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HAMLET AND THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

By Mrs Jessie K. Curtis

Lectures 1-5

HAMLET

There is no such thing as naked manhood.—*Dowden*

Hamlet is the man of impassioned reason.—*Henry Giles*

Hamlet views every duty as holy, but this one is too much for him.—*Goethe*

The play of *Hamlet* offers a direct contrast to that of *Macbeth*; the one proceeds with the utmost slowness, the other with breathless and crowded rapidity.—*Coleridge*

If the question were asked, what personage in the whole range, not only of dramatic literature, but of all fiction, has gained the deepest, the most pleasing, the most universal interest, the answer I am inclined to believe would be, the character of Hamlet.—*Henry Reed*

In *Hamlet* is one sole, constant, dominant impression; death hovers over the whole drama.—*Guizot*

We venture to find no fault with *Hamlet*; we revere even its irregularities, as we prefer the various beauties of forest landscape to the straight walks and trim parterres of a well-kept garden.—*Dr Bucknill*

A tragedy of thought, suggested by continual and unsatisfied meditation of the destiny of man, on the dark confusion of the events of this world, and designed to awaken the same meditation in the minds of the spectators.—*A. W. Schlegel*

Hamlet, the name, is I believe connected in some way with *homely*, the entire tragedy turning on the betrayal of home duties.—*Ruskin*

Every still soul loves to look into this calm sea in which is mirrored the universe of humanity, of time and eternity.

—*Herder*

Hamlet is not the most admirable of Shakspeare's works ; but Shakspeare is most admirable in *Hamlet*.— *L. Boerne*

Hamlet is the tragedy of intellect.— *Eduard Gans*

The power with which details are carried out overpowers the hearer so entirely that he finds himself more and more caught in the magic circle of the poem, and comes at last to find pleasure in the purely impossible.— *Moriz Rapp*

In this tragedy the center of gravity in the conscience is displaced. It lies in the soul of him who is to punish the crime, not, as in the other tragedies of Shakspeare, in the soul of him who has committed the deed.— *L. Klein*

Hamlet is the poesy and tragedy of the melancholic temperament just as *Lear* is of the choleric.— *Dr Eduard Vehse*

It is *Hamlet* to whom Shakspeare has confided his confession of faith as an artist.— *F. Kreyssig*

Hamlet is Shakspeare, and at the close of a gallery of portraits, which have all some features of his own, Shakspeare has painted himself as the most striking of them all.— *H. Taine*

This struggle between Will and Fate belongs not alone to the history of *Hamlet*, it belongs to us all. It is your life, it is mine. It was that of our fathers, it will be that of our sons. And hence the work of Shakspeare is eternal.— *François-Victor Hugo*

Hamlet is the epitome of mankind, a sort of mirror in which all see a reflection of themselves.— *Edwin Booth*

Hamlet shows the helplessness of man. Home, the stay of the individual, is destroyed; the nation, the curb of the race, is corrupt; while a young and gifted soul is left to set it right, when it all seems to go wrong. *Hamlet* is the autobiography of man, his heroic mould, his ardent aspirations and splendid opportunities, his grasp after greatness with his falterings and failures and achievements. It is the divine within man and the demon without grappling with each other, each, at times, gaining the mastery. It is Fate and Freedom in their desperate contention for the soul of man. It shows the solemn sorrow of thought and the awful hazard

of action. Time is projected into eternity and eternity is launched into time; the medium of both is a human soul. *Hamlet* is the most awe-inspiring allegory and the most real and vital living ever conceived by the brain of a poet. It is the race and the individual, man making or marring his own destiny; yet God supreme and right prevailing. Such is the framework. Within are the finest thoughts on human living and endless destiny, given in the finest form possible to the speech of man. All the relations of life are here discussed: father, mother, son, daughter, friend, lover, husband and wife; then ruler, subject, statesman, courtier, sycophant, the hireling. Its wit has a kind of awe and its wisdom is sometimes worldly, yet the soul-thoughts, specially the lone musings of man as he lays his soul naked before God, show mind in its grace and grandeur and grasp. Death broods over life, but life triumphs over death. Looked at from mere form, *Hamlet* seems a jumble of incidents recklessly patched together for pure scenic effect; studied as a thought-creation, it has a unity like unto the human body, in which every organ sometimes serves and sometimes masters and each is different in shape and office, yet all are bound into one by life, purpose, soul.

Preliminary questions

- 1 Give the probable date of writing this drama.
- 2 Give the sources of this story.
- 3 Why is it supposed to be a favorite of Shakspeare's?
- 4 Why is it a favorite with the critics?
- 5 What is its religious setting?
- 6 Does this show that Shakspeare believed this particular religious creed?
- 7 Why should he use it?
- 8 How does Shakspeare give creeds?
- 9 To what climate does it belong?
- 10 By what myth has it been explained?
- 11 How far can we explain it by any myth?
- 12 What English history has it been supposed to picture?

- 13 Why must *Hamlet* from its very nature be complex?
- 14 Why is this a virtue in the modern drama?
- 15 Why would it have been a fault in the ancient drama?

Lecture 1

MAN ENVIRONED BY EVENTS

Act 1

The time is out of joint; O blessed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right.

To thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

In this act we see man in his relation to events; it is shown in court and in people, specially in three young men whose futures are opened before them:

1 Hamlet, gifted with the grandest powers and greatest possibilities, must right a wrong done in the past and extending into the future. His life work is certain, but how to do it has not been told him. His is the problem of humanity.

2 Laertes, a gay and reckless youth, has been trained in pure policy without regard to principle; the world to him is a place of enjoyment. His path is clear, pleasure must serve right and duty.

3 Fortinbras is a soldier, the man of action. His legacy from the past is to possess his own. Might must serve right.

Scene 1

- 1 What does the ghost personify?
- 2 Name the witnesses to the ghost; give the quality and condition of each of the guards, the character and profession of each friend.
- 3 Compare the ghost in *Hamlet* with the witches in *Macbeth*.

- 4 Compare their effect on the human beings to whom they appear.
- 5 Why is Horatio as scholar, asked to speak to the ghost?
- 6 What object would Shakspeare have in this?
- 7 Is there any vital connection between this and the main thought of the drama?
- 8 In what does the skeptical-minded Horatio show himself superstitious?
- 9 Is this in accordance with human nature?
- 10 Give examples to illustrate from the Bible and other literature.
- 11 In what way do these witnesses strengthen our belief in the ghost?
- 12 Show how Shakspeare uses the superstition of the times.
- 13 What were his reasons for doing so?
- 14 Why should they wish to bring this matter to Hamlet instead of the king?
- 15 What have we learned of Hamlet?
- 16 What of Fortinbras?

Scene 2

- 17 Show the condition of the kingdom as portrayed by the king.
- 18 Why is Laertes introduced with so much pomp?
- 19 What did France represent?
- 20 Show how Hamlet's first words give a key to the tragedy. X
- 21 Show how Hamlet's manner toward his mother differs from his manner to the king.
- 22 What underlying thoughts of this drama are in the king's speech? (See lines 87-118.) X
- 23 Why should Shakspeare bring them in through the king?
- 24 Why does the king wish to keep Hamlet in Denmark?
- 25 Why does the queen wish to keep him?
- 26 What is Hamlet's reason for staying?
- 27 Give an analysis of Hamlet's soliloquy. (See lines 129-59.) X
- 28 Show its relation to the past and the future.
- 29 What change in Hamlet on meeting Horatio?

- 30 Contrast Hamlet in contemplation with Hamlet in action.
- 31 Why is Hamlet more ready to believe the ghost than Horatio?
- 32 What faculty of Hamlet's brain is shown in his questioning?
- 33 What quality of his soul in lines 246-56?
- 34 Contrast Hamlet at court, Hamlet among friends, Hamlet alone.

Scene 3

- 35 What characteristics does Ophelia show in the interview with Laertes?
- 36 Contrast Ophelia with Juliet, particularly in relation to her family and her lover.
- 37 Why does Laertes distrust Hamlet?
- 38 From what Englishman may Shakspeare have taken Polonius?
- 39 What kind of wisdom does he show in this advice to his son?
- 40 What two phrases are not of this nature; why were they introduced?
- 41 From what work in literature does Polonius take most of his quotations?
- 42 Why should Polonius object to Hamlet's attentions to Ophelia?
- 43 Are the reasons given to Ophelia the sole reasons?
- 44 What is Ophelia's chief office in this drama?
- 45 When may this be a virtue, when a vice?
- 46 Is this usually a characteristic of Shakspeare's women?
- 47 In what is Ophelia a direct contrast to Hamlet?
- 48 Show how this must lead each to a tragic destiny?

Scene 4

- 49 Why does the conversation open on weather and time?
- 50 How is the king shown to abuse kingship?
- 51 Give the qualities of an ideal king. (*See* Carlyle and Fénelon.)

- 52 What is the purpose of Hamlet's generalizations on "particular men?"
- 53 Why is Horatio the first to see the ghost?
- 54 What qualities does Hamlet show in following the ghost?
- 55 How can this be reconciled with his ideas in soliloquy?
- 56 Had Hamlet any suspicion of murder before the appearance of the ghost?
- 57 What burden is laid on Hamlet?
- 58 What restrictions accompany it?
- 59 What change is shown in Hamlet from this time?
- 60 Is there any reason to suppose that he gives up Ophelia with the acceptance of his father's command? Give reasons.
- 61 Explain Hamlet's seeming trifling with the ghost after this solemn scene.
- 62 Are Hamlet's plans for the future fully formed?
- 63 Show the rapidity of Hamlet's mind, his penetrative quality, artistic, philosophic, logical, his power in action.
- 64 Why should a man of Hamlet's character begin on a course of deception?
- 65 Has history any parallel to this?
- 66 What ruin in this act?
- 67 Who are the chief sufferers, the innocent or the guilty?
- 68 What is its effect on the nation?

Lecture 2

MAN ENVIRONED BY MAN

Act 2

What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

Scene 1

- 1 Why does Polonius set a spy on his son ?
- 2 Analyze Polonius's character as statesman, father, man.
- 3 What idea do we gain of Laertes ?
- 4 Why is Polonius suited to be prime minister of Denmark at this time ?
- 5 Has he parallels in history ?
- 6 Compare Polonius with Machiavelli.
- 7 Show the patriotism of Shakspeare in the character of Polonius.
- 8 Give a similar character in Hawthorne ; trace resemblances and differences.
- 9 Give a similar character in Molière ; trace resemblances and differences.
- 10 How do Ophelia and Reynaldo serve Polonius ?
- 11 Why do we pity Ophelia and despise Reynaldo ?
- 12 Explain Hamlet's conduct toward Ophelia.
- 13 Why is this scene given through Ophelia instead of directly from Hamlet ?
- 14 Compare Ophelia with Desdemona, Griselda, Enid.
- 15 Why does Polonius wish to inform the king of this ?
- 16 Has Polonius changed in his attitude toward Hamlet ?

Scene 2

- 17 Why does the king set spies on Hamlet ?
- 18 What do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern personify ?
- 19 Why are they in pairs ?
- 20 Why has Hamlet had such men among his friends ?
- 21 Why does Polonius reserve the cause of Hamlet's madness till after the ambassadors have been heard from ?
- 22 What have we learned of Fortinbras as a man ?
- 23 What quality of the king's is thrust on us at this time ?
- 24 Compare Claudius with those Roman emperors who gained their power by secret and subtle means ?
- 25 Compare him, in this respect, with Napoleon, Cromwell ; men whose power was their very boldness.
- 26 Is there any method in the indirect way in which Polonius describes Hamlet's madness ?

- 27 Are Hamlet's own plans prevented or aided by this revelation to the king and queen of his conduct ?
- 28 Does the king really believe in Hamlet's madness and the cause as given by Polonius.
- 29 Why should the queen wish to believe that Ophelia was the cause of her son's insanity ?
- 30 Why does Hamlet show such bitter satire on Polonius and why does he connect him with Ophelia ?
- 31 Give the double impression of this scene, on Polonius, on audience.
- 32 How does Hamlet awaken our sympathies ?
- 33 Why is Hamlet so different toward Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ?
- 34 Does Hamlet understand their real characters ? ×
- 35 Is he entirely frank with them ?
- 36 Why does Polonius return ?
- 37 Why does Hamlet show himself sane to the actors, since Polonius is present ?
- 38 Why is the Pyrrhus play introduced ?
- 39 Why does Hamlet forbid the players to mock Polonius ?
- 40 Analyze the closing soliloquy and compare it with the first soliloquy. ×

Lecture 3

MAN ENVIRONED BY ACTION; CONSCIENCE A GUARD OVER CONDUCT

Act 3

The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn away,
And lose the name of action.
Suit the action to the word, the word to the action.

Scene 1

- 1 Why are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern so uncommunicative to the king and queen as to their interview with Hamlet?
- 2 Why do they turn the conversation so suddenly on the actors?
- 3 How do you interpret the queen's speech to Ophelia?
- 4 How is the king's conscience aroused; why should Shakspeare show us the king's thought about himself just at this time?
- 5 Analyze Hamlet's soliloquy and compare it with those preceding?
- 6 Why does Hamlet greet Ophelia so tenderly?
- 7 Is Hamlet truthful in saying, "I never gave you aught"?
- 8 Why does he suddenly change toward Ophelia and why does he taunt her with dishonesty?
- 9 Why does Hamlet picture himself worse than he really is?
- 10 Is there any excuse for Ophelia when she says that her father is at home?
- 11 Give the various explanations of this scene from the different critics.
- 12 Show what portion of Hamlet's words are directed to those in hiding.
- 13 What makes Ophelia's soliloquy peculiarly pathetic?
- 14 What insight does it give into Ophelia's character?
- 15 What has the king learned from this scene?
- 16 Why does he wish Hamlet out of Denmark at this time?
- 17 What is the effect of all this on Polonius?
- 18 Why does he wish Hamlet brought before his mother?

Scene 2

- 19 How does Scene 2 contradict the theory of Hamlet's insanity?
- 20 How does it apply to Hamlet's own actions?
- 21 Analyze Hamlet's speech to Horatio. Show its special force now.

- 22 Analyze Horatio's character and show his relationship to Hamlet.
- 23 Why does Hamlet again turn to jesting with Polonius?
- 24 Why are Hamlet's jests with Ophelia so rude?
- 25 Why were both the dumb-show and the play introduced?
- 26 With what does this compare in Greek drama?
- 27 Is this introduction of minor plays in accordance with the unity of composition?
- 28 Analyze this inserted play, show what portion was Hamlet's, what an imitation of the old plays, what the object of each portion.
- 29 Show how this is the point of success, that Hamlet is not a failure in action.
- 30 To whom does Hamlet's first song refer? (*See lines 259-63.*)
- 31 What does Hamlet mean by "pajock;" what rhyme might he have used?
- 32 Is Hamlet's excitement over the play in accordance with his soliloquies?
- 33 Have Hamlet's feelings changed toward Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?
- 34 Why does Hamlet suddenly change when left to himself?
- 35 What are Hamlet's thoughts about his mother?
- 36 How does this explain Hamlet's not killing the king, when he has shown his guilt at the close of the play?

Scene 3

- 37 Has the king resolved to have Hamlet killed when sent to England?
- 38 Are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern aware of the king's real intentions?
- 39 What purpose in Hamlet's jokes with Polonius?
- 40 Show the character of the king from his soliloquy.
- 41 What explanation can you make of Hamlet's words on the praying king?
- 42 What Christian views may be in the writer's mind regarding human actions?

Scene 4

- 43 What is our last view of Polonius ?
- 44 Why is the lyrical form again used in Hamlet's first talk with his mother ? Give examples from other plays. What other dramatist uses this more than Shakspeare ?
- 45 Does the queen actually fear murder ?
- 46 Is the rapid drawing of the sword by Hamlet in accordance with his usual character ?
- 47 Why is Hamlet so little affected by the killing of Polonius ?
- 48 Is Hamlet, in his talk to his mother, acting in accordance with his father's commands ?
- 49 Why does the ghost appear, why differently dressed from the other time ?
- 50 Why does it affect Hamlet so differently from the other visit ?
- 51 Compare this scene with the ghost in *Macbeth* in the banquet room.
- 52 Compare the queen to Lady Macbeth.
- 53 What tenderness is shown amid these terrors ?
- 54 Why does Hamlet from this time change toward his mother ?
- 55 Why deny his madness when he has been trying to show it before and when it might excuse him for the death of Polonius ?
- 56 Why does Hamlet wish his mother to gain from the king that his madness is a pretense ?
- 57 How does he know that he is to go to England and why does he speak so lightly of it when the task commanded by his father has not been accomplished ?
- 58 How is this mimic play a compliment to the theater ?
- 59 What is man's relation to art ?

Lecture 4

MAN ENVIRONED BY SOUL

Act 4

What is a man,
 If his chief good and market of his time
 Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
Poor Ophelia
 Divided from herself and her fair judgment.

Scene 1

- 1 What is the real cause of the queen's grief?
- 2 Is the queen truthful, when she says that Hamlet weeps for what he has done?
- 3 Has the king any secret cause for rejoicing over the death of Polonius?
- 4 Show the king's shrewdness in this scene.
- 5 What is the state of the king's soul to himself?

Scene 2

- 6 Why is Hamlet so ready to show deceivers, like Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern, that he knows that the king is using them?
- 7 Why does he joke about the body? ✓

Scene 3

- 8 Was the king a man who delighted in "the strong law?"
- 9 Show how the king's own deeds are returning upon himself.
- 10 What is Hamlet's reason for keeping up the antics with his uncle?
- 11 Why does the king send Hamlet to England to be killed instead of killing him himself?
- 12 On what does the king rely at this time?
- 13 Which gets the better of the other, Hamlet or the king?

Scene 4

- 14 Why are Fortinbras and his soldiers introduced at this time?
- 15 What advantage has an undone deed to a soul like Hamlet's?
- 16 What is Hamlet's estimate of time?
- X 17 What great genius wrought as if the eternities were his own?
- 18 Analyze Hamlet's soliloquy.

Scene 5

- 19 Why should the poet make Ophelia insane?
- 20 How does her insanity differ from King Lear's?
- 21 Is her father's death the sole cause of Ophelia's insanity?
- O 22 How does she contrast with Hamlet?
- 23 Compare her at this time to Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene.
- 24 What kind of insanity is each? Cause of pathos in each?
- 25 What faculty of the mind is specially alive?
- S 26 What striking difference between real and feigned insanity in Shakspeare?
- 27 What revelation have we of the soul of Ophelia?
- 28 To what does Ophelia turn the king's thoughts?
- 29 To what the queen's?
- 30 What theatrical effect from Ophelia's songs?
- 31 Why is the king afraid of the noise without?
- O 32 How does Laertes contrast with Hamlet?
- 33 What indirect compliment is there to Queen Elizabeth in the king's speech?
- 34 How does Ophelia affect Laertes?
- 35 What signification in Ophelia's flowers?
- 36 Does the king show ability in his management of Laertes?

Scene 6

- 37 Why is this scene introduced in the midst of the talk between Laertes and the king?

Scene 7

- 38 Why does the king tell Laertes alone that Hamlet "pursued my life" ?
- 39 What does the energetic Laertes become in the hands of the king?
- 40 What qualities does Laertes show?
- 41 Why do Laertes and the king expose to each other their immorality?
- 42 Why has Ophelia sought the willow?
- 43 Why is this touch of natural scenery introduced?
- 44 Why the contrast between Macbeth and Lear and Hamlet in the use of natural scenery?
- 45 How ought Ophelia's death to have affected Laertes, if he were a man with nobleness of soul?
- 46 How is the queen able to describe Ophelia's death so minutely?
- 47 How does this act show the importance of soul in the problems of life? X

Lecture 5

GOD SUPREME

Act 5

V. ii *Hamlet*
 There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
 Rough-hew them how we may.

Scene 1

- 1 What needed element do the clowns introduce?
- 2 What contrast in character do they furnish?
- 3 What application to England in the quibbles of the law?
- 4 Where did Shakspeare get the clown's song?
- 5 What later poet uses portions of this?
- 6 Show that Hamlet's words on the grave-diggers are really a reflection on himself. X
- 7 Is there any thing more than Hamlet's naturally reflective disposition shown in his comments on the skulls? X
- 8 Why does he mention the politician?

- 9 Why the courtiers ?
- 10 Who is My Lady Worm ?
- 11 Why should Hamlet fall to joking with the clowns after censuring their indifference to death ?
- 12 Give some of the local references in this talk.
- 13 What irony on England ?
- 14 What is Hamlet's age ?
- 15 Why are Yorick's skull and Alexander's dust brought together in Hamlet's thoughts ?
- 16 What do the maimed rights show of the state of charity in Denmark ?
- 17 Why do we have Laertes shown at his best ?
- 18 Is he in accord with his previous character ?
- 19 What contrast does he show to Hamlet ?
- 20 Why do both grapple in the grave ?
- 21 Why does the king order them "plucked asunder" when he wants Hamlet killed ?
- 22 Is Hamlet truthful when he expresses such violent love for Ophelia ?
- 23 Why is Hamlet shown as ranting at this time ?
- 24 What is peculiarly pathetic in the queen's words ?
- 25 Why should Hamlet express his love for Laertes at this time ?
- 26 What reference to the king ?
- 27 What covert meaning in the king's speech ?

Scene 2

- 28 What has Hamlet attained by allowing the transportation of himself to England ?
- 29 What excuse has Hamlet for his method of disposing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ?
- 30 What has been the verdict of history in comparing individual life with national rights ?
- 31 Is there any parallel to the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in American history ?
- 32 What significance was there in Hamlet's use of his father's seal ?

- 33 What reference in "a baseness to write fair"?
- 34 Why does Hamlet refer to his conscience?
- 35 Show the change between the Hamlet of act 1 and of act 5.
- 36 What are the reasons for this change?
- 37 Give the character of Osric and show why he was needed.
- 38 Why does Hamlet at this important epoch in his life stop to accept a challenge from Laertes?
- 39 Is he in earnest in asking Laertes' pardon?
- 40 What change in Laertes at death?
- 41 Why was this change necessary for dramatic purposes?
- 42 Why does Fortinbras need to appear at this time?
- 43 What lessons does Fortinbras learn for his new kingdom?
- 44 Does Hamlet die as a hero?
- 45 What death honors are awarded to him?
- 46 Show how Horatio's speech is a summary of the play?
- 47 What problem has been shown by the culmination?

General questions

- 1 Why is action so often retarded in this drama?
- 2 How long is it from the death of one king to the death of the other?
- 3 What is the exact time of the action of the play?
- 4 In what is Hamlet like Orestes?
- 5 In what does he differ?
- 6 In what is he like Faust?
- 7 In what does he differ?
- 8 Show the power of Providence in *Hamlet*?
- 9 How is free will shown in *Hamlet*?
- 10 Define religion and show how it enters into this drama?
- 11 What are its teachings in regard to conscience?
- 12 What is the "dramatic collision" in *Hamlet*?
- 13 Show the difference between Shakspearean unity and the Greek unity?
- 14 How much of the epic enters into *Hamlet*?
- 15 Compare Hamlet and Lear.
- 16 Compare Hamlet and Macbeth.
- 17 Compare *Hamlet* and Greek tragedy.

- 18 Was Hamlet the slave of his gifts ?
 19 Was Hamlet master of events ?
 20 Can it be shown that Hamlet never lacked decision of character ?
 21 Where is the strongest dramatic element ?
 22 Which is the strongest act dramatically considered ?
 23 Which is the strongest act morally considered ?
 24 What religious thought is shown throughout this drama ?

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*Lectures 6-10***MERCHANT OF VENICE**

The *Merchant of Venice* is one of Shakspeare's most perfect works. — *A. W. Schlegel*

This drama is impregnated with a thoroughly Italian air, with an aroma of Italy, more readily felt than analyzed and defined. — *Elze*

The *Merchant of Venice* was to depict the relation of man to property. — *Gervinus*

The *Merchant of Venice* unites within itself all the charms of Shakspeare's poetry . . . As to the lawsuit, there can, I think, be scarcely a doubt that its meaning and significance coincide with the old juristic proposition, *summum jus summa injuria*. — *Ulrici*

The *Merchant of Venice*, ending in mediation, is classed as a comedy; but it comes very near to being a tragedy, from the pathos of its sentiments and the grandeur of its thoughts, and the fate of its chief character. It gives the relation of man to property, man to man, and of parent to child, of sect to sect.

Those problems that enter into all great dramas, fate and freedom, sin and punishment, are to be found in the *Merchant of Venice*. Yet, as with each play, Shakspeare gives them in a new form; for here mercy solves every question. We see the failure of law to move the machinery of life without interfering with some higher law and the need of mercy to legalize law to itself. We see religion, the law of the soul, requiring mercy from other religions, if each is to be a life, not a mere theory. The climax of this thought is found in Portia's plea, a plea which the proscribed creeds were unconsciously making to the civilized Europe of that day.

The two leading characters, around which all others gather, are Portia and Shylock. Portia is a beautiful woman fettered by fortune and decrees from the dead: She lays aside station and lends herself alone to aid the suffering.

She triumphs, not through wealth, nor a great name, but by her own intellectual attainments and the finer sentiments of her soul. Shylock is a middle-aged man without personal attractions but of great intellectual power. Shut out from the completeness of life by the cruelty of others, he has created a success of his own; in this he centers all his sensitive nature and his passionate pride. Yet this, in the very ecstasy of his power, he loses. Seldom has Shakspeare left a more pathetic picture than Shylock deprived of all in which he trusted but "content" with himself.

Preliminary questions

- 1 Give the probable date of writing the *Merchant of Venice*.
- 2 How many stories were combined for its plot?
- 3 Where were these found?
- 4 What drama, on a similar subject, had preceded this in English literature?
- 5 Show the superiority of Shakspeare's.
- 6 What striking difference between the two authors?
- 7 Why did Shakspeare choose old plots instead of creating new ones for himself?

Lecture 6

INSUFFICIENCY OF SELF

Act I

"For none of us liveth to himself."—*Romans*, 14:7
 Forsooth I know not why I am so sad,
 It wearies me.

Scene I

- 1 What quality does Antonio show as his great characteristic?
- 2 What sets this quality in a stronger light than his mere words?
- 3 Does Shakspeare often delight in this quality?

- 4 Mention a great artist who uses it with special power?
- 5 In what character of Shakspeare's does it culminate?
- 6 Contrast this character with Antonio, in age, in circumstances, in natural gifts.
- 7 Show the difference between the speeches of Salanio and Salario.
- 8 What light does this throw on their respective characters?
- 9 How does Antonio show his "self-sufficiency"?
- 10 How is this quality connected with the other?
- 11 Why is it an important part of the dramatic action?
- 12 Show what has caused this quality?
- 13 What element does Gratiano furnish?
- 14 What are Bassanio's characteristics? What contrast is he to Antonio?
- 15 Why does Antonio treat him so differently from the other young men who have gathered about him?
- 16 Why is Antonio so ready to trust the reckless Bassanio?

Scene 2

- 17 What resemblance between Portia and Antonio?
- 18 What causes this?
- 19 What dramatic purpose does it serve?
- 20 What are Portia's advantages in life?
- 21 By what restraints is she bound?
- 22 What symbolism in this?
- 23 In what is Portia's position similar to Hamlet's?
- 24 Show the difference between Portia and Nerissa.
- 25 What dramatic purpose does this serve?
- 26 What moral purpose does this serve?
- 27 Does Portia understand human nature?
- 28 What Shakspearean women would you place with Portia?
- 29 Show their resemblances and differences.
- 30 Show Portia's knowledge of human nature.

Scene 3

- 31 What contrast between the introduction of Shylock and Antonio? ↓
- 32 How do they contrast as business men?
- 33 In what does Shylock's self-sufficiency rest?
- 34 In Shylock's speech on Antonio, what characteristics does he show?
- 35 Is there any thing to attract you to Shylock?
- 36 How does Antonio show his dignity?
- 37 How does Shylock show his cunning?
- 38 Why do we need these two qualities brought prominently before us at this time?
- 39 Are there any excuses for this quality in Shylock?
- 40 With what does he continually associate money?
- 41 With what does he associate scripture?
- 42 What qualities has Antonio laid aside in his treatment of the Jew?
- 43 What dramatic purpose in showing us this side of Antonio's nature?
- 44 How does it reflect on the European treatment of the Jew in that age?
- 45 Is Antonio still self-sufficient?
- 46 What characteristic is still strong in Antonio?
- 47 How is the absurdity of the bond made natural?
- 48 What entanglements of life do we find in this act?
- 49 Show what each character lacks and why.

Lecture 7

THE INSUFFICIENCY OF REASON

Act 2

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.—
Romans, 1: 22

O, these deliberate fools! When they do choose,
They have the wisdom by their wit to lose.

- 1 What does the Prince of Morocco represent?
- 2 What are his characteristics?
- 3 Why had the other suitors withdrawn?
- 4 What quality of his makes him willing to make the choice?
- 5 What choice is he to make?
- 6 Show its importance.
- 7 What attracts us to be interested in his choice?
- 8 What still keeps us interested in the Prince?

Scene 2

- 9 What does Launcelot Gobbo represent?
- 10 What choice has he to make in life?
- 11 Why is his father made blind?
- 12 What choice has he to make?
- 13 What does he represent?
- 14 What bewilderments beset him?
- 15 Why are his plans changed?
- 16 Why is this sort of wit needed at this time?
- 17 How are these two connected with the main thought of the drama?
- 18 How are they connected with the special thought of this act?
- 19 Why does Launcelot continually interrupt his father?
- 20 Why is Bassanio made to reason with Gratiano about his wildness?
- 21 What change has Bassanio himself undergone?

Scene 3

- 22 What does Jessica represent?
- 23 What choice is she about to make?
- 24 On what ground does she make it?
- 25 Have we any sympathy with Jessica for being "ashamed to be her father's child"?
- 26 Have we any sympathy with Shylock as we foresee his loss of a daughter?

Scene 4

- 27 What do the masks mean?
- 28 How does Lorenzo lead us to interest in Jessica?
- 29 In choosing Jessica, what has Lorenzo had to contend with?

Scene 5

- 30 On what does Shylock base his judgments?
- 31 Why does he trust his daughter so absolutely?
- 32 What element in life has he failed to take into account?
- 33 What does Shylock introduce into every relation of life?

Scene 6

- 34 Where does Gratiano place the enjoyments of life?
- 35 What is the reason for this?
- 36 For what is his last figure of speech a preparation?
- 37 How does Jessica accept her disguise?
- 38 How does Jessica regard money?

Scene 7

- 39 In judging from appearances which casket would one naturally expect to be the right one?
- 40 What bewilderment is there in judging from the inscriptions?
- 41 On what is the Prince's reasoning based?
- 42 What is the relation between the Prince's musings and the idea of this act?
- 43 What is the connection between him and the great ideas of this play?
- 44 Give the reason for the death's head and its accompanying inscription?
- 45 What saves this scene from gloom?
- 46 Have we any sympathy with Shylock in his distresses?
- 47 What is there humorous in his pathetic plight?
- 48 What contrast is shown between him and Antonio?
- 49 What anxiety have we for Antonio?
- 50 What has he failed to take into account?

Scene 9

- 51 How does the Prince of Arragon differ from the Prince of Morocco?
- 52 What does the Prince of Arragon represent?
- 53 On what does he base his reasoning?
- 54 Why does he reason falsely?
- 55 Why should the fool's head accompany this inscription?
- 56 Have we any sympathy with the failure of Arragon?
- 57 How are his thoughts connected with the main idea of the play?
- 58 What takes the place of reason with close of this act?

Lecture 8

FAILURE OF APPEARANCES; VALUE OF CHARACTER

Act 3

Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.— *Eccl.* 1:2

You that choose not by the view,
Chance as fair and choose as true.

Scene 1

- 1 What is meant by the Rialto?
- 2 What preparation have we for Antonio's losses?
- 3 What loss has Shylock had?
- 4 What turns our sympathy away from him?
- 5 How is Shylock a type?
- 6 Define revenge.
- 7 In what periods of nationality has it a place? Why?
- 8 What is the purpose of punishment in perfected national life?
- 9 Why is Tubal required as well as Shylock?
- 10 What excites our sympathy for Shylock?
- 11 Has Jessica had sufficient cause for her conduct?
- 12 Why do we forgive her?
- 13 How does Shylock turn our sympathy toward Antonio?
- 14 In what is Shylock always faithful?

Scene 2

- 15 Show the contrast between Portia and Shylock in circumstances and character.
- 16 What is Bassanio's profession?
- 17 How does this help him in choosing?
- 18 Why is this scene needed just after the last?
- 19 Why is Portia so sure that Bassanio will choose aright?
- 20 Why does she have music furnished as he chooses?
- 21 Why just the song given?
- 22 How do we learn Bassanio's decision before he has given it?
- 23 Why does he choose what threatens?
- 24 Was Portia's father wise in thus making her marriage depend on a seemingly chance choice?
- 25 Why does Bassanio stop to muse on the portrait before reading the inscription?
- 26 In giving herself away, what does Portia show of her character?
- 27 Why is the betrothal by rings introduced?
- 28 How does Gratiano's wooing contrast with Bassanio's?
- 29 How with Lorenzo's?
- 30 Why is Lorenzo introduced at this time?
- 31 What shadow falls on this joy?
- 32 What test comes to both Portia and Bassanio?
- 33 What excellence of Antonio's is revealed?
- 34 With what does it contrast?

Scene 3

- 35 On what is Shylock depending for his revenge?
- 36 Why must it finally fail?
- 37 What effect has pleading with Shylock?
- 38 How does Antonio accept his fate?
- 39 Show what is the contrast at this point?

Scene 4

- 40 Why are Jessica and Lorenzo left in charge of Portia's mansion?
- 41 What new phase of character does Portia show?
- 42 Why is she so merry with Nerissa when her husband is in trouble?

Scene 5

- 43 What relation has Launcelot's word quibbling to the main action?
- 44 What the sparring between Lorenzo and Jessica?
- 45 What failures have there been in this act? What was their cause?
- 46 What successes have there been in this act? What was their cause?

Lecture 9

THE NEED OF MERCY

Act 4

Let not mercy and truth forsake you. — *Proverbs*, 3: 3

In the course of justice, none of us should see salvation.

- 1 What does the duke represent?
- 2 How much power does he possess?
- 3 Show how wisely he uses it.
- 4 Has Shylock any regard for law?
- 5 What quality has Antonio lost?
- 6 Why has this quality become stronger in Shylock?
- 7 What place does Bassanio serve?
- 8 Does Shylock really think that he has done no wrong?
- 9 Are right and wrong subjective qualities? (*See Charles Kingsley's Phaeton.*)
- 10 What lessons can we learn from this?
- 11 What argument does Shylock use to prove himself right?
- 12 Can right be proven?
- 13 Why has Portia waited outside till the cause seemed almost lost?

- 14 What persons are on trial in this act?
- 15 What ideas are on trial at this time?
- 16 Why is Gratiano needed in this act?
- 17 Show that Shylock by his constant appeal to law and bond is true to his Jewish training.
- 18 Was the letter from Bellario needed? Why?
- 19 What characteristic of Portia's is brought out prominently in her conduct of this case?
- 20 How many points does she make?
- 21 Give her first and analyze it.
- 22 What parallel has it in Shakspeare?
- 23 Show the difference in the character and circumstances of the pleaders.
- 24 Is justice ever used in place of mercy?
- 25 Define mercy and show its relation to justice.
- 26 What is Portia's second plea?
- 27 What was her object in this?
- 28 What reproof does she give to Bassanio?
- 29 Has she violated her promises as a wife?
- 30 How does she differ from Lady Macbeth as a wife?
- 31 Is Portia right in insisting on the inflexibility of the law?
- 32 What does she gain by it?
- 33 Why should Portia stop to demand a surgeon?
- 34 How does Antonio's complete surrender to death affect us?
- 35 What increases this feeling?
- 36 How do Gratiano's words affect us?
- 37 Is there any justification in Shylock's rebuke?
- 38 How does it allow some sympathy for Shylock?
- 39 Is Portia's reason for not losing one drop of blood reasonable?
- 40 Is it according to law?
- 41 On what does Portia's next argument rest?
- 42 Is the penalty imposed on Shylock fully justified?
- 43 Was the requirement that he should become a Christian justifiable?

- 44 How do we feel toward Shylock as he leaves the court room ?
- 45 Why was the demand for the rings necessary ?
- 46 What point of this act is the most tragic ?
- 47 What portion is most pathetic ?
- 48 What portion is most humorous ?
- 49 Are these emotions usually combined ?
- 50 What portions of the argument were furnished by Bel-lario ?
- 51 What portions by Portia ?
- 52 Would it have been out of place for Portia in that age to have gone into the court room as a woman ?
- 53 Give examples of the position of women in Italy in the past ?
- 54 Does Portia's treatment of this case furnish a plea for woman as lawyer ?
- 55 Do we feel that the Jew has been rightly treated throughout ?
- 56 How is this a reflection on the attitude of Europe toward the Jew ?
- 57 Show that Shylock is both a type and an individual.
- 58 Show that the relations between man and God are an underlying thought in this act ?
- 59 Show the demand for mercy in the relations between man and man.
- 60 Why must the idea of mercy enter into all religions ?

Lecture 10 .

THE EQUILIBRIUM OF LIFE

Act 5

My beloved is mine and I am his.— *Solomon's songs*, 2:16

Such harmony is in immortal souls.

Scene 1

- 1 Why is the sentimental talk between Lorenzo and Jessica needed?
- 2 Show how it differs from the talk between Portia and Bassanio.
- 3 Why is the candle suggestive to Portia?
- 4 In what is her mind similar to Hamlet's?
- 5 In what does she differ from Hamlet?
- 6 What relation do her words at this time bear to the general idea of this drama?
- 7 Why does her tone change to pleasantries on the entrance of Bassanio?
- 8 Why does the quarrel over the rings begin with Gratiano and Nerissa?
- 9 Why does Gratiano excuse himself through Bassanio?
- 10 What relations in life are brought into conflict through the rings?
- 11 What quality does this scene show is demanded in these relations?
- 12 Why should Antonio be the person through whom all are reconciled?
- 13 Why was this act necessary after the last?
- 14 In what condition are Lorenzo and Jessica?
- 15 Trace the development of character in Portia.
- 16 Why must this drama end in mediation?

General questions

- 1 Show how unity is preserved in the union of the three stories, the bond of Antonio, the elopement of Jessica, the wooing by caskets.
- 2 How is each symbolic of human life?
- 3 Show how unity is preserved in the contrast of character?
- 4 What are the two underlying thoughts of the play?
- 5 In what act does each culminate?
- 6 Which is necessary to the other?
- 7 What two sentiments are continually at play?
- 8 How are these made to balance?

- 9 How does Portia rank among Shakspeare's women ?
- 10 Why was such a character needed in this drama ?
- 11 Why do we see Bassanio chiefly through the words of others rather than by his own speeches and acts ?
- 12 How is Nemesis shown in this drama ?
- 13 Give the fault of each and the punishment of each.
- 14 What are "the poles of this drama ?"
- 15 What do they suggest of the form of the rest ?
- 16 What is the conflict between right and wrong ? How are they balanced ?
- 17 How does the Merchant of Venice rank for variety of characters ?
- 18 How does the Merchant of Venice rank for popularity ?
- 19 How is locality shown ?

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- Fletcher, George. A study of Shakspeare in the Merchant of Venice (*see* Fraser, 41: 499-512, 697-712).
- Ingoldsby, Thomas. The Merchant of Venice (*see* Bentley, 11: 429-38).

Topics for papers

- 1 The awful majesty of man as shown in Shakspeare.
- 2 Intellect in Shakspeare's characters.
- 3 Mingling of comedy and tragedy in Shakspeare psychologically considered.
- 4 Melancholy in Shakspeare.
- 5 Realism in Shakspeare.
- 6 Idealism in Shakspeare.
- 7 Development of character in Shakspeare.
- 8 Politics in Shakspeare.
- 9 Problems in Shakspeare.
- 10 Supernatural in Shakspeare.
- 11 Religion in Shakspeare.
- 12 Relation of man to himself.
- 13 Relation of man to man.
- 14 Relation of man to property.

- 15 Relation of man to God.
 16 The universal and the individual in Shakspeare.
 17 Character in Shakspeare.
 18 Plot in Shakspeare.
 19 Complexity of Shakspeare.
 20 Simplicity of Shakspeare.
 21 Discussion: Are Hamlet's gifts a blockade to his life work?
 Aff.
 Neg.
 22 The Jew in literature.

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