts
*He seek the life* of any citizen,
The party 'gainst the which he doth contrive,
Shall seize one half his goods, the other half
Comes to the privy coffer of the state,
*And the offender's life lies in the mercy*
*Of the Duke only*, 'gainst all other voice."

Here, raising her eyes from the page, and fixing them mercilessly upon the Jew, she continues, pointing at him with accusing finger:

"In which predicament, I say, *thou* stand'st!
For it appears, by *manifest* proceeding,
That *indirectly*, and *directly*, too,
*Thou hast contrived against the very life*
Of the defendant; and *thou hast incurr'd*
The *danger* formally by me rehearsed.
Down, therefore, and beg *mercy*—of the Duke."

What a terrific, Jovian speech! She has brilliantly and legally conducted the case to its triumphant conclusion, annihilating the Jew by means of sound Venetian law. Having made her big important point, by making him publicly *refuse to guard the life* of his victim, she permits herself to play dramatically with him and them all on the way to her certain conclusion.

Shylock has made a point of acting absolutely in accordance with the wording of the bond; and she holds him to it. She can threaten him with a heavy penalty, since he has already incurred it.

Notice also that she hoists Shylock with his own petard on several points; he has scorned to render mercy—

"Down, therefore, and beg—*mercy*—from the Duke,"

she concludes.

When she asks him to have by some surgeon, he asks if it is so nominated in the bond. "It is not so *express'd*," she replies, and, since it is not *expressed* there in so many words, he considers himself safe, on that quibble. Therefore, when she points out that he has no right to any blood, she pointedly says:

"The *words expressly are* 'a pound of flesh'!"

*Her quibble is founded upon his own*, and since

he based his immunity upon it, Antonio must logically be held immune also. It is Shylock himself undoubtedly that inspired Portia's quick wit. Of his insistency on justice she also takes advantage:



"For, *as thou urgest justice*, be assured
Thou shalt have justice; (more than thou desirest)."

Again, a moment after:

"The Jew shall have all *justice*; soft! no haste."

And yet again:

"He shall have merely 'Justice' and *his bond*!"

How humanly has Shakespeare written this great scene, and with what art! How characteristically he has drawn each figure with its varying emotion! Portia, so calm, dominant and dignified, warming beautifully and earnestly during her vain appeal for mercy, becoming again coldly disinterested until the Jew has committed himself irrevocably; letting her clear mind dominate her warm, impulsive heart, and the agitated assembly, until she may fitly colour her tones with her own feeling, as she finally soars aloft like a Saint George, leaving the conquered and captive evil writhing impotently below.

It must be admitted that tradition, presumably, leads every actress to "let go" on the "Blood" speech, for all she is worth. In consequence the following speeches, especially the second, which is merely elaborated tautology, strain the tense atmosphere and make it drag, so that the victorious conclusion comes flatly on an anticlimax. It has often occurred to me that the second speech, with its quite unnecessary repetition and elaboration of detail was never in the version originally played. Shakespeare was an actor, the author was an artist, and could never have been guilty of thus encumbering the action at so critical a point. He no doubt wrote, and re-wrote, that portion, and probably finally amalgamated the two speeches into one, cutting out the superfluous and retarding detail. To threaten Shylock with death in the second speech is absolutely to weaken the dramatic *dénouement* that is to follow. To weaken? To destroy it entirely!

To "cut" Shakespeare nowadays is not considered profane. Alas! often his scenes and characters are cut down without any more reason than to super-star a "well-known" London or American "name." When, therefore, I produce the "Trial Scene," I shall, with the utmost respect, rectify that obvious misversion and restore the original balance to that

thrilling climax, feeling convinced that the action will be justified in the eyes of both critics and audience by the happy result.

Since there exist people who proclaim that Portia's brilliant and legal victory, on carefully studied lines, was due but to "childish sophisms," it is equally natural for poor Mr Shakespeare to be accredited with having permitted the climax of his great scene to be conducted in so clumsy and unprofessional a manner.

# The Wily Little Shrew

Now this is not of any particular importance, save perhaps to those few who are martyrs to a delicate stomach. In vain to say to such:

"Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot."

The culprit utterly refuses to submit, and it is chiefly for the sake of such that these lines are penned.

*The Taming of the Shrew* contains a great deal of most interesting and subtle characterisation, but this is a quality for which actors, and the general public, have presumably no need, above all in so merry and boisterous a farce. Frankly, it would be foolish, under these circumstances, to play it in any other way since the essence of high comedy is subtlety. To be sure, to yell loudly, to crack a whip continuously, to throw things about does not really cry aloud for subtle treatment; so much must be admitted; nor does to rant and stamp and slap demand it. And how excruciatingly and gorgeously humorous it is, to be sure, to see

an uproarious, swaggering bully brutally browbeating a girl,

> " . . . young and beauteous,
> Brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman " ;



naughty and wilful a little devil as she may be. In the spirit of farce and low comedy combined, her taming is effected practically by those methods used to tame wild animals. Much noise, no food, and physical exhaustion is supposed to transform a very haughty, spirited and witty damsel into a humble female of servile obedience.

A puzzling bit of psychology, to be sure. *The Police Gazette* does not support the success of such a course of treatment ; the genuine high-spirited female there generally evinces a determination to " do in " her tormenter, or die for it. Often she does very nearly die for it, without the glorious satisfaction of having " done him in," for brute force " talks," and she is physically unable to answer effectually. Can it be possible, then, that a woman of some blood and culture is more easily cowed and conquered ?

Do you remember the last line of the play ? So innocent and so significant ! After Katherine, who has suffered every possible public insult and humiliation—and even outrage—has

spoken a perfectly wonderful speech concerning the relations of a wife to her husband, and urged the gentle, womanly Bianca and equally feminine Widow to submit implicitly to their owners, Lucentio is left *wondering* (and probably doubtful) at the transformation.

*Exeunt* PETRUCHIO *and* KATHERINE.

HOR. "Now, go thy ways; thou hast tam'd a curst shrew."

LUC. "*'Tis a wonder*, by your leave, she will be tamed *so*!"

There is a bit of "business" which, since it is a "tradition," is also somewhat significant. As Katherine concludes her speech with a profound obeisance, the delighted Petruchio clasps her in his arms, and taking off a "gold chain" throws it around her neck. It would be wonderful to look deep into her eyes at that moment. She has learnt her lesson, and according to the treatment of the play as *low farce*, or spirited high comedy, Petruchio's behaviour has changed her into a deep, deceitful woman, lying low, and laughing at him in her sleeve, or one whose culture has not been wasted, but who has awakened to the fact that man has muscles and brawling as weapons, and woman her wits, a sense of humour, and—well, tact, if you would prefer to call it so, that quality anyway which is

called "tact" or "dissimulation" according to the nice or horrid nature of the woman using it. A sense of humour generally saves the situation. The test of a Petruchio may well lie in the following little incident; indeed the decision of the actor in this may be said to determine the method of handling the play. At the conclusion of the "Wooing Scene," in which Petruchio is frankly delighted with his "super-dainty Kate," "the prettiest Kate in Christendom," he cries, "And, kiss me, Kate!" — and catches her to him, but she slaps his cheek roundly, evades his grasp, and flies out of the room, as with a ringing laugh he calls out after her:

"... we will be married o' Sunday!"

That suggests good temper and some humour. If he has played the entire scene in high spirits, and tinged it with tenderness and humour enough to sincerely attract her, it will account for her undisguised chagrin when he does not arrive in time for the wedding. The alternative "business" is this: mockery all through and an ugly evasion of the slap. The attitude of spiteful resentment at the idea of being slapped by a woman: displaying a mean nature, without any humour. Experience teaches woman that the really nice man rather revels in a slap;

nor, by the way, does it effectually deter his—impudence.

In subtle and high comedy handling there is in Petruchio something exceedingly attractive, in spite of his fantastic and intensely irritating pranks. He is showing her that two can play the game of scolding, general cantankerousness and selfish bad temper, and that the physically stronger is the winner. She is intensely attracted by him, but would rather die than admit it and give in. The crisis is a particularly delicate one, and Petruchio acts with great tact under the circumstances. She is his wife and under his roof, but one feels he respects her womanhood—a delicacy of which the coarse blusterer of low comedy would seem incapable.

But witty Kate, silenced perforce, finds good counsel in meditation. I ask you, is it possible a high-spirited and wilful girl could suddenly be transformed into an utterly meek and servile "worm"? She is cogitating upon how to use her wits to her advantage. You remember what Shakespeare makes Rosalind say concerning a woman's wits?

"... the wiser the waywarder! Make the doors upon a woman's wit and it will out at the casement; shut that and 'twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney!"

In the scene on the public road we see Kate considerably quieter and more thoughtful; nevertheless she has not quite learned—tact. She is seeing through him by now, and is somewhat contemptuous of his masculine superiority; what woman is not, when she has reached that stage? All the same, he *is* "a gentleman" and a very attractive one at that, and well—well! At last she wearies of the foolery, and is probably sustained by a gleam of humour.



In the sweetest, yet by no means servile, tones, but in an accent rather to suggest that she is beginning to be *bored*, and quite ready to *cease taking him seriously*, she replies:

> "Then God be bless'd, it *is* the blessed *sun*!
> But sun it is not, when *you* say it is not;
> And the moon changes—*even as your mind*!"

(Delicious irony!)

> "What *you* will have it nam'd, even that it *is*!
> And so it shall be; (so for *Katherine*)."

She has always indulged in little shafts of irony, and she is unchanged in this to the very end.

At this beautiful resignation Petruchio insists upon embracing her, to which she first demurs and then concedes with a quick glance up from piquantly indifferent eyes, the lids of

which fall a moment after. That is enough for Petruchio. O Woman! Outwardly he is conqueror, but what do outward forms matter? Her smile is sphinx-like. He is flattered to perdition: henceforth, by means of outward forms and—womanly tact, I think we agreed to call it?—she can lead him by the nose.



Listen to lines in her delightfully ironical last speech, spoken with that dangerous air of innocence.

She begins with common-sense, with which, being no fool, she is now in complete agreement —scowling brows are not attractive to men, who are influenced by beauty.

"Thy husband is thy lord, thy life"—

she has begun to count up all his *conventional* attributes on her fingers with extreme gravity—

"thy keeper,
"Thy head, thy sovereign . . .
. . . commits his body.
To painful labour"—

(here she throws great feeling into her tones, glancing innocently at the student dandy Lucentio, and the others, all obviously living in idle and luxurious ease)—

"both by sea and land."

Here the little devil becomes quite pathetic:

"*To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,*
Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe."

Delightful! The men are immediately struck at this heroic description, and unconsciously endeavour to look the part, whilst their wives look at each other understandingly! Beautifully Katherine declaims *the conventional opinion* concerning woman's place in the world. For one moment the genuine Katherine rings out somewhat unguardedly, but she covers it neatly:

"I am asham'd that women are so simple
To offer war, where they should—kneel for peace!
Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway
When they—are bound to serve, love and obey!"

Presently she has an enjoyable little dig at her demure, sly, "womanly" sister:

"Come, come, you *froward* and *unable worms*!"

What significance is in that line! Worms! Fools, too, says her tone.

"My *mind* hath been as big as one of yours,
My *heart* as great (my *reason*, haply, *more*!)
To bandy word for word and frown for frown.
But now I see our lances are but straws—
Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare."

This she confesses, and stoops gracefully, in order to conquer the more surely. And the dear goose of a Petruchio, charmed by such virtuous sentiments, and desperately in love to boot, immediately feels compelled to reward them!



In the eyes of the fascinating Kate lurks a sphinx-like smile; her air of demureness is almost uncanny, her lips, however, are distracting.

Wit *versus* Brute Force! Shall we say "Honours Divided"?

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