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THE
LIFE
OF
SHAKSPEARE

ENQUIRIES

INTO
THE ORIGINALITY OF HIS DRAMATIC PLOTS
AND CHARACTERS;

AND

ESSAYS

ON THE

Ancient Theatres and Theatrical Usages.

By AUGUSTINE SKOTTOWE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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HAMLET.

1600.

THE French novelist, Belleforest, extracted from Saxo Grammaticus' History of Denmark the history of Amleth, and inserted it in the collection of novels published by him in the latter half of the sixteenth century; whence it was transfused into English, under the title of "The Hystorie of Hamblett," a small quarto volume printed in black-letter.

The history of Hamlet also formed the subject of a play which was acted previous to 1589; and arguing from the general course of Shakspeare's mind, that play influenced him during the composition of his own Hamlet. But unfortunately the old play is lost, and the only remaining subject for illustration is the black-letter quarto.

We learn from that authority, that the happiness of Horvendille, king of Denmark, excited

the envy of his brother Fengon ; who was, moreover, enflamed by love for Geruth, the queen. The villain paused not to commit a fratricide which placed him on the throne, and facilitated his union with the object of his guilty passion.

Hamlet, the son of Horvendille and Geruth, was quick in his perception of the danger to be apprehended from the murderer of his father, and sought safety in assuming the appearance of mental imbecility. The execution, however, of his project was imperfect : suspicion was excited ; and “they counselled to try and know, if possible, how to discover the intent and meaning of the young prince ; and they could find no better nor more fit invention to entrap him, than to set some fair and beautiful woman in a secret place, that with flattering speeches, and all the craftiest means she could, should purposely seek to allure his mind. To this end certain courtiers were appointed to lead Hamlet to a solitary place within the woods, where they brought the woman. And surely the poor prince at this assault had been in great danger, if a gentleman that in Horvendille’s time had been nourished with him, had not shown himself more affectioned to the bringing up he had received with Hamlet, than desirous to please the tyrant. This gentleman bore the courtiers company, making full ac-

count that the least show of perfect sense and wisdom that Hamlet should make, would be sufficient to cause him to lose his life; and therefore by certain signs he gave Hamlet intelligence into what danger he was likely to fall, if by any means he seemed to obey, or once like the wanton toys and vicious provocations of the gentlewoman sent thither by his uncle; which much abashed the prince, as then wholly being in affection to the lady." The result was that the prince deceived the courtiers, who "assured themselves that without doubt he was distraught of his senses."

The failure of this plot was succeeded by a new experiment. It was thought that an unrestrained expression of his natural feelings might be anticipated from Hamlet in an interview with his mother, and a proper knowledge of his real character and views could be obtained by one concealed under the arras for the purpose of overhearing the conversation. But the wariness of Hamlet was not inferior to the craft of his enemies. Entering the chamber with his customary air of folly, he began to crow like a cock, beating his arms against the hangings in imitation of that bird's action with his wings. Feeling something stir behind the arras, he cried "A rat! a rat!" and drawing his sword thrust it through

the concealed spy, whose body he cut in pieces and cast into a vault. Returning to the chamber, Hamlet replied, in an authoritative tone, to the lamentations of the queen who bewailed her son's unhappy loss of intellect, justly upbraiding her shameless licentiousness, and characterising in the worst of colours a woman who could wantonly embrace the brother and murderer of her husband.

Fengon now lived in daily apprehension of meeting the same fate that had overtaken the courtier spy; and resolving to get rid of Hamlet at once, despatched him with letters to the king of England containing secret solicitations to put the prince immediately to death. "But the subtle Danish prince (being at sea), whilst his companions slept, having read the letters, and knowing his uncle's great treason, with the wicked and villainous minds of the two courtiers that led him to the slaughter, razed out the letters that concerned his death, and instead thereof graved others, with commission to the king of England to hang his two companions; and not content to turn the death they had devised against him upon their own necks, wrote further, that king Fengon willed him to give his daughter to Hamlet in marriage." Every thing fell out as Hamlet desired; his attendants were

executed, and himself was betrothed to the English princess. After a twelvemonths' residence in the British court, he returned to Denmark, and revenged himself on his enemies; first intoxicating his uncle's courtiers, and then setting fire to the banquet-hall where their senses were absorbed in drunken sleep. He next rushed into the apartment of Fengon, and gave "him such a violent blowe upon the chine of his neck, that he cut his head clean from the shoulders." Hamlet now discarded the cloak of folly in which he had hitherto disguised his intellect, and, convening an assembly of the nobility, explained and justified his conduct. Pity for his misfortunes, and indignation at the cruelty of his oppressor, were the sentiments of every bosom; and the title and dignity of king were conferred on Hamlet by the unanimous voice of the assembly.

Devoid of interest itself, and entirely unconnected with the drama, the remainder of the Danish prince's history may well be spared; while an attempt is made to extract from more promising passages a clue to the interpretation of one of the most debated, and perhaps, after all, least understood, of Shakspeare's dramatic portraits.

The character of Hamlet, complicated, and apparently contradictory, will be divested of

much ambiguity by separating its natural from its artificial qualities, and both from those features which were induced by circumstances. The innate goodness of his heart, and the glowing warmth of his affections speak in his reverence to the memory of his father, his manly friendship for Horatio, and his tender attachment to Ophelia. What greater proof can be required of the refinement and high-toned morality of his mind, than the impassioned enforcement of his admonitions on the queen to abjure her disgusting association with his uncle? Let Hamlet's awful reverence of the Great Supreme, his reflections on man, and his admiration of the works of nature, testify the philosophic turn of his mind; let his mental accomplishments, his excursive inquisitiveness, his acute penetration, be estimated by his observations on an infinity of unconnected and dissimilar subjects; and, in glancing back on the whole, it will perhaps be found, that in his natural disposition Hamlet combined almost every quality that can elevate man into dignity.

Hamlet was yet young* when his mind re-

* The first scene of the fifth act makes Hamlet exactly thirty years by computation; but I much doubt whether Shakspeare seriously thought of these matters, and there-

ceived a shock from the death of his father, the depravity of his mother, and the wreck of his own fortunes, which the tremulous sensitiveness of his nature was incapable of resisting. A morbid melancholy preyed upon his heart: his views of life were clouded. Doubts assailed him; and, in endeavouring to disentangle himself by the efforts of reason, he became perplexed in a maze of uncertainty, which deprived him of the power of action in a moment that demanded the most vigorous exertion. The operation of external causes modified, without essentially changing, Hamlet's character: he is still an amiable, reflecting, philosophic being, though the brilliancy of his virtues and the powers of his understanding are obscured. He yields himself a prey to unavailing sorrow, neglectful of his duties, unthankful for his existence, weary of the world, and disgusted with his fellow-creatures. Hence his regrets that his corporeal substance could not "resolve into a dew," that he was forbid by a canon of the Almighty to put a period at once to his sorrows and his life; and

fore prefer following his first idea, that of representing Hamlet a mere youth "going back to school in Wittenberg," Act I. sc. 2.

hence, in spite of conviction, he canvasses anew the question of self-murder, and is deterred from its perpetration only by doubts which assail him on the nature of a future state. Nor is the superinduced indecision of Hamlet's character less apparent in his actions than in his opinions. Hamlet, "the son of a dear father murdered," was solemnly pledged to revenge himself on the head of him who had "killed his king, whored his mother, popped in between the election and his hopes, and thrown out his angle for his proper life."* But when he should decide, he reasons; when he should act, he rails, "unpacks his heart with words, and falls a cursing like a very drab." Under the impression of notions foolishly and fancifully refined, he allows opportunities most favourable to his purpose to pass; and though "he does not know why yet he lives to say *This thing's to do*," he procrastinates till his own life falls a sacrifice to his delay.†

Shakspeare makes Hamlet's dilatoriness of action proceed from the superinduced indecision of his character, and not from those reasons of

* Act V. sc. 2.

† Act II. sc. 2.; Act III. sc. 1. and 3.; Act IV. sc. 4.; and Act V. sc. 2.

policy ascribed to the young prince in the history. — “ The desire of revenging my father’s death is so engraven in my heart, that, if I die not shortly, I hope to take such and so great vengeance that these countries shall for ever speak thereof. Nevertheless I must stay the time, means, and occasion ; lest by making over great haste, I be now the cause of my own sudden ruin and overthrow, and by that means end before I begin to effect my heart’s desire : he that hath to do with a wicked, disloyal, cruel, and discourteous man, must use craft and politic inventions, such as a fine wit can best imagine, not to discover his enterprise ; for seeing that by force I cannot effect my desire, reason alloweth me by dissimulation, subtlety, and secret practices to proceed therein.”

The conduct of Hamlet is, in a variety of instances, inconsistent with the mild and affectionate nature displayed by him on other occasions ; instances which fall under the division of Hamlet’s character already designated as its *artificial* features. Shakspeare has not marked, by a very broad distinction, the assumed from the natural disposition of Hamlet ; and hence arises an obscurity which reference to the black-letter history will greatly contribute to remove. It is there, for instance, explained that Hamlet was induced

to put "an antick disposition on," as a protection against the danger which he justly apprehended from his uncle, and as a cloak for the concealment of his own meditated designs. "It was not without cause, and just occasion, that my gestures, countenances, and words seem to proceed from a madman, and that I desire to have all men esteem me wholly deprived of sense and reasonable understanding; because I am well assured, that he that hath made no conscience to kill his own brother (accustomed to murders, and allured with desire of government without control in his treasons,) will not spare to save himself with the like cruelty, in the blood and flesh of the loins of his brother, by him massacred; and therefore it is better for me to feign madness, than to use my right senses as nature hath bestowed them on me: the bright shining clearness thereof I am forced to hide under this shadow of dissimulation, as the sun doth her beams under some great cloud, when the weather in summer-time overcasteth. The face of a madman serveth to cover my gallant countenance, and the gestures of a fool are fit for me; to the end that, guiding myself wisely therein, I may preserve my life for the Danes and the memory of my late deceased father." It is, perhaps, inferible from the play that such

were the motives which induced Hamlet to shroud his intellectual brightness under the garb of madness; but the fact is by no means so clear as to render unacceptable the illustration afforded by the black-letter history.

It admits not of a doubt that Hamlet's attachment to Ophelia is ardent and sincere; but it is left a problem why he treats a woman of honour and delicacy, whom he loves, with a severity and violence from which her sex should have protected even an unworthy object. A satisfactory solution of the difficulty is derived from the history; whence it is learnt, what is not to be learnt from the play, that Hamlet was aware that Ophelia was purposely thrown in his way; that spies were about them; and that it was necessary, for the preservation of his life, to assume a conduct which he thought could be attributed to madness only.

Shakspeare was certainly influenced by the novel in his delineation of the artificial part of Hamlet's character, and it is curious to notice his improvements. It was necessary, indeed, when the dramatist had conceived the character of a prince who could be called

“ The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword;
The expectancy and rose of the fair state;

The glass of fashion and the mould of form ;
The observ'd of all observers ;” *

to elevate him, even in madness, above the level of idiocy — rolling on the ground and wallowing in filth, till contamination became personal disguise. How different, but yet not entirely dissimilar, is the poet's striking picture of Hamlet's wild and disordered air —

———— “ his doublet all unbraced ;
No hat upon his head ; his stockings *foul'd*,
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ankle ;
Pale as his shirt ; his knees knocking each other ;
And with a look so piteous in purport,
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors.” †

There is little accordance between the debased and disgusting exterior of the Danish prince in the narrative, and the depth and acuteness of his understanding : at the first view, though irrational and irrelevant, beneath his outward guise of folly a pregnant meaning is generally discoverable in his conversation ; which, in fact, leaves an impression that the utterer is much more justly chargeable with craft than mental imbecility.

Between such enigmatical colloquy, and the sublime and enlarged, but wild and irregular

* Act III. sc. 1.

† Act II. sc. 1.

remark, keen satire, and high-toned irony of the dramatic Hamlet, no comparison can, of course, be instituted; but it is, nevertheless, observable, that ambiguous expressions and obscure allusions are resorted to by both characters, to induce a belief of insanity; that the imperfect assumption of madness is productive, in both cases, of the same results: a conviction that Hamlet only counterfeited madness; that the king's safety demanded the sacrifice of the prince's life; and a determination to send him to England, to meet a death treacherously prepared for him.

The Hystorie of Hamblet, then, contributes much towards the illustration of a character deemed peculiarly difficult. It assigns rational motives for actions otherwise unintelligible, and lays the foundation for the necessary distinction that has been made between the natural and artificial character of Hamlet; a clue to the interpretation of his actions which, carefully pursued, leaves little in his conduct dubious or obscure. Above all things, the reason for his deportment to Ophelia is explained.

The general adherence of Shakspeare to the novel necessitated him to engraft on his play the principal agents of the story. The dramatic importance of the queen is so small, that but for a curious question that has been raised relative

to the extent of her criminality, she would not require notice. Of her infidelity to her first husband there is no doubt: the ghost calls the usurper an "adulterate beast," speaks of the queen's "seduction," and denominates her "seeming virtuous."* But the apparition does not even insinuate her privity to the murder. Hamlet, indeed, almost directly charges her with the crime †, but apparently without authority, for he neither reiterates nor attempts to prove his accusation. No sure conclusion can be drawn from the queen's exclamation ‡, for it may be as well considered as an ejaculation of horror at such an imputation, as of wonder at Hamlet's knowledge of her guilt. It is singular, that in the black-letter history the same point is left in equal ambiguity. In both works, the adultery is indisputable; and the black-letter history, therefore, justly calls the queen an "unfortunate and wicked woman." And with regard to the murder, it is alleged against her, that she married "him that had been the tyrannous murderer of her lawful husband; which made divers men think, that she had been the causer of the murder, thereby

* Act I. sc. 5.

† "Almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king and marry with his brother."

Act III. sc. 4.

‡ "As kill a king!"

to live in her adultery without control." In her interview with Hamlet, she solemnly protests against being insulted by the accusation of ever "having consented to the death and murder of her husband; swearing by the majesty of the gods, that if it had lain in her to have resisted the tyrant, although it had been with the loss of blood, yea, and of life, she would surely have saved the life of her lord and husband." With the exception, therefore, of the omission of this extenuating declaration, Shakspeare left the character of the queen just such as he found it; but he has carefully heaped obloquy on the king, by ascribing to him nothing but low qualifications and disgustingly vicious propensities; a striking contrast, indeed, to the man whose perfections were such, that Hamlet had no hope of ever looking "on his like again."

In Polonius is, of course, recognized "the counsellor who entered secretly into the queen's chamber, and there hid himself behind the arras;" but it would be difficult to point out any further obligation of the poet to the history, for a character which boasts great originality in its conception and excellence in its execution. The commentators have not always been so successful as they proved themselves in their

essays on this full-grown "baby." Warburton ingeniously struck upon a right chord for the interpretation of the character; but he "gambled from" it, when he should have pushed it to its application. With somewhat unusual candour, Johnson acknowledged his predecessor's merit, while he rectified his error; defining Polonius as "a man bred in courts, exercised in business, stored with observation, confident in his knowledge, proud of his eloquence, and declining into dotage. Such a man is positive and confident, because he knows his mind was once strong, and knows not that it is become weak. Such a man excels in general principles, but fails in the particular application. He is knowing in retrospect, and ignorant in foresight. While he depends upon his memory, and can draw from his repositories of knowledge, he utters weighty sentences, and gives useful counsel; but as the mind in its enfeebled state cannot be kept long busy and intent, the old man is subject to sudden dereliction of his faculties: he loses the order of his ideas, and entangles himself in his own thoughts, till he recovers the leading principle, and falls again into his former train. This idea of dotage encroaching upon wisdom, will solve all the phenomena of the character of Polonius. His

mode of oratory ridicules the practice of Shakespeare's times, of prefaces that made no introduction, and of method that embarrassed rather than explained."

As a prototype of "the most beautified Ophelia," must be quoted "the fair and beautiful woman employed to discover the intent and meaning of the young prince, by flattering speeches, and all the craftiest means she could. The lady, from her infancy, had loved and favoured Hamblet, who was himself wholly in affection for her." The skill with which Shakespeare has availed himself of this hint for the introduction of a female character is eminently deserving of notice. A young, delicate, and accomplished lady, tenderly loved by a prince who commanded the admiration of all hearts, but whose exalted station forbade even a hope that his vows could be listened to with honour, excites an interest which ripens into the deepest sympathy, when the preservation of his life forces on Hamlet the necessity of taunting, insulting, and upbraiding her. It was an additionally refined stroke of art to make Ophelia the daughter of Polonius. He who lately bowed in adoration to her charms, had just abjured his faith; the lips that had ever previously flowed with "words of sweetest breath,"

had scarcely ceased from the utterance of a torrent of cruel mockery, when the hand that had proffered her "remembrances" was violently and fatally raised against the bosom of her father. In the madness naturally resulting from the pressure of such accumulated misfortunes, Ophelia is still distinguished by her artlessness of thought and tenderness of feeling: with a beautiful attention to nature, the griefs of her heart are betrayed in the simple and affecting airs which she chants of the perjuries of lovers and of images of death. All that renders Ophelia interesting was the work of Shakspeare, and it is to be wished that he had dismissed her from the scene

" When down her weedy trophies, and herself,
 Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide;
 And, mermaid like, a while they bore her up:
 Which time, she chanted snatches of old tunes;
 As one incapable of her own distress,
 Or like a creature native and indu'd
 Unto that element: but long it could not be,
 Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
 Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
 To muddy death."*

It is difficult to imagine any motive that could subsequently induce the poet to degrade this

* Act IV. sc. 7.

interesting maniac into a suicide narrowly escaping interment in "ground unsanctified," with "shards, flints, and pebbles," heaped on her, in lieu of the prayers of the charitable and the pity of the good.*

Hamlet's animating eulogy on the manly virtue of Horatio † exalts him above all praise; otherwise it might have been said, that he exhibits few qualities not readily suggested by the description of the "gentleman who had been nourished with Hamblet, and showed himself more affectioned to the bringing up he had received with him, than desirous to please the tyrant."

It scarcely requires to be mentioned, that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are "the two faithful ministers of Fenson, who bore Hamblet company to England."

Laertes, unknown to the original novel, necessarily sprung out of the alteration which the poet made in the story. In his desire of bringing the tragedy to a conclusion, Shakspeare appears to have lost sight of the idea he originally

* Act V. sc. 1.

† "Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
As e'er my conversation cop'd withal.

Since my dear soul, &c." Act. III. sc. 2.

entertained of creating an impression highly favourable to Laertes, or he never could have imputed to him an act so treacherous and cowardly as that by which Hamlet is deprived of life. Never were professions of friendship more vilely prostituted than by Laertes ; never a more iniquitous falsehood uttered than his declaration —

“ I am satisfied in nature,
Whose motive, in this case, should stir me most
To my revenge : but in my terms of honour,
I stand aloof ; and will no reconciliation,
Till by some elder masters, of known honour,
I have a voice and precedent of peace,
To keep my name ungor'd : *But till that time,
I do receive your offer'd love like love,
And will not wrong it.*” *

Hamlet, indeed, is not himself free from the imputation of falsehood : he apologises for his violence on Laertes on the plea of madness : † this is a meanness ; but the lie of Laertes is a crime of the blackest dye, inconsistent with any sense of honour, or acknowledgement of moral obligation.

Scarcely a play can be mentioned, in which there are not insipid personages who walk through the scene, with no other view than that

* Act V. sc. 2.

† Act V. sc. 2.

of keeping the plot in motion. Shakspeare is the parent of many such insignificant, though necessary beings; but it is delightful to contemplate the extent and variety of his observation, in the numerous short parts which he has dashed off with all the vividness of colouring which distinguishes many of his more extended efforts. Such is the portrait of the light, frivolous, and contemptible "water-fly," Osric, who boasts a distinctness of individuality, which effectually distinguishes him from every other creation of his author's imagination.

Not even the gravity of Hamlet, the most sublime and high-toned of the bard's performances, could secure it against the introduction of characters, which debase its dignity by their meanness, and detract from its simplicity, since they contribute nothing to the progress of the plot. Notwithstanding all that may be urged in favour of the inimitable humour displayed in their delineation, the grave-diggers are unsightly excrescences on a surface exquisitely beautiful and polished.

In the black letter history of Hamlet, Fensong's murder of his brother is openly avowed; and justified on the plea that the king would have slain his wife but for the interposition of Fensong, who was obliged to sacrifice his brother

to secure the safety of the queen. Shakspeare converted this murder into a secret, cowardly assassination, and thus created an opening for the mysterious agency of the Ghost.

Furnished so thickly as it has been by the credulous and the designing, the spiritual world affords almost as ample a field for a history of its inhabitants as the material. Fairies, or spirits of the earth, engaged our attention in a *Midsummer-Night's Dream*; witches, and their attendant imps, will demand a lengthened notice in *Macbeth*; ærial spirits in the *Tempest*; and Hamlet drags the demons of darkness from their subterranean abodes.

The doctrine of the middle ages, that all spirits, and especially subterranei, were under the influence, if not immediate agents, of the devil, was a little puzzling when it came to be applied to the pagan notion of the return of departed souls, with the view of conferring benefit on mankind. The doctrine, however, was admitted, and the subterranean inhabitants were divided into two classes,—the friends and the enemies of the human race. The object of the latter, in their appearance, was to entrap the unwary into the commission of some heinous crime, or, by continual torment, to excite mortals to mistrust or to blaspheme God, and

thus alienate their souls from his service to that of Satan.

In perfect accordance with these notions, Hamlet thus interrogates the apparition of his father,

“ Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd ;
Bring with thee airs from heaven, or blasts from hell ;
Be thy intents wicked, or charitable ?”

And when his sceptical disposition subsequently betrays him into unreasonable doubts, he pauses on the reflection,

“ The spirit, that I have seen,
May be a devil : and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape ; yea, and perhaps,
Out of my weakness, and my melancholy,
(As he is very potent with such spirits,)
Abuses me to damn me.” *

Among other horrible projects attributed to malignant spectres, were those of weakening the bodies, and afflicting their victims with incurable diseases ; of enticing them into places of gloom and peril, and exciting in them the deepest terror. Such is the foundation of the argument urged by Horatio to dissuade Hamlet from following the apparition “ to a more removed ground : ” —

* Act II. sc. 2.

“ What, if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
 Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff,
 That beetles o'er his base into the sea?
 And there assume some other horrible form,
 Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason,
 And draw you into madness?”*

A knowledge of the future, as well as of the past, was generally assigned to the inhabitants of the world of spirits, and the souls of departed mortals were still supposed to be actuated by the same predilections, antipathies, and dispositions that influenced them in the body. Their appearance, therefore, set expectation on the rack: dire misfortunes were anticipated, futurity was to be laid open, or past events and crimes hitherto secret to be revealed. Spirits friendly to man were most desirous of bringing to light and punishment horrible offences against God, of forewarning those they loved of sudden and imminent peril, and of watching generally over their good: they interfered for the restitution of money unjustly withheld; and they informed their heirs in what secret places were hidden valuable papers and hoards of plate and money. An address of more strict propriety, therefore, could not have been framed than that of Horatio to the Ghost: —

* Act I. sc. 4.

“ Stay, illusion !

If thou hast any sound, or use of voice,
 Speak to me :
 If there be any good thing to be done,
 That may to thee do ease, and grace to me,
 Speak to me :
 If thou art privy to thy country's fate,
 Which, happily, foreknowing may avoid,
 O, speak !
 Or, if thou hast uphoarded in thy life,
 Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
 For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,
 Speak of it : — stay, and speak.” *

From the relation of those who saw the phantom, Hamlet immediately concludes, that

“ All is not well ;
 I doubt some foul play : * * *
 * * * Foul deeds will rise,
 Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.” †

and the issue is precisely accordant with his conception.

Common church-yard ghosts, who had no particular affairs, but appeared only to scare drunken rustics from rolling over their graves, sometimes appeared clothed in white, perhaps, in their winding sheets ; but, when the business of spirits was important, they came in earthly

* Act I. sc. 1.

† Act I. sc. 2.

similitude of person, and precisely in the same dress that they customarily wore when alive. It was for no trite nor trivial matter that the "canoniz'd bones" of the deceased monarch "burst their cerements;" that the "sepulchre," wherein his body was "quietly in-urned," reop'd its "ponderous and marble jaws," "to cast him up again;" and that he "revisited the glimpses of the moon, making night hideous;" but an affair of deepest consequence, the discovery and punishment of a most horrible crime. The exact resemblance, therefore, of the apparition to the father of Hamlet is pressed into particular notice :

Marcel. "Look, where it comes again !

Bern. In the same figure, like the king that's dead."*

Horatio demands,

"What art thou, that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march?" †

In reply to the question of Marcellus, "Is it not like the king?" Horatio rejoins,

"As thou art to thyself:
Such was the very armour he had on,

* Act I. sc. 1. † Ibid.

When he the ambitious Norway combated ;
 So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle,
 He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice." *

And when the Ghost re-appears, in the queen's closet, Hamlet particularly insists on its similitude to the person of the late king : —

"Why, look you there ! look, how it steals away !
 My father, in his habit as he liv'd !" †

In the play of Friar Bacon, by Robert Green, the shade of Pompey is exhibited in the very armour that he wore at the battle of Pharsalia.

It was not often that apparitions took the shortest course to effect their object : Instead of appearing at once to the person most interested, they usually commenced their operations by presenting themselves to the view of those only remotely, or, sometimes, not at all, concerned in their disclosures. The Danish monarch is first seen by Bernardo and Marcellus ; then by Horatio, and, lastly, by Hamlet himself. The exciting of profound attention was the only object of the preparatory appearances of a Ghost, for his errand was never made known till he came in contact with the party to whom his mission was specifically directed.

* Act I. sc. 1

† Act III. sc. 4.

Marcellus and Bernardo twice see, but yet learn nothing from the spectre. Horatio was a scholar*, and, as such, his adjuration was particularly potent; in conformity with the principle that assigned an absolute power over the devil to the learned magician, and directed the exorcism of troubled spirits in the Latin language: yet Horatio fails to elicit any information from the mysterious wanderer. The Ghost at length comes in contact with Hamlet himself; but the presence of others still operates as a bar against disclosure, and it is not till the prince is separated from his companions, and left with the apparition, that the portentous secret is revealed.

Nothing was more offensive to apparitions than the neglect to attach importance to their appearance. Inattention to their admonitions and injunctions was succeeded by discontented, angry, and, at length, infuriated and horrible visitations; threats to tear the person employed to pieces, and, sometimes, an actual infliction of blows. — The dilatory and undecided Hamlet, ever reasoning instead of acting, makes small progress towards the punishment of his guilty uncle, and he, therefore, anxiously inquires on

* "Thou art a scholar: speak to it, Horatio." Act I. sc. 1.

the re-appearance of his father's shade, whether he had not come his

“tardy son to chide,
That, laps'd in time and passion, lets go by
The important acting of your dread command?
O, say!”*

and the Ghost solemnly admonishes Hamlet “not to forget,” though the present visitation was —

“but to whet his almost blunted purpose.”†

It is in perfect consistency with the belief that all spirits were not only naturally invisible, but that they possessed the power of making themselves visible under their assumed forms to such persons only as they pleased, that the queen sees not the apparition, while the form and voice of his father are perfectly palpable to Hamlet's senses.‡ Being incorporeal, also, they experienced no difficulty in entering into, and passing from, any place they desired, without creating alarm or noise. The entrance of the Ghost into the royal palace, and the chamber of the queen, could only be effected by such a power; and a further illustration of the facility with

* Act III. sc. 4. † Ibid. ‡ Ibid.

which spirits conveyed themselves from one spot to another, unobstructed by natural impediments, is afforded by the Ghost following under ground as Hamlet removed from place to place to administer the oath of secrecy to his friends. * Another consequence of the immateriality of spirits was their invulnerability, and of this Horatio speaks, in reproof of his own folly of sanctioning the proposition of Marcellus to “ strike at it with his partizan.”

“ We do it wrong, being so majestic,
To offer it the show of violence ;
For it is, as the air, invulnerable,
And our vain blows malicious mockery.”†

Darkness was an object on which superstition always fastened with avidity, and wherever the doctrine of the opposed principles of good and evil was admitted, the sun, or light, was recognised as the representative of the former, and night, or darkness, as an apt symbol of the latter. Regarding light as a good, and darkness as a bad presage, the Greeks did not hold it lawful to approach their altars till lustration had purified them from the defilements of the night, through which the infernal gods ranged free from all control ; and, carrying the prac-

* Act I. sc. 5.

† Act I. sc. 1.

tical application of these principles still further, *white* victims only were offered to the celestial gods, and *black* to the infernal; and the sacrificers themselves were clothed in white or black, according to their intentions.

It is not very difficult to perceive, that from these sources originated the doctrine, that spirits had permission to range the earth by night alone. If not actually under the influence of the devil, all orders of spirits were deemed evil, at the least, for all, more or less, partook of the crime that banished them from heaven. Hence the idea of darkness was connected with their name, and hence the hours of night were assigned for their operation. An instance of Shakspeare's notice of this superstition occurred in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but in mentioning it in this play, in connection with another piece of popular credulity, the poet has shown himself more attentive to the vulgar, than the philosophic view of the subject.

Ber. " It was about to speak, when the cock crew.

Hor. And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons : I have heard
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill sounding throat
Awake the god of day ! and, at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
The extravagant and erring spirit hies

To his confine ; and of the truth herein
This present object made probation." *

All this is perfectly correct : the Ghost vanishes on the crowing of the cock, because the crowing of that animal, like the " glow-worm," showed " the matin to be near."

" It faded on the crowing of the cock.
Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
This bird of dawning singeth all night long :
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad ;
The nights are wholesome ; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time." †

Such is, undoubtedly, the popular superstition ; but, in point of reasoning, nothing can be more manifestly erroneous. Apparitions were not alarmed at the cock himself : they fled from his voice, because it indicated the approach of day, and not on account of any virtue inherent in the sound of his shrill-clarion : the holiness of the season sanctified Christmas, and bound spirits in their " confine," not the crowing of the cock ! But that sound once acknowledged to be indicative of the flight of all spirits, the obtuseness of vulgar perceptions confounded the sign with the cause, and whenever spirits were sup-

* Act I. sc. 1.

† Ibid.

posed to be absent, it was hastily concluded that the cock must crow.

The skill displayed in Shakspeare's management of his Ghost, as Steevens observed with extreme acuteness of thought and neatness of expression, is too considerable to be overlooked. He has rivetted our attention to it by a succession of forcible circumstances :—by the previous report of the terrified centinels,—by the solemnity of the hour at which the phantom walks,—by its martial stride and discriminating armour, visible only *per incertam lunam*, by the glimpses of the moon,—by its long taciturnity,—by its preparation to speak, when interrupted by the morning cock,—by its mysterious reserve throughout its first scene with Hamlet,—by his resolute departure with it, and the subsequent anxiety of his attendants,—by its conducting him to a solitary angle of the platform,—by its voice from beneath the earth,—and by its unexpected burst on us in the closet.

Hamlet's interview with the spectre, in the fifth scene of the first act, must in particular be regarded as a stroke of dramatic artifice. The phantom might have told his story in the presence of the officers and Horatio, and yet have rendered itself as inaudible to them as afterwards to the queen. But suspense was our

poet's object; and never was it more effectually created, than in the present instance. Six times the royal semblance appeared, but till then was withheld from speaking. For this event we waited with impatient curiosity, unaccompanied by lassitude or remitted attention.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

1601.

THE plot of the Merry Wives of Windsor is founded on a story in *Il Pecorone di Ser Giovanni, Fiorentino*, which doubtless reached Shakspeare through the medium of an old translation; the same, in all probability, that was afterwards printed in a collection of novels bearing the whimsical title of "The Fortunate, the Deceived, and the Unfortunate Lovers."

A student at Bologna applies to the guide of his literary pursuits for instruction in the science of love. He fixes his affections on a beautiful woman; and, having been initiated by the pedagogue into the forms of courtship, he reports to him from time to time the progress of his suit. These disclosures at length awaken a suspicion in the master that no other person

than his own wife is the subject of seduction, and he resolves to ascertain the fact by watching the young man to his house. He follows him accordingly; but is foiled in his expectation of detecting the frailty of his spouse, a heap of wet linen effectually concealing the gallant from observation.

Perfectly unconscious that he was engaged in an intrigue with his master's wife, the young man relates to him the next morning the alarm, disappointment, and escape he had experienced; and, above all, the consolation he was to receive, that very night, in a new interview. As before, the master watches the approach of the youth, who is scarcely allowed time to enter the lady's house when a violent knocking proclaims the arrival of her husband: she admits him, and, at the same time, conceals her favourite by throwing the door completely back. As the husband rushes in, the gallant slips out; and the wife knowing all to be now safe, catches her husband in her arms, shrieks aloud, affects to believe him mad, and calls in the neighbours to witness his outrageous conduct: he cuts and stabs the linen with his sword, and talks wildly of a man concealed in his house. Search proves the falsity of his charge, and in the end he gets laughed at for his humour.

These are the incidents adopted by Shakspeare from the Italian tale, but his design in using them was totally different from that of the novelist. The story is a real, the play a mock, affair of gallantry : an injured husband is the butt of the former, and applause is solicited for the ingenuity of his deceivers. The play ridicules the folly of unreasonable suspicion ; and justly punishes, and exposes to contempt, the grossness and sensuality of Falstaff.

I have already slightly alluded to the tradition preserved by Rowe, that Queen Elizabeth was so much pleased with Falstaff in the two parts of Henry the Fourth, that she commanded Shakspeare to write another play, and exhibit him in love ; which was complied with in the production of the Merry Wives of Windsor. This story is strongly corroborated by the evidence of the play itself. There are two editions of the Merry Wives of Windsor ; a quarto, published in 1602, and the edition in the first folio ; and they materially differ from each other. The quarto is evidently the play referred to by a second story that the queen's commands were executed in a fortnight. It is a production such as might have been anticipated

from a hasty compliance with directions which, though foolish, could not be disregarded : it is slight, ill-digested, unfinished, and, viewed in connection with the two parts of Henry the Fourth, inconsistent also. The author saw and regretted the imperfections of his performance. In an endeavour to amend it, he retouched each character, and brightened almost every passage : but inherent defects were beyond his power of cure ; and as a continuation of the Falstaff of Henry IV., the Falstaff of the Merry Wives of Windsor must be considered as a failure. The two characters do not harmonise ; and it is particularly worthy of observation, that the want of symmetry between them is in the point of Falstaff's intrigue with the Merry Wives. The objection is not to his inclination to gallantry with Mistress Ford, or Mistress Page, but to the personal vanity and simple credulity which a belief of their attachment to him necessarily presupposes in Falstaff. Of personal vanity the fat knight of Henry IV. possesses not a spark : on the contrary, his preposterous fatness is an exhaustless theme of his own laughter. Rather than have courted exposure and ridicule from two sprightly women, he would instantly have smelt waggery in any advances they might have

made to him ; and if he had not at once put an end to their hopes of fooling him, he would merely have yielded, till he could successfully have turned the tables on themselves. The Falstaff of the Merry Wives indeed jests with himself and is merry with his unwieldy person, but the effect is only that of making his conduct appear more absurd and unnatural.

The dramatist exerted himself strenuously, to conceal defects which it was not in his power to remove. The hope of supplying his necessities furnishes motives to Falstaff to try the experiment of an intrigue with Mistress Ford ; and in Ford's application to him, there is an additional reason for perseverance. But still it always appears incredible that the keen-sighted knight should so far forget himself, and his knowledge of the world, as to incur the risque (the certainty, one might say) of exposure ; that he should be so utterly insensible to the wisdom of Shylock's caution, and not only let a serpent sting him "twice," but thrice : and being thrice gulled, that he should bow under disgrace, unexcused by falsehood, or undefended by wit.

From the novel which furnished Shakspeare with his plot he derived nothing in the shape of character ; but the Kiteley of Ben Jonson being

a previous delineation, it is doubtful whether Ford can be considered original: both are jealous, both causelessly so, and both make themselves ridiculous by their extravagance. The manly confidence of Page effectively contrasts the unworthy mistrust of Ford.

The wives of both are jewels, though not inestimable. Gay, witty, and good-humoured, sense and prudence are the directors, and virtue the object of their behaviour. They love their jest, and are doubly delighted to indulge it, its aim being the cure of folly and the exposure and punishment of wickedness. Mistress Page truly marked the conclusion deducible from their actions —

“ We'll leave a proof by that which we will do,
Wives may be merry, and yet honest too.”

There is not much humour of the highest order in Doctor Caius: the mirth he occasions is attributable to an illegitimate source of wit—blunders in language. But the character is very amusing, even by the force of its contrast to the Welsh parson. Sir Hugh Evans is inimitable: his general good sense, his integrity of intention, his imperfect knowledge of things and of the world, and his consequent con-

fused application both of principle and knowledge, are displayed with profound skill and irresistible humour.

Slender is another of Shakspeare's original and happy sketches. It must be regretted that so small a space was allotted to the unconsciously ignorant and simple Master Slender, who protests never again to get drunk but in "godly company," who entertains his mistress with his love of bear-baiting, and whose only expression of the tender passion is "sweet Ann Page!" reiterated on the most unseasonable and uncalled-for occasions.

More of the machinery of this play is Shakspeare's than usual. He borrowed the idea of the principal incidents, but entirely changed their detail and application; and, contrary to our frequent observation, was happy in his changes: the last act, however, is puerile in conception and execution. From the necessity of carrying the play to a prescribed extent appear to have resulted the episodes or underplots of Evans and Caius, and the love affair of Page's daughter. Much praise cannot be given to the author for the latter; and the former borders, somewhat too closely, upon farce; but both are skilfully engrafted on the main design. Had Shakspeare enjoyed the

freedom of following the suggestions of his own mind, he would have left a noble play, for the materials are good ; but an erroneous path was prescribed to him, and the wonder is, how he extricated himself so well from the difficulties he had to contend with.

TROIUS AND CRESSIDA.

1602.

PREVIOUSLY to the publication of the first ten books of the Iliad in 1581 by Arthur Hall, who translated them from the French, and the gradual transfusion, between 1596 and 1614, of the whole of Homer's works from the Greek into English by Chapman, the only sources of information open to the unlearned reader, relative to the history of Troy, were the Troy Book of Lydgate, and Caxton's Recuyel of the Histories of Troy. Lydgate's book was a poetic translation, with alterations and additions, from a Latin history of Troy, written in 1287 by Guido of Colonna. Lydgate's work was printed in 1513, and subsequently modernised, and reduced into regular stanzas, under the title of "The Life and Death of Hector." Caxton's Recuyel of the Histories of Troy, printed in

1471, was a prose version of a French book, with a similar title, by Raoul le Fevre.

That Shakspeare was indebted to one of the preceding writers is fully proclaimed by his drama, but to which of them has been made a question; two words, however, appear to decide the matter. The numerous passages that have often been quoted from Lydgate to show that his book was the authority, prove nothing; for the pages of Caxton are equally illustrative of the poet's text. All doubt, however, is removed by the fact, that Shakspeare names the entrances to "Priam's six-gated city" after Caxton's Recuyel, and not from Lydgate's Troy Book: Shakspeare's orthography of "Antenorides" agrees in every letter with that of Caxton; while Lydgate designates the sixth gate "Anthonydes."

Caxton's Recuyel, and Chaucer's "Booke of Troilus and Creseide," were the chief materials used by Shakspeare in the construction of his drama. There is also to be traced the influence of some portions of Homer's Iliad, which had assumed an English garb before the play was written.

In his management of the story of Troilus and Cressida, the dramatist paid an almost equal regard to Caxton and Chaucer, selecting circumstances, indifferently, from the tale of either. As

a lover, Troilus is distinguished by the attributes usually ascribed to the votaries of beauty; but, in other respects, Caxton, Chaucer, and Shakspeare appear alike solicitous for his exaltation. Caxton's praise is brief, but full—"Troilus was great, and of great courage; well attempered, and sore beloved of young maidens. In force and gladness he resembled much to Hector, and was the second after him of prowess; and there was not in all the royaume a more strong and hardy young man." Chaucer is still more unmeasured in his commendations:—

“ And Troilus well woxen was in hight,
 And complete formed by proportioun,
 So well that kind it naught amenden might,
 Young, fresh, strong, and hardy as lioun,
 Trew as steele, in ech conditioun
 One of the best enteched creature,
 That is or shall, while that the world may dure.

“ And certainly, in story as it is fond,
 That Troilus was never unto no wight
 As in his time, in no degree second,
 In daring do that longeth to a knight,
 All might a giaunt passen him of might,
 His herte aye with the first and with the best,
 Stood peregall to dare done what him list.”

Shakspeare surpasses both his predecessors in the real dignity of character which he bestows on Troilus.*

* Act IV. sc. 5. “The youngest son of Priam, a true knight,”
 &c.

Between the character given of Cressida, and the actions ascribed to her by Caxton and Chaucer, there is a contradiction, not exactly reconcilable to modern notions. The former, in addition to his description of her, whom he calls *Bresyda*, as “passing fair, of mean stature, white and medled with red, and well made, sweet and piteous, and whom many men loved for her beauty,” calls her “*wise*.” Chaucer amplifies this praise of the lady, adding —

“ She sobre was, eke simple, and wise withall,
 The best inorished eke that might bee,
 And goodly of her speech in generall ;
 Charitable, estately, lusty, and free,
 Ne nevermore, ne lacked her pitee ;
 Tender-hearted, sliding of corage,
 But truely I cannot tell her age.”

And this is the lady the sequel to whose story is shameless inconstancy! Shakspeare took a very different view of the subject. She was to appear in the subsequent scenes of his play destitute of virtue ; and he represents her therefore, from the first, as volatile and licentious, gross in ideas and indelicate in language.* It is true, that she loves Troilus, and all her protestations of fidelity are the undisguised feelings of her heart at the moment† : but as her love is violent,

* Act I. sc. 2.

† Act IV. sc. 2.

so is it transitory; and the same fervent temperament that, in the first instance, resigned her to the dominion of one tender feeling, renders her willingly susceptible of a second, when separated from the original object of her passion. Shakspeare's representation of Cressida is one consistent exemplification of an animated passage, in which she is justly and accurately described by Ulysses, —

“ Fye, fye upon her,
 There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip !
 Nay, her foot speaks ; her wanton spirits look out
 At every joint and motive of her body.
 Oh these encounterers ! so glib of tongue,
 That give a coasting welcome ere it comes
 And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
 To every ticklish reader ! Set them down
 For sluttish spoils of opportunity,
 And daughters of the game.”*

Pandarus flourishes with extraordinary prominence in Chaucer's tale ; whence Shakspeare caught not only the general idea of his character, but several minute particulars of conduct : such as Pandarus' rallying of Cressida, after he had betrayed her to the arms of Troilus † ; a passage completely parallel to one in Chaucer.

Diomedes is a courtly and obsequious lover

* Act IV. sc. 5.

† Act IV. sc. 2.

in Caxton and Chaucer ; but he appears in Shakspeare born for any thing rather than “a woman’s slave.” He, in fact, subdues the wanton Cressida, by convincing her that the practice on him of the arts and coquetries of her sex will be the surest way to lose him — “Thou never shall mock Diomedé again ;” — “I do not like this fooling.” *

The story of Troilus and his faithless mistress was of itself too slight to form the entire subject of a play, and the poet endeavoured to supply the deficiency by the introduction of the principal actors in the Trojan war previous to the death of Hector ; with which event his drama closes. The facts of the historical portion of the play are confusedly intermixed : the writer was evidently conversant with his subject, but shrunk from the trouble of reducing the events represented into a systematic and regular arrangement. Caxton’s work afforded abundant information relative to the origin and progress of the Trojan war ; but Shakspeare derived from the first book of Homer his knowledge of an event which, next to the story of Troilus and Cressida itself, is made the leading feature of the drama — the retiring of Achilles from the field of battle.

* Act V. sc. 2.

Shakspeare's reason for that circumstance is different from Homer's: —

“ The great Achilles, — whom opinion crowns
The sinew and the forehead of our host, —
Having his ear full of his airy fame,
Grows dainty of his worth, and in his tent
Lies mocking our designs.” *

“ Possessed he is with greatness ;
And speaks not to himself, but with a pride
That quarrels at self-breath: imagin'd worth
Holds in his blood such swoln and hot discourse,
That 'twixt his mental and his active parts,
Kingdom'd Achilles in commotion rages,
And batters down himself.” †

It is, indeed, a sad perversion of historic fact to convert the just wrath of the high-minded Achilles into a wayward and splenetic ebullition of vanity and pride; but Shakspeare seized on the incident of Achilles' withdrawing himself from combat, and bent it to an object that he had immediately in view, — the playing off Achilles and Ajax on each other. To effect his purpose the dramatist took scarcely fewer liberties with the character of Ajax than with that of Achilles. Caxton gives the following description of Ajax: — “ Of great stature, great and large in the shoulders, great arms, and alway was well clothed, and richly. And was of no

* Act I. sc. 3.

† Act II. sc. 3.

great enterprise, and spake lightly." But by no licence of interpretation can this passage be said to convey the most distant hint, except the words "spake lightly," of the highly-coloured, but well discriminated character given of Ajax by the poet: —

"This man hath robbed many beasts of their particular additions: he is as valiant as the lion, churlish as the bear, slow as the elephant; a man into whom nature hath so crowded humours, that his valour is crushed into folly, his folly sauced with discretion. There is no man hath a virtue that he hath not a glimpse of; nor any man an attaint, but he carries some stain of it: he is melancholy without cause, and merry against the hair. He hath the joints of every thing; but every thing so out of joint, that he is a gouty Briareus, — many hands and no use; or purblind Argus, — all eyes and no sight."*

All the circumstances which fix the contest with Hector on Ajax; the mortification of Achilles' vanity by the insidious exaltation of Ajax; and Achilles' consequent resolve again to take up arms, are inventions of Shakspeare, executed with inimitable dexterity and wit.

The second book of Homer gives a very distinct description of Thersites as a deformed

* Act I. sc. 2.

and factious cynic. The dramatist, either in compliance with the taste of the public or his own judgment, has degraded Thersites into a common stage buffoon.

The deference of Shakspeare to authority is no where so exact in this play as to induce him, on any material point, to copy the language of his originals. In assigning speeches to the different dramatis personæ, he kept in view the general impression of the characteristic features of the Greek and Trojan leaders, which his reading had necessarily supplied him with; and several of the orations would not have disgraced the lips of those to whom they are ascribed. If it be not at all times easy, in the drama, to recognize those whose names are linked with the never-dying history of Troy, let it not be forgotten, that Shakspeare drew from a source so polluted as to designate the heroes of antiquity by the modern appellations of dukes, earls, barons, knights, and squires, and which speaks familiarly of a bishop and of burgesses of Troy. It should be a matter of small wonder, therefore, if, under the names of Hector, Æneas, and Troilus, the courtly knight of chivalry is recognized. Such errors, and the neglect of this play, more, perhaps, than any other production of Shakspeare, to

address itself to the common feelings of mankind, are the faults with which it is particularly chargeable. Its exterior is little attractive, and it is not every reader of Shakspeare who sets down to its perusal with impartial and patient attention: and yet the characters are strongly marked and skilfully contrasted; and the dialogue abounds in much fine writing and profound remarks. With what admirable terseness it is said—

“The amity, that wisdom knits not, folly may easily untie!”*

The succeeding just reflection on due appreciation requires no apology for its citation:—

“*Hector.*—Brother, she is not worth what she doth cost,—
The holding.

Troilus.— What is aught, but as 'tis valued?

Hector.— But value dwells not in particular will;
It holds his estimate and dignity
As well wherein 'tis precious of itself
As in the prizer: 'tis mad idolatry,
To make the service greater than the god;
And the will dotes, that is attributive
To what infectiously itself affects,
Without some image of the affected merit.”†

Other passages of equal merit in this neglected play are Ulysses' argument on the necessity of a scale of rank in society†; his as-

* Act II. sc. 3.

† Act II. sc. 2.

‡ “Troy, yet upon its basis, had been down,” &c.— Act I. sc. 3.

sertion of the superiority of the directing mind over the executing hand *; and his reflections on the endeavours which every one ought to make to keep himself in his just station in society.† Nestor's argument, also, on the necessity of matching Ajax against Hector, to repress the presumption of Achilles, is conceived and conducted with great ingenuity.‡

It appears from the preface to the quarto edition of this play, which was not, however, written by Shakspeare, that Troilus and Cressida was published previous to its representation; an instance, it is believed, singular in the history of our author's dramatic works. But the story had in all probability previously appeared on the stage, as two sums of money were advanced by the manager Henslow to Decker and Chettle, "in earnest of their booke called Troyeles and Creassedaye," which, if ever completed, is now no longer in existence.

* "They tax our policy and call it cowardice," &c. — Act I. sc. 3.

† "Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back." — Act III. sc. 3.

‡ "It is most meet: Whom may you else oppose?" — Act I. sc. 3.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

1603.

JURISTE, governor of Inspruck, was in the highest reputation for wisdom and virtue, when the relatives of a young lady complained to him of the violation of her person by Lodovico. The man was seized ; and, confessing the fact, condemned, in due course of law, to lose his head.

Epitia, the sister of the offender, was a virgin of exquisite beauty, and highly cultivated mind. She loved her brother with the tenderest affection, and resolved to attempt his deliverance. As a suppliant, on her knees, she pleaded the cause of the unhappy culprit with pathetic earnestness and impressive eloquence. Juriste stood enraptured : the beauteous form extended at his feet, the lovely features bathed in tears, the heavenly sweetness of Epitia's voice, enchanted and subdued him. Virtue sunk under the

temptation, and licentiousness triumphed. In exchange for the possession of her person he promised to spare the life of Lodovico. With all the dignity of insulted innocence, the infamous proposal was rejected. But the pusillanimous Lodovico was unworthy the possession of such a sister : he wept, he sobbed, he clasped her to his bosom, and besought her, by every tie of nature and of love, to save his life. His prayers and tears prevailed : under the promise of marriage Epitia resigned herself to the arms of Juriste.

The supposed ransom of her brother's life was the sacrifice of her honour ; who then shall describe the agony of Epitia when the bleeding corpse of Lodovico was borne into her presence ? The governor, regardless of his vows, had enforced the order for Lodovico's execution. The spirit of a just revenge now animated the bosom of the insulted Epitia. She carried her complaints to Maximine, emperor of the Romans ; Juriste was summoned to appear ; he stood convicted ; was compelled to repair the injury done to Epitia by marriage ; and, as an atonement for the life of Lodovico, was condemned to lose his own. By a wonderful exertion of the virtue of forgiveness, Epitia recognised in Juriste the sacred character of a husband only, and earnestly

pleaded for his pardon. Struck with astonishment and admiration at the greatness of her mind, the emperor yielded to her solicitations; and Juriste, reflecting on the unmerited kindness and generosity of Epitia, loved her with the most ardent affection, and lived happy with her the remainder of his life.

From this novel, which is Cinthio's, Shakspeare has been erroneously supposed to have derived his plot of Measure for Measure. But the story had been dramatised as early as 1578, in a play in two parts, entitled the "History of Promos and Cassandra," by George Whetstone. Instead of condemning the youth for the crime of violation, Whetstone makes his offence the guilty indulgence of his passion with a female to whom he was affianced. Instead of suffering execution for his crime, Whetstone saves the culprit by producing the head of another person instead of that which had been severed from the youth. Both these deviations from Cinthio are found in Shakspeare; and a further comparison of his play with that of Whetstone will lead to the conclusion, that Promos and Cassandra furnished the materials for the construction of Measure for Measure.

Promos thus replies to the solicitations of the suppliant virgin; —

“ Leave thy bootless suit : by law he hath been tried ;
Law found his fault, law judged him death.”

Which is quite paralleled by Shakspeare : —

“ Be thou content, fair maid ;
It is the law, not I, condemns your brother.”

Both the governors attribute their fall in the hour of temptation to the same singular cause,— the charms of modesty and virtue, and their superiority over the meretricious lures of vice : —

“ I do protest her modest words hath wrought in me amaze.
Though she be fair, she is not deckt with garish shews for
gaze ;
Her beauty lures, her looks cut off fond suits with chaste
disdain.”

Thus in Measure for Measure : —

“ Can it be
That modesty may more betray our sense
Than woman's lightness ?

O cunning enemy, that to catch a saint,
With saints doth bait thy hook ! Most dangerous
Is that temptation, that doth goad us on
To sin in loving virtue : never could the strumpet,
With all her double vigour, art and nature,
Once stir my temper ; but this virtuous maid
Subdues me quite. — Ever, till now,
When men were fond, I smiled, and wonder'd how.”*

With great ingenuity the sister, in both plays, turns the unlawful solicitations of the magistrate into an extenuation of her brother's crime; and, as an argument in favour of his pardon, urges,—

“ If that you love (as so you say) the force of love you know;
Which felt, in conscience you should my brother favour
show.”*

“ *Angelo.* — Plainly conceive, I love you.

Isabel. — My brother did love Juliet; and you tell me,
That he shall die for it.”†

And Angelo himself, in endeavouring to curb by reason the evil suggestions of his passions, and reflecting on the guilt of his heart, pursues the same train of thought : —

“ O let her brother live:
Thieves for their robbery have authority,
When judges steal themselves.”‡

It is equally remarkable that both the sisters affect to believe they are solicited to sin by the judge for the purpose of making trial of their virtue : —

“ Renowned lord, you use this speech (I hope) your thrall
to try;” §

* *Promos and Cassandra*, Part I. Act III. sc. 2.

† *Measure for Measure*, Act II. sc. 4.

‡ Act II. sc. 2.

§ *Promos and Cassandra*, Part I. Act III. sc. 2.

which is a little amplified by Isabella : —

“ I know your virtue hath a licence in't,
Which seems a little fouler than it is,
To pluck on others.” *

The communication to the condemned brother of the detestable alternative by which his life might be saved, is in each play strikingly similar : —

“ If thou dost live, I must my honour lose.
Thy ransom is, to Promos' fleshly will
That I do yield.

O! would my life would satisfy his ire!
Cassandra then would cancel soon thy band.” †

Thus Isabella : —

“ If I would yield him my virginity,
Thou might'st be freed.

O! were it but my life,
I'd throw it down for your deliverance
As frankly as a pin.” ‡

When Isabella first tells Claudio of Angelo's proposal, he answers, with honest indignation, “ Thou shalt not do't;” and in his willingness to meet his fate, nobly exclaims, —

* Measure for Measure, Act II. sc. 4.

† Act III. sc. 4.

‡ Act III. sc. 1.

“ If I must die,
I will encounter darkness as a bride,
And hug it in my arms.” *

But the fear of death, nevertheless, ultimately proves fatal to his virtue; and the play of Whetstone supplied Shakspeare with the sophistical arguments by which Claudio endeavours to persuade his sister, that a compliance with Angelo's wishes could not be very dangerous to her soul :—

“ Nay, Cassandra ; if thou thyself submit
To save my life * * *
Justice will say thou dost no crime commit,
For in forc'd faults is no intent of ill.” †

The argument in Measure for Measure is pushed beyond the original :—

“ Sweet sister, let me live !
What sin you do to save a brother's life,
Nature dispenses with the deed so far,
That it becomes a virtue.” †

Shakspeare was so well satisfied with this sophistry, that he placed it also in the mouth of Angelo; who confidently uses it in urging his dishonourable suit, insisting, that —

* Act III. sc. 1.

† Promos and Cassandra, Part I. Act III. sc. 4.

‡ Act III. sc. 1.

“ Our compell'd sins
Stand more for number than account;”

and insidiously demanding,—

“ Might there not be a charity in sin
To save this brother's life?” *

It appears sufficiently extraordinary that the wretched Cassandra of Whetstone should plead with earnestness for the life of the actual violator of her person, and the supposed murderer of her brother; but what will be thought of her thus addressing the lustful and sanguinary Promos,—

“ Yet ere we part, sweet husband, let us kiss —
O! at his lips why faileth not my breath?” †

and of her declaration —

“ Unto the king with me yet once more go,
See if his grace my husband's life will save;
If not, with his death shall my corps ingrave?” ‡

Shakspeare avoids this inconsistency by the expedient of introducing Mariana, a lady to whom Angelo had been affianced. Mariana modestly undertakes to avail herself of silence and darkness, and she counterfeits Isabella in a private meeting with Angelo. Her acceptance

* Act II. sc. 4.

† Promos and Cassandra, Part II. Act V. sc. 4.

‡ Promos and Cassandra, Part II. Act V. sc. 3.

of him as a husband, after these circumstances, is not very extraordinary; and, moreover, the injuries of Angelo against Mariana are by no means of so deep a dye as those of Promos against Cassandra. But Angelo is a man equally as depraved as Promos, and Mariana is fully acquainted with his villany; circumstances not very consistent with her expression of perfect satisfaction with her bargain :—

“ O my dear lord !
I crave no other, nor no better man.”*

The Cassandra of Whetstone is a wretched creature, whose abjectness Shakspeare has cast on Mariana, and thus enabled himself to present his Isabella in spotless and austere chastity; not exciting our love,—for her self-involved virtue needs no human sympathy,—but commanding our reverence for her purity and sacredness. Occasionally, the influence of the old play may be traced in her sentiments; but her pathetic earnestness, powerful argument, and impassioned eloquence, throw Whetstone’s heroine to an immeasurable depth of inferiority.

The leading features in the characters of Promos and Angelo are the same; though the

* Act V. sc. 1.

progress of their guilt is marked by differing as well as accordant circumstances. Apparently men of strict integrity and unimpeachable virtue, in the hour of temptation, unhappily, they fall; but they fall not without a struggle, nor without remorse: they combat with the guilty suggestions of their passions, and seek refuge from the allurements of beauty in the offices of religion. Promos, the more readily to prevail with Cassandra, enters into a positive engagement to marry her, as well as to spare the life of her brother. Angelo is not guilty of this vulgar artifice; but his villany assumes a blacker character from the unmanly threats by which he seeks to enforce compliance with his wishes.*

In a moment of inconsiderate anger, Isabella threatens to expose the villany of Angelo, and endeavours, by that means, to extort the pardon of her brother. The reply is sufficiently obvious; but Shakspeare is not without the authority of the old play for the expressions which he assigns to Angelo:—

“ No force for that my might commandeth right :
Her privy maim her open cries will stay ;

* Act II. sc. 4.

Or if not so, my frowning will her fright :
And thus shall rule conceal my filthy deed." *

Angelo places unbounded confidence in the argument, and urges it with considerable force:—

“ Who will believe thee, Isabel ?
My unsoil'd name, the austereness of my life,
My vouch against you, and my place i' the state,
Will so your accusation overweigh,
That you shall stifle in your own report,
And smell of calumny.” †

Again : —

“ For my authority bears off a credent bulk,
That no particular scandal once can touch,
But it confounds the breather.” †

Angelo lays great stress on the death of Claudio as the means of preventing the detection of his crime ; and that he may be perfectly satisfied on so important a point, he directs the head to be brought to him after the execution. Promos commands the gaoler to deliver the head to Cassandra.

In the management of the Duke, in the early scenes of the play, Shakspeare has deserted Whetstone to follow his own conceptions. The King, in Promos and Cassandra, has no immediate

* Part I. Act IV. sc. 2.

† Act II. sc. 4.

‡ Act IV. sc. 4.

superintendence over the actions of his deputy, for he resides at a distance, and learns the delinquency of Promos from the injured female who appeals to him. This is credible and natural, which is more than can be said of the conduct of the Duke. He resigns his government into the hands of deputies under the pretence of making a journey into Poland, whither he does not go; but remains concealed in Vienna overlooking the conduct of Angelo, and prying for intelligence in the disguise of a friar.

When the sovereign in the original makes his entrance into the city, due solemnity and state are observed on the occasion: the delegated authorities are assembled to receive him, and to resign their power into his hands; and proclamation is made throughout the streets for all those who think themselves aggrieved to apply to him for redress. Shakspeare has not omitted any of these circumstances; the public reception of the Duke he exhibits on the stage, whilst Angelo mentions the other particulars;—"And why meet him at the gates, and re-deliver our authorities there?" Shakspeare has also copied the sovereign's salutation of the guilty magistrate both in substance and form:

"But see where Promos and the Mayor wait
To welcome me with great solemnity.

With cheerful show I shadow will the hate
I bear to him for his insolency."

Promos, the good report of your good government
I hear:">*

Thus in Measure for Measure :

" Give me your hand,
And let the subject see, to make them know
That outward courtesies would fain proclaim
Favours that keep within.

We have made enquiry of you ; and we hear
Such goodness of your justice, &c.

O, your desert speaks loud." †

The crimes of the iniquitous governors detected,
they, in both plays, make confession.

" My guilty heart commands my tongue, O King, to tell a
truth,
I do confess this tale is true, and I deserve thy wrath." †

" No longer session hold upon my shame,
But let my trial be mine own confession ;
Immediate sentence then, and sequent death,
Is all the grace I beg." §

* Promos and Cass. Part II. Act I. sc. 8 and 9.

† Act V. sc. 1.

‡ Promos and Cass. Part II. Act III. sc. 2.

§ Measure for Measure, Act V. sc. 1.

Promos and Angelo are both pardoned by the intercession of the females they have injured; they are both compelled to marry them, and both are similarly exhorted to repay by affection the unmerited kindness of their deliverers.

“ Be loving to good Cassandra thy wife.” *

“ Look you love your wife : —”

and again

“ Love her, Angelo;

I have confess'd her, and I know her virtue.” †

Had it been only in view to prove that Promos and Cassandra, and not the novel of Cinthio formed the groundwork of Measure for Measure, many of the preceding extracts might have been spared; but the attaining of an insight into Shakspeare's process in the construction of his play has been the object, and for that reason we are still led to the notice of one or two other concurring particulars. In both plays, low officers take into custody the inmates of a brothel, and carry them before the deputy; and a woman of bad character bewails the enforcement of the laws against the vices of her trade. Whetstone's Rosko and Shakspeare's Clown are gentlemen

* Promos and Cass. Part II. Act V. sc. 4.

† Meas. for Meas. Act V. sc. 1.

of the same calling, and equally worthy members of their profession ; Rosko, however, is a keen, active, witty rogue, but the Clown is full of low cunning disguised under an affected simplicity. The stupid constable, Elbow, bears a greater resemblance to Dogberry, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, than to any personage in Whetstone's play. Bernardine indeed is the only character entirely original, and considering the small space he occupies in the play, it is astonishing with what distinctness his peculiarities are marked. Some sportive fancy of Shakspeare caused his appearance, for a character more unnecessary for the advancing of a plot was never placed in a list of *dramatis personæ*.

OTHELLO.

1604.

THE story of Othello is found in the seventh novel of the third decade of Cinthio's Hecatomithi.

A Moor once commanded the military force of Venice. His virtues, his talents, and the fame of his martial exploits captivated the affections of Desdemona, a lady of the city: the passion was reciprocal; and, heedless of the remonstrances of her kindred, she married the object of her love. The command of Cyprus was committed to the Moor, and he repaired to that island with his bride.

Among the officers of the army was a Lieutenant whose handsome person indicated nobleness of mind, and whose gaiety and frankness gained him the friendship of all his military associates: to him the Moor was particularly attached, and their wives also were intimate.

But this state of happiness was disturbed by the endeavour of the Lieutenant to corrupt the fidelity of Desdemona. The lady's heart however was engrossed by conjugal affection, and the assiduities of the gallant were unheeded. Ignorant of the cause of her indifference, the Lieutenant erroneously attributed her coldness to the pre-occupation of her regard by a young Cypriot Captain: he resolved, therefore, on his death, and that his revenge for his disappointment might be complete, he determined to accuse Desdemona of disloyalty to the Moor.

Fortune favoured his malignity, for just at this period the Captain was deprived of his command for indiscreetly wounding a soldier. Desdemona greatly lamented his misfortune, and knowing her husband's regard for him, she often solicited his pardon. In the course of his interviews with the Lieutenant, the Moor remarked that he believed he should re-instate the Captain in compliance with the very earnest entreaties of Desdemona. She has reason, replied the villain, she will then see him as usual: do not urge me to be more explicit, he continued, observing some surprise in the face of his friend; I wish not to blight your matrimonial felicity, yet I think if you were watchful, strange things would be apparent to you. The Moor

pondered deeply on these suggestions: every renewed solicitation of the innocent Desdemona tortured him with additional doubts, and he peremptorily demanded of the Lieutenant an explicit avowal of his meaning. Dissembling reluctance, the villain artfully resisted, and pretended to yield only to the earnestness of importunity. I cannot deny, he said, but that my extreme reluctance to give you, my lord, uneasiness, has hitherto closed my lips on a subject deeply affecting your happiness; but since you command me to speak out, my regard for your honour as my friend, and my duty to you as my general, compel me to declare the truth. Know then, that your black colour is odious to your wife; she is ardently in love with the Captain, and impatience at the loss of his company is the cause of her anxiety for his restoration.

The Moor, though fatally credulous, affected awhile to doubt the truth of what he heard. How darest thou presume, said he, to asperse the fair fame of Desdemona? This rage, replied the Lieutenant, is the reward I expected, but my duty to you and my regard for your honour have carried me thus far, and I will not now retract: what I have related is too true, and if your wife, with cunningly assumed affection, has blinded you to your shame, I will not, on

that account, suppress the communication of circumstances which I positively know are true. The Captain has made me the confidant of his happiness : his infamous confession merited death, and the fear of your resentment alone restrained me from inflicting it. — Give me the means, exclaimed the frantic Moor, of witnessing with mine own eyes the infidelity of Desdemona, or else I will make thee wish thou hadst been dumb. While the Captain and yourself were united in friendship, and his access to your house was unrestrained, replied the Lieutenant, the task would have been easy ; but it is otherwise now ; and though I am convinced he often converses with Desdemona, dread of detection obliges him to act with caution ; yet I do not still absolutely despair of being able to give you ocular demonstration.

With much deliberation, the Lieutenant matured his scheme. He stole from the girdle of Desdemona a handkerchief of curious Morisco workmanship, a bridal present from her lord. This he dropt in the Captain's room, who, knowing it to belong to Desdemona, sought an opportunity of returning it to her. Being under the General's displeasure, he took advantage of his absence from home to knock softly at the back door of the house. The Moor at that

moment returned ; full of tormenting distrust, he ran hastily to see who the stranger was : the Captain fled. The enraged General darted to the apartment of his wife, and it was impossible to convince him that she uttered truth, when the innocent Desdemona declared her ignorance of the person who had been knocking at the door. The Moor restrained his passion, for he was resolved to take no decisive measures till he had consulted his wicked confederate.

The villain was now prepared with a new device. He placed the Moor in a situation where he could see, but not hear, the Captain and himself. They talked on indifferent subjects ; but the Lieutenant contrived by signs and gestures to impress the jealous husband with the idea, that they were jesting at his dishonour ; an impression the Lieutenant afterwards confirmed by relating a feigned confession of the Captain, that, at their last interchange of endearments, Desdemona had presented him with a handkerchief given her by her husband on the day of their marriage. Positive proof now appeared attainable, and the Moor immediately hastened to demand of Desdemona the production of his handkerchief. Having missed it for some time, the lady blushed and was confused while she endeavoured to evade further question.

Every suspicion of her lord was soon afterwards ripened into certainty by his beholding the gift of love in the hand of the Captain's courtesan. The Moor was now resolutely bent on the murder of Desdemona, and, by intreaties and bribes, induced the Lieutenant to execute a similar vengeance on her supposed paramour. The Lieutenant attacked him as he returned from a visit to his mistress, and with one blow cut off his leg. The cries of the wounded man speedily brought assistance. Fearing discovery, the Lieutenant fled, but immediately returning by another road, mingled with the crowd, and lamented the misfortune of his brother officer with fraternal solicitude.

The news of this event quickly reached Desdemona: her natural expressions of regret were interpreted into a conclusive proof of her guilt, and the jealous monster immediately sought the Lieutenant, to concert the means of putting her to death. Poison and the dagger were proposed and rejected: they beat her to death with a bag of sand, and breaking down a beam in the ceiling, placed it as if it had fallen by accident and killed her. No doubts were entertained of the cause of Desdemona's death, and the perpetrators of the horrid deed appeared secure from discovery. And now the resentment of the

Moor expired, and love for the innocent victim of his jealousy resumed its empire in his breast. The Lieutenant became odious to his sight, and he shortly deprived him of his command to rid himself of his reproachful presence. Exasperated by such treatment the villain sought revenge. He disclosed the murder of Desdemona, and cleared himself from its guilt by relating that the Moor had in vain endeavoured, by the promise of great rewards, to seduce him into a participation in his crime. The Moor was arrested, carried to Venice, and publicly tried. Persisting in a denial of the deed, he was put to the rack, but the utmost torment forced no confession from his lips. He was remanded to prison, and some time after dismissed into exile, where the relations of Desdemona procured his assassination.

The punishment of the Lieutenant resulted from his perseverance in crime: he accused one of his companions of an attempt to bribe him to the commission of murder: the gentleman was seized and racked, but denied the fact so resolutely, and laid open so much of the depravity of the Lieutenant, that the accuser was in his turn tortured, and, with such extreme severity, that he died while he was being taken from the wheel.

We immediately perceive that Shakspeare's drama is founded on the novel of Cinthio : it remains to compare them with each other, and a more commodious method of doing so cannot, perhaps, be found than the selection of the character of Iago for minute examination. Iago is the master-spirit from whom the action of the drama emanates ; and in following him through his devious path, and tracing the mazes of his intricate policy, occasions will present themselves for the notice of every important point of accordance and dissimilarity between the play of Shakspeare and the tale of Cinthio.

The outset of the tragedy is marked by a singular deviation from the novelist. The Lieutenant in the tale very naturally continues in the service of the Moor for the sake of the opportunity of corrupting the virtue of Desdemona. Her disregard of his passion changes his love into hatred, and the gratification of his new, and equally powerful, feeling is only to be accomplished by his adherence to the Moor. Except as a means of vengeance on Desdemona, the infliction of pain upon the Moor forms no part of the Lieutenant's design.

But the object of Iago's hatred is Othello ; a change creating a necessity for the assigning of new motives for the villain's conduct. Shak-

speare did not overlook the circumstance, but has not altogether succeeded in meeting the difficulty satisfactorily. Iago's motives for hatred are the refusal of the Moor to appoint him to an office previously promised to another, and the general rumour that he had been too familiar with his wife:

“ I know not if't be true ;
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do, as if for surety.”*

It is surely straining the matter beyond the limits of probability to attribute Iago's detestation of Othello, whom he hated as he did “ hell pains,” to causes so inadequate and vague; and to suppose that, for no better reasons, he followed him to put him to “ a jealousy so strong that judgment cannot cure,” and thence drive him to the commission of murder. Except as a means of accomplishing his vengeance on Othello, the destruction of Desdemona forms no part of Iago's design.

Unwilling entirely to reject the incident of the villain's love of Desdemona, Shakspeare makes Iago contemplate the seduction of Desdemona in retaliation for a similar injury

which he supposed Othello had inflicted upon him :

“ Nothing can or shall content my soul,
Till I am even with him, wife for wife.” *

But of this enterprise nothing afterwards is heard : the dramatist seems either to have forgotten his original intentions, or found that Iago had already enough business on his hands.

Of the idea furnished by the novel of the Moor's person becoming distasteful to Desdemona, Shakspeare has made a noble use. With sentiments of women entirely libertine, the conclusion of Iago is strictly correct, that the marriage of Othello placed within his reach his much desired opportunity of revenge. He beheld his enemy united to a young and lovely woman, who had already transgressed the bounds of propriety and delicacy by quitting the protection of her paternal roof, and clandestinely uniting herself to a Moor ; and he sagaciously argued, that Desdemona could not long continue attached to the swarthy object of her choice ; that as their love “ was a violent commencement,” it would not fail of “ an answerable sequestration :” “ her eye must be sed ;

* Act II. sc. 1.

and what delight shall she have to look upon the devil?" * * In want of "sympathy in years, manners and beauties, her delicate tenderness will find itself abused, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and abhor the Moor; very nature will instruct her in it, and compel her to some second choice."

These points firmly fixed in his belief, his next care is to see what advantage can be made of them; his penetrating mind surveys the materials at his command, and he sketches a bold outline of his plot:

"Cassio's a proper man"

"A young and handsome knave, with all those requisites that folly and green minds look after."

"Let me see: ———"

After some time to abuse Othello's ear,
That he is too familiar with his wife: —
He hath a person and a smooth dispose,
To be suspected; framed to make woman false."

Unlike the Lieutenant in the novel, Iago depends not on the accidents of time, but having carefully formed, boldly enters on the execution of his design, and the consummate skill displayed in his progress, is particularly worthy of observation.

“Ha! I like not that,” when he observes Cassio quit Desdemona, is a remark that opens a wide field for conjecture, which his answer to Othello’s question, “Was not that Cassio, parted from my wife?” artfully converts into keen insinuation :

“Cassio, my lord? No, sure, I cannot think it,
That he would steal away so guilty-like,
Seeing you coming.”

The first stone of Iago’s building being thus laid, the erection of the superstructure is rapidly proceeded in :

“Did Michael Cassio, when you woo’d my lady,
Know of your love?”

“Indeed!” is an expression of mingled astonishment and regret, that Cassio “went between them very oft,” which could not fail to make a powerful impression on the Moor; and Iago’s cold recognition of Cassio’s honesty, accompanied by the reflection that “men should be what they seem” still further alarms, as was intended, the wakeful vigilance of a suspicious mind. His refusal to disclose his thoughts, his acknowledgement that they were “foul,” and incompatible with Othello’s peace, are gradations so consequent and easy, as to be almost imperceptible, towards the conclusion Iago had all

along been aiming at, and which he at length certainly and permanently fixes, by the mention of the horrid passion "jealousy" and the frightful picture which he draws of the miseries of its victims.*

Othello, by his dignified reply †, rises for a moment superior to the arts of his tormentor; but no change is too sudden to ruffle Iago's self-possession, and his acuteness and ingenuity turn all things to his own advantage :

" I am glad of this; for now I shall have reason
 To show the love and duty that I bear you
 With franker spirit : therefore, as I am bound,
 Receive it from me : — I speak not yet of proof.
 Look to your wife ; observe her well with Cassio;
 Wear your eye thus — not jealous, nor secure :
 I would not have your free and noble nature,
 Out of self-bounty, be abus'd ; look to it :
 I know our country disposition well ;
 In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks
 They dare not show their husbands ; their best con-
 science
 Is — not to leave undone, but keep unknown."

Could such remarks, from a young and handsome libertine, fail to impress Othello, a foreigner, little entitled himself to presume on the partiality of the fair sex, with a fearful conviction of the general laxity of Venetian morals ?

* " That cuckold lives in bliss," &c. Act III. sc. 3.

† " Why? why is this," &c. *Ibid.*

Iago had presumed to believe the virtue of Desdemona assailable, and, with the deepest policy, he presses upon Othello those sentiments by which he himself had been led to his dissolute conclusion. With a force forbidding reply, he urges her violation of the natural delicacy of her sex, and especially her duplicity :

“ She did deceive her father, marrying you ;
 And, when she seem'd to shake, and fear your looks
 She lov'd them most.—
 She that so young, could give out such a seeming,
 To seal her father's eyes up, close as oak — :”

The inference was too palpable to be missed, and none of its force was lost by compelling the Moor to complete the deduction by an operation of his own mind. His fond relapse into tenderness, “ I do not think but Desdemona's honest”, is parried with surprising adroitness : “ Long live she so ! and long live you to *think* so !” This implied reproach of doting credulity again directs the wavering husband's thoughts into their old channel of suspicion, “ And yet, how nature erring from itself, — ” a reflection immediately seized on for the introduction of one of the most masterly strokes of Iago's ingenuity :

“ Ay, there's the point : — As, — to be bold with you,
 Not to affect many proposed matches,

Of her own clime, complexion, and degree ;
 Whereto, we see, in all things nature tends :
 Foh ! one may smell, in such, a will most rank,
 Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural. —
 But pardon me ; I do not, in position,
 Distinctly speak of her : though I may fear
 Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
 May fall to match you with her country forms,
 And (haply) repent."

These are sentiments, just and undeniable, on general principles, though liable to exceptions, which the perturbed mind and strong feelings of the Moor were ill capable of taking against their application to Desdemona. The point is pressed by Shakspeare with wonderful force, and, amidst a world of thoughts and images, we can scarcely recognise the brief and natural hint of Cinthio, "Know then that your colour makes you personally odious to your wife."

Thus far Shakspeare carried Iago in the execution of his design with little assistance from the novel. Jealousy is ripened in Othello ere Cinthio has sown the seeds of suspicion in the Moor. In furnishing the series of proofs necessary to complete Othello's conviction of Desdemona's guilt, the dramatist becomes more largely indebted to the story, but considerably varies the application of the materials which he borrowed. The Lieutenant of Cinthio makes a skil-

ful use of circumstances as they arise : Iago's superior ability enables him to direct the actions of others with infinite facility ; he uses his associates as mere instruments of his will, and is thus the creator of his own opportunities for the accomplishing of his design.

Iago had some suspicion of Cassio with his "night-cap," and entertained an earnest desire "to get his place," but the Lieutenant laboured under no very considerable portion of the Ancient's hatred. Yet, as a fit agent for his purposes, Iago used him, and, when his ruin appeared necessary to the furtherance of his views, he paused not a moment to effect it. In a familiar interview, he prevails over the "thrice gentle Cassio" to transgress the bounds of his accustomed abstemiousness ; and aided by that "poor trash of Venice," Roderigo, a quarrel and disturbance are created, an alarm spread through the town, and the intoxicated Cassio exposed on "the court of guard" to the observation of his General. Varying very immaterially from the truth, Iago's feigned reluctant narration of the occurrences of the night is so peculiarly constructed as to imply deep criminality in Cassio : —successfully imitating the affectionate solicitude of a friend, he recognises throughout the existence of an offence justly meriting disgrace.

Cassio is displaced from his lieutenancy. In the novel, it will be remembered, the Captain's degradation arises from an indiscretion with which the Lieutenant is in no way connected.

The influence which Desdemona possessed over Othello was an obvious means of effecting the restoration of Cassio, and hence Iago counselled his friend to sue to the General's wife, knowing that her solicitations could be easily made subservient to his designs. In the novel, the amiable interference of the lady is entirely uninfluenced by the Lieutenant, who, unlike Iago, entertains no idea of converting her disinterested benevolence into a means of effecting her ruin till the Moor himself remarks the earnestness of Desdemona's entreaties in the captain's favour.

In the scene where Othello, goaded almost to madness, seizes Iago by the throat, and threatens him with destruction*, Shakspeare is indebted to Cinthio both for Iago's judicious reply to his violence, and Othello's singular demand for ocular demonstration of Desdemona's guilt; but Shakspeare cannot be too highly praised for the master-stroke by which Iago makes his victim recoil from what he so eagerly sought, as to

* Act III. sc. 3.

horrid for his contemplation*, and Othello is thus satisfactorily subdued to the reception of evidence of inferior weight, "imputation and strong circumstance," the only testimony that Iago could by any possibility adduce. In the novel, the Lieutenant relates that the Captain had boasted of the favours he received from Desdemona. The narration of Cassio's dream is far more artfully imagined. Shakspeare has shown great judgment in the use of the incident of the handkerchief at the critical period when something resembling distinct and positive proof of Desdemona's guilt was wanting to complete the impression already made, and nothing could touch more closely on the point than the allegation, that her paramour's "amorous works" had been gratified "with that recognizance and pledge of love" first given her by her husband: "With such a handkerchief," says Iago, "did I to day see Cassio wipe his beard;" an exquisite piece of cunning, as the proof of Cassio's possession of the handkerchief was easy, and involved in it no danger of the detection of his villainy.

The most feebly executed scene in the play is

* "You would be satisfied? But how? How satisfied?"
&c. Act III. sc. 3.

that in which Othello is placed in such a situation as to overhear a dialogue between Cassio and Iago, relative to the courtesan Biancha, so managed by Iago as to convince Othello that Desdemona was the subject of their conversation. The novel would here have been deserted with advantage.

Shakspeare's solicitude to display the masterly ingenuity of Iago must frequently press itself upon the notice of the reader, and there is still further occasion to remark the care of the poet to furnish the villain with extensive and diversified occasions for the exhibition of his talents. It was with these views that Shakspeare introduced, entirely from his own resources, that "silly gentleman" Roderigo. Scarcely, it has been seen, had the Moor become united to Desdemona when the fertile brain of Iago sketched a rude outline of his meditated proceedings. Alive to the advantage of every auxiliary, he availed himself of a passion for Desdemona, which this "trash of Venice" dignified by the name of love, to inveigle him to Cyprus. Adapting his manners and conversation to the capacity of the coxcomb, Iago moulds him completely to his purpose: from the fortunes of Roderigo his pecuniary necessities are supplied, he had his "purse as if the strings were his," and he

“bobs” from him “jewels” which would half have corrupted a votarist : Roderigo is employed to effect the disgrace of Cassio; and when Othello resolved to sacrifice the life of that officer, Roderigo is again thrust forward into action.

Iago's affairs are now brought exactly to a crisis ; success or ruin hovers o'er his head: He has “rubbed this young quat almost to the sense,”

“ And he grows angry. Now, whether he kill Cassio,
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Every way makes my gain : Live Roderigo,
He calls me to a restitution large
Of gold, and jewels, that I bobb'd from him,
As gifts to Desdemona ;
It must not be : if Cassio do remain,
He hath a daily beauty in his life,
That makes me ugly ; and, besides, the Moor
May unfold me to him ; there stand I in much peril :
No, he must die.”

Iago stationed himself where he could behold what passed, and the event justified his caution, for Roderigo's failure placed him in the utmost peril. The conduct assigned by Shakspeare to Iago in this emergency strongly marks the influence of the novel. Iago had just declared the death of Cassio most desirable, and it was of course to be expected, with his life immediately in his power, that he would take it. But no : in the novel, the captain is wounded in the leg ;

and against Cassio's leg, therefore, is the sword of Iago only directed : and to justify a proceeding so apparently unaccountable, the poet was at the pains to make Cassio give a previous intimation, that his body was protected by secret armour.*

In the novel, the Lieutenant's triumph over Desdemona and the Moor is complete, for no detection is made of his villainy till its victims are no more. The hand of justice overtakes Iago instantly : his detection is complete, and he is dismissed with the intimation

“ If there be any cunning cruelty,
That can torment him much, and hold him long,
It shall be his :”

even here the novel is preserved in view : the Lieutenant expired under the pangs of torture.

The concluding scene of the tragedy, happily varied from the disgusting catastrophe of Cinthio, is awfully impressive. Rejecting his clumsy expedient for killing Desdemona, Shakespeare, after the original, makes it a question by what means her death is to be effected : Othello proposes poison, but eagerly embraces the suggestion of Iago to “ strangle her in her bed,

* “ That thrust had been my enemy indeed,
But that my coat is better than thou think'st.”

even the bed she has contaminated.” “ Good, good : the justice of it pleases.”

Between the conduct of the two Moors after the murder, a striking difference is observable. The Moor of Cinthio, meanly regardful of his life, shelters himself from the consequences of his crime, by giving the appearance of accident to Desdemona's death. Othello, though protected by the dying declaration of his wife, that she herself had done the deed, disdains to shrink from the avowal of an action, not of “ hate,” but “ honour.” Desdemona, the innocent Desdemona, gone ; the treasure in which he lived, bereft from him for ever ; “ the fountain from the which his current ran,*” dried up, existence could only be intolerable, death alone a refuge from his woes. To have submitted to the ignominy of torture ; to have dragged out a dishonourable existence in exile ; and to have perished by the hands of Desdemona's friends, would have been an irreconcilable inconsistency in Othello, who fetched his “ life and being from men of royal siege,” who always bore himself with a lofty demeanour and proud sense of his own worth and virtue, and who confidently referred to “ his parts, his title, and his perfect soul,” to “ manifest him rightly.”†

* Act IV. sc. 2.

† Act I. sc. 2.

The Desdemona of the novel is far inferior to the interesting heroine of the drama in humility, fascinating helplessness, and unalterable attachment. The

“ maiden never bold ;
Of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion
Blush'd at herself,”

is not recognisable in Cinthio, whose lady degrades her husband by the accusation that “ Moors are naturally moved to anger and a thirst for revenge by every trifling vexation.” We turn with delight to her, who, subdued to the very quality of her lord, finds even in “ his stubbornness, his checks and frowns, a grace and favour.” Othello murders her, but even in the act of death, her thoughts are fixed on his exculpation :

Emilia. “ ——— Oh, who hath done
This deed ?

Desd. Nobody ; I myself ; farewell :
Commend me to my kind lord ; O, farewell.”

It is particularly noticed in the novel that Desdemona's attachment to the Moor had its origin in her admiration of his great qualities and noble virtues, and not in any irregular sally of the blood. Shakspeare is no less tender of the reputation of his heroine, who sees “ Othello's visage in his mind, and to his honours and his

valiant parts her soul and fortune consecrates." Nothing is more clear than that our author, in spite of her "downright violence and storm of fortunes," intended to represent her as a woman of the strictest delicacy.

In delineating Emilia as a person of somewhat doubtful virtue, Shakspeare had probably two objects in view ; in the first place, to give colour to Iago's hatred of Othello, and his persecution of Cassio, by making him suspicious of their illicit intercourse with his wife ; and secondly, to account for her extraordinary conduct relative to Desdemona's handkerchief ; her participation in its theft, her impudent profession of utter ignorance respecting it, and her criminal silence on the outrageous Moor's reiteration of his demand for its production, when one explanatory word from herself would have dissipated every misunderstanding. But it may be remarked that Emilia's want of virtue is not so undoubted as to enable even Iago to lay much stress upon her infidelity ; neither is she so destitute of feeling, honesty, or courage in other instances, as not to leave her conduct respecting the handkerchief a matter of surprise. But to have made the guilt of Emilia with the Moor and Cassio apparent ; to have represented her of questionless dishonesty, would have involved our author in a

greater inconsistency — that of associating the wife of the General, the refined, the amiable Desdemona, in terms of intimacy and friendship with a woman of notorious depravity.

In the novel, the wife of the Lieutenant, though frequently importuned to co-operate with her husband, steadily refuses to participate in his cruel designs : fear restrains her from betraying his secret, but she does not neglect to give her mistress advice calculated to thwart her husband's projects. The Lieutenant himself steals the handkerchief of Desdemona ; his wife being in no way instrumental to the theft. Had Shakspeare, in this instance, been contented to follow the authority of the novel, his course would have been simple and easy, and the conduct of Emilia natural and consistent ; at present her principles are neither good enough to justify the affection and confidence of Desdemona, nor are they so depraved as to leave us without astonishment at the dishonesty of her actions.

Making use of few other materials than the facts of Cinthio's novel, Shakspeare has given a highly natural air to his drama, by displaying the secret springs of their successive occurrence. Every event appears distinctly consequent upon the will of one or other of the characters, who are all distinguished by obvious diversities of in-

tellect and disposition, whence their actions result in perfect consistency with nature : all are deeply interested in the subject of the scene, and they severally direct their minds to the furtherance of the views by which they are engrossed.

All the passion, all the mind of the play, are Shakspeare's. He was indebted to Cinthio for the circumstances of his plot, and some individual traits of Othello's and Iago's characters, particularly of that of the latter. Desdemona he chastened into beauty, and the Captain, whose character in the novel is scarcely distinguishable, he invested with qualities exactly correspondent to the purpose he was intended to fulfil. The wife of the Lieutenant perhaps the poet had better have left as he found her ; for in raising Emilia above insignificance, he unfortunately rendered her inexplicable. Roderigo is, as we have hinted, his own absolute creation.

KING LEAR.

1605.

THE story of Lear and his daughters is to be met with in many national repositories of romantic fiction. Geoffrey of Monmouth gave the tale an English character and English names. In this instance, Holinshed was the faithful transcriber of Geoffrey; and Holinshed was constantly in Shakspeare's hands.

Camden is, likewise, a brief narrator of the history, and from him Shakspeare gleaned an incident which will be mentioned in its proper place.

But more numerous than to all other sources combined were the obligations of Shakspeare to a drama entitled, "The True Chronicle History of King Leir and His Three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella," a work which must, in fact, be considered as the foundation stone of the bard's performance.

Though involving the fate of royalty, the tale of Lear is precisely of that interesting and domestic nature that will, at all times, command extensive popularity, and, antecedent to Shakspeare's play, it formed the subject of a ballad whence the great poet did not disdain to adopt hints. The ballad is without date, but I have no doubt of its priority to Shakspeare's Lear. Would the copyist of Shakspeare have sent Lear from Regan, (whose cruel treatment drove him from her court,) to Goneril; from Goneril back to Regan; and from Regan back again to Goneril,

“ That in her kitchen he might have
What scullion boys set by”?

Would the follower of Shakspeare have sent Lear

“ o'er to France,
In hopes from fair Cordelia there
To find some gentler chance”?

and would he have ascribed the following termination to the invasion of England by Cordelia and her husband? —

“ And so to England came with speed,
To repossess king Lear,
And drive his daughters from their thrones
By his Cordelia dear :

Where she, true-hearted noble queen,
Was in the battle slain :
 Yet he, good king, in his old days,
Possest his crown again."

It is confidently presumed he would not; while numerous reasons are apparent why Shakspeare, with the ballad before him, would reject these circumstances for the adoption of others more appropriate. It is, therefore assumed, though not solely on these grounds, that the ballad preceded Shakspeare's play, and the ballad was doubtless founded on Holinshed's Chronicle.

To these materials, in the hands of Shakspeare, must be added the Arcadia of Sir Philip Sidney, which will hereafter receive the attention it deserves.

It is an observable singularity that the old dramatist, the ballad, and Shakspeare agree in deviating from Holinshed by making Lear resign the whole of his kingdom and power; the historian only stating that Lear "willed and ordained that his land should be divided, after his death, between the husbands of his daughters; and the one half thereof immediately should be assigned to them in hand;" and it was not till "after that Lear was fallen into age, the two dukes that had married his two eldest daughters,

thinking it long ere the government of the land did come to their hands, arose against him in armour, and reft from him the governance of the land, upon conditions to be continued for term of life: by the which he was put to his portion, that is, to live after a rate assigned to him for the maintainance of his estate, which in process of time was diminished as well by Maglanus as by Hennisus."

In reading Shakspeare's play, every one must be struck by the inconsistency of his statements of the king's intentions, in regard to the division of his kingdom,

" Know, that we have divided in three our kingdom,"

and in this partition, Kent declares, " equalities are so weighed, that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety." Yet the question put by Lear to his daughters is,

" Which of you, shall we say, doth love us most ?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where merit doth most challenge it."

A reconciliation of these incongruities is impossible, but a key is, perhaps, to be found to them by reference to Shakspeare's authorities.

The king, in the old play, declares his determination to " resign his crown"

“ In *equal* dowry to his daughters three.”

His intention is reiterated :

“ No more, nor less, but even all alike.”

It is a proposition to the king, in the old drama, that

“ Your majesty knowing well,
What several suters your princely daughters have,
To make them *each a jointure more or less,*
As is their worth, to them that love profess.”

Holinshed, also, makes the disposal of the kingdom entirely a matter of uncertainty till the king had heard the answers of his daughters. “ When Leir, therefore, was come to great years, and began to wax unwieldy through age, he thought to understand the affections of his daughters towards him, *and prefer her whom he best loved,* to the succession over the kingdom.”

In Holinshed's implied publicity of Lear's object in the interrogation of his children is, perhaps, to be found the origin of its avowal in Shakspeare's drama. The Leir of the old play is studiously silent, *to his daughters,* respecting his ultimate intentions, which are, however, betrayed to them by his confidant, Skalliger,

“ Not doubting but your wisdoms will foresee
What course will best unto your good agree.”

The confining of the knowledge of Leir's scheme to his two eldest daughters marks their combination against Cordella, whose superiority in beauty is strongly stated to have excited their jealousy and hatred; a point Shakspeare left untouched.

It would be trifling to dwell on our dramatist's introduction of the elder sisters as already married, whereas, in the old play, they are contracted and wedded after Leir's division of his kingdom; or, on the equally immaterial circumstance, that in the original drama the territorial dowers are disposed of by lot, whereas Shakspeare distinctly specifies the portions of Goneril and Regan, in the first instance, and, after disinheriting Cordelia, directing "Cornwall and Albany," with his "two daughters' dowers," to "digest the third."

It is of more moment to notice that there is a general concurrence between the bard and his authorities on the facts of Lear's interrogation of his daughters, his silly credulity in, and absurd reward of, the sordid flattery of his elder children, and his cruel persecution of the sincere Cordelia. On the subject of his inflexibility there is a particular coincidence between the dramatists:—

“ Cease, good my lords, and sue not to reverse
Our censure, which is now irrevocable,

* * * *

Then do not so dishonour me, my lords,
As to make shipwreck of my kingly word.” *

Shakspeare's king urges the same plea of obstinacy, with the superadded circumstance of his irritation against Kent :

“ Hear me, recreant !
On thine allegiance hear me ! —
Since thou hast sought to make us break our vow,
(Which we durst never yet,) and, with strain'd pride,
To come betwixt our sentence and our power,” &c. †

The following passage, which Shakspeare has thrown into action above all eulogy, will show that the old dramatist was principally his guide in the representation of the king's ill treatment by the ungrateful Goneril.

“ The king hath dispossess himself of all,
Those to advance, which scarce will give him thanks :
His youngest daughter he hath turned away,
And no man knows what is become of her.
He sojourns now in Cornwall with the eldest,
Who flatter'd him, until she did obtain
That at his hands, which now she doth possess :
And now she sees he hath no more to give,
It grieves her heart to see her father live,

* Old play.

† Act I. sc. 1.

Oh, whom should man trust in this wicked age,
 When children thus against their parents rage?
 But he, the mirror of mild patience,
 Puts up all wrongs and never gives reply:
 Yet shames she not in most opprobrious sort,
 To call him fool and dotard to his face,
 And sets her parasites of purpose oft,
 In scoffing wise to offer him disgrace.
 Oh iron age! O times! O monstrous vilde,
 When parents are contemned of the child!
 His pension she hath half restrain'd from him,
 And will, ere long, the other half, I fear;
 For she thinks nothing is bestow'd in vain,
 But that which doth her father's life maintain."

Shocked at the unkindness of Gonorill, Leir flies to Ragan, who receives him with external demonstrations of kindness, but with inward disgust which is so highly inflamed by letters from her sister, that she bribes the messenger to murder her father, and his faithful attendant Perillus. They would have been sacrificed, but for the intervention of several well-timed flashes of lightning and claps of thunder, which turn the wretch from his purpose:

"He quakes, and lets fall one dagger then the other."

Good taste suggested some, and necessity others, of Shakspeare's deviations from this arrangement. He deferred to both in suddenly removing Cornwall and Regan, on the intim-

ation of their father's intention to visit them, from their own house to that of the Duke of Gloster: the most palpable affront was put upon the King, and the desired opportunity happily found of intimately connecting the harmonious and beautiful episode of Gloster and his sons with the history of Lear.

The only hint Shakspeare appears to have had for exposing Lear to contention with the "fretful elements" is to be found in the old play, where, flying from the persecution of his "pelican daughters," he seeks protection at the hands of Cordella.

Landing in France, with Perillus, they are without the means of remunerating the mariners for their passage, except by an exchange of their rich garments for the sailors' clothes, and then, utterly destitute, they are on the point of perishing from hunger and fatigue.

Holinshed, the old play, and the ballad, agree in sending Lear to France. Not only has Shakspeare's arrangement the advantage of considerably simplifying the action; but, when the manner is known in which the meeting between the father and daughter had been previously effected, it will not be thought that the confining of the scene to England was the most important improvement introduced.

The king of France, of the old play, possessed with the spirit of masquerading, disguises himself, Mumford his friend, and Cordella his Queen, "like countrey folke," and they set out on a journey to the coast, carrying their own basket of provisions. They accidentally arrive in time to meet and relieve Leir and Perillus in their extremity. A long conversation ensues, and Leir is induced to tell his story, and Cordella weeps, and says,

"Myself a father have a great way hence,
Used me as ill as ever you did her;
Yet, that his reverend age I once might see,
Ide creep along, to meet him on my knee."

And yet he knows her not, till she addresses him by the name of father, calls herself his daughter, and kneels to him!

The narrative of the Chronicle, which the ballad follows, is less improbable.

"The lady Cordeilla hearing that he was arrived in poor estate, she first sent to him, privily, a certain sum of money to apparel himself withal, and to retain a certain number of servants, that might attend upon him in honourable wise, as appertained to the estate which he had borne: and then, so accompanied, she appointed him to come to the court, which he did, and was so joyfully, honourably, and lovingly

received, both by his son-in-law Aganippus, and also by his daughter Cordeilla, that his heart was greatly comforted : for he was no less honoured, than if he had been king of the whole country himself."

A few words conclude the history of Leir : the powers of France invade his kingdom, drive his daughters and their husbands from his throne, and reinstate Leir in his rights. Thus far the old play, with which the ballad and the Chronicle accord, in assigning the victory to Leir's party ; but the ballad sings that Cordelia was slain in the battle, and Leir died of grief.

For the outlines of Leir's character Shakspeare was indebted to "The History of King Leir and his Three Daughters."

"I am as kind," says the king of the old play,

"as is the pelican,

That kills itself, to save her young ones' lives :
And yet as jealous as the princely eagle,
That kills her young ones if they do but dazzle
Upon the radiant splendour of the sun."

Shakspeare is not so discriminating, for he ascribes to Lear the tenderest love of his children, notwithstanding his cruelty to Cordelia.

Again of his dotage :

"O that I had some pleasing mermaid's voice,
For to enchant his senseless senses with!"

Whate'er I say to please the old man's mind,
Who dotes as if he were a child again.

For he you know is always in extremes.

But his old doting doltish withered wit,
Is sure to give a senseles check for it.*

Besides the motive for interrogating his daughters before alluded to, the old play assigns an anxiety to entrap Cordella into marriage :

“ My youngest daughter, fair Cordella, vows
No liking to a monarch unless love allows.
She is solicited by divers peers ;
But none of them her partial fancy hears.
Yet, if my policy may her beguile,
I'll match her to some king within this isle,
And so establish such a perfect peace
As fortune's force shall ne'er prevail to cease.

I am resolved, and even now my mind
Doth meditate a sudden stratagem,
To try which of my daughters loves me best :
Which till I know I cannot be in rest.
This granted, when they jointly shall contend,
Each to exceed the other in their love :
Then at the vantage will I take Cordella,
Even as she doth protest she loves me best,
I'll say, then, daughter, grant me one request,
To shew thou lovest me as thy sisters do,
Accept a husband whom myself will woo.

* Old play.

This said, she cannot well deny my suit,
 Although (poor soul) her senses will be mute :
 Then will I triumph in my policy,
 And match her with a king of Brittainy."

Shakspeare makes the whole of Lear's rage and inflexibility emanate from his own mind ; whereas, in the old play, much of his violence is attributable to the instigation of his fiend-like daughters. Before the old man has an opportunity of replying to Cordella's modest tender of the duty of a child, his dissatisfaction is prompted by both Gonorill and Ragan.

Gon. " Here is an answer answerless indeed :
 Were you my daughter, I should scarcely brook it.
Rag. Dost thou not blush, proud peacock as thou art,
 To make our father such a slight reply ?"

It appears also, afterwards, that they persevered in their wicked scheme :

Gon. " I have incenst my father so against her,
 As he will never be reclaim'd again.
Rag. I was not much behind to do the like."

And Leir himself particularly expresses how deeply they were implicated in the guilt of his unjust severity :

" Oh, how thy words add sorrow to my soul,
 To think of my unkindness to Cordella !

Whom causeless I did dispossess of all
*Upon th' unkind suggestions of her sisters.**

How noble is the burst of passion, agony,
 and remorse, that succeed the disappointment
 of Shakspeare's king!

“Life and death! I am ashamed
 That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus:
That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,
 Should make thee worth them. * * *
 * * * Old fond eyes,
Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck you out;
 And cast you, with the waters that you lose,
 To temper clay.”

And

“You think, I'll weep;
 No, I'll not weep:—
 I have full cause for weeping; but this heart
 Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws
 Or ere I'll weep.”

To these passages the author of the old play
 derives some slight claim, for his Leir weeps
 after the vituperations of Gonorill; and Ragan
 observes,

“He cannot speak for weeping.”

Shakspeare can well afford to concede him
 some share also of the “patience” Lear is soli-

* Old play.

citous for, and of which he ventures, improperly enough, to boast :

“ But for true need,
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need !”

In the midst of his frenzy Kent demands of him,

“ Sir, where is your patience now,
That you so oft have boasted to retain ?”

and Lear declares that he will be “ the pattern of all patience, I will say nothing :” this is obviously from the preceding drama,

“ But he, the mirror of mild patience,
Puts up all wrongs, and never gives reply.”

But all the subsequent passages of affection and agony, — the sublime of astonishment when Lear’s faculties are palsied into doubts of his own personal identity — all the frightful maledictions when he unites himself with the spirit of nature — all these passages own no inspiration but that of Shakspeare.

The specific difference between the Lears of the two dramatists is, that the king of the old play yields to despondency, and resigns himself to his fate, as justly merited by his cruelty to the only child who loved him. Shakspeare’s king is full of energy and rage ; and, though repenting

the folly of his conduct, resignation and tame submission form no part of his mind. Revenge such as shall be "the terror of the earth," and the resumption of the shape which it was thought he had "cast off for ever," are objects dear to his heart. This last feeling is slightly alluded to in the old play; not, however, by Leir, but by his counsellor, who expresses an opinion that Ragan would

" practise ere't be long,
By force of arms for to redress your wrong."

The idea of Lear's insanity was so obvious as well as natural, that Shakspeare will be no great loser, if it be shown that it did not originate with himself. The old play furnished him with Leir houseless and desolate, and the bard poetically exaggerated the incident into the exposure of the king to the bitter malice of the elements, on a night wherein

" the wrathful skies
Gallow the very wanderers of the dark,
And make them keep their caves. Since I was man,
Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never
Remember to have heard: man's nature cannot carry
The affliction, nor the fear;" *

* Act III. sc. 2.

and, by a bold and happy exertion of his skill, superadded from the ballad the circumstance of Lear's madness :

“ And calling to remembrance then
 His youngest daughter's words,
 That said the duty of a child
 Was all that love affords :
 But doubting to repair to her,
 Whom he had banish'd so,
Grew frantic mad ; for in his mind
 He bore the wounds of woe :
Which made him rend his -milkwhite locks
And tresses from his head :
 And all with blood bestain his cheeks,
 With age and honour spread.”

The only passages, besides those already quoted, that I can detect among Shakspeare's authorities, as having supplied him with any hints for Lear's conduct subsequent to his quitting Gloster's roof, and previous to his reconciliation to Cordelia, are in the old play. “ Did I,” demands Leir of Perillus,

“ e'er give thee living, to increase
 The due revenues which thy father left ?
 Or, did I ever dispossess myself
 And give thee half my kingdom in good will ?
 * * * * *

If they to whom I always have been kind
 And bountiful beyond comparison ;
 If they for whom I have undone myself

And brought my age unto this extreme want,
Do now reject, contemn, despise, abhor me,
What reason moveth thee to sorrow for me?"

Though no particular, there is certainly here a general resemblance to such passages in Shakspeare as —

" I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness,
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children;
You owe me no subscription; why then let fall
Your horrible pleasure?"

The restoration of the king to reason is the point at which Shakspeare, and his relief from starvation is the point at which the old dramatist reconcile Cordelia to her father; and though the same end is effected by the poets in ways perfectly dissimilar, Shakspeare has left ample traces of his recollection of his predecessor's scene. In the old play, Cordella kneels to her father on discovering herself, and Leir replies,

" O stand thou up, it is my part to kneel,
And ask forgiveness of my former faults.
Cordella. O, if you wish I should enjoy my breath,
Dear father rise, or I receive my death."

Shakspeare's text is different, but the action that should accompany the delivery of both passages is similar.

Cordella. " ——— O, look upon me, sir,
And hold thy hands in benediction o'er me."

This is a request Cordelia could only make upon her knees ; and she should be answered, as the continuation of her speech proves, by an attempt on the part of Lear to kneel to her.

“ No, sir, you must not kneel.”

On quitting the scene, also, Lear addresses his daughter,

“ You must bear with me :
Pray now forget and forgive : I am old and foolish ;”

and, when subsequently a prisoner with Cordelia,

“ When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
And ask of thee forgiveness.”*

When the cause of Leir is put, in the old drama, to the decision of the sword, the king piously devotes himself to prayer :

“ The while your hands do manage ceaseless toil,
Our hearts shall pray the foes may have the foil.”

The arrangement did not, apparently, fall in with Shakspeare's views, but unwilling to lose the advantage of the incident, he carefully reserved it for the use of Gloster :

“ *Enter Edgar and Gloster.*

Edgar. Here, father, take the shadow of this tree
For your good host ; pray that the right may thrive.”†

* Act IV. sc. 7.

† Act V. sc. 2.

Leir is left, by the ancient drama, a victorious monarch quietly re-established on his throne. Holinshed adds that " he ruled after this by the space of two years, and then died, forty years after he first began to reign. His body was buried at Leicester, in a vault under the channel of the river of Sore beneath the town."

The conclusion of the ballad is tragical.

" But when he heard Cordelia's death,
Who died indeed for love
Of her dear father, in whose cause
She did this battle move ;
He swooning fell upon her breast,
From whence he never parted :
But on her bosom left his life,
That was so truly hearted."

This is evidently the suggestion followed by Shakspeare, and that to him are attributable those exquisitely delicate touches of nature, that expression of intense human agony, and overwhelming pathos which characterise the closing scene of Lear, will excite surprise in none who have traced him through these volumes, triumphantly creating forms of pure and perfect beauty from the most rude materials.

Cordeilla, Cordella, and Cordelia are the varied forms under which Holinshed, the old dramatist, and the author of the ballad, represent the name of Lear's youngest daughter, and

Shakspeare's good taste in adopting the latter, is sanctioned by Spencer, in the narrative of the same story, contained in the second book and tenth canto of the Fairy Queen. The personage next in consequence to Lear himself is Cordelia, and though, in comparison with his dramatic predecessor, Shakspeare has allotted but a small space to the development of her character, she has acquired under his hands additional beauty. It is curious to notice the appearances of filial affection in the heroines of the two plays. It was the boast of Cordella, that though the greatest monarch were to sue to her

“ Except my heart could love, and heart could like,
 Better than any that I ever saw,
 His great estate no more should move my mind,
 Than mountains move by blast of every wind.”*

She had the most exalted notions, therefore, of the love due to a husband, and was, consequently, unwilling to give any pledge of affection to her father that might trench on the performance of her conjugal duties.

Cordelia says,

“ But look, what love the child doth owe the father,
 The same to you I bear, my gracious lord.”†

Shakspeare here differs from the old dramatist

* Old Play.

† Act I. sc. 1.

and his other usual authorities, and borrows from Camden: "the youngest, but the wisest, told her father flatly, without flattery, that albeit she did love, honour, and reverence him, and so would whilst she lived, as much as nature and daughterly duty, at the uttermost, could expect; yet she did think that one day it would come to pass that she should affect another more fervently; meaning her husband, when she were married, who being made one flesh with her, as God by commandment had told, and nature had taught her, she was to cleave fast to, forsaking father and mother, kiffe and kinne." It should be added, that Camden is the only author who gives to Lear's question that extensive meaning required by the tenor of the story. All Shakspeare's other authorities, and Shakspeare after them, confine Lear's interrogation to the actual extent of his daughter's love, while, according to Camden, the king asks "whether they did love him, *and so would during their lives, above all others.*" The adopting of Cordelia's answer to this question, from Camden, required the adopting of Lear's question also, to make the harmony complete.

It has always been observed, as an incident not less affecting than natural, that Shakspeare represents the youngest as the favourite daughter

of her father ; the child whom he cast in misguided passion from his bosom was her whom " most he loved," " his best, his dearest." The poet needed not the sanction of authority for the trait, but he had it; Holinshed informing him, that " Leir had three daughters, whom he greatly loved, *but specially Cordeilla, the youngest, far above the two elder.*" The address of Shakspeare's Lear

" Now, our joy,
Although the last, not least ;"

is evidently framed on a passage in the old play:

" Thanks (worthy Mumford) to thee last of all,
Not greeted last, 'cause thy desert was small."

As the old play says, Cordella's " deeds do make report for her," and, therefore, a mere narration of her history is at all times sufficient to make her appear amiable and interesting. But no where, except in Shakspeare's portrait of Cordelia, is to be found an union of the qualities that constitute the perfection of the female character. Her ejaculation, " What shall Cordelia do? Love and be silent," eloquently proclaims the intense of her affection. A noble dignity is expressed in her refusal to purchase the favour of her father by emulating her sisters' sordid flattery. The accurate definition of a

child's duty to a parent, evinces the same good sense that pointed out to her, in the moment of degradation, the necessity of having it recognised that for

“ No unchaste action or dishonour'd step,”

was she discarded from the grace and favour of her father.

With her father, Cordella is left victorious and happy in the old play. The ballad sings that

“ She, true-hearted, noble queen
Was in the battle slain ;”

and Holinshed relates that “ Cordeilla, the youngest daughter of Leir, was admitted queen and supreme governess of Britain in the year of the world 3155, before the building of Rome 54, Uzia then reigning in Juda, and Jeroboam over Israel. This Cordeilla after her father's decease ruled the land of Britain right worthily during the space of five years, in which mean time her husband died, and then about the end of those five years, her two nephews Margan and Cimedag, sons to her aforesaid sisters, disdaining to be under the government of a woman, levied war against her, and destroyed a great part of the land, and finally took her prisoner, and laid her fast in ward, werewith she took such grief,

being a woman of a manly courage, and despairing to recover liberty, there she slew herself when she had reigned (as is before mentioned) the term of five years."

It is to this account that the conclusion of Shakspeare's play is assimilated; with the difference, that the poet judiciously evaded the termination of Cordelia's life by such revolting means as suicide, making her the victim of the blood-thirsty hatred of her enemies.

Of Regan and Goneril there is not much to be remarked. Though Shakspeare has given less prominence than the old dramatist to their intention of murdering their father, he has deepened the wickedness of both. Regan's instigation of Albany's cruelty to Gloster, is horrible beyond conception; and Goneril's design upon the life of her own husband, and actual poisoning of her sister are acts of wickedness unsurpassable. The love of these two women for Edmund is a circumstance of Shakspeare's own invention, and it should not be neglected to observe on the strict satisfaction of the claims of retributive justice in their fates, when Holinshed, the old play, and the ballad, dismiss them merely with defeat:

"Hereupon, when this army and navy of ships were ready, Leir and his daughter Cordeilla with

her husband took the sea, and arriving in Britain, fought with their enemies, and discomfited them in battle, in the which Maglanus and Hennius were slain." *

Hennius, Duke of Cornwall, and Maglanus, Duke of Albania, are the husbands assigned to Leir's elder daughters by Holinshed. The ballad does not name them, and the old play calls them the king of Cornwall and the king of Cambria. The duke, whom Shakspeare designates as "wat'rish Burgundy," whose "election made not up" to the portionless Cordelia, has no part in any of the stories besides our author's drama.

Shakspeare introduces the king of France at the English court, without authority from any quarter, though the old play, the ballad, and Holinshed agree in giving him to Cordelia, and the two latter in calling him Aganippus. After

" wand'ring up and down,
Unhelp'd, unpity'd, gentle maid,
Through many an English town:"

the ballad sends Cordelia to France, where the monarch,

" With full consent of all his court,
Made her his wife and queen."

* Holinshed.

Holinshed's French king despatches an embassy to Lear demanding his youngest daughter in marriage; "to whom answer was made, that he might have his daughter; but as for any dower, he could have none, for all was promised and assured to her other sisters already. Aganippus, notwithstanding this answer of denial to receive any thing by way of dower with Cordeilla, took her to wife, only moved thereto for respect of her person and amiable virtues."

It would be in vain to speculate why Shakspeare kept this passage in view when he wrote Lear's address to Burgundy, entirely neglected it in the more courtly speech to France, and again referred to it in the French monarch's final reply.

" Sir, there she stands ;
 If aught within that little, seeming substance,
 Or all of it, with our displeasure piec'd,
 And nothing more, may fitly like your grace,
 She's there, and she is yours.

* * * *

For you, great king,

[To France.

I would not from your love make such a stray,
 To match you where I hate; therefore beseech you
 To avert your liking a more worthier way,
 Than on a wretch whom nature is asham'd
 Almost to acknowledge hers.

* * * *

France. Fairest Cordelia, thou art most rich, being poor;
 Most choice, forsaken; and most lov'd, despised.

Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon

* * * *

Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my chance,
Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France."

The far-famed beauty of Leir's daughter attracts the French king in the old play to England, with one of his courtiers. They are romantically disguised like pilgrims, they meet Cordella accidentally, and the king courts, and wins her.

The Perillus of the old play is evidently the prototype of Kent, but with some diversity of delineation. Perillus, like Kent, opposes himself to the rash and unnatural conduct of his royal master; but here the matter ends without any disgrace to Perillus, who is, in his proper character, the faithful attendant of Leir in his misfortunes. When Shakspeare's Lear, in a burst of passion, banished Kent, it was necessary to clothe the faithful nobleman in disguise, that he might accomplish the business required of him. In the old play the king of France has a courtier, Mumford, attendant on him, in disguise, whose characteristics are coarse pleasantry, and blunt straight forward honesty. Hence the assigning of the same humour to Kent, for the integrity of Perillus is not exhibited under any peculiarity of disposition.

Shakspeare's steward is the parallel of the messenger of the old play. Both are the medium through which the daughters communicate to each other their schemes of wickedness; and though Shakspeare declines the employment of his servant in the murder of Lear, he is made to reply to the suggestion :

“ If you do chance to hear of that blind traitor, (Gloster) Preferment falls on him that cuts him off.

Stewd. “ Would I could meet him; madam ! I would Show what party I do follow.”

The messenger's heart fails him in the execution of the bloody business consigned to him, and the steward perishes by the hand of Edgar as he assaults the life of Gloster: the king of Paphlagonia, Gloster's prototype, is, when in danger of assassination, protected by his good son, of whom Edgar is the representative.

A passage in Sir Philip Sidney may be abridged in illustration of the episode of Gloster and his sons. In the *Arcadia* is to be found, “ The pitifull state and storie of the Paphlagonian unkinde king, and his kind sonne : first related by the sonne, then by the blind father.”

The king of Paphlagonia was the father of two sons, one borne him by his wife, the other illegitimate. What the bastard's birth denied him, he acquired by villany; and, having sup-

planted his brother in his parent's love, prevailed on the old man to command the murder of his heir in an adjoining forest. More merciful than the king, the servants spared the life of the young man, who found security under a disguise. The misplaced affection of the king reaped a natural and merited reward; for, reposing implicit confidence in his bastard son, the Paphlagonian monarch was suddenly dethroned, and, as if in wantonness, condemned to wander through his kingdom, destitute and helpless, with his eyes put out, no one daring to direct his erring steps, or administer to the most urgent of his necessities.

Regardless of his own life, and forgetful of the injuries unnaturally heaped upon him, the good prince flew to the assistance of his father, and took upon himself the office of guide in his distress. Knowing that nothing could be more desirable to the bastard than the death of the rightful heir to the throne, and that his virtuous child was now exposed to peril on his account, the king earnestly besought the affectionate Leonatus to lead him to the summit of a stupendous rock, whence he might cast himself, and put a period to his own miseries, and thus terminate the dangers of his protector.

The young man had not effectually silenced

the intreaties of his father, when the wicked usurper and his followers surrounded, and were only prevented from murdering them by the arrival of unexpected succour. This contest was the commencement of a war which terminated in the discomfiture of the usurper, and the gift of the crown to his more deserving brother. The meanness of the bastard stooped to sycophancy where he could not tyrannise, and he lived a despicable dependant on the court of Leonatus.

Of the character of the Paphlagonian king, nothing further appears, than that, weakly misled by the misrepresentations of his bastard, he sought the life of his lawful son; but, convinced of his own cruelty, had the generosity to acknowledge his error; and, in gratitude for unmerited kindness, was desirous of sacrificing himself to insure his son's safety.

The humane and zealous interference of Gloucester in behalf of Lear is evidence of the rectitude of his intentions. He would not have proved himself inferior to his prototype in any point, if opportunity had been given him of making those amends for his conduct which to the Paphlagonian monarch was afforded. "But," says Edgar, "I

Never (O fault!) reveal'd myself unto him,
 Until some half hour past, when I was arm'd,
 Not sure, though hoping, of this good success,
 I ask'd his blessing, and from first to last
 Told him my pilgrimage : But his flaw'd heart,
 (Alack, two weak the conflict to support!)
 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
 Burst smilingly."

"The blind king having," narrates Sir Philip Sidney, "in the chief city of his realm set the crown upon his son Leonatus' head, with many tears (both of joy and sorrow), setting forth to the whole people his own fault and his son's virtue, after he had kist him, and forced his son to accept honour of him, as of his new-become subject, even in a moment died: as it should seem, his heart broken with unkindness and affliction, stretched so far beyond his limits with this excess of comfort, as it was able no longer to keep safe his vital spirits."

There is in the old play of King Leir a personage named Skalliger, who styles himself

"a villaine, that to curry favour,
 Have given the daughter counsel 'gainst the father."

This man Shakspeare altogether omits, without, indeed, his place is deemed to have been supplied by the representative of the wicked son of the king of Paphlagonia: though for purposes

dissimilar from those of Skalliger, Edmund is the bosom friend and counsellor of Goneril and Regan.

The wickedness of Plexirtus against his brother is exactly paralleled by Edmund's against Edgar; but Sir Philip Sidney evades the task of delineating the details of the tale under the plea that it would only "tediouslie trouble" the reader. That the noble author might otherwise have managed his story, admits not now of question; for throughout the whole range of Shakespeare's dramas, a second-rate character is not to be found so clear and vigorous in delineation, and, consequently, so strong in its claims on attention as Edmund's. He is bold in the conception of his designs, and ingenious in their execution, and feeling the ability, he proceeds with the confidence of a master: his double deception of his father and brother, and nice management of the two sisters, whom he makes subservient to his schemes, bespeak a villain scarcely inferior in accomplishments to Iago, to whom, indeed, in other points, he bears some distant resemblance. There is in Edmund's reflections on bastardy, and that "excellent foppery of the world," astrology, a mixture of wit, keen satire, bitter sarcasm, acute observation, and contempt of the opinions and feelings of

society, similar in spirit to, and not unworthy of the genius of that paragon of all rogues, "his Moorship's Ancient."

The crime of plucking out Gloucester's eyes, Shakspeare transfers from Edmund to the Duke of Cornwall.

Edgar is Shakspeare's representative of Leonatus, the good son of the king of Paphlagonia, and the distinctions between them are, that Leonatus secured himself from the persecutions of his father, and the malice of his brother, by entering as a private soldier in the service of a neighbouring power, where his courage and conduct quickly brought him into notice; and, on the point of advancement, he relinquished every thing to succour his afflicted father. Edgar saves his own life by concealing himself under the disguise of a maniac.

For the delineation of the madness of Lear, the poet drew on the resources of his own genius alone; and from his deep knowledge of human nature, he traced a mind and heart like Lear's through all the wanderings of insanity; and no picture of this lamentable degradation of humanity was ever more pathetic, delicate, or true.

Edgar's madness is assumed, and the course pursued by the poet sufficiently indicates how sensibly he felt the difference of the task before

him. He was relieved from the labour of that reflection which was necessary to the development of the intricate windings of the heart, and the exhibition of mental aberration, in harmony with the natural character and disposition of the "sound man;" for the part of Edgar required nothing more than a judicious proportion of such extravagant and unconnected ideas as would support the character of a wandering lunatic. Shakspeare, therefore, gave himself little more trouble than what reference occasioned him to Harsnet's "Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures to withdraw Her Majesty's Subjects from their Allegiance;" a work written to expose the craft of the Jesuits, whose pretended cures of feigned demoniacs were used as a means for the seduction of converts to the Catholic religion. It was from this work that he extracted the names of all the fiends and devils with which Edgar displays such extreme familiarity. "Frateretto; Hopdance, Obdicut, prince of lust; Hobbididance, of dumbness; Mahu, of stealth; Modo, of murder; and Flibbertigibbet, of mopping and mowing; who since possesses chambermaids and waiting-women," are all exhibited in turn by the lynx-eyed bishop, from whom Shakspeare also borrowed, for the use of Edgar, many casual phrases, which, being inex-

pressive of valuable ideas, are devoid of sufficient interest to justify their individual quotation.

Edgar loses nothing in the comparison of heroism with the Paphlagonian prince. Like him he exposes his life in defence of his father, like him he is victorious; and his impeachment, challenge, and punishment of the villanous Edmund, are in the highest strain of chivalric gallantry.

When Edgar throws aside his disguise, and proclaims himself the son of Gloster, he shortly recounts the way in which he passed the days of his adversity; all which the audience were as well acquainted with as himself, for his actions had all been exhibited before them. But Shakspeare found the story twice narrated in the *Arcadia*, and he was seduced, on this occasion, to the commission of tautology, as he had been by the poem of Arthur Brooke, when he wrote *Romeo and Juliet*.

A contrast of the plot and characters of Shakspeare's tragedy with the materials used in its construction, has nearly exhausted our means of further illustration, and of the little that remains to be said the importance is but trifling.

Johnson censures Shakspeare for making *Lear* too much a mythologist, in swearing by *Apollo* and *Jupiter*. To obviate the objection,

Malone quotes Geoffrey of Monmouth, Holinshed, and *The Mirrour of Magistrates*, for the fact that “Bladud, Lear’s father, attempting to fly, fell on the temple of Apollo and was killed;” on which Steevens sarcastically asks, whether we are to understand from this circumstance, that the *son* swears by Apollo, because the *father* broke his neck on the temple of that deity? Shakspeare, indeed, learnt from Bladud’s accident that Apollo was worshipped by our British ancestors; but it is doubted, whether reference would not have been more pertinent to the old play, which most probably put Apollo, and Jupiter too, into Shakspeare’s head:—

“ This will please him more
Than e’er *Apollo’s* music pleased *Jove*.”

The use made by Shakspeare of ideas that he met with in his reading, is sometimes extremely unexpected and singular. In the old play he found—

“ I am as kind as is the pelican,
That kills itself to save her young ones lives.”

The obvious image of Lear sacrificing himself for the benefit of his children made, apparently, little impression on Shakspeare, and his mind passed on to the more remote idea of Lear’s

children, like the young of the pelican, glutting themselves on their parent's blood, and, accordingly, Lear is made to exclaim —

“ Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! 'twas this flesh begot
Those pelican daughters.”

Its obviousness would make it superfluous to observe, that the history of the Paphlagonian king furnished the incident which gave occasion for Edgar's magnificent description of Dover cliff, were it not necessary to remark, that he did not thence derive the incongruous idea of persuading Gloster that he had actually fallen from the stupendous height, though he was perfectly unhurt, and only fell the length of his own body.

Respecting the management of the story of Lear, the most striking circumstance is its connection with the history of the king of Paphlagonia and his sons. Never were the materials of an episode more harmonious with the main incident, and never was an episode more ingeniously interwoven and finally amalgamated with the subject matter than the fable of Gloster with the tale of Lear. Indeed, from the arrival of Albany and Regan at Gloster's castle it is

impossible to disconnect the stories; and by means the most artful, though at the same time apparently natural and simple, the episode is made to promote the ends of retributive justice, which were unsatisfied by the conclusion of the original tale.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

1606.

THE plot of *All's Well that Ends Well*, or, as Dr. Farmer supposes it to have been sometimes called, *Love's Labour Wonne*, was originally the property of Bocaccio, but was immediately derived by Shakspeare from the thirty-eighth novel in the first volume of *Painter's Palace of Pleasure*: its title is *Giletta of Narbona*.

Isnardo, Count of Rossiglione, was continually afflicted by sickness. He retained in his house a celebrated physician, Gerardo of Narbona, whose daughter, Giletta, fostered a very early attachment for Bertram, the son of Isnardo. On the decease of his father, the young Count became a ward of the king, and was sent to Paris. Shortly afterwards the father of Giletta

also died, when she conceived the idea of making a journey in pursuit of the object of her romantic passion.

The king's disease baffled his most skilful physicians; and on this circumstance Giletta founded a project of obtaining Bertram for her husband. Directed by the knowledge she had obtained from her father, she prepared a powder of herbs; set out for Paris, had an audience of the king, and undertaking to effect his cure, without any pain, within the period of eight days, she prevailed on him to make a trial of her skill. The penalty of failure was to be death by fire: in the event of success, she stipulated for permission to choose a husband, with reservation only of the royal blood.

The king was restored to health within the appointed time, and Giletta fixed her choice on Bertram. Unable to refuse obedience to the king's commands, he reluctantly submitted to the union; but highly disgusted with the meanness of his connection, immediately after the performance of the marriage ceremony he dismissed his bride to her home, and set out himself for Tuscany to join the Florentine army.

From Rossiglione, Giletta despatched two knights to Bertram with a message expressive of her entire obedience to his will. He coldly re-

plied, "Let her do what she list : for I do purpose to dwell with her when she shall have this ring upon her finger, and a son in her arms begotten by me." The ring was one he greatly loved, and constantly wore upon his finger on account of a virtue he supposed it to possess.


Giletta quickly determined on her course. Providing herself with money and jewels, she assumed the habit of a pilgrim, and taking with her a kinsman and female servant, travelled without intermission till she arrived at Florence. Here she discovered that her husband was violently in love with the daughter of a poor, but highly respectable lady, On this information she formed her plan ; and repairing to the house of this lady, after the fullest explanation, proposed that her daughter should seemingly acquiesce in the desires of the Count, on his consenting to give her the ring he wore. Every preparation was made for Bertram's introduction in the obscurity of night, and Giletta, instead of the young lady whom he loved, received Bertram to her arms. The ring was obtained, and Giletta had the satisfaction, in due time, of giving birth to two sons, both bearing a striking resemblance to their father.

In the mean time, Bertram, informed of the departure of his wife from Rossiglione, resolved

to return home and reside there. It was on the celebration of a great entertainment given by the Count, that Giletta, with her husband's "ring upon her finger, and two sons begotten by him in her arms," prostrated herself before him, claiming the fulfilment of his promise to receive her as his wife. The Countess then related every particular relative to her accomplishment of the conditions imposed upon her. The Count embraced and kissed her, and acknowledging her for his lawful wife, vowed thenceforth to love and honour her.

Not only the leading features of this story, but many minute and unimportant circumstances have been copied into his play by Shakspeare with almost verbal fidelity. In several instances, however, he has thought proper to desert his original; sometimes capriciously, sometimes with advantage.

The singularity of the monarch's submission of his case to the care of a young woman is lessened, if not entirely removed, by Shakspeare's judicious preparation for the incident. In a previous scene the king inquires after Gerardo de Narbona, and declares, "if he were living I would try him yet:" his attention to the professions of the daughter, therefore, is scarcely to be wondered at.



Not equally happy is the proposition to Bertram, on the supposition of his wife's death, of a second marriage. His eager acceptance of the proposal, and his declaration of a previous attachment to the lady*, form nothing but obstacles to the Count's subsequent reconciliation to Helena, whose re-appearance, when her husband was on the point of uniting himself to a woman he loved, would have any effect rather than that of removing his dislike to, and fixing his affections on, herself.

The Count's ring, which in the novel is represented as possessed of some extraordinary virtue, Bertram designates as

“ an honour 'longing to our house,
Bequeathed down from many ancestors ;
Which were the greatest obloquy i' the world
In me to lose.”

From this description of its value, Shakspeare has taken occasion to supply the virgin, whose virtue Bertram endeavoured to corrupt, with a most elegant and argumentative reply to his criminal solicitations :—

“ Mine honour's such a ring :
My chastity's the jewel of our house,
Bequeathed down from many ancestors ;

* Act V. sc. 3.

Which were the greatest obloquy i'the world
 In me to lose : Thus your own proper wisdom
 Brings in the champion honour on my part,
 Against your vain assault." *

In taking, during the night, the ring of
 Bertram from his finger, Helena supplies its
 place with one she had received as a present
 from the king, who, in bestowing it,

“ bade her, if ever her fortunes stood
 Necessitated to help, that by this token
 He would relieve her.”

The king detects this ring in the possession of
 Bertram. Failing to give any satisfactory ac-
 count of the means by which he obtained it, he
 is suspected of having murdered his wife ; a sus-
 picion countenanced by her disappearance from
 Rossiglione, and the strongly attested report of
 her death.

Shakspeare perseveres in his deviation from
 his original by making the young lady, whom
 Bertram supposed he had seduced at Florence,
 prefer her complaints to the king, and claim the
 fulfilment of the Count's promise to marry her
 on the death of his wife. After a scene of
 much unnecessary perplexity and apparent con-
 tradiction, Helena appears, clears up all the

* Act IV. sc. 2.

difficulties, and is acknowledged as the wife of Bertram.

Inasmuch as the incident of the king's ring forms a strong corroborative proof that Bertram was the father of Helena's children, its introduction is judicious; but the appearance of Diana only serves to perplex what was before perfectly simple, and renders that puerile and ineffective which might have been a striking dramatic conclusion. Shakspeare considerably spared Helena the production of twins within the period allotted for the performance of his drama, contenting himself with introducing her to her husband, in a condition promising the desired circumstance.

For the comic scenes, which are so prominent in the play, Shakspeare had no authority from the novel. They boast no great ingenuity in their contrivance, and the skill of their execution is principally confined to the display of Parolles, a character entirely unconnected with the fable, and useful only as the creator of mirth and variety. He is an infinitely entertaining personage:—"A notorious liar," a "great way fool," "solely a coward."

" These fixed evils sit so fit in him,
That they take place, when virtue's steely bones
Look bleak in the cold wind."

The Countess is also an introduction of Shakspeare's, and the part, though short, is distinguished by the display of an admirable understanding. Her speech of blessing on, and advice to, her son, is less known than many passages of Shakspeare, but is scarcely less deserving of admiration than some of the most celebrated.*

Collectively, the characters of this drama cannot be described as forcible. The king is simply distinguished by a good heart and sound sense. Lafeu, Diana, and the Widow, are mere necessary auxiliaries in the progress of the story. Bertram has little or no character; he is the agent of the various circumstances allotted in the novel to the Count, and might have been the agent of almost any other events without much violation of propriety. Helena offers considerably higher pretensions to distinction. In giving the sanction of Bertram's mother to her attachment, and in sending her to Paris with "leave and love," and "means and attendants," Shakspeare has removed much of the levity which characterises Giletta. But her pursuit of a man who hated her is an inherent indelicacy in her conduct, and not all the estimable qualities she possesses can wash her pure of that stain. It is not very

* Act I. sc. 1. "Be thou blest, Bertram," &c.

easy to tolerate the union of wisdom and goodness with boldness and indiscretion, in "a maid too virtuous for the contempt of empire." Many of the remarks assigned by Shakspeare to Helena are of a very high mental character; of which the reflections introductory to the project of her journey to Paris, and her argument to induce the king to make trial of the efficacy of her prescription are instances. *

The comic scenes, and the general graceful ease and fluency of its diction, give an air of lightness and variety to the play that are wanting in the novel. The mere story is not productive of more effect in one than in the other, and the drama makes no pretensions to rank in the first order of excellence. But a value is conferred upon Shakspeare's performance beyond its dramatic merit, by its being the repository of much sententious wisdom, and numerous passages of remarkable elegance. A single speech of the king may be referred to as an instance of both †, and Helena's description of her hopeless passion may be selected as exquisitely beautiful. ‡

* Act I. sc. 1. "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie," &c.

Act II. sc. 1. "He that of greatest works is finisher," &c.

† ————— "It much repairs me

To talk of your good father," &c. Act I. sc. 2.

‡ "I know I love in vain," &c. Act I. sc. 3.

MACBETH.

1606.

THE history of Macbeth is recorded in Holinshed's Chronicle of Scotland, whence Shakspeare derived his knowledge of the striking incidents embodied in his immortal tragedy.

Malcolm, King of Scotland, dying without a male heir, was succeeded, in 1040, by Duncan, the son of his eldest daughter Beatrice, the wife of Crinen, Thane of the isles and western parts of Scotland. Malcolm's second daughter, Doda, married Sinel, Thane of Glamis, and was the mother of Macbeth.

The disposition of Duncan was too beneficent and mild for the lawless age in which he lived, and rebellion sprang from the culpable leniency of his sway. The magnitude of his danger at length compelled the king to a vigorous assertion of his authority, and Macbeth, his cousin, and Banquo, thane of Lochquhaber, were de-

spatched against the chief rebel, Macdowald, who was supported by a powerful body of Kerns and Galloglasses. Defeated, and despairing of mercy, Macdowald slew himself.

Scarcely was this insurrection suppressed when Sueno, King of Norway, invaded Scotland. With an unaccustomed activity, Duncan marched in person against the enemy, himself commanding the main battle, and consigning the inferior charges to Banquo and Macbeth. The Scots were defeated with great slaughter, and the king took refuge in the castle of Bertha, while the activity of his generals, undismayed by defeat, was exerted to collect new powers.

Duncan, by feigned negotiations, lulled his enemies into security, when suddenly Macbeth and Banquo appeared again in the field; the Danes were slaughtered without resistance, only Sueno, and ten other persons effecting their escape. The celebration of this triumph was succeeded by a new alarm, the arrival of a second fleet of Danes, sent by Canute, King of England, in revenge of his brother Sueno's overthrow. Macbeth and Banquo encountered and defeated the enemy: those who escaped the sword were fain to purchase the privilege of burial for their slaughtered friends in Saint Colmes Inch, by a large payment of gold: a

treaty was at the same time concluded, by which the Danes bound themselves never to renew hostilities against the Scots.

“It fortun'd as Macbeth and Banquo journied towards Fores, where the king then lay, they went sporting by the way together without other company, save only themselves, passing through the woods and fields, when suddenly in the midst of a laund, there met them three women in strange and wild apparel, resembling creatures of elder world, whom when they attentively beheld, wondering much at the sight, the first of them spake and said; ‘All hail Macbeth, thane of Glamis,’ (for he had lately entered into that dignity and office by the death of his father Sinel.) The second of them said; ‘Hail Macbeth, thane of Cawdor.’ But the third said; ‘All hail Macbeth, that hereafter shall be king of Scotland.’ — Then Banquo; ‘What manner of women (saith he) are you, that seem so little favourable unto me, whereas to my fellow here, besides high offices, ye assign also the kingdom, appointing forth nothing for me at all?’ ‘Yes (saith the first of them), we promise greater benefits unto thee, than unto him, for he shall reign in deed, but with an unlucky end: neither shall he leave any issue behind him to succeed in his place, where con-

trarily thou in deed shalt not reign at all, but of thee those shall be born which shall govern the Scottish kingdom by long order of continual descent.' Herewith the aforesaid women vanished immediately out of their sight." *

By the law of Scotland, if Duncan died during the minority of his sons, the crown descended to the next of blood. Macbeth stood in this relation to the throne, but suddenly found his prospect of succession annihilated by the elevation of the king's eldest son, Malcolm, to the dignity of Prince of Cumberland, the possessor of that title being always deemed the heir apparent. Irritated against his sovereign by a sense of injury, stimulated by the flattering promises of the weird sisters, and urged on by his wife, by Banquo, and other friends, Macbeth resolved to possess himself of the throne by violence. He slew Duncan at Inverness; proclaimed himself king; and was invested with the regal dignity at Scone. The sons of Duncan fled in dismay; Malcolm to England, and Donald-Bane into Ireland.

The government of the usurper was, for a time, wise and equitable, but, tortured by the continued dread, that what he obtained by blood

* Holinshed.

he should lose by blood, and oppressed by the prophecy which assigned the crown to the posterity of Banquo, Macbeth became a tyrant. Banquo and his son were invited to a supper only to be murdered on their return: the father was slain, but Fleance escaped under favour of the night's obscurity. The tyrant continued his course of bloody policy: the nobles were sacrificed to suspicion, and their coffers plundered for the maintenance of an army to which he confided the protection of his person. More firmly to establish his arbitrary sway, Macbeth erected a castle of great strength on the summit of the lofty hill called Dunsinane, causing all the thanes to lend their assistance in the progress of the costly work. Macduff, thane of Fife, supplied his due proportion of labourers and materials; but justly suspicious of the king's disposition towards him, he forbore to give his personal attendance. Highly offended at the omission, Macbeth's hatred of the thane received a new stimulus in the admonition of a wizard to beware of Macduff, who was destined to aim at his destruction. The warning would have cost the thane his life, but for the usurper's implicit confidence in the assurance of a witch, that "he should never be slain with man born of any woman, nor vanquished till

the wood of Birnam came to the castle of Dunsinane.”

The jealousy of Macbeth led him to corrupt a member of every noble family in his realm. An intrigue of Macduff with Malcolm was, therefore, quickly known, and its revenge as speedily resolved on. The castle of Macduff was sacked, and his wife and children were barbarously murdered. Macduff had previously set out for England, where he exhorted the young prince Malcolm, by all the wrongs of his suffering country, to assert his indisputable claim to its crown, and attempt its deliverance from the yoke of the tyrant.

Malcolm was deeply grieved at the misfortunes of his native land; but, doubtful whether Macduff was not employed by Macbeth to decoy him to destruction, he cautiously replied, that nothing was nearer his heart than the welfare of Scotland, to which, however, he was utterly incapable of affording relief, being himself the slave of every vice that debased the human character. Lust, sensuality, avarice, duplicity, treachery, and deceit, were crimes which he described as having reached their greatest enormity in himself. For some time, Macduff endeavoured to evade the force of Malcolm's objections, but convinced, at last, that he was

abandoned to wickedness, and devoid of a single spark of redeeming virtue, he indignantly exclaimed, “ ‘ Here then I leave thee, and therefore say ; Oh ye unhappy and miserable Scotchmen, which are thus scourged with so many and sundry calamities, each one above other ! Ye have one cursed and wicked tyrant, that now reigneth over you, without any right or title, oppressing you with his most bloody cruelty. This other, that hath the right to the crown, is so replete with the inconstant behaviour and manifest vices of Englishmen, that he is nothing worthy to enjoy it : for by his own confession, he is not only avaricious, and given to unsatiable lust, but so false a traitor withall, that no trust is to be had unto any word he speaketh. Adieu, Scotland, for now I account myself a banished man for ever, without comfort or consolation :’ and with those words the brackish tears trickled down his cheeks very abundantly. At the last, when he was ready to depart, Malcolm took him by the sleeve, and said : ‘ Be of good comfort, Macduff, for I have none of these vices before remembered, but have jested with thee in this manner, only to prove thy mind : for divers times heretofore hath Macbeth sought by this manner of means to bring me into his hands, but the more slow I have shewed myself to condescend to thy

motion and request, the more diligence shall I use in accomplishing the same.' Incontinently hereupon, they embraced each other, and promising to be faithful the one to the other, they fell in consultation how they might best provide for all their business to bring the same to good effect. * * * In the mean time, Malcolm purchased such favour at King Edward's hands, that old Siward, Earl of Northumberland, was appointed with ten thousand men to go with him into Scotland to support him in this enterprise, for the recovery of his right. After these news were spread abroad in Scotland, the nobles drew into two several factions, the one taking part with Macbeth, and the other with Malcolm. * * * When Macbeth perceived his enemies' power to increase by such aid as came to them forth of England with his adversary Malcolm, he recoiled back into Fife, there purposing to abide in camp fortified, at the castle of Dunsinane, and to fight with his enemies, if they meant to pursue him; howbeit some of his friends advised him, that it should be best for him, either to make some agreement with Malcolm, or else to flee with all speed into the Isles, and to take his treasure with him, to the end he might wage sundry great princes of the realm to take his part, and retain strangers,

in whom he might better trust than in his own subjects, which stale daily from him : but he had such confidence in his prophecies, that he believed he should never be vanquished, till Birnam wood were brought to Dunsinane ; nor yet to be slain with any man, that should be or was born of any woman."

" Malcolm following hastily after Macbeth, came the night before the battle unto Birnam wood, and when his army had rested awhile there to refresh them, he commanded every man to get a bough of some tree or other of that wood in his hand, as big as he might bear, and to march forth therewith in such wise, that on the next morrow they might come closely and without sight in this manner within view of his enemies. On the morrow, when Macbeth beheld them coming in this sort, he first marvelled what the matter meant, but in the end remembered himself, that the prophecy which he had heard long before that time, of the coming of Birnam wood to Dunsinane castle was likely to be now fulfilled. Nevertheless, he brought his men in order of battle, and exhorted them to do valiantly, howbeit his enemies had scarcely cast from them their boughs, when Macbeth, perceiving their numbers, betook him straight to flight, whom Macduff pursued with great hatred even till he

came to Lunfannaine, where Macbeth perceiving that Macduff was hard at his back, leapt beside his horse, saying; ‘Thou traitor, what meaneth it, that thou shouldest thus in vain follow me that am not appointed to be slain by any creature that is born of a woman; come on therefore, and receive thy reward which thou hast deserved for thy pains,’ and therewithal he lifted up his sword thinking to have slain him. But Macduff quickly avoiding from his horse, ere he came at him, answered, (with his naked sword in his hand) saying: ‘It is true, Macbeth, and now shall thine insatiable cruelty have an end, for I am even he that thy wizards have told thee of, who was never born of my mother, but ripped out of her womb:’ therewithal he stept unto him, and slew him in the place. Then cutting his head from his shoulders, he set it upon a pole, and brought it unto Malcolm. This was the end of Macbeth, after he had reigned seventeen years over the Scottishmen.”

Such is Holinshed’s history of Macbeth. Of Shakspeare’s deviations from the Chronicle more requires to be said than of his general, and sometimes even literal, obligations to it.

In the opening of the historical portion of his play, the rebellion of Macdowald is con-

founded with the invasion of Scotland, first by Sueno, and subsequently by the forces of Canute. The death of Macdowald, who, it will be remembered, slew himself, is ascribed to the hand of Macbeth, a licence perfectly warrantable when its object was the reflection of lustre on the warlike character of the hero of the drama.

Holinshed gives no particulars of the murder of Duncan, but simply relates, that Macbeth "slew the king at Inverness," a brevity which Shakspeare supplied by reference to a former page of the historian, where the following narrative occurs of the murder of king Duffe, in the year 971 or 72, by Donwald, captain of the castle of Fores.

Incensed against his sovereign by real or imaginary injuries, Donwald yielded to the persuasion of his wife to revenge himself on the person of the king, whose frequent sojourn at the castle, and entire confidence in his host, afforded, she suggested, extraordinary facilities for the execution of the bloody purpose. The night previous to his intended departure, on his last visit to Fores, the royal guest distributed thanks and gifts to Donwald, and his other favourites. He then retired, accompanied by two chamberlains, who, having assisted his

majesty to bed, returned to banquet with Donwald and his wife. The carousal of the chamberlains was late, and their intemperance excessive: once laid upon their pillows, their drunken sleep bade defiance to disturbance.

In his heart, Donwald greatly abhorred the act he contemplated; but he persevered at the instigation of his wife. A little before cock-crow, the king's throat was cut by four of Donwald's servants, who immediately conveyed the body from the castle by a postern gate: labourers were then employed to bury it in the bed of a small adjacent river; and they had no sooner finished their work than they were slain by the servants: the servants immediately fled to Orkney.

The plot was deeply laid. Whilst the murder was being executed, Donwald mingled with the castle guard, and continued in their company till an alarm was raised in the morning of the disappearance of the king: his murder was obvious from the bloody pollution of the bed and chamber. Instantly assuming a loyal and zealous fury, Donwald slew the chamberlains, and then ransacked every corner of the castle for the body of the king. The guilt was now fastened on the chamberlains: the night previous to the murder, the keys of the fortress

had been committed to their custody, and the postern gate was discovered open.

Neither the sun by day, nor the moon by night, appeared in any part of Scotland for six months after the commission of this heinous deed. The sky was obscured by perpetual clouds, and the elements were so frequently disturbed by outrageous tempests, that the people lived in continual fear of destruction. In Lothian, horses of singular beauty and swiftness did eat their own flesh, and would in no wise taste of any other food. A gentleman, in Angus, was delivered of a child without eyes, nose, hand, or foot. A sparrow-hawk also was strangled by an owle.

In the representation of Duncan's murder, a due attention to scenic effect induced Shakspeare to make some deviations from this passage of the Chronicle, though he adopted its general scope, and copied it in many minute particulars. From that source proceeds the distribution of "great largess" among Macbeth's officers, and Duncan's presenting to the lady a diamond, and greeting her "by the name of most kind hostess." Hence the intoxication of the chamberlains till "death and nature did contend about them." The horror of the scene is greatly heightened by the assigning of the murder to Macbeth himself rather than to the

ignoble hands of hirelings. Macbeth's slaughter of the chamberlains, in an assumed frenzy of loyalty, exactly parallels the conduct of Donwald. The prodigies that succeeded the death of Duffe are applied to the fatal night of Duncan's murder:

“ Where we lay
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,
And prophesying, with accents terrible,
Of dire combustion and confus'd events,
New hatch'd to the woeful time. The obscure bird
Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth
Was feverous, and did shake.”*

In the poet's description of the unnatural occurrences which proclaimed the horrid deed, it is delightful to observe the beautiful poetic colouring which he has thrown over the circumstances of the Chronicle:

“ On Tuesday last,
A falcon, towering in her pride of place,
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at, and kill'd.
Rosse. And Duncan's horses, (a thing most strange
and certain),
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make
War with mankind.
Old Man. 'Tis said, they eat each other.
Rosse. They did so, to the amazement of mine eyes,
That look'd upon't.” †

* Act II. sc. 3.

† Act II. sc. 4.

In many other circumstances of the play Shakspeare returned to Holinshed's history of Macbeth; but he sometimes deviated from his authority. In the Chronicle, Banquo is murdered after his return from Macbeth's entertainment, and not, as in the play, during his ride before supper. The opportunity thus obtained of displaying Macbeth and his wife in a striking situation, explains the motive for the change. Shakspeare added nothing to the solemnity or interest of his scene by the representation of the interview in which the tyrant engaged the ruffians to murder Banquo; nor can he be praised for introducing the murderer, with "blood upon his face," to the hall of banquet, to whisper into the ear of his master, in the presence of the assembled nobility of Scotland, the particulars of the assassination.

The play affords no information relative to the erecting of Dunsinane castle, the refusal to assist in which was the immediate cause of quarrel between Macbeth and the thane of Fife. The dramatist mainly ascribes the breach to the neglect of Macduff to attend the "solemn supper" of the usurper.*

* "How say'st thou, that Macduff denies his person
At our great bidding."

Act III. sc. 4.

"For

It was far more convenient, for theatrical purposes, that Macbeth should end his career on the spot of his defeat, than effect his escape by flight "even till he came to Lunfannaine," and Shakspeare, therefore, "tied him to the stake." History does not relate that Macbeth's death was marked by any extraordinary display of valour, but Shakspeare, with his usual attention to nature, closed the life of a soldier, whose courage once shone conspicuous in the field, with a desperate effort of manly valour.

The page of history represents Banquo as scarcely less guilty than the actual murderer of Duncan. Macbeth, having sometime contemplated the crime, at length "communicated his purposed intent with his trusty friends, *among whom Banquo was the chiefest*, and upon confidence of *their promised aid*, he slew the king." But Shakspeare carefully separates Banquo from all participation in the guilt of the usurper, and transforms him into a pattern of loyalty and virtue. Unlike Macbeth, he lends no eager ear to excitements to ambition proceeding from a polluted and suspicious source; nor is he se-

"For from broad words, and 'cause he fail'd
His presence at the tyrant's feast, I hear,
Macduff lives in disgrace."

Act III. sc. 6.

fear bore ample testimony to the virtue before which he shrunk :

“ In his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be feared : 'Tis much he
dares ;
And to that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety. There is none, but he
Whose being I do fear : and, under him,
My genius is rebuk'd ; as it is said,
Mark Antony's was by Cæsar.” *

This misrepresentation of the character of Banquo might be justified on the ground of the variety and contrast of character which it introduced into the play ; but it is, perhaps, ascribable to a cause less obvious and defensible. It is historically true that, after the murder of Banquo, Fleance fled into Wales, where he found protection. He married ; his son repaired to Scotland, and ultimately became Lord Steward of that country. From this grandson of Banquo the royal family of Scotland descended in a direct line. The tragedy of Macbeth was produced after the accession of the first monarch of the house of Stuart, to the English throne. Whatever might have been his motive, it was an elegant compliment of the poet to pourtray the ancestor of his

* Act III. sc. 1.

sovereign in the most amiable colours; and James could not but justly appreciate the more immediate personal flattery,—the prediction that a descendant of Banquo would “two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry.”*

No where are Shakspeare’s matchless powers displayed with more grandeur than in his *Lady Macbeth*. The character is sketched in the *Chronicle*. Not only is *Lady Macbeth* there described as the stimulatress of her husband to his deed of blood, but boldly called a woman “very ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of queen.” Thus much for the wife of *Macbeth*. But, in consulting the history of king *Duffe*, Shakspeare met with an additional inducement to assign his heroine an active participation in the crime of murder. It was the wife of *Donwald* who suggested the assassination of *Duffe*; it was she who devised “the means whereby he might soonest accomplish it;” and by her its consummation was effected, when her husband “greatly abhorred the act in his heart.”†

These rude materials were wrought by Shakspeare into a character so sublime as to throw into the shade the finest works of the Greek

* Act IV. sc. 1.

† Holinshed.

tragic writers, those masters of the lofty and terrific. With a vigour peculiarly his own, he developed the ambition, courage, and cruelty which characterised the wife of Donwald and the historic Lady Macbeth. His fervid imagination supplied every thought which stamped these qualities on his heroine; and to him, alone, must be referred an exquisite trait of nature, which lightens, by a single ray, the black depravity of a mind otherwise dead to every softer feeling of humanity. With a caution provident against every possibility of failure, Lady Macbeth stole to the chamber of the sleeping Duncan and laid the daggers ready for her husband's use: with the swiftness of the lightning's blast, the damned suggestion flashed across her mind — to do the deed herself: — she had done so; — but, Duncan resembled her “father as he slept,” and her murderous hand was stayed.

History does not record the fate of the usurper's queen: the crimes of Donwald's wife were expiated by a public execution. Shakspeare assigned a more horrid termination to the career of Lady Macbeth, — death, the effect of terror; but, unhappily, he has neglected to mark the gradations of her mind from its native fearlessness to that abject state: he plunges her, at once, from the full vigour of intellect and self-posses-

sion into miserable imbecility and wretchedness. The victim of horror, from which she knows no refuge, she sinks under a conflict to which nature is unequal; and she who once could contemplate the dead as "pictures," and thought it beneath any, but the eye of childhood, to fear "a painted devil," falls a prey to the terrors of imagination.

Holinshed's history of Macbeth records the life of a brave, but superstitious soldier, whose natural cruelty, of disposition and implicit reliance on the mysterious agents of a hellish power, betrayed him to the murder of his sovereign. He found not the happiness he anticipated from the possession of a crown purchased by a deed of blood, "for the prick of conscience caused him ever to fear, lest he should be served of the same cup he had ministered to his predecessor."* He sought security in systematic tyranny, and justly perished by the hands of his indignant and injured countrymen.

To this slight foundation for the construction of the dramatic hero's character, must be added the hints adopted by Shakspeare from the conduct of Donwald, the murderer of king Duffe: "Then Donwald, *though he abhorred the act*

* Holinshed.

greatly in his heart —.” Hence the poet assigned a virtuous mind to Macbeth, instead of the “cruel nature” ascribed to him in his history; and hence the design of tracing the progress of guilt from the first conception of its thought in an innocent bosom, till it gradually acquired ascendancy over every other feeling.

Shakspeare’s adopting of the gentle disposition of Donwald, instead of the cruel nature of the historic Macbeth, is a distinctive feature never lost sight of. The uncorrupted nature of the hero of the scene exhibits an assemblage of the noblest qualities. Heroically brave*, his valour is conspicuous in every act becoming the dignity of man†: his “brandish’d steel” “smokes with bloody execution” on his country’s foes‡, but “the milk of human kindness” circles with generous profusion in his breast.§ He is, indeed, ambitious, but ambitious only, as the best of men have been so, for he is a stranger to the qualities that make ambition vice. || The crown, perhaps, had not been absent from his

* Act I. sc. 2. *passim*.

† “I dare do all that may become a man.” Act I. sc. 7.

“What man dare, I dare.” Act III. sc. 4.

‡ Act I. sc. 2.

§ Act I. sc. 5.

|| “Art not without ambition, but without

The illness should attend it.”

Act I. sc. 5.

hopes, and his near relation to the throne justified their indulgence. "What he would highly, that would he holily;" and though not absolutely free from the desire of "wrongly winning," he disdained to "play false" for an unlawful acquisition.* On one point only is his integrity vulnerable, and there "the divinity of hell" assails him. Tremulously alive to superstition, he sinks before the assaults of supernatural agents, who inflame his ambition to views which he indulges to the destruction of his innocence. But, though shaken to their base, neither virtue nor reason are completely overthrown in Macbeth's mind; he is never blind to the turpitude of his deeds, nor deaf to the reproaches of his conscience. His march to wickedness is reluctant, irregular, and slow, and his bosom is the scene of a perpetual opposition of his natural reason and virtue, against ambition enflamed by superstition into crime. The thought of murder, as the "nearest way" to the greatness promised him, is the suggestion of his criminal passions, whilst to his reliance on the witches' word must be referred his resolution patiently to await the developements of time: "If chance will have

* Act I. sc. 5.

me king, why, chance may crown me then without my stir.”* Unhappily, however, Macbeth is not suffered to repose on his own virtuous decisions, for evil meets with a powerful coadjutor in his all-daring, and insatiably ambitious wife. His purity is already sullied by the thought of murder; the admission of its possibility, and his near and serious contemplation of it, are the next steps in the scale of guilt; and nothing is necessary to reconcile Macbeth to hazard the joys of a future world for splendour and pre-eminence in this, but an assurance that the assassination would seat him in peaceful security upon Duncan’s throne, without the production of any other consequence. But such security, he was aware, could scarcely, under any possibility, be the result of the deed he meditated. He who ascends a throne by blood, does but instruct others against himself: the poisoned chalice is reserved, by even-handed justice, for the lips of the preparer, and the life of the usurper is necessarily an existence of terror and suspicion. From a prospect so melancholy, the susceptible Macbeth naturally turns to reflection on the enormity of the crime he contemplated; the virtues of his intended victim rise in judgment

* Act I. sc. 3.

against the brutality of his own thoughts, and he resolves to "proceed no further in the business."* As particularly illustrative of Macbeth's character, and of Shakspeare's skill in the use of his materials, the celebrated soliloquy has been dwelt on at unusual length. When it is read in Holinshed, that "the prick of conscience (as it chanceth ever in tyrants, and such as attain to any estate by unrighteous means) caused him ever to fear, least he should be served of the same cup as he had ministered to his predecessor," no anticipation is raised of so beautifully poetic a paraphrase as

" in these cases,
 We still have judgement here; that we but teach
 Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
 To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
 Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
 To our own lips."

In Holinshed the passage stands as the motive of a tyrant to tyranny; but Shakspeare has converted it into the dispassionate language of reason, weighing the consequences of a contemplated, but, as yet, unresolved enterprise, and Macbeth's conclusion is accordant with his just and salutary reflection. Again, the baneful in-

* Act I. sc. 7.

fluence of his wife interferes for his seduction, and he finally resolves to

“ bend up

Each corporal agent to the terrible feat :”

He,

“ Goes, and it is done.”

By the commission of murder, Macbeth is fairly enlisted in the cause of wickedness, and his progress in guilt is proportionably rapid, for in the gratification of his ambition, the demon of hell left him not without motives for perseverance in a career of blood. They who “ referred him to the coming on of time, with, *Hail, king that shalt be,*” promised no less to the children of his partner. Banquo is sacrificed to his fears; and the result is such as he might confidently have anticipated; an addition is made to his catalogue of crimes, and the prediction which caused him to “ eat his meal in fear, and nightly sleep in the affliction of terrific dreams,”* stands opposed to his happiness in undiminished force.

Distracted by doubts, oppressed by a threatened danger, of which he neither comprehended the nature nor extent, Macbeth now impatiently throws himself into the arms of the dæmon that destroys him, madly resolved “ to know, by the worst means, the worst.”† This is the climax

* Act III. sc. 2.

† Act III. sc. 4.

of his fate : delusive promises assure him an impunity in crime, hush his fears, and exalt his confidence into presumption. His hopes are elevated above wisdom, no bounds restrain his wanton acts of wickedness and cruelty, till, suddenly, the power whom he serves deserts him, the illusion is destroyed, and he perishes in a desperate effort of valour. Macbeth has little in common with the herd of cruel and revengeful tyrants. The original virtue, and natural goodness and benevolence of his heart, are apparent throughout his long career of blood. Its influence over him is awful ; and not the power of hell itself is able to destroy his perception of right from wrong, or stifle the just reproaches of his conscience. The crimes which he commits are abhorrent from his nature, and shocking to his thoughts ;

“ His pester'd senses do recoil, and start,
When all that is within him does condemn
Itself, for being there.”*

He yields himself a prey to melancholy and remorse ; the “ vessel of his peace is full of rancours,” for he has parted with his “ eternal jewel to the common enemy of man † ;” he has “ lived long enough ” ‡, for he has survived his innocence ; his mind is diseased, a rooted sor-

* Act V. sc. 2. † Act III. sc. 1. ‡ Act V. sc. 3.

row preys upon his memory ; his heart is oppressed by an accumulation of iniquity ; and morally certain of conquest, he declines to combat with Macduff, for his "soul is too much charg'd with blood of his already."*

The happiness of Macbeth and his wife is sacrificed in the pursuit of the object of their ambition ; but a broad distinction must be drawn between their feelings. Lady Macbeth is the victim of a horror which it is difficult to define, for she exhibits not one symptom of remorse, and appears alarmed only by the recollection of deeds which made no impression on her at the time of their perpetration. The affliction of Macbeth, on the contrary, is that of conscience ; the deep regrets of a virtuous mind for its aberrations from rectitude : reflection on his own deeds fills him with horror ; of all other species of dread he is perfectly devoid ; "he dares do all that may become a man ;" and the mind he sways by "and the heart he bears, could never sagg with doubt, nor shake with fear."†

It has been already hinted, that the substitution of the gentle disposition of Donwald for the cruel nature of Macbeth, was made with the view of tracing the progress of the human mind from

* Act V. sc. 7.

† Act V. sc. 3.

its first aberrations from virtue to the last stage of depravity and wickedness; and if we superadd the intention of displaying the destructive influence of superstition on the peace and innocence of the mind in which it is suffered to take root, we shall only ascribe to Shakspeare a design which the tenderest humanity, and most enlightened policy, might have dictated. Not only at the period in which Macbeth was produced was the popular mind imbued with an implicit belief of the power of magicians, astrologers, and witches, to disclose the events of futurity, and of spirits to direct and control the actions of mankind; but the floating superstitions of the times were embodied and authenticated by an act of the first parliament of James against withcraft, and by the reprint, in England, of His Majesty's Essay on Dæmonology, shortly after his accession to the throne: error was, as it were, promulgated, and ignorance fortified in folly, by the sanction of authority and law.

The belief was implicit of the power of the witch to create tempests, hail, thunder, and lightning; to sink ships, turn the course of rivers, dry up springs, arrest the course of the sun, to stay both day and night, and change the one into the other. The harvest was either destroyed at their bidding, or transferred from one place to

another ; animals were infected with the spirit of devils, cattle destroyed by their looks, and snakes torn in pieces by their words. The mind of man was perverted, and his corporeal powers blasted ; he loved or hated, was valiant or a coward, he became potent or impotent, he pined in lingering decay, or was torn by fits and convulsions, as he was worked on by their spells. The witches could strike with barrenness, induce miscarriage, or destroy the infant in the womb. Children unbaptized, or not protected by the sign of the cross, were plucked from their mother's bosoms in the night, drowned in rivers, or killed by the thrust of a needle through the brain : the infant's blood was sometimes drank, and its flesh devoured by its destroyer. Witches could strike with lightning, kill by the infection of their eyes, or destroy by the slow effect of charms or poison. They summoned souls from the repose of the grave ; the secrets of the past were revealed, the future was familiar to them as the present, and they could foreshew to others the events which they themselves foresaw. They possessed the power of transforming themselves into the shape of animals, and, under the favourite metamorphosis of a wolf, preyed on the flesh of human beings, and particularly infants. Invisible, they passed through the smallest aper-

ture, triumphant in the air they rode upon the blast, and in an egg, a cockle, or a muscle shell, sailed through tempestuous seas.

The opinions entertained from time to time by different nations, and by the same nation at different periods, of the nature of the spiritual world, were numerous and contradictory; but towards the close of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries the idea was generally acquiesced in, that all the invisible inhabitants of the elements were originally Angels, holy, glorious, and powerful, but that they had been banished from heaven for disobedience; their glory was annihilated, their holiness perverted, and their power malignantly directed against the temporal and eternal happiness of the human race. Great discrimination was believed to have been used in the punishment of these fallen spirits. All were guilty, but not equally so, and their degradation was proportioned to their degrees of criminality. The least culpable were the spirits of fire, who wandered in the region of the moon, but without the power to enter it. The second sort, consisting of spirits of the air, had their habitation a little lower. The third were earthly, the fourth of water, the fifth subterranean, and the sixth delighted in darkness.

Though the three first orders of spirits hate God, and are enemies to man, entering by sub-

tilty into the minds of men to deceive them, and provoking them to absurd and wicked actions, their guilt bears no comparison to that of the Aquei, Subterranei, and Lucifugi. Aquei are they that raise tempests, drown sailors, and do all other mischiefs on the water. Subterranei and Lucifugi enter into the bowels of men, and torment those they possess with phrensy, and the falling evil; they also assault miners, and others who work in caverns and places under ground.

As much confusion was created in the theology of the ancients by the multiplication of deities whom it was acknowledged were all ultimately resolvable into one, so the spiritual system of the middle ages was rendered difficult of comprehension by the enumeration of a great variety of spirits, who were sometimes spoken of as existing independently, and, at others, simply as portions of the great diabolical power. Glanvil says, the devil is a name for a "body politic," in which there are very different orders and degrees of spirits; and Defoe humorously observes, "It is a question not yet determined by the learned whether the word '*devil*' be a singular, that is, the name of a person standing by himself, or a *noun of multitude*."

Such were the beings with which ignorance

and superstition peopled the elements of the terrestrial sphere; and such the powers of injury with which they were invested against the temporal and eternal happiness of mankind. Two classes of persons were supposed particularly susceptible of seduction to communion with the ministers of darkness:—

1. The philosopher, whose researches had unfolded to him the hidden secrets of nature, whose erudition carried him through the depths of science, and whose powerful understanding exalted him above his fellow creatures. Here the devil conceived the greatest hope of alluring a victim into the practice of magic.

2. The pitiable object, whether man or woman, whom age, infirmity, or poverty, had humbled to the lowest depth of misery, and whom ignorance debased to a level with the brute creation. Here the devil discovered apt materials for the formation of a witch. Women were peculiarly liable to his fascination, being more frail, more inclined to revenge, and altogether fitter subjects for his machinations than men. The potency of the devil over woman was exemplified in Eve; and from the same power sprang more witches than wizards. Of women, the lean, the hollow-eyed, and the deformed, made the most potent witches, with an exception, humor-

ous enough, in favour of the highly beautiful and accomplished. Unlike the magician, the witch never asserted her pretensions to the possession of miraculous powers. Persecution and torture often obtained from her an acknowledgement of her character, — it was the confession of guilt to an imputed crime, not the claim to a proud distinction. The witch sometimes received tribute from fear ; but never the homage of respect. So odious was she to her neighbours that communication was, as much as possible, avoided with her ; and she was so much feared that few dared to offend her or deny her any thing they possessed.

A witch is defined, by an historian of witchcraft, as one “ who can do, or seems to do, strange things, beyond the power of art and ordinary nature, by virtue of a confederacy with the powers of hell.” The compact was sometimes privately agreed on ; sometimes solemnly entered into at a public assembly of witches, who talked and conferred familiarly with the devil, receiving his instructions how to compass their wicked intents, and gave him an account of all their horrible proceedings. While the compact was forming, the devil was busily employed with his long nails scratching the forehead where the cross had been made at baptism, or where the chrism

was laid; and on that spot of his new disciple he impressed his own mark: the part he touched remained for some time painful, but for ever after was insensible, and the mark irremovable. The contract was finally sealed by a bestial act of homage paid to the devil by the witch, who, on her part, renounced the Christian faith, and swore allegiance to her infernal master, binding herself to observe all his commandments, and to seduce men, women, and children into his society: she yielded her body to his desires, her blood to his nutrition, and her soul to be tormented in everlasting fire. The contract was not invariably for the period of the witch's life, but occasionally for a given term of years; nor did she always deny the whole Christian faith, but merely neglected particular injunctions of the church. The devil, in return, promised the witch long life and prosperity, and enabled her, by his agency, to exercise the miraculous powers of witchcraft; but in perfect consistency with the depravity of his nature, always deserted his dupe when she was detected, preferring the immediate possession of her soul to the chance of the evil she might effect by a longer earthly existence.

The witch perpetually manifested her depend-

ance on a superior being. Without the use of some mysterious form of words, mumblings, whisperings, and secret sounds, the sorceress was powerless. The hellish incantation, uttered with a steady faith in its efficacy, was capable of effecting the greatest wonders, the devil or his spirits rewarding the act of homage by assistance : charms were no less available. The hair, or any other part of a wolf ; the brain of a cat, a newt, or lizard ; the bone of a frog's leg ; the garments of the dead ; candles that had been partly burnt before a corpse ; and needles that had sewed a dead man in his shroud ; were all efficacious in their enchantments. The crossing of sticks, digging pits, casting a stone over the left shoulder, or hogs' bristles boiled, were productive of storms. If a witch was desirous of a gambol in the air, the bowels and members of a child were first to be seethed in a brazen vessel, and an ointment made up from the fat, which, carefully rubbed into their bodies, enabled them to feast, sing, and dance beneath the moon. The thinner potion taken from the cauldron enabled the drinker, on the observance of certain ceremonies, immediately to practise witchcraft. Magical pictures, or waxen images, consumed or gradually melted before slow fires,

produced a corresponding waste, by sickness or mysterious pining, in those whose persons the effigies represented.

It is impossible to advance a step towards a belief in the power of uninspired persons to disclose the events of futurity and produce supernatural effects, without recognising an arbitrary predestination of mundane affairs, or the agency of powers that controlled the established laws of nature. Every system of pagan worship inculcates the doctrine of fate, or of presiding or subservient spirits; for each appealed to the miraculous powers of its ministers in support of its pretensions. It is not very easy to reconcile these doctrines together, but, in most cases, both were combined, and in the Gothic system of witchcraft, in particular, both are decidedly conspicuous.

According to the mythology of the Edda, in the beautiful city of Valhall, or the paradise of heroes, dwell three virgins named Urda, the past; Verdandi, the present; and Sskuld, the future. Their business is to attend on the gods and preside over the fate of mankind. Collectively, they are called Valkeries, or Nornies, that is, Fairies, or Destinies, and are the chief of many beings of a similar quality: every man had his own destiny, who assisted at the mo-

ment of his birth, and marked beforehand the period of his days.

The Chronicle of Holinshed is precise, and repeated, in its denomination of the women who addressed Macbeth as Fairies, or Weird (that is, prophetic) Sisters; who, though by no means the representatives of, appear fully invested with the attributes ascribed to the three Eddic Valkeries, or the Fates and presiding genii of the North; and Shakspeare has abridged nothing of their power. His witches' address to Macbeth is in the decisive tone of absolute and directing powers: they discourse of the events of futurity as of matters absolutely certain; they proclaim him "thane of Glamis and of Cawdor," things "not within the prospect of belief," and the truth of their predictions is attested in the moment of their utterance—

"Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme. —

'All hail,
Macbeth! that shall be king hereafter.'"

Here, overwhelmed with astonishment and awe, the victim of hell is left to pause, and he sinks into the firm belief that he had only to wait "the coming on of time" to reap the fulfilment of his most ardent hopes: "If chance

will have me king, why, chance may crown me without my stir." He snatches, however, that which was promised him as a gift; and, seated on the throne, his confidence is augmented in the authority and power of the witches to unfold to him the secrets of futurity. When fears shake, and doubts distract him, he flies for the resolving of both, to their assistance.

—— " I will to-morrow,
(And betimes I will,) to the weird sisters:
More shall they speak; for now I am bent to know,
By the worst means the worst."

The result of this interview is the elevation of his confidence into presumption, and he exultingly proclaims his assurance of security: " Then live, Macduff; What need I fear of thee?" — " Sweet bodements! good!"

" The spirits that know
All mortal consequences have pronounc'd me thus:
*Fear not, Macbeth; no man that's born of woman,
Shall e'er have power upon thee.*—Then fly, false thanes,
And mingle with the English epicures:
The mind I sway by, and the heart I bear,
Shall never sagg with doubt, nor shake with fear."

" I will not fear of death and bane,
Till Birnam forest come to Dunsinane."

The time, however, does arrive when Birnam forest moves, and yet Macbeth mistrusts not the

authority of the witches. He “doubts,” indeed, “the *equivocation* of the fiend, that *lies* like truth;” but “swords he smiles at, weapons laughs to scorn, brandish’d by man that’s of a woman born,” and, the moment previous to his death, he meets Macduff with the proud defiance :

“Thou loçest labour :

As easy may’st thou the intrenchant air
 With thy keen sword impress, as make me bleed :
 Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests ;
 I bear a charmed life, which must not yield
 To one of woman born.”

The actions of Macbeth are not in constant accordance with his faith. They who placed the “golden round” upon his brow, promised similar honours to the issue of another. He was bound to believe both, or neither, of these predictions. He rightly concluded, that “if chance would have him king, why, chance would crown him without his stir;” and he ought to have added, that if the succession of Banquo’s children was registered among the decrees of fate, no human arm could arrest the march of that event. In neither case does he abide the event. He first yields to an alarm, on the elevation of Malcolm to the principality of Cumberland, of which his professed principles,

“ thrust home,” ought to have demonstrated to him the fallacy; he next snatches by crime, as “ the nearest way,” what was promised him as a gift; and, lastly, madly opposes himself to what he ought to have acknowledged a decree of fate.

These are incongruities, but they are not chargeable on Shakspeare, who only embodied the theory of witchcraft, which adopted, from the same sources, the two contradictory doctrines of absolute fate, and the influence of man’s actions by evil spirits. The classic world assigned to every individual a demon, or genius, which always presided over his actions, gave him private counsels, and watched over his secret intentions; and some writers maintained that two demons, the one good, the other bad, were the invariable attendants of every man. Of the Valkeries some were good and others evil, and they dispensed good and evil; and were the cause of good or bad actions in others, according to their origin. The operation of these principles on Macbeth is very obvious and frequent. As yet unsexed, he would have patiently awaited the coming on of “ the all-hail hereafter!” but the moment of prediction was seized by, what Lady Macbeth designates, “ the spirits that tend on

mortal thoughts," to tempt him to the commission of a damning crime :

" This supernatural soliciting
 Cannot be ill ; cannot be good : — If ill,
 Why hath it given me earnest of success
 Commencing in a truth ? I am thane of Cawdor :
 If good, *why do I yield to that suggestion*
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
 Against the use of nature ?"

Similar bloody purposes were suggested to his mind on Malcolm's elevation, —

" Stars, hide your fires !
 Let not light see my black and deep desires :
 The eye wink at the hand ! yet let that be,
 Which the eye fears, when it is done to see."

The prophecy relative to Banquo and his issue must also be viewed as a stratagem to inspire Macbeth with murderous thoughts, whence he might be readily betrayed to the absolute commission of the contemplated crime. Banquo was clearly pointed out to him as an enemy ; by him his "genius was rebuk'd," and he held him "in such bloody distance that every minute of his being thrust against his nearest life."

The influence of human actions by evil spirits was one of the corner stones of a belief in witch-

craft, and Shakspeare has given great prominence to the doctrine :

— “ 'Tis strange :
 And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
 The instruments of darkness tell us truths ;
 Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
 In deepest consequence.”

It is in allusion to the supposed prevalence of the attempts of malignant spirits to effect their purposes by the suggestion of evil in dreams, that Banquo prays to be restrained in the “ cursed thoughts that nature gives way to in repose,” and it appears that he had reason for his prayer ; he “ dreamt last night of the three weird sisters.”

Macbeth's description of the dead of night defines it as the hour when “ wicked dreams abuse the curtain'd sleep.” This is a gothic version of classic superstition. The ancients always attributed dreams to supernatural interference, and hence proper subjects for the art of divination. Sophocles makes Clytemnestra pray, in the *Electra*, against terrific or bad dreams. Apollo, the guardian of houses and families, was properly solicited to avert such disturbances of domestic peace.

The subserviency of witches to a Dame was a recognised feature in witchcraft ; and Shak-

speare, it may be thought, designated the mistress of the weird sisters Hecate, by finding that goddess in the exercise of the same office in a play called *The Witch*, by Thomas Middleton. But in the description of "Persey's daughter" in Golding's translation of Ovid, he met with "Heccatee, of whom the witches hold as of their goddess;" and the same author also furnished him with the knowledge of the "*triple* Hecat's holy rites," which he displays in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "the *triple* Hecate's team." Yet, in the present play, is this presiding deity of witchcraft inconsistently represented as anxious to catch the "vap'rous drop profound" that hung "upon the corner of the moon." Could the poet have overlooked that Hecate was herself the moon?

It has been questioned whether ancient and modern superstition are not confounded by placing Hecate in ascendancy over the witches of *Macbeth*. But Shakspeare is guilty of no impropriety, for both the names and attributes of Diana were perfectly familiar to Gothic superstition. Proserpine, indeed, under the name of Creirwy, or Llywy, occupied a singularly conspicuous place in the religion of the British Druids: she was the daughter of Ked, or Ceridwen, the most important personage in Druid

worship. So completely similar were the attributes of parent and offspring that it has not been thought unreasonable to regard them as the same mystical personage. They presided over the most sacred mysteries of Druidism; they were enchantresses, and possessed the power of transformation; they were venerated in conjunction with, or under the symbol of the moon; and in their custody was the sacred cauldron of inspiration and science, the preparation of which was a necessary preliminary to the celebration of the deepest mysteries of their religion: it was fabled that he who merely tasted its contents immediately became skilled in science, and had the whole of futurity laid open to his view. The cauldron of Ceridwen is the prototype of the cauldron of the weird sisters.

The idea of exhibiting his witches in the act of celebrating their foul and prestigious rites appears to have been caught by Shakspeare from Middleton's *Witch*.* Hecat and a group of

* The witches of Middleton are low, vulgar, and disgusting, and their employment in the destruction of the bridegroom's virility, the wasting of Almachildes, whom the Duchess hated, and the inspiring of illicit love, by charms, for such only is their business in the scene, are acts corresponding to their ignoble demeanours. In Shakspeare, an air of mystery, solemnity, and grandeur, is cast around the celebration of the rites of witchcraft, and the witches

hags are there assembled round a cauldron, preparing their infernal beverage. They wind up their enchantments by a song, of which the words,

“ Black spirits and white ; red spirits and gray ;
Mingle, mingle, mingle, you that mingle may,”

are found both in Middleton and Shakspeare. In *The Witch* the song is continued, and the last lines are,

“ Round, around, around, about, about ;
All ill come running in, all good keep out !”

and the vessel is then filled with the filthy ingredients of which the charms of witches were composed. In *Macbeth* we have

“ Round about the cauldron go ;
In the poison'd entrails throw, —”

and the mixture of the hellish porridge proceeds.

In my endeavour to ascertain whence Shakspeare derived his extensive knowledge of the principles and practice of witchcraft, I have

themselves are elevated into dignity : they are the oracles of fate ; they proclaim the destinies of kings and kingdoms ; and, labouring in the cause of the demon whom they serve, their object is no less than the alienation from God of a soul, as yet, of pure and spotless innocence.

been utterly unable to trace his steps. It is not reasonable to doubt his knowledge of such books of his time as embodied the popular superstition, but I could never detect more than such casual coincidences as will necessarily occur between two authors who treat of the same subject. Of the ancients, he had undoubtedly read Ovid in Golding's translation; and as an illustrative instance, may be adduced the general, but not particular, resemblance between the enchantments of the witches round the cauldron, and the preparation of the charm that renewed the youth of Æson.

“ The med'cine seething all the while a wallop in a pan
Of brasse, to spirt and leape aloft and gather froth began.
There boyled she the roots, seeds, flowres, leaves, stalks and
juice together,

Which from the fields of Thessalie she late had gathered
thither :

She cast in also precious stones, fetcht from the furthest
East,

And which the ebbing ocean washt fine gravell from the
West ;

She put thereto the deaw that fell upon a Monday night :
And flesh and fethers of a witch, a cursed odious wight,
Which in the likeness of an owle abroad a nights did flie,
And infants in their cradles change, or sucke them that they
dye.

The fingles also of a wolfe, which when he list could take
The shape of man, and when he list, the same again forsake ;
And from the river Cyniphis which is in Lybie land,
She had the fine sheere scaled filmes of water-snayles at hand.

And of an endlesse lived hert the liver had she got ;
To which she added of a crow that then had lived not
So little as nine hundred yeares, the head and bill also."

The rites of witchcraft combined a large portion of the horrors with which the superstitious depravity of man had encumbered the awful name of religion. Their celebration in gloomy caverns, in the darkness and silence of the night ; the evocation of the dead from the peaceful grave ; the awful fire ; the iron and brazen vessels ; the charms ; the bloody sacrifices and beastly offerings ; the horrid dance and solemn invocation, are all to be met with in the systems of oriental, classic, and gothic superstition : the witchcraft of modern times presented a faint and distorted image of the worship paid to the great and terrible triplicated goddess of paganism, who, whether as Proserpine, Diana, or Luna, or as C eridwen or Crierwy, was invariably deemed the presiding deity over magic, and perpetually evoked in its practice. Incantations charmed her from her sphere ; her eclipses were ascribed to the power of enchantment, and the moon was the mirror in which her votaries read all things that were to happen for a thousand years. Hence the belief that demons invoked in low and murmuring voices would disclose the events of futurity by the reflection of images,

which the skilful interpreted, on glass and other speculums, or on the surfaces of springs, and vessels of pure water, opposed to a glare of light. Among other pretensions of modern magicians was their ability to read the events of futurity in a magic mirror: the celebrated friar Bacon was said to be possessed of one of these invaluable articles which displayed to him all that was passing within a circuit of fifty miles. Jewels, crystals, beryls, and steel plates highly polished, were in use as well as glasses, and the method in which they were used was this: the conjurer repeated the necessary charms and adjurations, with the Litany, or an invocation peculiar to the Spirit he wished to call; and the answer forthwith appeared on the speculum in types or figures: sometimes, though rarely, the spirits themselves spoke articulately.

Macbeth might well have apprehended that the train of shadows which passed in review before him would stretch "out to the crack of doom" had the "line" been carried only down a quarter of the distance that separated Banquo and King James; but the magic speculum enabled Shakspeare to cut the exhibition short, and yet communicate the information he desired:

“ The eighth appears, who bears a glass,
Which shows me many more; and some I see,
That two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry;
Horrible sight ! — Now, I see, 'tis true;
For the blood-bolter'd Banquo smiles upon me,
And points at them for his.”

So much has been said, in Hamlet, respecting darkness, and its connection with superstition, and deeds of wickedness and horror, that allusion to it here, is only necessary for the purpose of remarking how completely as a master, Shakspeare wrote upon this subject, interweaving in the form of allusion, those parts of it which demanded not a prominence more remarkable :

“ How now, you secret, *black, and midnight* hags ?”

is the prefatory address of Macbeth to his conjuration of the witches by “ that which they profess.” — He advances to the chamber of his kinsman in the character of a murderer, and his horror-struck heart recoils at the reflection that

“ Now o'er the one half world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep ; now witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's offerings ; and wither'd murder,
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost.”

When the murder of Banquo is resolved on,
it is announced that

“ ere the bat hath flown
His cloister'd flight ; ere, to black Hecate's summons,
The shard-borne beetle, with his drowsy hums,
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note ;”

and as Banquo advances towards the bloody
reception too carefully prepared for him,

“ light thickens ; and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood :
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse ;
Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse.”

Macbeth was, at all times, a manly and courageous soldier : he waded through a sea of blood, and having “ supp'd full with horrors” “ almost forgot the taste of fears ;” but in his days of innocence, he informs us, his “ senses would have cool'd to hear a night-shriek.”

The owl might almost be designated the genius of darkness and horror : Lady Macbeth is startled by a noise, as she awaits the completion of the murder :

“ It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman,
That gives the stern'st good-night ;”

and while “ lamentings were heard i' the air”

“ strange screams of death ;
Of dire combustion and confus'd events,

New hatch'd to the woeful time. *The obscure bird*
Clamour'd the livelong night."

We know that the predictions of the classic augurs were made from peculiarities in the flight of the eagle, the vulture, and other birds of prey, and from observations on the crowing of the cock, the croaking of the raven, and the chattering of pies. The raven's cry was deemed infallibly indicative of approaching death: there is much force and beauty, therefore, in the figurative description of the servant almost choked by his exertions to communicate with the utmost speed the news of the king's arrival at Inverness,

"The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under these battlements."

The imps supposed to be constantly attendant upon witches were mere modifications of the demons or genii, who possessed the power of metamorphosis to an unlimited extent, and this opinion was, in truth, the foundation of the classic doctrine of lycanthropy. Modern superstition condemned all spirits as infernal; and, therefore, the genius, or attendant spirit of the witch, was declared to be the devil which she worshipped, disguised under the form of a cat,

a dog, a weazel, or a rat, who fed upon her blood.

These notions, as well as the former, were plagiarisms from paganism, for the Greeks recognised the approach of evil in a black dog, snakes, toads, weazels, and other noxious reptiles; and it is notorious that the Egyptians worshipped a variety of animals, such as the ox, dog, wolf, hawk, crocodile, the ibis and the cat. Of all the attendants on a witch, though no bestial shape appears to have been exempt from possession by these familiars, a cat was most commonly assigned to her. "Thrice the brinded cat hath mewed" intimates to Macbeth's witches, that it is time to commence the celebration of their rites; in the first scene of the play, they appear to consider the summons of "graymalkin" as imperative, as well as that of "paddock" or the frog. Witches themselves also possessed the power of transformation; but their metamorphoses into animals were always deficient of that most essential ornament, a tail:

" And like a rat without a tail,
I'll do, I'll do, I'll do."

Only one point of witchcraft, as connected with Macbeth, remains to be noticed. All the wise and weird among the northern nations

claimed a power over winds and tempests. "I know a song of such virtue," says Odin, "that were I caught in a storm, I can hush the winds, and render the air perfectly calm." The Lapland witches pretended to send winds to sailors, and the Finlanders sold cords, tied with three magical knots: the loosening of the first produced a favourable gale, of the second a brisker, but when the third was untied, a terrific hurricane was the consequence. There are penal statutes in the Capitularies of Charlemagne, in the canons of several councils, and in the ancient laws of Norway, against those who raised storms and tempests. Shakspeare has followed the common superstitions.

- " 2. *Witch.* I'll give thee a wind.
- 1. *Witch.* Thou art kind.
- 3. *Witch.* And I another.
- 1. *Witch.* I myself have all the other."

And he makes Macbeth confess the power of the witches to "untie the winds, and let them fight against the churches."

TWELFTH NIGHT.

1607.

THE thirty-sixth novel of the second part of Bandello's novels bears a very striking general resemblance to the plot of this comedy.

Ambrogio was the father of a son and a daughter, Paolo and Nicuola, remarkable for their extraordinary beauty and perfect resemblance to each other. Their age was about fifteen years, when Rome was sacked by the united arms of Spain and Germany. Paolo, the boy, was made prisoner, and carried by a person of consideration to Naples. The distressed Ambrogio retired with his daughter to Aix, where she became enamoured of the wealthy and accomplished Lattantio. She was happy in the return of her passion, till the charms of a rival seduced her lover from his faith. Every expedient to recall his affections was resorted to in vain, and the unhappy Nicuola resolved, in de-

spair, to disguise herself as a boy, and enter the service of Lattantio, in the capacity of his page. Her father quitted Aix for a time, and by the aid of her nurse she effected her scheme. The attention and graceful assiduity of Nicuola quickly engaged the confidence of her master. Alas! this happiness proved but a prelude to the bitterest mortification. In the hope that the beautiful person and insinuating address of his page might propitiate the affections of Catella, his new mistress, Lattantio despatched Nicuola as a messenger of love to her. The beauty of the emissary proved dangerous to the lady, who yielded her heart a willing captive, and openly avowed her weakness. The sudden return of Ambrogio compelled the reluctant Nicuola to fly from the service of Lattantio. At this critical juncture the long lost brother, Paolo, re-appeared. His master died at Naples, and bequeathed to him his wealth, and Paolo immediately set out in search of his parent and his sister. Arriving at Aix, he accidentally passed the house of Catella, who mistook Paolo for the page of whom she was enamoured, and ordered her maid to invite him in. He entered with a mind full of doubts regarding the quality of the lady.

In the mean time Lattantio was much distressed

by the unaccountable disappearance of his page, for whom he felt the greatest regard: he instituted the most anxious inquiries, and Nicuola was at length traced to the house of her nurse Philippa. The good woman vehemently denied that either *man* or *boy* had taken refuge there; and then contrived so skilfully to avail herself of her knowledge of Lattantio's affairs as gradually to excite his attention. She enlarged on the pangs of unrequited love, she assured him of the hopelessness of his passion for Catella, who doated on another; and then, reverting to his former attachment, obtained the important confession, that if the beautiful Nicuola retained her regard for him, she was doubly entitled to his affection. "She loves you yet," exclaimed Philippa, "loves you with unabated ardour; and often has she declared to me that she shall never cease to do so but with life."—"Alas!" interrupted Lattantio, "do not endeavour to deceive me?"—"I do not deceive you," replied Philippa; "I can convince you of the truth of what I say: Nicuola loves you; for you she deserted her father's house; for you she discarded the timidity of her sex, the wealth she was heir to, and the rank she filled in life; and entered your service as a menial — as a page. Behold!" she continued, presenting her in the dress of a boy to Lattantio, "behold your Nicuola,

behold your much regretted page ; she who disregarded the whole world for your sake, and at the risk of her life and reputation waited on you day and night." Lattantio was lost in wonder : but presently recovering, vowed eternal fidelity ; and Nicuola, whose fondest wishes were realised, could scarce restrain the swelling transports of her soul.

It is almost needless to add, that a second interview between Paolo and Catella proved equally satisfactory to both, and that they were married on the same day that witnessed the union of Lattantio and Nicuola.

It was long supposed that from this tale Shakspeare formed the plot of Twelfth Night, having either read it in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*, of which it is the seventh history of the fourth volume, or in an old translation of that work. But the discordances between the play and the novel are so numerous, that the supposition of the drama emanating from the latter is open to many objections ; and the much nearer affinity of Shakspeare's plot to the *Historie of Apolonius and Silla*, in a collection entitled, *Rich, his Farewell to Militarie Profession, 1583*, appears to demonstrate its incorrectness.

It was the misfortune of Duke Apolonius to be wrecked on the isle of Cyprus on his return

to Constantinople from a crusade against the infidels. He was succoured and hospitably entertained by Pontus, the duke and governor, whose daughter, Silla, became deeply enamoured of the young and handsome guest. But wholly engrossed by the desire of returning to his native city, Apolonius was insensible to such advances as the modesty of Silla permitted her to make, and he departed ignorant of her attachment.

The difficulties in the way of its gratification inflamed the love of Silla, and trusting herself to the protection of a faithful servant, she stole from her father's court in pursuit of Apolonius. The vessel in which she embarked was wrecked, Pedro, her servant, was drowned, and she herself barely escaped with life on a chest belonging to the captain. The chest was rich in apparel and in coin : she disguised herself as a man, assumed the name of her brother, Silvio, prosecuted her journey, and arrived safe at Constantinople. She directed her steps to the palace of Apolonius, offered herself to him as a page, and was readily received into his service. Her attention and diligence speedily recommended her to the notice of her master, and of all his servants she was first in his confidence and love.

There was resident in Constantinople a widow named Julina, famous for wealth and beauty, to

whom Apolonius endeavoured, in vain, to make himself acceptable. Silvio was the bearer of his tokens of affection, and, altogether desirous to please her master, pressed his suit with earnestness. Though cold to Apolonius, the lady was not insensible to the charms of grace and beauty, and she became as deeply entangled in love with the page as his master was with herself. "Silvio," said Julina, interrupting him in a message from his master, "it is enough that you have said in behalf of another; henceforth speak only for yourself, or be for ever silent."

The clandestine flight of Silla from her father's court was ascribed to her seduction by Pedro who accompanied her, and her brother vowed never to discontinue his pursuit of the fugitives till he had found and punished the betrayer of his sister's honour. He traversed many countries without success, and at length reached Constantinople. He had been there but a few days when Julina met and accosted him as the page of Apolonius, for so strong was the resemblance of Silvio and Silla that it was impossible for strangers to distinguish them.

The curiosity of Silvio was awakened at being thus familiarly addressed, and perceiving by the splendour of Julina's train that she was no less wealthy than beautiful, he answered her with

courtesy, and joyfully accepted an invitation to supper on the following evening. He went, he loved; and Julina did not suffer him to languish in despair. Reflecting on what had passed, Silvio clearly perceived that he had been mistaken for some other person: apprehensive, therefore, that Julina's discovery of her error might plunge him into difficulty, he determined to quit Constantinople and resume his journey in search of Silla.

When the duke again preferred his suit to Julina, she silenced his importunity by the reply, that she had transferred her power to another; and it quickly reached the ears of Apolonius that he was rejected in favour of his page, on whom the most profuse and lavish favours were bestowed. Piqued and enraged, he cast the supposed offender into prison in spite of his most vehement protestations of innocence.

Julina found it necessary to take some active steps for the preservation of her fame; and she accordingly resolved to wait upon the duke and claim Silvio as her husband. Apolonius could not but believe his page to be the most despicable of hypocrites; and he was confirmed in his opinion by the perseverance of Silvio in asseverations of his guiltlessness, even when assured by Julina herself of protection, and conjured, by

every motive of honour and of gratitude, to declare the truth and rescue her reputation from destruction.

Moved by compassion for a lady he had long tenderly loved, and disgusted to the last degree with what he imagined the unparalleled effrontery and villany of his page, the duke solemnly swore to put Silvio to death upon the spot without he made honourable reparation to Julina. It being no longer possible to dissemble, Silla solicited a private interview with her accuser, and on that occasion revealed her sex and told her tale.

When Apolonius was informed of these circumstances, he instantly recognised the daughter of his benefactor, the governor of Cyprus, and struck with admiration at love and disinterestedness so unequivocal, immediately directed the commencement of preparations for the solemnisation of his nuptials with her. The fame of events so extraordinary was bruited through every corner of the country; and it no sooner came to the knowledge of Silvio than he comprehended the whole affair, and hastened back to Constantinople. His marriage with Julina concludes the tale.

It will be immediately perceived that this story contains many particulars of the play, of which Shakspeare could not have received the most distant hint from the Italian novel. Here the

prototype of Orsino is, like himself, a duke, and not a private citizen, as the hero of the other tale. Lattantio first returned the passion of the maid who loved him, and the design of her disguise is not to make an original conquest, but to reclaim his affections. The dukes know no attachment but to the ladies to whom the pages are sent, till they are rejected by those scornful beauties. They are then subdued by the fidelity of their disguised lovers.

There is no shipwreck in *Bandello*; but the heroine of the English story is cast away, and her life with difficulty is saved: hence the shipwreck of Viola on the coast of *Illyria*. But it must not be concealed, that, after all, the separation of Sebastian and Viola, in the play, assimilates more closely to a tale in the *Heccatommithi* than to either of those already mentioned. *Cinthio* relates the story of a gentleman, who, falling under the displeasure of the King of Naples, leaves that country with his two children, a boy and a girl, bearing a strong resemblance to each other. Their vessel is wrecked, and their father is lost; but the two children getting safely to the shore are brought up, unknown to each other, by different persons. Shakspeare's Sebastian and Viola are twins and orphans separated by shipwreck; each is ignorant that the other had

survived, and both are indebted to strangers for their preservation.

Shakspeare makes no mention of the occurrences of Viola's voyage previous to the shipwreck. Silla narrowly escaped violation by the master of the vessel ; but the dramatic captain is a humane and honourable man, and zealously assists Viola in her distress.

It has been thought improbable that Viola, shipwrecked on a foreign shore, should immediately form the plan of captivating an unknown prince, and of supplanting the lady whom he loved. The novel of *Bandello* does not solve the difficulty ; but we learn from the English tale, that the lady had long previously loved the prince ; that she had forsaken her friends and country in pursuit of him. With such violence of attachment, and, after such sacrifices, her resolution to surmount every interposing difficulty is natural ; and Viola's conduct is only chargeable with incongruity because Shakspeare has neglected to represent, or narrate, the circumstances that constitute her justification. It is this forgetfulness that has also laid Viola open to the charge of indelicacy, since she at present wants the excuse of a previous attachment, which may be urged in defence of the hazardous experiment of that "peerless beauty," Silla. On the other hand,

Viola is no contemner of the ties of nature, she deserts not her relatives, and flies not from her country in pursuit of a man by whom she is not loved. A helpless, houseless, friendless orphan may be justified in adopting many expedients not to be sanctioned in a female of more happy circumstances.

Viola is endued with all the warmth of romantic love, which characterises the heroine of the novel, who "altogether desirous to please her master cared nothing at all to offend herself, followed his business with so good a will as if it had been in her own preferment." But no where but in Shakspeare is to be found the fascinating tenderness, the pathetic eloquence, and the thousand charms of mental grace, loveliness, and purity, by which Viola is distinguished.

While Bandello's tale was regarded as the origin of Shakspeare's plot, it was regretted, that he had attributed the actions of a young, thoughtless, and inexperienced girl, the indiscreet and wanton Catella, to one who sways her house, commands her servants, and, in other respects, regulates her affairs "with smooth, discreet, and stable bearing." But Shakspeare followed Riche's fable, and had it not been that he expressly calls her "a virtuous maid," Olivia might

well have passed for the Constantinopolitan "noble dame, a widdowe, whose husband was but lately deceased, one of the noblest men that were in the partes of Grecia, who left his lady and wife large possessions and great livings."

In bringing about the conclusion of the play, Shakspeare varies very considerably from his original. Either of the novels would have furnished him with a good and probable reason for the appearance of the brother in the same city with his sister, a circumstance now wearing the semblance of accident. The recognition of the former for the latter, his invitation to the lady's house, and Sebastian's joyful acceptance of it, are closely copied from Riche's tale, but Shakspeare preserves Olivia's reputation by carefully contracting her in marriage with Sebastian, in the presence of a priest beneath a consecrated roof.

Under the same error as Julina, Olivia claims Cesario for her husband before the duke, and meets with the same denial of the contract: Olivia, like Julina, attributes the conduct of the page to fear, and, like Apolonius, Orsino believes his page an epitome of meanness, deceit, and cunning.

The entrance of Sebastian, in the play, while Viola is present on the scene, is the cir-

cumstance which leads to the solution of every difficulty, and it is not till that moment that Viola makes any disclosure of her sex.

In perusing *Twelfth Night*, it is remarkable how small a portion of its scenes is occupied by the incidents of its plot, and that in truth, with the exception of Viola, the principal interest settles in Ague-cheek, Belch, and Malvolio, (characters entirely of Shakspeare's creation,) who contribute but little to the progress of the story. The last, indeed, not at all, and the others are only connected with the fable by the incidents of Sir Andrew's jealousy, and consequent duel with Viola. Sir Andrew Ague-cheek and Sir Toby Belch are studiously placed in mutual contrast. The imbecility of Ague-cheek's mind and character falls little short of fatuity: Belch is a reveller and a drunkard, but, withal, a humourist, a satirist, and an attentive observer of the world: with a keen relish for the ludicrous, he is quick in the discernment of foibles, and admirable in exposing them to ridicule. The manners of this facetious and jolly roisterer are aped by the drivelling, imbecile, Ague-cheek, who, of no character himself, complacently culls the peculiarities of all men.

Malvolio, the pedantic, the sententious, the

churlish Malvolio, is one of the most elaborately finished pictures of personal vanity that is any where to be met with. He is, as Olivia tells him, "sick of self-love," and "tastes all things with a distempered appetite." So active is the principle of vanity within him, that its own potency alone suggests the preposterous idea that Olivia loves him, and he, in consequence, falls immediately by the plot laid for his exposure. The inordinate and deep-rooted opinion of his own merits is the medium through which he sees and construes all things, and he never thinks that the actions and words of others will bear any interpretation but the vain suggestions of his own self-love. "Why, every thing adheres together; that no dram of a scruple, no scruple of a scruple, no obstacle, no incredulous or unsafe circumstance—What can be said? Nothing, that can be, can come between me and the full prospect of my hopes." And all this vanity is often clad in the garb of modesty,—so fine is Shakspeare's tact in the representation of character. "Well, Jove, not I, is the doer of this, and he is to be thanked." Tyrwhitt pertinently observed that Malvolio, in his *humour of state*, bears a strong resemblance to Alnaschar, the barber's fifth brother, in the Arabian Nights. The passage is too long for

quotation, but the following specimen will give an idea of the nature of the similarity: "When I retire with my wife in the evening, I will sit on the upper seat, I will affect a grave air, without turning my head to one side or the other. I will speak little; and whilst my wife, beautiful as the full moon, stands before me in all her charms, I will make as if I did not see her. Her women about me will say to me, 'Our dear lord and master, here is your spouse, your humble servant, before you, ready to receive your caresses, but much mortified that you do not vouchsafe to look upon her; she is wearied with standing so long, bid her, at least, sit down.' I will make no answer, which will increase their surprise and grief. They will prostrate themselves at my feet; and after they have for a considerable time entreated me to relent, I will at last lift up my head, give her a careless look, and resume my former posture, &c. &c."

The plot of Maria is inimitably framed for the degradation of this paragon of coxcombs. More effectually he could not be exposed to contempt in the eyes of his mistress and his fellows, than by the behaviour he is prompted to assume. "Be opposite with a kinsman, surly with servants: let thy tongue tang arguments of state; put thyself into the trick of singularity."

JULIUS CÆSAR.

 1607.

ON three occasions only had Shakspeare recourse to the fertile field of Roman story for subjects for his dramas. Such a portion of historical knowledge as was necessary to his purpose was easily to be acquired, from the highly popular translation of Plutarch by Sir Thomas North.

The dramatist appears to have had it generally in view to adhere as closely as possible to the classic biographer, and the notes which crowd the page of the variorum editions of Shakspeare, and which might with ease have been swelled to double their extent, furnish superabundant evidence of his scrupulous fidelity. *

* The errors as well as the true statements of his author were copied. In *Coriolanus*, Titus Lartius speaks of Marcius as "a soldier even to Cato's wish." (Act I. sc. 4.) Cato was posterior to *Coriolanus* two centuries and a half; but in North's *Plutarch*, the poet found it said of *Coriolanus* that "he was even such another as Cato would have a

The subject of Julius Cæsar was not first dramatized by Shakspeare; perhaps the honour of the dictator's introduction to the stage may be due to the contriver of the "droll," in which his fortunes were exhibited under the auspices of

soldier and a captain be." Publius and Quintus and Censorinus are, also, named as the ancestors of Coriolanus by Shakspeare (Act II. sc. 3.); but they were in fact his descendants; and from the indefinite manner in which Sir Thomas North speaks of them originated Shakspeare's error. In the same play it is stated as absolutely necessary to his election to the consulate, that Coriolanus should "speak to the people." (Act II. sc. 2.) But the senate then, and for more than a century afterwards, chose both the consuls. The anachronism was copied from the old Plutarch: "it was the custom of Rome, at that time, that such as did sue for any office should for certain days before be in the market-place, only with a poor gown on their backs, and without any coat underneath, to pray the people to remember them at the day of election." Life of Coriolanus.— We will confine ourselves to the notice of one other error derived from the same source. In Julius Cæsar, where the scene is in the forum near the capitol, (Act III. sc. 2.) Antony informs the populace that Cæsar had bequeathed to them "all his walks, his private arbours, and new planted orchards on *this* side Tyber;" now Cæsar's gardens were separated from the main city by the river, and, therefore, on the *other* side of the Tyber. But Sir Thomas North informed Shakspeare, that Cæsar "bequeathed unto every citizen of Rome seventy-five drachmas a man, and he left his gardens and arbours unto the people, which he had on *this* side of the river Tyber."

“mammets.”* Stephen Gosson mentions the existence of a play entitled “The History of Cæsar and Pompey,” in 1579, and in 1582 a Latin play, by Dr. Richard Eedes, on the subject of Cæsar’s murder, was acted in the university of Oxford. It is highly probable, that Shakspeare’s play was performed in 1607; and in that year an edition (perhaps the second, for there is another without a date,) of the anonymous tragedy of Cæsar and Pompey, or Cæsar’s Revenge, was printed. At the same period Alexander, Earl of Sterline, published his *Julius Cæsar* †, and in 1607, also, Chapman’s ‡ *Cæsar and Pompey* appeared. To none of these sources, as far as we are acquainted with them, does Shakspeare seem to have been at all indebted, whilst every scene of his play proclaims his obligations to Sir Thomas North. It will be the object, therefore, of the following pages to contrast the characters of the drama with their prototypes, in the historical work of Roman annals which Shakspeare adopted as his guide.

* *Every Woman in her Humour*. Malone’s *Chronol.* Vol. II. p. 449.

† The first act of this play is consumed by a speech of Juno, which consists of 240 lines, and a chorus of 70 lines. His Lordship was a friend to alliteration.

“Great Pompey’s pomp is past, his glory gone.”

‡ *Life of Brutus*, 994. ed. 1631.

Plutarch represents the great instigator of the conspiracy against Cæsar to have been Cassius, “ a cholericke man, and hating Cæsar privately ; he incensed Brutus against him * * *. The friends and countrimen of Brutus, both by divers procurements and sundrie rumours of the citie, and by many bills also, did openly call and *procure him to do that he did.*” * — “ Now when Cassius felt his friends, and did stirre them up against Cæsar, they all agreed, and promised to take part with him, so Brutus were the chiefe off their conspiracie. For they told him that so high an enterprise and attempt as that, did not so much require men of manhood and courage to draw their swords, as it stood them upon to have a man of such estimation as Brutus, to make every man boldly thinke, that by his onely presence the fact were holy and just. If he tooke not this course, then that they should go to it with fainter hearts ; and when they had done it, they should be more fearefull because every man would thinke that Brutus would not have refused to have made one with them, if the cause had been good and honest. Therefore Cassius, considering this matter with himselfe, did first of all speake to Brutus.” †

* Life of Brutus, 994. ed. 1631.

† Ibid. 995.

A testimony so honourable to Brutus, who was certainly intended for the hero of his play, Shakspeare has carefully preserved :

“ O, he sits high, in all the people’s hearts :
And that, which would appear offence in us,
His countenance, like richest alchymy,
Will change to virtue, and to worthiness.”

The simple fact, that no oath was taken by the conspirators, the poet learnt from Plutarch* ; but the argument which demonstrates the inutility of such a ceremony—the succeeding quotation proves to be his own: “ Having never taken oaths together, nor taken or given any caution or assurance, nor binding themselves one to another by any religious othes, they all kept the matter so secret to themselves, and could so cunningly handle it, that notwithstanding the gods did reveale it by manifest signes and tokens from above, and by predictions of sacrifices, yet all this would not be beleaved.” †

Shakspeare, like Plutarch, has wished to make public duty a principle of Brutus’ conduct. Brutus knows no “ personal cause to spurn at Cæsar but for the general ;” nor can he tell, “ to speak truth of Cæsar,” “ when his affections sway’d

* “ No, not an oath : If not the face of men,” &c.

Act II. sc. 1.

† Life of Brutus, p. 996.

more than his reason." — "The quarrel," he says, "will bear no colour for the thing he is;" but he argues, that if Cæsar should be king, he then will have "a sting in him, that at his will he may do danger with." And this is the wretched hypothesis on which Brutus justifies his conscience in the murder of Cæsar! When Shakspeare deserted his author, and described the rest of Brutus' character from his own imagination, how beautiful is the picture! — his calmness and dignity so well sustained by the abounding maxims of his philosophy; — his considerate regard for Lucius*, in such accordance with the character of gentleness in Brutus. In the struggle of feeling and philosophy, when he tells Cassius of the death of Portia, he can speak with calmness of his misfortune, and is able even to narrate the circumstances of its occurrence without embarrassment; but the strict attention he observes to utter no unnecessary word, his haste to dismiss, and his injunctions against the renewal of the subject, denote, in a manner as deeply impressive as language could have made it, the internal agony of his mind.† This is one of those surprising instances of Shakspeare's power to produce extraordinary

* Act II. sc. 1. — Act IV. sc. 3. † Act IV. sc. 3.

effects, by means apparently the most simple and inartificial. — But to continue our general comparison.

Shakspeare, prudently enough, omits to notice the motives which should have restrained Brutus from raising his arm against the head of Cæsar. “The great honors and favour Cæsar shewed unto him, kept him backe that of himselfe alone he did not conspire nor consent to depose him of his kingdome. For Cæsar did not only save his life after the battel of Pharsalia when Pompey fled, and did at his request also save many moe of his friends besides ; but, furthermore, he put a marvellous confidence in him.” *

But while he rescued his hero from the charge of ingratitude, the dramatist exposes him to a more disgraceful accusation, that of violating the sacred bond of friendship, by confounding him with Decimus Brutus, whom, after Plutarch, he styles Decius. Shakspeare calls Marcus Brutus “Cæsar’s angel,” and the “well-beloved,” and makes him say that he had slain his “best lover.” Now it was “Decius Brutus, surnamed Albinus, in whom Cæsar put such confidence, that in his last will and testament he had appointed him to be his heire†”, and who with “Octavius, the son

* Life of Julius Cæsar, p. 739.

† Ibid. 740.

of his neece," accompanied him "throughout al Italy."*

Though Plutarch's account of Cæsar's disposition towards Brutus is very contradictory, he clearly enough intimates, that neither friendship nor familiarity subsisted between them. "Cæsar, on the other side, did not trust Marcus Brutus overmuch, nor was without tales brought unto him against him: howbeit he feared his great mind, authoritie, and friends. Yet on the other side, also, he trusted his good nature and faire conditions. For intelligence being brought him one day, that Antonius and Dolabella did conspire against him; he answered, that these fat long-haired men made him not afraid, but the lean and whitely-faced fellows, meaning that by Brutus and Cassius."†

The lives both of Cæsar and Anthony also mention the dictator's aversion from abstemiousness; and though in every instance Brutus is coupled with Cassius as a man to be suspected, Shakspeare omits to name him in transferring into his play the testimony of Cæsar in favour of the loyalty of the votaries of conviviality. ‡

* Life of Antonius.

† Life of Brutus, p. 994.

‡ "Let me have men about me that are fat," &c.

Had all the conspirators been as deeply impressed with the overwhelming importance of their enterprize as Brutus was, the momentous secret must have been divulged, since even the constancy of the philosopher was scarcely able to maintain an exterior indifference, while his mind was oppressed by the difficulties that surrounded him :—“ when he was out of his house, he did so frame and fashion his countenance and lookes, that no man could discern he had any thing to trouble his mind. But when night came that he was in his owne house, then he was cleane changed : for, either care did wake him against his will when he would have slept, or else oftentimes of himself he fell into such deepe thoughts of his enterprize, casting in his mind all the dangers that might happen.”* How intense Shakspeare intended to represent the feelings of his hero, may partly be seen, as in Plutarch, from what his wife, Portia, alleges of him ; but far more impressively from Brutus’ description of his mental anxiety in the fearful interval between the formation of his resolution and its execution.† The patriot’s injunctions to his associates, with regard to the manner of their

* Life of Brutus, p. 996.

† “ Between the acting of a dreadful thing,” &c.

Act II. sc. 1.

behaviour, are formed upon Plutarch's description of Brutus' own conduct.* The biographer is fertile in instances of the command maintained by Brutus over himself when the execution of his enterprise arrived. Shakspeare confines himself to one, that in which Popilius Lena displays his knowledge of the conspiracy.†

Deficient in that nobleness of mind which conferred on the most questionable of Brutus' actions the character of virtue, the enterprising spirit of Cassius gave him an importance to which the purity of his motives by no means entitled him. "Marvellous cholericke and cruell," he himself panted for the possession of that uncontrolled sway to which he was a declared enemy in others, it being "certainly thought that he made warre, and put himself into sundrie dangers, more to have absolute power and authoritie than to defend the liberty of his countre." His hatred of Cæsar was rather the result of personal pique than patriotism, "hating Cæsar privately, more than he did the tyrannie openly:" so that whereas Brutus hated the tyranny, "Cassius hated the tyrant."‡

* "Good gentlemen, look fresh and merrily," &c.

Act II. sc. 1.

† "I wish your enterprize to day may thrive."

Act III. sc. 1.

‡ Life of Brutus, p. 994. 1003.

Shakspeare has very artfully contrived to give a more favourable portrait of Cassius than that which the page of history warrants, without, however, so misrepresenting him as to destroy the identity of his character. With reference to dramatic effect, indeed, some change was necessary: Brutus could only, with propriety, be associated, in private friendship and in public undertakings, with a man who, in outward appearance at least, possessed some claims to equality with him. The poet, therefore, suppressed the vindictiveness, cruelty, and tyranny of Cassius, and gave the utmost effect to the fire and energy which characterised him, and particularly marked his abhorrence from living under the control of an arbitrary monarch.* Shakspeare has made Cassius' hatred of Cæsar sufficiently apparent; but so repeatedly is his love of liberty enforced, that the patriot, rather than the malignant avenger of his own wrongs, appears to strike against the tyrant.

The great political error of the life of Brutus was his gross mis-estimation of Marc Antony. To the mistake of sparing his life, in the first instance, and of suffering him to speak at the

* "Indeed, they say," &c. to the conclusion of the scene.

Act I. sc. 3.

funeral of Cæsar, in the second, his subsequent reverse of fortune is entirely attributable. Plutarch ascribes this forbearance on the part of Brutus to honourable motives, and a want of foresight and penetration.*

The humanity of Brutus might probably have been unproductive of much evil if due precaution had been adopted; but still acting under the delusion that Antony wanted both inclination and power to prove a dangerous enemy, the fatal error was committed of permitting the funeral of Cæsar to be conducted agreeable to Antony's wishes. "When this was done, they came to talke of Cæsar's will and testament, and of his funerals and tombe. Then Antonius thinking good his testament should be read openly, and also that his bodie should be honourably buried, and not in hugger-mugger, lest the people might thereby take occasion to be worse offended if they did otherwise: Cassius stoutly spake against it. But Brutus went with the motion, and agreed unto it: wherein it seemeth he committed a second fault. For the first fault he did, was when he would not consent to his fellow-conspirators that Antonius should be slaine; and therefore he was justly

* Life of Antonius, 917. Life of Brutus, 998.

accused, 'that thereby he had saved and strengthened a strong and grievous enemy of their conspiracy. The second fault was, when he agreed that Cæsar's funerals should be as Antonius would have them, the which indeed marred all." *

The superior penetration of Cassius, a circumstance extremely curious in itself, has not been overlooked by Shakspeare, who, in his judicious use of it, has reaped the twofold advantage of raising Cassius to something like an equality with Brutus, and of adhering strictly to historic truth. †

The dramatist hazarded much of the respect so skilfully obtained for Cassius by touching upon so delicate a point as the rapacity of a man "that would oftentimes be carried away from justice for gaine." ‡ In the celebrated scene of Cassius' quarrel with Brutus, he has, however, risked its introduction. The fact of

* Life of Brutus, p. 999.

† "————— I think it is not meet,
Mark Antony, so well belov'd of Cæsar,
Should outlive Cæsar," &c. Act II. sc. 1.

"I have a mind that fears him much."

Act III. sc. 1.

"Brutus, a word with you," &c. Act III. sc. 1.

‡ Life of Brutus, p. 1003.

the angry encounter of the chieftains, with several particulars of their altercation, Shakspeare learned from Sir Thomas North, who relates the circumstance in his usual simple language. "Now, as it commonly happeneth in great affaires between two persons, both of them having many friends, and so many captaines under them, there ranne tales and complaints betwixt them. Therefore, before they fell in hand with any other matter, they went into a little chamber together, and bade every man avoid, and did shut the dores to them. Then they began to poure out their complaints one to the other, and grew hot and loud, earnestly accusing one another, and at length fell both a weeping."*

The exalted eulogium pronounced by Brutus over the dead body of Cassius, though very difficult to reconcile with Plutarch's account of the man, is a testimony in his favour as imperishable as honourable. Some of Shakspeare's lines are almost literally from Plutarch. "So when he was come thither, after he had lamented the death of Cassius, calling him the last of the Romanes; being impossable that Rome should ever breed againe so noble and

* Life of Brutus, 1005.

valiant a man as he, he caused his body to be buried.”* But the pathos of the passage, the

“ Friends, I owe more tears

To this dead man than you shall see me pay ;”

is Shakspeare’s. Brutus speaks his love for Cassius, but he says that his private miseries shall not interfere with his public cares. Then, however, nature claims the heart, the whole man, as her own ; and, as if the spirit of his friend reproached him, he cries

“ I shall find time, Cassius, I shall find time.”

What can be more touching than the repetition of this promise of grief to severed affection ?

The succeeding play demands a full investigation of the character of Marc Antony, and precludes the necessity for any particular mention of him here, and we therefore pass at once to the minor personages of the present drama. To class Cæsar among them wears somewhat the air of absurdity. But when he is introduced for little other purpose than that of being killed †; to

* Life of Brutus, 1010.

† Neither the Latin exclamation put by Shakspeare into the mouth of Cæsar, “ *Et tu, Brute?*” nor English words of the same import, being found in North’s Plutarch, curiosity was naturally excited to enquire whence he had de-

what station can he be more properly assigned? And after all, what have we to say of him? In fact, the character is so faintly marked, that he "who kept the world in awe" is scarcely recognisable, except by Shakspeare's notice, with every appearance of unpremeditated carelessness of his natural infirmities :

" I rather tell thee what is to be feared,
Than what I fear ; for always I am Cæsar.
Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf,
And tell me truly what thou think'st of him."

Plutarch says that Cæsar was " often subject to head-ache, and otherwhile to the falling-sickness," thus alluded to by Shakspeare :

" What! did Cæsar swoon ?

Casca. He fell down in the market-place, and foamed at mouth, and was speechless.

Brutus. 'Tis very like ; he hath the falling sickness."

rived them : Malone has shown the sources to have been numerous from which they might have been obtained. (in loc.) It is also a remark of Malone, that Shakspeare's making the *capitol* the scene of Cæsar's murder, contrary to the truth of history, is easily accounted for in Hamlet, where it afforded an opportunity for introducing a quibble ; but it is difficult to conjecture why, in the present play, he should depart from Plutarch, who expressly says that Julius was slain in " one of the porches about the theatre, where was set up the image of Pompey." *North's Plut.* pages 740, 996.

The introduction of “the Ghost of Cæsar” is more theatrical than judicious. Plutarch gives no other designation to the “wonderfull strange and monstrous shape of a body,” which appeared to Brutus, than that it was his “evill spirit.”

Cicero appears as a character, though he has scarcely anything to do with the conduct of the play. Nor in the little said of him does Shakespeare seem to have had Plutarch very strongly in his mind. Casca’s reply to the question, “Did Cicero say any thing?” “Aye, he spoke Greek,”* may not unfairly be ascribed to the passage which relates that Cicero was commonly called “the Grecian, and scholer, which are two words which the artificers (and such base mechanicall people at Rome) have ever ready at their tongue’s end.”† The poet has judiciously enough made the unlettered Casca endeavour to convert Cicero’s love of Greek into a subject of contempt: such a reproach from the attic mind of Brutus, or from the lips of Cassius, who “read much,” would have been ridiculous: to say nothing of it as a violent deviation from the spirit of his authority.

* Act I. sc. 2.

* Life of Cicero, 861.

The conspirators, it appears from Plutarch, declined to associate Cicero in their design, "although he was a man whom they loved dearly, and trusted best: for they were affraid that, he being a coward by nature, and age also having increased his feare, he would quite turne and alter al their purpose, and quench the heat of their enterprize."* Shakspeare notices the same determination of Brutus and his friends, but assigns an entirely different reason (a reason consistent with general nature) for their conduct:

" Let us not break with him ;
For he will never follow any thing
That other men begin."

Though Shakspeare has conferred on Marcus Brutus the regard that Cæsar, in fact, only entertained for Decius, he has not neglected to represent Decius as exercising the influence over Cæsar, which enabled him to carry the Dictator to the senate-house after he had resolved not to go: the arguments by which he effects his purpose are copied almost literally from Plutarch. †

Calphurnia and Portia both act very humble parts, for little more pains has been bestowed

* Life of Brutus, 995.

† Act II. sc. 2.

on them than the transfusion of a few passages into verse from the homely prose of Sir Thomas North. The following is an entertaining, though not very favourable, specimen of the worthy knight's style: "She (Portia) tooke a little razour, such as barbers occupie to pare men's nailes, and causing her maydes and women to go out of her chamber, gave herselfe a great gash withall in her thigh, that was straight all of a goare bloud."*

* Life of Brutus, 996.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

1608.

IN an age when the dominion of the world was submitted to the arbitrement of the sword, Antony speedily acquired the consideration which the splendour of his military talents merited. Sagacious and skilful in command, he fearlessly encountered the most imminent dangers, and cheerfully submitted to the severest privations. He lived as the comrade rather than the general of his troops; and his princely generosity in the day of prosperity, and considerate attention to their necessities and sufferings in the hour of misfortune, insured their entire devotion to his service. But the lustre of his virtues was clouded by numerous and heinous vices. The merit of his noble behaviour over the corpse of Brutus fades before his cruel persecution of, and brutal

triumph over, Cicero. His attachment and fidelity to Cæsar are too unhappily contrasted by his desertion of Fulvia, and base ingratitude to the devoted and virtuous Octavia. If we applaud his unbounded munificence, his insatiable rapacity and wanton cruelty deserve nothing less than the severest reprobation. His energy, and patient endurance of almost unexampled hardships, in war, are too strongly contrasted by his luxury, and shameful depravity, in peace. In an early association with dissolute companions, he contracted a fatal love of dissipation, which the splendour of his subsequent fortune afforded him the most unbounded means of gratifying. He was naturally open and unsuspecting, and the habitual indulgence of his passions rendered him an easy prey to the blandishments of female art. In the hands of the voluptuous, but all accomplished, Cleopatra, he lost even the power of resistance; the calls of honour, the voice of fame, and the excitements of ambition were alike powerless. In the frivolous pastimes of a female court, and the luxurious surfeits of sumptuous entertainments, the soldier who had

“ Quarter'd the world, and o'er green Neptune's back
With ships made cities;”

was lost in the effeminate votary to sloth and sensual indulgence :

“ The triple pillar of the world transform'd
Into a strumpet's fool”.

Such has history described the hero of the tragedy before us. The most repulsive feature in his character, cruelty, the dramatist has entirely suppressed, whilst he has taken frequent opportunities to enlarge upon, and give instances of, his courage, constancy, nobility, and generosity. In Julius Cæsar, indeed, Shakspeare has carried his partiality to Antony so far, that a sincere and amiable attachment to Cæsar is his prominent characteristic, and his vices are no more than lightly alluded to under the scarcely reprobative phrase, “ Antony, that revels long o' nights,” and, “ a masker and a reveller.” Not till our author exhibited Antony under the witchery of Cleopatra did he represent him as completely abandoned to voluptuousness. Shakspeare adopted the opinion of Plutarch that Cleopatra “ did waken and stir up many vices yet hidden in Antony, and were never seene to any : and if any sparke of goodness or hope of rising were left him, Cleopatra quenched it straight, and made it worse than before.”*

It will be seen from Plutarch, that the instances

* Life of Antonius, 922.

given by Shakspeare of Antony's indolence and dissipation are not amusements which the probability of their occurrence suggested to the mind of the poet, but faithful copies of the grave assertions of the historian :

“ From Alexandria

This is the news : he fishes, drinks, and wastes
The lamps of night in revel.” *

Sir Thomas North's account of the fishing party reflects more honour upon the divers than any others concerned in it :

“ On a time he went to angle for fish, and when he could take none, he was as angrie as could be ; because Cleopatra stood by. Wherefore he secretly commanded the fishermen, that, when he cast in his line, they should straight dive under the water, and put a fish on his hooke which they had taken before : and so snatched up his angling rod, and brought up a fish twice or thrise. Cleopatra found it straight, yet she seemed not to see it, but wondered at his excellent fishing : but when she was alone by herself among her own people, she told them how it was, and bad them the next morning to be on the water to see the fishing. A number of people came to the haven, and got into the fisher-boats to see this fishing. Antonius then threw in his line, and Cleopatra straight commanded one of her men to

* Act I. sc. 4.

dive under the water before Antonius' men, and to put some old salt-fish upon his bait. When he had hung the fish on his hooke, Antonius thinking he had taken a fish indeed, snatched up his line presently. Then they all fell a laughing.*

Of this stroke of Cleopatra's wit, Shakspeare makes, in a subsequent passage, distinct mention :

“ 'Twas merry, when
You wager'd on your angling; when your diver
Did hang a salt-fish on his hook, which he
With fervency drew up.”

The notoriety of Antony's drunkenness and midnight revelry precludes the necessity of quotation from Plutarch; but it may not be amiss to produce our author's authority for so startling an allegation as “ eight wild boars roasted whole at a breakfast, and but twelve persons there.” † — “ Philotas, a physician, being in Antonius' kitchen, saw a world of diversities of meats, and amongst others, eight wild bores rosted whole; he began to wonder at it, and said: ‘ Sure, you have a great number of guests to supper.’ The cooke fell a laughing, and answered him: ‘ No (quoth he), not many guests; not above twelve in all: but yet all that is boiled or rosted must be served in whole, or else it would be marred straight.’ ” †

* Life of Antonius, 924. † Act II. sc. 2.

‡ Life of Antonius, 928.

Shakspeare has very concisely expressed the disgust which Octavius would naturally feel at his coadjutor's degrading irregularities :

“ Let us grant, it is not
Amis to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy;
To give a kingdom for a mirth; to sit
And keep the turn of tipping with a slave;
To reel the streets at noon, and stand the buffet
With knaves that smell of sweat: say, this becomes him,
(As his composure must be rare indeed
Whom these things cannot blemish,) yet must Antony
No way excuse his soils, when we do bear
So great weight in his lightness.” *

I shall quote some passages from Plutarch in illustration of this account of Anthony.

“ Furthermore, things that seeme intollerable in other men, as to boast commonly, to jest with one or other, to drinke like a good fellow with every body, to sit with the souldiers when they dine, and to eat and drinke with them souldier-like, it is incredible what wonderful love it wan him amongst them.” † Standing “ the buffet with knaves that smell of sweat,” has reference to another princely amusement in which Antony delighted. “ Sometime, also, when he would go up and downe the city disguised like a slave in the night, and would peere into poore men's windowes and their shops, and scold and braule with them within the house; Cleopatra would be

* Act I. sc. 4.

† Life of Antonius, 923.

also in a chamber-maide's array, and amble up and downe the streets with him, so that often times *Antonius bare away both mocks and blows.*" *

In the first scene of the play, Antony proposes such an expedition to the beauteous partner of his pleasures :

“ To-night we'll wander through the streets, and note
The qualities of people. Come, my queen;
Last night you did desire it: —”

The extent and effect of Antony's fatal infatuation by Cleopatra, are forcibly stated in Plutarch: —

“ Now Antonius was so ravished with the love of Cleopatra, that though his wife Fulvia had great wars, and much ado with Cæsar for his affaires, and that the army of the Parthians was now assembled in Mesopotamia, ready to invade Syria: yet (as though all this had nothing touched him) he yielded himselfe to go with Cleopatra into Alexandria, where he spent and lost in childish sports, (as a man might say) and idle pastimes, the most precious thing a man can spend, and that is, Time. For they made an order between them, which they called Amimetobion, (as much as to say, no life comparable and matchable with it) one feasting each other by turnes, and in cost exceeding all measure and reason.”

* Life of Antonius, 923.

Shakspeare's expression of Antony's devotedness to the delights of love, and of the oblivion of his projects of ambition, is extremely spirited *; but the passage most strongly expressive of the entire subjection of his reason to his passions, is his reply to Cleopatra's petition for pardon, when her indiscretion had effected his utter ruin :

“ Fall not a tear I say ; one of them rates
All that is won and lost : Give me a kiss ;
Even this repays me.” †

The opinion entertained by the dramatic Antony of the worthlessness of Cleopatra, is a circumstance entirely of the poet's own creation. Antony describes her as “ cunning past man's thought,” and designates her in terms which, to the mind of a lover, would naturally communicate feelings of unmingled disgust.

“ I found you as a morsel, cold upon
Dead Cæsar's trencher : nay, you were a fragment
Of Cneius Pompey's ; besides what hotter hours,
Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have
Luxuriously pick'd out : — For, I am sure,
Though you can guess what temperance should be,
You know not what it is.” †

He is fully alive to, and bitterly laments

* “ Let Rome in Tyber melt ! and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall !” Act I. sc. 1.
and the subsequent passages.

† Act III. sc. 9.

‡ Act III. sc. 11.

the folly and degradation of his conduct; but his firmest resolves are feebly opposed against the potent spell of his

“grave charm,—

Whose eye beck'd forth his wars, and call'd them home;

Whose bosom was his crownet, his chief end.”

The opinions and actions of Shakspeare's Antony, therefore, are diametrically opposed to each other; but there is no inconsistency in his conduct. The licentiousness of Cleopatra is the link which binds her to the heart of Antony: dissolute and voluptuous himself, her depravity is congenial to his nature: that which others would have revolted from, is to him a spell. Of the “beauty, wisdom, and modesty,” of that “gem of women,” Octavia, he makes small account; her “holy, cold, and still conversation” has no charms for a constitution in every respect the reverse; the “Egyptian dish” alone is food for a palate which banquets on the leavings of half a dozen predecessors. But, what was grateful to his appetite did not command the approbation of his judgment. History has alike recorded Antony's intellectual ability and his corporeal frailty: a victim to the latter, enough of the former doubtless survived to impress on his memory the deepest sense of his folly, the weakness and the unworthiness of his infatu-

ation. Shakspeare read the inmost thoughts of Antony; he has given them an everlasting record; and the pages on which they are impressed, will long be referred to as instructive lessons against the indulgence of the passions, and the sacrifice of the judgment to the will.

Shakspeare has not been successful in conveying an idea of the elegance of Cleopatra's mind. Neither her manners, thoughts, nor language, impress us with a conviction of her possessing those accomplishments which he ascribes to her. Mark the model that Shakspeare had before him. "Now her beauty (as it is reported) was not so passing, as unmatchable of other women, nor yet such as upon present view did enamour men with her: but so sweet was her company and conversation, that a man could not possibly but be taken. And besides her beauty, the good grace she had to talke and discourse, her curteous nature that tempered her words and deeds, was a spur that pricked to the quick. Furthermore, besides all these, her voice and words were marvellous pleasant: for her tong was an instrument of musick to divers sports and pastimes, the which she easily turned into any language that pleased her. She spake unto few barbarous people by interpreter, but

made them answer herself, or at least the most part of them." *

The susceptible Antony,

"Whom ne'er the word of no woman heard speak,"

was as little desirous as capable of offering resistance to an assault from such a combination of dangerous qualifications. The conquest obtained by Cleopatra's accomplishments her consummate art secured, for there was no flattery to which she did not condescend in order to rivet the chains which bound to her the heart of Antony. "Plato writeth, that there are foure kinds of flatterie: but Cleopatra divided it into many kinds. For she (were it in sport, or in matters of earnest) still devised sundry new delights to have Antonius at commandment, never leaving him night nor day, nor once letting him go out of her sight. For she would play at dice with him, drinke with him, and hunt commonly with him, and also be with him when he went to any exercise or activitie of body." † "She subtilly seemed to languish for the love of Antonius, pining her body for lacke of meat. Furthermore, she every way so framed her countenance that when Antonius came to

* Life of Antony, p. 923.

† Ibid. p. 924.

see her, she cast her eyes upon him, like a woman ravished for joy. Straight again when he went from her, she fell a weeping and blubbering, looking rufully on the matter, and still found the means that Antonius should often times find her weeping: and then when he came suddenly upon her, she made as though she dried her eyes, and turned her face away, as if she were unwilling that he should see her weepe." *

Shakspeare has, with perfect knowledge of the world, assigned Cleopatra female attendants, whose virtue was not likely to be a reproach upon the looser hours of their mistress, if their conversation in the second scene of the play may be presumed to convey any idea of their principles. The names Charmian and Iras, are found in Sir Thomas North, who calls the latter "a woman of Cleopatra's bed-chamber, that frizelled her haire, and dressed her head." †

The imagination of Warburton so frequently outstripped his judgment, that it is seldom safe to copy his opinions. His remarks, however, on Shakspeare's management of the character of Octavius, are skilful as well as refined. "It is observable with what judgment Shakspeare

* Life of Antonius, p. 924. † Ibid. p. 938.

draws the character of Octavius. Antony was his hero; so the other was not to shine: yet being an historical character, there was a necessity to draw him *like*. He was, therefore, compelled to admit the great strokes of his character, but has, notwithstanding, contrived to leave him feeble and ineffective."

Of the three plays founded by the bard on the history of Plutarch, that of Antony and Cleopatra is the one in which he has least indulged his fancy. His adherence to his authority is minute*, and he bestowed little pains in the adaptation of the history to the purposes of the drama, beyond an ingenious, and fre-

* As unnecessary a deviation from the truth of his history as any to be met with in our author's plays, however, occurs in the present. In the height of his anger at discovering the favourable reception of Thyreus by Cleopatra, Antony exclaims, —

“ Have I my pillow left impress'd in Rome,
Forborne the getting of a lawful race,
And by a gem of women, to be abus'd? ” &c.

Act III. sc. 11.

All this is in direct opposition to Plutarch, who in one place speaks of Octavia's being “ at that time great with child, and moreover had a second daughter by him; ” (Life of Antony, 927) and in another relates the marriage of these daughters; the one to “ Domitius Ænobarbus, and the other, which was Antonia, unto Drusus the sonne of Livia and sonne-in-law of Cæsar. ” (Ibid. p. 949.)

quently elegant, metrical arrangement of the humble prose of Sir Thomas North. But Shakespeare seldom wrote without recording, in concise and elegant language, remarks on human nature, which enlighten the understanding and improve the heart. Thus Antony, on receiving the news of Fulvia's death, —

“ There's a great spirit gone! Thus did I desire it :
 What our contempts do often hurl from us,
 We wish it ours again ; the present pleasure,
 By revolution lowering, does become
 The opposite of itself : she's good, being gone ;
 The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on.”*

To the same purpose is the following : —

“ It hath been taught us from the primal state,
 That he, which is, was wish'd, until he were ;
 And the ebb'd man, ne'er lov'd, till ne'er worth love,
 Comes dear'd, by being lack'd.”

Where is the reflecting mind, that has not on a variety of occasions acknowledged the justice of the succeeding admirable observation ? —

“ We, ignorant of ourselves,
 Beg often our own harms, which the wise powers
 Deny us for our good ; so find we profit,
 By losing of our prayers.” †

* Act I. sc. 2. † Act I. sc. 4. ‡ Act II. sc. 1.

CORIOLANUS.

1610.

THE hero, whose remarkable vicissitudes of fortune constitute the subject of the play before us, has been transmitted to posterity as a man of extraordinary military skill and valour, and whose virtuous life and incorruptible honesty excited the admiration of the world, whilst his pride and irascibility drew upon him their fear and detestation.

“ He was so cholericke and impatient,” says Plutarch, “ that he would yield to no living creature: which made him churlish, uncivil, and altogether unfit for any man’s conversation. Yet men marvelling much at his constancie, that he was never overcome with pleasure nor money, and how he would endure easily all manner of paines and travels: therèupon they well liked and commended his stoutnesse and temperancy.

But for all that they could not be acquainted with him as one citizen useth to be with another in the city : his behaviour was so unpleasant to them by reason of a certain insolent and stern manner he had, which because he was too lordly, was disliked." *

" He was a stout man of nature, that never yielded in any respect, thinking that to overcome alwaies, and to have the upper hand in all matters, was a token of magnanimity." †

Shakspeare has displayed much skill in exciting an interest in favour of his hero ; a task of difficulty, since to have represented the pride of Coriolanus as less imperious, or his impatience as more under restraint, than history has recorded of these unamiable qualities, would have struck at the very root of his plot. It is indeed on the existence of those characteristics in *excess*, that the fate of Coriolanus turns : " Of all his misfortune and ill hap, the austeritie of his nature, and his haughty obstinate mind," says Plutarch, " was the onely cause." ‡ Compelled, therefore, to give these repulsive features great prominence, the bard has prepared for them an ingenious defence, by directing the arrogance and passion of Marcius against the rabble and their tribunes only ; thus

* Life of Coriolanus, p. 221. † Ibid. p. 228. ‡ Ibid. p. 244.

justifying the contempt and irritability of a high minded patrician by the senseless inconsistency, unfeeling insolence, and selfish malignity of the Roman multitude. A broad distinction is here to be drawn between the historic and the dramatic Coriolanus. The pride, austerity, and impatience of the former are described by his biographer as universal: the same characteristics, in the latter, are confined to one object only in their operation. Unlike the hero of Plutarch, Shakspeare's Marcius is neither "churlish," nor "altogether unfit for any man's conversation;" but, on the contrary, noble in his nature; of the highest honour; modest, amiable, and affectionate in his social relations; almost adored by his kindred; universally respected by his friends. His "noble acts and vertues" are displayed with peculiar grace; and not, as described in Plutarch, "so wanting in affability as to become hateful, even to those that received benefite by them, who could not abide his severity and selfe will."* To one class of persons only is he proud, to them only is he choleric, impatient, and austere; and in opposition to their encroachments, only, is he inflexible and obstinate.

The display of the repulsive part of Corio-

* Life of Coriolanus, p. 243.

lanus's character being thus confined to one object, it became Shakspeare's next care, even in this instance, to justify it. In the insurrection of the people on the subject of the usury laws, when they withdrew to Mons-Sacer, and Tribunes were granted to their importunity, Plutarch represents the citizens as in the right: of their subsequent demand for a gratuitous distribution of corn, he does not appear to entertain so favourable an opinion. Shakspeare commences the action of his play by the grant of Tribunes to the people, but he does not ascribe that concession to the insurrection occasioned by the usury laws; and, entirely leaving out the retiring of the plebeians to the holy mount, he makes the dispute respecting the distribution of corn the ground of their sedition, and represents the grant of Tribunes as an extortion, by a seditious mob, from the weakness of the nobility. The change is important, because it gives to the insurrection of the people the distinctive character of an insolent and overbearing interference with the privileges of the patricians, and, consequently, fixes on Coriolanus's hostile resistance of the encroachment the stamp of sound political wisdom.

Plutarch has assigned to Coriolanus a long argument against the people's claims, which I

shall quote as illustrative of the dexterity with which Shakspeare adapted his materials to his purpose.

“ But Martius standing upon his feet, did somewhat sharply take up those who went about to gratifie the people therein; and called them people pleasers, and traitours to the nobility. Moreover, he said, they nourished against themselves the naughtie seede and cockle of insolencie and sedition, which had bene sowed and scattered abroad amongst the people, which they should have cut off, if they had been wise, in their growth: and not (to their owne destruction) have suffered the people to establish a magistrate for themselves, of so great power and authority, as that man had, to whom they had granted it. Who was also to be feared, because he obtained what he would, and did nothing but what he listed; neither passed for any obedience to the Consuls, but lived in all liberty, acknowledging no superiour to command him, saving the onely heads and authours of their faction, whom he called his magistrats. Therefore, said he, they that gave counsell, and perswaded that the corne should be given out to the common people *gratis*, as they used to do in the cities of Grece, where the people had more absolute

power, did but only nourish their disobedience, which would breake out in the end, to the utter ruine and overthrow of the whole state. For they will not thinke it is done in recompence of their service past, sithence they know well enough they have so oft refused to go to the warres, when they were commanded: neither for their mutinies when they went with us, whereby they have rebelled and forsaken their country: neither for their accusations which their flatterers have preferred unto them, and they have received, and made good against the senate: but they will rather judge, we give and grant them this, as abasing ourselves, and standing in feare of them, and glad to flatter them every way. By this means, their disobedience will still grow worse and worse: and they will never leave to practise new sedition and up-roles. Therefore it were a great folly for us, me thinks, to do it: yea, shall I say more? we should if we were wise, take from them their Tribuneship, which most manifestly is the embasing of the Consulship, and the cause of the division of their city. The state whereof, as it standeth, is not now as it was wont to be, but becometh dismembered in two factions, which maintaines alwaies civil dissention and discord

between us, and will never suffer us againe to be united into one body.”*

Discarding the formality of an oration, Shakspeare has split this speech into dialogue, making Coriolanus deliver almost every sentiment of the original as the expression of impassioned feeling. †

Whilst Shakspeare was solicitous to make his hero right in the principle on which he acts, he has been equally careful, by exaggerating the intemperance of his conduct, to place him decidedly wrong in its application. Instead of soliciting the suffrages of the people as a favour; of submitting an humble statement of his services, and exhibiting the wounds which he had received in defence of his country, as Plutarch informed the poet (though incorrectly) was the custom with suitors, the dramatic Coriolanus insolently demands the consulship as a right, and proudly refuses to gratify the citizens by a display of those scars which bore testimony to his valour and his services. Plutarch says, that Coriolanus “shewed many wounds and cuts upon

* Life of Coriolanus, p. 228.

† “It is a purpos’d thing, and grows by plot,” &c. with the subsequent passages through a great part of the scene.” Act III. sc. 1.

his body which he had received in seventeen years' service at the wars." *

Though Shakspeare has not hesitated to deviate, in this instance, entirely from his authority, he has been extremely minute in the preservation of minor traits of character related by Plutarch of the subject of his page. Marcius looked upon pecuniary rewards with contempt, rejecting the gift of a tenth part of the spoil that he had won at Corioli, as "rather a mercenarie reward, than a honourable recompence; he would have none of it, but was contented to have his equal part with the other souldiers." †

The poet has given the passage a most elegant turn of expression :—

" I thank you, general ;
But cannot make my heart consent to take
A bribe to pay my sword : I do refuse it ;
And stand upon my common part with those
That have beheld the doing." ‡

But whilst Coriolanus rejects princely gifts with indifference, he disdains not solicitation in the cause of mercy : " Onely, this grace (said he) I crave and beseech you to grant me : Among the Volces there is an old friend and hoast of mine, an honest wealthy man, and now a pri-

* *Life of Coriolanus*, p. 228. † *Ibid.* p. 225. ‡ *Act I. sc. 9.*

soner, who living before in great wealth in his owne country, liveth nowe a poore prisoner, in the hands of his enemies : and yet, notwithstanding all this his misery and misfortune, it would do me great pleasure if I could save him from this one danger, to keepe him from being sold as a slave.” * I shall not quote the dramatist’s version of this pleasing trait of Marcius’ humanity ; it is merely necessary to direct the attention of the reader to the singularity of Shakspeare in rendering the petition nugatory in the moment it is granted :

“ *Com.* O well begg’d !
 Were he the butcher of my son, he should
 Be free, as is the wind. Deliver him, Titus.
Lart. Marcius, his name ?
Cor. By Jupiter, forgot : —
 I am weary ; yea, my memory is tir’d.” †

It is amusing to trace so apparently careless and inartificial a sentence as the following, to the grave authority of an historian : —

“ 1 *Cit.* I say unto you, what he hath done famously, he did it to that end : though soft-conscienc’d men can be content to say, it was for his country, *he did it to please his mother*, and to be partly proud.”

The passage in Plutarch stands thus : — “ The

* Life of Coriolanus, p. 225.

† Act I. sc. 9.

only thing that made him to love honour, was the joy he saw his mother did take of him. For he thought nothing made him so happy and honourable, as that his mother might heare every body praise and commend him, that she might alwaies see him return with a crown upon his head, and that she might still embrace him with teares running down her cheekes for joy." *

Shakspeare has a second reference to this uncommon cause of a hero's devotion to the hardships and dangers of a military life. †

The conduct and feelings of Coriolanus on receiving his sentence of banishment, are extremely well described by Plutarch. " Martius alone, who neither in his countenance nor in his gate, did ever show himselfe abashed, or once let fall his great courage : but he onely of all other gentlemen that were angry at his fortune, did outwardly show no manner of passion, nor care at all of himselfe. Not that he did patiently beare and temper his evill hap, in respect of any reason he had, or by his quiet condition : but because he was so carried away with the vehemence of anger, and desire of revenge, that he had no sense nor feeling of the hard state he was in." †

* Life of Coriolanus, p. 222.

† " I pr'ythee now, sweet son," &c.

Act III. sc. 2.

‡ Life of Coriolanus, p. 231.

Shakspeare has entirely lost sight of the self-possession of Coriolanus, implied throughout this passage, by permitting his hero to relapse into passion, and pour upon his persecutors a torrent of abuse. *

The scenes in the play representing Coriolanus's flight to Antium, his entertainment by Aufidius, his march to Rome as general of the Volcians, and his reception of the embassies of the affrighted citizens, are copied with great accuracy from the history, which is, with one or two interesting exceptions, too long for quotation. " Now was Martius set then in his chaire of state, with all the honours of a generall, and when he had spied the women coming afar off, he marvelled what the matter meant : but afterwards knowing his wife which came foremost, he determined at the first to persist in his obstinate and inflexible rancour. But overcome in the end with natural affection, and being altogether altered to see them, his heart would not serve him to tarrie their coming to his chaire, but coming downe in hast, he went to meet them, and first he kissed his mother, and embraced her a pretty while, then his wife and little children. And

* " You common cry of curs !" &c.

nature so wrought with him, that the tears fell from his eyes, and he could not keep himself from making much of them, but yielded to the affection of his blood, as if he had been violently carried with the fury of a most swift-running streame. After he had thus lovingly received them, and perceiving that his mother Volumnia would begin to speake to him, he called the chiefest of the counsel of the Volsces to heare what she would say." — Volumnia's address concluded, — "Herself, his wife, and children, fell down upon their knees before him: Martius seeing that, could refraine no longer, but went straight and lift her up, crying out, Oh, mother! what have you done to me? And holding her hard by the right-hand, Oh, mother, said he, you have won a happy victory for your country, but mortall and unhappy for your son: for I see myself vanquished by you alone. These words being spoken openly, he spake a little apart with his mother and wife, and then let them return again to Rome, for so they did request him; and so remaining in camp that night, the next morning he dislodged, and marched homeward into the Volces country againe." *

The precipitate conduct of Coriolanus, on

* Life of Coriolanus, p. 238, 9.

this occasion, is well characterised by Plutarch, as “an act not so much to honour his mother with, as to dishonour his country by, the which was preserved for the pity and intercession of a woman, and not for the love of itself, as if it had not beene worthy of it. And so was his departure a grace (to say truly) very odious and cruell, and deserved no thanks of either party, to him that did it. For he withdrew his army, not at the request of the Romaines, against whom he made war: nor at their consent, at whose charge the warre was made.”*

The speech of Volumnia to Coriolanus, and the mention of her ardent love of her son’s military glory, are the only hints afforded by Plutarch to Shakspeare for his bold portrait of the lion-hearted Roman matron, who is more splendid than attractive; and more to be admired than loved. The meek timidity of Virginia is a beautiful contrast to the masculine boldness of Volumnia.

The jocularities of Menenius has been objected to as incompatible with the dignity of a Roman senator. Shakspeare had not only human nature, the frequent union of the magnificent and the mean, to plead in his justification, but the authority of history: “The Senate being

* Life of Coriolanus, p. 215.

afear'd of their (the people's) departure, did send unto them certaine of the *pleasantest old men*, and the most acceptable to the people among them. Of those, Menenius Agrippa was he, who was sent for chiefe man of the message from the Senate."* Shakspeare was too well disposed to mirth to neglect so favourable an opportunity for the introduction of a character of somewhat broad and low humour, and he accordingly produced the agreeable Menenius. The admirable fable illustrative of the dependence of every component part of a state upon the fountain head of authority, whose operations, though unseen, are incessant, Shakspeare was not content to copy implicitly from Plutarch, who makes Menenius relate it; but apparently pleased with the manner of its narration in the "Remains"† of Camden, (who ascribes it to Pope Adrian the Fourth) the poet has adopted an amplification which he met with there, and combined the two accounts. Plutarch only relates that "all other parts and members did labour painfully, and were very carefull to satisfie the appetites and desires of the body." Camden is more explicit as to the duties performed by each: "the eyes beheld, the ears heard, the hands laboured, the feete travelled, the tongue spake."

* Life of Coriolanus, p. 223.

† Wise Speeches.

The character of Aufidius, of very secondary interest in history, has not been exalted in the mimic scene. His frequent opposition in personal combat with Marcius, so often alluded to by Shakspeare, is dwelt upon at some length in Plutarch; and the envy which he entertained of the great renown and glory of his rival in arms, is thus made to account for his murder of Coriolanus.

“Now when Martius was returned againe into the city of Antium from his voyage, Tullus, that hated and could no longer abide him for the feare he had of his authority, sought divers meanes to take him away, thinking if he let slipt that present time, he should never recover the like and fit occasion againe.” * * *

“For these causes, Tullus thought he might no longer delay his pretence and enterprise, neither to tarry for the mutining and rising of the common people against him; wherefore, those that were of the conspiracy began to cry out that he was not to be heard, and that they would not suffer a traitor to usurpe tyrannical power over the tribe of the Volsces, who would not yield up his state and authority. And in saying these words they all fell upon him, and killed him in the market place.”*

* Life of Coriolanus, p. 240—1.

CYMBELINE.*

 1609.

THE incidents exhibited in the play of Cymbeline, were collected by Shakspeare from three sources, the principal of which was the ninth novel of the Second Day of Boccacio. No entire translation of the Decamerone appeared in English earlier than 1620; but the epistle dedicatory of the folio edition then published, declares, that many of the novels of Boccacio had been translated long before; and that this particular story was among the number, is placed beyond a doubt by the occurrence of a deformed imitation of it. "Imprÿted in the yere of our lorde god a. MCCCCC and XVIII."

An infinitely superior imitation of this pleasing tale, was also published in London in 1603, in a

* Without the slightest particle of evidence or argument Malone has placed the composition of this play previous to that of Coriolanus. It was certainly written about the year 1609. I insert my Essay on it here, in order that I may not break the series of the Roman plays,

book entitled *Westward for Smelts*.* The English story differs considerably from the Italian: its scene is laid "at Waltam (not farre from London) in the troublesome raigne of King Henry the Sixt." The narration is spirited, but would scarcely have attracted attention in the present day, had not Shakspeare adopted hints from it.

On the plot constructed with materials from these two sources, Shakspeare engrafted some incidents from the early history of England. All he knew of *Cymbeline* he acquired from Holinshed, who is sometimes closely followed, and sometimes strangely perverted.

The following is the story of Boccacio :

Several Italian merchants met accidentally in Paris at supper, and conversed freely of their absent wives. I know not, one jestingly remarked, how my wife conducts herself in my

* The whole title is worth transcribing: "*Westward for Smelts, or the Waterman's Fare of mad Merry Western Wenches, whose Tongues albeit, like Bell-clappers, they never leave ringing, yet their Tales are sweet, and will much content you: written by kinde Kitt of Kingstone.*" — I wish that this title had fallen under the notice of the lively and ingenious author of *Major Ravelin's Lucubrations*. Adorned with some of his acute and brilliant sentences, it would have formed a delightful paragraph in his learned and witty paper on "*Title Pages.*"

absence, but of this I am certain, that whenever I meet with an attractive beauty, I make the best advantage I can of the opportunity. And so do I, quoth another, for whether I believe my wife unfaithful or not, she will be so if she pleases. A third said the same, and all readily coincided in the licentious opinion, except Bernabo Lomellin, of Genoa, who maintained, that he had a wife perfectly beautiful, in the flower of youth, and of such indisputable chastity, that he was convinced if he were absent for ten years she would preserve her fidelity. A young merchant of Piacenza, Ambrogiulo, was extremely facetious on the subject, and concluded some libertine remarks, by offering to effect the seduction of this modern Lucretia, provided opportunity were afforded him. Bernabo answered his confident boast by the proposition of a wager, which was instantly accepted.

According to agreement, Bernabo remained at Paris, while Ambrogiulo set out for Genoa, where his enquiries soon convinced him that Zinevra, the wife of Bernabo, had not been too highly praised, and that his wager would be lost, without he could effect by stratagem what he had certainly no probability of obtaining by direct solicitation. Chance threw in his way a

poor woman, often employed in the house of Zinevra, whom he secured in his interest by a bribe. Pretending unavoidable absence for a few days, the woman intreated Zinevra to take charge of a large chest till she returned. The lady consented, and the chest, with Ambrogiulo secreted in it, was placed in Zinevra's bed chamber. When the lady retired to rest, the villain crept from his concealment, and by the light of a taper, took particular notice of the pictures and furniture, and the form and situation of the apartment. Advancing to the bed, he eagerly sought for some mark about the lady's person, and at last espied a mole and tuft of golden hair upon her left breast. Then taking a ring, a purse, and other trifles, he returned to his concealment, whence he was not released till the third day, when the woman returned, and had the chest conveyed home.

Ambrogiulo hastily summoned the merchants in Paris, who were present when the wager was laid. As a proof of his success he produced the stolen trinkets, called them gifts from the lady, and described the furniture of the bed room. Bernabo acknowledged the correctness of the account, and confessed, that the purse and the ring belonged to his wife; but added, that as Ambrogiulo might have obtained his account of

the room, and procured the jewels also, from some of Zinevra's servants, his claim to the money was not yet established. The proofs I have given, said Ambroguilo, ought to suffice; but as you call on me for more, I will silence your scepticism at once; — Zinevra has a mole on her left breast. Bernabo's countenance testified the truth of the assertion, and he shortly acknowledged it by words: he then paid the sum he had wagered, and instantly set out for Italy. Arriving near his residence, he dispatched a messenger for Zinevra, and gave secret orders that she should be put to death upon the road. The servant stopped in a lonely place, and declared his master's harsh instructions. The lady vehemently protested her innocence of any crime against her husband; besought the compassion of her conductor, and promised to conceal herself in some distant and obscure abode. Her life was spared, and the servant returned to his master with some of Zinevra's clothes, reporting that he had killed her, and left her body to the ferocity of beasts of prey.

Zinevra disguised herself in the garments of a man, and entered the service of a Catalonian gentleman, who carried her to Alexandria. Here she was fortunate enough to attract the attention of the Sultan, who solicited her from her master.

She soon became a favourite, and under the name of Sicurano, was appointed captain of the guard. For the security of both Christian and Turkish merchants, who resorted to the fair at Acre, the Sultan annually sent an officer with a band of soldiers. Sicurano was employed on this service, when being in the shop of a Venetian merchant, she cast her eye upon a purse and girdle, which she recognised as her own. Without declaring her discovery, she enquired to whom they belonged, and whether they were for sale. Ambrogiulo, who had arrived with a stock of merchandise, now stepped forward, and replied, that the trinkets were his, and begged Sicurano, since he admired them, to accept of them. Sicurano asked why he smiled; when Ambrogiulo related, that the purse and girdle were presents to him from a married lady of Genoa, whose love he had enjoyed; and that he smiled at the folly of her husband, who had laid five thousand against one thousand florins, that the virtue of his wife was incorruptible.

The jealousy and revenge of Bernabo were now explained to Zinevra, and the base artificer of her ruin stood before her. She feigned pleasure at Ambrogiulo's story, cultivated his acquaintance, and took him with her to Alexandria. Her next care was to have Bernabo, now re-

duced to great distress, brought privately to Alexandria. Then, watching a favourable opportunity, she prevailed with the Sultan to compel Ambrogiulo to relate publicly every circumstance of his villainy. Bernabo confessed that he had caused his wife to be murdered on the supposition of her guilt with Ambrogiulo. You perceive, said Sicurano to the Sultan, how little reason the unhappy lady had to be proud either of her gallant or her husband: if you, my lord, will punish the deceiver, and pardon the deceived, the traduced lady shall appear in your presence. The Sultan assented; Sicurano fell at his feet, and discarding her assumed demeanour, declared herself to be Zinevra: the display of the mole upon her breast, banished every doubt. Ambrogiulo was then put to a cruel death; and his immense wealth was given to Zinevra. The Sultan pardoned Bernabo, and, making Zinevra a princely donation of jewels and money, provided a ship, and suffered her and her husband to depart for Genoa.

This tale, which wears all the character of Italian fancy, Shakspeare has combined with the stern and gloomy events of early English story.

Kymbeline, or Cimbeline, was contemporary with Augustus Cæsar, under whom he served in war, and was in such favour, as to be “ made a

knight" by him. Holinshed relates little more than this of a monarch who reigned five and thirty years, and hence appears the extent of Shakspeare's additions, when he represents the king of England a widower, intermarried with a widow, who had a son named Cloten. On this "thing, too bad for bad report," it was Cymbeline's intention to bestow his only daughter, Imogen, the presumptive heir of the kingdom; his sons Guiderius and Arviragus having been stolen away in their infancy.

But Imogen disdained alliance with the despicable Cloten, and she clandestinely bestowed herself on Posthumus, a poor, but all accomplished gentleman, resident at her father's court. On the discovery of this union, Posthumus is banished. The parting of the lovers is solaced by interchanging tokens of affection: Posthumus receives from the hand of Imogen a ring, and, in return, places on her arm a bracelet, "a manacle of love." The elevation of the Genoese merchant into

" a creature such

As, to seek through the regions of the earth
For one his like, there would be something failing
In him that should compare,"

and his wife into the daughter of a king; their clandestine love, and hapless separation, are

decided improvements upon a story already interesting ; and the alterations are coupled with a corresponding refinement of manners and delicacy of sentiment.

When Posthumus is imprudently hurried into a wager on the chastity of his wife, the scene is laid in Rome, and there are present, besides the principals, Philario, a Frenchman, a Dutchman, and a Spaniard. In an ancient translation of the story of Boccacio we are told, “ How iiii merchants met all together in on way, which were of iiii dyverse landes.” In the trifling particular of the arrangement of his dramatis personæ in this scene, therefore, Shakspeare acted under the influence of authority ; and this is likewise evident, from the circumstance that the Spaniard and Hollander are mutes.

Before the entrance of Posthumus, Iachimo's disposition to cavil and detraction is carefully displayed, so that the ensuing conversation between them, being easily and naturally introduced, carries with it little appearance of any thing extraordinary. It is with very peculiar effect that the last gift of Imogen, her ring, the pledge of love, is made the stake wagered by Posthumus on her honour, against the ten thousand ducats of Iachimo. Shakspeare corrects the impropriety of which Boccacio is guilty, of

making an affectionate husband the proposer of an indelicate wager on the chastity of his wife. Following the arrangement of the story in *Westward for Smelts*, the dramatist originates the wager with the libertine sceptic; and Posthumus consents to the proposition, only under the provocation of repeatedly, and insolently, expressed confidence, and he finally couples his acquiescence with the honourable stipulation, that if Iachimo fails in his disgraceful enterprise, he shall answer for his presumption with his sword.*

It will be remembered, that Boccacio's villain has no interview with the lady: in *Westward for Smelts*, he introduces himself as having been entreated by her husband to call and see her.

Shakspeare provides Iachimo with particular recommendations to Imogen, and avails himself of the opportunity for an admirable scene, in

* In Act V. sc. 5., Iachimo professes to give an account of the origin of the wager; but his narration bears but a slender resemblance to the facts as they occurred. In Act I. sc. 5., there is no "feast," no Posthumus "sitting sadly," no high bred gallants praising their "loves of Italy,

For beauty that made barren the swell'd boast
Of him that best could speak:"

but almost exactly the reverse. Shakspeare was inattentive to what he had previously written, and thought only of the "Italian merchants who accidentally met in Paris at supper, and talked freely of their wives at home."

which the Italian, in vain, endeavours to shake the fidelity of the princess.

The traducer of the lady's honour, in Westward for Smelts, conceals himself under her bed, which is no very happy deviation from the clumsy expedient of Ambrogiulo to obtain admittance to Zinevra's chamber. Shakspeare's management of this difficult incident is extremely skilful. Iachimo being a stranger in the town requests Imogen to receive into her care a chest of plate and jewels, which some Romans, together with her husband, had bought as a present for the emperor. This is an artful appeal to the lady's tenderest feelings, and opens an easy and natural access to Iachimo. "Willingly," replied Imogen, —

" And pawn mine honour for their safety: *since*
My lord hath interest in them, I will keep them
In my bed-chamber."

Zinevra was ignorant of the cause of her husband's apparent cruelty. Imogen is made acquainted with Posthumus's charge of adultery. The rest of the scene coincides more closely with the English than the Italian novel. Neither the lady, in the English tale, nor Imogen, in the play, solicit life from the servant; but each resigns herself with submission to the decree of her husband. The compassionate tenderness of the ser-

vant in both cases, reconciles the lady to the assumption of a disguise; and, in both cases, she wanders alone, destitute, and in danger of starvation.

To enable us to speak intelligibly of the ensuing part of the plot, it is necessary to explain, that the queen is a woman of malignant disposition, who, finding it impracticable to unite her son Cloten to Imogen, contemplated the destruction of the princess by slow poison. Preparatory to the execution of her base design, she gave a box of the mixture to Pisanio, with great commendations of its medical virtues, hoping thus to deprive Imogen of this faithful adherent. The physician, however, by whom the drug had been prepared, too well understood the character of the queen to trust her with what she requested, and he rendered the preparation which he gave her perfectly innoxious by the substitution of an opiate for poison. In full confidence of its virtues, Pisanio gave the box to Imogen, when he parted with her in the woods, after having spared her life.

The continuation of the plot of the play is, that Guiderius and Arviragus, the sons of Cymbeline, had been stolen from court in their infancy. The names of these children of the king are rightly copied from Holinshed, but the idea of

their having been kidnapped is fabulous. Shakespeare introduces them in the third act, grown to man's estate; and with them Belarius, a nobleman, formerly banished by Cymbeline, under a false impression of treason. The poet supposes Belarius to have secretly carried the infant princes into the mountains of Wales, where he brought them up as his own, and all three followed the life of hunters, under the names of Morgan, Polydore and Cadwal.

Exhausted by fatigue and hunger, fortune directed the steps of the wandering Imogen to the cave where her brothers and old Belarius dwelt. They received and entertained her with the warmth and simplicity of rustic hospitality; but overcome by sickness, she has recourse to the medicine given her by Pisanio: a deep sleep ensues, accompanied by every outward appearance of death.

In the mean time, Pisanio had returned to court, and Cloten so directly charges him with being accessory to the flight of Imogen, and threatens him so determinately with instant death on prevarication, that Pisanio is driven to the expedient of giving him a feigned letter from Posthumus, which induces Cloten to set out in pursuit of Imogen, among the mountains near Milford. In the course of his search, Cloten encounters Guiderius, whom he provokes

by his insolence : Guiderius kills him, and cuts off his head. When Belarius and the princes return to their cave, they discover the apparently dead body of Imogen. The headless trunk of Cloten, and the senseless Imogen are laid together :

“Thersites’ body is as good as Ajax,
When neither are alive.”

On recovery from the effects of the opiate, Imogen finds herself, as she imagines, near the corpse of her husband; for, in order to add insult to the injury he meditated on her person, Cloten had clothed himself in the dress of Posthumus, Imogen having once said, that she held the meanest of her husband’s garments in more respect than the person of her silly admirer. Abandoning herself to grief, she falls in agony upon the body, where she lays insensible till found by the Roman-general Caius Lucius, who takes her as his page; as the lady in Westward for Smelts is discovered destitute by King Edward, and received into his service as a page.

To account for the appearance of a Roman army in England, in the reign of Cymbeline, Shakspeare is obliged to represent it as coming to enforce a neglected payment of tribute; forgetting that Holinshed asserts, in the first place, that Cymbeline “was at liberty to pay his tribute or

not ;” and secondly, that both “Cymbeline and his father Theomantius lived in quiet with the Romans, and continuallie to them paid the tributes.” The war between Rome and England respecting tribute was in the reign of Guiderius “the first sonne of Kymbeline.”

Both Iachimo and Posthumus arrived in England with the Roman forces. Posthumus, however, determined not to bear arms against his country, quits the Romans and follows the British force as a peasant. An engagement ensues, and Cymbeline is on the point of being destroyed ; when Belarius, Guiderius, Arviragus, and Posthumus, place themselves in a lane, stop the victorious progress of the Roman arms, and convert defeat into a triumph. This service completed, Posthumus resumes the character of a Roman, and as such, is made prisoner with Lucius, Iachimo, and others. Imogen follows the fortunes of her master Lucius, and remains a prisoner with him.

It is left to the last scene of the last act to unravel the almost inextricable maze into which the plot is by this time woven.

Cymbeline, seated in his tent, with Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus by his side, as the preservers of his throne, commands the Roman prisoners to be brought into his presence. Imogen attends on Lucius as his page.

In the progress of the scene, Cymbeline is so powerfully affected by the appearance of the page, that he promises to grant whatever the boy shall ask. Imogen's eye had been caught by the ring on the finger of Iachimo, which she knew to be the one given by her to Posthumus: she demands therefore, that Iachimo shall "render of whom he had it." In Westward for Smelts, the lady under the protection of King Edward demands how a small crucifix of gold, once hers, came into the possession of the man by whom her husband had been deceived.

Bending under the weight of guilt, Iachimo makes full confession of his villany: Posthumus rushes forward, Imogen declares her sex, and mutual explanations and reconciliations ensue.

Belarius now also avows himself, and discovers the two noble youths who had fought with him, and by their valour preserved the British throne, to be the sons of Cymbeline, he having stolen them in their infancy, and reared them as his own in solitude. Guiderius and Arviragus are recognised and acknowledged, and Belarius is pardoned.

The play of Cymbeline, then, is the junction of a modern Italian novel and an ancient British story. Either tale set off with such episodes as adorn the Twelfth Night, and other dramas,

would have furnished an interesting play ; but the events in Cymbeline, though curiously interwoven, are often “ perplexed beyond self-explication,” as Imogen says of Pisanio’s face. The charms which Shakspeare has thrown over the nakedness of his original stories make the reader regret that his attention is ever distracted. How beautiful is the development of Imogen’s character ; how rich and spirited the dialogue, particularly the scene between Posthumus and Iachimo, after the return of the latter to Rome ! The fine poetry which the dramatist has lavished upon Iachimo is an excuse for having left him the same common place villain that he appears in the novel ; and where in Boccacio, or in any other writer, is the wretchedness of impure love so beautifully displayed, as in one of the speeches of this hypocrite, during his conversation with Imogen ? The ancient British story is adorned with many beauties. Though the king and queen are dull, and prate too much, yet Cloten is interesting. He is a natural fool ; yet he often talks with the wit of one of Shakspeare’s professed fools. He loves Imogen, for she is fair and royal ; but he hates her because she despises his person ; and Shakspeare makes his hatred predominate, because vanity is the characteristic of a fool. What vigour and vitality are thrown over the

monkish chronicle by the fable of the Cambrian gentlemen :—Belarius, full of valuable axioms and sentences, embittered indeed by a world that had disgraced him, and Guiderius and Arviragus, with glorious enthusiasm and lofty hopes, piercing through the meanness of their estate.

TIMON OF ATHENS.

1610.

FROM a passage in "Jack Drum's Entertainment," Dr. Farmer conjectured that Timon had made his appearance on the stage previous to 1601. There was in the possession of the late Mr. Strutt, the engraver, a manuscript drama on the subject, and if the date, 1600, usually assigned to it be correct, the supposition of Farmer is confirmed. This play bears no more than a partial resemblance to Shakspeare's. It contains a scene resembling Shakspeare's banquet given by Timon to his flatterers. Instead of *warm water*, he sets before them *stones painted like artichokes*, and afterwards beats them out of the room. He then retires to the woods, attended by his faithful steward, who, like Kent, in King Lear, has disguised himself to continue his services to his master. Timon, in the last act, is

followed by his fickle mistress, &c. after he was reported to have discovered a hidden treasure by digging the earth.

There appears no objection to the belief that thus much Shakspeare was indebted to the old play; but it still remains a question where he acquired that knowledge which enabled him to construct the more material parts of his performance. His well-ascertained familiarity with Painter's Palace of Pleasure naturally suggests the idea that he made use of the twenty-eighth novel of the first volume of that collection; but the neglect of the novelist to account for Timon's hatred of mankind negatives the notion. Timon's story is shortly narrated in Plutarch's Life of Antonius, and there the omission of the novelist is abundantly supplied. "Because of the unthankfulness," says Sir Thomas North, "of those he had done good unto, and whom he tooke to be his friends, he was angry with all men, and would trust no man."* It may be contended that from this hint alone Shakspeare developed the origin of Timon's detestation of mankind; and it has been deemed a satisfactory conclusion that he derived none of his materials from Lucian, because no translation of the dialogue of Timon is

* Page 943.

known to have existed in Shakspeare's age. But it should rather have been inferred, from the many striking coincidences between the play and the dialogue, that Lucian had some influence over the composition of Timon, although the channel through which that influence was communicated is no longer to be traced.

The following is Lucian's description of Timon : — “ To speak the truth, his probity, humanity, and charity to the poor, have been the ruin of him ; or rather, in fact, his own folly, easiness of disposition, and want of judgment in his choice of friends ; he never discovered that he was giving away his all to wolves and ravens. Whilst these vultures were preying upon his liver, he thought them his best friends, and that they fed upon him out of pure love and affection. After they had gnawed him all round, ate his bones bare, and, if there was any marrow in them, sucked it carefully out, they left him, *cut down to the roots and withered* ; and so far from relieving or assisting him in their turns, would not so much as know or look upon him. This has made him turn digger ; and here, in his skin garment, he tills the earth for hire ; ashamed to show himself in the city, and venting his rage against the ingratitude of those, who, enriched

as they had been by him, now proudly pass along, and know not whether his name is Timon.”*

It is quite incredible, that a harmony so complete as that which exists between Shakspeare's portrait of Timon and the preceding passage, proceeded from the poet's expansion of the meagre materials of Plutarch, with no guide but the suggestions of his own imagination. Upon the expression, “they left him, cut down to the roots and withered,” it should be observed, that the dramatic Timon, contrasting his prosperous with his forlorn state, describes his friends as

“ numberless upon me stuck, as leaves
Do on the oak, have with one winter's brush
Fell from their boughs, and left me open, bare
For every storm that blows.” †

Though there is no verbal coincidence, the image in both cases is the same.

When Shakspeare's Timon is demanded by Alcibiades, “What is thy name?” His reply—

* It would have been very easy to have furnished a fresh translation of Lucian, which would have made the coincidences between the dramatist and the satirist appear in a much stronger light. To avoid the charge of misrepresenting my author for the support of an hypothesis, I have quoted from the version of Dr. Franklin, who will surely escape the imputation of any sinister design.

† Act IV. sc. 3.

“ I am *misanthropos*, and hate mankind,” * is strikingly similar to the language of Lucian’s Timon. “ The fairest name I would wish to be distinguished by is that of *misanthrope*.”

Lucian’s Timon thus expresses his satisfaction on discovering gold in the earth. “ It is, it must be gold, fine, yellow, noble gold, heavy, sweet to behold. * * Burning like fire, thou shinest day and night : come to me, thou dear delightful treasure : now do I believe that Jove himself was once turned into gold : what virgin would not spread forth her bosom to receive so beautiful a lover ?”

The dramatic Timon exclaims —

“ What is here ?

Gold ? yellow, glittering, precious gold ?” †

And in his reflections on its all seductive influence, he indulges in a train of thought perfectly of kin to that of Lucian’s imputation on the corruptible nature of the virtue of the sex :

“ thou bright defiler

Of Hymen’s purest bed ! thou valiant Mars !
Thou ever young, fresh, lov’d, and delicate wooer,
Whose blush doth thaw the consecrated snow
That lies in Dian’s lap !” ‡

* Act IV. sc. 3.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

Exalted to an affluence, as he expresses it, beyond what "the Persian king can boast," the Timon of Lucian resolves to "purchase some retired spot, there build a tower to keep my gold in, and live for myself alone: this shall be my habitation; and, when I am dead, my sepulchre also: from this time forth it is my fixed resolution to have no commerce or connection with mankind, but to despise and avoid it. I will pay no regard to acquaintance, friendship, pity, or compassion: to pity the distressed or to relieve the indigent I shall consider as a weakness, nay, as a crime; my life, like the beasts of the field, shall be spent in solitude, and Timon alone shall be Timon's friend. I will treat all beside as enemies and betrayers; to converse with them were profanation; to herd with them, impiety: accursed be the day that brings them to my sight."

Selfishness, so detestable, would have been incompatible with the high-minded disinterestedness of Shakspeare's Timon, whose generous spirit is a stranger to the vice of avarice. But the influence of Lucian's dialogue is nevertheless, even in this instance, to be traced in the play. Spurning, himself, the possession of his newly acquired wealth, Timon still devotes it to a purpose similar to that assigned to it in Lucian; he

bestows it on his faithful steward, with this express condition and solemn admonition :

“ Here, take :— the gods out of my misery
 Have sent thee treasure. Go, live rich and happy :
 But thus condition'd ; thou shalt build from men :
 Hate all, curse all : show charity to none ;
 But let the famish'd flesh slide from the bone,
 Ere thou relieve the beggar : give to dogs
 When thou deny'st to men ; let prisons swallow them,
 Debts wither them to nothing : Be men like blasted
 woods,
 And may diseases lick up their false bloods !” †

A brief notice of one or two other instances in which Lucian may be traced in the drama will suffice. In the first scene, Timon is the means of marrying the daughter of an old Athenian, by bestowing on a servant of his own, her suitor, a sum (three talents), equal to her portion ; an act very much resembling what Lucian's Timon relates as having been done by himself : “ he whom I gave a large piece of ground to, and *two talents for his daughter's portion.*”

One of the lords describes the dramatic Timon's profuse liberality, by representing the dispersion of his wealth as “ pouring it out ; Plutus the god of gold is but his steward.”* In Lucian's dialogue, “ Plutus” is sent by

* Act IV. sc. 3.

† Act I. sc. 1.

Jupiter to "carry Timon a large treasure." In the play, we observe that the restoration of Timon to wealth, immediately brings out to him the sycophants, who in the days of his prosperity had preyed upon, and in the hour of adversity deserted him. Thus in Lucian. "But hush! whence all this noise and hurry? What crowds are here, all covered with dust and out of breath; somehow or other they have smelt out the gold. I'll get upon this hill, and pelt them from it with stones." To this measure he actually resorts, in order to rid himself of some of his sordid visitors; others he very unceremoniously beats. Shakspeare's Timon pelts Apemantus, and inflicts corporal chastisement on the poor poet and painter.

In the powerful contrast and nice discrimination of characters, Shakspeare is unrivalled. How few authors would have ventured to produce two madmen on the scene together, as in *Lear*, or two misanthropists, as in the play before us; and who, besides himself, could, amidst difficulties so complicated, have arrived at conclusions so triumphant?

Timon and Apemantus, at the first view similar, have nothing in common but their hatred of mankind. Disgusted with a world, the hollowness and ingratitude of which Timon in his own

person proved, he madly rushes to the conclusion, that virtue is a stranger to the human breast; that love, gratitude, and integrity, are merely assumed for purposes of imposition; and that the sole business of man is one continued endeavour to overreach and defraud his fellow-creature. Timon's dignified and upright soul, incapable of concealing the deep rooted disgust with which the baseness of his sycophant friends had inspired him, vents itself in virtuous indignation; and abjuring all connection with monsters, in his estimation less tolerable than the beasts that range the desert, he seeks refuge from the contaminating influence of society, in the deep recesses of the woods; there resolved to pass the remainder of his days in the peaceful innocence of primitive simplicity. Mark the contrast in Apemantus.

Apemantus is a vile, ill-natured churl, affecting singularity for the pitiful ambition of notoriety; railing at man for the purpose of creating vexation; and pretending to virtue which he neither feels nor knows. Timon's exposure of the philosopher's pretensions is "bitter beyond bitterness," as Johnson designates the last line of the quotation:

"Thou art a slave, whom Fortune's tender arm
With favour never clasp'd; but bred a dog.

Hadst thou, like us, from our first swarth, proceeded
 The sweet degrees that this brief world affords
 To such as may the passive drugs of it
 Freely command, thou wouldst have plung'd thyself
 In general riot; melted down thy youth
 In different beds of lust; and never learn'd
 The icy precepts of respect, but follow'd
 The sugar'd game before thee.

* * * * *
 Why should'st thou hate men?
 They never flatter'd thee: What hast thou given?

* * * * *
 Hence! be gone! —
 If thou hadst not been born the worst of men,
 Thou hadst been a knave and flatterer." *

Apemantus is, in fact, a cynic, and it was from Lucian that Shakspeare acquired his accurate knowledge of that sect:

“But now, mind how you are to behave: you must be bold, saucy, and abusive to every body, kings and beggars alike; this is the way to make them to look upon you, and think you a great man. Your voice should be barbarous, and your speech dissonant, as like a dog as possible; your countenance rigid and inflexible, and your gait and demeanour suitable to it: every thing you say, savage and uncouth: modesty, equity, and moderation, you must have nothing to do with: never suffer a blush to come upon your cheek:

seek the most public and frequented place ; but when you are there, desire to be alone, and permit neither friend nor stranger to associate with you ; for these things are the ruin and destruction of power and empire.”*

* Sale of Philosophers. *Franklin's Translation.*

WINTER'S TALE.

 1611.

THE origin of the Winter's Tale is a novel, entitled, *Dorastus and Fawnia*, the work of one of Shakspeare's contemporaries, Robert Greene, a child of genius and misfortune.

Shakspeare's prevailing, and not the least singular, deviation from his authority, is his ascribing to the king of Bohemia circumstances which in the novel are related of the king of Sicily, and to the latter, the actions of the former.

Leontes, king of Sicily, is, according to Shakspeare married to the beautiful and virtuous Hermione, by whom he has one son. From his earliest youth he had maintained the closest intimacy with Polixenes, king of Bohemia, who, at the opening of the play, is about to conclude a visit

to the Sicilian court. Leontes in vain solicits his friend to remain; the entreaties, however, of Hermione prevail, and Leontes is immediately jealous. The novel marks the growth of this passion in the king; in the play, it is instantaneous and uncontrollable, and Leontes commands Camillo, under pain of death, to infuse poison into the drink of Polixenes. The novel describes the king as intending also to destroy his wife: but Camillo prevails on Leontes to restore her to favour on Polixenes being removed.

The good Camillo unfolds the sanguinary purpose of his sovereign to Polixenes, and, as the only means of avoiding the vengeance of Leontes, they make their escape together to Bohemia.

The flight of Polixenes confirms Leontes in his unjust suspicions, and he hastens to the queen, whom he finds, as related in the novel, playing with her little son. He accuses her of infidelity, and of conspiring with Polixenes and Camillo. She is conveyed to prison, and there gives birth to a daughter. The king's rage is increased by this event: he brands the infant with the name of bastard, and orders it instantly to be burnt. The humane intercessions of his nobles prevail against so barbarous a determination, but one scarcely less cruel is adopted: with the forlorn hope of saving the infant's life, Anti-

gonus, a courtier, consents to carry it to a desert place, remote from the Sicilian dominions, and there leave it,

“ Without more mercy to its own protection,
And favour of the climate.”

In the novel, the king exposes the child in an open boat to the mercy of the winds and waves.

Another variation from the original story occurs in the conduct pursued towards the queen. Greene's tyrant resolves to burn both the mother and the child; but the queen's demand for an open trial is warmly seconded by the nobility, and the king prudently consents to send six of the nobility to the *Isle* of Delphos, to question the oracle of Apollo, respecting the queen's innocence or guilt. In the *Winter's Tale*, the embassy originates with Leontes himself:

“ I have despatch'd in post,
To sacred Delphos, to Apollo's temple,
Cleomenes and Dion, whom you know
Of stuff'd sufficiency: now, from the oracle
They will bring all; whose spiritual counsel had,
Shall stop, or spur me.”

Leontes summons a session of his nobility for the reception of the ambassadors on their return,

“ for, as she hath
Been publicly accus'd, so shall she have
A just and open trial.”

The ensuing scene abounds with instances of the dramatist's close adherence to the sentiments and language of the novel, from which the following reply of the queen to the accusations against her is quoted: — "If the divine powers be privie to human actions, as no doubt they are, I hope my patience shall make fortune blush, and my unspotted life shall stayne spiteful discredit * * * How I have lead my life before Egisthus' coming, I appeal, Pandosto, to the gods, and to thy conscience."

Thus improved by Shakspeare:

" If powers divine
Behold our human actions, as they do,
I doubt not then, but innocence shall make
False accusation blush, and tyranny
Tremble at patience.

* * *

I appeal
To your own conscience, sir, before Polixenes
Came to your court, how I was in your grace,
How merited to be so."

To which in Dorastus and Fawnia it is replied:—

"It is her part to deny such a monstrous crime, and to be impudent in foreswearing the fact, since she had passed all shame in committing the fault."

Shakspeare generalises this observation into a maxim:

Leontes. " I ne'er heard yet,
That any of these bolder vices wanted
Less impudence to gainsay what they did,
Than to perform it first."

The queen proceeds, in the novel, to a more particular denial of her crime :

" What hath passed between him and me the gods only know, and I hope will presently reveale. That I loved Egisthus, I cannot denie ; that I honoured him, I shame not to confess. But as touching lascivious lust, I say Egisthus is honest, and hope myself to be found without spot. For Franion, I can neither accuse him nor excuse him. I was not privie to his departure. And that this is truth which I have here rehearsed, I refer myself to the divine oracle."

Shakespeare a little dilates on these ideas :

" For Polixenes,
With whom I am accus'd, I do confess,
I lov'd him; as in honour he requir'd ;
With such a kind of love, as might become
A lady like me ; with a love, even such,
So, and no other, as yourself commanded :
Which not to have done, I think, had been in me
Both disobedience and ingratitude,
To you, and toward your friend ; whose love had spoke,
Even since it could speak, from an infant, freely
That it was yours. Now, for conspiracy,
I know not how it tastes ; though it be dish'd
For me to try how : all I know of it,

Is, that Camillo was an honest man ;
 And why he left your court, the gods themselves,
 Wotting no more than I, are ignorant.

* * *

Your honours all,

I do refer me to the oracle ;
 Apollo be my judge."

The commissioners appear ; the sacred scroll which they had borne from Delphos is produced and read aloud :

" Suspicion is no proofe ; jealousie is an unequal judge ; Bellaria is chaste ; Egisthus blameless ; Franion a true subject ; Pandosto treacherous : his babe innocent ; and the king shall dye without an heire, if that which is lost be not found." — *Dorastus and Fawnia*.

" Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten ; and the king shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found." — SHAKSPEARE.

When the judgment of the oracle is declared in the play, a servant hastily enters, and proclaims the death of the king's son. The transition from joy at her acquittal, to grief for the sudden loss of her child, is too violent for the enfeebled queen to bear : she sinks in a swoon upon the earth, and is carried lifeless from the judgment-hall. The novel adds, that the dreadful

spectacle deprived the king of reason : at the end of three days he recovered ; but was with difficulty prevented from putting a period to his life. Shakspeare omits these paroxysms of grief, and simply prescribes to Leontes the customary decent forms of lamentation and atonement. Both the widowers resort daily to the cemetery of the queen :

“ Once in every day he went to Bellaria’s tomb, and with tears of penitence, and sorrow, lamented her unhappy fate and his own misfortunes.” — *Dorastus and Fawnia*.

“ Once a day I’ll visit
The chapel were they lie ; and tears, shed there,
Shall be my recreation.” — SHAKSPEARE.

At this period of the story both the play and the novel turn aside to pursue the infant princess in her adventures. The boat in which the novel placed her was fortunately driven on the coast of Sicily, the dominions of Egisthus, and it as fortunately happened that a shepherd who had missed one of his sheep, just at the same time came to “ the sea-cliffes, to see if perchance the sheepe was browsing on the sea-ivy.” Shakspeare sends Antigonus, under the impression of a vision, to a “ desert country, near the sea,” in Bohemia, the dominions of

Polixenes, where, having safely deposited the infant, he is torn to pieces by a bear as he endeavours to return to the ship. Shakspeare's shepherd is attracted to the "sea-side" in search of his sheep which he hoped to find "browsing on ivy." In both cases the infant is found by the shepherd, and reared up as his own.

The interval between the infancy of the child, and her growth into the prime of youth and beauty, is easily passed over in narration; but it was a serious difficulty in the play. The dramas of his predecessors and contemporaries furnished Shakspeare with abundance of precedents for the expedient he adopted, — that of personifying Time, and in that character soliciting the spectators to imagine the lapse of sixteen years.

In the simple occupation of a shepherdess, the exiled princess had advanced from infancy to womanhood, and she now appears as the lovely Perdita,

" A creature,
Would she begin a sect, might quench the zeal
Of all professors else ; make proselytes
Of who she but bid follow."

It was the fortune of Florizel, the son of Polixenes, to meet her as he returned from

hawking; and so deeply did he become enamoured of Perdita's beauty, that, for the sake of her society, he cast aside his princely robes, and assumed the habit of a shepherd :

“ The heavenly gods have sometime earthly thought ;
 Neptune became a ram, Jupiter a bull,
 Apollo a shepherd : they gods, and yet in love.”

Dorastus and Fawnia.

Florizel. “ The gods themselves,
 Humbling their deities to love, have taken
 The shapes of beasts upon them : Jupiter
 Became a bull, and bellow'd ; the green Neptune
 A ram, and bleated ; and the fire-rob'd god,
 Golden Apollo, a poor humble swain,
 As I seem now.

SHAKSPEARE.

The discovery of Florizel in his degrading metamorphosis by Polixenes is superadded by the dramatist to the story of the novel ; whence, however, the trifling particular of Perdita being “ mistress of the feast” is borrowed.

Detected in his disguise, Florizel fled from his father's dominions with the lovely object of his choice ; and they safely land in Sicily. Dorastus is not discovered by his father, but still he flies, and, with his beautiful shepherdess, carries her reputed father : they are driven by

a storm upon the coast of Bohemia.* Florizel goes at once to the court of the king of Sicily, declares himself the son and ambassador of Polixenes, and presents Perdita as his wife.

Dorastus, remembering the existing enmity between the king of Bohemia and his father, conceals his name and rank: he is thrown into prison by the king of Bohemia, who attempts the corruption of Fawnia's virtue. Leontes receives Florizel with every demonstration of kindness and affection. Shakspeare forbears from the representation of so revolting a spectacle as a father seeking the seduction of his child, but he was not able wholly to divest his mind of the influence of his original:

Florizel. " At your request,
My father will grant precious things as trifles.

Leontes. Would he do so, *I'd beg your precious mistress,*
Which he counts but a trifle.

Paulina. Sir, my liege,
Your eye hath too much youth in't: not a month
Fore your queen died, she was more worth such gazes
Than what you look on now."

* If critics on Shakspeare had read the novel, they would have been spared the trouble of writing their air-drawn speculations on Shakspeare's taste in causing a shipwreck on the coast of Bohemia.

In the novel, the king of Sicily sends ambassadors to demand the release of his son, and the death of Fawnia. In the play, the father of Florizel himself follows the fugitives, and prevents the marriage.

To bring the plot, at this crisis, to a conclusion, the presence of the shepherd who had found the infant princess, and who could alone furnish proofs of her identity, was absolutely necessary, and it is contrived both in the play and the novel, though by means somewhat different, to transport him from his native country in the vessel with the lovers. Subsequent explanation is easy; the prediction of the oracle is fulfilled; in the person of Perdita "that which is lost, is found;" and the king no longer lives "without an heir." The lovers are united, and the kings reconciled.

The novel narrates that reflection upon the injustice and cruelty of his former conduct fixed a deep melancholy in the mind of the Bohemian monarch, and that in a paroxysm of madness he put a period to his life.

If not a more natural, Shakspeare has certainly substituted a more agreeable conclusion to his drama. Indeed, few scenes of greater interest, and none managed with a more consummate knowledge of stage effect, are to be met with

than that which closes the *Winter's Tale*. With the exception of this striking scene, Shakspeare has done little towards the improvement of the story that he worked from; but he was more successful in his delineation of its principal characters. Nothing that is seen of Egisthus in the novel, can at all compare with the masterly display of the jealousy of Leontes in the second scene of the first act. For dignity and eloquence, Bellaria cannot, for a moment, be put in competition with Hermione. When the dramatist deviated from the novel by sending the infant, born of the queen, to a remote and desert place, he was obliged to create a character for the execution of the important commission: hence Antigonus; whose part is short indeed, for a bear devours him in the third act. The plot for the restoration of Hermione, also, required an agent, not to be met with in the novel; and such an one was supplied in Paulina, the wife of Antigonus. Paulina is not one of Shakspeare's happiest female portraits: however good her heart and her intentions, her manners are not well adapted for a court; her candour is ill-bred bluntness, and her vehemence vulgar passion. The intrinsic worth of Florizel is not very superior to that of Dorastus, but the air of refined sentiment which Shakspeare has thrown over

his actions, elevates him greatly above his predecessor.

The lovely Fawnia is interesting ; but what portrait can be compared with Shakspeare's Perdita? She embodies the poetic conceptions of Arcadian innocence and simplicity ; and with that truth to nature so peculiar to the characterisations of our dramatist, he has endued the princess, though fostered in a cottage, with innate delicacy of sentiment and elegance of taste.

The old shepherd of the novel has a wife who is naturally visited by some qualms of jealousy when her husband brings an infant home for her to take care of. Shakspeare omits this lady, but, not to leave the rustic without a companion, supplies her place by assigning him a son, who is no bad specimen of a country clown. The amusing awkwardness of the father and son at court is an incident of Shakspeare's own conception.

As is the case in many other of Shakspeare's plays, a character is engrafted on the Winter's Tale of which no traces are to be found in the materials he used, and whose business in the progress of the business of the scene is utterly unimportant. Autolycus is a wit, a songster, a liar, and a thief. He is a shrewd observer of life and manners ; his bosom is impenetrable to the necessities of

others, and his vigilance ever awake to administer to his own. His fund of humour is inexhaustible, and his impudence matchless. He is moreover interesting, as connected with the manners of Shakspeare's age — as the representative of a class of persons numerous in the middle ages, but who dwindled away as towns increased, and the wants of life did not depend on wakes and fairs for their satisfaction.

TEMPEST.

1611.

COLLINS, the poet, informed Warton that he had once met with a romance in which the principal character was a chemical necromancer who had bound a spirit, like Ariel, to obey his call and perform his services. His account that the story was printed in Italian, Spanish, French, and English, in 1588, has not led to its discovery. If such a tale preceded the composition of the *Tempest*, it may be inferred that Shakspeare, agreeably to his practice on other occasions, availed himself of as much of its contents as he found suitable to his purpose. Malone advanced the pretensions of the sixth tragical tale of George Turberville, and Greene's

comical history of Alphonsus, king of Arragon, to the honour of having originated a large portion of the plot ; but the points of resemblance are extremely few and imperfect, and the other authority is the more natural course.

The use evidently made by Shakspeare, in his representation of the loss of the king's ship, of the printed accounts of the wreck of Sir George Somers in the Bermudas, in 1609, proves this play to have been written subsequent to that period.

Sir George Somers was admiral of the fleet that sailed from England in 1609 for the settlement of a colony in Virginia. The expedition itself was deeply interesting to the country ; the separation of Somers from his squadron by a tremendous *Tempest*, the uncertainty which prevailed respecting his fate for upwards of a year, and his extraordinary shipwreck and adventures on a desert island, were circumstances of a character so romantic as intensely to excite public curiosity ; and Shakspeare was thus led to affix a title to his drama, which, having direct reference to these events insured it immediate attention.

Previous to the wreck of Somers and his companions, the Bermudas (or, as Shakspeare calls them, the Bermoothes) were regarded as an

enchanted pile of rocks whose inhabitants were devils and witches : hence the enchantment of the island inhabited by Prospero ; hence the assigning to him of the powers of a magician ; and hence the supposition of its previous occupation by Sycorax, the witch.

How vivid and prevalent were the ideas of magic and supernatural influences, is fully attested by Shakspeare's production of a drama, of which the scene is laid in regions full of

“ Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not,”

and of which the principal agents are a magician and his attendant spirit.

While the illiterate were fully aware of the powers of nature to produce good or bad effects, a knowledge of their actual properties was peculiar to the learned. An air of mystery was thus thrown over science, to which the grossness of ignorance attached the belief of supernatural interference. It was assumed, that latent qualities existed in waters, minerals, stones, herbs, and plants, their shape, colour, and size, a proper application of which, by the agency of the spiritual world, enabled the student to effect miraculous results. Such was the foundation for a

belief in the powers of a magician, who, by an additional refinement, was supposed to elicit by his art the aid of good spirits, and command the ministry of the bad. A question then arose whether magic was to be reprobated by one sweeping condemnation, or, whether it might not be admissible to draw a distinction between lawful and unlawful necromancy; distinguishing the work of good angels by the title of natural, or *white magic*, and the work of diabolical spirits by the adverse designation of the *black art*. But it was found very difficult to mark the boundary line of these branches of the science, and the practice of the *black art* was decidedly condemned as criminal, while the practice of the white art was pronounced dangerous in the extreme; for it was impossible to determine whether the agency of the devil was voluntary or compulsory. If spontaneous, there was no doubt but that it was rendered to entrap the unwary artist into a wickedness whence there was no escape; for the powers of hell submit not themselves to servitude, except to obtain an absolute dominion over the soul of the necromancer.

To the philosopher the devil addressed himself by an appeal to his pride of science, his thirst for knowledge, and his love of power. By sug-

gesting to him thoughts of vast mental superiority, he inspired him with pride in his own attainments, and contempt for his fellow creatures; and, while engaged in the investigation of remote and hidden things, the evil one insidiously tempted the student, by the display of miraculous effects which appeared to place all nature at his command. Even the professor of *white magic*, therefore, was the dupe of the powers he aspired to command; and though unenlisted in the cause of wickedness by palpable agreement, he really acted in co-operation with the great enemy of mankind.

Between the professors of the *black art* and the devil a formal contract was always supposed, either written with the magician's blood, or, being merely a verbal agreement, ratified by the devil touching the magician, though the touch did not always, as in the contract between the devil and the witch, leave a mark on his person. The contract was usually made for a term of years, during which time the devil bound himself to the service of the magician, who, at the expiration of the period, resigned his soul to his seducer. But, at any time, the slightest deviation from, or omission in, the prescribed form of necromantic ceremonies, or error in the words

to be used, an incorrectness in the magic circle, or the displacing of the innumerable characters surrounding the circle, both within and without, subjected the soul of the magician to be instantly seized on by his malignant foe.

So commanding is the influence of mental superiority, that, the profession of magic notwithstanding its admitted unlawfulness, was never deemed dishonourable; on the contrary, its practice was accepted as evidence of erudition and ability which demanded deference and respect from less cultivated and feebler understandings. Presuming on the popular disposition to the subject, Shakspeare adopted a magician as the hero of a drama, and invested magic with a grandeur such as it had never known. With an exalted dignity of demeanour, which commands respect while it forbids familiarity, Prospero does not disgrace the super-human powers with which he is invested. Without any other object in view in the practice of his art, but that of facilitating the march of retributive justice, his decrees are founded in, and strictly compatible with, equity. Almost unlimited in power, he is not terrific in its exercise; for judgment, not passion, is the director of his actions. - Not from sudden ebullitions of arbitrary feeling are his commands peremptory; but, habituated to sway, and

conscious of infallibility, he admits no question of obedience to, or delay in the execution of, his determinations.

Purified from the admixture of sordid motives, the character of the magician is in Prospero's person eminent and imposing. Scientific knowledge is the foundation of his practice of magic; and his high attainments in the art result from the depth of his erudition:

“ Rapt in secret studies,
 * * * * *
 neglecting worldly ends, all dedicate
 To closeness and the bettering of his mind
 With that, which, but by being so retir'd,
 O'er priz'd all popular rate,”

his “ library is dukedom large enough,” and “ prized above his dukedom:” “ for the liberal arts” he is reputed “ without a parallel; those being all his study.”*

Magic, in its best sense, was always deemed the perfection of natural philosophy; and their books and studies are, consequently, always prominent features in the histories of magicians: “ I'll to my book,” says Prospero,

“ For yet, ere supper time, must I perform
 Much business appertaining.”†

* Act I. sc. 2.

† Act III. sc. 1.

The importance of a book in magical operations is inseparably connected with a superstition as remarkable for its antiquity as its universality. Almost every nation used to make pretensions to the possession of volumes of anti-diluvian antiquity, divine origin, or super-human knowledge. History, theology, ethics, astronomy, and natural philosophy were the subjects of which they treated; and they disclosed the occult secrets of nature, and taught the acquisition of supernatural power by their use.* Nor were these extravagant notions confined to the primitive ages; but a belief of perfection in every branch of human science was long liberally conceded to extraordinary mental abilities, and erudite treatises on philosophy, natural and moral, were attributed to their possessors. It was the fable, in many instances, that these works were irrecoverably lost; in some, that their contents were partially preserved; and in others, that whatever remained of them, whether much or little, was shadowed out in mystic doctrines, or concealed

* The vulgar faith in the efficacy of the retrograde reading of the Bible has clearly reference to the oriental languages, always supposed the repositories of much occult and mysterious knowledge, and which, being read from right to left, beginning at what is commonly considered the end of the volume, would obviously suggest to an ignorant person the idea of *reading backwards*.

under hieroglyphical characters, intelligible only to the initiated. To all but the learned, therefore, the wisdom of the sages was involved in obscurity and mystery: they alone were masters of the supernatural knowledge that it taught. But so abstruse was the subject, and so difficult of comprehension and interpretation were the mysticism and symbols under which it was charactered, that unremitting assiduity was indispensable to the success of the student who aspired to the exercise of super-human powers. We have here the complete theory, and obtain some insight into the practice also, of the use of a book in magical operations. Thrice does Caliban urge on Stephano and Trinculo the necessity of depriving Prospero of his books:

“ 'Tis a custom with him
I'the afternoon to sleep: there thou may'st brain him,
Having first seiz'd his books”

* * * *
Burn but his books.
* * *

Remember,
First to possess his books; for without them
He's but a sot, as I am, *nor hath not*
One spirit to command.”*

Demons are perpetually evoked, and the souls of the dead compelled to speak, both in eastern

* Act III. sc. 2.

and western romance, by reading from a magical book. Prospero absolves all his attendant spirits from their allegiance to him, at the same time abjuring magic, and expressing his determination to "drown his book."*

The characters of priest, philosopher, and magician were identified by the heathens; but Christianity disclaimed the disgraceful union; and at the first dawn of enlightened philosophy, its professors denied the possibility of the ministers of the true God holding communion with the devil. The grossness of popular perception, however, persisted in entertaining many ideas in common of each, long after the characters of conjurer and divine had been separated. Purity, both moral and personal, was always justly deemed essential in the life of the philosopher and priest; who frequently withdrew from intimate commerce with the world; and, immured in the obscurity of cells, or secluded in spots far removed from the habitation of man, dedicated their time to the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of the few virtues that can be nourished in solitude. Hence the magician's power was estimated by the extent of his virtue, as well as of his mental attainments.

Than the life of Prospero, nothing can be

* Act V. sc. 1.

more pure, simple, and secluded. A desert island is his domain; his residence, a cell; his sole associate, his daughter; and in instructing her consists his recreation. Every circumstance in his existence is favourable to his acquisition of proficiency in magic.

That the magician was distinguished by some imposing peculiarity of apparel, is, perhaps, likewise to be attributed to the original identification of his character with that of philosopher and priest. To those who have remarked how perpetually power and its symbols are confounded by the vulgar, it will not be thought extraordinary that the mantle and the wand were indispensable to the magician. When Prospero lays aside his art, to enter on the narrative of his misfortunes, he directs Miranda to “pluck his magic garment from him* ;” and when he abjures the practice of magic altogether, he resolves to “break his staff, and bury it certain fathoms in the earth.”†

Commensurate with the depth of his science was the power of the magician over the world of spirits. A master of his art had under authority seventy-nine principal and princely spirits (all named by the historians of magic) who

* Act I. sc. 2.

† Act V. sc. 1.

had under them, as their ministers, multitudes of legions of inferior devils.

Prospero was reputed "for the liberal arts; without a parallel; those being all his study;" and, as a consequence of his extensive knowledge, his art was in the highest degree potent, as appears by his authoritative address to his various spiritual agents.*

By the most skilful magician alone could the devil be compelled to exhibit visionary castles, forts, illuminated saloons, sumptuous festivals, troops of gallant knights, and beauteous dames, and splendid armies, both of horse and foot; and such a deference, we find, is paid to Prospero. In the third scene of the third act is described the entrance of, amidst "solemn and strange music, several strange shapes, bringing in a banquet;" and, in a subsequent part of the scene, the stage direction is, "thunder and lightning. Enter Ariel like a harpy; claps his wings upon the table, and, with a quaint device, the banquet vanishes." Again, in the first scene of the fourth act, a visionary masque is exhibited, in which Iris, Ceres, Juno, and certain nymphs, are the principal performers; then "enter certain reapers, properly habited:

* "Ye elves of hills, brooks," &c. Act V. sc. 1.

they join with the nymphs in a graceful dance."

Sycorax was a witch of such extensive ability, that she

" Could control the moon, make floods and ebbs,
And deal in her command without her power,"*

Yet, with all her potency, though renowned

" For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible,"

she was feeble in comparison with Prospero; he could control her very god, great Setebos, "and make a vassal of him."† In "most unmitigable rage" Sycorax imprisoned Ariel in the rift of a cloven pine; but it was by an exertion of the art of Prospero, only, that he was released.‡

But the most decisive instance of the pre-eminence of Prospero, as a magician, is the obedience of Ariel. The necromancer of ordinary acquirements domineered over inferior spirits; the more skilful, over invisible beings of a more exalted nature; but that artist, alone, whose powerful genius had led him triumphant through the whole range of human science, could aspire to the control of spirits resident in

* Act V. sc. 1.

† Act I. sc. 2.

‡ Ibid.

the highest regions of spiritual existence. Of this order is Ariel, the attendant minister of Prospero, and Shakspeare has somewhat overstrained the privilege which, as a superior spirit, he enjoyed, by releasing him from all restrictions upon the time of his appearance. The approach of day was the signal for the departure of all spirits, the most wicked disappearing first, and the least criminal lingering till dawn, and even day-light itself, appeared. Ariel was entitled to protract his stay to the latest possible period allowed; but all spirits were more or less guilty of the rebellion for which they were banished heaven; and, as a guilty thing, the performance of all his labours between two and six o'clock in the afternoon, to which they are specifically fixed *, is inadmissible.

The purity and delicacy of Ariel's ethereal nature rendered him an unfit minister to "act the earthly and abhorr'd commands" of the

* *Prosp.* "What is the time o'the day?"

Ariel. Past the mid season.

Prosp. At least two glasses: The time 'twixt six and now
Must by us both be spent most preciousy." Act I. sc. 2.

Prosp. "How's the day?"

Ariel. On the sixth hour, at which time, my lord,
You said our work should cease." Act V. sc. 1.

foul witch, Sycorax* ; but to the virtuous and benignant Prospero he is a faithful and diligent, though not invariably cheerful, attendant ; for his service is not voluntary, and he therefore often pleads for liberty, and his master holds out to him the prospect of release as the most welcome gift he could bestow. It is in reference to the belief that the duration of a spirit's servitude was stipulated by agreement, that Prospero demands of Ariel whether he looked for freedom "before the time be out," and that Ariel reminds him of his promise, "to bate him a full year."†

The ability of the magician to exact from his ministering spirits the utmost limit of their stipulated servitude, and to punish their neglect or disobedience, is made apparent in the cruel infliction of Sycorax on Ariel‡, and the threat of Prospero, in the event of his murmuring,

* Act I. sc. 2.

† Ibid.

‡ "Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee
By help of her more potent ministers,
And in her most unmitigable rage,
Into a cloven pine ; within which rift
Imprison'd, thou didst painfully remain
A dozen years."

Act I. sc. 2.

“to rend an oak, and peg him in his knotty entrails, till he had howl’d away twelve winters.”* Spirits, indeed, were deemed particularly sensible of pain, and peculiarly to dread the wound of a sword: conjurors, in consequence, often entered thus armed into their magic circles for the due enforcement of their authority. It was, however, the necromancer only who had power to injure spiritual beings; to other hands they were invulnerable, and of this privilege Ariel boasts, when Alonzo and Sebastian draw their swords for his destruction :

“ You fools! I and my fellows
 Are ministers of fate; the elements
 Of whom your swords are temper’d, may as well
 Wound the loud winds, or with bemock’d-at stabs
 Kill the still closing waters, as diminish
 One dowle that’s in my plume; my fellow ministers
 Are like invulnerable.” †

Purely spiritual, they could appear corporeally only as apparitions, or under favour of the privilege of assuming various shapes at pleasure. The stage directions of the *Tempest* perpetually direct the entrance of Ariel “invisible;” he appears as a harpy, and a water-nymph, and

* Act I. sc. 2.

† Act III. sc. 3.

“flames amazement” among the distracted crew of the king’s ship.

Ariel’s gambols, as a meteor, are in exact conformity with the attributes of an aerial spirit. Many extraordinary stories are on record in the marvellous narratives of voyages performed in the sixteenth century, respecting the appearance of supernatural lights upon masts, rigging, and other parts of vessels. Classical authority may be quoted in proof of the antiquity, if not as to the origin of the superstitions respecting them. Meteors were much observed by the Greeks, and, very naturally, with particular attention in naval affairs. When the storm was hushed which threatened the destruction of the Argonauts, it was observed that a flame had then appeared over the head of Castor and Pollux, and it was ever afterwards believed, that when two lights appeared together, they indicated favourable winds and prosperity; but when one meteor only flamed, or if two lights had first been visible, and were succeeded by a single appearance which drove them away, nothing but storms and shipwrecks were portended. Ariel divided, “and burnt in many places; on the top-mast, the yards and bowsprit did he flame distinctly, *then meet, and join.*”*

* Act I. sc. 2.

The power of different spiritual beings was confined to that portion of the elements in which their residence was fixed, and the magician was necessitated to use the agency of fiery, aërial, watery, or terrestrial spirits, according to the nature and situation of the bodies on which he wished to operate. Prospero exerts his art on all the supposed elements of nature, and, in strict propriety, he ought to have effected his wonders in each by the spirits peculiar to each. Such an arrangement, which would have been obviously inconvenient in a drama, by the introduction of a multiplicity of characters, Shakspeare has skilfully evaded, and finds more than an apology for his inaccuracy in the advantage obtained by it. The powers of Ariel are considerably extended, and, when not employed as a principal himself, he is invariably made the agent for the conveyance of Prospero's commands to the other ministers of his will.

It was one of the serious charges against magic, as a power convertible to the worst of purposes, that the agency of spirits was frequently employed to inspire love. The instruments of evil are sanctified by the use to which the hands of Prospero apply them. He consigns to Ariel the charge of raising the flame of at-

tachment in the bosoms of Ferdinand and Miranda :

“ It goes on, I see
As my soul prompts it : — Spirit, fine spirit ! I'll free
thee
Within two days for this.

At first sight
They have chang'd eyes : — Delicate Ariel,
I'll set thee free for this !” *

But mark the purposes of Prospero in producing these effects: it is by the union of Ferdinand and Miranda, that he ensures his own restoration to his dukedom, the devolution of hereditary rights to his child, and the restoration of his country to freedom, absolving Milan from disgraceful vassalage, the payment of tribute and homage to the court of Naples.

There is scarcely any history of a magician that might not be quoted as more or less illustrative of the Tempest, but none can with more propriety be referred to than “ The Honorable Historie of Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay,” the work of Robert Green, mentioned already as a contemporary of Shakspeare. Bacon, like Prospero, is represented as a master of his art, compelling the devil to pay him homage, and not receiving his services by virtue of any iniquitous contract.

* Act I. sc. 2.

Bacon, therefore, has recourse continually to his books, boasting that by their aid he can

“ Make storming Boreas thunder from his cave
 And dim fair Luna by a dark eclipse ;
 The great arch-ruler, potentate of hell,
 Trembles, when Bacon bids him, or his friends,
 Bow to the force of his Pentageron.
 What art can work the frolic friar knows,
 And therefore will I turn my magic books,
 And strain out necromancy to the deep.”

Having

“ dived into hell,
 And sought the darkest palaces of fiends,
 That with his magic spells great Belcephon
 Hath left his lodge and kneeled at his cell :”

that is, having subdued the world of spirits to implicit obedience to his commands, the friar exhibits many of those wonders of his art which so much astonish and delight in Prospero. In the presence of the King and Queen, Bacon waves his wand, and immediately appear a troop of dancers, and a masque of apes and antics ; and, on another occasion, he introduces a procession of Russians, Polanders, Indians, and Armenians ; and at the wedding of a poor gentleman raises a sumptuous banquet of delicacies. As Ferdinand in the presence of Prospero*, and Antonio and Sebastian when enraged against Ariel†, are

* Act I. sc. 2.

† Act III. sc. 3.

charmed into helplessness, so Prince Edward, Warren, and Ermsbie, in Friar Bacon, are rendered incapable of drawing their swords; and as Ariel deluded Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo through

“ Tooth'd briars, sharp furzes, pricking goss and thorns,
Which enter'd their frail shins : at last I left them
I'the filthy mantled pool beyond your cell;
There dancing up to the chins, that the foul lake
O'erstunk their feet,” *

so Bacon leads an honest gentleman very far out of his way, and entangles a gang of thieves in an erroneous path, where they are covered with dirt and mire. Finally, disgusted with his art, which makes, he says, a man a devil, the Friar burns his books of magic, resolving to devote the remainder of his days to the study of divinity; sorely repenting

“ That ever Bacon meddled in this art
For using devils to countervaile his God.”

The perfect purity of Prospero's conduct, and the excellence of his intentions, throw a lustre over his dealings with the powers of darkness, and it is never suspected that he has been engaged in the practice of an unlawful art till he

* Act IV. sc. 1.

abjures "rough magic," expresses his determination to

"break his staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound,"

to "drown his book" and then retire to Milan, where "Every third thought shall be his grave." *

From Eden's *History of Travaile*, published in 1577, and the chapter in Philemon Holland's translation of Pliny, 1601, which treats "of strange and wondrous shapes of sundrie nations," Shakespeare gathered many general ideas of a monster in human shape, like Caliban. But the hints contained in both these works, are neither sufficiently numerous nor important to shake his claim to the praise of originality in the production of what has not been improperly called a new character on the stage. Imagination cannot conceive brutality more absolute than in Caliban, this loathsome offspring of a wicked witch, born and reared on the inhospitable shore of a desert island, without even the knowledge of the existence of a third human being. His repulsive features are displayed with an energy almost frightful, and Caliban's ignorance is exemplified in numerous instances, with the closest

* Act V. sc. 1.

attention to nature. Yet it admits of question, whether the portrait be a perfect and harmonious whole. Whence, it may be asked, did Caliban obtain such skill in the accurate and even familiar use of words not necessary to the expression of common ideas? Whence his clear notions of the relative situations of the governor and the governed? "Gabbling, like a thing most brutish, not knowing his own meaning," Caliban might, certainly, in less than "twelve years," be taught "to speak," "how to name the bigger light, and how the less that burn by day and night;" but could all the skill and diligence of Prospero have imbued his mind with the knowledge he evinces? Of explaining to the "poisonous slave" his indisputable right to the dominion of the island, under the double claim of inheritance and possession *, his able master will not even be suspected.

The name of Caliban, says Dr. Farmer, is a mere metathesis of Canibal. From the following passage, it appears how Caliban comes to call his dam's god *Setebos*. The adventurous discoverer Magellan, secured two giant savages, whom he called Patagonians, and they no sooner "saw how they were deceived, than they roared

like bulls

* Act I. sc. 2. Act III. sc. 2.

lyke bulles, and cryed upon their great devil Setebos to help them.”*

To the beautiful simplicity, interesting artlessness, and spotless innocence of Miranda’s mind, a new grace is given by the quick susceptibility and eager confidence of her young and tender heart, ignorant and unsuspecting of the perfidies of love. But no circumstance in her state or education would ever lead us to expect her reply to Ferdinand’s

“ prime request,
Which I do last pronounce, is, O, you wonder!
If you be made, or no ?

Miranda. No wonder, sir ;
But, certainly a maid :” †

and still less are we prepared for her insidiously charitable remarks upon her poor grand-mother, when Prospero, speaking of Antonio, directs her to

“ Mark his condition, and the event ; then tell me,
If this might be a brother.

Miranda. I should sin
To think but nobly of my grandmother :
Good wombs have borne good sons.” †

Little remains to be said of the only two remaining characters that make any pretensions to

* Eden’s History of Travel. † Act I. sc. 2. ‡ Ibid.

prominency, Trinculo the jester, and Stephano*, the drunken steward. In no remarkable degree do they differ from various other low characters in the scenes of Shakspeare. Their wit, mostly disfigured by grossness, is nevertheless wit, rich, various, and poignant; and distinguished by that *gusto* which so strongly marks the author's delight in the delineation of the humour of vulgar minds.

Among the advantages the Tempest is supposed to possess over many of its author's performances, that of regularity has been dwelt on with peculiar earnestness. If not immediately subservient to the main design, the presence of all the characters is naturally accounted for; their sphere of action properly limited to the object immediately in view; and the time consumed in the occurrence of the events represented, is particularly stated not to reach four hours. Of

* There is a character called Stephano in the Merchant of Venice, where the word is always improperly accented on the middle syllable.

“ My friend Stephāno, signify I pray you.”

In the present play the *a* is always, rightly, short; and the secret of the correction lies in Shakspeare's acquaintance with Ben Jonson's *original* Every Man in his Humour, in which there is a Stephano who, it need scarcely be added, is always properly called.

the good effect produced by an attention to the dramatic rules in the two first cases there can be no question; but it will not fail to strike the reader of the *Tempest*, that one consequence of an adherence to the unity of time, is the appearance of an unnatural precipitation of the story. Admitting the extreme diligence of the parties, and supposing them intent upon the execution of their allotted business with the greatest expedition, the completion of all that the plot embraces is, perhaps, possible in the prescribed time. But amidst action so rapid where is the leisure to be found in which those changes of the mind are effected which precede all human actions, and which, between the conception and the execution of an idea, occupy more time than the twinkling of an eye?

THE END.

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