LITERARY REMAINS

Extract from a Letter written by Mr. Coleridge, in February, 1818, to a gentleman who attended the course of Lectures given in the spring of that year.

My next Friday's lecture will, if I do not grossly flatter-blind myself, be interesting, and the points of view not only original, but new to the audience. I make this distinction, because sixteen or rather seventeen years ago, I delivered eighteen lectures on Shakspeare, at the Royal Institution; three-fourths of which appeared at that time startling paradoxes, although they have since been adopted even by men, who then made use of them as proofs of my flighty and paradoxical turn of mind; all to prove that Shakspeare's judgment was, if possible, still more wonderful than his genius; or rather, that the contradistinction itself between judgment and genius rested on an utterly false theory. This, and its proofs and grounds have been--I should not have said adopted, but produced as their own legitimate children by some, and by others the merit of them attributed to a foreign writer, whose lectures were not given orally till two years after mine, rather than to their countryman; though I dare appeal to the most adequate judges, as Sir George Beaumont, the Bishop of Durham, Mr. Sotheby, and afterwards to Mr. Rogers and Lord Byron, whether there is one single principle in Schlegel's work (which is not an admitted drawback from its merits), that was not established and applied in detail by me. Plutarch tells us, that egotism is a venial fault in the unfortunate, and justifiable in the calumniated, &c.

* * * * * * * *

7
DEAR SIR,—First permit me to remove a very natural, indeed almost inevitable, mistake, relative to my lectures: namely, that I have them, or that the lectures of one place or season are in any way repeated in another. So far from it, that on any point that I had ever studied (and on no other should I dare discourse—I mean, that I would not lecture on any subject for which I had to acquire the main knowledge, even though a month’s or three months’ previous time were allowed me; on no subject that had not employed my thoughts for a large portion of my life since earliest manhood, free of all outward and particular purpose)—on any point within my habit of thought, I should greatly prefer a subject I had never lectured on, to one which I had repeatedly given; and those who have attended me for any two seasons successively will bear witness, that the lecture given at the London Philosophical Society, on the Romeo and Juliet, for instance, was as different from that given at the Crown and Anchor, as if they had been by two individuals who, without any communication with each other, had only mastered the same principles of philosophic criticism. This was most strikingly evidenced in the coincidence between my lectures and those of Schlegel; such, and so close, that it was fortunate for my moral reputation that I had not only from five to seven hundred ear witnesses that the passages had been given by me at the Royal Institution two years before Schlegel commenced his lectures at Vienna, but that notes had been taken of these by several men and ladies of high rank. The fact is this; during a course of lectures, I faithfully employ all the intervening days in collecting and digesting the materials, whether I have or have not lectured on the same subject before, making no difference. The day of the lecture, till the hour of commencement, I devote to the consideration, what of the mass before me is best fitted to answer the purposes of a lecture, that is, to keep the audience awake and interested during the delivery, and to leave a sting behind, that is, a disposition to study the subject anew, under
Definition of Poetry

the light of a new principle. Several times, however, partly from apprehension respecting my health and animal spirits, partly from the wish to possess copies that might afterwards be marketable among the publishers, I have previously written the lecture; but before I had proceeded twenty minutes, I have been obliged to push the MS. away, and give the subject a new turn. Nay, this was so notorious, that many of my auditors used to threaten me, when they saw any number of written papers upon my desk, to steal them away; declaring they never felt so secure of a good lecture as when they perceived that I had not a single scrap of writing before me. I take far, far more pains than would go to the set composition of a lecture, both by varied reading and by meditation; but for the words, illustrations, &c., I know almost as little as any one of the audience (that is, those of any thing like the same education with myself) what they will be five minutes before the lecture begins. Such is my way, for such is my nature; and in attempting any other, I should only torment myself in order to disappoint my auditors—torment myself during the delivery, I mean; for in all other respects it would be a much shorter and easier task to deliver them from writing. I am anxious to preclude any semblance of affectation; and have therefore troubled you with this lengthy preface before I have the hardihood to assure you, that you might as well ask me what my dreams were in the year 1814, as what my course of lectures was at the Surrey Institution. Fuimus Troes.

SHAKSPEARE,

With introductory matter on Poetry, the Drama, and the Stage.

DEFINITION OF POETRY.

Poetry is not the proper antithesis to prose, but to science. Poetry is opposed to science, and prose to metre. The proper and immediate object of science is the acquirement, or communication, of truth; the proper and immediate object of poetry is the com-
10  Definition of Poetry

In the definition of immediate pleasure. This definition is useful; but as it would include novels and other works of fiction, which yet we do not call poems, there must be some additional character by which poetry is not only divided from opposites, but likewise distinguished from disparate, though similar, modes of composition. Now how is this to be effected? In animated prose, the beauties of nature, and the passions and accidents of human nature, are often expressed in that natural language which the contemplation of them would suggest to a pure and benevolent mind; yet still neither we nor the writers call such a work a poem, though no work could deserve that name which did not include all this, together with something else. What is this? It is that pleasurable emotion, that peculiar state and degree of excitement, which arises in the poet himself in the act of composition;—and in order to understand this, we must combine a more than ordinary sympathy with the objects, emotions, or incidents contemplated by the poet, consequent on a more than common sensibility, with a more than ordinary activity of the mind in respect of the fancy and the imagination. Hence is produced a more vivid reflection of the truths of nature and of the human heart, united with a constant activity modifying and correcting these truths by that sort of pleasurable emotion, which the exertion of all our faculties gives in a certain degree; but which can only be felt in perfection under the full play of those powers of mind, which are spontaneous rather than voluntary, and in which the effort required bears no proportion to the activity enjoyed. This is the state which permits the production of a highly pleasurable whole, of which each part shall also communicate for itself a distinct and conscious pleasure; and hence arises the definition, which I trust is now intelligible, that poetry, or rather a poem, is a species of composition, opposed to science, as having intellectual pleasure for its object, and as attaining its end by the use of language natural to us in a state of excitement,—but distinguished from other species of composition, not excluded by the former criterion, by permitting a pleasure from the whole consistent with a consciousness of pleasure from the component parts;—and the perfection of which
Definition of Poetry

is, to communicate from each part the greatest immediate pleasure compatible with the largest sum of pleasure on the whole. This, of course, will vary with the different modes of poetry;—and that splendour of particular lines, which would be worthy of admiration in an impassioned elegy, or a short indignant satire, would be a blemish and proof of vile taste in a tragedy or an epic poem.

It is remarkable, by the way, that Milton in three incidental words has implied all which for the purposes of more distinct apprehension, which at first must be slow-paced in order to be distinct, I have endeavoured to develope in a precise and strictly adequate definition. Speaking of poetry, he says, as in a parenthesis, "which is simple, sensuous, passionate." How awful is the power of words!—fearful often in their consequences when merely felt, not understood; but most awful when both felt and understood!—Had these three words only been properly understood by, and present in the minds of, general readers, not only almost a library of false poetry would have been either precluded or still-born, but, what is of more consequence, works truly excellent and capable of enlarging the understanding, warming and purifying the heart, and placing in the centre of the whole being the germs of noble and manlike actions, would have been the common diet of the intellect instead. For the first condition, simplicity,—while, on the one hand, it distinguishes poetry from the arduous processes of science, labouring towards an end not yet arrived at, and supposes a smooth and finished road, on which the reader is to walk onward easily, with streams murmuring by his side, and trees and flowers and human dwellings to make his journey as delightful as the object of it is desirable, instead of having to toil with the pioneers and painfully make the road on which others are to travel,—precludes, on the other hand, every affectation and morbid peculiarity;—the second condition, sensuousness, insures that framework of objectivity, that definiteness and articulation of imagery, and that modification of the images themselves, without which poetry becomes flattened into mere didactics of practice, or evaporated into a lazy, unthoughtful, day-dreaming; and the third condition, passion, provides that
Definition of Poetry

neither thought nor imagery shall be simply objective, but that the passio vera of humanity shall warm and animate both.

To return, however, to the previous definition, this most general and distinctive character of a poem originates in the poetic genius itself; and though it comprises whatever can with any propriety be called a poem (unless that word be a mere lazy synonyme for a composition in metre,) it yet becomes a just, and not merely discriminative, but full and adequate, definition of poetry in its highest and most peculiar sense, only so far as the distinction still results from the poetic genius, which sustains and modifies the emotions, thoughts, and vivid representations of the poem by the energy without effort of the poet's own mind,—by the spontaneous activity of his imagination and fancy, and by whatever else with these reveals itself in the balancing and reconciling of opposite or discordant qualities, sameness with difference, a sense of novelty and freshness with old or customary objects, a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order, self-possession and judgment with enthusiasm and vehement feeling,—and which, while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature, the manner to the matter, and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the images, passions, characters, and incidents of the poem:

Doubtless, this could not be, but that she turns
Bodies to spirit by sublimation strange,
As fire converts to fire the things it burns—
As we our food into our nature change!

From their gross matter she abstracts their forms,
And draws a kind of quintessence from things,
Which to her proper nature she transforms
To bear them light on her celestial wings!

Thus doth she, when from individual states
She doth abstract the universal kinds,
Which then reclothed in divers names and fates
Steal access thro' our senses to our minds.¹

¹ Sir John Davies on the Immortality of the Soul, sect. iv. The words and lines in italics are substituted to apply these verses to the poetic genius. The greater part of this latter paragraph may be found adopted, with some alterations, in the Biographia Literaria, vol. ii. c. 14: but I have thought it better in this instance and some
GREEK DRAMA.

It is truly singular that Plato,—whose philosophy and religion were but exotic at home, and a mere opposition to the finite in all things, genuine prophet and anticipator as he was of the Protestant Christian æra,—should have given in his Dialogue of the Banquet, a justification of our Shakspeare. For he relates that, when all the other guests had either dispersed or fallen asleep, Socrates only, together with Aristophanes and Agathon, remained awake, and that, while he continued to drink with them out of a large goblet, he compelled them, though most reluctantly, to admit that it was the business of one and the same genius to excel in tragic and comic poetry, or that the tragic poet ought, at the same time, to contain within himself the powers of comedy. Now, as this was directly repugnant to the entire theory of the ancient critics, and contrary to all their experience, it is evident that Plato must have fixed the eye of his contemplation on the innermost essentials of the drama, abstracted from the forms of age or country. In another passage he even adds the reason, namely, that opposites illustrate each other’s nature, and in their struggle draw forth the strength of the combatants, and display the conqueror as sovereign even on the territories of the rival power.

Nothing can more forcibly exemplify the separative spirit of the Greek arts than their comedy as opposed to their tragedy. But as the immediate struggle of contraries supposes an arena common to both, so both were alike ideal; that is, the comedy of Aristophanes rose to as great a distance above the ludicrous of real life, as the tragedy of Sophocles above its tragic events and passions,—and it is in this one point, of absolute

others, to run the chance of bringing a few passages twice over to the recollection of the reader, than to weaken the force of the original argument by breaking the connection. Ed.

1 — ἑγερόμενος δὲ ἰδεῖν τούς μὲν ἄλλους καθεύδοντας καὶ οἰχομένους,
'Ἀγάθωνα δὲ καὶ Ἀριστοφάνην καὶ Σωκράτην ἔτι μόνον ἑγεργορέουσα, καὶ
πιθεῖν ἐκ φάσματι μεγάλης ἐπιτείμων· τοῦ ὅνω Σωκράτη τοῦτο διαλέγεσθαι:
καὶ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα ὁ Ἀριστοφάνης οὐκ ἐπὶ μεμήχανε τὸν λόγον· ὅπερ γὰρ ἐξ
ἀρχῆς παραγερέσθαι, ὑπονυτάσσειν τε· τὸ μέντοι κεφάλαια λθή, προσαναγ-
κάζειν τῷ Σωκράτῃ ὁμολογεῖν αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς εἶναι κωμικάν καὶ
τραγῳδιὰν ἐπιτάσσει τινεῖν, καὶ τὸν τέχνη τραγῳδιῶν διἀ, καὶ κω-
μικάν ἑιλαί· Symp. sub fine.
ideality, that the comedy of Shakspeare and the old comedy of Athens coincide. In this also alone did the Greek tragedy and comedy unite; in every thing else they were exactly opposed to each other. Tragedy is poetry in its deepest earnest; comedy is poetry in unlimited jest. Earnestness consists in the direction and convergence of all the powers of the soul to one aim, and in the voluntary restraint of its activity in consequence; the opposite, therefore, lies in the apparent abandonment of all definite aim or end, and in the removal of all bounds in the exercise of the mind,—attaining its real end, as an entire contrast, most perfectly, the greater the display is of intellectual wealth squandered in the wantonness of sport without an object, and the more abundant the life and vivacity in the creations of the arbitrary will.

The later comedy, even where it was really comic, was doubtless likewise more comic, the more free it appeared from any fixed aim. Misunderstandings of intention, fruitless struggles of absurd passion, contradictions of temper, and laughable situations there were; but still the form of the representation itself was serious; it proceeded as much according to settled laws, and used as much the same means of art, though to a different purpose, as the regular tragedy itself. But in the old comedy the very form itself is whimsical; the whole work is one great jest, comprehending a world of jests within it, among which each maintains its own place without seeming to concern itself as to the relation in which it may stand to its fellows. In short, in Sophocles, the constitution of tragedy is monarchical, but such as it existed in elder Greece, limited by laws, and therefore the more venerable,—all the parts adapting and submitting themselves to the majesty of the heroic sceptre:—in Aristophanes, comedy, on the contrary, is poetry in its most democratic form, and it is a fundamental principle with it, rather to risk all the confusion of anarchy, than to destroy the independence and privileges of its individual constituents,—place, verse, characters, even single thoughts, conceits, and allusions, each turning on the pivot of its own free will.

The tragic poet idealizes his characters by giving to the spiritual part of our nature a more decided prepon-
derance over the animal cravings and impulses, than is met with in real life: the comic poet idealizes his characters by making the animal the governing power, and the intellectual the mere instrument. But as tragedy is not a collection of virtues and perfections, but takes care only that the vices and imperfections shall spring from the passions, errors, and prejudices which arise out of the soul;—so neither is comedy a mere crowd of vices and follies, but whatever qualities it represents, even though they are in a certain sense amiable, it still displays them as having their origin in some dependence on our lower nature, accompanied with a defect in true freedom of spirit and self-subsistence, and subject to that unconnection by contradictions of the inward being, to which all folly is owing.

The ideal of earnest poetry consists in the union and harmonious melting down, and fusion of the sensual into the spiritual,—of man as an animal into man as a power of reason and self-government. And this we have represented to us most clearly in the plastic art, or statuary; where the perfection of outward form is a symbol of the perfection of an inward idea; where the body is wholly penetrated by the soul, and spiritualized even to a state of glory, and like a transparent substance, the matter, in its own nature darkness, becomes altogether a vehicle and fixture of light, a means of developing its beauties, and unfolding its wealth of various colours without disturbing its unity, or causing a division of the parts. The sportive ideal, on the contrary, consists in the perfect harmony and concord of the higher nature with the animal, as with its ruling principle and its acknowledged regent. The understanding and practical reason are represented as the willing slaves of the senses and appetites, and of the passions arising out of them. Hence we may admit the appropriateness to the old comedy, as a work of defined art, of allusions and descriptions, which morality can never justify, and, only with reference to the author himself, and only as being the effect or rather the cause of the circumstances in which he wrote, can consent even to palliate.

The old comedy rose to its perfection in Aristophanes, and in him also it died with the freedom of Greece. Then arose a species of drama, more fitly called, dramatic
Greek Drama

entertainment than comedy, but of which, nevertheless, our modern comedy (Shakspeare's altogether excepted) is the genuine descendant. Euripides had already brought tragedy lower down and by many steps nearer to the real world than his predecessors had ever done, and the passionate admiration which Menander and Philemon expressed for him, and their open avowals that he was their great master, entitle us to consider their dramas as of a middle species, between tragedy and comedy,—not the tragi-comedy, or thing of heterogeneous parts, but a complete whole, founded on principles of its own. Throughout we find the drama of Menander distinguishing itself from tragedy, but not, as the genuine old comedy, contrasting with, and opposing it. Tragedy, indeed, carried the thoughts into the mythologic world, in order to raise the emotions, the fears, and the hopes, which convince the inmost heart that their final cause is not to be discovered in the limits of mere mortal life, and force us into a presentiment, however dim, of a state in which those struggles of inward free will with outward necessity, which form the true subject of the tragedian, shall be reconciled and solved;—the entertainment or new comedy, on the other hand, remained within the circle of experience. Instead of the tragic destiny, it introduced the power of chance; even in the few fragments of Menander and Philemon now remaining to us, we find many exclamations and reflections concerning chance and fortune, as in the tragic poets concerning destiny. In tragedy, the moral law, either as obeyed or violated, above all consequences—its own maintenance or violation constituting the most important of all consequences—forms the ground; the new comedy, and our modern comedy in general, (Shakspeare excepted as before) lies in prudence or imprudence, enlightened or misled self-love. The whole moral system of the entertainment exactly like that of fable, consists in rules of prudence, with an exquisite conciseness, and at the same time an exhaustive fulness of sense. An old critic said that tragedy was the flight or elevation of life, comedy (that of Menander) its arrangement or ordonnance.

Add to these features a portrait-like truth of character,—not so far indeed as that a bona fide individual should be described or imagined, but yet so that the features
Greek Drama

which give interest and permanence to the class should be individualized. The old tragedy moved in an ideal world,—the old comedy in a fantastic world. As the entertainment, or new comedy, restrained the creative activity both of the fancy and the imagination, it indemnified the understanding in appealing to the judgment for the probability of the scenes represented. The ancients themselves acknowledged the new comedy as an exact copy of real life. The grammarian, Aristophanes, somewhat affectedly exclaimed:—"O Life and Menander! which of you two imitated the other?" In short the form of this species of drama was poetry, the stuff or matter was prose. It was prose rendered delightful by the blandishments and measured motions of the muse. Yet even this was not universal. The mimes of Sophron, so passionately admired by Plato, were written in prose, and were scenes out of real life conducted in dialogue. The exquisite Feast of Adonis (Συρακοῦσαι Ἑ Ἀδωνίζουσαι) in Theocritus, we are told, with some others of his eclogues, were close imitations of certain mimes of Sophron—free translations of the prose into hexameters.

It will not be improper, in this place, to make a few remarks on the remarkable character and functions of the chorus in the Greek tragic drama.

The chorus entered from below, close by the orchestra, and there, pacing to and fro during the choral odes, performed their solemn measured dance. In the centre of the orchestra, directly over against the middle of the scene, there stood an elevation with steps in the shape of a large altar, as high as the boards of the logeion or movable stage. This elevation was named the thymele, (θυμήλη) and served to recall the origin and original purpose of the chorus, as an altar-song in honour of the presiding deity. Here, and on these steps the persons of the chorus sate collectively, when they were not singing; attending to the dialogue as spectators, and acting as (what in truth they were) the ideal representatives of the real audience, and of the poet himself in his own character, assuming the supposed impressions made by the drama, in order to direct and rule them. But when the chorus itself formed part of the dialogue, then the leader of the band, the foreman or coryphaeus, ascended, as some think, the level summit of the thymele in order
to command the stage, or, perhaps, the whole chorus advanced to the front of the orchestra, and thus put themselves in ideal connection, as it were, with the dramatis personae there acting. This thymele was in the centre of the whole edifice, all the measurements were calculated, and the semicircle of the amphitheatre was drawn, from this point. It had a double use, a twofold purpose; it constantly reminded the spectators of the origin of tragedy as a religious service, and declared itself as the ideal representative of the audience by having its place exactly in the point, to which all the radii from the different seats or benches converged.

In this double character, as constituent parts, and yet at the same time as spectators, of the drama, the chorus could not but tend to enforce the unity of place;—not on the score of any supposed improbability, which the understanding or common sense might detect in a change of place;—but because the senses themselves put it out of the power of any imagination to conceive a place coming to, and going away from the persons, instead of the persons changing their place. Yet there are instances, in which, during the silence of the chorus, the poets have hazarded this by a change in that part of the scenery which represented the more distant objects to the eye of the spectator—a demonstrative proof, that this alternately extolled and ridiculed unity (as ignorantly ridiculed as extolled) was grounded on no essential principle of reason, but arose out of circumstances which the poet could not remove, and therefore took up into the form of the drama, and co-organised it with all the other parts into a living whole.

The Greek tragedy may rather be compared to our serious opera than to the tragedies of Shakspeare; nevertheless, the difference is far greater than the likeness. In the opera all is subordinated to the music, the dresses and the scenery;—the poetry is a mere vehicle for articulation, and as little pleasure is lost by ignorance of the Italian language, so is little gained by the knowledge of it. But in the Greek drama all was but as instruments and accessories to the poetry; and hence we should form a better notion of the choral music from the solemn hymns and psalms of austere church music than from any species of theatrical singing. A single flute or pipe
Greek Drama

was the ordinary accompaniment; and it is not to be supposed, that any display of musical power was allowed to obscure the distinct hearing of the words. On the contrary, the evident purpose was to render the words more audible, and to secure by the elevations and pauses greater facility of understanding the poetry. For the choral songs are, and ever must have been, the most difficult part of the tragedy; there occur in them the most involved verbal compounds, the newest expressions, the boldest images, the most recondite allusions. Is it credible that the poets would, one and all, have been thus prodigal of the stores of art and genius, if they had known that in the representation the whole must have been lost to the audience,—at a time too, when the means of after publication were so difficult and expensive, and the copies of their works so slowly and narrowly circulated?

The masks also must be considered—their vast variety and admirable workmanship. Of this we retain proof by the marble masks which represented them; but to this in the real mask we must add the thinness of the substance and the exquisite fitting on to the head of the actor; so that not only were the very eyes painted with a single opening left for the pupil of the actor's eye, but in some instances, even the iris itself was painted, when the colour was a known characteristic of the divine or heroic personage represented.

Finally, I will note down those fundamental characteristics which contradistinguish the ancient literature from the modern generally, but which more especially appear in prominence in the tragic drama. The ancient was allied to statuary, the modern refers to painting. In the first there is a predominance of rhythm and melody, in the second of harmony and counterpoint. The Greeks idolized the finite, and therefore were the masters of all grace, elegance, proportion, fancy, dignity, majesty—of whatever, in short, is capable of being definitely conveyed by defined forms or thoughts: the moderns revere the infinite, and affect the indefinite as a vehicle of the infinite;—hence their passions, their obscure hopes and fears, their wandering through the unknown, their grander moral feelings, their more august conception of man as man, their future rather than their past—in a word, their sublimity.
PROGRESS OF THE DRAMA.

Let two persons join in the same scheme to ridicule a third, and either take advantage of, or invent, some story for that purpose, and mimicry will have already produced a sort of rude comedy. It becomes an inviting treat to the populace, and gains an additional zest and burlesque by following the already established plan of tragedy; and the first man of genius who seizes the idea, and reduces it into form,—into a work of art,—by metre and music, is the Aristophanes of the country.

How just this account is will appear from the fact that in the first or old comedy of the Athenians, most of the dramatis personæ were living characters introduced under their own names; and no doubt, their ordinary dress, manner, person and voice were closely mimicked. In less favourable states of society, as that of England in the middle ages, the beginnings of comedy would be constantly taking place from the mimics and satirical minstrels; but from want of fixed abode, popular government, and the successive attendance of the same auditors, it would still remain in embryo. I shall, perhaps, have occasion to observe that this remark is not without importance in explaining the essential differences of the modern and ancient theatres.

Phenomena, similar to those which accompanied the origin of tragedy and comedy among the Greeks, would take place among the Romans much more slowly, and the drama would, in any case, have much longer remained in its first irregular form from the character of the people, their continual engagements in wars of conquest, the nature of their government, and their rapidly increasing empire. But, however this might have been, the conquest of Greece precluded both the process and the necessity of it; and the Roman stage at once presented imitations or translations of the Greek drama. This continued till the perfect establishment of Christianity. Some attempts, indeed, were made to adapt the persons of Scriptural or ecclesiastical history to the drama; and sacred plays, it is probable, were not unknown in Constantinople under the emperors of the East. The first of the kind is, I believe, the only one preserved,—
namely, the Χριστός Πάσχας, or, "Christ in his sufferings," by Gregory Nazianzen,—possibly written in consequence of the prohibition of profane literature to the Christians by the apostate Julian. In the West, however, the enslaved and debauched Roman world became too barbarous for any theatrical exhibitions more refined than those of pageants and chariot-races; while the spirit of Christianity, which in its most corrupt form still breathed general humanity, whenever controversies of faith were not concerned, had done away the cruel combats of the gladiators, and the loss of the distant provinces prevented the possibility of exhibiting the engagements of wild beasts.

I pass, therefore, at once to the feudal ages which soon succeeded, confining my observation to this country; though, indeed, the same remark with very few alterations will apply to all the other states, into which the great empire was broken. Ages of darkness succeeded;—not, indeed, the darkness of Russia or of the barbarous lands unconquered by Rome; for from the time of Honorius to the destruction of Constantinople and the consequent introduction of ancient literature into Europe, there was a continued succession of individual intellects;—the golden chain was never wholly broken, though the connecting links were often of baser metal. A dark cloud, like another sky, covered the entire cope of heaven, —but in this place it thinned away, and white stains of light showed a half eclipsed star behind it,—in that place it was rent asunder, and a star passed across the opening in all its brightness, and then vanished. Such stars exhibited themselves only; surrounding objects did not partake of their light. There were deep wells of knowledge, but no fertilizing rills and rivulets. For the drama, society was altogether a state of chaos, out of which it was, for a while at least, to proceed anew, as if there had been none before it. And yet it is not undelightful to contemplate the eduction of good from evil. The ignorance of the great mass of our countrymen was the efficient cause of the reproduction of the drama; and the preceding darkness and the returning light were alike necessary in order to the creation of a Shakspeare.

A.D. 563. But I believe the prevailing opinion amongst scholars now is, that the Χριστός Πάσχας is not genuine. Ed.
Progress of the Drama

The drama re-commenced in England, as it first began in Greece, in religion. The people were not able to read,—the priesthood were unwilling that they should read; and yet their own interest compelled them not to leave the people wholly ignorant of the great events of sacred history. They did that, therefore, by scenic representations, which in after ages it has been attempted to do in Roman Catholic countries by pictures. They presented Mysteries, and often at great expense; and reliques of this system still remain in the south of Europe, and indeed throughout Italy, where at Christmas the convents and the great nobles rival each other in the scenic representation of the birth of Christ and its circumstances. I heard two instances mentioned to me at different times, one in Sicily and the other in Rome, of noble devotees, the ruin of whose fortunes was said to have commenced in the extravagant expense which had been incurred in presenting the præsepe or manger. But these Mysteries, in order to answer their design, must not only be instructive, but entertaining; and as, when they became so, the people began to take pleasure in acting them themselves—in interloping,—(against which the priests seem to have fought hard and yet in vain) the most ludicrous images were mixed with the most awful personations; and whatever the subject might be, however sublime, however pathetic, yet the Vice and the Devil, who are the genuine antecessors of Harlequin and the Clown, were necessary component parts. I have myself a piece of this kind, which I transcribed a few years ago at Helmstadt, in Germany, on the education of Eve’s children, in which after the fall and repentance of Adam, the offended Maker, as in proof of his reconciliation, condescends to visit them, and to catechise the children,—who with a noble contempt of chronology are all brought together from Abel to Noah. The good children say the ten Commandments, the Belief and the Lord’s Prayer; but Cain and his rout, after he had received a box on the ear for not taking off his hat, and afterwards offering his left hand, is prompted by the devil so to blunder in the Lord’s Prayer as to reverse the petitions and say it backward!  

1 See vol. i. p. 76, where this is told more at length and attributed to Hans Sachs. Ed. Vol. ii. pp. 16, 17, and edit. S. C.
Progress of the Drama

Unaffectedly I declare I feel pain at repetitions like these, however innocent. As historical documents they are valuable; but I am sensible that what I can read with my eye with perfect innocence, I cannot without inward fear and misgivings pronounce with my tongue.

Let me, however, be acquitted of presumption if I say that I cannot agree with Mr. Malone, that our ancestors did not perceive the ludicrous in these things, or that they paid no separate attention to the serious and comic parts. Indeed his own statement contradicts it. For what purpose should the Vice leap upon the Devil's back and belabour him, but to produce this separate attention? The people laughed heartily, no doubt. Nor can I conceive any meaning attached to the words "separate attention," that is not fully answered by one part of an exhibition exciting seriousness or pity, and the other raising mirth and loud laughter. That they felt no impiety in the affair is most true. For it is the very essence of that system of Christian polytheism, which in all its essentials is now fully as gross in Spain, in Sicily and the south of Italy, as it ever was in England in the days of Henry VI.—(nay, more so, for a Wicliffe had not then appeared only, but scattered the good seed widely,) it is an essential part, I say, of that system to draw the mind wholly from its own inward whispers and quiet discriminations, and to habituate the conscience to pronounce sentence in every case according to the established verdicts of the church and the casuists. I have looked through volume after volume of the most approved casuists,—and still I find disquisitions whether this or that act is right, and under what circumstances, to a minuteness that makes reasoning ridiculous, and of a callous and unnatural immodesty, to which none but a monk could harden himself, who has been stripped of all the tender charities of life, yet is goaded on to make war against them by the unsubdued hauntings of our meaner nature, even as dogs are said to get the hydrophobia from excessive thirst. I fully believe that our ancestors laughed as heartily, as their posterity do at Grimaldi;—and not having been told that they would be punished for laughing, they thought it very innocent;—and if their priest had left out murder in the catalogue of their prohibitions (as indeed they did under
certain circumstances of heresy), the greater part of them,—the moral instincts common to all men having been smothered and kept from development,—would have thought as little of murder.

However this may be, the necessity of at once instructing and gratifying the people produced the great distinction between the Greek and the English theatres;—for to this we must attribute the origin of tragi-comedy, or a representation of human events more lively, nearer the truth, and permitting a larger field of moral instruction, a more ample exhibition of the recesses of the human heart, under all the trials and circumstances that most concern us, than was known or guessed at by Æschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides;—and at the same time we learn to account for, and—relatively to the author—perceive the necessity of, the Fool or Clown or both, as the substitutes of the Vice and the Devil, which our ancestors had been so accustomed to see in every exhibition of the stage, that they could not feel any performance perfect without them. Even to this day in Italy, every opera—(even Metastasio obeyed the claim throughout)—must have six characters, generally two pairs of cross lovers, a tyrant and a confidant, or a father and two confidants, themselves lovers;—and when a new opera appears, it is the universal fashion to ask—which is the tyrant, which the lover? &c.

It is the especial honour of Christianity, that in its worst and most corrupted form it cannot wholly separate itself from morality;—whereas the other religions in their best form (I do not include Mohammedanism, which is only an anomalous corruption of Christianity, like Swedenborgianism,) have no connection with it. The very impersonation of moral evil under the name of Vice, facilitated all other impersonations; and hence we see that the Mysteries were succeeded by Moralities, or dialogues and plots of allegorical personages. Again, some character in real history had become so famous, so proverbial, as Nero for instance, that they were introduced instead of the moral quality, for which they were so noted;—and in this manner the stage was moving on to the absolute production of heroic and comic real characters, when the restoration of literature, followed by the ever-blessed Reformation, let in upon the kingdom not only new knowledge, but new motive. A useful rivalry commenced between the metropolis on the
one hand, the residence, independently of the court and
nobles, of the most active and stirring spirits who had not
been regularly educated, or who, from mischance or other-
wise, had forsaken the beaten track of preferment,—and
the universities on the other. The latter prided them-
selves on their closer approximation to the ancient rules
and ancient regularity—taking the theatre of Greece, or
rather its dim reflection, the rhetorical tragedies of the
poet Seneca, as a perfect ideal, without any critical-
collation of the times, origin, or circumstances;—whilst,
in the mean time, the popular writers, who could not
and would not abandon what they had found to delight
their countrymen sincerely, and not merely from in-
quiries first put to the recollection of rules, and answered
in the affirmative, as if it had been an arithmetical sum,
did yet borrow from the scholars whatever they advan-
tageously could, consistently with their own peculiar
means of pleasing.

And here let me pause for a moment's contemplation
of this interesting subject.

We call, for we see and feel, the swan and the dove
both transcendentally beautiful. As absurd as it would
be to institute a comparison between their separate
claims to beauty from any abstract rule common to
both, without reference to the life and being of the animals
themselves,—or as if, having first seen the dove, we
abstracted its outlines, gave them a false generalization,
called them the principles or ideal of bird-beauty, and
then proceeded to criticise the swan or the eagle;—
not less absurd is it to pass judgment on the works of a
poet on the mere ground that they have been called by the
same class-name with the works of other poets in other
times and circumstances, or on any ground, indeed, save
that of their inappropriateness to their own end and being,
their want of significance, as symbols or physiognomy.

Oh! few have there been among critics, who have
followed with the eye of the imagination the imperishable
yet ever wandering spirit of poetry through its various
metempsychoses, and consequent metamorphoses;—or
who have rejoiced in the light of clear perception at
beholding with each new birth, with each rare avatar,
the human race frame to itself a new body, by assimili-
lating materials of nourishment out of its new circum-
Progress of the Drama

stances, and work for itself new organs of power appropriate to the new sphere of its motion and activity!

I have before spoken of the Romance, or the language formed out of the decayed Roman and the Northern tongues; and comparing it with the Latin, we find it less perfect in simplicity and relation—the privileges of a language formed by the mere attraction of homogeneous parts;—but yet more rich, more expressive and various, as one formed by more obscure affinities out of a chaos of apparently heterogeneous atoms. As more than a metaphor,—as an analogy of this, I have named the true genuine modern poetry the romantic; and the works of Shakspeare are romantic poetry revealing itself in the drama. If the tragedies of Sophocles are in the strict sense of the word tragedies, and the comedies of Aristophanes comedies, we must emancipate ourselves from a false association arising from misapplied names, and find a new word for the plays of Shakspeare. For they are, in the ancient sense, neither tragedies nor comedies, nor both in one,—but a different genus, diverse in kind, and not merely different in degree. They may be called romantic dramas, or dramatic romances.

A deviation from the simple forms and unities of the ancient stage is an essential principle, and, of course, an appropriate excellence, of the romantic drama. For these unities were to a great extent the natural form of that which in its elements was homogeneous, and the representation of which was addressed pre-eminently to the outward senses;—and though the fable, the language and the characters appealed to the reason rather than to the mere understanding, inasmuch as they supposed an ideal state rather than referred to an existing reality,—yet it was a reason which was obliged to accommodate itself to the senses, and so far became a sort of more elevated understanding. On the other hand, the romantic poetry—the Shakspearian drama—appealed to the imagination rather than to the senses, and to the reason as contemplating our inward nature, and the workings of the passions in their most retired recesses. But the reason, as reason, is independent of time and space; it has nothing to do with them: and hence the certainties of reason have been called eternal truths. As for example—the endless properties of the circle:—what connection
have they with this or that age, with this or that country?
The reason is aloof from time and space; the imagination
is an arbitrary controller over both;—and if only the
poet have such power of exciting our internal emotions
as to make us present to the scene in imagination chiefly,
he acquires the right and privilege of using time and
space as they exist in imagination, and obedient only
to the laws by which the imagination itself acts. These
laws it will be my object and aim to point out as the
examples occur, which illustrate them. But here let
me remark what can never be too often reflected on by
all who would intelligently study the works either of
the Athenian dramatists, or of Shakspere, that the
very essence of the former consists in the sternest separa-
tion of the diverse in kind and the disparate in the degree,
whilst the latter delights in interlacing, by a rainbow-
like transfusion of hues, the one with the other.

And here it will be necessary to say a few words on
the stage and on stage-illusion.

A theatre, in the widest sense of the word, is the general
term for all places of amusement through the ear or eye,
in which men assemble in order to be amused by some
entertainment presented to all at the same time and in
common. Thus, an old Puritan divine says:—"Those
who attend public worship and sermons only to amuse
themselves, make a theatre of the church, and turn
God's house into the devil's. Theatra ædes diabololat-
trica." The most important and dignified species of
this genus is, doubtless, the stage, (res theatralis histri-
onica), which, in addition to the generic definition above
given, may be characterized in its idea, or according to
what it does, or ought to, aim at, as a combination of
several or of all the fine arts in an harmonious whole,
having a distinct end of its own, to which the peculiar
end of each of the component arts, taken separately,
is made subordinate and subservient,—that, namely,
of imitating reality—whether external things, actions,
or passions—under a semblance of reality. Thus, Claude
imitates a landscape at sunset, but only as a picture;
while a forest-scene is not presented to the spectators
as a picture, but as a forest; and though, in the full
sense of the word, we are no more deceived by the one
than by the other, yet are our feelings very differently
Progress of the Drama

affected; and the pleasure derived from the one is not composed of the same elements as that afforded by the other, even on the supposition that the quantum of both were equal. In the former, a picture, it is a condition of all genuine delight that we should not be deceived; in the latter, stage-scenery, (inasmuch as its principal end is not in or for itself, as is the case in a picture, but to be an assistance and means to an end out of itself) its very purpose is to produce as much illusion as its nature permits. These, and all other stage presentations, are to produce a sort of temporary half-faith, which the spectator encourages in himself and supports by a voluntary contribution on his own part, because he knows that it is at all times in his power to see the thing as it really is. I have often observed that little children are actually deceived by stage-scenery, never by pictures; though even these produce an effect on their impressionable minds, which they do not on the minds of adults. The child, if strongly impressed, does not indeed positively think the picture to be the reality; but yet he does not think the contrary. As Sir George Beaumont was shewing me a very fine engraving from Rubens, representing a storm at sea without any vessel or boat introduced, my little boy, then about five years old, came dancing and singing into the room, and all at once (if I may so say) tumbled in upon the print. He instantly started, stood silent and motionless, with the strongest expression, first of wonder and then of grief in his eyes and countenance, and at length said, "And where is the ship? But that is sunk, and the men are all drowned!" still keeping his eyes fixed on the print. Now what pictures are to little children, stage illusion is to men, provided they retain any part of the child's sensibility; except, that in the latter instance, the suspension of the act of comparison, which permits this sort of negative belief, is somewhat more assisted by the will, than in that of a child respecting a picture.

The true stage-illusion in this and in all other things consists—not in the mind's judging it to be a forest, but, in its remission of the judgment that it is not a forest. And this subject of stage-illusion is so important, and so many practical errors and false criticisms may arise, and indeed have arisen, either from reasoning on it as actual
Progress of the Drama

delusion, (the strange notion, on which the French critics built up their theory, and on which the French poets justify the construction of their tragedies), or from denying it altogether, (which seems the end of Dr. Johnson's reasoning, and which, as extremes meet, would lead to the very same consequences, by excluding whatever would not be judged probable by us in our coolest state of feeling, with all our faculties in even balance), that these few remarks will, I hope, be pardoned, if they should serve either to explain or to illustrate the point. For not only are we never absolutely deluded—or any thing like it, but the attempt to cause the highest delusion possible to beings in their senses sitting in a theatre, is a gross fault, incident only to low minds, which, feeling that they cannot affect the heart or head permanently, endeavour to call forth the momentary affections. There ought never to be more pain than is compatible with co-existing pleasure, and to be amply repaid by thought.

Shakspeare found the infant stage demanding an intermixture of ludicrous character as imperiously as that of Greece did the chorus, and high language accordant. And there are many advantages in this;—a greater assimilation to nature, a greater scope of power, more truths, and more feelings;—the effects of contrast, as in Lear and the Fool; and especially this, that the true language of passion becomes sufficiently elevated by your having previously heard, in the same piece, the lighter conversation of men under no strong emotion. The very nakedness of the stage, too, was advantageous,—for the drama thence became something between recitation and a re-presentation; and the absence or paucity of scenes allowed a freedom from the laws of unity of place and unity of time, the observance of which must either confine the drama to as few subjects as may be counted on the fingers, or involve gross improbabilities, far more striking than the violation would have caused. Thence, also, was precluded the danger of a false ideal,—of aiming at more than what is possible on the whole. What play of the ancients, with reference to their ideal, does not hold out more glaring absurdities than any in Shakspeare? On the Greek plan a man could more easily be a poet than a dramatist; upon our plan more easily a dramatist than a poet.
THE DRAMA GENERALLY, AND
PUBLIC TASTE.

Unaccustomed to address such an audience, and having lost by a long interval of confinement the advantages of my former short schooling, I had miscalculated in my last Lecture the proportion of my matter to my time, and by bad economy and unskilful management, the several heads of my discourse failed in making the entire performance correspond with the promise publicly circulated in the weekly annunciation of the subjects, to be treated. It would indeed have been wiser in me, and perhaps better on the whole, if I had caused my Lectures to be announced only as continuations of the main subject. But if I be, as perforce I must be, gratified by the recollection of whatever has appeared to give you pleasure, I am conscious of something better, though less flattering, a sense of unfeigned gratitude for your forbearance with my defects. Like affectionate guardians, you see without disgust the awkwardness, and witness with sympathy the growing pains, of a youthful endeavour, and look forward with a hope, which is its own reward, to the contingent results of practice—to its intellectual maturity.

In my last address I defined poetry to be the art, or whatever better term our language may afford, of representing external nature and human thoughts, both relatively to human affections, so as to cause the production of as great immediate pleasure in each part, as is compatible with the largest possible sum of pleasure on the whole. Now this definition applies equally to painting and music as to poetry; and in truth the term poetry is alike applicable to all three. The vehicle alone constitutes the difference; and the term 'poetry' is rightly applied by eminence to measured words, only because the sphere of their action is far wider, the power of giving permanence to them much more certain, and incomparably greater the facility, by which men, not defective by nature or disease, may be enabled to derive habitual pleasure and instruction from them. On my mentioning these considerations to a painter of great
and Public Taste

genius, who had been, from a most honourable enthusiasm, extolling his own art, he was so struck with their truth, that he exclaimed, "I want no other arguments;—poetry, that is, verbal poetry, must be the greatest; all that proves final causes in the world, proves this; it would be shocking to think otherwise!"—And in truth, deeply, O! far more than words can express, as I venerate the Last Judgment and the Prophets of Michel Angelo Buonaroti,—yet the very pain which I repeatedly felt as I lost myself in gazing upon them, the painful consideration that their having been painted in fresco was the sole cause that they had not been abandoned to all the accidents of a dangerous transportation to a distant capital, and that the same caprice, which made the Neapolitan soldiery destroy all the exquisite masterpieces on the walls of the church of the Trinitado Monte, after the retreat of their antagonist barbarians, might as easily have made vanish the rooms and open gallery of Raffael, and the yet more unapproachable wonders of the sublime Florentine in the Sixtine Chapel, forced upon my mind the reflection; How grateful the human race ought to be that the works of Euclid, Newton, Plato, Milton, Shakspeare, are not subjected to similar contingencies,—that they and their fellows, and the great, though inferior, peerage of undying intellect, are secured;—secured even from a second irruption of Goths and Vandals, in addition to many other safeguards, by the vast empire of English language, laws, and religion founded in America, through the overflow of the power and the virtue of my country;—and that now the great and certain works of genuine fame can only cease to act for mankind, when men themselves cease to be men, or when the planet on which they exist, shall have altered its relations, or have ceased to be. Lord Bacon, in the language of the gods, if I may use an Homeric phrase, has expressed a similar thought:—

Lastly, leaving the vulgar arguments, that by learning man excelleth man in that wherein man excelleth beasts; that by learning man ascendeth to the heavens and their motions, where in body he cannot come, and the like; let us conclude with the dignity and excellency of knowledge and learning in that whereunto man's nature doth most aspire, which is, immortality or continuance: for to this tendeth generation, and raising of houses and families; to this tend buildings, foundations, and monuments;
The Drama Generally

to this tendeth the desire of memory, fame, and celebration, and in effect the strength of all other human desires. We see then how far the monuments of wit and learning are more durable than the monuments of power, or of the hands. For have not the verses of Homer continued twenty-five hundred years, or more, without the loss of a syllable or letter; during which time, infinite palaces, temples, castles, cities, have been decayed and demolished? It is not possible to have the true pictures or statues of Cyrus, Alexander, Caesar; no, nor of the kings or great personages of much later years; for the originals cannot last, and the copies cannot but lose of the life and truth. But the images of men's wits and knowledges remain in books, exempted from the wrong of time, and capable of perpetual renovation. Neither are they fitly to be called images, because they generate still, and cast their seeds in the minds of others, provoking and causing infinite actions and opinions in succeeding ages: so that, if the invention of the ship was thought so noble, which carrieth riches and commodities from place to place, and consociateth the most remote regions in participation of their fruits; how much more are letters to be magnified, which, as ships, pass through the vast seas of time, and make ages so distant to participate of the wisdom, illuminations, and inventions, the one of the other?\footnote{Advancement of Learning, book 1, \textit{sub fine}.}

But let us now consider what the drama should be. And first, it is not a copy, but an imitation, of nature. This is the universal principle of the fine arts. In all well laid out grounds what delight do we feel from that balance and antithesis of feelings and thoughts! How natural! we say;—but the very wonder that caused the exclamation, implies that we perceived art at the same moment. We catch the hint from nature itself. Whenever in mountains or cataracts we discover a likeness to any thing artificial which yet we know is not artificial—what pleasure! And so it is in appearances known to be artificial, which appear to be natural. This applies in due degrees, regulated by steady good sense, from a clump of trees to the Paradise Lost or Othello. It would be easy to apply it to painting and even, though with greater abstraction of thought, and by more subtle yet equally just analogies—to music. But this belongs to others; suffice it that one great principle is common to all the fine arts, a principle which probably is the condition of all consciousness, without which we should feel and imagine only by discontinuous moments, and be plants or brute animals instead of men;—I mean that ever-varying balance, or balancing, of images, notions,
or feelings, conceived as in opposition to each other;—in short, the perception of identity and contrariety; the least degree of which constitutes likeness, the greatest absolute difference; but the infinite gradations between these two form all the play and all the interest of our intellectual and moral being, till it leads us to a feeling and an object more awful than it seems to me compatible with even the present subject to utter aloud, though I am most desirous to suggest it. For there alone are all things at once different and the same; there alone, as the principle of all things, does distinction exist unaided by division; there are will and reason, succession of time and unmoving eternity, infinite change and ineffable rest!—

Return Alpheus! the dread voice is past
Which shrunk thy streams!

——Thou honour’d flood,
Smooth-flowing Avon, crown’d with vocal reeds,
That strain I heard, was of a higher mood!—
But now my voice proceeds.

We may divide a dramatic poet’s characteristics before we enter into the component merits of any one work, and with reference only to those things which are to be the materials of all, into language, passion, and character; always bearing in mind that these must act and react on each other,—the language inspired by the passion, and the language and the passion modified and differentiated by the character. To the production of the highest excellencies in these three, there are requisite in the mind of the author;—good sense; talent; sensibility; imagination;—and to the perfection of a work we should add two faculties of lesser importance, yet necessary for the ornaments and foliage of the column and the roof—fancy and a quick sense of beauty.

As to language;—it cannot be supposed that the poet should make his characters say all that they would, or that, his whole drama considered, each scene, or paragraph should be such as, on cool examination, we can conceive it likely that men in such situations would say, in that order, or with that perfection. And yet, according to my feelings, it is a very inferior kind of poetry, in which, as in the French tragedies, men are made to talk in a
The Drama Generally

style which few indeed even of the wittiest can be supposed to converse in, and which both is, and on a moment's reflection appears to be, the natural produce of the hot-bed of vanity, namely, the closet of an author, who is actuated originally by a desire to excite surprise and wonderment at his own superiority to other men,—instead of having felt so deeply on certain subjects, or in consequence of certain imaginations, as to make it almost a necessity of his nature to seek for sympathy,—no doubt, with that honourable desire of permanent action which distinguishes genius.—Where then is the difference?—In this that each part should be proportionate, though the whole may be perhaps impossible. At all events, it should be compatible with sound sense and logic in the mind of the poet himself.

It is to be lamented that we judge of books by books, instead of referring what we read to our own experience. One great use of books is to make their contents a motive for observation. The German tragedies have in some respects been justly ridiculed. In them the dramatist often becomes a novelist in his directions to the actors, and thus degrades tragedy into pantomime. Yet still the consciousness of the poet's mind must be diffused over that of the reader or spectator: but he himself, according to his genius, elevates us, and by being always in keeping, prevents us from perceiving any strangeness, though we feel great exultation. Many different kinds of style may be admirable, both in different men, and in different parts of the same poem.

See the different language which strong feelings may justify in Shylock, and learn from Shakspeare's conduct of that character the terrible force of every plain and calm diction, when known to proceed from a resolved and impassioned man.

It is especially with reference to the drama, and its characteristics in any given nation, or at any particular period, that the dependence of genius on the public taste becomes a matter of the deepest importance. I do not mean that taste which springs merely from caprice, or fashionable imitation, and which, in fact, genius can, and by degrees will, create for itself; but that which arises out of wide-grasping and heart-enrooted causes, which is epidemic, and in the very air that all breathe.
and Public Taste

This it is which kills, or withers, or corrupts. Socrates, indeed, might walk arm and arm with Hygeia, whilst pestilence, with a thousand furies running to and fro, and clashing against each other in a complexity and agglomeration of horrors, was shooting her darts of fire and venom all around him. Even such was Milton; yea, and such, in spite of all that has been babbled by his critics in pretended excuse for his damning, because for them too profound, excellencies,—such was Shakespeare. But alas! the exceptions prove the rule. For who will dare to force his way out of the crowd,—not of the mere vulgar,—but of the vain and banded aristocracy of intellect, and presume to join the almost supernatural beings that stand by themselves aloof?

Of this diseased epidemic influence there are two forms especially preclusive of tragic worth. The first is the necessary growth of a sense and love of the ludicrous, and a morbid sensibility of the assimilative power,—an inflammation produced by cold and weakness,—which in the boldest bursts of passion will lie in wait for a jeer at any phrase, that may have an accidental coincidence in the mere words with something base or trivial. For instance,—to express woods, not on a plain, but clothing a hill, which overlooks a valley, or dell, or river, or the sea,—the trees rising one above another, as the spectators in an ancient theatre,—I know no other word in our language, (bookish and pedantic terms out of the question,) but hanging woods, the sylva superimpendentes of Catullus; yet let some wit call out in a slang tone,—"the gallows!" and a peal of laughter would damn the play. Hence it is that so many dull pieces have had a decent run, only because nothing unusual above, or absurd below, mediocrity furnished an occasion,—a spark for the explosive materials collected behind the orchestra. But it would take a volume of no ordinary size, however laconically the sense were expressed, if it were meant to instance the effects, and unfold all the causes, of this disposition upon the moral, intellectual, and even physical character of a people, with its influences on domestic life and individual deportment. A good document upon this subject would be the history of Paris.

1 Confestim Peneos adest, viridantia Tempe,
    Tempæ, quæ cingunt sylva superimpendentes.

society and of French, that is, Parisian, literature from the commencement of the latter half of the reign of Louis XIV. to that of Buonaparte, compared with the preceding philosophy and poetry even of Frenchmen themselves.

The second form, or more properly, perhaps, another distinct cause, of this diseased disposition is matter of exultation to the philanthropist and philosopher, and of regret to the poet, the painter, and the statuary alone, and to them only as poets, painters, and statuaries;—namely, the security, the comparative equability, and ever increasing sameness of human life. Men are now so seldom thrown into wild circumstances, and violences of excitement, that the language of such states, the laws of association of feeling with thought, the starts and strange far-flights of the assimilative power on the slightest and least obvious likeness presented by thoughts, words, or objects,—these are all judged of by authority, not by actual experience,—by what men have been accustomed to regard as symbols of these states, and not the natural symbols, or self-manifestations of them.

Even so it is in the language of man, and in that of nature. The sound sun, or the figures s, u, n, are purely arbitrary modes of recalling the object, and for visual mere objects they are not only sufficient, but have infinite advantages from their very nothingness per se. But the language of nature is a subordinate Logos, that was in the beginning, and was with the thing it represented, and was the thing it represented.

Now the language of Shakspeare, in his Lear for instance, is a something intermediate between these two; or rather it is the former blended with the latter,—the arbitrary, not merely recalling the cold notion of the thing, but expressing the reality of it, and, as arbitrary language is an heir-loom of the human race, being itself a part of that which it manifests. What shall I deduce from the preceding positions? Even this,—the appropriate, the never to be too much valued advantage of the theatre, if only the actors were what we know they have been,—a delightful, yet most effectual remedy for this dead palsy of the public mind. What would appear mad or ludicrous in a book, when presented to the senses under the form of reality, and with the truth of nature, supplies a species of
actual experience. This is indeed the special privilege of a great actor over a great poet. No part was ever played in perfection, but nature justified herself in the hearts of all her children, in what state soever they were, short of absolute moral exhaustion, or downright stupidity. There is no time given to ask questions, or to pass judgments; we are taken by storm, and, though in the histrionic art many a clumsy counterfeit, by caricature of one or two features, may gain applause as a fine likeness, yet never was the very thing rejected as a counterfeit. O! when I think of the inexhaustible mine of virgin treasure in our Shakspeare, that I have been almost daily reading him since I was ten years old,—that the thirty intervening years have been unintermittingly and not fruitlessly employed in the study of the Greek, Latin, English, Italian, Spanish and German belle lettrists, and the last fifteen years in addition, far more intensely in the analysis of the laws of life and reason as they exist in man,—and that upon every step I have made forward in taste, in acquisition of facts from history or my own observation, and in knowledge of the different laws of being and their apparent exceptions, from accidental collision of disturbing forces,—that at every new accession of information, after every successful exercise of meditation, and every fresh presentation of experience, I have unfailingly discovered a proportionate increase of wisdom and intuition in Shakspeare;—when I know this, and know too, that by a conceivable and possible, though hardly to be expected, arrangement of the British theatres, not all, indeed, but a large, a very large, proportion of this indefinite all—(round which no comprehension has yet drawn the line of circumscription, so as to say to itself, 'I have seen the whole')—might be sent into the heads and hearts—into the very souls of the mass of mankind, to whom, except by this living comment and interpretation, it must remain for ever a sealed volume, a deep well without a wheel or a windlass;—it seems to me a pardonable enthusiasm to steal away from sober likelihood, and share in so rich a feast in the faery world of possibility! Yet even in the grave cheerfulness of a circumspect hope, much, very much, might be done; enough, assuredly, to furnish a kind and strenuous nature with ample motives for the attempt to effect what may be effected.
SHAKSPEARE, A POET GENERALLY.

CLOTHED in radiant armour, and authorized by titles sure and manifold, as a poet, Shakspeare came forward to demand the throne of fame, as the dramatic poet of England. His excellences compelled even his contemporaries to seat him on that throne, although there were giants in those days contending for the same honour. Hereafter I would fain endeavour to make out the title of the English drama as created by, and existing in, Shakspeare, and its right to the supremacy of dramatic excellence in general. But he had shown himself a poet, previously to his appearance as a dramatic poet; and had no Lear, no Othello, no Henry IV., no Twelfth Night ever appeared, we must have admitted that Shakspeare possessed the chief, if not every, requisite of a poet,—deep feeling and exquisite sense of beauty, both as exhibited to the eye in the combinations of form, and to the ear in sweet and appropriate melody; that these feelings were under the command of his own will; that in his very first productions he projected his mind out of his own particular being, and felt, and made others feel, on subjects no way connected with himself, except by force of contemplation and that sublime faculty by which a great mind becomes that, on which it meditates. To this must be added that affectionate love of nature and natural objects, without which no man could have observed so steadily, or painted so truly and passionately, the very minutest beauties of the external world:—

And when thou hast on foot the purblind hare,
Mark the poor wretch; to overshoot his troubles,
How he outruns the wind, and with what care,
He cranks and crosses with a thousand doubles;
The many musits through the which he goes
Are like a labyrinth to amaze his foes.

Sometimes he runs among the flock of sheep,
To make the cunning hounds mistake their smell;
And sometime where earth-delving conies keep,
To stop the loud pursuers in their yell;
And sometime sorteth with a herd of deer:
Danger deviseth shifts, wit waits on fear.

For there his smell with others' being mingled,
The hot scent-snuffing hounds are driven to doubt,
Ceasing their clamorous cry, till they have singled,
Shakspeare, a Poet Generally

With much ado, the cold fault cleanly out,
Then do they spend their mouths; echo replies,
As if another chase were in the skies.

By this poor Wat far off, upon a hill,
Stands on his hinder legs with listening ear,
To hearken if his foes pursue him still:
Anon their loud alarums he doth hear,
And now his grief may be compared well
To one sore-sick, that hears the passing bell.

Then shalt thou see the dew-bedabbled wretch
Turn, and return, indenting with the way:
Each envious briar his weary legs doth scratch,
Each shadow makes him stop, each murmur stay.
For misery is trodden on by many,
And being low, never relieved by any.

Venus and Adonis.

And the preceding description:—

But lo! from forth a cope that neighbours by,
A breeding jennet, lusty, young and proud, &c.

is much more admirable, but in parts less fitted for quotation.

Moreover Shakspeare had shown that he possessed fancy, considered as the faculty of bringing together images dissimilar in the main by some one point or more of likeness, as in such a passage as this:—

Full gently now she takes him by the hand,
A lily imprisoned in a jail of snow,
Or ivory in an alabaster band:
So white a friend ingirts so white a foe! Ib.

And still mounting the intellectual ladder, he had as unequivocally proved the indwelling in his mind of imagination, or the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others, and by a sort of fusion to force many into one;—that which afterwards showed itself in such might and energy in Lear, where the deep anguish of a father spreads the feeling of ingratitude and cruelty over the very elements of heaven;—and which, combining many circumstances into one moment of consciousness, tends to produce that ultimate end of all human thought and human feeling, unity, and thereby the reduction of the spirit to its principle and fountain, who is alone truly one. Various are the workings of this the greatest faculty of the human mind, both passionate
Shakspeare, a Poet Generally

and tranquil. In its tranquil and purely pleasurable operation, it acts chiefly by creating out of many things, as they would have appeared in the description of an ordinary mind, detailed in unimpassioned succession, a oneness, even as nature, the greatest of poets, acts upon us, when we open our eyes upon an extended prospect. Thus the flight of Adonis in the dusk of the evening:

Look! how a bright star shooteth from the sky;
So glides he in the night from Venus' eye!

How many images and feelings are here brought together without effort and without discord, in the beauty of Adonis, the rapidity of his flight, the yearning, yet hopelessness, of the enamoured gazer, while a shadowy ideal character is thrown over the whole! Or this power acts by impressing the stamp of humanity, and of human feelings, on inanimate or mere natural objects:

Lo! here the gentle lark, weary of rest,
From his moist cabinet mounts up on high,
And wakes the morning, from whose silver breast
The sun ariseth in his majesty,
Who doth the world so gloriously behold,
The cedar-tops and hills seem burnish'd gold.

Or again, it acts by so carrying on the eye of the reader as to make him almost lose the consciousness of words,—to make him see every thing flashed, as Wordsworth has grandly and appropriately said:

Flashed upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;—

and this without exciting any painful or laborious attention, without any anatomy of description, (a fault not uncommon in descriptive poetry)—but with the sweetness and easy movement of nature. This energy is an absolute essential of poetry, and of itself would constitute a poet, though not one of the highest class;—it is, however, a most hopeful symptom, and the Venus and Adonis is one continued specimen of it.

In this beautiful poem there is an endless activity of thought in all the possible associations of thought with thought, thought with feeling, or with words, of feelings with feelings, and of words with words.
Shakspeare, a Poet Generally

Even as the sun, with purple-colour'd face,
Had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn,
Rose-cheek'd Adonis hied him to the chase:
Hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn.
Sick-thoughted Venus makes amain unto him,
And like a bold-faced suitor 'gins to woo him.

'Remark the humanizing imagery and circumstances of the first two lines, and the activity of thought in the play of words in the fourth line. The whole stanza presents at once the time, the appearance of the morning, and the two persons distinctly characterized, and in six simple verses puts the reader in possession of the whole argument of the poem.

Over one arm the lusty courser's rein,
Under the other was the tender boy,
Who blush'd and pouted in a dull disdain,
With leaden appetite, unapt to toy,
She red and hot, as coals of glowing fire,
He red for shame, but frosty to desire:

This stanza and the two following afford good instances of that poetic power, which I mentioned above, of making every thing present to the imagination—both the forms, and the passions which modify those forms, either actually, as in the representations of love, or anger, or other human affections; or imaginatively, by the different manner in which inanimate objects, or objects unimpassioned themselves, are caused to be seen by the mind in moments of strong excitement, and according to the kind of the excitement,—whether of jealousy, or rage, or love, in the only appropriate sense of the word, or of the lower impulses of our nature, or finally of the poetic feeling itself. It is, perhaps, chiefly in the power of producing and reproducing the latter that the poet stands distinct.

The subject of the Venus and Adonis is unpleasing; but the poem itself is for that very reason the more illustrative of Shakspeare. There are men who can write passages of deepest pathos and even sublimity on circumstances personal to themselves and stimulative of their own passions; but they are not, therefore, on this account poets. Read that magnificent burst of woman's patriotism and exultation, Deborah's song of victory; it is glorious, but nature is the poet there. It is quite another matter to become all things and yet remain the same,—to make the
changeful god be felt in the river, the lion and the flame:—this it is, that is the true imagination. Shakspeare writes in this poem, as if he were of another planet, charming you to gaze on the movements of Venus and Adonis, as you would on the twinkling dances of two vernal butterflies.

Finally, in this poem and the Rape of Lucrece, Shakspeare gave ample proof of his possession of a most profound, energetic, and philosophical mind, without which he might have pleased, but could not have been a great dramatic poet. Chance and the necessity of his genius combined to lead him to the drama his proper province: in his conquest of which we should consider both the difficulties which opposed him, and the advantages by which he was assisted.

*Shakspeare's Judgment equal to his Genius.*

Thus then Shakspeare appears, from his Venus and Adonis and Rape of Lucrece alone, apart from all his great works, to have possessed all the conditions of the true poet. Let me now proceed to destroy, as far as may be in my power, the popular notion that he was a great dramatist by mere instinct, that he grew immortal in his own despite, and sank below men of second or third-rate power, when he attempted aught beside the drama—even as bees construct their cells and manufacture their honey to admirable perfection; but would in vain attempt to build a nest. Now this mode of reconciling a compelled sense of inferiority with a feeling of pride, began in a few pedants, who having read that Sophocles was the great model of tragedy, and Aristotle the infallible dictator of its rules, and finding that the Lear, Hamlet, Othello and other master-pieces were neither in imitation of Sophocles, nor in obedience to Aristotle,—and not having (with one or two exceptions) the courage to affirm, that the delight which their country received from generation to generation, in defiance of the alterations of circumstances and habits, was wholly groundless,—took upon them, as a happy medium and refuge, to talk of Shakspeare as a sort of beautiful *lusus naturae*, a delightful monster,—wild, indeed, and without taste or judgment, but like the inspired idiots so much venerated in the East, uttering,
amid the strangest follies, the sublimest truths. In nine places out of ten in which I find his awful name mentioned, it is with some epithet of 'wild,' 'irregular,' 'pure child of nature,' &c. If all this be true, we must submit to it; though to a thinking mind it cannot but be painful to find any excellence, merely human, thrown out of all human analogy, and thereby leaving us neither rules for imitation, nor motives to imitate;—but if false, it is a dangerous falsehood;—for it affords a refuge to secret self-conceit,—enables a vain man at once to escape his reader's indignation by general swoln panegyrics, and merely by his ipse dixit to treat, as contemptible, what he has not intellect enough to comprehend, or soul to feel, without assigning any reason, or referring his opinion to any demonstrative principle;—thus leaving Shakspeare as a sort of grand Lama, adored indeed, and his very excrements prized as relics, but with no authority or real influence. I grieve that every late voluminous edition of his works would enable me to substantiate the present charge with a variety of facts one tenth of which would of themselves exhaust the time allotted to me. Every critic, who has or has not made a collection of black letter books—in itself a useful and respectable amusement,—puts on the seven-league boots of self-opinion, and strides at once from an illustrator into a supreme judge, and blind and deaf, fills his three-ounce phial at the waters of Niagara; and determines positively the greatness of the cataract to be neither more nor less than his three-ounce phial has been able to receive.

I think this a very serious subject. It is my earnest desire—my passionate endeavour,—to enforce at various times and by various arguments and instances the close and reciprocal connexion of just taste with pure morality. Without that acquaintance with the heart of man, or that docility and childlike gladness to be made acquainted with it, which those only can have, who dare look at their own hearts—and that with a steadiness which religion only has the power of reconciling with sincere humility;—without this, and the modesty produced by it, I am deeply convinced that no man, however wide his erudition, however patient his antiquarian researches, can possibly understand, or be worthy of understanding, the writings of Shakspeare.
Assuredly that criticism of Shakspeare will alone be genial which is reverential. The Englishman, who without reverence, a proud and affectionate reverence, can utter the name of William Shakspeare, stands disqualified for the office of critic. He wants one at least of the very senses, the language of which he is to employ, and will discourse, at best, but as a blind man, while the whole harmonious creation of light and shade with all its subtle interchange of deepening and dissolving colours rises in silence to the silent fiat of the uprising Apollo. However inferior in ability I may be to some who have followed me, I own I am proud that I was the first in time who publicly demonstrated to the full extent of the position, that the supposed irregularity and extravagances of Shakspeare were the mere dreams of a pedantry that arraigned the eagle because it had not the dimensions of the swan. In all the successive courses of lectures delivered by me, since my first attempt at the Royal Institution, it has been, and it still remains, my object, to prove that in all points from the most important to the most minute, the judgment of Shakspeare is commensurate with his genius,—nay, that his genius reveals itself in his judgment, as in its most exalted form. And the more gladly do I recur to this subject from the clear conviction, that to judge aright, and with distinct consciousness of the grounds of our judgment, concerning the works of Shakspeare, implies the power and the means of judging rightly of all other works of intellect, those of abstract science alone excepted.

It is a painful truth that not only individuals, but even whole nations, are oftentimes so enslaved to the habits of their education and inmediate circumstances, as not to judge disinterestedly even on those subjects, the very pleasure arising from which consists in its disinterestedness, namely, on subjects of taste and polite literature. Instead of deciding concerning their own modes and customs by any rule of reason, nothing appears rational, becoming, or beautiful to them, but what coincides with the peculiarities of their education. In this narrow circle, individuals may attain to exquisite discrimination, as the French critics have done in their own literature; but a true critic can no more be such without placing himself on some central point, from which he may command the whole, that is, some general rule, which, founded in reason,
Shakspeare, a Poet Generally 45

or the faculties common to all men, must therefore apply to each,—than an astronomer can explain the movements of the solar system without taking his stand in the sun. And let me remark, that this will not tend to produce despotism, but, on the contrary, true tolerance, in the critic. He will, indeed, require, as the spirit and substance of a work, something true in human nature itself, and independent of all circumstances; but in the mode of applying it, he will estimate genius and judgment according to the felicity with which the imperishable soul of intellect shall have adapted itself to the age, the place, and the existing manners. The error he will expose, lies in reversing this, and holding up the mere circumstances as perpetual to the utter neglect of the power which can alone animate them. For art cannot exist without, or apart from, nature; and what has man of his own to give to his fellow man, but his own thoughts and feelings, and his observations, so far as they are modified by his own thoughts or feelings?

Let me, then, once more submit this question to minds emancipated alike from national, or party, or sectarian prejudice:—Are the plays of Shakspeare works of rude uncultivated genius, in which the splendour of the parts compensates, if aught can compensate, for the barbarous shapelessness and irregularity of the whole?—Or is the form equally admirable with the matter, and the judgment of the great poet, not less deserving our wonder than his genius?—Or, again, to repeat the question in other words:—Is Shakspeare a great dramatic poet on account only of those beauties and excellences which he possesses in common with the ancients, but with diminished claims to our love and honour to the full extent of his differences from them?—Or are these very differences additional proofs of poetic wisdom, at once results and symbols of living power as contrasted with lifeless mechanism—of free and rival originality as contra-distinguished from servile imitation, or, more accurately, a blind copying of effects, instead of a true imitation, of the essential principles?—Imagine not that I am about to oppose genius to rules. No! the comparative value of these rules is the very cause to be tried. The spirit of poetry, like all other living powers, must of necessity circumscribe itself by rules, were it only to unite power with beauty. It must
Shakspeare, a Poet Generally

embody in order to reveal itself; but a living body is of necessity an organized one; and what is organization but the connection of parts in and for a whole, so that each part is at once end and means?—This is no discovery of criticism;—it is a necessity of the human mind; and all nations have felt and obeyed it, in the invention of metre, and measured sounds, as the vehicle and involucrum of poetry—itself a fellow-growth from the same life,—even as the bark is to the tree!

No work of true genius dares want its appropriate form, neither indeed is there any danger of this. As it must not, so genius cannot, be lawless; for it is even this that constitutes it genius—the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination. How then comes it that not only single Zoilus, but whole nations have combined in unhesitating condemnation of our great dramatist, as a sort of African nature, rich in beautiful monsters—as a wild heath where islands of fertility look the greener from the surrounding waste, where the loveliest plants now shine out among unsightly weeds, and now are choked by their parasitic growth, so intertwined that we cannot disentangle the weed without snapping the flower?—In this statement I have had no reference to the vulgar abuse of Voltaire,¹ save as far as his charges are coincident with the decisions of Shakspeare's own commentators and (so they would tell you) almost idolatrous admirers. The true ground of the mistake lies in the confounding mechanical regularity with organic form. The form is mechanic, when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material;—as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes, as it develops, itself from within, and the fulness of its development is

¹ Take a slight specimen of it.

Je suis bien loin assurément de justifier en tout la tragédie d'Hamlet : c'est une pièce grossière et barbare, qui ne serait pas supportée par la plus vile populace de la France et de l'Italie. Hamlet y devient fou au second acte, et sa maîtresse folle au troisième ; le prince rue le père de sa maîtresse, feignant de tuer un rat, et l'héroïne se jette dans la rivière. On fait sa fosse sur le théâtre ; des fossoyeurs disent des quolibets dignes d'eux, en tenant dans leurs mains des têtes de morts ; le prince Hamlet répond à leurs grossièretés abominables par des folies non moins déplorables. Pendant ce temps-là, un des acteurs fait la conquête de la Pologne. Hamlet, sa mère, et son beau-père doivent ensemble sur le théâtre ; on chante à table, on s'y querelle, on se bat, on se lève : on croirait que cet enferrage est le fruit de l'imagination d'un sauvage ivre. Dissertation before Semiramis.

This is not, perhaps, very like Hamlet; but nothing can be more like Voltaire. Ed.
Characteristics of Shakspeare's Dramas

one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such as the life is, such is the form. Nature, the prime genial artist, inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms;—each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within,—its true image reflected and thrown out from the concave mirror;—and even such is the appropriate excellence of her chosen poet, of our own Shakspeare,—himself a nature humanized, a genial understanding directing self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper even than our consciousness.

I greatly dislike beauties and selections in general; but as proof positive of his unrivalled excellence, I should like to try Shakspeare by this criterion. Make out your ampest catalogue of all the human faculties, as reason or the moral law, the will, the feeling of the coincidence of the two (a feeling sui generis et demonstratio demonstrativum) called the conscience, the understanding or prudence, wit, fancy, imagination, judgment,—and then of the objects on which these are to be employed, as the beauties, the terrors, and the seeming caprices of nature, the realities and the capabilities, that is, the actual and the ideal, of the human mind, conceived as an individual or as a social being, as in innocence or in guilt, in a play-paradise, or in a war-field of temptation;—and then compare with Shakspeare under each of these heads all or any of the writers in prose and verse that have ever lived! Who, that is competent to judge, doubts the result?—And ask your own hearts,—ask your own common sense—to conceive the possibility of this man being—I say not, the drunken savage of that wretched sciolist, whom Frenchmen, to their shame, have honoured before their elder and better worthies,—but the anomalous, the wild, the irregular, genius of our daily criticism! What! are we to have miracles in sport?—Or, I speak reverently, does God choose idiots by whom to convey divine truths to man?

RECAPITULATION, AND SUMMARY

Of the Characteristics of Shakspeare's Dramas.¹

In lectures, of which amusement forms a large part of the object, there are some peculiar difficulties. The architect

¹ For the most part communicated by Mr. Justice Coleridge. Ed.
place his foundation out of sight, and the musician tunes his instrument before he makes his appearance; but the lecturer has to try his chords in the presence of the assembly; an operation not likely, indeed, to produce much pleasure, but yet indispensably necessary to a right understanding of the subject to be developed.

Poetry in essence is as familiar to barbarous as to civilized nations. The Laplander and the savage Indian are cheered by it as well as the inhabitants of London and Paris;—its spirit takes up and incorporates surrounding materials, as a plant clothes itself with soil and climate, whilst it exhibits the working of a vital principle within independent of all accidental circumstances. And to judge with fairness of an author's works, we ought to distinguish what is inward and essential from what is outward and circumstantial. It is essential to poetry that it be simple, and appeal to the elements and primary laws of our nature; that it be sensuous, and by its imagery elicit truth at a flash; that it be impassioned, and be able to move our feelings and awaken our affections. In comparing different poets with each other, we should inquire which have brought into the fullest play our imagination and our reason, or have created the greatest excitement and produced the completest harmony. If we consider great exquisiteness of language and sweetness of metre alone, it is impossible to deny to Pope the character of a delightful writer; but whether he be a poet, must depend upon our definition of the word; and, doubtless, if every thing that pleases be poetry, Pope's satires and epistles must be poetry. This, I must say, that poetry, as distinguished from other modes of composition, does not rest in metre, and that it is not poetry, if it make no appeal to our passions or our imagination. One character belongs to all true poets, that they write from a principle within, not originating in any thing without; and that the true poet's work in its form, its shapings, and its modifications, is distinguished from all other works that assume to belong to the class of poetry, as a natural from an artificial flower, or as the mimic garden of a child from an enamelled meadow. In the former the flowers are broken from their stems and stuck into the ground; they are beautiful to the eye and fragrant to the sense, but their colours soon fade, and their odour is transient as the
smile of the planter; — while the meadow may be visited again and again with renewed delight; its beauty is innate in the soil, and its bloom is of the freshness of nature.

The next ground of critical judgment, and point of comparison, will be as to how far a given poet has been influenced by accidental circumstances. As a living poet must surely write, not for the ages past, but for that in which he lives, and those which are to follow, it is, on the one hand, natural that he should not violate, and on the other, necessary that he should not depend on, the mere manners and modes of his day. See how little does Shakspeare leave us to regret that he was born in his particular age! The great aera in modern times was what is called the Restoration of Letters; — the ages preceding it are called the dark ages; but it would be more wise, perhaps, to call them the ages in which we were in the dark. It is usually overlooked that the supposed dark period was not universal, but partial and successive, or alternate; that the dark age of England was not the dark age of Italy, but that one country was in its light and vigour, whilst another was in its gloom and bondage. But no sooner had the Reformation sounded through Europe like the blast of an archangel’s trumpet, than from king to peasant there arose an enthusiasm for knowledge; the discovery of a manuscript became the subject of an embassy; Erasmus read by moonlight, because he could not afford a torch, and begged a penny, not for the love of charity, but for the love of learning. The three great points of attention were religion, morals, and taste; men of genius as well as men of learning, who in this age need to be so widely distinguished, then alike became copyists of the ancients; and this, indeed, was the only way by which the taste of mankind could be improved, or their understandings informed. Whilst Dante imagined himself a humble follower of Virgil, and Ariosto of Homer, they were both unconscious of that greater power working within them, which in many points carried them beyond their supposed originals. All great discoveries bear the stamp of the age in which they are made; — hence we perceive the effects of the purer religion of the moderns, visible for the most part in their lives; and in reading their works we should not content ourselves with the mere narratives
of events long since passed, but should learn to apply their maxims and conduct to ourselves.

Having intimated that times and manners lend their form and pressure to genius, let me once more draw a slight parallel between the ancient and modern stage, the stages of Greece and of England. The Greeks were polytheists; their religion was local; almost the only object of all their knowledge, art and taste, was their gods; and, accordingly, their productions were, if the expression may be allowed, statuesque, whilst those of the moderns are picturesque. The Greeks reared a structure, which in its parts, and as a whole, filled the mind with the calm and elevated impression of perfect beauty, and symmetrical proportion. The moderns also produced a whole, a more striking whole; but it was by blending materials and fusing the parts together. And as the Pantheon is to York Minster or Westminster Abbey, so is Sophocles compared with Shakespeare; in the one a completeness, a satisfaction, an excellence, on which the mind rests with complacency; in the other a multitude of interlaced materials, great and little, magnificent and mean, accompanied, indeed, with the sense of a falling short of perfection, and yet, at the same time, so promising of our social and individual progress, that we would not, if we could, exchange it for that repose of the mind which dwells on the forms of symmetry in the acquiescent admiration of grace. This general characteristic of the ancient and modern drama might be illustrated by a parallel of the ancient and modern music;—the one consisting of melody arising from a succession only of pleasing sounds,—the modern embracing harmony also, the result of combination and the effect of a whole.

I have said, and I say it again, that great as was the genius of Shakspeare, his judgment was at least equal to it. Of this any one will be convinced, who attentively considers those points in which the dramas of Greece and England differ, from the dissimilitude of circumstances by which each was modified and influenced. The Greek stage had its origin in the ceremonies of a sacrifice, such as of the goat to Bacchus, whom we most erroneously regard as merely the jolly god of wine;—for among the ancients he was venerable, as the symbol of that power which acts without our consciousness in the vital energies of nature,—
Shakspeare’s Dramas

the vinum mundi,—as Apollo was that of the conscious agency of our intellectual being. The heroes of old under the influences of this Bacchic enthusiasm performed more than human actions;—hence tales of the favorite champions soon passed into dialogue. On the Greek stage the chorus was always before the audience; the curtain was never dropped, as we should say; and change of place being therefore, in general, impossible, the absurd notion of condemning it merely as improbable in itself was never entertained by any one. If we can believe ourselves at Thebes in one act, we may believe ourselves at Athens in the next. If a story lasts twenty-four hours or twenty-four years, it is equally improbable. There seems to be no just boundary but what the feelings prescribe. But on the Greek stage where the same persons were perpetually before the audience, great judgment was necessary in venturing on any such change. The poets never, therefore, attempted to impose on the senses by bringing places to men, but they did bring men to places, as in the well known instance in the Eumenides, where during an evident retirement of the chorus from the orchestra, the scene is changed to Athens, and Orestes is first introduced in the temple of Minerva, and the chorus of Furies come in afterwards in pursuit of him.¹

In the Greek drama there were no formal divisions into scenes and acts; there were no means, therefore, of allowing for the necessary lapse of time between one part of the dialogue and another, and unity of time in a strict sense was, of course, impossible. To overcome that difficulty of accounting for time, which is effected on the modern stage by dropping a curtain, the judgment and great genius of the ancients supplied music and measured motion, and with the lyric ode filled up the vacuity. In the story of the Agamemnon of Æschylus, the capture of Troy is supposed to be announced by a fire lighted on the Asiatic shore, and the transmission of the signal by successive beacons to Mycenæ. The signal is first seen at the 21st line, and the herald from Troy itself enters at the 486th, and Agamemnon himself at the 783rd line. But the practical absurdity of

¹ Æsch. Eumen. v. 230-239. Notandum est, scenam jam Athenas translatam sic instituit, ut primo Orestes solus conspicuatur in templo Minervae supplex ejus simulacrum venerans; paulo post autem eum consequuntur Eumenides, &c. Schütz’s note. The recessions of the chorus were termed μεταφωνία. There is another instance in the Ajax, v 814. Ed.
this was not felt by the audience, who, in imagination stretched minutes into hours, while they listened to the lofty narrative odes of the chorus which almost entirely filled up the interspace. Another fact deserves attention here, namely, that regularly on the Greek stage a drama, or acted story, consisted in reality of three dramas, called together a trilogy, and performed consecutively in the course of one day. Now you may conceive a tragedy of Shakspeare’s as a trilogy connected in one single representation. Divide Lear into three parts, and each would be a play with the ancients; or take the three Æschylean dramas of Agamemnon, and divide them into, or call them, as many acts, and they together would be one play. The first act would comprise the usurpation of Ægisthus, and the murder of Agamemnon; the second, the revenge of Orestes, and the murder of his mother; and the third, the penance and absolution of Orestes;—occupying a period of twenty-two years.

The stage in Shakspeare’s time was a naked room with a blanket for a curtain; but he made it a field for monarchs. That law of unity, which has its foundations, not in the factitious necessity of custom, but in nature itself, the unity of feeling, is every where and at all times observed by Shakspeare in his plays. Read Romeo and Juliet;—all is youth and spring;—youth with its follies, its virtues, its precipitancies;—spring with its odours, its flowers, and its transiency; it is one and the same feeling that commences, goes through, and ends the play. The old men, the Capulets and the Montagues, are not common old men; they have an eagerness, a heartiness, a vehemence, the effect of spring; with Romeo, his change of passion, his sudden marriage, and his rash death, are all the effects of youth;—whilst in Juliet love has all that is tender and melancholy in the nightingale, all that is voluptuous in the rose, with whatever is sweet in the freshness of spring; but it ends with a long deep sigh like the last breeze of the Italian evening. This unity of feeling and character pervades every drama of Shakspeare.

It seems to me that his plays are distinguished from those of all other dramatic poets by the following characteristics:

1. Expectation in preference to surprise. It is like the true reading of the passage;—‘God said, Let there be light,
Shakspeare's Dramas

and there was light; —not there was light. As the feeling
with which we startle at a shooting star compared with that
of watching the sunrise at the pre-established moment, such
and so low is surprise compared with expectation.

2. Signal adherence to the great law of nature, that all
opposites tend to attract and temper each other. Passion
in Shakspeare generally displays libertinism, but involves
morality; and if there are exceptions to this, they are, in-
dependently of their intrinsic value, all of them indicative
of individual character, and, like the farewell admonitions
of a parent, have an end beyond the parental relation.
Thus the Countess's beautiful precepts to Bertram, by
elevating her character, raise that of Helena her favorite,
and soften down the point in her which Shakspeare does
not mean us not to see, but to see and to forgive, and at
length to justify. And so it is in Polonius, who is the per-
sonified memory of wisdom no longer actually possessed.
This admirable character is always misrepresented on the
stage. Shakspeare never intended to exhibit him as a
buffoon; for although it was natural that Hamlet,—a
young man of fire and genius, detesting formality, and dis-
liking Polonius on political grounds, as imagining that he
had assisted his uncle in his usurpation,—should express
himself satirically,—yet this must not be taken as exactly
the poet's conception of him. In Polonius a certain indura-
tion of character had arisen from long habits of business;
but take his advice to Laertes, and Ophelia's reverence for
his memory, and we shall see that he was meant to be repre-
sented as a statesman somewhat past his faculties,—his
recollections of life all full of wisdom, and showing a knowl-
dedge of human nature, whilst what immediately takes
place before him, and escapes from him, is indicative of
weakness.

But as in Homer all the deities are in armour, even
Venus; so in Shakspeare all the characters are strong.
Hence real folly and dulness are made by him the vehicles
of wisdom. There is no difficulty for one being a fool to
imitate a fool; but to be, remain, and speak like a wise man
and a great wit, and yet so as to give a vivid representation
of a veritable fool,—hic labor, hoc opus est. A drunken
constable is not uncommon, nor hard to draw; but see
and examine what goes to make up a Dogberry.

3. Keeping at all times in the high road of life. Shak-
Characteristics of

Shakespeare has no innocent adulteries, no interesting incests, no virtuous vice;—he never renders that amiable which religion and reason alike teach us to detest, or clothes impurity in the garb of virtue, like Beaumont and Fletcher, the Kotzebues of the day. Shakespeare's fathers are roused by ingratitude, his husbands stung by unfaithfulness; in him, in short, the affections are wounded in those points in which all may, nay, must, feel. Let the morality of Shakespeare be contrasted with that of the writers of his own, or the succeeding, age, or of those of the present day, who boast their superiority in this respect. No one can dispute that the result of such a comparison is altogether in favour of Shakespeare;—even the letters of women of high rank in his age were often coarser than his writings. If he occasionally disgusts a keen sense of delicacy, he never injures the mind; he neither excites, nor flatters, passion, in order to degrade the subject of it; he does not use the faulty thing for a faulty purpose, nor carries on warfare against virtue, by causing wickedness to appear as no wickedness, through the medium of a morbid sympathy with the unfortunate. In Shakespeare vice never walks as in twilight; nothing is purposely out of its place;—he inverts not the order of nature and propriety,—does not make every magistrate a drunkard or glutton, nor every poor man meek, humane, and temperate; he has no benevolent butchers, nor any sentimental rat-catchers.

4. Independence of the dramatic interest on the plot. The interest in the plot is always in fact on account of the characters, not vice versa, as in almost all other writers; the plot is a mere canvass and no more. Hence arises the true justification of the same stratagem being used in regard to Benedict and Beatrice,—the vanity in each being alike. Take away from the Much Ado About Nothing all that which is not indispensable to the plot, either as having little to do with it, or, at best, like Dogberry and his comrades, forced into the service, when any other less ingeniously absurd watchmen and night-constables would have answered the mere necessities of the action;—take away Benedict, Beatrice, Dogberry, and the reaction of the former on the character of Hero,—and what will remain? In other writers the main agent of the plot is always the prominent character; in Shakespeare it is so, or is not so, as the character is in itself calculated, or not calculated, to
form the plot. Don John is the main-spring of the plot of this play; but he is merely shown and then withdrawn.

5. Independence of the interest on the story as the ground-work of the plot. Hence Shakspeare never took the trouble of inventing stories. It was enough for him to select from those that had been already invented or recorded such as had one or other, or both, of two recommendations, namely, suitableness to his particular purpose, and their being parts of popular tradition,—names of which we had often heard, and of their fortunes, and as to which all we wanted was, to see the man himself. So it is just the man himself, the Lear, the Shylock, the Richard, that Shakspeare makes us for the first time acquainted with. Omit the first scene in Lear, and yet every thing will remain; so the first and second scenes in the Merchant of Venice. Indeed it is universally true.

6. Interfusion of the lyrical—that which in its very essence is poetical—not only with the dramatic, as in the plays of Metastasio, where at the end of the scene comes the *aria* as the *exit* speech of the character,—but also in and through the dramatic. Songs in Shakspeare are introduced as songs only, just as songs are in real life, beautifully as some of them are characteristic of the person who has sung or called for them, as Desdemona’s ‘Willow,’ and Ophelia’s wild snatches, and the sweet carollings in As You Like It. But the whole of the Midsummer Night’s Dream is one continued specimen of the dramatized lyrical. And observe how exquisitely the dramatic of Hotspur ;—

Marry, and I’m glad on’t with all my heart;
I’d rather be a kitten and cry—mew, &c.

melts away into the lyric of Mortimer ;—

I understand thy looks: that pretty Welsh
Which thou pourest down from these swelling heavens,
I am too perfect in, &c.

Henry IV. part i. act iii. sc. i.

7. The characters of the *dramatis personae*, like those in real life, are to be inferred by the reader;—they are not told to him. And it is well worth remarking that Shakspeare’s characters, like those in real life, are very commonly misunderstood, and almost always understood by different persons in different ways. The causes are
Outline of an Introductory

the same in either case. If you take only what the friends of the character say, you may be deceived, and still more so, if that which his enemies say; nay, even the character himself sees himself through the medium of his character, and not exactly as he is. Take all together, not omitting a shrewd hint from the clown or the fool, and perhaps your impression will be right; and you may know whether you have in fact discovered the poet's own idea, by all the speeches receiving light from it, and attesting its reality by reflecting it.

Lastly, in Shakspeare the heterogeneous is united, as it is in nature. You must not suppose a pressure or passion always acting on or in the character!—passion in Shakspeare is that by which the individual is distinguished from others, not that which makes a different kind of him. Shakspeare followed the main march of the human affections. He entered into no analysis of the passions or faiths of men, but assured himself that such and such passions and faiths were grounded in our common nature, and not in the mere accidents of ignorance or disease. This is an important consideration, and constitutes our Shakspeare the morning star, the guide and the pioneer, of true philosophy.

Outline of

An Introductory Lecture Upon

Shakspeare.

Of that species of writing termed tragi-comedy, much has been produced and doomed to the shelf. Shakspeare's comic are continually re-acting upon his tragic characters. Lear, wandering amidst the tempest, has all his feelings of distress increased by the overflowings of the wild wit of the Fool, as vinegar poured upon wounds exacerbates their pain. Thus even his comic humour tends to the development of tragic passion.

The next characteristic of Shakspeare is his keeping at all times in the high road of life, &c. Another evidence of his exquisite judgment is, that he seizes hold of popular

1 See the foregoing Essay. S. C.
Lecture upon Shakspeare

tales; Lear and the Merchant of Venice were popular tales, but are so excellently managed, that both are the representations of men in all countries and of all times.

His dramas do not arise absolutely out of some one extraordinary circumstance, the scenes may stand independently of any such one connecting incident, as faithful representations of men and manners. In his mode of drawing characters there are no pompous descriptions of a man by himself; his character is to be drawn, as in real life, from the whole course of the play, or out of the mouths of his enemies or friends. This may be exemplified in Polonius, whose character has been often misrepresented. Shakspeare never intended him for a buffoon, &c.¹

Another excellence of Shakspeare in which no writer equals him, is in the language of nature. So correct is it, that we can see ourselves in every page. The style and manner have also that felicity, that not a sentence can be read, without its being discovered if it is Shaksperian. In observation of living characters—of landlords and postilions Fielding has great excellence; but in drawing from his own heart, and depicting that species of character, which no observation could teach, he failed in comparison with Richardson, who perpetually places himself, as it were, in a day-dream. Shakspeare excels in both. Witness the accuracy of character in Juliet’s Name; while for the great characters of Iago, Othello, Hamlet, Richard III., to which he could never have seen any thing similar, he seems invariably to have asked himself, How should I act or speak in such circumstances? His comic characters are also peculiar. A drunken constable was not uncommon; but he makes folly a vehicle for wit, as in Dogberry: every thing is a sub-stratum on which his genius can erect the mightiest superstructure.

To distinguish that which is legitimate in Shakspeare from what does not belong to him, we must observe his varied images symbolical of novel truth, thrusting by, and seeming to trip up each other, from an impetuosity of thought, producing a flowing metre and seldom closing with the line. In Pericles, a play written fifty years before, but altered by Shakspeare, his additions may be recognised

¹ See the Notes on Hamlet, which contain the same general view of the character of Polonius. As there are a few additional hints in the present report, I have thought it worth printing. S. C.
Outline of an Introductory Lecture

to half a line, from the metre, which has the same perfection in the flowing continuity of interchangeable metrical pauses in his earliest plays, as in Love's Labour's Lost.¹

Lastly contrast his morality with the writers of his own or of the succeeding age, &c.² If a man speak injuriously of our friend, our vindication of him is naturally warm. Shakspere has been accused of profaneness. I for my part have acquired from perusal of him, a habit of looking into my own heart, and am confident that Shakspere is an author of all others the most calculated to make his readers better as well as wiser.

Shakspere, possessed of wit, humour, fancy and imagination, built up an outward world from the stores within his mind, as the bee finds a hive ³ from a thousand sweets gathered from a thousand flowers. He was not only a great poet, but a great philosopher. Richard III., Iago, and Falstaff are men who reverse the order of things, who place intellect at the head, whereas it ought to follow, like Geometry, to prove and to confirm. No man, either hero or saint, ever acted from an unmixed motive; for let him do what he will rightly, still Conscience whispers "it is your duty." Richard, laughing at conscience and sneering at religion, felt a confidence in his intellect, which urged him to commit the most horrid crimes, because he felt himself, although inferior in form and shape, superior to those around him; he felt he possessed a power, which they had not. Iago, on the same principle, conscious of superior intellect, gave scope to his envy, and hesitated not to ruin a gallant, open and generous friend in the moment of felicity, because he was not promoted as he expected. Othello was superior in place, but Iago felt him to be inferior in intellect, and unrestrained by conscience, trampled upon him.—Falstaff, not a degraded man of genius, like Burns, but a man of degraded genius, with the same consciousness of superiority to his companions, fastened himself on a young Prince,

¹ Lamb, comparing Fletcher with Shakspere, writes thus: "Fletcher's ideas moved slow; his versification, though sweet, is tedious, it stops at every turn; he lays line upon line, making up one after the other, adding image to image so deliberately, that we see their junctions. Shakspere mingles every thing, runs line into line, embarrasses sentences and metaphors; before one idea has burst its shell, another is hatched and clamorous for disclosure." Characters of Dram. Writers, contemp. with Shakspere.

² See the foregoing Essay.

³ There must have been some mistake in the report of this sentence, unless there was a momentary lapse of mind on the part of the lecturer.
to prove how much his influence on an heir apparent would exceed that of a statesman. With this view he hesitated not to adopt the most contemptible of all characters, that of an open and professed liar: even his sensuality was subservient to his intellect; for he appeared to drink sack, that he might have occasion to show off his wit. One thing, however, worthy of observation, is the perpetual contrast of labour in Falstaff to produce wit, with the ease with which Prince Henry parries his shafts; and the final contempt which such a character deserves and receives from the young king, when Falstaff exhibits the struggle of inward determination with an outward show of humility.

ORDER OF SHAKSPEARE'S PLAYS.

Various attempts have been made to arrange the plays of Shakspeare, each according to its priority in time, by proofs derived from external documents. How unsuccessful these attempts have been might easily be shewn, not only from the widely different results arrived at by men, all deeply versed in the black-letter books, old plays, pamphlets, manuscript records and catalogues of that age, but also from the fallacious and unsatisfactory nature of the facts and assumptions on which the evidence rests. In that age, when the press was chiefly occupied with controversial or practical divinity,—when the law, the church and the state engrossed all honour and respectability,—when a degree of disgrace, levior quaedam infamiae macula, was attached to the publication of poetry, and even to have sported with the Muse, as a private relaxation, was supposed to be—a venial fault, indeed, yet—something beneath the gravity of a wise man,—when the professed poets were so poor, that the very expenses of the press demanded the liberality of some wealthy individual, so that two thirds of Spenser's poetic works, and those most highly praised by his learned admirers and friends, remained for many years in manuscript, and in manuscript perished,—when the amateurs of the stage were comparatively few, and therefore for the greater part more or less known to each other,—when we know that the plays of Shakspeare,
both during and after his life, were the property of the stage, and published by the players, doubtless according to their notions of acceptability with the visitants of the theatre,—in such an age, and under such circumstances, can an allusion or reference to any drama or poem in the publication of a contemporary be received as conclusive evidence, that such drama or poem had at that time been published? Or, further, can the priority of publication itself prove any thing in favour of actually prior composition?

We are tolerably certain, indeed, that the Venus and Adonis, and the Rape of Lucrece, were his two earliest poems, and though not printed until 1593, in the twenty-ninth year of his age, yet there can be little doubt that they had remained by him in manuscript many years. For Mr. Malone has made it highly probable, that he had commenced a writer for the stage in 1591, when he was twenty-seven years old, and Shakspeare himself assures us that the Venus and Adonis was the first heir of his invention.1

Baffled, then, in the attempt to derive any satisfaction from outward documents, we may easily stand excused if we turn our researches towards the internal evidences furnished by the writings themselves, with no other positive data than the known facts, that the Venus and Adonis was printed in 1593, the Rape of Lucrece in 1594, and that the Romeo and Juliet had appeared in 1595,—and with no other presumptions than that the poems, his very first productions, were written many years earlier,—(for who can believe that Shakspeare could have remained to his twenty-ninth or thirtieth year without attempting poetic composition of any kind?)—and that between these and Romeo and Juliet there had intervened one or two other dramas, or the chief materials, at least, of them, although they may very possibly have appeared after the success of the Romeo and Juliet and some other circumstances had given the poet an authority with the proprietors, and created a prepossession in his favour with the theatrical audiences.

1 But if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather, &c.

Dedication of the V. and A. to Lord Southampton.
Order of Shakspeare’s Plays

CLASSIFICATION ATTEMPTED, 1802.

First Epoch.
The London Prodigal.
Cromwell.
Henry VI., three parts, first edition.
The old King John.
Edward III.
The old Taming of the Shrew.
Pericles.
All these are transition-works, Uebergangswerke; not his, yet of him.

Second Epoch.
All’s Well That Ends Well;—but afterwards worked up afresh (*umgearbeitet*), especially Parolles.
The Two Gentlemen of Verona; a sketch.
Romeo and Juliet; first draft of it.

Third Epoch
rises into the full, although youthful, Shakspeare; it was the negative period of his perfection.
Love’s Labour’s Lost.
Twelfth Night.
As You Like It.
Midsummer Night’s Dream.
Richard II.
Henry IV. and V.
Henry VIII.; Gelegenheitsgedicht.
Romeo and Juliet, as at present.
Merchant of Venice.

Fourth Epoch.
Much Ado About Nothing.
Merry Wives of Windsor; first edition.
Henry VI.; *rifacimento*.

Fifth Epoch.
The period of beauty was now past; and that of grandeur succeeds.
Lear.
Macbeth.
Order of Shakspeare’s Plays

Hamlet.
Timon of Athens; an after vibration of Hamlet.
Troilus and Cressida; Uebergang in die Ironie.
The Roman Plays.
King John, as at present.
Merry Wives of Windsor.}\quad umgearbeitet.
Taming of the Shrew.
Measure for Measure.
Othello.
Tempest.
Winter’s Tale.
Cymbeline.

CLASSIFICATION ATTEMPTED, 1810.

Shakspeare’s earliest dramas I take to be,
Love’s Labour’s Lost.
All’s Well That Ends Well.
Comedy of Errors.
Romeo and Juliet.

In the second class I reckon
Midsummer Night’s Dream.
As You Like It.
Tempest.
Twelfth Night.

In the third, as indicating a greater energy—not merely of poetry, but—of all the world of thought, yet still with some of the growing pains. and the awkwardness of growth, I place
Troilus and Cressida.
Cymbeline.
Merchant of Venice.
Much Ado About Nothing.
Taming of the Shrew.

In the fourth, I place the plays containing the greatest characters;
Macbeth.
Lear.
Hamlet.
Othello.

And lastly, the historic dramas, in order to be able to show
Order of Shakspeare's Plays.

my reasons for rejecting some whole plays, and very many scenes in others.

CLASSIFICATION ATTEMPTED, 1819.

I think Shakspeare's earliest dramatic attempt—perhaps even prior in conception to the Venus and Adonis, and planned before he left Stratford—was Love's Labour's Lost. Shortly afterwards I suppose Pericles and certain scenes in Jeronymo to have been produced; and in the same epoch, I place the Winter's Tale and Cymbeline, differing from the Pericles by the entire rifacimento of it, when Shakspeare's celebrity as poet, and his interest, no less than his influence as manager, enabled him to bring forward the laid by labours of his youth. The example of Titus Andronicus, which, as well as Jeronymo, was most popular in Shakspeare's first epoch, had led the young dramatist to the lawless mixture of dates and manners. In this same epoch I should place the Comedy of Errors, remarkable as being the only specimen of poetical farce in our language, that is, intentionally such; so that all the distinct kinds of drama, which might be educed a priori, have their representatives in Shakspeare's works. I say intentionally such; for many of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, and the greater part of Ben Jonson's comedies are farce-plots. I add All's Well that Ends Well, originally intended as the counterpart of Love's Labour's Lost, Taming of the Shrew, Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, and Romeo and Juliet.

Second Epoch.

Richard II.
King John.
Henry VI.,—rifacimento only.
Richard III.

Third Epoch.

Henry IV.
Henry V.
Merry Wives of Windsor.
Henry VIII.,—a sort of historical masque, or show play.
Notes on the Tempest

Fourth Epoch

gives all the graces and facilities of a genius in full possession and habitual exercise of power, and peculiarly of the feminine, the lady's character.

Tempest.
As You Like It.
Merchant of Venice.
Twelfth Night.

and, finally at its very point of culmination,—

Lear.
Hamlet.
Macbeth.
Othello.

Last Epoch,

when the energies of intellect in the cycle of genius were, though in a rich and more potentiated form, becoming predominant over passion and creative self-manifestation.

Measure for Measure.
Timon of Athens.
Coriolanus.
Julius Caesar.
Antony and Cleopatra.
Troilus and Cressida.

Merciful, wonder-making Heaven! what a man was this Shakspeare! Myriad-minded, indeed, he was.

NOTES ON THE TEMPEST.

There is a sort of improbability with which we are shocked in dramatic representation, not less than in a narrative of real life. Consequently, there must be rules respecting it; and as rules are nothing but means to an end previously ascertained—(inattention to which simple truth has been the occasion of all the pedantry of the French school),—we must first determine what the immediate end or object of the drama is. And here, as I have previously remarked, I find two extremes of critical decision;—the French, which evidently presupposes that a perfect delusion is to be aimed at,—an opinion which needs no fresh confutation; and the exact opposite to it, brought forward by Dr.
Notes on the Tempest

Johnson, who supposes the auditors throughout in the full reflective knowledge of the contrary. In evincing the impossibility of delusion, he makes no sufficient allowance for an intermediate state, which I have before distinguished by the term, illusion, and have attempted to illustrate its quality and character by reference to our mental state, when dreaming. In both cases we simply do not judge the imagery to be unreal; there is a negative reality, and no more. Whatever, therefore, tends to prevent the mind from placing itself, or being placed, gradually in that state in which the images have such negative reality for the auditor, destroys this illusion, and is dramatically improbable.

Now the production of this effect—a sense of improbability—will depend on the degree of excitement in which the mind is supposed to be. Many things would be intolerable in the first scene of a play, that would not at all interrupt our enjoyment in the height of the interest, when the narrow cockpit may be made to hold

The vasty field of France, or we may cram
Within its wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt.

Again, on the other hand, many obvious improbabilities will be endured, as belonging to the groundwork of the story rather than to the drama itself, in the first scenes, which would disturb or disentrance us from all illusion in the acme of our excitement; as for instance, Lear’s division of his kingdom, and the banishment of Cordelia.

But, although the other excellences of the drama besides this dramatic probability, as unity of interest, with distinctness and subordination of the characters, and appropriateness of style, are all, so far as they tend to increase the inward excitement, means towards accomplishing the chief end, that of producing and supporting this willing illusion,—yet they do not on that account cease to be ends themselves; and we must remember that, as such, they carry their own justification with them, as long as they do not contravene or interrupt the total illusion. It is not even always, or of necessity, an objection to them, that they prevent the illusion from rising to as great a height as it might otherwise have attained;—it is enough that they are simply compatible with as high a
degree of it as is requisite for the purpose. Nay, upon particular occasions, a palpable improbability may be hazarded by a great genius for the express purpose of keeping down the interest of a merely instrumental scene, which would otherwise make too great an impression for the harmony of the entire illusion. Had the panorama been invented in the time of Pope Leo X., Raffael would still, I doubt not, have smiled in contempt at the regret, that the broom-twigs and scrubby bushes at the back of some of his grand pictures were not as probable trees as those in the exhibition.

The Tempest is a specimen of the purely romantic drama, in which the interest is not historical, or dependent upon fidelity of portraiture, or the natural connexion of events,—but is a birth of the imagination, and rests only on the coaptation and union of the elements granted to, or assumed by, the poet. It is a species of drama which owes no allegiance to time or space, and in which, therefore, errors of chronology and geography—no mortal sins in any species—are venial faults, and count for nothing. It addresses itself entirely to the imaginative faculty; and although the illusion may be assisted by the effect on the senses of the complicated scenery and decorations of modern times, yet this sort of assistance is dangerous. For the principal and only genuine excitement ought to come from within,—from the moved and sympathetic imagination; whereas, where so much is addressed to the mere external senses of seeing and hearing, the spiritual vision is apt to languish, and the attraction from without will withdraw the mind from the proper and only legitimate interest which is intended to spring from within.

The romance opens with a busy scene admirably appropriate to the kind of drama, and giving, as it were, the key-note to the whole harmony. It prepares and initiates the excitement required for the entire piece, and yet does not demand any thing from the spectators, which their previous habits had not fitted them to understand. It is the bustle of a tempest, from which the real horrors are abstracted;—therefore it is poetical, though not in strictness natural—(the distinction to which I have so often alluded)—and is purposely restrained from centering the interest on itself, but used merely as an induction or tuning for what is to follow.
Notes on the Tempest

In the second scene, Prospero’s speeches, till the entrance of Ariel, contain the finest example, I remember, of retrospective narration for the purpose of exciting immediate interest, and putting the audience in possession of all the information necessary for the understanding of the plot.\(^1\) Observe, too, the perfect probability of the moment chosen by Prospero (the very Shakspeare himself, as it were, of the tempest) to open out the truth to his daughter, his own romantic bearing, and how completely any thing that might have been disagreeable to us in the magician, is reconciled and shaded in the humanity and natural feelings of the father. In the very first speech of Miranda the simplicity and tenderness of her character are at once laid open:—it would have been lost in direct contact with the agitation of the first scene. The opinion once prevailed, but, happily, is now abandoned, that Fletcher alone wrote for women;—the truth is, that with very few, and those partial, exceptions, the female characters in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher are, when of the light kind, not decent; when heroic, complete viragos. But in Shakspeare all the elements of womanhood are holy, and there is the sweet, yet dignified feeling of all that continues society, as sense of ancestry and of sex, with a purity unassailable by sophistry, because it rests not in the analytic processes, but in that same equipoise of the faculties, during which the feelings are representative of all past experience,—not of the individual only, but of all those by whom she has been educated, and their predecessors even up to the first mother that lived. Shakspeare saw that the want of prominence, which Pope notices for sarcasm, was the blessed beauty of the woman’s character, and knew that it arose not from any deficiency, but from the more exquisite harmony of all the parts of the moral being constituting one living total of head and heart. He has drawn it, indeed, in all its distinctive energies of faith, patience, constancy, fort-

---

\(^1\) Pro. Mark his condition, and th' event; then tell me,
    If this might be a brother.

Mir. I should sin,
    To think but nobly of my grandmother;
      Good wombs have bore bad sons.

Pro. Now the condition, &c.

Theobald has a note upon this passage, and suggests that Shakspeare placed it thus:—

Pro. Good wombs have bore bad sons,—
    Now the condition.

Mr. Coleridge writes in the margin: ‘I cannot but believe that Theobald is quite right.’—Ed.
Notes on the Tempest

tude,—shown in all of them as following the heart, which gives its results by a nice tact and happy intuition, without the intervention of the discursive faculty, sees all things in and by the light of the affections, and errs, if it ever err, in the exaggerations of love alone. In all the Shakspereian women there is essentially the same foundation and principle; the distinct individuality and variety are merely the result of the modification of circumstances, whether in Miranda the maiden, in Imogen the wife, or in Katherine the queen.

But to return. The appearance and characters of the super or ultra-natural servants are finely contrasted. Ariel has in every thing the airy tint which gives the name; and it is worthy of remark that Miranda is never directly brought into comparison with Ariel, lest the natural and human of the one and the supernatural of the other should tend to neutralize each other; Caliban, on the other hand, is all earth, all condensed and gross in feelings and images; he has the dawning of understanding without reason or the moral sense, and in him, as in some brute animals, this advance to the intellectual faculties, without the moral sense, is marked by the appearance of vice. For it is in the primacy of the moral being only that man is truly human; in his intellectual powers he is certainly approached by the brutes, and, man’s whole system duly considered, those powers cannot be considered other than means to an end, that is, to morality.

In this scene, as it proceeds, is displayed the impression made by Ferdinand and Miranda on each other; it is love at first sight;—

at the first sight
They have chang’d eyes:—

and it appears to me, that in all cases of real love, it is at one moment that it takes place. That moment may have been prepared by previous esteem, admiration, or even affection,—yet love seems to require a momentary act of volition, by which a tacit bond of devotion is imposed,—a bond not to be thereafter broken without violating what should be sacred in our nature. How finely is the true Shakspereian scene contrasted with Dryden’s vulgar alteration of it in which a mere ludicrous psychological experiment, as it were, is tried—displaying nothing but
Notes on the Tempest

indelicacy without passion. Prospero’s interruption of the courtship has often seemed to me to have no sufficient motive; still his alleged reason—

lest too light winning
Make the prize light—

is enough for the ethereal connections of the romantic imagination, although it would not be so for the historical.\(^1\) The whole courting scene, indeed, in the beginning of the third act, between the lovers, is a masterpiece; and the first dawn of disobedience in the mind of Miranda to the command of her father is very finely drawn, so as to seem the working of the Scriptural command Thou shalt leave father and mother, &c. O! with what exquisite purity this scene is conceived and executed! Shakspeare may sometimes be gross, but I boldly say that he is always moral and modest. Alas! in this our day decency of manners is preserved at the expense of morality of heart, and delicacies for vice are allowed, whilst grossness against it is hypocritically, or at least morbidly, condemned.

In this play are admirably sketched the vices generally accompanying a low degree of civilization; and in the first scene of the second act Shakspeare has, as in many other places, shown the tendency in bad men to indulge in scorn and contemptuous expressions, as a mode of getting rid of their own uneasy feelings of inferiority to the good, and also, by making the good ridiculous, of rendering the transition of others to wickedness easy. Shakspeare never puts habitual scorn into the mouths of other than bad men, as here in the instances of Antonio and Sebastian. The scene of the intended assassination of Alonzo and Gonzalo is an exact counterpart of the scene between Macbeth and his lady, only pitched in a lower key throughout, as designed to be frustrated and concealed, and exhibiting the same profound management in the manner of familiarizing a mind, not immediately recipient, to the suggestion of guilt, by associating the proposed crime with something ludicrous or out of place,—something not habitually matter of reverence. By this kind of sophistry the imagination

---

\(^1\) Fer. Yes, faith, and all his Lords, the Duke of Milan,
And his brave son, being twain.
Theobald remarks that no body was lost in the wreck; and yet that no such character is introduced in the fable, as the Duke of Milan’s son. Mr. C. notes: ‘Must not Ferdinand have believed he was lost in the fleet that the tempest scattered?’—Ed.
and fancy are first bribed to contemplate the suggested act, and at length to become acquainted with it. Observe how the effect of this scene is heightened by contrast with another counterpoint of it in low life,—that between the conspirators Stephano, Caliban, and Trinculo in the second scene of the third act, in which there are the same essential characteristics.

In this play and in this scene of it are also shown the springs of the vulgar in politics,—of that kind of politics which is inwoven with human nature. In his treatment of this subject, wherever it occurs, Shakspeare is quite peculiar. In other writers we find the particular opinions of the individual; in Massinger it is rank republicanism; in Beaumont and Fletcher even jure divino principles are carried to excess;—but Shakspeare never promulgates any party tenets. He is always the philosopher and the moralist, but at the same time with a profound veneration for all the established institutions of society, and for those classes which form the permanent elements of the state—especially never introducing a professional character, as such, otherwise than as respectable. If he must have any name, he should be styled a philosophical aristocrat, delighting in those hereditary institutions which have a tendency to bind one age to another, and in that distinction of ranks, of which, although few may be in possession, all enjoy the advantages. Hence, again, you will observe the good nature with which he seems always to make sport with the passions and follies of a mob, as with an irrational animal. He is never angry with it, but hugely content with holding up its absurdities to its face; and sometimes you may trace a tone of almost affectionate superiority, something like that in which a father speaks of the rogueries of a child. See the good-humoured way in which he describes Stephano passing from the most licentious freedom to absolute despotism over Trinculo and Caliban. The truth is, Shakspeare's characters are all genera intensely individualized; the results of meditation, of which observation supplied the drapery and the colours necessary to combine them with each other. He had virtually surveyed all the great component powers and impulses of human nature,—had seen that their different combinations and subordinations were in fact the individualizers of men, and showed how their harmony was produced by reciprocal disproportions.
Notes on Love’s Labour’s Lost. 71

of excess or deficiency. The language in which these truths are expressed was not drawn from any set fashion, but from the profoundest depths of his moral being, and is therefore for all ages.

LOVE’S LABOUR’S LOST.

The characters in this play are either impersonated out of Shakspeare’s own multiformity by imaginative self-position or out of such as a country town and schoolboy’s observation might supply,—the curate, the schoolmaster, the Armado, (who even in my time was not extinct in the cheaper inns of North Wales) and so on. The satire is chiefly on follies of words. Biron and Rosaline are evidently the pre-existent state of Benedict and Beatrice, and so, perhaps, is Boyet of Lafeu, and Costard of the Tapster in Measure for Measure; and the frequency of the rhymes, the sweetness as well as the smoothness of the metre, and the number of acute and fancifully illustrated aphorisms, are all as they ought to be in a poet’s youth. True genius begins by generalizing and condensing; it ends in realizing and expanding. It first collects the seeds.

Yet if this juvenile drama had been the only one extant of our Shakspeare, and we possessed the tradition only of his riper works, or accounts of them in writers who had not even mentioned this play,—how many of Shakspeare’s characteristic features might we not still have discovered in Love’s Labour’s Lost, though as in a portrait taken of him in his boyhood?

I can never sufficiently admire the wonderful activity of thought throughout the whole of the first scene of the play, rendered natural, as it is, by the choice of the characters, and the whimsical determination on which the drama is founded. A whimsical determination certainly;—yet not altogether so very improbable to those who are conversant in the history of the middle ages, with their Courts of Love, and all that lighter drapery of chivalry, which engaged even mighty kings with a sort of serio-comic interest, and may well be supposed to have occupied more completely the smaller princes, at a time when the noble’s or prince’s court contained the only theatre of the domain
or principality. This sort of story, too, was admirably suited to Shakspeare's times, when the English court was still the foster-mother of the state, and the muses; and when, in consequence, the courtiers, and men of rank and fashion, affected a display of wit, point, and sententious observation, that would be deemed intolerable at present,—but in which a hundred years of controversy, involving every great political, and every dear domestic, interest, had trained all but the lowest classes to participate. Add to this the very style of the sermons of the time, and the eagerness of the Protestants to distinguish themselves by long and frequent preaching, and it will be found that, from the reign of Henry VIII. to the abdication of James II. no country ever received such a national education as England.

Hence the comic matter chosen in the first instance is a ridiculous imitation or apery of this constant striving after logical precision, and subtle opposition of thoughts, together with a making the most of every conception or image, by expressing it under the least expected property belonging to it, and this, again, rendered specially absurd by being applied to the most current subjects and occurrences. The phrases and modes of combination in argument were caught by the most ignorant from the custom of the age, and their ridiculous misapplication of them is most amusingly exhibited in Costard; whilst examples suited only to the gravest propositions and impersonations, or apostrophes to abstract thoughts impersonated, which are in fact the natural language only of the most vehement agitations of the mind, are adopted by the coxcombry of Armado as mere artifices of ornament.

The same kind of intellectual action is exhibited in a more serious and elevated strain in many other parts of this play. Biron's speech at the end of the fourth act is an excellent specimen of it. It is logic clothed in rhetoric; —but observe how Shakspeare, in his two-fold being of poet and philosopher, avails himself of it to convey profound truths in the most lively images,—the whole remaining faithful to the character supposed to utter the lines, and the expressions themselves constituting a further development of that character:—

Other slow arts entirely keep the brain:
And therefore finding barren practisers,
Notes on Love’s Labour’s Lost

Scarce shew a harvest of their heavy toil:
But love, first learned in a lady’s eyes,
Lives not alone immured in the brain;
But, with the motion of all elements,
Courses as swift as thought in every power;
And gives to every power a double power,
Above their functions and their offices.
It adds a precious seeing to the eye,
A lover’s eyes will gaze an eagle blind;
A lover’s ear will hear the lowest sound,
When the suspicious tread of theft is stopp’d:
Love’s feeling is more soft and sensible,
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails;
Love’s tongue proves dainty Bacchus gross in taste;
For valour, is not love a Hercules,
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?
Subtle as Sphinx; as sweet and musical,
As bright Apollo’s lute, strung with his hair;
And when love speaks, the voice of all the gods
Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.
Never durst poet touch a pen to write,
Until his ink were temper’d with love’s sighs;
O, then his lines would ravish savage ears,
And plant in tyrants mild humility.
From women’s eyes this doctrine I derive:
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;
They are the books, the arts, the academies,
That shew, contain, and nourish all the world;
Else, none at all in aught proves excellent;
Then fools you were these women to forswear;
Or, keeping what is sworn, you will prove fools.
For wisdom’s sake, a word that all men love;
Or for love’s sake, a word that loves all men;
Or for men’s sake, the authors of these women;
Or women’s sake, by whom we men are men;
Let us once lose our oaths, to find ourselves,
Or else we lose ourselves to keep our oaths:
It is religion, to be thus forsworn:
For charity itself fulfilth the law:
And who can sever love from charity?

This is quite a study;—sometimes you see this youthful
god of poetry connecting disparate thoughts purely by
means of resemblances in the words expressing them,—
a thing in character in lighter comedy, especially of that
kind in which Shakspeare delights, namely, the purposed
display of wit, though sometimes, too, disfiguring his
graver scenes;—but more often you may see him doubling
the natural connection or order of logical consequence in
the thoughts by the introduction of an artificial and
r:*

This is quite a study;—sometimes you see this youthful
god of poetry connecting disparate thoughts purely by
means of resemblances in the words expressing them,—
a thing in character in lighter comedy, especially of that
kind in which Shakspeare delights, namely, the purposed
display of wit, though sometimes, too, disfiguring his
graver scenes;—but more often you may see him doubling
the natural connection or order of logical consequence in
the thoughts by the introduction of an artificial and
r:*
sought-for resemblance in the words, as, for instance, in the third line of the play,—

And then grace us in the disgrace of death;—
this being a figure often having its force and propriety, as justified by the law of passion, which, inducing in the mind an unusual activity, seeks for means to waste its superfluity,—when in the highest degree—in lyric repetitions and sublime tautology—(at her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down; at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell down dead),—and, in lower degrees, in making the words themselves the subjects and materials of that surplus action, and for the same cause that agitates our limbs, and forces our very gestures into a tempest in states of high excitement.

The mere style of narration in Love’s Labour’s Lost, like that of Ægeon in the first scene of the Comedy of Errors, and of the Captain in the second scene of Macbeth, seems imitated with its defects and its beauties from Sir Philip Sidney; whose Arcadia, though not then published, was already well-known in manuscript copies, and could hardly have escaped the notice and admiration of Shakespeare as the friend and client of the Earl of Southampton. The chief defect consists in the parentheses and parenthetic thoughts and descriptions, suited neither to the passion of the speaker, nor the purpose of the person to whom the information is to be given, but manifestly betraying the author himself,—not by way of continuous undersong, but—palpably, and so as to show themselves addressed to the general reader. However, it is not unimportant to notice how strong a presumption the diction and allusions of this play afford, that, though Shakespeare’s acquirements in the dead languages might not be such as we suppose in a learned education, his habits had, nevertheless, been scholastic, and those of a student. For a young author’s first work almost always bespeaks his recent pursuits, and his first observations of life are either drawn from the immediate employments of his youth, and from the characters and images most deeply impressed on his mind in the situations in which those employments had placed him;—or else they are fixed on such objects and occurrences in the world, as are easily connected with, and seem to bear upon, his studies and the hitherto exclusive subjects
Notes on Love's Labour's Lost of his meditation. Just as Ben Jonson, who applied himself to the drama after having served in Flanders, fills his earliest plays with true or pretended soldiers, the wrongs and neglects of the former, and the absurd boasts and knavery of their counterfeits. So Lessing's first comedies are placed in the universities, and consist of events and characters conceivable in an academic life.

I will only further remark the sweet and tempered gravity, with which Shakspeare in the end draws the only fitting moral which such a drama afforded. Here Rosaline rises up to the full height of Beatrice:

Ros. Oft have I heard of you, my lord Biron
Before I saw you, and the world's large tongue
Proclaims you for a man replete with mocks;
Full of comparisons, and wounding flouts,
Which you on all estates will execute
That lie within the mercy of your wit:
To weed this wormwood from your fruitful brain,
And therewithal, to win me, if you please,
(Without the which I am not to be won,)
You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day
Visit the speechless sick, and still converse
With groaning wretches; and your talk shall be,
With all the fierce endeavour of your wit,
To enforce the pained impotent to smile.

Biron. To move wild laughter in the throat of death?
It cannot be; it is impossible;
Mirth cannot move a soul in agony.

Ros. Why, that's the way to choke a gibing spirit,
Whose influence is begot of that loose grace,
Which shallow laughing hearers give to fools:
A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it: then, if sickly ears,
Deaf'd with the clamours of their own dear groans,
Will hear your idle soins, continue then,
And I will have you, and that fault withal;
But, if they will not, throw away that spirit,
And I shall find you empty of that fault,
Right joyful of your reformation.

Act v. sc. 2. In Biron's speech to the Princess:

—and, therefore, like the eye,
Full of straying shapes, of habits, and of forms—

Either read stray, which I prefer; or throw full back to the preceding lines,—

like the eye, full
Of straying shapes, &c.
76 Notes on Midsummer Night's Dream

In the same scene:

_Biron._ And what to me, my love? and what to me?
_Ros._ You must be purged too, your sins are rank;
You are attaint with fault and perjury:
Therefore, if you my favour mean to get,
A twelvemonth shall you spend, and never rest,
But seek the weary beds of people sick.

There can be no doubt, indeed, about the propriety of expunging this speech of Rosaline's; it soils the very page that retains it. But I do not agree with Warburton and others in striking out the preceding line also. It is quite in Biron's character; and Rosaline not answering it immediately, Dumarine takes up the question for him, and, after he and Longaville are answered, Biron, with evident propriety, says:—

_Shrub_ my mistress? &c.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

Act i. sc. i.

_Herm._ O cross! too high to be enthrall'd to low—
_Lys._ Or else misgrafted, in respect of years;
_Herm._ O spite! too old to be engag'd to young—
_Lys._ Or else it stood upon the choice of friends;
_Herm._ O hell! to chuse love by another's eye!

There is no authority for any alteration;—but I never can help feeling how great an improvement it would be, if the two former of Hermia's exclamations were omitted; —the third and only appropriate one would then become a beauty, and most natural.

_Ib._ Helena's speech:—

I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight, &c.

I am convinced that Shakspeare availed himself of the title of this play in his own mind, and worked upon it as a dream throughout, but especially, and, perhaps, unpleasingly, in this broad determination of ungrateful treachery in Helena, so undisguisedly avowed to herself, and this, too, after the witty cool philosophizing that precedes. The act itself is natural, and the resolve so to act is, I fear, likewise too true a picture of the lax hold which principles
have on a woman's heart, when opposed to, or even separated from, passion and inclination. For women are less hypocrites to their own minds than men are, because in general they feel less proportionate abhorrence of moral evil in and for itself, and more of its outward consequences, as detection, and loss of character than men,—their natures being almost wholly extroitive. Still, however just in itself, the representation of this is not poetical; we shrink from it, and cannot harmonize it with the ideal.


Through bush, through briar—

Through flood, through fire—

What a noble pair of ears this worthy Theobald must have had! The eight amhimacers or cretics,—

Ovéh hill, óvéh dale,
Thóro' bush, thóro' bríar,
Ovéh párk, óvéh pálé,
Thóro' főód, thóro' fire—

have a delightful effect on the ear in their sweet transition to the trochaic,—

Í dō wándër év'ry whērē
Swiftër thān thē mǒōnēs sphērē, &c.—

The last words as sustaining the rhyme, must be considered, as in fact they are, trochees in time.

It may be worth while to give some correct examples in English of the principal metrical feet:

Pyrrhic or Dibrach, o o = bōdy, spirit.
Tribrach, o o o = nōbōdy, hastily pronounced.
Iambus, o — = delight.
Trochee, — o = lightlē.
Spondee, — — = Gōd spake.

The paucity of spondees in single words in English and, indeed, in the modern languages in general, makes, perhaps, the greatest distinction, metrically considered, between them and the Greek and Latin.

Dactyl, — o o = mérilē.
Anapæst, o o — = à prōpōs, or the first three syllables of cērēmōny.¹

¹ Written probably by mistake for "cērēmōnious."
Notes on Comedy of Errors

Amphibrachys, _does distressful.
Amphimacer,  does over hill.
Antibacchius,  does the Lord God.
Bacchius —  does Hellwell.
Molossus,  does John James Jones.

These simple feet may suffice for understanding the metres of Shakspeare, for the greater part at least;—but Milton cannot be made harmoniously intelligible without the composite feet, the Ionics, Paons, and Epitrites.

Ib. sc. 2. Titania’s speech:—(Theobald adopting Warburton’s reading.)

Which she, with pretty and with swimming gate
Follying (her womb then rich with my young squire)
Would imitate, &c.

Oh! oh! Heaven have mercy on poor Shakspeare, and also on Mr. Warburton’s mind’s eye!

Act v. sc. 1. Theseus’ speech:—(Theobald.)

And what poor [willing] duty cannot do,
Noble respect takes it in might, not merit.

To my ears it would read far more Shakspearian thus:—

And what poor duty cannot do, yet would,
Noble respect, &c.

Ib. sc. 2.

_Puck._ Now the hungry lion roars,
And the wolf behowls the moon;
Whilst the heavy ploughman snores
All with weary task foredone, &c.

Very Anacreon in perfectness, proportion, grace, and spontaneity! So far it is Greek;—but then add, O! what wealth, what wild ranging, and yet what compression and condensation of, English fancy! In truth, there is nothing in Anacreon more perfect than these thirty lines, or half so rich and imaginative. They form a speckless diamond.

COMEDY OF ERRORS.

The myriad-minded man, our, and all men’s, Shakspeare, has in this piece presented us with a legitimate farce in exactest consonance with the philosophical principles and character of farce, as distinguished from comedy and from
Notes on As You Like It

entertainments. A proper farce is mainly distinguished from comedy by the license allowed, and even required, in the fable, in order to produce strange and laughable situations. The story need not be probable, it is enough that it is possible. A comedy would scarcely allow even the two Antipholuses; because, although there have been instances of almost indistinguishable likeness in two persons, yet these are mere individual accidents, *casus ludentis naturae*, and the *verum* will not excuse the *inverisimile*. But farce dares add the two Dromios, and is justified in so doing by the laws of its end and constitution. In a word, farces commence in a postulate, which must be granted.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

Act i. sc. i.

*Oli.* What, boy!

*Orla.* Come, come, elder brother, you are too young in this.

*Oli.* Wilt thou lay hands on me, villain?

There is a beauty here. The word 'boy' naturally provokes and awakens in Orlando the sense of his manly powers; and with the retort of 'elder brother,' he grasps him with firm hands, and makes him feel he is no boy.

*Ib.* *Oli.* Farewell, good Charles.—Now will I stir this gamester: I hope, I shall see an end of him; for my soul, yet I know not why, hates nothing more than him. Yet he's gentle; never school'd, and yet learn'd; full of noble device; of all sorts enchantingly beloved! and, indeed, so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people, who best know him, that I am altogether mispriz'd: but it shall not be so long; this wrestler shall clear all.

This has always appeared to me one of the most un-Shakspearean speeches in all the genuine works of our poet; yet I should be nothing surpriz'd, and greatly pleased, to find it hereafter a fresh beauty, as has so often happened to me with other supposed defects of great men. 1810.

It is too venturous to charge a passage in Shakspeare with want of truth to nature; and yet at first sight this speech of Oliver's expresses truths, which it seems almost impossible that any mind should so distinctly, so livelily, and so voluntarily, have presented to itself, in connection with feelings and intentions so malignant, and so contrary.
to those which the qualities expressed would naturally have called forth. But I dare not say that this seeming unnaturalness is not in the nature of an abused wilfulness, when united with a strong intellect. In such characters there is sometimes a gloomy self-gratification in making the absoluteness of the will (sit pro ratione voluntas!) evident to themselves by setting the reason and the conscience in full array against it. 1818.

Ib. sc. 2.

*Celia.* If you saw yourself with your eyes, or knew yourself with your judgment, the fear of your adventure would counsel you to a more equal enterprize.

Surely it should be 'our eyes' and 'our judgment.'

Ib. sc. 3.

*Cel.* But is all this for your father?

*Ros.* No, some of it is for my child's father.

Theobald restores this as the reading of the older editions. It may be so: but who can doubt that it is a mistake for 'my father's child,' meaning herself? According to Theobald's note, a most indelicate anticipation is put into the mouth of Rosalind without reason;—and besides what a strange thought, and how out of place, and unintelligible!

Act. iv. sc. 2.

Take thou no scorn
To wear the horn, the lusty horn;
It was a crest ere thou wast born.

I question whether there exists a parallel instance of a phrase, that like this of 'horns' is universal in all languages, and yet for which no one has discovered even a plausible origin.

**TWELFTH NIGHT.**

Act i. sc. i. Duke's speech:—

—so full of shapes is fancy,
That it alone is high fantastical.

*Warburton's* alteration of *is* into *in* is needless. 'Fancy' may very well be interpreted 'exclusive affection,' or 'passionate preference.' Thus, bird-fanciers, gentlemen of the fancy, that is, amateurs of boxing, &c. The play of
assimilation,—the meaning one sense chiefly, and yet keeping both senses in view, is perfectly Shakspearian.

Act. ii. sc. 3. Sir Andrew’s speech:—

An explanatory note on Pigromonitius would have been more acceptable than Theobald’s grand discovery that ‘lemon’ ought to be ‘lemian.’

Ib. Sir Toby’s speech: (Warburton’s note on the Peripatetic philosophy.)

Shall we rouse the night-owl in a catch, that will draw three souls out of one weaver?

O genuine, and inimitable (at least I hope so) Warburton! This note of thine, if but one in five millions, would be half a one too much.

Ib. sc. 4.

Duke. My life upon’t, young though thou art, thine eye
    Hath stay’d upon some favour that it loves;
    Hath it not, boy?

Vio. A little, by your favour.

Duke. What kind of woman is’t?

And yet Viola was to have been presented to Orsino as a eunuch !—Act i. sc. 2. Viola’s speech. Either she forgot this, or else she had altered her plan.

Ib.

Vio. A blank, my lord: she never told her love —
    But let concealment, &c.

After the first line, (of which the last five words should be spoken with, and drop down in, a deep sigh) the actress ought to make a pause; and then start afresh, from the activity of thought, born of suppressed feelings, and which thought had accumulated during the brief interval, as vital heat under the skin during a dip in cold water.

Ib. sc. 5.

Fabian. Though our silence be drawn from us by cars, yet peace.

Perhaps, ‘cables.’

Act iii. sc. 1.

Clown. A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit. (Theobald’s note.)

Theobald’s etymology of ‘cheveril’ is, of course, quite right;—but he is mistaken in supposing that there were no
82 Notes on All’s Well that Ends Well

such things as gloves of chicken-skin. They were at one
time a main article in chirocosmetics.

Act v. sc. i. Clown’s speech:—

So that, conclusions to be as kisses, if your four negatives make
your two affirmatives, why, then, the worse for my friends, and the
better for my foes.

(Warburton reads ‘conclusion to be asked, is.’)

Surely Warburton could never have wooed by kisses
and won, or he would not have flounder-flatted so
just and humorous, nor less pleasing than humorous, an
image into so profound a nihility. In the name of love
and wonder, do not four kisses make a double affirmative?
The humour lies in the whispered ‘No!’ and the inviting
‘Don’t!’ with which the maiden’s kisses are accompanied,
and thence compared to negatives, which by repetition
constitute an affirmative.

*ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.*

Act i. sc. i.

Count. If the living be enemy to the grief, the excess makes it
soon mortal.

Bert. Madam, I desire your holy wishes.

Laf. How understand we that?

Bertram and Lafeu, I imagine, both speak together,—
Lafeu referring to the Countess’s rather obscure remark.

Act ii. sc. i. (Warburton’s note.)

King. —let higher Italy
(Those ’bated, that inherit but the fall
Of the last monarchy) see, that you come
Not to woo honour, but to wed it.

It would be, I own, an audacious and unjustifiable
change of the text; but yet, as a mere conjecture, I
venture to suggest ‘bastards,’ for ‘bated.’ As it stands,
in spite of Warburton’s note, I can make little or nothing
of it. Why should the king except the then most ille-
trious states, which, as being republics, were the more
truly inheritors of the Roman grandeur?—With my con-
jecture, the sense would be;—‘let higher, or the more
northern part of Italy—(unless ‘higher’ be a corruption
Notes on Merry Wives of Windsor

for ‘hir’d,’—the metre seeming to demand a monosyllable) (those bastards that inherit the infamy only of their fathers) see, &c. ’ The following ‘woo’ and ‘wed’ are so far confirmative as they indicate Shakspeare’s manner of connexion by unmarked influences of association from some preceding metaphor. This it is which makes his style so peculiarly vital and organic. Likewise ‘those girls of Italy’ strengthen the guess. The absurdity of Warburton’s gloss, which represents the king calling Italy superior, and then excepting the only part the lords were going to visit, must strike every one.

Ib. sc. 3.

Laj. They say, miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons to make modern and familiar, things supernatural and causeless.

Shakspeare, inspired, as it might seem, with all knowledge, here uses the word ‘causeless’ in its strict philosophical sense;—cause being truly predicable only of phenomena, that is, things natural, and not of noumena, or things supernatural.

Act iii. sc. 5.

Dia. The Count Rousillon:—know you such a one?
Hel. But by the ear that hears most nobly of him;
His face I know not.

Shall we say here, that Shakspeare has unnecessarily made his loveliest character utter a lie?—Or shall we dare think that, where to deceive was necessary, he thought a pretended verbal verity a double crime, equally with the other a lie to the hearer, and at the same time an attempt to lie to one’s own conscience?

MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

Act i. sc. 1.

Shal. The luce is the fresh fish, the salt fish is an old coat.

I cannot understand this. Perhaps there is a corruption both of words and speakers. Shallow no sooner corrects one mistake of Sir Hugh’s, namely, ‘louse’ for ‘luce,’ a pike, but the honest Welchman falls into another, namely, ‘cod’ (baccalà), Cambrice ‘cot’ for coat.
84 Notes on Measure for Measure

_Shal._ The luce is the fresh fish—
_Evans._ The salt fish is an old cot.

‘Luce is a fresh fish, and not a louse;’ says Shallow.
‘Aye, aye,’ quoth Sir Hugh; ‘the _fresh_ fish is the luce;
it is an old cod that is the salt fish.’ At all events, as the
text stands, there is no sense at all in the words.
Ib. sc. 3.

_Fal._ Now, the report goes, she has all the rule of her husband’s
purse; she hath a legion of angels.
_Pist._ As many devils entertain; and _To her, boy_, say I.

Perhaps it is—

As many devils enter (or enter’d) swine; and _to her, boy_, say I—

a somewhat profane, but not un-Shakspearian, allusion to
the ‘legion’ in St. Luke’s ‘gospel.’

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

This play, which is Shakspeare’s throughout, is to me the
most painful—say rather, the only painful—part of his
genuine works. The comic and tragic parts equally border
on the _μυστήριον_, — the one being disgusting, the other
horrible; and the pardon and marriage of Angelo not
merely baffles the strong indignant claim of justice—(for
cruelty, with lust and damnable baseness, cannot be for-
given, because we cannot conceive them as being morally
repented of;) but it is likewise degrading to the character
of woman. Beaumont and Fletcher, who can follow Shaks-
peare in his errors only, have presented a still worse,
because more loathsome and contradictory, instance of
the same kind in the Night-Walker, in the marriage of
Alathe to Algripe. Of the counter-balancing beauties of
Measure for Measure, I need say nothing; for I have
already remarked that the play is Shakspeare’s throughout.
Act iii. sc. I.

_Ay, but to die, and go we know not where, &c.

This natural fear of Claudio, from the antipathy we have to
death, seems very little varied from that infamous wish of Mæcenas,
recorded in the 101st epistle of Seneca:

_Debilem facito manu,_
_Debilem pede, coxa, &c._ Warburton’s note.

I cannot but think this rather an heroic resolve, than
Notes on Cymbeline

an infamous wish. It appears to me to be the grandest symptom of an immortal spirit, when even that bedimmed and overwhelmed spirit recked not of its own immortality, still to seek to be,—to be a mind, a will.

As fame is to reputation, so heaven is to an estate, or immediate advantage. The difference is, that the self-love of the former cannot exist but by a complete suppression and habitual supplantation of immediate selfishness. In one point of view, the miser is more estimable than the spendthrift;—only that the miser’s present feelings are as much of the present as the spendthrift’s. But ceteris paribus, that is, upon the supposition that whatever is good or lovely in the one coexists equally in the other, then, doubtless, the master of the present is less a selfish being, an animal, than he who lives for the moment with no inheritance in the future. Whatever can degrade man, is supposed in the latter case, whatever can elevate him, in the former. And as to self;—strange and generous self! that can only be such a self by a complete divestment of all that men call self,—of all that can make it either practically to others, or consciously to the individual himself, different from the human race in its ideal. Such self is but a perpetual religion, an inalienable acknowledgment of God, the sole basis and ground of being. In this sense, how can I love God, and not love myself, as far as it is of God?

Ib. sc. 2.

Pattern in himself to know,
Grace to stand, and virtue go.

Worse metre, indeed, but better English would be,—
Grace to stand, virtue to go.

CYMBELINE.

Act i. sc. 1.

You do not meet a man, but, frowns: our bloods
No more obey the heavens, than our courtiers’
Still seem, as does the king’s.

There can be little doubt of Mr. Tyrwhitt’s emendations of ‘courtiers’ and ‘king,’ as to the sense;—only it is not impossible that Shakspere’s dramatic language may allow of the word, ‘brows’ or ‘faces’ being understood after the
word 'courtiers,' which might then remain in the genitive case plural. But the nominative plural makes excellent sense, and is sufficiently elegant, and sounds to my ear Shakspearian. What, however, is meant by 'our bloods no more obey the heavens?'—Dr. Johnson's assertion that 'bloods' signify 'countenances,' is, I think, mistaken both in the thought conveyed—for it was never a popular belief that the stars governed men's countenances—and in the usage, which requires an antithesis of the blood,—or the temperament of the four humours, choler, melancholy, phlegm, and the red globules, or the sanguine portion, which was supposed not to be in our own power, but, to be dependent on the influences of the heavenly bodies,—and the countenances which are in our power really, though from flattery we bring them into a no less apparent dependence on the sovereign, than the former are in actual dependence on the constellations.

I have sometimes thought that the word 'courtiers' was a misprint for 'countenances,' arising from an anticipation, by foreglance of the compositor's eye, of the word 'courtier' a few lines below. The written r is easily and often confounded with the written n. The compositor read the first syllable court, and—his eye at the same time catching the word 'courtier' lower down—he completed the word without reconsulting the copy. It is not unlikely that Shakspeare intended first to express, generally the same thought, which a little afterwards he repeats with a particular application to the persons meant;—a common usage of the pronominal 'our,' where the speaker does not really mean to include himself; and the word 'you' is an additional confirmation of the 'our,' being used in this place, for 'men' generally and indefinitely, just as 'you do not meet,' is the same as, 'one does not meet.'

Act i. sc. 2. Imogen's speech:

—My dearest husband,
  I something fear my father's wrath; but nothing
(Always reserv'd my holy duty) what
  His rage can do on me.

Place the emphasis on 'me;' for 'rage' is a mere repetition of 'wrath.'

Cym. O disloyal thing,
  That should'st repair my youth, thou heapest
  A year's age on me!